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A narrative analysis of the psychosocial problems of the psychological self in possible selves

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Announcements

Finishing this thesis, thankfully looking back and forward, I would like to express my appreciation for the support I received while being involved in writing my Bachelor thesis at the University of Twente.

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Felicia Suppmann

Abstract

The demand for individual agency might pose challenges to the self in the process of personal development. The emergence of the self in this context has been defined by McAdams (2013) as the *psychological self* being composed of three developmental stages: the *social actor* within the present, followed by the *motivated agent* oriented towards the future, and the *autobiographical author* incorporating the past, present, and future. In times of challenges, the psychological self is assumed to experience a rupture. In this process, the rupture within the psychological self is assumed to be expressed through its psychosocial challenges: self-regulation, self-esteem, and self-continuity. These psychosocial challenges can be found in possible selves embedded within narrative identities. Effortful control shows to measure self-regulation, sense of mastery shows to measure self-esteem, while self-continuity shows to be the challenge of keeping an identity over time.

The present study aims to explore how the psychosocial problems of the psychological self are depicted in narratives of possible selves. The psychological self is organised temporarily with the past, present and the future. Therefore, narrative research was proposed to explore possible selves within which the psychosocial problems can be explored. Thereby, a multi-method design, combining letters from the future and semi-structured interviews, was applied. Four participants were explored in how their psychosocial problems were expressed within their personal letter and interview. Results showed two participants experiencing fewer challenges with their psychosocial problems compared to the other two participants. Challenges were highlighted through strong effortful control towards external constraints or weak sense of mastery. All four participants however, showed strong personal reflection. Building on constructive developmental psychology, the model of the psychological self can be used to investigate developmental learning through personal reflection. Thereby the closer exploration of the psychosocial problems could serve as the identification for reasons of stagnation or successful personal developmental integration. Both insights can be used to find a pattern of constructive development in the self, helping to integrate the pattern into a method to help people who experience destructive developmental processes.

Introduction

Within postmodern times of loosening traditions, the individual faces the challenge of increasing possibilities, and demands for individual choice (Giddens, 1991). In this process of making choices while building an identity as a self, the individual might face personal challenges. Exploring the self within this challenging process of finding an identity, the present study makes use of McAdam's (2013) dynamic model "Features of the Psychological Self". The psychological self consists of the social actor, acting in the present, the motivated agent, oriented towards the future, and the autobiographical author as a holistic portrayer of the self, incorporating its past, present, and future. Growing up in a social and cultural setting, the self is confronted with psychosocial problems while building an identity (McAdams, 2013). The present study argues that the psychosocial problems of the psychological self: self-regulation, self-esteem, and self-continuity, become visible in that process of developing identity. The search for integration within the psychological self is assumed to be found in possible selves, expressed through future narratives. Individually attempting to explore the psychosocial problems of the psychological self, the study applies narrative analysis in letters from the future and interviews.

The three Components of the Psychological Self

The human being becomes a self through a constant dynamic exchange within the social environment as explained by Mead (1934). The self continuously creates personal content through the process of integrating and evaluating input received from the social world. This personalised content is released in performing during social interaction. As a constant act of exchange, the world inside and outside the self is continuously altered. In that circuit, the self, as a "me", is holding the content of others in the light of personalised interpretation. Meanwhile, the self's personalised content is communicated during the social interaction through the "I".

Postmodern times, defined by the gradual decline of traditional orientation, decrease the amount of information communicated by the social environment to the self (Giddens, 1991). Thereby, individuals find themselves increasingly confronted with the demand to make individual choices. This freedom of choice incorporates a challenge to identity - without traditions, the self is defined by personal choices, building up to become a constantly revised self (Giddens, 1991). Sugarman (2005) discussed the challenge of modernity in the light of moral agency. He proposed moral agency to be a constant evaluation of the self in the social setting. Instead of accepting an uncriticised moral law, the self should constantly revise moral laws according to past experiences. Thereby, the self develops a sense of agency through increased

evaluation and sense of self-determination (Sugarman, 2005).

Habermas and Köber (2015) addressed the challenge of personal continuity in the light of required change. Thereby, change is generally linked with confrontations of unfamiliar situations. These situations can be in form of internal and external developmental challenges, as well as changes in the social environment, like economic circumstances. Hence, challenging changes confronting the self can be imposed by conditions of modernity and its demand for increased individual agency.

As a facilitator to deal with challenges confronting the self, Rossiter (1999) suggested a narrative approach. Thereby, storytelling does not just serve as an aid but is automatically stimulated within the self when confronted with life challenges. Creating and recreating meaning within a story is the means through which the change is integrated within the self. In this reflective process of reinventing meaning, the individual's existence within the culture and other familial settings become object of renegotiation as well (Rossiter (1999). Irwin (1996) explained that "it is during such phases of exceptionality or rupture that the implicit narratives by which people regulate their lives can become explicit" (p.113). McAdams (2013) presented a concept of the self in which the constructive process of narrative identities is explained as a holistic, coherent and dynamic model.

Human life is defined as a constant evolvment within the self by McAdams (2013). Translating this evolvment into a dynamic model, he gave possible answers to "what the I may see and know when it reflexively encounters the Me" (McAdams, 2013). Self-comprehension, based on being an observed self "I", comprises the psychological perspective of being an actor, an agent and an author. In his model "*The features of the Psychological Self*", McAdams (2013) specifies the three standpoints in their emergence into different developmental stages of human life.

The first stage of the self's journey is marked by becoming a *social actor* within early childhood (McAdams, 2013). Before the emergence of self-consciousness, the individual has already entered social interaction, receiving feedback and reinforcement of behaviour and emotions. Building on self-attribution and categorization, the social actor's personalised contents are defined traits, skills, and social roles. Meanwhile, the self's social reputation serves as a measurement of how the actor's performance is perceived by others. Development of the social actor towards adulthood displays differences in personal understanding. Eventually, however, the self recognizes how the context of behaviour is determining actions and traits coming to the fore. Contextually speaking, the self sees itself prone to different behaviours in different social roles. The psychosocial problem of the social actor is, therefore, *self-regulation* which is needed to act

in the present according to requirements of behaviour on the “social stage of human life” (McAdams, 2013, p. 273). The social actor is maintained throughout the life of an individual. However, the process of maturation brings a future-orientation to the self in the form of a goal-oriented motivated agent.

Evolving into the second stage, the psychological self comes to the fore as a motivated agent during middle or late childhood (McAdams, 2013). Goal-directed behaviour is, independent on age, a human feature. A fulfilled motivated agent, however, needs the “I” to discover the “Me” in accordance with personal goals, values, plans, hopes and fears. Thereby, behaviour is consciously directed towards the personalised goals. Constantly evaluating the “Me” in terms of success and failure, the “I” creates a tendency towards high or low *self-esteem*, which results in a psychosocial problem for the self (McAdams, 2013). Hence, past events, from which the self-esteem partly arises, may influence the motivated agent’s idea of future possibilities. While however, the motivated agent is only marginally concerned with the past, the autobiographical author accesses the past deeply, drawing a full picture of the self - an identity that holds on to a personalised past, present and future.

Children become authors when telling stories about their experiences (McAdams, 2013). A fully developed autobiographical author, however, creates a whole frame of meaning within the personal story. Through autobiographical reasoning, a coherent identity is formed, adding personal meaning to the self’s past, present and future. The capacity to reason on that level develops around adolescence and emerging adulthood. Making meaning for the self’s content, the author might arrive at conclusions about values to hold on to and goals to work on. Telling stories about the self, the author could arrange a whole new narrative about the self with distinct traits and the possibility of new skill possession. Thus, the autobiographical author gives meaning to the self’s content, while the social actor and the motivated agent act on the meaning’s behalf. In a process of ever-changing social expectations and personal recreation, the individual narratively creates an identity. The psychosocial problem is, therefore, *self-continuity* - “how the I creates a dynamic sense of the Me as retaining its sameness or identity over time, even as the self and the world change” (McAdams, 2013, p. 274).

With the development of the autobiographical author, the self obtains the aptitude of reasoning in time, allowing for critical examinations within the self (McAdams, 2013). This process of questioning the self serves as a potential survival strategy to confront potential life challenges (Rossiter, 1999). Successful coping was suggested to result in an integrative changed self. Thereby, the psychosocial problems of the self, which are embedded within the self as an agent, and as being inhabited in a cultural and social order, confront the self as perennial

challenges (McAdams, 2013). Within his model, McAdams (2013) depicted how culture is accompanying the self on its way to identity creation.

The psychosocial problems within the psychological self

Social roles and traits are to be found in cultures around the world (McAdams, 2013). Nevertheless, the *social actor* is guided culturally in how specific traits are expressed and how clearly defined social roles are practised. Hence, the self is confronted with cultural norms. Accordingly, specific behaviour is either encouraged or constrained. Following the social role theory, as an example, the socialization of normative behaviour shows differences in possible future selves comparing men and women (Brown & Diekmann, 2010). The social structure of gender roles gives individuals an idea of how they should behave which leads to more typical female future selves' projection by women and more typical male future selves' projection by men. Reflecting social roles, women's future narratives go more towards marriage and family, by trend, while occupation dominates man's future narratives. Traditional gender roles are still highly represented in the world, nevertheless, gender norms changed towards a tendency to more equal future perspectives (Brown & Diekmann, 2010).

Responsible for planning behaviour towards possible future selves, the *motivated agent* is guided by culture to encourage, or the reject specific goals and values, thereby defining the content of goals as well as the time frame specified for each goal (McAdams, 2013). Thus, the self's age determines the responsibilities, roles and positions one is expected to conform with in the social context (Nurmi, 1993). Existing normative time frames given by society are articulated, for example, towards when to have a job, be married, or have children (Neugarten & Moore & Lowe, 1965). Neugarten and et al. (1965) considered the individuals, who position themselves outside of these cultural norms, to be in risk of social rejection. Studying the influence of social rejection on the individual, Wright, Gonfein and Owens (2000) found that social rejection is enduringly involved in social stress which has a further effect on increasing undervaluation of the self.

Normative expectations are a product of the cultural idea of how it's member's life – the narrative story of the self – should look like (McAdams, 2013). Therefore, the *autobiographical author* carries the idea of an ideal life, it's content, but also how the story should be told to the public. Thus, the self puts meaning on personal life events, creating a coherent picture that represents a life for which the self wants to be held accountable for. The norms of culture thereby promote specific life events or neglect them, evaluating each with an idea of “moral legitimization” (McAdams, 2013, p. 288).

While cultural influence on the psychological self has been discussed by McAdams (2013), Bandura (1989) gave insight into the cognitive process of human agency. Therein, self-determined action is highly dependent on the individual's self-efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy is translated into an internal standard according to which behaviour is revised if performance does not meet expectations. "Psychosocial functioning is, therefore, regulated by an interplay of self-produced and external sources of influence" (Bandura, 1989, p. 1179). McAdams (2013) displays the psychosocial problems within the three components of the psychological self.

Being involved in representing different social roles, one of the self's survival strategy is *self-regulation* - the psychosocial problem of the social actor (McAdams, 2013). Losing self-regulation leads to unpredictable outcomes for the self, involving potential harm for social reputation, as an example. The self as a social actor grows up getting feedback on behaviour, eventually feeling proud of some and guilty for others. Self-regulation in the future, thus, is expressed in either practising or dismissing behaviour according to the social environment's reactions (McAdams, 2013).

Differences in self-regulation can be observed in people attempting *effortful control* (McAdams, 2013). Tracy, Eisenberg, Gaertner and et al. (2007) defined effortful control as "the ability to voluntarily focus and shift attention and to voluntarily inhibit or initiate behaviors" (p. 2). In their study, Tracy and et al. (2007) showed that high effortful control positively correlated with regulating behaviour and emotions. Socially adapting behaviour through effortful control was shown to include both positive and negative aspects of behaviour. Hence, it is assumed that self-regulation could be helpful and harmful to the self. Controlling behaviour in favour of one's goals, however, requires a specific level of *sense of mastery* (McAdams, 2013). Erol and Orth (2011) defined *sense of mastery* as "the extent to which individuals perceive having control over their lives" (p. 608).

Self-esteem - the psychosocial problem of the motivated agent was shown to be measurable by the extent of sense of mastery (McAdams, 2013). While young children usually show high self-esteem, differences are detected starting around seven years of age. High self-esteem is observed in the self who put a high value on life's components and approaches them with self-confidence. Self-esteem as an unstable condition within the self was explained by Crocker and Knight (2005): "Instability of self-esteem is the result of being ego-involved in events, or having contingent self-worth" (p. 200). Hence, self-esteem can lead to the regulation of behaviour, approaching events that make the "I" feel good about the "Me" (Crocker & Knight, 2005). Protecting self-esteem, thus, could lead to patterns of avoiding or approaching specific behaviour. As a result, contingent self-worth assumes low autonomy within the self (Crocker &

Knight, 2005). Meanwhile, low autonomy refers to an increase in pressure toward standard behaviour and expectations.

Evenly cumulating increases in self-esteem from age 14 to 30 has been shown for males and females (Erol & Orth, 2011). *Sense of mastery* being positively correlated with self-esteem assumes the pursuit of goals being dependent on the measure of self-esteem (McAdams, 2013). Problems pursuing goals, however, could also be the result of an “identity crisis” displaying a lack of self-continuity - the psychosocial problem of the autobiographical author (McAdams, 2013).

Attempting to learn lessons for life, the self tries to personally improve on a constant basis (McAdams, 2013). The challenge for the self thereby consists in remaining biographically self-continuous. The autobiographical author’s determination is to travel in time and create a narrative identity which is coherent despite changes within the life story. Generally, changes are more easily adaptable for the self when they display redemption within the self, compared to changes in contamination (Sani, 2010). Positioned in a post-modern time, the self deals more frequently with its psychosocial problems. Therefore, Irwin (1996) emphasises that “the demand for narrative is no longer the exception but the rule” (p. 113).

Exploring the Psychosocial Problems within the Psychological Self through Narrated Possible Future Selves

As the autobiographical reasoning develops over time, young adults and older adults, compared to adolescence, had a higher tendency to incorporate wisdom gained into their narrative story (McAdams, 2013). This integration of complexity into the self-image is shown to be vital in keeping self-continuity during challenging life events. Thereby, narrative identities are shown to become psychologically more holistic with the increase of age. Following the autobiographical author’s purpose, narrating the past, the present and the future help the self in keeping a sense of continuity.

Presenting a narrative approach to development, Rossiter (1999) emphasised the temporal meaning within the narrative identity formation. Thereby, the past is a detailed idea of who the self is in the present. Meanwhile, the present self is more preoccupied with the future. The future is either seen as a possible threat or an unknown place full of possibilities. Within the perspective of seeing the future as a threat, the present self seeks wisdom from the past. Looking at the future as a place full of possibilities, the self creates a space of hope. Thereby, the future incorporates something unknown which can be unlimitedly defined within the narrative.

In the context of mutual influence of past and present, I propose that exploring the

psychological self takes both a reflective perspective on the past and a vision of the future. The unlimited nature of future narratives further proposes that the future carries more potential for the expression of individual agency than the past (Rossiter (1999). Meanwhile, cultural constraints are proposed to be explorable in more details within narratives about the past.

The two perspectives on approaching the future are displayed within the psychological self (McAdams, 2013). The autobiographical author approaches the future through thorough reflection about the past. While, the motivated agent, unconcerned about the past, approaches the future through unlimited hopes. Within these hopes, however, the motivated agent also reflects fears within the self. Markus and Nurius, (1986) defined possible selves as “the selves we could become, and the selves we are afraid of becoming” (p. 954). Hence, possible selves, as a direct recreation of the motivated agent, are mainly influenced by the psychosocial problem of the motivate agent - self-esteem. Herein, possible selves refer back to Bandura (1989) who stressed self-efficacy as a tool of individual agency. Supported by strong beliefs within the self, any possible self can be realized.

Narrative psychology suggests individual agency considering that we can change the story we tell about ourselves, whether true or not (Irwin, 1996). This possibility of reinventing the self shows how narrating can be a freeing process. Habermas and Köber, (2015) presented three arguments promoting life narrative depicted by Paul Ricoeur (1990). The narrative is explained to create a link between the narrator and the actor aiming to display them as one continuous story of the self. Thereby, autobiographical activity is temporal and developmental. This means that a narrative is structured in time and structured in meaning by the defined events. Finally, autobiographical reasoning involves a subjective perspective which allows for constant re-evaluation and integration of the self as a narrator and actor.

In constructive developmental psychology, a developmental process within the self is supposed to be observed through four steps taken by the self within the narrative (Irwin, 1996). The first step is displayed by the self's recognition of a problem. In the second step, the self takes distance from the problem. During a reflective process, the self then articulates the changes made. The final step is displayed by the self's adaptation.

The four steps of development show the steps of how the self manages to integrate change through building a new identity. Thus, it is proposed that through this developmental process, self-continuity can be detected within narratives. Markus and Nurius (1989) suggested that change in possible selves requires a change in self-concept and regulated behaviour. Hence, it is proposed that the examination within the self in times of challenges leads to a change in self-concept and self-regulated behaviour. This, however, presupposes the conscious approach

towards reflecting on the self-concept of the self and the self-regulated behaviour. As a result, self-esteem and self-regulation might become visible in narratives of possible selves.

Aim of the Study: The Psychosocial Problems of the Psychological Self depicted in Narratives of Possible Selves.

The present study aims to explore how the psychological self is depicted in narratives of the past, present and future. Thereby, the psychosocial problems, as argued to become visible through the developmental process of narrating, serve as a visualization of each psychological self. Effortful control has been shown to measure self-regulation, sense of mastery has been shown to measure self-esteem, and the successful integration of life challenges in the form of learned lessons has been shown to measure self-continuity. Attempting to explore the psychological self through its psychosocial problems within narrative identities, the following research question is guiding the process: How are the psychosocial problems of the psychological self depicted in narratives of possible selves?

In answering the research question, the study's first aim is to contribute to constructive developmental psychology. The second aim is to make a contribution to developmental theory building. Intentionally mentioned choosing this order, the study's exploration focuses on the development of the data and reporting what seen. Showing pattern of the developmental process is a secondary goal. Thereby, patterns are observed but not prioritized in a selective process.

Methods

Participants

The participants of this study were approached through purposeful sampling. Altogether, four participants took part in the study. The only criteria for choosing participants was the requirement of a minimum age of 20 years. This requirement was due to the autobiographical author's developmental phase between 15 and 25 (McAdams, 2013). While the extent of reflective abilities varies according to age and individuals, 20 years of age has been assumed to provide a safe account of reflection, displaying a clear possible future self and the ability to answer the interview questions provided. As a result, the four participants included two female, 22 and 29 years old, and two male participants, 22 and 32 years old. The two female participants and the 22 years old male participant were originally from Germany, and the 32 years old male

participant was originally from India. All of them currently live and study at Universities in Enschede (Netherlands).

Materials

The study made use of a multiple method design in exploring the psychosocial problems of the psychological self in narratives of possible selves. The first method applied was a personal, hand-written letter from the future, and the second method applied a semi-structured interview. The ethics committee approval number for this study is 190563.

The letters from the future were developed by Sools and Mooren (2012) as a research instrument for storytelling within the context of narrative psychology. In their study, the letters from the future were written by the participants, imagining themselves in a desired future state. In this study, the letters allowed a focused perspective on the possible selves imagined by the participants. As the present study is small-scale research involving four participants, a semi-structured interview allowed the possible freedom needed to explore the single participant in more detail (Drever, 1995). This semi-structured consisted of three prepared questions. Meanwhile, additional questions were supplemented during the interview, varying according to each participant.

The three questions of the interview tackled the *psychological self* as defined by McAdams (2013). There was one question for each component of the psychological self. The *social actor* was addressed by the question: “Can you tell me a story about a moment of self-awareness of your past or present that plays a role in your possible future self from the letter?”. The *motivated agent* was addressed by the question: “Can you tell me about a story of motivational change from the past or present that plays a role in your possible future self from the letter?”. The *autobiographical author* was addressed by the question: “Can you tell me a story of your past or present and how your possible future self from the letter relates to this story?”.

The letter was used as the first method to attain a future perspective that has not been influenced by interview questions posed before. Likewise, the interviewer did not read the letter before conducting the interview. It was important to avoid the content of the letter influencing the interviewer in asking improvised questions during the interview.

In the following, the psychological self’s features have been operationalized as materials for the data analysis.

The *Social Actor* has been operationalized as *social roles, traits, skills*, and the psychosocial problem - *self-regulation* of behaviour - becoming visible within the letter and the

interview. *Self-regulation* has been operationalized as *effortful control*, which is shown by either effortfully repressed, or effortfully attempted behaviour.

The *Motivated Agent* has been operationalized as *goals, values, hopes, fears*, and the psychosocial problem - *self-esteem* - becoming visible within the letter and the interview. *Self-esteem* has been operationalized as *sense of mastery*, which means that goals are either believed to be achievable or doubted.

The *Breach* has been operationalized as weak *sense of mastery* and *effortful control* towards a desired goal expressed in possible selves.

Table 1.

Coding scheme of the categories of effortful control, and sense of mastery, used to identify the breach

Effortful control	Sense of mastery
Weak: Behaviour towards a specific goal is not a topic of the letter. Behaviour is neither implicitly nor explicitly mentioned.	Weak: Behaviour towards a specific goal is mentioned with negative implications, like “I would like to do this, but I am not sure if it will work out”.
Strong: At least one behaviour directed towards a specific goal is mentioned. This behaviour can be expressed implicitly or explicitly. Strong effortful control can be shown in repressed behaviour or the attempt towards the behaviour.	Strong: Behaviour towards a specific goal is mentioned with positive implications, like “I will do this”, or “I am doing this”.

The *Autobiographical author* has been operationalized as the *narrative identity* through which *possible selves* are expressed in the letter and the interview. Each participant imagined themselves to be in a self-chosen future time. Writing the letter as an agent from this perspective, possible selves have been created as a representation of the narrative identity.

The extent of the autobiographical author’s expression has been operationalized as *autobiographical reasoning*, which means that behaviour and motivation towards goals are reported and reflected upon.

The psychosocial problem of *self-continuity* has been operationalized as the conscious integration of challenges within the self. These challenges have been explained as ruptures within the self that might lead to a breach (like operationalized above). Ruptures could be the result of a disagreement with cultural norms, or the confrontation of challenging life events (Rossiter, 1999). Conscious integration of challenges could be shown as the integration of new thinking patterns. These thinking patterns could be the result of rethinking cultural norms or rethinking the self in

general. The integration of these thinking patterns could be shown as conscious decision making towards changes within the self's life. In this study, *autobiographical reasoning* is observed within the extent of personal reflection. Thereby, strong autobiographical reasoning, followed by changes made in life, display *self-continuity*.

Table 2.

Coding scheme of the category autobiographical reasoning

Autobiographical reasoning	Self-continuity
Weak: behaviour and motivations towards events in life are not reflected upon	Weak: behaviour and motivations towards events in life are not reflected upon.
Strong: behaviour and motivations towards events in life are reflected upon	Strong: strong autobiographical reasoning combined with behavioural adjustments

Procedure

Participants were approached in person, face to face. Before the participants agreed to be part of the study, they were informed about the elements of the research. Before the data collection started, each participant was asked to sign the informed consent (see Appendix 3). The informed consent provided information about the type of the study, the procedure, the type of data collection, the data's confidentiality, and contact information of the researcher. Afterwards, they were asked to write a letter from the future. They were told to imagine themselves in a chosen future state, from which they write a letter. Thereby, it was explained that there are not any rules in how the letter is written and which content is provided, as long as the letter reflects a personal future state. Without any other conditions on how to write the letter, the participants were given a pen and a blank paper to write their letter from the future. Thereby, a time frame of 15 minutes was provided.

After finishing the letter, the interview was conducted as soon as the participant was ready. The interviews had a mean time of around 50 minutes. After the interview, the participant was given the chance to ask any questions desired. Finally, the participant was provided with contact details of the researcher in case of later questions, or the desire to withdraw from the study.

Data Analysis

This study's qualitative data analysis is based on the explorative investigation of narrative data, applied to identify the psychosocial problems of the psychological self in possible selves. First, two letters needed to be translated into English. Meanwhile, the letters in their original form can be found in Appendix 2. Second, the interviews were transcribed. The quotes extracted later

from the interviews were translated into English, which was necessary for three of the interviews. Finally, each participant was assigned a name, distinct from the original one, for anonymity purposes.

The narrative analysis of the letters from the future is built on Kenneth Burke's "Grammar of Motives" (1969). Burke (1969) uses the concept of a theatre play to explain motives of human action. This concept is summarised as individuals living in situations made up of different elements, also described as the "five key terms of dramatism". Thereby, drama seems to be a recreation of the natural happenings in human life. In a clinical setting, Murray and Sools (2014) put the method to use in health psychology. Building on this method, they developed the method of storyline analysis, as a means to investigate narrative identities. Storyline analysis follows the idea that the narrative identity can be analysed through the investigated elements in a story and their mutual interaction. Murray and Sools (2014) revised version of Burke's (1969) five terms has been used within the storyline analysis in this study.

The first element is the *agent*, the individual, whose perspective determines the whole setting. The second element is the *setting*, which is the form of background in which the agent appears, for example, physically, psychologically, or historically. The third element is the *act*, the events within the storyline. The fourth element is the *purpose* the agent aims for throughout the storyline. The fifth element is the *means*, the tools used by the agent to reach towards the aim. The final element is the *breach*. Disruption becomes part of the scene as soon as imbalance marks a contradicted behaviour of one of the elements towards the overall purpose. Thus, the *breach* is the leading motivation of the story of the self's attempts for inner balance.

In this study, the participant's letter from the future was analysed through the method of storyline analysis, using the six elements developed by Murray and Sools (2014). Each storyline analysis started with the translated letter. The factors which have been used to define the *breach* were integrated into analysing the letter: *effortful control* and *sense of mastery*. Hereby, the analysis was guided by the identification of personal goals within the elements. Then, the goals were examined on the extent of showing *sense of mastery* and *effortful control*. Finally, the defined *breach* served as a theme in analysing the interview. Thereby, the interview offered a closer look into past, present and future states of the narrative identity and the self's psychosocial problems.

A theoretical thematic analysis was applied in analysing the interview. Theoretical thematic analysis is a top-down approach, meaning that a specific research question with specific themes in mind is guiding the process of coding (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). In the present study, the operationalized *breach* was based on the psychosocial problems of the *social actor* and

the *motivated agent*. Following the storyline analysis of the letter from the future, the *breach* served as the guiding theme for analysing the interview. Depending on the content of the generated *breach*, segments from the interview were extracted for further coding. The segments were sorted to represent either the *social actor*, the *motivated agent* or the *autobiographical author*. All three components of the psychological self were coded according to the content of the self and the psychosocial problems.

The contents of the *social actor* are social roles, skills, traits and social reputation. This content was detected through the self-attributions and categorizations of the self. The contents of the *motivated agent* are personal goals, plans, values, hopes and fears. This content was detected through the self's exploration of, and commitment to life projects, planning, and prioritizing investments for the future. The content of the *autobiographical author* is the life narrative, which was detected through autobiographical reasoning and the construction of an integrative life story. The psychosocial problems of the social actor and the motivated agent were coded according to the coding scheme of *effortful control* and *sense of mastery*. The psychosocial problem of the autobiographical author was coded according to the coding scheme of *self-continuity*.

Results

The following reporting of the results is structured into four sections representing each participant's results separately. The reporting starts with a short introduction about who the participant is. This introduction is followed by the letter from the future and the storyline analysis. Afterwards, the psychological self is presented with a section for each of the three components (social actor, motivated agent, autobiographical author). In each section, the content from the storyline analysis and the theoretical thematic analysis of the interview are fused into one coherent explanation of the psychological self. Finally, a conclusion is given about how the psychosocial problems are depicted in the psychological self throughout the analysis of the letter and the interview.

The letters from the future are written in italic. Each line of the letter is numbered starting from one. According to the numbered line in the letter, the information mentioned in the storyline analysis is given a number in brackets at the end of the sentence. Throughout the storyline analysis and the theoretical thematic analysis, the segments which refer to the codes *effortful control*, *sense of mastery*, or *self-continuity* are written in italic. In the end of the same sentence, where the coded segment is marked, the appropriate code is given in brackets.

Ana (Participant 1):

The first participant is a 22 years old female university student. She seemed very open to answering the questions. Her style of talking was calm, changing into passionately trying to express herself. The focus of her interview lies on the mind shift she went through, which made her reflect on herself and life.

1 **Letter from the future.** *Today is finally the day. My world tour is finally starting. The last few*
2 *weeks passed quickly. It's been 4 months now that I have successfully completed my Masters of*
3 *Psychology. The last weeks, I have earned some money and have invested some time in the*
4 *planning & preparation of the trip. Now, I am at the airport and feel free. Finally, I can do what*
5 *I want - how long I have been waiting for this day. I am looking forward to everything that is to*
6 *come now.*

Agent. The letter is not directed to anyone, nor does Ana finish the letter with her name. Thus, the letter's content speaks as the only identifier for the agent. Ana stays anonymous by finishing the letter without a personal name while providing a first-person narrative. The I-perspective shows strong identification with the future perspective. The letter is written in the present tense of the future perspective, referring to the past and the future. The agent seems to be excited, impatient and exhausted. She expresses excitement towards the future of traveling the world (5/6), *impatience about the time it took to arrive at a present which is about to embrace the desired future* (1/4/5), and *exhausted from the past* (strong effortful control; 5), which seems having been a condition for the desired future. Travelling the world seems to be the agent's personal goals for the future.

Ana's past consists of saving money and planning the trip which seems to be directly linked to the world travelling she is about to make. Another part of the past, which is not directly linked to the trip but seems to serve as a condition for the future, is "successfully" completing her "Master of Psychology" (2/3). Hence, *the agent prioritizes having obtained the status of the master's education before following that, which makes her feel free* (strong effortful control; 4). With this condition, the agent shows that the university degree is not just a personal goal but also an obligation to some extent.

The agent's value is freedom (4/5), which she believes to be fulfilled after having completed the obligations of the past and taken the step towards the future. The present of the letter is the agent's moment of freedom. The value of freedom, however, seems to be a paradox in this letter. Freedom can only be obtained when the past goals have been successfully achieved, which gives the agent's definition of freedom a starting point, reached only under certain

conditions. With a starting point, however, an ending point of freedom in the future is also suggested considering the agent's definition of freedom as being conditional.

Ana's present future has not yet started the travelling, which reveals how her future self and the freedom obtained are strongly bound to the past. The lack of detail in describing her personal freedom displays *possible insecurities about the future and a strong bound to the past* (weak sense of mastery). The agent still seems to have difficulties integrating the future into the narrative identity as a reality.

Act. Ana describes the acts of the past of having finished a degree in Psychology and the last four months of having made money, *planned and prepared the future* (strong effortful control, strong sense of mastery). Meanwhile, the present future self stands at the airport and feels free. There is more description of the acts from the past than what is about to be realised in the future. Instead of actual acts, the future is described through feelings like "I am looking forward to everything that is to come", or "Now I am at the airport and I feel free". To the writer, the future acts seem to be rather untouchable, while the past can be described in more detail and as actual acts.

Setting. The setting of the letter seems to be one *looking back to a successful past and forward to a future full of hope and excitement of finally being able to realise future desires* (strong sense of mastery; strong effortful control). First, she looks back to the last few weeks having passed quickly. Then, the writer gives insight into the life acts of the last four months (2/3/4), finally *arriving at the airport, which is not yet the place she longed to be but a potential place which will take her there* (strong sense of mastery; 4/5/6).

The airport, where the agent is just about to enter a new identity defined by freedom, can be symbolised as a place of *reassurance*. The agent looks back making sure that everything has been done that had to be done in order to obtain the freedom of travelling the world. Confirming success, she can now "feel free" and look "forward to everything that is to come".

Purpose. The purpose of the story line is freedom of doing what the writer wants to do (4/5). Ana's definition of freedom has been known already before arriving at the present future in which she feels this freedom. The dominant communication of finally being free shows how Ana *lacked freedom in the past* (strong effortful control; weak sense of mastery). Hence, in some way freedom was taken away from her before, and *now, she has regained it* (strong sense of mastery).

Means. Ana describes two events of the past. Four months ago, when she finished her master's degree, and the last two weeks, during which she earned money and planned the world tour, symbolized as freedom. Earning money and planning the world tour seem to be direct means - resources to be used while enjoying the freedom of the present and the future. The

master's degree does not seem to have a direct relationship with the world tour. Nevertheless, the successful completion of the "Masters of Psychology" has been shown to be a means for attaining freedom, as well. Hence, the two means seem to have different purposes. While money and planning serve as obtaining the freedom to do what she wants physically (e.g. buying flight tickets; knowing where to go), the University degree seems to provide the agent with psychological freedom.

Breach. Ana communicates what has happened, is happening, and will happen. She refers three times to the present with "finally", stressing the relief of having reached the current point in life. Her expression about feeling free now, while having waited so long for the present, emphasises a compromise made in her life. It can be said, that Ana never lacked freedom physically, neither in the letter's past nor in the letter's present or future. Thus, freedom seems to be psychologically defined. Nevertheless, she does not reveal how exactly the personally defined freedom looks and feels like. It incorporates, however, that she has a Psychology degree, money, and a plan. The question arises whether Ana is satisfied with the compromise made, which seems to be about studying first and travelling second. Independent of the level of satisfaction however, the compromise is Ana's personal goal.

Conclusion about the psychological self within the letter and the interview:

Social actor. The background of the letter's future vision displays how the interviewee experienced freedom through *knowledge gained outside of her usual environment* (strong effortful control). In the interview, the participant explained that during her last travels in Cambodia, she had a moment of self-awareness in which she realized "from what kind of world I am actually coming from" and considered it as weird and stupid "about what kind of things I am thinking about". She talks about the lack of thankfulness in her own country "that we are actually also very unthankful". Going further, she mentioned her privileged existence "that I can actually do anything I want". Even though, this moment of mind expansion made her feel "stupid", she was very glad about the experience because it was also "a feeling of, ehm, freedom". This freedom lies within her realization that she has been thinking and acting a certain way because of the way *she has been playing her role in her social surrounding* (strong effortful control). Rejecting some of the thinking patterns, she feels freed, while understanding "how big the world actually is" and that there is not just the one way of doing things.

Having taken a step outside of thinking patterns, the interviewee started questioning the norms of her social environment. The Psychology studies have been considered as something which will lead her through life "for the next years", but she realized that she is not sure about the

studies anymore and wants to go travelling “before making a big decision like that again”. In the past, she has been pressured in deciding what to do in life on top of the pressure she put on herself by seeing everyone succeed in making decisions (strong effortful control; “a lot of pressure, I made myself but also received from others”; “while others already knew very concretely in which occupation they want to go”). Despite her mind shift, she still prefers to do her master’s before going travelling. She reveals a potentially strong *self-regulating behaviour* which might be due to the norms of her social role, she probably still feels attached to.

During her moment of self-awareness, she realized that she can “theoretically” go travelling tomorrow. On the one side, the word “theoretically” reveals that even though she is aware that freedom is there, she still *holds on to a pattern* of when and how to do specific things (strong effortful control; “somehow, you are totally free, but somehow bound to the way of how to be free”). This example shows that freedom can be theoretically there, without being practised fully. She herself admits “*I have to see that I go back to using my intuition more again, and not just the norms ‘that’s how you just do it’, and yes, just questioning more*” (strong effortful control).

Motivated agent. The interviewee explained that the time in Cambodia “is probably the biggest impulse to go further in this direction” of expanding the mind. Therefore, her goal is to travel the world and start by going back to Cambodia. “Everything you can still learn about the world and people” she explains “I just thought this feeling was very beautiful”. The interviewee’s desire for freedom expands into *wanting to help people*, who were less privileged than her to enjoy the same level of education she has (strong sense of mastery; “that I can give a little bit of my freedom to others, also with the knowledge what I was allowed to learn, I can give this to other children who are not as privileged to go to school”).

The self-knowledge, she gained, is a source of freedom for her. It helps to „also *follow one’s own dreams and maybe to become also more confident and stuff like that, and then also helps in this kind of decisions*” (strong sense of mastery). Travelling is “this vision, the way I would like to have it in some years, and yes, that is why *it definitely gives me motivation*” for her *current present of staying in university* (strong sense of mastery). She explained that she does believe that her culture had an impact on her. Thereby, she said that the values her culture holds are a lot about defining the person through their academic achievements. It could be possible that this kind of cultural pressure of achieving a specific status puts time pressure on the interviewee to finish her studies first. Instead of experiencing motivational constraints however, she explained, her vision of travelling enhances her motivation to finish her studies and get through this time (“the vision of this makes me go forward”). The motivated agent is expressed in this

self-motivated compromise *consciously deciding for a goal outside of her freed existence using the freedom of travelling as a motivation to persist over this time* (strong sense of mastery).

Autobiographical author. The moment of *self-reflection* (strong autobiographical reasoning) changed the interviewee. *First, she had to admit things about herself, that she did not like, before she could accept them and strive for an integrative self* (strong self-continuity ; “First, I felt stupid and small and somehow a little bit bad but on the other side I found the feeling very beautiful because it was a feeling of, ehm, freedom”). Increased self-reflection might have created a conflict inside herself. However, the interviewee solved this conflict by refusing to beat herself up for who she was but looking forward to becoming more of who she wants to be.

Within the interviewee’s reflection, she complained about the social and cultural norms that are sometimes blindly followed by people around her. She explained that “then the single person does not need to think really anymore, what is right for me, what do I want actually”. Spiritually, one of her main goals is to be a person who “*acts according to how I think and what I think is right*” (strong self-continuity).

Considering the fact, that in the letter she did not go directly for what she desired most, she admitted that “*changes do have something difficult about them*”. However, she thinks that *despite change, one stays the same throughout time, and that change usually comes easy to her* (strong self-continuity; “I think my relationship to change is quite good and that it also comes relatively easy to me”). Furthermore, she said that changes within yourself make you “only become bigger, getting a wider horizon, and ehm, maybe changing the focus one time a little bit again, but always staying the same, just a little bit more of it”. Thus, she seems to have a stable self-image which means that despite change self-continuity does not become a problem for her. Finally, the interviewee shows strong self-reflection. Thus, she might have decided to follow a less desired goal first, as shown in the letter. Still, the University degree as a priority might have been *a conscious decision made evaluating the past, the present, and the future* (strong autobiographical reasoning) according to her newly formed state of mind.

Conclusion about the psychosocial problems within the psychological self:

Ana’s identified breach within the letter consists of a compromise, she negotiated with herself, about two goals in life, of which one is her deep desire, and the other one is characterized as having a rather obligatory nature. The autobiographical author displayed in the interview is shown through strong self-reflection about the past, present and future. According to that reflection, she might be on the wrong path in life. Being aware, she still decides to go on with her studies and wait for travelling a couple more years. This compromise shows strong effortful

control towards finishing her University degree in the letter and the interview. This assumes the psychosocial problem of self-regulation.

The degree of self-regulation displayed within Ana's narrative could be due to norms she still seems to be attached to. Concerning the compromise, she made with herself, Ana's motivated agent was expressed through strong sense of mastery. In the letter, weak sense of mastery was shown implicitly. This was suggested as Ana reported more about her past than her future, displaying possible insecurities about her future. Nevertheless, she shows strong sense of mastery explicitly in reporting the way she looks forward to the future. In the interview, she shows a conscious relation to the compromise she made with herself. Thereby, she proves strong sense of mastery towards her plans. Thus, the psychosocial problem of self-esteem is expressed as a supporting feature of Ana's strong sense of mastery towards her goals in life.

The desire to travel has been a consequence of strong personal reflection. Thereby, old beliefs systems and habits have been rejected in an attempt to become a better self. In that context, however, she did not lose touch with herself as a person. Instead, she tried to expand these newly gained insights into her future as a positive influence. As an autobiographical author, she shows confidence in changing without losing self-continuity within her identity. Confident change has been reflected in her conscious decision to make a compromise which will lead her to where she wants to be eventually.

Ben (Participant 2):

The second participant is male and 22 years old. He seemed very open to answering questions. In the end, he said that he enjoyed the interview because of the challenge it gave him to reflect on his life. His future vision is given with attention to details in the letter.

1 **Letter from the future.** *Dear past me,*
2 *Spoiler alert. I'm sitting here in my High Castle on Mars. Just kidding. Still funny, but*
3 *still I'm happy to tell you that I'm happy. Let me tell you, you're on the right path. Don't stop*
4 *trusting the universe. I'm sitting here in my beautiful garden at my house on a small mountain*
5 *near the lake. Good nature around here and the city is also not that far away. My praxis is also*
6 *on my property. I'm really good at what I do and I love bringing the love back into people's lives.*
7 *This is not my full time activity though. Don't give up on music! As I'm writing from the future, I*
8 *know you won't hehe. I get much love for my music and sometimes tour with friends and we do*
9 *little shows. I don't worry about money. I have created a network of good people. The diversity is*
10 *incredible. From these, I have a bunch of really close friends and we hang out nearly everyday.*
11 *We still do drugs. Just on special occasions and mostly psychedelics. I kind of got spiritual over*

12 *the years, but not in a weird way, don't worry. I do lots of creative stuff. Anyways, I already told*
13 *you too much. Keep doing what you're doing. Have faith.*
14 *Sincerely, Fuck you <3*

Agent.

The agent addresses the letter to the past self. At the end of the letter, the author stays anonymous, ending the letter with “Sincerely, Fuck you <3”. The future self communicates with the past self on three different levels. The first level is the I-perspective. The second level is the communication with the past self as if he was another person, approaching the past self with “you”. The third level is happening through the future self, giving instructions to the past self, like “Don’t stop trusting the universe”. Thereby, the personal goal of the agent seems to be to convince the past self that he should have trust in the future and keep going.

Four different values of the agent are identified. The first value seems to be happiness. At the beginning of the letter, the feeling of happiness is communicated to the past self. Thereby, the *future self wants to make sure the past self knows that whatever he is doing will lead to happiness somehow* (strong sense of mastery). Thus, the past self is tried to be kept from worrying, while convinced to “have faith” (9/14). The second value is trust. Throughout the letter, the importance of having trust is communicated to the past self (4/14). The future self already knows that *everything is going to turn out fine, hence, worry is gratuitous* (strong sense of mastery). The third value is *to keep going and not give up* (strong sense of mastery). This value is closely linked to having trust and is given as an instruction from the future self to the past self (7/14). The fourth value is love. The future self has a praxis where “*bringing the love back into people's lives*” (strong sense of mastery) plays a role. Reversely, the future self gets much love for his music (8). The agent seems very happy with the life he is living while he knows that the past self has not reached the point of complete trust and happiness yet.

Music is something, the future self emphasises strongly. Having the need to tell the past self to keep having faith and to not give up on music reveals that the past self might *struggle with his confidence to be who he is* (weak sense of mastery). Hence, the actions of the past self seem to be *restricted by doubt* (strong effortful control). While the past self seems to be doubtful, the future self has obtained the amount of *personal freedom that makes him happy and faithful* (strong sense of mastery). Even though the past self needs to be lectured by the future self, *the future self has obtained enough confidence to trust the past self in what he is doing* (strong sense of mastery; 8).

Act.

Doing music and drugs are two activities that link the future self to the past self. The future self values this form of *continuity in dedication*, instructing the past self *to not give up on music* (strong effortful control; 7). The act of consuming drugs is described as “just on special occasions and mostly psychedelics”. The emphasis on behavioural constraints concerning drug intake seems to be a condition with which the future self distinguishes itself from the past self (strong sense of mastery). Thereby, the future self seems to be satisfied with this kind of *behavioural self-regulation* (strong effortful control) while *advertising it to the past self* (strong sense of mastery).

Setting.

The future self is talking to the past self from a specific location “I’m sitting here in my beautiful garden at my house on a small mountain near the lake”. From this location, the future self is telling the past self about how his future life is going to look like (3-13). The future self is happy with the life described and excited about telling the past self (3). After revealing his happiness to the past self, the future self tells the past self that he is *on the right path and should trust the universe* (strong sense of mastery; 2/3). Followed by that, a description of the life’s content, which serves as an aid to highlighting the happiness of the future self, *should convince the past self of the value of trust and remaining defiant* (effortful control).

Purpose.

The purpose of the narrative story is about making the past self see that he is *on the right path* and giving support in *worrying less* (strong effortful control; 3). The future self explicitly mentions his self-awareness of being in the future, understanding that the past self does just as expected by the future self (strong sense of mastery; 7/8). Thus, the existence of this knowledge assumes that the future self might focus on the goal of making the past self worry less on the way (13/14). Thereby, the priority is not on trying to warn the past self that if he does not listen to the future self, things will not work out. Instead, *the priority is to open a path with fewer worries towards the future* (strong effortful control).

Means.

The agent uses a specific atmosphere in the letter, as a means to communicate the desired message to the past self. *Using humour within the letter* (strong effortful control; 2/8) gives the letter a touch of easiness. Fitting the purpose of less worry and faith towards life, humour could help in the attempt of taking life less serious and thus worry less.

A detailed description of the future self’s life serves as a proof to the past self, that the life he will be faced with is a good one and will make him a happy person. These means might be chosen to address specific current worries of the past self. For example, the future self explains:

“I don’t worry about money” (strong sense of mastery), considering *money might be an aspect about which the past self experiences concerns* (weak sense of mastery). Generally, the future self uses instructions to tackle the most important messages to the past self directly (3/7/13/14). These instructions are probably chosen carefully, as a means to address doubts and concerns the past self has.

Breach.

The letter is focused strongly on two aspects. One aspect is about the future self, telling the past self about his life, which seems to be very fulfilling (3). The other aspect is about the future self, giving instructions to the past self (3/7/13/14). Both aspects are a means of motivating the past self to keep going. At one point, however, the future self gives a reminder about knowing that the past self will not give up anyways. Being aware, the future self still provides instructions, trying hard to reassure the past self about how good the future is. Hence, there might be a lack of trust in the past self. The letter might display an imbalance that is defined by this lack of trust. Still, the future self actively attempts to work out this imbalance within the letter.

Conclusion about the psychological self within the letter and the interview:

Social Actor. The interviewee is aware of his skill of making music. Nevertheless, he has *difficulties believing that* this skill could be used as an occupational source (“you know, if you say, I want to dedicate my life completely towards music, and also earning money with it, but, I do not know, that is like, I do not see myself there”). Music is for the interviewee like “escaping the world”. However, he said that *he can only express himself fully when he knows that nobody is listening* (strong effortful control; “where maybe no one hears me, where you can, a little bit more, express yourself freely with music”).

The barricade to making music is the company he is living with, and his desire to be alone, because “when I want to experiment with myself, I want to, really crazy, to just let go”. *Exposing himself to others might come with the fear of losing his social reputation, which has been maintained through self-regulated behaviour of not expressing himself* (strong effortful control). Showing improvement, however, he added “It is not a long time ago that I just started doing this, that I do not have inhibitions to sing in front of other people”. Thus, he *attempts to express himself through music despite fears* (strong effortful control).

Motivated Agent. The interviewee explained music embedded in his future as follows: “definitely, I do not want to give up music”, still, “I do not want to count on it, because if it is really about earning money and having a safe future, then music definitely stays a hobby first”. Through music, he gets “automatically, like, more positive thoughts”. Hence, music seems to be a

personal goal of the interviewee, as well as a source of hope towards a more positive future. Nevertheless, he entitled his free musical expression as “*denudation*” (weak sense of mastery; “It is kind of a denudation a little bit”). The interviewee revealed further that “somehow, for a long time, *I was not really confident when it came to my abilities*” (weak sense of mastery). Going on, he said that “it seems that somehow, it is *not really easy, somehow to swim with it, to jump right in*” (weak sense if mastery).

Despite his insecurity, however, he managed to *sing in front of others* (strong sense of mastery), even if it took him a while to get there. Thus, he hopes that maybe he will be able to combine music with another job so that he does not need to give up music (“but somehow, I hope that I can maybe, that both can work parallel in a good way, first the job and then also the music”). Deductively, it can be said that the motivated agent is expressed through the personal goal of keeping music in his life but fearing that music will be unreliable for a safe future, which makes him want to compromise his focus. Consequently, the future self in the letter shows that a *compromise has been made between music and a “safe” job*, with which he tells the past self to be very happy about (strong sense of mastery).

Autobiographical author. Music is an activity that has been a continuous companion of the interviewee throughout his life. Through “the music lesson that I had” and other tools he was provided with he says: “I definitely see a light and bright future”. Still, he also says: “Yes, the music was always there, and for some time, I had a naïve imagination that I will do something with music”. With these two points of views, the interviewee shows ambivalent thoughts towards music being a part in his future. This ambivalence is generally shown within the narrative identity. The letter also reveals how the future self is sure about a fulfilled life with music but seems to be aware of the past self’s struggles to believe in himself. *Within this context of struggling to believe in himself, the interviewee shows strong self-reflection* (strong autobiographical reasoning). Meanwhile, *his actions in favour of doing music anyways, despite his doubts, prove persistence* (self-continuity).

The interviewee explained his insecurities considering that he “was also bullied and then it was kind of a victim role and then I also could not really, could not really express myself freely in lessons and that also inhibits a lot”. Hence, *he shows self-reflection in recognizing the past as a potential reason for fearing rejection when going public with his music* (strong autobiographical reasoning). Furthermore, he reflects about the way writing music takes him out of this world and makes him see everything from a distance (“somehow, I can distance myself from everything through text-writing, as if I was above everything, and look at everything from the bird’s eye

view, and this is quite comfortable, it helps a little bit, it opens the horizon”). During that moment at least, he might feel free from any judgement and expectations.

Conclusion about the psychosocial problems within the psychological self:

Ben seems to have a clear future vision. The only breach coming to the fore, within the storyline, is the future self’s constant reminder to the past self to not give up on his desired future. These instructions were translated to show potential insecurities. However, insecurities are not reported explicitly in the letter. In the interview, however, the interviewee revealed his struggles in following his desire of becoming a musician.

The social actor is expressed through self-regulated behaviour. Two types of strong effortful control are shown within the social actor. Firstly, the interviewee’s struggle to express himself with his music in front of others leads to strong effortful control towards the rejection of doing music, as long as others are around who can hear him. Secondly, the interviewee explained, and the future vision showed, that he overcame the fear and started performing in front of others. Overcoming fear was assumed to show strong effortful control towards more positive thinking and courage.

The motivated agent is expressed through his personal goals, hopes, and mixed expressions of high and low self-esteem. The continuous goal throughout the letter and the interview is music, while hopes towards the fulfilment of future goals are expressed in positive terms. Thereby, strong sense of mastery towards a future of being a musician has been expressed, as well as weak sense of mastery. On the one hand, the future incorporates music, thus goals have been achieved. On the other, the future self encourages the past self, knowing about the insecurities he is dealing with.

The autobiographical author is expressed through the ambivalence within his narrative identity which comes to the fore as believing in his potential of making music, and the lack of believing in it. Furthermore, he shows autobiographical reasoning in reflecting on how his past experiences have influenced his struggles to believe in himself as a musician. Still doing music, he reflects about how writing music gives him a wider perspective on looking at himself and life. Having made an attempt to overcome his fear, it is shown that the interviewee started integrating this wider, possibly more positive perspective into his self-concept. This process of learning and integrated the learned lessons into his life shows self-continuity within the narrative identity.

Cecilia (Participant 3):

The third participant is 29 years old and female. She seemed very open to answering questions. During the interview, she was very confident in telling me when she needed a short break to gather thoughts which gave the whole interview a calm atmosphere. The future vision is short and precise, stating how her future occupation will look like.

Letter from the future. Hello,

I am currently working on my designs for the new collection of my own brand and considering which colours I would like to use. Sustainability is very important to me, that's why we also produce ethically, fairly and environmentally conscious. The brand supports the Slow Fashion model and consumption in the world has slowed down. In addition, I visited the producers in the countries and selected local family businesses

Agent. The letter starts with a simple “hello” without the knowledge of who is addressed. The agent stays anonymous by finishing the letter without a personal name while providing a first-person narrative. Thereby, the anonymity might not just be directed towards the undefined audience but also towards the self, as an expression of an undefined identity. Thus, the letter’s content speaks as the only identifier for the agent. The I-perspective, meanwhile, shows strong identification with the future perspective. The short and formal description of the future self’s life leaves an impression of unexcused determination towards life goals.

Within the letter, the occupation of Cecilia is presented. Thereby, only specific details are chosen for representation. Part of her job being about sustainability assumes the value of sustainability (3/4/5). The agent’s goals are about working environmentally conscious and ethically fair towards the people involved in the work she is doing (strong sense of mastery). Since these goals are tackled within her occupation, the agent shows successful goal attainment (strong effortful control).

Act. Cecilia writes from the current moment of choosing a colour for her new fashion collection. The agent’s goal is to be sustainable. To live by this value, the future self produces “ethically, fairly and environmentally-conscious” (strong effortful control). *Tailoring her work to the value of sustainability with the so-called “Slow Fashion Model”, Cecilia refers to the achievement that the “consumption in the world has slowed down”* (strong effortful control, strong sense of mastery; 4). The last activity mentioned by the writer is her visiting the “producers in the country” and selecting “local family businesses”.

Setting. The setting of the letter is about the author *working for her new fashion collection* (strong effortful control) and reflecting on the kind of work she does. It is a setting in which the author introduces herself through the work she does. Cecilia presents her passion for

design and sustainability, and how both are fused together into an occupation, the agent follows.

Purpose. Cecilia seems to be passionate about fashion design. Therein, she values sustainability, considering the environment and producing fair. Thus, her purpose is the fusion of both, her passion and her values, making an occupation for herself.

Means. It seems as if fashion design is for Cecilia a means with which she *tackles sustainability challenges* (strong sense of mastery). Meanwhile, sustainability might be a means with which she gives meaning to her work as a fashion designer.

Breach. The letter does not provide any signs of an existing breach within the future vision.

Conclusion about the psychological self within the letter and the interview:

Social Actor. In the letter, the interviewee reveals herself as a fashion designer. Originally, however, she wanted to become a make-up artist. Her parents though, instilled in her the idea that it would be better to do something “prudent”, something with which to earn some money (“yes I think it started with my parents, that I just realized that it will make more sense to learn something prudent and study for example”; “generally to be able to earn money”). Thereby, the social actor is expressed in the *orientation towards norms provided by her parents* (strong effortful control).

Finding a turn though, she found value in her fashion and technology studies in which she discovered new interests. This study was a *compromise of going to university according to her parent’s norms, and still being true to her desire to work creatively* (strong effortful control; “the fashion studies that was, boah, that was kind of a compromise with myself”; “yes, then also different interests developed”).

Motivated Agent. The interviewee revealed that she never became a make-up artist, “because *I just did not believe in myself*. I also did not receive assistance from outside” (weak sense of mastery). Furthermore, the fear to not be good enough hindered her to apply to some universities in the past (weak sense of mastery; “I was just scared that my application map will be shit and that the people will not want me”).

The interviewee explained that she likes being creative and when she gets affirmation for her creativity, she *feels “connected” again with her talent* (strong sense of mastery; “I get some affirmation from outside, and then I see it again, then I feel a little bit connected again to my talent”). Nevertheless, the interviewee began to realize that “it is just fun, and I like to express myself, but it is not like I would want to do it professionally”. The interviewee explained that *she is content now and her goal is to “not necessarily make creativity an occupation” but to be*

creative outside her work (strong sense of mastery).

Spiritually, she explained to be interested in “Slow Living, the simple life, and I realised that *I start adapting to that more and more, that this is my thing*” (strong sense of mastery).

Furthermore, she emphasised that “I do not want material things in my life or goods, that is not important to me.

Autobiographical author. The interviewee shows *reflective insights considering how she went from her childhood dream to her current situation of studying, and further to her future vision* (strong autobiographical reasoning). *Thereby, she stayed true to herself in the way that she is still working towards attaining a position as a creative worker* (strong self-continuity; “the link is that I would favour working creatively, I just do see myself in a position like that”). Finally, she added a lesson learned: “in life, it is not necessarily about making your occupation about your passion, but it could have been possible that I would have become a make-up artist but would have been extremely unhappy”. Integrating this lesson into her narrative identity, she revealed: “*I realized, step by step, how I want to live my life, or what I consider as important*” (strong autobiographical reasoning, strong self-continuity).

Conclusion about the psychosocial problems within the psychological self:

The social actor is expressed through self-regulating behaviour in expressing her creativity. Considering her parents, the interviewee got influenced to think towards a more standard way to earn money. Following the interview, she seems to agree with the idea of expressing herself outside of her profession, contentedly. Eventually, however, the letter reveals that she still puts her creativity into work showing that she found her own way of being creative and earning money somehow. Hence, strong effortful control is shown in her process of finding her own way. Thereby, she shows strong effortful control, as a means, to conform to her parents, and as a means to find her personal goals and values, and work towards integrating them into her life.

While the interviewee used to struggle with low self-esteem in following her desires, the future self seems to be sorted, knowing what she wants. The motivated agent is expressed through this weak sense of mastery towards her desire to be creative in her profession. Thereby, she let others tell her what is possible in life and what is not. Developing a personal sense of her goals and values in life, she developed the strong sense of mastery needed to do what she wants. Finally, this strong sense of mastery is reflected in her future vision.

The autobiographical author is expressed through her strong personal reflection about the past and how she evolved to be who she is today. The life lesson she learned is about her

realization that her occupation does not need to be all about her passion for being creative and that she can be happy another way. Showing the integration of this life lesson into the future vision, in which she still managed to work creatively, she shows self-continuity in her narrative identity.

Daniel (Participant 4):

The fourth participant is 32 and male. He seemed very open in answering the questions and provided mostly clear and definite statements. He seems to know who he is and why he became to be the person he is and will be.

Letter from the future. *Looking back at all the things that I have done, be in school, or becoming a concert producer, or getting married once, or travelling the world, or going back to study at the end of twenties, being in polymerous relationships. All these things were exactly the way they were supposed to be to get where I am right now, which is living on a beach, growing my own food, staying healthy, having staggering amounts of sex, doing psychedelics, and writing books about humanity. So yeah, well done.*

Agent. The letter neither has a classical beginning, nor a classical ending. It starts and ends with the content of the writer's message. Daniel stays anonymous by finishing the letter without a personal name while providing a first-person narrative. Thus, the letter's content speaks as the only identifier for the agent.

The end of the letter reveals that the letter is addressed to the self. The writer's last sentence is "So yeah, well done". This sentence is addressed to the self after having reflected about his life, and about how everything he did led to a point where he can say to himself "well done". The past is not reflected as an independent event but as events which have led to the present (3/4). Congratulating the self, the agent shows that his life turned out exactly the way he wanted to, appreciating every part of it (6). The agent seems to value the moment of awareness, looking at his life with satisfaction about how everything turned out. All in all, the agent's *value seems to be appreciation of the self through looking back and realizing that everything had a meaningful place in life* (strong sense of mastery).

Act. The agent seems to be at a point in life where he wants to reflect on his life as an author (1-3). Daniel's letter consists of various acts of the past leading to the scenario of the present (6). The agent's main act is the celebration of the present through an appreciation of the past, and the congratulation to the self for the *achievement of a valued life* (strong sense of mastery).

Setting. The agent looks "back at all the things that" he has done. The setting is a

harmonious one. Daniel presents all the past events leading to the present place, he enjoys being in (6). The goal seems to be the *appreciation of the harmony of different events in life forming to become something which is just right just as it is “supposed to be”* (strong sense of mastery).

Purpose. There are two purposes detected in the letter. The first purpose is Daniel giving himself a “well done” to his life. Thereby, he presents: this is me, this is my past and my present, and that is my definition of a good life. Thereby, the second purpose seems to be a celebration.

Means. Daniel’s past and present are the means with which the agent looks at his life with satisfaction. Meanwhile, the present is the means with which Daniel decides to celebrate life and praise the self.

Breach. The letter does not provide signs of an existing breach within the future vision.

Conclusion about the psychological self within the letter and the interview:

Social Actor. Contrary to his clear determined future vision, the interviewee admitted that in the past “growing up, high school, and everybody keeps telling you: No, this is not the way. It's not about feeling good, it's about working hard for it, or you know feeling bad before feeling good”. Thereupon, “I got sucked into it”. Thereby, the interviewee shows that *he has been letting himself categorize into a social role telling him how to perform* (strong effortful control). Later, however, he said that he got back to his ideals he held as a child which was “Life is about having a good time”. Implementing this ideal back into his life, *he stopped behavioural constraints in favour of his own choices* (strong effortful control).

Concerning the way he lives, the interviewee explained further: “some of these behaviours change from time to time, but uh my state of mind does not change that is not affected by anything. And that way, *so my interaction or other people’s opinions have no effect on the way I want to be*” (strong effortful control). All in all, the social actor is expressed as an attempting independent actor who tries to be himself without social influences. During the interview, he talks about times, when he did not keep away from performing according to norms. In the letter though, he lives according to his childhood dream and does not regret anything. “And for me that’s what spirituality is basically, being able to apply yourself to your situation to the most efficient way”.

Motivated Agent. Throughout his life, the interviewee had different goals. He started: “Then I became a concert producer and I loved to work in the beginning, but after a point, the money takes over and then it becomes about the money and it is no different than a corporate job”. Realizing that he is not having fun nor growing anymore, “*I decided to get on the road, and I started travelling and I left*. From there actively a lot of things followed and it's come to where I

am right now” (strong sense of mastery).

During the decision to change the path, he had his personal goals in mind “I needed change, I wanted to grow. So, I was like chasing knowledge, I guess” (strong sense of mastery). The future vision displays how *the interviewee never quit. He was always going towards “having a good time” and growing* (strong sense of mastery). Hence, he was always following his goals. Repeating his future vision of the letter he explained that *“everything I do is dedicated with that goal”* (strong sense of mastery).

Autobiographical author. The interviewee *explained that growing up in the culture of his Indian family* (strong autobiographical reasoning), “mediocrity is celebrated, always. Mediocrity was something that was always celebrated and you know there was always the good thing to be as safe and mediocre as possible. And this is something which I didn't like at all, and I was like it's, it's a crime to live life, and, in a way that's just for that and to not excel and to not make something out of life”. While “I've picked up things that were useful, at the same time I picked up things that were against the democratic opinion of things, but this had helped me in *thinking critically. So, I always am able to see one side of the perspective while I'm thinking the other side. So, it's always there with me, so I'm always on the other side also*” (strong autobiographical reasoning).

After a very dangerous car accident, the interviewee revealed that he realized that life is all about being in the present moment. Thereby, he learned to put away his ego and act rationally. Because the accident happened in a moment where he was very ego-involved, concentrated on himself instead of on the street, this incident led him back to remembering what life is about for him. Incorporating this realization into his life by being himself and refusing to be influenced by anyone, the interviewee shows *self-continuity*.

Conclusion about the psychosocial problems within the psychological self:

The social actor is expressed through self-regulative behaviour in the past. The interviewee who used to be involved in his culture's norms experienced strong effortful control in the way he was behaving. When he realized that this behaviour did not match his actual goals and values, strong effortful control turned to be directed towards the things he wanted out of life.

The motivated agent shows strong sense of mastery when showing confidence and belief in being himself and who he wants to be. Even if he lost direction at times through social influence, the interviewee reported that he always found back to his way of living. Meanwhile, the future vision shows how Daniel celebrates his life unconditionally for what it is.

All in all, the autobiographical author of the interviewee shows strong reflection about the past, the present and the future. Life seems to be a treasure for him that should be valued and lived the way he wants for himself. While it is not wrong to make mistakes or consider ideas from others, the author in this story line promotes the creation of one's personal images of how life should look like. Aiming for challenges and growth, the autobiographical author shows strong self-continuity in constantly revising himself, while staying true to his identity.

Discussion

Discussion of the psychosocial problems

Departing from the model of the psychological self by McAdams (2013), the present study aimed to explore the expression of the psychosocial problems as depicted in the of individuals. The three components of the self are the social actor, the motivated agent, and the autobiographical author. The psychosocial problem of each component was explored within future narratives and more specifically understood and identified within the interview. In the study, the psychosocial problems were expressed in four different participants.

Self-regulation, the psychosocial problem of the social actor, was expressed dominantly as practising strong effortful control towards a compromise between the self's desire and negotiation of external ideas about life. Self-esteem, the psychosocial problem of the motivated agent was expressed as strong sense of mastery towards the desired possible selves in the future. The past, however, dominantly revealed a history of weak sense of mastery, represented by reasons of shame, pressure, and insecurity. Self-continuity, the psychosocial problem of the autobiographical author was expressed as an integrative self. Every participant displayed a development from the past to the future in which challenges have been overcome and life lessons have been learned. The results of having integrated the learned lessons into the narrative identity have been displayed dominantly by the letters.

As a first conclusion, the results of this study confirm the finding of developmental research, that between 14 and 30 years of age, self-esteem is increasing gradually (Erol and Orth, 2011). Thereby, the first two participants (both 22 years old) showed both less sense of mastery than the two older participants (29 and 32 years old). Meanwhile, the 32 years old participant showed the strongest sense of mastery. The gradual increase of self-esteem cannot just be detected between the participants but also within the participants. The results showed how self-esteem improved from the participant's past towards the participant's future.

The definition of high self-esteem given by McAdams (2013) has been completely fulfilled by the oldest participant. While the participant's letter displayed the purpose of celebrating life as incorporating both past and present, putting a high value on life was proven. In both the letter and the interview, the participant proved confidence towards approaching life as personally desired without being externally influenced in how to feel and what to do. In this study, sense of mastery measured this life approaching confidence.

According to the first conclusion, it might be discussed if the model of the psychological self, used in this study is a suitable one in referring to self-esteem. The provided three psychosocial problems are interacting with each other (McAdams, 2013). Hence, low self-esteem may lead to influencing behaviour in self-regulating the self to avoid an activity (Crooker & Knight, 2005). Meanwhile, self-regulating behaviour to avoid an activity that makes the self feel good about him/herself could also lead to low self-esteem. Meanwhile, an identity which is deprived of the activities that make up the self might lead to low self-continuity, which in turn has an influence on the other two psychosocial problems (McAdams, 2013).

In the results of this study, the interdependence of the psychosocial problems has been confirmed as described. Increase of self-esteem was coupled with self-regulated behaviour towards a more positive outcome. Nevertheless, it cannot be concluded whether self-esteem or self-regulated behaviour occurred first. Referring back to McAdams's (2013) definition of the motivated agent, however, it could be suggested that self-esteem implicitly initiated behaviour. Thereby, self-esteem is still built from the past self (McAdams, 2013). Hence, I carefully conclude that the single evaluation of the psychosocial problems loses value as soon as it is taken out of context.

As a second conclusion, I am carefully supporting Irwin's (1996) and Rossiter's (1999) argument that a rupture in the self's life improves development within the self. This development was a positive one throughout each participant's results. They all showed strong personal reflection leading up to strong self-continuity. Ruptures as breaches in the storyline analysis were only detected in two of the participants. Having identified the breach for both, the interview still showed strong personal reflection about the content and constructive incorporation of life lessons into the narrative identity. The other two participants still showed a personal development throughout the interview, in which strong personal reflection led to a change, and further to a more integrated self.

Taking a closer look into the development of self-continuity, the results confirm the developmental process of the self, depicted by Irwin (1996). The first step of recognizing a problem has been shown through strong personal reflection within the interviews of all

participants. For example, one participant recognized the problem low self-confidence towards professionalizing her artistic skills. The second step of taking distance from the problem has been shown through a deeper and more constructive personal reflection. Thereby, the participant showed understanding of the origins of her low self-confidence. Furthermore, she displayed a deeper understanding of what she wants which is not necessarily about making her creative skills an occupation. The third step displays the change within the self. During this step, the participants showed either a decision made or already acquired behaviour. Hereby, the example showed a compromise was followed with confidence. The final adaptation has been shown within the letters. Thereby, their future vision incorporated the development depicted in the interview. In the last step, the participant, as exemplified, showed a development towards an occupation in which she uses her creative skills and incorporates her personal value into her style of working. Hence, the participant further developed and continuously adapted to her development.

As a third conclusion, I am showing that effortful control throughout the letter and the interview has been found in all the participants. Nevertheless, it was observed that the older the participant, the more effortful control was directed towards the individual agency, while effortful control towards norms was more observed in the younger participants. This conclusion could be traced back to the pattern of self-esteem found in the first conclusion. Furthermore, autobiographical reasoning has also shown to become stronger with age. This suggests that with more autobiographical reasoning, there is more critical examination within the self (McAdams, 2013). This critical examination could lead to the awareness of how the self is embedded in a cultural context, which could lead to an increased need for and use of individual agency (Rossiter, 1999).

Implications

In this study, letters from the future and interviews have been used as methods for data collection. The study included the letter as a written approach and the interview as a spoken approach. The letter as a written approach produced shorter responses which are more focused on a coherent idea of the self in a specific time and space (Adler & Dunlop & Fivush & Lilgendahl & Lodi-Smith & McAdams & Syed, 2017). This focused approach can be advantageous. In this study, however, the interview was needed to provide a wider view of the psychological self which is a model, complex enough to demand a broader scope of information. The written letter might have shown advantages, as interviewer effects are likely to be minimized and sensitive information that would usually not be shared might be provided as a written text rather than a spoken sentence (Adler and et al., 2017). However, the letter did not allow for further clarification of the data provided by the participant. In this study though, the interview allowed

for a more extensive exploration of the narrative identity. While both interview and letter have provided a temporal perspective on past, present and future, only the interview allowed extensive personal reflection by the interviewee, on the written and spoken topics. Both temporal flexibility as well as the scope to reflect deeply were especially of value in exploring the self-continuity as a psychosocial problem. In the case of trying to detect only the motivated agent as one component of the psychological self, a narrative approach using only the letter could be more focused on the future perspective and thus advantageous.

The semi-structured interview had standardized questions. Parts of the questions were asked spontaneously which is prone to losing value in validity measures (Barriball & While, 1994). Nevertheless, the openness of the interview structure allowed for more free expression from the side of the interviewee but also from the side of the interviewer in coming up with creative questions. The strength of improvised questions is the possibility too attune to the interviewee and thereby tailor questions to the way he/she is experienced as a whole person.

Criteria for choosing participants were limited. This allowed for diversity within the people interviewed, which increases validity within the study (Barriball & While, 1994). Furthermore, the three of the four interviewees were able to be interviewed and write the letter in the mother tongue which helps the process of valid data collection. Nevertheless, the narrative data faces the challenge of relativism (Irvin, 1996). Thereby, relativism leads to rather implicit results in which interpretations can be argued in being right or wrong without finding an answer. Still, it can be argued that narrative data have value in their authenticity.

As a contribution to developmental theory and constructive developmental psychology (Irvin, 1996), this study shows a development from the past to the future within the psychological self. This incorporates self-esteem, self-regulation in favour of individual agency, and self-continuity through the integration of life lessons. I would categorize the findings into contributing to constructive developmental psychology. Even though, existing theories about age and self-esteem have been confirmed by the results. Clearer results might be created through frequent replications of the study. Hence, the main value in this construction lies within the results of the single participant.

Based on Irvin's (1996) four steps to processing challenge into an integrative self, the study showed that each participant went through this same process. This scheme of recognizing a problem, reflecting about it, taking desired chances, and adapting to a changed self, provides the potential for future research. Thereby, this study adds the value of investigating the background of a processed challenge. In case someone did not went through the steps reaching an integrative self at the end of the process, it could be possible to analyse this person's process considering the

psychosocial problems of the psychological self. In this context, low self-esteem might leave the person stuck at the step of taking chances after reflecting about a problem. Next, to that, it might be interesting to analyse how people with high self-esteem work throughout the steps. Especially insights of developmental processing by high self-esteem participants could help in creating a method to help participants with low self-esteem.

Conclusion

The individual's search for identity is embedded in a constant challenge of self-development. Thereby, it seems hard to keep a sense of self, staying the same while everything around the individual changes, including the self. The present study provides insights into the expression of the psychosocial problems within the process of personal development. Narrative identities show how psychosocial problems can inflict stagnation or movement within the self. Through personal awareness, however, narratives provide insights into the psychosocial problems nature and allow for further investigation. Thereby, the self can be individually revised in the process of recognition and actively attempted change.

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Appendix 1 – Interview

Social actor:

1. Can you tell me a story about a moment of self-awareness of your past and present that plays a role in your possible future self from the letter?

Motivated agent:

2. Can you tell me about a story of motivational change from the past or present that plays a role in your possible future self from the letter?

Autobiographical author:

3. Can you tell me a story of your past and present and how your possible future self from the letter relates to this story?

Appendix 2 - Letters from the future

Letter 1:

Heute ist es endlich so weit. Meine Weltreise geht nun endlich los. Die letzten Wochen vergingen wie im Flug. Jetzt ist es schon 4 Monate, dass ich meinen Master in Psychologie erfolgreich abgeschlossen habe. Die letzten Wochen habe ich etwas Geld verdient und habe einige Zeit in die Planung & Vorbereitung der Reise investiert. Jetzt bin ich am Flughafen und fühle mich frei. Endlich kann ich machen was ich will – wie lange ich auf diesen Tag gewartet habe. Ich freue mich auf alles was jetzt kommt.

Letter 2:

Dear past me,

Spoiler alert. I'm sitting here in my High Castle on Mars. Just kidding. Still funny, but still I'm happy to tell you that I'm happy. Let me tell you, you're on the right path. Don't stop trusting the universe. I'm sitting here in my beautiful garden at my house on a small mountain near the lake. Good nature around here and the city is also not that far away. My praxis is also on my property. I'm really good at what I do and I love bringing the love back into people's lives. This is not my full time activity though. Don't give up on music! As I'm writing from the future, I know you won't hehe. I get much love for my music and sometimes tour with friends and we do little shows. I don't worry about money. I have created a network of good people. The diversity is incredible. From these, I have a bunch of really close friends and we hang out nearly everyday. We still do drugs. Just on special occasions and mostly psychedelics. I kind of got spiritual over the years, but not in a weird way, don't worry. I do lots of creative stuff. Anyways, I already told you too much. Keep doing what you're doing. Have faith.

Sincerely, Fuck you <3

Letter 3:

Hallo,

Ich sitze gerade an meinen Entwürfen für die neue Kollektion meiner eigenen Brand und überlege welche Farben ich benutzen möchte. Nachhaltigkeit ist mir sehr wichtig, deshalb produzieren wir auch ethisch, fair und umweltbewusst. Die Marke unterstützt das Slow Fashion

Modell und der Konsum in der Welt hat nachgelassen. Außerdem habe ich die Produzenten in den Ländern besucht und lokale Familienbetriebe ausgewählt.

Letter 4:

Looking back at all the things that I have done, be in school, or becoming a concept producer, or getting married once, or travelling the world, or going back to study at the end of thirty, being in polymerous relationships. All these things were exactly the way they were supposed to be to get where I am right now, which is living on a beach, growing my own food, staying healthy, having staggering amounts of sex, doing psychedelics, and writing books about humanity. So yeah, well done.

Appendix 3 – Informed Consent

Title of the study

A narrative analysis of the psychosocial problems of the psychological self in possible selves

The following research study is about exploring the psychological self in narrative data. The study happens in the context of the researcher's bachelor thesis. The BMS Ethics Committee of the University of Twente has reviewed and finally approved the research study. Any approval to participate in the study can be withdrawn anytime. Furthermore, questions can be asked throughout the study and anytime afterwards. It is possible to contact the researcher anytime for questions or withdrawal from the study. Thereby, it is not required to provide any reasons. For further questions about your personal rights in the context of being a research participant, the Ethics Committee of the University of Twente (ethicscommittee-bms@utwente.nl).

The first part of the data collection consists of a letter from the future. Thereby you are asked to write a letter from the future imagining yourself to be in that future state at this moment. The second part consists of an interview. This interview is about you as a psychological self and the way you experience yourself living in a social world. As a psychology student doing qualitative research, I am interested in hearing your story. I will ask you questions which will refer to you as a psychological self. There are no rules in answering the questions. The interview will last about 45 minutes, nevertheless, there is flexibility in extending the time or shorting the

time if your answers are leading this way. The interview's purpose is not about doing an intervention with you but to collect data for the StoryLab founded by the University of Twente. Thus, it is only about your story and the way you experience it. All of your answers are anonymous, voluntarily and confidential.

Under your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed afterwards. Both the audio-record and the transcription will be held by the researcher until the Bachelor's degree is attained. The letter will be copied into the research report word for word, except for personal names. Furthermore, quotes from the transcript will be included in the research report.

I agree to voluntarily participate in this study.

Name of participant

Signature

Date

I have provided the participant with the necessary information and made sure that the information is understood completely.

Name of the researcher

Signature

Date

