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Methodological Experiences in Collaborative Ethnography. Communication and Participation as Frameworks for Constructing in Common

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Abstract: In this article, we will analyze how we built the research process of a collaborative ethnography with the Stop Evictions Granada 15M Movement (SEG15M). We will begin with a brief contextualization of the housing issues in Spain and the SEG15M movement to explain why we started the co-research experience with the movement. Next, we will clarify the composition, function, and main purposes of the ‘debate groups’ in our research, as well as their particular differences and dynamics concerning other qualitative techniques. Finally, we will focus on two main aspects, participation and communication, which emerged within the debates and later materialized into a transmedia project and the development of a radio soap opera. The latter is a product, and a process, of collaborative work that bridges communication and participation at the intra- and inter-group levels. It is a fictional story that emerges from the common lived experiences of the groups.

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Feminist, and Decolonial Ethnographies]. Buenos Aires: CLACSO and the article Álvarez Veinguer, Aurora and Luca Sebastiani. 2020. "Habitar la investigación en la universidad neoliberal y eurocentrada: la etnografía colaborativa como apuesta por lo común y la subjetivación política [Inhabiting Research in the Neoliberal and Eurocentric University: Collaborative Ethnography as a Commitment to the Common and Political Subjectivation]." *AIBR, Revista Iberoamericana de Antropología* 15(2):247-271.

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serving and Start Participating? Reflections on 'Participant Observation' from a Committed Investigation]." Pp. 385-410 in *Investigaciones en movimiento. Etnografías colaborativas, feministas y decoloniales* [Research in Motion: Collaborative, Feminist, and Decolonial Ethnographies], edited by A. Álvarez Veinguer, A. Arribas, and G. Dietz. Buenos Aires: CLACSO.

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Since the 1970s, it is possible to identify profound discussions about the ways of producing knowledge in social sciences. Questions such as the relationship between researchers and the subjects of study, the forms of engagement with specific research situations, or the positions of those involved have been at the center of the debate. Collaborative research (Lasiter 2005; Leyva and Speed 2008; Álvarez Veinguer and Sebastiani 2020), the perspective that underpins

the content of this article, is constituted in the heat of these epistemic proposals—participatory action research (Fals Borda 1986; Villasante 2007), feminist epistemologies (Harding 1993; Gregorio 2019), activist-militant research (Malo 2004; Hale 2008; Greenwood 2008), or epistemologies of the South (Santos 2019). Such proposals share the need to abandon the extractive principles of certain social research (Grosfoguel 2016). Collaboration, in this theoretical-methodological proposal, has to do with the fact that the

entire research process—the research design, data production, interpretation, and analysis—is carried out together with the people involved in the research. Introducing the condition of co-labor or co-research implies: i) transforming the relationship between the research subject and the researched object (Holmes and Marcus 2008); ii) transforming the status of the ‘field’ where data collection took place within a space of co-conceptualization (Vasco 2002; Rappaport 2007); and iii) transforming the classic separation between theory and practice (Köhler 2018; Leyva 2018), among others.

How Did We Construct the ‘Whats’ in a Collaborative Ethnography?

We start this article with an epistemological justification for our research process, which was based on our desire to distance ourselves from the extractive ways of conducting traditional research. We did not want to investigate ‘about’ but rather ‘with’ to get to our findings. For this, we had to adopt co-analysis as our main perspective.

If we think about the ‘hows’ of conventional research, or how one is proposed, the initial formative phase is where one defines the ‘whats’ or research questions and objectives. This is usually the ‘desk work’ process (Velasco and Diaz de Rada 2006), carried out by an individual or a group of researchers. Some social scientists consider this phase as ‘pre-research.’ However, this is very debatable due to the epistemological starting points that underlie any research process, referring to the necessities of answering the ‘whys’ and ‘for what’ of the research. These cannot be separated from the ‘whats’ of the methodological framework that any proposal will be built upon. A segment of the so-called desk work is what is known as research design, implying the

development of an outline where the objectives are defined and research points are addressed. All the while indicating and justifying the social situations that the researcher wants to investigate, which actors to contact, which places to visit, and what methodologies and techniques to carry out, anticipating the chronology and scheduling of the research. In most cases, desk work is defined as the steps of formulating the objectives and the subject being investigated, and consequently—the ‘how.’ These are the tasks assigned and assumed by the conducting researcher(s). It is this precise first step of defining the ‘whats’ or research questions that we have collectively internalized to question and uncover from its inception, certain extractivist practices that are deeply rooted in more traditional research (Grosfoguel 2016; Santos 2019; Álvarez Veinguer and Sebastiani 2020). Too often in a decontextualized manner and without connections or relations with the desired communities or collectives (even after answering crucial or relevant queries), researchers are distant from the realities, wishes, and necessities of the groups they wish to research.¹ Throughout our research project with Stop Evictions Granada 15M (SEG15M), a movement located in the city of Granada (Andalusia, Spain) that struggles for the right to proper housing conditions, we put in place certain mechanism of active listening that materialized into what we call ‘debate groups.’² Its objective was to

¹ We are differentiating between research done ‘on’ or ‘over’ a movement, group, or community and one conducted ‘alongside’ or ‘with.’

² Project: “Emerging processes and communal agencies: the praxis of collaborative social research and new forms of political subjectivation” (I+D+I, State Program for the Promotion of Scientific and Technical Research of Excellence, Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of the Spanish Government). Reference: CSO2014-56960-P. The project was finalized in December 2018 and was based on different case studies developed from academic centers in Granada, Barcelona, New York, and Veracruz. Regarding the Granada team, although there were only three people who signed the text, it is sustained by a collective process. The rest of the work team is made up of Ariana

bring into dialogue the common lived experiences and acknowledge the individual narratives of the collective that everyone was a part of.³ However, at no time did we present pre-formulated objectives or preconceived analytical notions. The intention (our methodological objective) was to activate various intersubjective spaces where we wagered on the 'encounter' to start the framing of the 'whats' of the research⁴ (Álvarez Veinguer and Olmos Alcaraz 2020). Likewise, it was not the initial objective of the aforementioned 'debate groups' to conduct an exclusive ex-post analysis on behalf of the researchers of the content being formulated in the groups. Furthermore, and at every turn, we strove to evade the act of speaking 'on behalf' or 'for' other analysis that emerged in the groups. Instead, we focused on how people narrated their stories and experiences. We believed that in the realm of possibility, co-analysis would articulate the 'hows' of the research (Vasco 2002; Rappaport 2007; 2008; Bertely 2018; Köhler 2018).

Sánchez Cota, Luca Sebastiani, and many colleagues from Stop Desahucios Granada-15M (SEG15M).

³ The implementation of this experience stems from a previous link between research and activism. In November 2015, we approached two SEG15M neighborhood assemblies, including the one in Zaidín. In both cases, we expressed our research intentions, as well as our commitment to solidarity and support for their struggles. Throughout this time, the research tools deployed in each assembly have been different, as they were adopted to the characteristics of each space. Similarly, our role as committed researchers has been heterogeneous. Some played a more 'activist' role, taking on the day-to-day tasks of the collective, as opposed to those who played a more peripheral role in these issues. It is important to underline that some researchers had previous links and relationships with SEG15M that started before this specific project.

⁴ By this we do not mean that there were no prior objectives or interests on the part of the researchers. In fact, as we have argued in other works (Álvarez Veinguer et al. 2016; Sánchez et al. 2017; Olmos Alcaraz et al. 2018), building collaborative research does not mean accepting just anything, but rather that a collective negotiation process must necessarily be developed with all the people involved in the research. For us, collaboration meant developing knowledge-building experiences that were based on dialogical and horizontal principles.

In summary, the 'debate groups' wanted to operate as (1) a space to listen and be heard (something that many people sadly did not have the time due to their everyday life emergencies) and (2) as a means to collectively construct the research and not simply produce an analysis of the group discussions.

In our research, we wanted to approximate a process of daily arrangements and political subjectivation. It was after the 'collective self-diagnoses' exercises,⁵ throughout 16 'debate groups' held, that participation and communication emerged as two transversal axes that the group considered as not being taken care of within the movement and seemed important to focus on them. In reiterated fashion, two concerns worried people especially—on the one hand, how SEG15M was represented and how it communicated with society at large; and on the other, how to increase the level of engagement and involvement among assembly attendees. Collectively, we began to work on both points.

This article aims to present how we constructed the research process of collaborative research alongside SEG15M. For this, we shall briefly contextualize the housing issues in Spain and the emergence of SEG15M, collective fighting for the right to housing. We shall momentarily go over the assembly procedures of the movement, and in the subsequent section, we will explain the composition and concerns of the various 'debate groups' in our research. We will also analyze the 'hows' of these groups and their traits and characteristics. In the following section, we will inspect the aforementioned focal points of participation and communication that emerged as the key points to focus and work on in

⁵ Participation Action Research (PAR) classifies the first phase of any research as the fulfillment of a diagnosis.

the subsequent phases of the research, which later materialized into a transmedia project and a radio soap opera.

SEG15M and the Struggle for the Right to Housing

The outbreak of the global financial crisis (2007-2008) had a devastating impact on the Spanish economy. The more prominent consequences were the increase in poverty and unemployment, resulting in the insolvency of thousands of citizens and the immediate increase in evictions. By and large, this was the outcome of five decades of speculation on the Spanish economy and the real estate market.⁶ As Harvey and Smith (2005) point out, there was a shift in the circulation of capital: from industrial production to the construction market.

It is estimated that between 2008-2019 there were more than 1,000,000 evictions.⁷ In the first years of the crisis, evictions were caused by foreclosures. However, the data for 2019 reveal that evictions

⁶ With the creation of the Ministry of Housing in 1957, housing policies were aimed at purchasing and retaining private properties. As the minister José Luis de Arrese affirmed, it was to turn Spain into a country of owners and not proletarians. Along with the approval of the Spanish Constitution commenced: i) the privatization of the banking sector, ii) the entry into the European Union, and iii) the accession to the Eurozone. These generated a massive influx of foreign investment, returning the Spanish economy to the global market. To this would be added the period of 1996-2007, where the then Spanish governments deregulated the housing market, passing laws that loosen rents, facilitating the requalification and accessibility of land outside Municipal Plans and promoting urban megaprojects (Naredo and Montiel 2010; Gaja 2015). Moreover, with the entry into the Eurozone, and once the currency stabilized, the real estate sector needed to increase the volume of its business to maintain its profits. Office branches were opened across the country, and the minimum solvency criteria for granting mortgage loans was relaxed (Colau and Alemany 2012; Suárez 2014).

⁷ For detailed information, see: <https://afectadosporlahipoteca.com/2020/01/28/desde-2008-se-han-producido-1-002-000-desahucios/>.

numbered 68% and were due to rent not being paid (CGPJ 2019; PAH 2019). Andalusia, a region in the south of Spain, where Granada is located, is second to Catalonia in the most affected area for evictions. In 2019, there were 8,806 evictions (CGPJ 2019). This would indicate an average of 25 evictions daily (APDHA 2019). For the city of Granada, in the same year, there were 1,078 evictions, of which 360 were foreclosures and 651 for non-payment of rent, juxtaposed with a socio-demographic context where the unemployment rate was 21.19%, and the at-risk-of-poverty population was 35% (INE 2019).

This social-economic backdrop fueled the creation of SEG15M.⁸ The collective was formed from the synergies of the platform for People Affected by Mortgages (PAH) and the 15M movement. It was in the assembly of May 22, in which a charting document was approved and paved the way for the creation of the collective. It asserted “an innate right to housing as a social good over an economical one” (AA.VV. 2016:30 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). By the end of the year, SEG15M achieved its first victory of an in-lieu-of-payment for an affected individual. By the end of the first year of existence, 70 families had appealed to the group and 14 evictions had been stopped (AA.VV. 2016:14). At the time of writing, the group had 11 committees in various neighborhoods and towns in the Granada region of Andalusia. It is modularly structured with different groups for work, training, and coordination. Its principal tool is the assembly, where cases are reviewed collectively, and two types of demonstra-

⁸ It should be noted that both SEG15M and the People Affected by the Mortgage Platform (PAH) were not unprecedented. Their origins go back to past movements like the ‘Movement for Dignified Housing’ (2003) or ‘V for Housing’ (2006). Given the length limitations of this paper, for more information, we recommend the works of: Álvarez, Zapata, and Zapata (2014); Colau and Alemany (2012; 2013); Mangot (2013a; 2013b); Mir et al. (2013); Sebastiani, Fernandez, and García (2016).

tive actions that are invoked at either the bank's branch door or the eviction house, where they halt the expulsion.

Having briefly summarized the financial crisis of 2007 and the socio-economic backdrop where our research takes place, with its ongoing housing predicament that led to the creation of SEG15M, we will next analyze the methodological approach, focusing on one of the techniques used in our work.

The 'Debate Groups': Composition and Function

To further our methodological approach, which, in this case, we are denoting as a 'debate group,' we will note the methodological basis that guided our design. We shall then reflect on both the continuities and the particularities while maintaining the epistemic position of collaborative ethnography (Rappaport 2007; 2008; Dietz and Álvarez Veinguer 2014; Álvarez Veinguer and Olmos Alcaraz 2020; Álvarez Veinguer and Sebastiani 2020) that pushed us in the way it has.

Methodological Bases: The Birth and Development of 'Debate Groups'

Our 'debate groups' were based on the qualitative research technique of Group Discussion.⁹ This investigative social technique, which is qualitative in nature, evolves in our context from the works of Jesus Ibáñez (1979). He refers to group discussions as "places of conversation, where to converse reveals a symbolic elaboration of a collective task, as

well as adhering to it, psychologically and socially" (Domínguez and Dávila 2008:98 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). The conversation aspect, as we shall see, became central to our methodological procedure. It seemed fundamental to activate methodological tools that would promote group dynamics, dialogue, and a non-hierarchical structure of exchange of knowledge (Olmos Alcaraz et al. 2018).

We held 16 'debate groups' with three different groups, each session lasting approximately two hours. Some were composed of five people, while others by seven. The sessions were recorded, with the shared needs, concerns, and proposals noted in edited documents that would later be distributed in the fifth and final session. These papers incorporated changes, suggestions, and further proposals that were taken up by the assemblies. On occasions, the groups were fewer than those outlined, something which would not be considered accurate by some methodological approaches similar to our own. However, the lack of time, and the difficulty of doing something as mundane as assisting a session with people who have vulnerable existences and are beset by everyday emergencies, influenced the number of attendees in each session. The groups were designed for either five or seven people, but at times they were three or four. For us, however, this was not a problem. On the contrary, it allowed us to experience sessions where the atmosphere was 'closer' and more intimate, with wider opinions and life stories, which, as we understand it, gave further richness and depth to our practices. A lot of trust was generated and even though some individuals missed a session, they were easily incorporated in the following one without any difficulty. Like group attendance, the duration of sessions varied. There were days the meetings started 30 or 40 minutes later than planned (due to waiting

⁹ A comparative analysis between the techniques of the Discussion Group and the Focus Group can be seen with our proposal of Debate Groups in Álvarez Veinguer and Olmos Alcaraz (2020).

for two or three individuals) or ended an hour later because individuals were still conferring.

The 'selection' process for establishing the groups fell outside the criteria of the self-representing groups discussions (Ibáñez 1979). For us, it was important to take into account: (1) the affinity of group members, not bringing together those who did not 'mesh' well; (2) everyone knowing each other; and (3) sufficient diversity to match people at different stages of their housing issues, gender balance, experiences, et cetera. Ultimately, we followed the criteria to help people feel comfortable enough to express themselves and speak freely. Our aim was not to "create data, but rather construct processes-relationships-connections"¹⁰ (Álvarez Veinguer and Olmos Alcaraz 2020:124 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]).

Each group used to meet once a week at The Ribera.¹¹ The selection of this place was purposely done because it was a familiar and comfortable space where the weekly Stop Evictions assemblies for the Zaidín neighborhood of Granada met. We sought to avoid alleged 'neutrality' or formal settings for pleasant and familiar ones for the participants, places where comfort and familiarity superseded the cold unknown.

In our 'debate groups' there were no expert figure moderators, researchers, nor anyone in charge of eliciting people to speak. Instead, we participated

¹⁰ As explained, the profiles were very varied. The first group (group A) was made up of seven people, three men and four women aged between 30 and 70. Group B consisted of five people, three women and two men aged between 40 and 50. Group C consisted of six people, two men and four women aged between 30 and 45.

¹¹ The 'Local de la Ribera' is an associational space that began in May 2011. It is located in the popular neighborhood of Zaidín (Granada). It houses various social projects, among which is SEG15M. See: <https://colectivolaribera.es/tag/local-de-la-ribera/>.

in the debates when we considered we had something to contribute. In other words, the programmatic idea of staying "on the sidelines" during the conversations was incongruous for us, even though we understood what the functional responsibilities were of group dynamics (Ibáñez 1979). As investigators, we were part of the group. In this sense, "more than dialoguing, we strove to listen and to make ourselves be heard as a group" (Álvarez Veinguer and Olmos Alcaraz 2020:122 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). All the while aiming for moderation as accompaniment instead of supervision, we stressed our non-expert status.

In the sessions, we worked on different topics. Although we initially prepared the topic themes for the first meeting, all subsequent sessions were built upon the expressed worries and concerns that would emerge in the debates respectively; from one week to the next. The first session, the one we designed, and to an extent conducted, had two objectives: (a) to know the shared stories about SEG15M from the last five years, and (b) to know the shared stories about its accomplishments. These objectives were worked through across three questions: (1) What are the first memories of SEG15M that you have? (2) Why and how did you get involved with SEG15M and why do you continue your involvement? and finally, (3) What moments do you think are more important in your history as a movement and as a group? We also established session guidelines that were unanimously agreed upon by the group. We agreed to follow the procedural guidelines for all meetings, which were broadly displayed at all times and meetings. The guidelines were as follows: (1) to not lose sight of the objective of debating, analysis, and reflecting about our discussions and practices to strengthen the group; (2) to share relevant first-hand experiences in one's voice and a respectful

manner, keeping in mind that there might be other perspectives; (3) to mute all electronic devices and avoid entering-exiting or doing so without bothering others; finally, (4) to feel as comfortable as possible to share one's opinion and listen to one another. The worked topics in the following sessions allowed us to collectively reflect on the meaning and implications of the organization (of a movement) to be a collective, as well as the work completed and what is yet to be done by the group to achieve such. Furthermore, how to take care and engage the people in the movement and aspects relating to the intra-communication between participants, within the movement, and other social agents.

In the sessions, we focused on dialoguing and co-analyzing the emerging questions, attempting to co-interpret the meanings of the covered topics and problems. For the preparation of this last part of the work, we systematically organized all the discussed narrations and shared them in an easy-to-read format to socialize the discussion. This allowed for the debate participants to review and thoroughly acknowledge the material constructed by their group, leading to the final session.

Methodological Proposal: Potentiality and Innovations

If we were to highlight something from our methodological model concerning the 'debate groups,' it would be, without a doubt, its potentiality to generate listening and co-analysis spaces for the collective. Co-analysis implies "placing the participants' thoughts in a parallel analysis, instead of considering them as simply ethnographic data" (Rappaport 2007:202 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). Therein lies the value in our approach, which allows us, among others, to access "new conceptual tools to there-

by give meaning to realities" (Rappaport 2007:200 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]) in which to do our research. An example of this is how the sessions were named 'debate groups.' As we write these words, with a social science background and inevitably a professional particularity, we initially believed in implementing the group discussion technique at the start of our project with perhaps some particularities. However, it was the group that decided to name itself a 'debate group' and not a 'discussion.' It was not a simple word change without any other epistemological implications. Rather, it was a form of more precisely identifying and keeping by the group's sentiment of "what we were doing there and why." In other words, with the simple act of self-identifying, "the implicit theory [that is always present] in political practices" (Köhler 2018:411 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]) was evidenced. We were able to see that one of the core elements of the group was to construct (more so than 'discuss') from dialogues and debates. On the other hand, 'debate groups' emerged as examples of spaces for constructing meaning from collective shared experiences. Through questioning, listening, and the conversational potential, we reached various collective assents, beyond compromises that allowed us to further construct meaning via co-analyses. As a collective task of the symbolic elaboration (Domínguez and Dávila 2008), it generated synergies that went beyond the sum of its parts. It was here where the reflexive, analytical, and interpretive capacity is evidenced, of and for the group. It exceeds the bounds of the "inside/outside" assertion, intricating rather than simplifying the dynamic and heterogeneous reality (Rappaport 2007). With the 'debate groups' we incorporated listening through conversation, without restrictions or urgency of our hectic schedules, or scheduled assembly work. More importantly, through this technique, we activated processes

of 'de-authorization' towards the work identified as 'expert' in the social sciences (Álvarez Veinguer and Olmos Alcaraz 2020), which served to start processes of 'authorization' by the Stop Eviction members. By this, we are not referring to disappearing or denying our knowledge, but to 'decentering' ourselves (Arribas 2015). In other words, attempting to place our knowledge at the same level as the knowledge constructed by the rest of the people, as well as recognizing and valuing any proposal that arose in the groups. This caused a certain loss in the control of the process, but we understood that even with the inherent uncertainty, this technique would potentially afford us access to experiences that otherwise would not be possible, opening a possible co-analysis window.

Collaborative work strains the production and validation of knowledge mechanisms since it questions the dichotomies of objectivity-subjectivity and theory-practice, among others (Lassiter 2004; Rappaport 2007; Dietz and Álvarez Veinguer 2014; Arribas 2015; Leyva 2018).¹² We experienced this in our 'debate groups' in two concrete ways. On the one hand, because we eliminated the category of the informant, we did not see the subjects of the research as those providing inherent information to the expert for it to then be analyzed. Instead, they were subjects that together and with whom we reflected collectively. On the other hand, it was because we also abandoned the idea that only the expert investigator was capable of having and generating valid knowl-

¹² Practice, from the most traditional research, is conceived as a set of material activities (far from the theory), or as purely individual actions. This conception of practice, as Vasco (2002:3 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]) states, entails that "a specific territorial space is constructed for ethnographic research, designating a particular space for the practice and another for the theory," and not just a territorial space but a temporality as well—first the world of the subject matters and then that of the researcher and subject of knowledge.

edge.¹³ In this way, when the informant category stops making sense, and we begin to understand the subjects as epistemic colleagues (Holmes and Marcus 2008:84), the spaces of fieldwork transform into spaces of encounter and "reflexive dialoguing" (Arribas 2015:61). In this way, the "epistemological status of the fieldwork" (Vasco 2002:3 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]) is restructured. We no longer have to go to the 'field' to collect data, but rather, we are in the 'field' to meet and build knowledge through co-analysis.¹⁴ The 'group debate' experience should not be just a mere participatory diagnostic. They were processes of concerted active listening to collectively build the research. These were not established as a concrete 'action plan' beforehand, but rather were derivatives of the shared process. We shall narrate this last point in the following section, focusing on our collective reflections and how these have framed the possibility of continuing to co-investigate.

The 'Debate Groups' Content: Designing the 'Whats' of the Research

The content of the 'debate groups' was built according to the emerging themes that were identified as necessary in each session. Among various questions, our guiding compass was always pointing at the collective uniting us, SEG15M. As it appears in

¹³ Assuming consequently that the processes of knowledge validation are based on the division between knowing and feeling, between what is knowledge and experience. As Suárez-Krabbe (2011:192 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]) maintains, "borders that define the field of interaction differentiate what is relevant and irrelevant in scientific research; what establishes knowledge or non-knowledge."

¹⁴ We defined co-theorization as "the collective production of conceptual vehicles that are based on both a theoretical anthropological concept and on concepts developed by our interlocutors" (Rappaport 2008:5). Thus, we prefer to speak of co-analysis because during the debate groups, we analyzed and reflected critically on various topics related to the SEG15M, but we did not construct theoretical meaning or abstract thought.

the charter document, SEG15M is an assembly-led movement that promotes collective decision making, diffusion of information, and the sharing of tasks and responsibilities—to fight for dignified housing for everyone. From this, the act of participating (acting together before others with the same level of engagement) and communicating (sharing information with others) emerged in the debate groups as fundamental actions for SEG15M to remain operational. These two points needed ongoing consideration to improve the collective's function. Beyond these, other questions appeared. The first meetings focused more on personal aspects, where the memories about the initial encounters within the collective took center stage. The 'debate groups' members had joined the collective from very different walks of life and at different times. Some had been members for over a year, while others had been part of the collective since its inception. At this point, we paused to reflect on more formal group questions, where the assemblies and their functions took on more prominence. Some included: improving the time management; working on inclusive participation; rethinking the moderation function of the assemblies; conducting thematic assemblies; working on the assembly's ambiance; or active listening. On the other hand, we emphasized the need to pay more attention to collective emotional support. An example of this would be advocating a no-blame atmosphere for new arrivals of the collective. We agreed that all of these should be carried out and placed at the heart of SEG15M; specifically, to work on active listening, empathizing more with new arrivals, and interpreting internal complaints as 'suggestions' rather than 'demands.' In the next section, we will focus on each of these key points (to participate and to communicate) as central questions for the 'debate groups'; also, we will expand on how working on them led to the advancement of the

'whats' of the research materializing into different audio and visual products, and the development of the soap opera.

Participate: Creating in Common

In the 'debate groups,' we shared that one of the readings that housing movements have been able to elaborate—including SEG15M—is that change will only be possible if many people get involved. Therefore, to obtain results, broader and more active participation must be counted on. However, what did it mean to participate in a collective like SEG15M? The struggle for the right to housing has reconfigured social movements: people are organizing around concrete issues and not ideologies. Traditionally, Spanish housing movements were composed of youths with unstable wages, or jobs, who organized to emancipate from their familial homes. In the case of SEG15M, however, it was mostly composed of "families affected by mortgage foreclosure proceedings" (Colau and Alemany 2012:193 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). This was a new scenario where it was vital to think of strategies for "incorporating those who do not enter the model of an available, educated, and digitally connected activist" (Marin 2015:1 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). These being "normal, modest, and of the street people" (Mangot 2013a:78 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). We agreed that the collective housed individuals from distinct backgrounds, many of which never had previous experiences participating in a socio-political event, "we opened our own eyes" (Group C, Session 1).¹⁵

This heterogeneity makes SEG15M widely diverse, and one of its virtues is that it offered people a space

¹⁵ To facilitate citation, we separated the sessions into three groups (A, B, C) of four sessions each.

to “articulate their struggle and grow as an activist, empowering themselves and going from victim to affected, and affected to activist” (Adel, Lara, and Mármol 2014:14 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). A transformation that implies breaking from deep-seated notions and signaling that not only a change in the way of proceeding is taking place but also a transformation of subjectivity: “I now feel like a different person” (Group A, Session 1). We conceded that actively participating in collective and democratic decision-making processes caused measurable results in people’s daily lives. It caused “a shift in focus in regards to the political process; going from being considered as a distant and unalterable reality to being a set of actions and reactions on which it is possible to exert decisive influence” (Adel et al. 2014:14 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). For this, we pointed out, the collective needed to make people see beyond their cases and participate in the political process:

People come to our group after receiving a tremendous blow...and we, as a group, have to build. And to build is that when someone arrives at the group, the thing to do, as a priority task, is to show them that the group will not solve their case. The group is working for the right to dignified housing; solving their case is but a step in the journey. However, let us be clear, [fixing cases] is not the objective. [Group B, session 4]

One of the most recurring issues at the assemblies is for the collective to make clear that it is not a non-governmental organization (NGO) and does not provide a social aid program. That is, that SEG15M is not a traditional advisory service where a person can relate their problem to a more knowledgeable person and then wait for it to be resolved. Instead, it means that all need to fight together to achieve results. Moreover, the collective’s bylaws

clarify: “those individuals who participate in counseling and have working legal knowledge (lawyers, jurists, etc.), should share their knowledge in the assembly while avoiding the role of experts, making it clear that everyone’s involvement is necessary to reach a solution” (SEG15M 2014 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). As previously stated, the collectively shared advice was one of the main characteristics of this social movement. In fact, “it has proven to be an essential and transformative tool that helps those affected to confront a problem that normally overwhelms them, while concurrently, losing the fear, shame, and feelings of failure associated with the process” (Colau and Alemany 2012:99 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). During the ‘debate groups’ sessions, these techniques also allowed us to: (1) create a safe and secure space, (2) socialize tools and knowledge, and (3) be active participants. That is to say, going from being a victim, assisted by an expert, to “becoming an active transmitting agent of knowledge” (Colau and Alemany 2012:100 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). Many times, this change can be difficult to adopt for it means breaking from deeply ingrained notions and biases. It is also a long molding process where some individuals do not understand how the collective works and leave in frustration. “Some people have come to [SEG15M] and left without grasping the movement. Of course, in one assembly, you cannot get the direction to this, you have to come [much] more” (Group A, session 1). This misunderstanding aspect, we contended, was due to the very nature of the movement, which at times contradicted people’s long-held beliefs. “There are people who come off the couch, obeying the boss and never questioning anything; breaking with that hierarchical discipline is not from one day to the next” (Group A, session 1). Notwithstanding, not everyone leaves: “The few people I know who have been catching the direction of this have done

so because of that collective learning of knowing, being able, deciding what to do, and to debate has been an education, done little by little, in a you-to-you or you-with-another dialogue" (Group A, session 2).

The collective works as both a space for mutual aid meetings and as a politicization learning in which anyone can help or be helped. In some 'debate group' sessions, we remembered how at the beginning of the collective, none of the members knew about mortgages or how to negotiate with financial institutions. "It was there that we realized that if you learn tools, learn knowledge, and you're collectively together with people, you can achieve many things. Those first examples were very valuable to continue" (Group A, session 1). For this reason, one of SEG15M's objectives was to obtain broader and deeper participation of those who pass through it. "Big or small, everything is useful" (Group C, session 2).

Participation was necessary not only of those who were able to and could dedicate a lot of time but also of those who did not. It was here where a question of how to improve the collective surfaced: How do we get new arrivals at SEG15M to stay and assume responsibilities? How do we transform those affected into activists? We began by inverting the line of reasoning by asking not just about why people were leaving SEG15M but also what was being done by the group so that these people did not stay:

The problem is that when people don't participate, we look too much at each other and not enough at what we're doing ourselves. If we don't even know how to hold a meeting and talk about what we need to talk about...What can we demand of a new arrival? To be more than you? It's impossible. We cannot grow by

hoping that others come with the desire to make the revolution. [Group A, session 3]

From this diagnosis, we reflected on concrete proposals that would reverse the situation. The first of these dealt with how to improve the reception of newcomers:

The first thing the assembly has to do is to ask how many new cases there are and explain to them how we function; what the assembly consists of and how it will be held. That takes time, but you always have to direct the assembly at the new arrivals. Why? Because those of us there already know how we function. [Group A, session 2]

Beyond the reception phase, there was also the listening to consider:

I also believe that people are not being listened to in the manner they should be listened to. Because many times, new people are not allowed to explain themselves. For them, the first day is like a psychological session. You have to let them at least vent some steam. [Group B, session 4]

We all agreed that if the assemblies were more pleasant and efficient, then the attendance would improve. After which, welcoming new arrivals would take prominence. "Listening, respecting them when they cry, and letting them see that [whoever] speaks to them has gone through something similar" (Marin 2013:3 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]).

The second proposal that emerged in the groups dealt with the initial procedure for new cases. Commonly, a new arrival at a SEG15M assembly is assigned to a support group that will accompany them in solving their situation. However, this assistance

was not always done correctly. It was being provided as help and not as an empowering opportunity. “First we have to see where the error is. The mistake is that I helped a person and in the way, I helped them...” (Group A, session 3). We realized that the individuals who had stayed the longest in SEG15M were the ones who took the longest to resolve their case. They had struggled a lot and learned. In contrast, those whose cases were quickly resolved ended up leaving. “That paternalism, that assistance that we give them by doing things for them, solving their problem, makes them feel useless. If they don’t feel useful, why are they going to stay? What are they going to do here?” (Group B, session 1). A possible solution was to initiate a mentoring practice by older colleagues for newcomers, lasting two or three months. Such close accompaniment would allow the creation of ties, which will help us see the collective in “a different light and my problem in another way. Whether a person stays or leaves, this is not in the assembly, nor in the formation. It is in the treatment we give to each of those we accompany” (Group A, session 2).

The third proposal dealt with the various tasks performed in the collective. For many, SEG15M would become a family, one that endures and always has tasks to do. We reasoned that for the community in which, and for which, it struggles to flourish, each person needed to contribute their knowledge. A principal problem of this was that new arrivals did not know what could be done. Coupled with the sheltering assistance that sometimes occurred, it led to newcomers feeling useless. A female colleague suggested making a list of tasks that could be carried out within the group. By “communicating our interests and strengths, as well as our doubts, we can find the best way to participate in one’s interest” (PAH Vellekas 2016:4 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]).

“There are thousands of things and many ways to collaborate, but something should be created to keep him there and for people to know what the tasks are” (Group B, session 2). It was furthered that there should also be a rotation of tasks so as not to rank them:

If at a certain moment, someone important from the collective, one who has been involved the longest, says, “I’ll clean with you, I’ll sign up!” that elevates it, and it doesn’t come across as someone who doesn’t know what they’re doing. You’re honoring it. How do you then tell someone that his work is marvelous if nobody wants it and the same person always does it? [Group B, session 2]

Having analyzed the different aspects of the group participation dynamics, their implications, and meanings for SEG15M, as well as how the ‘debate groups’ outlined the ‘whats’ of the research, we shall next reflect on the second crucial element, to communicate.

Communicate: A Bi-Directional Process of Inward and Outward

One of the collective’s main accomplishments—along with the rest of the movements’ fighting for housing rights—has been to supplant the discourse that blamed the victims for their situations and evictions, telling them that they had “lived beyond their means” (Suárez 2014:85 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]), for holding the banks and governments accountable for promoting the housing bubble, over-indebtedness, and for approving unfair laws. This accomplishment has been possible, in part, by its multiple communicative practices. We will focus more on the external communication of SEG15M, noting that the collective’s internal communication

was fundamental and efficient in mobilizing people. Once again, group assemblies are a positive example of spaces where everyone was invited to participate and exchange their knowledge, as well as being instances of active communication.

One of the aspects debated the most during the 'debate groups' had to do with communication between the movement and other social agents. Social communication, the way in which Stop Evictions communicated with society, and in turn, how it viewed and acted towards the collective itself, emerged as one of the main difficulties for the group. "People don't know what SEG15M is, nor how it functions nor how it is...There's very little information outside" (Group C, session 1). However, this was not exclusively a fault of their own. "For a long time, the mortgage drama faced by hundreds of thousands of families didn't resonate in the media to the proportion of the problem" (Colau and Alemany 2012:163 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). Thousands of families lived silenced and in solitude. It was a drama that did not transcend into the public dialogue, an opaqueness due to unawareness. We shared that for many, before joining the group, SEG15M seemed like a group of "squatters, with nothing else to lose" (Group C, session 1). "Everything with long hair and dog" (Group C, session 1).

To reverse the obscurity, SEG15M began a weekly and public class-action claim against and in front of financial institutions. These demonstrations and mobilizations were established to not only "publicly expose who the culprits were but, above all, to start a process of blamelessness" (Adel et al. 2014:10 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]) for the families who were experiencing evictions, defaults on mortgages or rents, and occupational scenarios.

The 'debate groups' reasoned that although the solutions to the evictions lay in the domain of institutional policy, it was still fundamental to carry out direct public actions. This was an assertion that "the affected cannot sit idly dreaming of new legislation" (Huerga 2015:62 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). The group's action protests were principally two: the aforementioned public protest against the banking organizations and the halting of evictions. The action of meeting at the bank's door with other affected people was designed to force collective bargaining. It is a tool to put pressure that also "pretends to generate social support by publicly showing the bank's unfair, immoral, and dishonest practices" (Colau and Alemany 2012:203 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). In some of the debate sessions, it was recognized that due to new arrivals not possessing previous demonstration experience, which at times generated fear or misgivings, the group needed to "encourage people to take actions...we have to awaken that feeling of solidarity because we cannot compel anyone" (Group C, session 4).

The halting of evictions is another demand practice used by the collective. It is an act of civil disobedience by peacefully intervening with people at the door of the affected house, defying court orders. This type of action conforms to the collective's public image, hence, its name. This act of disobedience "shelters itself in a superior jurisdiction, which the Spanish state systematically violates, human rights" (Colau and Alemany 2012:124 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). We reflected that many people at SEG15M did not know or were unclear on what civil disobedience was and had never thought of practicing it. Moreover, we deliberated on how the perception of civil disobedience still varied after having the option of participating in one. Now, many see it as "a normal practice and as a moral obligation before

an unjust law” (Mir et al. 2013:58 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]).

Even though SEG15M used these two aforementioned advocacy strategies to give itself visibility, the ‘debate groups’ countered that it was not enough and that it was necessary to go further to try to occupy both the media and the public space. On the one hand, we needed to appear on the streets in various ways, differently than before, and go beyond the weekly action meetings. “One thing that worked well that I no longer see being done was going to schools and street markets. You talked to people, and it worked...even in the neighborhood squares” (Group B, session 3). Many times, people believe that the collective only focuses on stopping evictions, and it needed to explain that it was more than that, that anyone could join and not just those in need of foreclosure help. Another proposal was:

To commandeer a central spot and start talking with people that this exists [the collective]. Because there are more people than we think who are silenced and don’t know what we do...or make a large assembly, each of us with our folding chairs gets together in a central location and conducts our assembly there. Take our megaphone, t-shirts, and make ourselves known. The same that we do here [in the collective], but there. [Group C, session 1]

We also noted the importance of not only demonstrating how SEG15M works but also of showcasing the movement’s victories and achievements; the cases in which people solved their housing issues:

One way to attract, and make this attractive is to run a mega marketing campaign...What you have to do here is to make people tell their problems and what

steps they took to solve them, with videos in a documentary style. It’s important to show that people have solved their own problems. [Group C, session 2]

Another issue deliberated on was the tone in which said actions would be implemented. As a group, we ultimately chose to promote festive strategies, as they were at the start of the collective. It was something that surprised people, considering the pressing issue. More importantly, it attracted newcomers to activism. Dancing, singing, or laughing also helps to “promote an image of the affected that is contrary to that of victims” (Sanz 2017:2 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). Finally, we pointed out that we needed to develop other communicative strategies as entertainment—to create events and fun products that infectiously and subtly engage people alike. “We could do a karaoke at the door of the bank, inviting people to sing with us” (Group C, session 4).

As one can see, the analysis that is done by the group about the forms and needs to communicate more and differently makes it a central key aspect of the operational dynamics of SEG15M. Its emergence, along with the previously analyzed participation, became a topic of great interest in the ‘debate groups.’ It entailed a decisive element for the collective construction of the research project. At its center were other ways of doing ethnography. Through alternative forms of participating and communicating, different ways of storytelling and conducting research began to take shape. The transmedia project and the radio soap opera were not born in the investigator’s work desk but rather emerged from the ‘debates groups’ where there was a need to communicate and participate differently. This concern also directly questioned those of us who have dedicated ourselves to ethnographic research since we have been reflecting and writing on the need of deploy-

ing other forms of research. In this perspective, the 'whats' and 'hows' have developed hand in hand.

In Closing. To Participate and to Communicate: Framing the 'Whats' and 'Hows'

At the methodological level, to participate and communicate have been the two frameworks on which the entire active listening process is based, as exhibited by the 'debate groups.' Faced with the act of 'grasping' lectures and narratives produced by the 'debate groups,' we became interested in the production of knowledge in all directions and did not just experiment through a specific investigative process but also deploying learning in common with all the various parts involved, from the 'whats' to the 'hows.'

In the dimension of the 'whats' and 'hows' of participating, it has been a collective affirmation of commitment and willingness to be involved against a solitary struggle: to participate, get involved, and commit with the understanding that "being is with the others" (Garcés 2009 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]). Communicating was understood as a bidirectional process towards the interior of the group and outwards. Firstly, inward to its less involved and committed members. Secondly, an intragroup communication that is part of the 'debate groups.' Thirdly, to communicate to connect from the SEG15M collective to the city in which the movement takes place, converting themselves into producers and representatives, not consumers of the collective's content. To participate and communicate have emerged as two pillars of the practice of politicizing the suffering (Fernández-Savater 2008; Álvarez Veinguer and Sebastiani 2019), as well as being artifacts of shared construction. A leitmotif of the 'debate groups' bor-

rowed from Marina Garcés's (2009 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]) series of questions: "How can one be in the world, involving oneself beyond the roles of viewers and consumers? What does it mean to intervene? How to disassociate from being a spectator and actively make the world instead of consuming its objects and experiences?" Further still, "How do you activate civic engagement?" (Garcés 2012 [trans. AAV, RGS, and AOA]).

Returning to our starting point, the 'debate groups' were deployed to collectively define what we wanted to investigate—a collective process within a movement that fights for the right to decent housing; while placing in the center of the questions and objectives of the research, the will to influence, intervene and transform the world we inhabit (Freire 1970; Fals Borda 1986; Santos 2019). All the while, appealing to the ethical-epistemological responsibility of research. The 'whats' were not born as purely intellectual questions, artificially manufactured on the investigator's 'desk work.' They were built in an artisanal way (Santos 2019), slowly and calmly from the group's discomforts and feelings, as enunciated and transmitted in long listening sessions. This process radically transformed the traditional formulation of the 'whats' and the initial investigative queries to meet the demands of the group undergoing a collaborative ethnography. All to leave behind the operational scenario of academic or militant research (Hale 2008).

After this investigative year-long process, we started a transmedia project to abridge the revolving pillars of participation and communication.¹⁶ We learned to make and produce videos, an image bank and

¹⁶ A creative and collaborative story made up of several others, where anyone can contribute through what they know or want.

express ourselves in a new visual language while navigating through all the created material. At the methodological level, we deemed it important to deconstruct the academic literature (Santos 2019) and experiment with alternative ways of visually summarizing the collectively-lived experiences (Gray et al. 2020). It was no small feat to stop passively consuming audiovisual products and collectively and collaboratively produce one. We understood that as it had occurred in the ‘debate groups,’ the politicization of suffering and the processes of political arrangements would require contrasting forms of conducting and presenting research (Álvarez Veinguer and Sebastiani 2019).

The first product was a promotional video encapsulating the movement.¹⁷ We also produced a video of a ‘reporter on the street’ asking passerby’s opinions and knowledge about evictions, their numbers in Granada and Andalusia, and about the Stop Evictions movements.¹⁸ In the summer of 2018, we started working on a radio soap opera because we decided to draw on the communal narratives to experiment with other types of registers and uncommon grammars in an academic context (Simon, Bibeau, and Villada 2003).¹⁹ Following ethnographic fictions as a methodology, it allowed us to construct reality-based narratives, written as a tale or story. This creative product of fiction, that incorporated memory, research, and imagination, has enormous potential because it transforms

individual experiences into a commonly constructed plot. A fictional account that begins in the first person (‘I’), coupled with the groups’ lived experiences, is then transposed to other ways of storytelling, self-reflection, and analysis on each one of the narratives being constructed (LaMarre and Rice 2016).

The radio soap opera, as a means to communicate and participate, is a product that allows us to directly address both pillars at the intra- and inter-group level. Further still, via fiction, it can directly connect the experiences of the affected people with the listeners. For over a year, it has been allowing the building of connections and affections in each of the weekly meetings. This is a type of communal engagement, drawn from stories we like to share. It is a wishful space that exceeds and binds us with what affects the group, from the joy, laughter, and fears, to the creative imaginative moments, politicizing the actions of communication, and participation from shared narratives.

There is no single way of understanding and practicing collaborative ethnography, and in the last decade, several genealogies underline this (Álvarez Veinguer, Arribas, and Dietz 2020). Throughout our co-research process with SEG15M (which began 6 years ago), we have focused our interest on constructing the research in common (the research questions, as well as the methodological approach), adapting ourselves at all times to the group, its characteristics, and its interests. This has implied recognizing other know-how (beyond scientific and expert knowledge) and seeking other ways of incorporating the centrality of the group and the production of knowledge in common. In our case, instead of the individual as the main actor of the research—the central producer of knowledge—we assumed co-research as a horizon that has enabled another way of constructing social

¹⁷ See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X905BLSYUg&feature=emb_title.

¹⁸ See: <https://afectadosporlahipotecagranada.com/reporteros-y-reporteras-stop-desahucios-granada-15m/?fbclid=IwAR2OXkRbd-kvM8wkNCTLPH5ubiTM9KhFBtwCboIO0-YM61sx2EtNS08Azsw>.

¹⁹ In June 2018, we organized a course on community narratives within the framework of our project. It was taught by colleagues from the New York team: Angel Luis Lara, professor at SUNY and professional screenwriter, and some colleagues who were producing a radio soap opera in New York on the life experiences of Mexican migrant women in the US.

research. In our experience, this has meant a substantial change in the traditional logic of who formulates the research questions, how the methodology and techniques to be applied are decided since we have tried to decentralize the researcher—to build the process of co-research from the ‘debate groups.’ This has involved two major changes, as we have been pointing out in this paper: (i) on the one hand, the research questions have not been formulated by the university researcher, but collectively, through a long process of listening through the ‘debate groups’; (ii) on the other hand, it has also allowed the building of a solid link between the people who have participated in the process. The work developed since 2018 in the radio soap opera has evidenced a strong commitment and enormous level of responsibility that everyone has assumed and manifested both with the process and with the product, an engagement that we had not been able to detect and perceive in more traditional research experiences. All the people have been linked

amazingly with something that they have verbalized and felt like their own (not as something foreign and imposed), because it went through them and affected them, and it is being built collectively.

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Honoring Student “Voice” in Investigating Student Identity Development in a Narrative Study: A Methodological and Analytical Example

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Abstract: Multiple, interrelated narrative methods were employed in a doctoral study purposed to investigate the student identity development of seven first-year participants. This approach provided them with multiple opportunities to convey their unique first-year experiences and revealed rich understandings of how they constructed their identities at a private higher education provider in Johannesburg, South Africa. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that fostering the trust of participants ensured the formation of rich biographical narrative portraits through multiple narrative-type collection methods and forms of analyses, resulting in rich tapestries of personal experience, which were constitutive of their identity formation. Each participant’s narratives revealed their particularities, complexities, and unique experiences of their first year. Although each participant experienced their first year of study very differently, this article weaves in the first-year experiences of one person into its fabric. The narrations of Kondwani (pseudonym), a Zambian student, are used to illustrate how her voice emerged and was held in a trustful research relationship. Her case is representative of all the participants in that it is an exemplar to illustrate the richness of the individual narratives gleaned from carefully chosen methods and forms of analysis that were employed in the study.

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Authors from various backgrounds (see: Bruner 1986; Polkinghorne 1988; Clandinin and Connelly 2000) have suggested that telling stories is a means of making sense of experiences. Narrative Inquiry, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000:32), is a way of truly understanding human experience:

It is a collaboration between researcher and respondents, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus. An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of experience that make up people’s lives, both individual and social. Simply stated...narrative inquiry is stories lived and told.

Since the student protests in South Africa started in 2015, much research has focused on issues of social justice for students in South Africa. The 2015 “#Rhodesmustfall” and the “#Feesmustfall” student protests called mostly for the decolonization of campuses and the curriculum in South African universities and illustrated disdain for the high tuition fees that students were paying (Boughey and McKenna 2016:1). In their article, which discussed these student protests, Boughey and McKenna (2016:7) called for more reflective and theoretical work to be done so as not to perpetuate the current “common-sense” assumptions made about students in the field of academic development. On the back of the protests has followed “a powerful mobilization around the lived experiences of students” (Ngabaza, Shefer, and Clowes 2018:1).

This has further supported the growth in the use of narrative as a tool to better understand the experiences of higher education students in South African

higher education research (Boughey and McKenna 2016; Chinyamurundi 2016a; 2016b; 2018; Pather and Chetty 2016; Carolissen and Kiguwa 2018; Ngabaza et al. 2018).

Factors contributing to the growth of narrative studies in South Africa include an awareness of how narrative accounts can assist in recollecting and experiencing the past through a focused lens (Coetzee and Rau 2017). Narratives, therefore, provide the capability to answer questions about student transition and, in turn, how students live and convey their identities.

Defining and Positioning Identity

In this article, identity is viewed as “a set of reifying, significant, endorsable stories about a person. These stories, even if individually told, are products of a collective storytelling” (Sfard and Prusak 2005:14). This definition implies that the collections of stories that commencing students in higher education tell and reflect are representative of their identities. Sfard and Prusak (2005) further clarify that although the term “identity” previously emanated from mostly psychological discourses, it now inhabits research spaces in many social and humanistic sciences. The developing identity of being a student is not investigated as a psychological concept in this article, it is rather seen as a simultaneously cultural, historical, social, and personal construction. The argument that self-narratives are expressive of and constitutive of identity is well documented in the literature (Hardy 1968; Bruner 1986; Giddens 1991; Ricouer 1991; McLellan 1994; Hitchcock and Hughes 1995; McAdams 1996; Polkinghorne 1988, Clandinin and Connelly 2000; Czarniawska 2004; Singer 2004; Sfard and Prusak 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006; Riessman 2008; Gill and Goodson 2011; McAdams and McLean 2013).

Polkinghorne (1988:150) provided a brief yet very succinct argument as to why a narrative study is relevant when addressing how identities are revealed and developed:

The tools being used by the human disciplines to gain access to the self-concept are, in general, the traditional research implements designed for formal science to locate and measure objects and things... we achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we are constantly having to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives. Self, then, is not a static thing or substance, but a configuring of personal events into a historical unity which includes not only what one has been but also anticipations of what one will be.

A Methodology to Build Trust and Honor Student Voice

Multiple, interrelated methods to better understand the experiences of participants (Denzin and Lincoln 2013) were employed. The careful choice of various narrative methods to gather field texts, knowledge about the everyday lives and worlds of the participants, as told by them, ensured trusting reciprocal relationships between them and the researcher. Further, they facilitated keeping the stories of participants intact and authentic. Participants felt that they had a contribution to make and appreciated the fact that they were given “voices of authority” and the freedom to share what they were comfortable with regarding their first-year experiences (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

The methods employed and described comprehensively in the next section were chosen specifically to honor the voices of the participants. Narrative interviews were held four months into their first year of higher education study. The remainder of the field texts were gathered at the end of their first year to determine how they had navigated their first year, in retrospect. Table 1 provides a summary of each form of field text set collection method with a summarized statement illustrating how their voices were intentionally sought and honored throughout the research.

Table 1 Methods employed to honor participants voices

Field text collection method	Description of how participant voices were sought
Narrative interviews	Moved away from categorical-form responses towards natural, open-ended conversation (Mishler 1986)
Images—participants generated photo-elicitation	Allowing participants to bring an image of their choosing gave them power and control in the research process
Drawing “Rivers of Life” and participant conversations whilst drawing	The analysis was conducted based on the explanations provided by participants, not the drawings themselves
Focus group sharing and reflecting on first-year journeys	Participants were given the freedom to share what they felt comfortable with the group

Source: *Self-elaboration.*

Through sharing her experiences of commencing higher education with participants, and what she was aiming for in the study, the participants became more responsive to the researcher. Their level of comfort as participants in the research was heightened, and a relaxed rapport was developed. Sharing stories diminished the distance between the researcher and participants, created trust, and positioned the researcher in the role of "insider" (Berger 2015).

The participants' full stories were shared in the biographical narrative portraits rather than fragmenting their lived experiences of the first year into codeable categories to control their meanings (Riessman 2002:2). Kim (2016) explains that biographical narrative inquiry tells personal stories about others and respects and values what they say. With the tapestry of field text sets gathered from the participants, seven rich, layered, deep participant biographical narrative portraits were crafted to determine how they had woven or constructed their stories by recreating one composite story of each of their experiences. Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011) affirm that telling others' stories in such a way knits text and content, stays true to individuals by ensuring their dignity, it sanctions cause and consequence, and allows events to unfold naturally.

All participants signed consent forms for their field texts, and subsequent narratives to be used for various purposes, provided that their anonymity was ensured. Final crafted biographical narrative portraits were shared with each of them to gain their approval or allow them to edit their stories before the doctoral study was finalized. Examples of the feedback received from them were positive and required no changes or small amendments. As an example, Kondwani wrote, "whilst I was reading it, it

made me look back at how I've grown from the first year until now. I'm glad to have gone through that journey."

The anticipated use of their texts for publication purposes to improve the student experience at the research site was explained. Chase (2011:424) explained that narrative researchers often include longer participant narratives in their publications, which may make participants feel vulnerable and exposed. She advised that the researcher should inform them again and ask permission to use such extended narratives. Kondwani's permission to include her narratives was sought and given approval once again before submitting this article for publication.

The study employed the use of a qualitative research paradigm and a complementary methods research design-type to answer two research questions: "What are the first-year experience stories narrated by students in South African higher education?" and "What are the common identity themes of first-year students based on their narratives of first-year higher education experience?"

The term "field text" rather than "data" was used as the appropriate term for the narrative inquiry. The interpretive nature of field texts allowed the researcher to re-narrate stories told by the participants.

Although individual narrative stories already guarantee variety in results, representivity and perspective across participants were necessary to increase a variety of perspectives and stories and to enrich the study results (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2011:103). Purposeful sampling was used to intentionally select the participants so that the central

phenomenon could be better understood (Cresswell 2002:194). Josselson, Lieblich, and McAdams (2003) posited that saturation never occurs when telling personal stories, as each participant has something unique to add to the study. However, seven participants were sufficient to gain multiple, unique, rich understandings of first-year experiences.

Including Kondwani, the participants comprised four South African students and three international students from Liberia, Zambia, and one other sub-Saharan country, respectively. One participant was reluctant to reveal the identity of her home country due to its political situation.

Kondwani's case is representative of all the participants in that it is an exemplar to illustrate the richness of the individual narratives gleaned from carefully chosen methods that were employed in the study. However, there were commonalities across the seven participants' experiences, which are briefly discussed later in the article. Each of the seven participants' narratives revealed their particularities, complexities, and unique experiences. No two research participants had the same experiences or even experienced the same events in the same ways. Each participant was a multicultural subject (Denzin and Lincoln 2013:27), resulting in each one of them experiencing their first year of study very differently.

The next section provides a brief overview of one of the seven participants in the study—Kondwani. It is important to illustrate her narratives as they are a descriptive and formative exemplar of the process of her student identity construction, which was simultaneously strong and delicate. Her identity was strong as identity is strongly held onto during times of major tensions or transitions (Gid-

dens 1991). It was also delicate because the stories that she expressed were only some of the many other stories that could be told of her first-year experience (Giddens 1991). Her narratives, as with the other participants, provided a snapshot in that the stories were accepted for what they were at the time and used as a lens for an investigation into her identity development at the time of the study. Her introduction is shared as each of the field text collection methods explained after that provides examples of her narrative contributions that were used to create her final narrative portrait.

An Introduction to Kondwani

Kondwani was a Zambian student. She had commenced her studies in the field of Information Technology.

Despite having a frantic start to her studies, Kondwani got through her first year of study through her faith in God, and her friendly, quiet confidence, and determination. This allowed her to make friends and take charge of situations. She was tested by academic pressures and loneliness, and she missed her family. She carried many worries on her shoulders and felt the need to always take responsibility for everything she did and to do even better. She was the first-born child in her family, which placed a lot of pressure on her as she wanted her family to be proud of her. She was an individual who was hard on herself, never letting her guard down. With a strong sense of duty towards her family and herself as a student, her first-year story is one of enduring and overcoming the obstacles she faced. She was confident enough to evaluate her new campus and made suggestions for improvement based on her experiences. Her story was one of personal transformation through perse-

vering through personal and academic challenges over her first year of study.

The following section summarizes the carefully chosen methods employed with each of the seven participants to honor their “voices,” using Kondwani’s narrations as an exemplar.

Methods Employed for Field Text Set Collection

Narrative Interviews

The aim of conducting narrative interviews was to glean detailed accounts instead of short answers and general statements from participants (Riessman 2008:23). Categorical forms of response were avoided and moved towards narratives of natural, open-ended conversation (Mishler 1986).

The transcripts were rewritten into a draft narrative sketch showing the main threads of the conversation and then finalized (Gill 2005).

Selected examples illustrate Kondwani’s initial experiences in her first four months of becoming a first-year student.

Arriving at the institution to study, she was informed that she “should have” arranged her study visa in Zambia before coming to South Africa. She was only given one week by the institution to arrange her study visa, police permit, and to gain health clearance in Zambia, which was extremely stressful for her:

There was so much involved, and there was so much up and down movement, and the expenses. I had come to South Africa, I had to fly back to Zambia and

then do all those things. It required money. It was so intense...I almost lost hope.

In this process, she missed the full week of orientation prior to the formal start of the semester and almost the whole first week of classes. She had missed a lot of vital information:

...when I came back, I found out that I was a week late, and I was slacking a bit, especially in the different subjects...the lecturers had already covered the introductory week, it was hard for me.

At the outset of her studies, she experienced extreme homesickness:

I thought that maybe this wasn’t the place for me...I missed being with my family and friends. I almost broke down at a certain point. I was in my room, thinking about everything, and I just became so emotional. I felt like I was enclosed in a box—I really needed someone to talk to. I had no one to talk to...

Kondwani was the eldest child in the family and felt the need to be a good example to her siblings and make her parents proud of her:

My parents bringing me here is... it’s a lot, and I just put that into consideration and know at the end of the day, I’m not only doing this for myself but for my family back home. Being the firstborn brings many challenges with it. At the end of the day, you’re going to make your parents proud. So, I put that into consideration.

She described her difficulty in seeking support for her academic work that she was struggling with:

I was too shy to ask someone because maybe I would be embarrassed...but I’m learning to reach out for

help. I went to find a tutor who has really helped me, it's helped me in my grades as well... I am doing better now than previously, with his help. I am doing my best not to be reluctant, but rather to push and give it my all.

Getting to know her residence peers was a disconcerting challenge for her:

Everyone is in their own world. You can't go and knock on someone's door and talk to them because everyone seems to close you out.

She summed up her first few months of being a higher education student as:

...an up and down experience from the time I enrolled to actually getting here. Finding friends was difficult, just getting to know the place. When I arrived on campus for the first time, it was my first day of ever being in South Africa. I've never been here. So being in a new place, a new environment, was kind of difficult...integrating with people...

However, she did not give up in her first few months:

...eventually, with trying, I got used to everything. It was very difficult, the technology and everything, everything was so new to me, and the whole experience itself. With time, I ended up making friends. The subjects that we do here were a challenge as well, but, with time, I got used to it.

In the examination of the narrative interview conducted with Kondwani, empirical evidence of how stories are shaped for their contextual, situated telling was found. This is evidence that narrative form is molded by the social context in which the individual is immersed, and that narrativity as a discursive

mode is central to the social and institutional world of the individual (Thornborrow and Coates 2005:7).

Images—Participant Generated Photo-Elicitation

Adding and mixing methods of collecting field texts offered the potential to enhance the capacity for a social explanation by the participants.

The visual and the sensory are also worthy of investigation but cannot always be communicated easily by verbal means (Eisner 2008). Pushing beyond the non-linguistic dimensions in research and expanding the investigation by using visual and arts-based methods was ensured as these offer other expressive possibilities that allow access to different levels of experience (Bagnoli 2009:547-548). The creative activity of using visual methods and methodologies is the starting block for emergent thoughts about personal experience and identity, which are conveyed to the researcher (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006:82). By creatively mixing methods, "out-of-the-box" thinking came to the fore, which allowed new ways of cross-examining and understanding social experiences and lived realities (Mason 2006:9-10).

Through reviewing relevant literature, the emergence of graphic elicitation as a rich instrument to uncover experiences that are not otherwise understood became clear (Crilly, Clarkson, and Blackwell 2006; Bagnoli 2009; Copeland and Agosto 2012; Rodriguez and Kerrigan 2016). Photographs have, for example, been used as a way of evoking memories of an experience (Rose 2012:307). In this study, bringing their images assisted participants in reflecting on their first year of higher education. In addition, they assisted in investigating the daily taken-for-granted thoughts, experiences, and routines of the participant (Rose 2012:306). Guillemin

and Drew (2010:177) explain that participant-generated photo-elicitation opens the intricacies of the phenomenon being investigated.

In the review of literature, participant-generated photography most often involves participants being given a camera and being tasked with taking pictures of their experiences or things that are important to them in a particular context (Guillemin and Drew 2010:176). However, in this study, each of the participants was asked to bring an already-taken image to a group session, which they felt best captured their experience of their first year at the higher education institution. The images brought by participants could take the form of a photograph, a meme, a photograph downloaded from the Internet, or a picture from a magazine. This differs substantially from the traditional method of eliciting participant-generated photography but allowed participants to select the image themselves, thus giving them power and control to bring an image with which they were comfortable. In addition, this method resonated with participants who, between the ages of 18 and 20, were avid consumers of social media on mobile phones. They could access an image reminding them of their first-year experience easily. It allowed them to use it as a vehicle and a metaphor to explain it in terms of why it reminded them of their first-year experience. It also fitted well with the field text collection plan of using visual texts for an opening activity as a field text set collection point.

Participants were asked to bring an image that in retrospect reflected something important or poignant from their experiences from their first year. Selecting an image with this in mind ensured that each participant had utilized time and effort in advance to do some reflection of their first year in

higher education and, as a result, they arrived on the day with some thoughts and positionings of self regarding their experiences already.

The opening activity allowed students to start performing their identities in the discussion of their images. The descriptions given by participants are termed by Croghan, Griffin, Hunter, and Phoenix (2008:347) as “forms of self-accounting” in that identity work is performed that focuses particularly on the image.

Participants’ verbal input as to why they chose their image as a primary field text set was used. No visual analysis of the photographs took place. Only their talk about the selected image(s) was transcribed into a field text set.

Kondwani’s image that reminded her of her first year depicted her sitting in an airplane as she embarked on her initial journey from Zambia to study in South Africa. She was both nervous and excited at the same time:

That was me on my way to South Africa from Zambia, the picture represents me being nervous but low-key excited about going into my first year...

She explained that she was sad to leave her family behind but excited at the prospect of the new life journey ahead of her—she knew that it would be a challenging road ahead.

Despite the simplicity of the image that she provided, a self-taken photo of her on her plane trip from Zambia to South Africa portrayed the most poignant or significant experience of Kondwani’s first year—leaving her home and her country to start her higher education studies in South Africa.

Drawing “Rivers of Life” and Participant Conversations while Drawing

Lived experience also takes place in visual and sensory dimensions, which merit investigation but cannot always be articulated in the form of language (Eisner 2008). Leitch (2008) noted the growing interest in the combined use of narrative and drawing to understand the world of those being researched. The work of Guillemin and Drew (2010) unveiled the growth of literature in research (Evans and Hall 1999; Mirzoeff 1999; Emmison and Smith 2000; Banks 2001; Sturken and Cartwright 2001; Van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001; Rose 2007), which is dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of visual images.

Participants were asked to draw “Rivers of Life.” The “River of Life” concept was introduced as a metaphor for the journeys of their first-year experience. Using “Rivers of Life” has been utilized in research as a participatory visual narrative method that facilitates the visual telling of stories of the past, present, and future (Moussa 1994; Fisher and White 2001; Fullana, Pallisera, and Montserrat 2014). Participants used the metaphor of a river to reflect on their first-year experiences, encompassing both the positive aspects and the challenges along the way. They were asked to draw a river to represent their first-year journey at the institution, including significant elements that had contributed to shaping their experience.

Conversations between participants whilst drawing their pictures were audio-taped. The drawings themselves, the explanations of their drawings given by the participants, and the informal banter taking place between participants during the drawing process were transcribed as field texts.

Although there are various approaches according to which visual texts can be analyzed and interpreted (Guillemin 2004; Rose 2001; 2007; 2012), participants’ interpretations and explanations were integrated verbatim into the portraits—“you shouldn’t try to analyze each creative artifact because that is better done by the person who made it” (Gauntlett and Holzwarth 2006:87).

Giving the participants space to create their drawings of experience enhanced the trustworthiness of this study as the participants had the power to create and contribute to the study providing transactional validity (Schulze 2017). The participants’ drawings gave them a voice, positioning them as expert authorities on their lives (Schulze 2017).

Recording participant conversations whilst drawing proved to be a rich field text. The students were relaxed and engaged in natural conversation during which they opened up to each other. The transcriptions revealed thoughts, events, and emotions which had not been gleaned from any of the other field texts.

Kondwani revealed her strong religious faith in conversation with other participants whilst drawing “Rivers of Life”:

...aren’t you like?...“Okay, God, maybe you are trying to show me a sign like...okay, that wasn’t for me?”
I kept on trying, but He kept closing the door instead.
Your plans are not God’s plans.

Focus Group Sharing and Reflecting on Participants’ First-Year Journeys

Once the drawings had been completed, participants were allowed to present their “River of Life”

first-year experience story to the focus group. Each participant fixed their A3-sized drawing to a wall and explained their first-year story referring to their drawing while sharing their story. Other participants were invited to ask questions and seek clarity when and if necessary. These presentations were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. The focus group format increased the opportunity for participants to uncover new and possibly unexpected learning (McDrury and Alteiro 2003:34). The participants listened to each other, illustrated, and shared multiple realities of their first-year experiences in the discussion. The researcher relied on the meaning-making that participants attributed to what they had drawn.

Kondwani pointed out various literal aspects of her drawing, saying things like:

We have the sun, the clouds, there’s a tree, the river, there’s a quote, and there’s me.

She indicated that the sun depicted her positive moments, and the clouds depicted the moments that had been hard for her. At the same time, the green leaves depicted her positive experiences, and the yellow leaves were her more negative experiences during her first year. Despite hardships, she had managed to move forward and overcome them. She mentioned that she had been scraped by the brown rocks in her river as her journey had not been easy:

It’s been very overwhelming...

She only made mention of different experiences but did not seem to want to divulge too much detail to the group. She shared that she had endured a challenging first year and so included writing in a quote on her drawing that read:

“A journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

She qualified this by saying that she had not given up even though her year had not been easy—she had experienced difficulties of her own. She attributed her faith in God for getting her through her first year:

He’s seen me through my journey.

Participants’ Personal Reflections on Sharing Their Experiences

While seated together after presenting the individual stories of their first-year experience, participants were asked if they had learned from the experiences of the other participants over the period of their involvement in the research. These interactions were audio-taped and transcribed. In addition, the following question was asked: “What was the value for you in being part of this study?” They were asked to submit this in an email as a reflective piece of writing. These reflective pieces of writing were integrated into the final biographical narrative portraits.

Kondwani’s verbal reflection on whether she had learned from the narrated experiences of the other participants is provided verbatim below, honoring her “voice”:

I really didn’t know what to expect, and I was a bit nervous about how things were going to turn out. I wondered if I would be comfortable with the other respondents because I did not know any of them. I was scared about how I was going to stand up and speak to them. Surprisingly, I’ve been comfortable expressing myself. Listening to everyone’s different experiences has been a good thing. Despite the different challenges that we’ve all faced—yes, they broke

us down—but we all have that positivity in us—the fighting spirit that things will get better. We all fall, lying in different places, but we’re still getting back up to try to see the good in it. So, it’s good to see that through these different challenges, that we are all growing in different aspects of our lives.

Kondwani’s written reflection is presented below and was incorporated into the final narrative portrait:

My experience of the first year through being a participant in the research was so overwhelming. From the last time I was interviewed until our last encounter with you, I have been through so many changes as an individual. By this, I mean that I’ve grown through the different challenges or experiences I have faced. From the activity we had on that day, telling our stories through a drawing was a first-time experience as I had never done it before. In the beginning, I did not know how to go about it, but eventually, I got the hang of it and found it easy to tell my story through a drawing.

Being able to share my story through the drawing with others was nice because it helped me to open up and share the experiences that I had during my first year. On the other hand, hearing other people’s stories through their drawings was great because it made me realize that we all go through similar experiences at the end of the day.

There’s so much value in sharing stories of our experiences in the first year. It helps us relate to one another, in the sense that you as an individual are not the only one going through that problem or situation—even if you feel that you are alone—others are going through the same things. When we share our experiences with others, it helps us to know that we can all get through it and try to help each other. A problem shared is a problem solved.

What I really learned from the others, is that despite the different encounters we faced, we all grew and continued pushing ourselves through. We all tried to be positive about things at the end of the day. We all had a mindset of putting academic work as our main priority but also remembered that we have a social life. Our social lives allowed us to meet people that help us or teach us different lessons. Through this we continue to discover who we are, knowing that we are growing and learning through the different experiences we face in every aspect of our lives.

These personally narrated, fragmentary perspectives on Kondwani’s becoming experiences, illustrated that identity is socially constructed and constantly re-created in storied interactions by people and between people. Her identity development resulted from situated interactions during her first year where she picked up institutional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal cues for learning her student identity. The myriad, complex paths that she traversed, which were captured in her various field text sets, allowed a “bird’s eye view” into her experiences.

Narrative and Thematic Analysis

Narrative analysis resides within the narrative inquiry in that it “understands lives as unfolding temporally, as particular events within a particular individual’s life. The final result is a story. Instead of applying a stimulus/response approach, the researcher rather opts for opportunities where respondents can develop narrative accounts” (Riessman 2008:23). Narrative analysis was used in the first phase of the analysis to write up the biographical narrative portraits of the seven participants.

The analysis of narratives can be likened more to general qualitative research, where narratives are

analyzed into themes and categories. Analysis of narratives was used in the second phase of the analysis where common themes were discovered across the participants’ narratives by using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis.

A Trajectory for Analysis and Writing Up the Biographical Narrative Portraits

The work of Kim (2016) offered a process for integrating and analyzing the fieldsets in that she encourages narrative researchers to “flirt” with texts. She defines flirting with texts (Kim 2016:188) as follows:

Flirting with data is an attempt to analyze and interpret the research data to exploit the idea of surprise and curiosity, as we don’t know what is going to evolve and emerge until we deal with the data; it creates a space for us where we can discover ways to reach and negotiate our research aims with data; it encourages us to make time to embrace less familiar possibilities; and it is a way for cultivating ideas for finding yet another story, one we have not necessarily bargained for.

As James (2017) and Hunter (2010), Kim (2016) does not provide a “one-size-fits-all-method” for analyzing narrative field text sets as prescribing a specific method would result in researchers trying to fit their field text analysis into a given method.

Labov’s model of analysis (Labov and Waletzky 1967), adapted by Mishler (1995), was used to craft the biographical narrative portraits. Labov’s model is a trusted method used for narrative analysis (Mishler 1986; 1995; McCormack 2004; Riessman 2008; Patterson 2013). Mishler (1995) adapted Labov and Waletzky’s model of 1967, explaining that a personal narrative comprises six components, which are explained below. Labov’s work on narrative pro-

vides legitimacy and methodological rigor in the qualitative analysis of human identities and personal experience (Johnstone 2016:543). However, Kim’s (2016) notion of “flirting with data” was retained.

The term “portraits” was apt for the study—in employing a visual metaphor, the revealing of narrative portraits of each participant reveals a self-portrait in that each of their stories is told (Schiffrin 1996). “Just as an artist may display a portrait through composition and color, a story may display through a teller, telling experience” (Schiffrin 1996:199).

Research portraits were found to be useful as tools for maintaining the presence of the participants within the analytical process. The use of portraiture prevails mostly within the social sciences and specifically within the sociological study of education (Golsteijn and Wright 2013:300). In adopting narrative portraits to present the narrative findings, the researcher ensured that she focused on the personal and social context of participants through the insights that they offered (Golsteijn and Wright 2013:308).

Each narrative portrait was composed by following the steps below:

1. After the field texts were collected and transcribed (where appropriate), they were read and re-read to become familiar with what participants had storied.
2. Working through the text sets of each participant to create the ordering framework, the positive and negative influences on the identity of each participant were highlighted. The result was an integrated narrative portrait summary sketch for each participant.

3. Each field text set was analyzed. The meaning that participants made regarding all their text sets collected was relied on.
4. Mishler's six components, which make up a personal narrative, were utilized. The six components were collapsed into three. This was because in the ordering framework it had become apparent that there were layers of meaning across different text sets on the same topics of conversation. Trying to fit participant narratives under six different headings for the stories became mechanical and broke down the authenticity of individual accounts of experience. The three main headings for each narrative portrait were re-designed as follows.

Abstract and Orientation

In each narrative portrait, a short overview of each participant's story was provided, along with context to provide the reader with a fuller context of who the participant was. Participants often first spoke of their time at high school as an introduction to their stories and how they came to study at the institution. In this article, Kondwani's abstract and orientation was shared verbatim in this article in her introductory paragraph named "An Introduction to Kondwani."

Complicating Actions and Evaluation

Complicating actions and evaluations were combined. The layers of field text sets, crafted together into participant stories of first-year experiences, provided rich information regarding events, sequences, and plots, with crises and turning points. The researcher stayed true to the stories told by the participants in the narrative portraits—their stories were presented as they told them.

Resolution and Coda

Participants' reflections were captured in each narrative portrait. They narrated their thoughts and expressed their perspectives about what they had gained from being a part of the study. This section also provided the opportunity to connect their first-year journeys with the present by explaining where they were in their academic careers at the time of writing up the research. The information under this heading was mostly gleaned from the focus group discussion, their verbal and written reflections on the value they gained from being participants in the study.

Each narrative portrait was presented chronologically/temporally as far as possible based on Mishler's (1995) typology for the analysis of narratives.

Each narrative portrait was given a title. The title ascribed to each participant's story was inspired by a significant event, tension, challenge, or strength that was narrated in a participant's story of the first-year experience. Kondwani's story title was "A Journey of a Thousand Miles Begins with One Step."

With the tapestry of field text sets gathered for each of them, seven rich, layered, deep participant narrative portraits were created, to determine how they had woven or constructed their stories by recreating one composite story of each of their experiences.

Pointers Crafted to Write Up the Narrative Portraits

Respected authors in the field of narrative inquiry were investigated to draw up pointers to write participant narratives and transform them into public documents, which would be accepted in the scientific community (Bolivar 2002:16). In the absence of

a fixed set of guidelines for writing up biographical narrative portraits of experience, the narrative research work of various authors (Bruner 1987; Bolivar 2002; Riessman 2008; Somekh and Lewin 2011; Maitlis 2012; Golsteijn and Wright 2013; Kim 2016) were drawn on to write them. It may be said that there can never be one set of guidelines for writing up a narrative portrait as such a thing is an art, and the artist (author) participates creatively in the process. However, the following pointers offered clear direction and structure.

Read and Re-Read Each Narrative Portrait

Reading and re-reading the narrative portrait several times as ideas can initiate different interpretations or new ideas for the portrait (Golsteijn and Wright 2013:310). In practice, each narrative portrait was re-crafted three to four times, often changing the ordering of events, sequences, and participants' thoughts to ensure that their stories were authentic and chronologically correct.

Detail the Setting, as well as Researcher Feelings of Setting and Each Participant

The narrative should detail the setting where the interactions took place. It should feature the researcher's feelings about the setting and the individual participant (Golsteijn and Wright 2013:308). Participants and the researcher's backgrounds and lives before coming to the institution were provided as a backdrop to their narratives of the first-year experience.

Tell a Story That Is Interesting, Understandable, and Convincing

A narrative must answer the question “Why?” “Why is this worth telling, what is interesting about

it?” (Bruner 1987:29). A narrative must be about a sequence of events over time, which is structured comprehensibly. The narrative must tell something interesting—something that makes it exceptional in that it produces something that we did not expect (Bruner 1987:29). Good narrative research is not just one that gathers the different voices in the field or interprets them but one that makes the story understandable and believable. The unique biography must be written within a framework of general structure in a context that explains it (Bolivar 2002:16). The narrative should be carefully and authentically orchestrated to produce feelings of empathy and authenticity on the part of the reader (Kim 2016:197). The unique aspects of each participant's first-year journey and staying “true” to their stories as they told them were ensured. Each narrative portrait was inspired by using a distinguishing feature, event, or theme, which underpinned their story, to draw the reader into wanting to read each participant's story.

Integrate the Field Text Sets into a Coherent Whole Using a Chronological Sequence

The final narrative portrait does not violate or remove the voices of the subjects investigated as it does not apply categorical analyses of participants' words—“the nuances of the narrativization of a life can never be caught in a thematic category” (Bolivar 2002:13). In other words, do not interrogate the actual words uttered by participants to formal rules that force researchers to explain why participants say what they say (Bolivar 2002:16). Rather, the process of crafting a “true” narrative is to integrate field text sets into a coherent whole. The result is an understanding of the past events in retrospect, using a chronological sequence from beginning to end—if this is done successfully, a specific plot will emerge (Bolivar 2002:16). What was presented in each nar-

rative were honest and authentic accounts of what each participant narrated. Participants' stories were not changed in any way and strove to integrate the set of field texts of each of them into a coherent whole to allow specific plots to emerge.

“Clean Up” Speech to Make the Narrative Portrait Easier to Read

Erase disfluencies, break-offs, and repeated phrases that serve no purpose to participant stories. Do the same for researcher speech where necessary (Riessman 2008:57-58). The researchers' utterances were removed from each narrative portrait. Without changing or manipulating what each participant told, disfluencies, break-offs, and repeated phrases were removed. Where participants uttered swear words, a letter or letters were removed and replaced with an asterisk.

Focus on Preserving the Words Used by Participants However Long or Short Their Narratives May Be

Quote the actual words of the participants extensively. Large, verbatim fragments should be placed into the narrative portraits (Golsteijn and Wright 2013:308). Glean and craft told stories and not “how” they told their stories. Preserve historical sequence and the wealth of detail contained in the long sequences of participants, rejecting the idea of generic explanations (Riessman 2008:74). Narratives can vary in length. A narrative may only be a few lines long in total but may vary to long and complex stories that comprise parts, or the whole, of the story of a person's life (Maitlis 2012:493). Do not fracture participants' accounts. Work through one participant's texts at a time and order relevant topics and episodes into a chronological, biographical account

to create portraits that stay “true” to what participants narrate (Riessman 2008:74). In the crafting of each narrative portrait large, verbatim chunks of what participants narrated were used to stay true to their stories. The accounts of participants were not fractured in any way.

Place the Participant at the Center of the Story Using Their Key Narratives, Storylines, or Plots

The narrative should come together structurally around the key narratives, or storylines/plots, which underpin what the participant is telling the researcher, “documenting their voices and visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom” (Golsteijn and Wright 2013:308). In each narrative portrait, Mishler's (1995) components for the analysis of narratives, with input from Johnstone (2016), provided structure for each story.

Provide Rich Descriptions of the Experiences of Participants

Rich descriptions that give meaning should be aimed for. Ensure a balance between the words of the participant and the interpretation that he or she provides (Bolivar 2002:13). A narrative portrait must display the participant's inner reality within the wider explainable context (Bolivar 2002:16). A well-written research portrait must be strongly specific and contextual and should portray “the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context” (Golsteijn and Wright 2013:300). Look for patterns in constructions of agency or positioning of participants (Shukla, Wilson, and Boddy 2014). Participants' self-positioning and their inner worlds that influenced their first-year experiences were brought to the fore.

Analysis and Findings

The narrative analysis allowed a vertical analysis of each participant, facilitating the write-up of seven unique, authentic biographical narrative portraits. The presentation of these portraits answered the first research sub-question: "What are the first-year experience stories narrated by students in South African higher education?" The presentation of narrative portraits revealed seven unique first-year experience stories narrated by students in a South African private higher education institution and revealed their identities as first-year students. The narrative portraits told participants' stories of becoming first-year students from careful methodological vantage points to hear and their "voices," confirming the notion that unique, individual experiences are rich tapestries of personal experience and constitutive of identity formation.

The thematic analysis of narratives (Braun and Clarke 2006) allowed a horizontal analysis across the seven participants, resulting in five broad themes, most consisting of a variety of sub-themes, emerging across all seven participants. Common themes of the seven participants' experiences allowed theorization from the cases whilst keeping the individual stories intact. The presentation of the findings of the thematic analysis answered the second research question: "What are the common identity themes of first-year students based on their narratives of first-year higher education experience?" First, first-year student identities are formed by *interpersonal experiences* in their journeys. These experiences are characterized by their friendships, faith, family, and finances. Second, first-year student identities are formed by *intrapersonal experiences* in their journeys. These experiences are characterized by their personal experiences, their emotions, and

their strengths and growth. Third, first-year student identities are formed by *institutional experiences* between leaving high school and before commencing study in their institutional journeys. Fourth, first-year identities are formed by *experiences of formal learning* in their institutional journeys. These experiences were characterized by their experiences of formal learning characterized by the changes that they experienced between school and higher education and their academic experiences. Last, first-year identities are formed by *learning experiences beyond the classroom*. Their learning experiences were characterized by extra-curricular activities and their experiences of culture and cultural diversity at the institution.

Discussion

Due to the social turn being made in defining student identity in this study, it acknowledged that identity is socially constructed and constantly created and re-created in storied interactions by people and between people. Each participant told very different stories of their first-year experiences but there were common threads to their narratives. Although it must be acknowledged that the identities of people are self-evolving and fluid, the participants' myriad, complex paths that they traversed allowed a snapshot into their experiences. The stories were accepted for what they were at the time and used as a lens for an investigation into their identity development at the time of the study.

The narrative analysis revealed that their identity development resulted from situated interactions during their first year where they picked up institutional, intrapersonal, and interpersonal cues for learning their student identities. They developed their student identities through the everyday rituals

(Sfard and Prusak 2005) of their new environment over their first year in higher education through personal and institutional experiences. In all cases, the participants' learning of whom they were expected to be as students was that they all somehow wanted to play according to "the rules of the game" (Boughey 2013)—they wanted to fit in and comply with what was expected of them. A close reading of the seven narrative portraits shows many instances of self-correcting and attempts to find their way as they navigated through the ritualized norms of their new institution. They all had an intense internal need to succeed in their first-year journeys. Congruent with the studies of Mahlangu and Fraser (2017) and McGhie (2017), the personal resilience, personal strengths, and efforts of the participants, and their ability to adapt to the expectations of their new institution, were vital tools that they used to adapt to and succeed in their first-year studies.

The study has various recommendations for practice: student-facing staff in marketing, admissions, and enrolment are often the first point of contact with prospective students. There is a need for these staff members to interact positively with students at all times with clear, ongoing communication to students as they navigate their way into institutions of higher learning.

The research process and findings indicate the need for higher education institutions to view the first-year experience of students holistically to facilitate the positive identity development of students. Trusted representatives responsible in any way for first-year students have an impact on the types of identities developed by students. Their approach and interactions with first-year students should facilitate the sense that the institution is welcoming, supportive, and caring. The need for higher educa-

tion institutions to intentionally create and foster a sense of belonging for all students is of paramount importance (Gyamera 2018:155).

This research shows that first-year students need "community" with peers. It is recommended that regular times are scheduled during first-year experience programs for students to come together to discuss their experiences and learn from others. These opportunities should allow students to share their experiences, often reflect with others, and learn from peers over the year to settle well into their new routines as students. Ideas for participation could include the various methods of field text collection (students interview each other, talk in small groups about their experiences, bring pictures or photographs that remind them of their year so far, draw their experiences, and reflect in small groups) used in this study.

There is a need for higher education institutions to plan vibrant, relevant, well-advertised first-year student experience programs encompassing the academic, cultural, personal, social, and sporting spheres to assist in building positive identities for new students.

Teaching and learning approaches should be adapted to integrate the socio-cultural context of the student and the disciplinary content and knowledge of what students are taught (Snowball and McKenna 2016). Academic staff should adapt their teaching and learning approaches, which harness the personal strengths and lived experiences of students. In doing this, the voices of culturally diverse students are also heard.

Conclusion

The study approached the narrative investigation with Kim's (2016:222) self-coined notion of "flirtation" by "capitalizing on imagination and creativ-

ity to adapt, modify, and deepen existing analysis methods to address our narrative research design and process” to produce trustworthy and credible accounts of participants’ first-year experiences. Allowing the participants an opportunity to select an already-taken image reminding them of their first-year experience broadens the narrative methodological base in understanding commencing students’ experiences in higher education by making use of images for research in a new and innovative way. Imagination, curiosity, and creativity were used to deepen existing analysis methods in the broader field of narrative research

As there is seldom a roadmap of how to conduct and analyze a narrative study, this research provides a living exemplar—a way in which such a complex research process could unfold. Researchers could use and adapt parts of the study as they see fit for future studies.

In employing a complementary methods design type using narrative and thematic methods for analysis, the study demonstrated the fluidity of the boundaries between the two approaches for analysis and facilitated deeper, richer understandings of students’ transition experiences of the first year.

This study did not set out to exhaust how students experience their first year in higher education but rather to honor the voices of individual students to help facilitate better understandings of commencing students that higher education practitioners face every day.

The research implies the need for further research into how staff experiences their daily work with students in transition and how they can collaborate to ensure a smoother, meaningful transition experience for students, facilitating student identity devel-

opment. Further, higher education institutions and practitioners may re-examine their practices, policies, procedures, and guidelines to better facilitate the “walk of the student” through the first year.

Research is encouraged to uncover how higher education institutions communicate their shared norms, values, and practices (Wolgemuth and Agosto 2019). The norms, values, and practices of higher education institutions are often discrete and hard to navigate for students who are new to higher education. Research into this area could facilitate a better “meeting” between first-year students and institutional expectations.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, research is needed into how first-year students are developing first-year student identities in an online learning context. There is a need for higher education institutions to innovate to keep first-year students engaged and develop the identities required for their academic and personal success in undergraduate study.

This study was based on research with a small number of student participants and, therefore, findings may not be transferable. The field text sets were collected in a unique, private higher education setting and may not have findings and recommendations beyond the periphery of the site at which the research was undertaken.

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Vocational Teacher Educators' Role Identity: A Case Study in Malta

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Keywords:

Vocational Teacher Educators (VTEs); Role Identities; Vocational Education (VET) Context; Identity Theory

Abstract: This paper gains a deeper understanding of the professional role identities of vocational teacher educators (VTEs) when compared with mainstream teacher educators (MTEs) in Malta. It is framed using identity theory from the structural symbolic interactionism perspective (Burke and Stets 2009). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, adopting thematic analysis. Findings show that VTEs and MTEs underpin their teaching differently, influenced by the perceptions they have about their professional role identities. There is no “one size fits all” solution for each country, yet this study contributes to a field with a limited research base and offers new insights to identity theory.

Alison Said is a warranted engineer by profession who worked in Malta's telecommunications industry before her current senior lecturing role within Malta's main vocational education and training institution, MCAST. She received her B.Sc. (Hons.) ICT in Communications and Computer Engineering and M.Sc. ICT in Telecommunications from the University of Malta in 2010 and 2012, respectively. In 2020, she was awarded a Ph.D. in Higher Education: Research, Evaluation and Enhancement by Lancaster University. Her doctoral research was partially funded by the Tertiary Education Scholarship Scheme (TESS) Grant offered by the Maltese Ministry for Education and Employment, which she had won in 2018. Her main research interests focus on vocational teaching and learning, higher education, and professional identities.

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Those who support future teachers, teacher educators (TEs), play a significant role in initial teacher education (ITE) programs and the continuous professional development (CPD) of all teachers from across the entire state and private education sectors. An ITE program, which is a pre-service teaching program, is the entry point into the teaching profession, where student teachers study a combination of both theoretical and practical subject areas. Such courses are provided by TEs, who are “at the core of good teacher education” (Vloet and van Swet 2010:149). According to Loughran (2006), their work significantly impacts the quality of future classroom teachers. As a result, attention has increased on these key actors within the education sector. Research has focused

on their roles and identities, the challenges they face, and the support they receive (Cochran-Smith 2003; Murray and Male 2005; Lunenberg, Korthagen, and Swennen 2007; Kosnik and Beck 2008; Murray, Swennen, and Shagrir 2008).

Nonetheless, although research has increased in this area, more needs to be understood about TEs, their different roles, and their professional development needs concerning their practice (Izadinia 2014). Not recognizing the importance and significance of their profession will heavily impact the formation of their role identities, which is a crucial aspect for them personally and for the service they deliver (Lunenberg and Hamilton 2008).

The European Commission (EC) (2013) admits that most European Union (EU) countries still do not share an understanding of TEs' roles, competencies, or qualification requirements,

in most member states, government policy on the quality requirements for teacher educators, or on their academic and professional development, does not exist or is underdeveloped; this is especially the case for those who educate teachers in early education, adult education, as well as vocational education and training. [p. 7]

The situation affects the educational attainment of the competencies TEs need to fulfill roles effectively. Thus, policies need to be established to support the profession and guarantee consistency and quality.

Professional role identities have common aims, values, and philosophy (EC 2013) and are important in any professional context. In addition, the quality of the professional role also determines members' standards (EC 2013). Research by Swennen, Jones, and Volman (2010) found that TEs have multiple pro-

fessional identities as classroom teachers, teachers in higher education (HE), researchers, or teachers of teachers. It is also important to look at the individual personal and social manifestations of a particular professional identity.

Research has mainly focused on TEs within mainstream education¹ (Bullough 2005), where they are considered to be a "poorly understood occupational group" (Davison, Murray, and John 2005:113), and their role is considered to be "ill-defined" (Menter et al. 2010:124)—perhaps due to the limited amount of research defining them proves problematic. On the other hand, vocational teacher educators (VTEs)² are even less visible and underrepresented in research and policy (Noel 2006). More research needs to be conducted on VTE roles as this has the potential to enhance the quality of vocational students' education. Unless there is a clear understanding of the VTE role identities, policies or quality frameworks for them cannot be set.

Having a shared understanding of the role identities of VTEs and the competencies they require would be beneficial in terms of the ways support is offered to them and how educational programs are designed. Failure to understand their roles and identities means VET-related policies will be based on flawed assumptions and partial evidence, which may then have unknown consequences for the vocational student teachers (VSTs). To date, policymakers do not emphasize the importance of TEs in general (Swennen and van der Klink 2009). In fact,

¹ In this paper, mainstream education refers to general/academic education as opposed to vocational education.

² TEs working in a VET context, i.e., teaching vocational student teachers (VSTs) to become vocational teachers. Those individuals may have two identities: professional education and training identity and their other/prior professional identity.

they are often referred to as hidden professionals (Livingston 2014).

This paper takes a novel perspective and puts the spotlight on the TEs working in the VET context. The Republic of Malta, an EU member state, serves as a useful case study to start building a broader understanding of TEs' role identities in the VET context.

Developing a better understanding of the role identities of VTEs in Malta is essential for shaping education and training policies, especially when the global labor market is undergoing dynamic transformation due to demographic change and changes in technology. A more supportive coherent approach could be achieved by understanding the roles of VTEs responsible for future vocational teachers.

VTEs are the crucial players for sustaining a high-quality VET teaching workforce and have a significant influence on the quality of vocational teaching and learning in schools. Neglecting them in policymaking jeopardizes the VET profession and its professional development. Moreover, not recognizing their importance may result in poor teaching behaviors. Unfortunately, the recent report by CEDEFOP about VET in Malta (2017) does not make any reference to the role of the TE.

To advance research on TEs, specifically within a VET context, the objective of this study is to understand how VTEs and MTEs in Malta describe their role identities.

To fulfill this objective, this study investigates the following research question: *How do VTEs differ from MTEs in how they describe their role identities in the Maltese context?*

Literature Review

VTEs influence the teacher training programs they deliver by the ways they make sense of their teacher-learning experiences (EC 2013). Therefore, role identities greatly influence how VTEs teach VSTs, which then reflects vocational teaching in general in schools or vocational colleges in Malta. This study explores whether VTEs' role identities differ from mainstream teacher educators (MTEs).³

According to Danielewicz (2001:3), a focus on professional identities is important because being a teacher requires "engagement with identity" and "teaching is a state of being, not merely ways of acting or behaving." This assumption has also been accepted by other scholars where the interpretation, judgment, behavior, and performance of individuals in their professional roles are influenced by their view on their professional identities (Stryker 1980; Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt 2000). Thus, investigating the role identities of VTEs can result in identifying effective ways to support them in their practice, and inspire and inform policymakers in this endeavor, leading to higher quality teaching.

In addition, TEs who work within a VET context are less visible yet still impacted heavily by the new demands on teacher training (Cort, Harkonen, and Volmari 2004). This paper argues that the professionalism of the VET workforce has been under-researched, particularly in the context of VTEs. It presents a foundation for establishing the professional role profiles of VTEs to foster understanding among policymakers and support policy learning through recommendations. However, the main

³ Mainstream TEs: TEs within the higher education context.

contribution of this paper is to open up a space for a more informed consideration of whether there is a significant difference between the role identities of VTEs and MTEs, through the lens of identity theory (Burke and Stets 2009).

A systematic review of the literature, which was conducted and confined only to studies within the last twenty years and to articles published in peer-reviewed academic journals in English, revealed very little on TE identities, especially within a VET context. In fact, according to Grollman (2008), many international studies do not make any reference to the teaching workforce in VET. In addition, there are many terms used to refer to the VET context, which were used to search for articles. For example, England provides vocational and work-based education within the post-compulsory education (PCE) and training, further education (FE) sector (Orr and Simmons 2010). Other terms used are the "lifelong learning sector" (LLS) (Atkins 2011) or the "learning and skills sector" (LSS) (Noel 2006). However, as stated above, research in the broader area of teaching may well be relevant.

What Is a TE?

The common definition that the EC (2013:8) adopted to describe TEs is "all those who actively facilitate the (formal) learning of student teachers and teachers." That implies that the definition is not limited to professionals in a particular educational context but also applies to all who are responsible for future teachers in their preparation and professional developmental needs (EC 2013).

It is a broad definition that does not attempt to differentiate between different educational contexts.

Particular attention needs to be placed on the VET context, which is currently being overshadowed by the general education context (Misra 2011; Springbett 2018).

What Is Known about TEs in General?

In recent years, a growing interest has been developed in studies of TEs, believed to be central to high-quality teacher education. Studies look into who they are, their challenges during induction, the support they receive, and what helps them transition from school teachers to TEs (Izadinia 2014). This focus may be seen in studies on the emerging new concept of TE identity in general education contexts, generally defined as a "socially and culturally constructed 'self' formed through a life's experiences and through communication about these experiences" (McKeon and Harrison 2010:27). Social relations and processes during the lifelong learning experience shape identity (Berger and Luckmann 1991). Swennen, Jones, and Volman (2010) point out that TEs' professional identity formation occurs when they are at work and interacting with colleagues, student teachers, and others that are all involved in teacher education. However, identity itself is not simply formed, as it takes time and is dependent on the context and work practices (Dinkelman 2011). Yet, little research has taken place on how the identities of TEs vary according to the work context. Developing a professional identity is a crucial part of the process of becoming a TE, as there is a close connection between identity and practice (Timmerman 2009). Ben-Peretz and colleagues (2010) argue that a TE's practice and their professional identity development are directly proportional to each other, meaning a TE's practice is likely to influence the professional role identity and differ ac-

ording to the context. Thus, VTEs' role identities might differ from those of TEs working in a general education context.

Since the emergence of the notion of TE identity, researchers have investigated various factors that influence its formation (Izadinia 2014). Existing literature has explored the importance of communities of practice (Murray 2008); reflective activities (Dinkelman 2011); and various professional experiences in forming the identity of TEs (Hockings et al. 2009). However, one criticism of much of the existing literature is that researchers have argued that the profession of TEs is not well defined (Lunenberg and Hamilton 2008) and is under-researched (Swennen, Volman, and van Essen 2008).

Amongst existing literature on TEs' identity, it was found that the process of becoming a TE is influenced by three factors: personal and professional biography; institutional contexts; and a personal pedagogy of teacher education (Williams, Ritter, and Bullock 2012). Similarly, Murray (2014) argues that TEs' professionalism may be influenced by their personal life, institutional setting, and national requirements for teacher education. Likewise, a review by Livingston (2014) on TEs aimed to gain a better understanding of the concept of TE identities and their roles. Implications for teacher education and TEs were reviewed, together with the diversity of their identities and roles. However, research still needs to clarify and address who these "TEs" are and how they are supported. This is particularly important for those TEs working in a VET context because of the diversity within it. In fact, Cochran-Smith (2003) argues that one has to define the identity of TEs first before taking into consideration their

professional development. The following section sheds light on studies that focus on teacher education within the VET context.

What Is Known about TEs in a Vocational Education and Training Context?

The little knowledge about TEs in general is mainly focused on school TEs (Noel 2006) and current literature on TEs within a VET context is sparse (Springbett 2018). In particular, the latter are rarely studied, and their lives have been described as "secret" (Noel 2006). Noel (2006), Crawley (2013), and Springbett (2018) inform this paper as they are the three publications that have specifically focused on TEs working in a VET context.

Large-scale investigations of the professional situation of TEs in the lifelong learning sector (LLS) were conducted by both Noel (2006) and Crawley (2013). Although Noel's (2006) study provided the most comprehensive demographic profile of the TE profession in the PCE sector to date, she does not explore the meaning of a TE identity within the LLS. The aim of Crawley's (2013) research was to enhance the professional well-being of TEs within the PCE sector by shedding light on various ways of supporting them. Although Crawley (2013) highlights the essential characteristics that TEs should have, his attempt to provide a clearer and broader picture of their professional situation in the PCE sector and issues of their professional identity or attempts to define it was neglected.

These two studies (Noel 2006; Crawley 2013) contribute information about TEs, in general, by considering age, ethnicity, and gender. However, there seems to be no in-depth understanding of what their professional identity consists of. Fur-

ther research carried out by Springbett (2018), who explored the professional identities of TEs in three FE colleges, contributes some depth to the subject. Springbett (2018) draws on a small-scale case study where she explores how the FE sector positions TE identity. Her findings demonstrate how various factors impact the TEs within this vocational context. She claims that avoiding obscure links between professional concerns and policy landscapes is best done by understanding TEs as a heterogeneous occupational group.

Although these three previous studies provided an overview of the TEs' demographic profile, together with how the FE sector positions TE identity, no attempt was made to define the meaning of a VTE professional role identity within this educational sector, or how TEs perceive their most prominent and salient role identities.

Theoretical Perspective

Burke and Stets' (2009) identity theory was chosen as the main theoretical lens to understand the role identities of both MTEs and VTEs. Choosing identity theory from the structural symbolic interactionism (SI) perspective as an analytical lens enables the researcher to focus on *meaning*—"what it means to be who one is" (Stryker 1980). Specifically, the identity model within this theory was used together with the concepts "identity prominence" and "identity salience" to investigate how the participants view and rank their meanings of identity (Burke and Stets 2009). This theoretical perspective shows that individuals develop a shared meaning of identity through symbolic interactions. Choosing SI as the main theoretical lens throughout the study offers a deep understanding of TEs' identity at a more granular

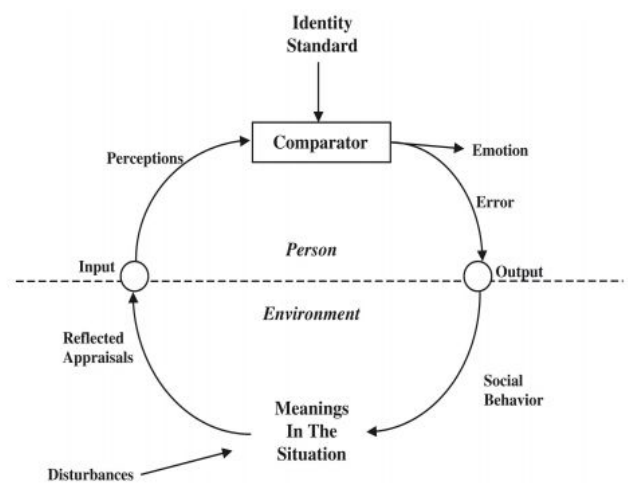
level rather than merely seeking to consider the institutional or national level. That enables the researcher to explore the dynamic nature of TEs in the narration of their identity and how they posit themselves.

The following section explains the theoretical model that underpins this research. Ultimately, to understand a role identity well, it needs to be seen as a process.

Identity Model

Identity theory stems from two sets of ideas: SI and perceptual control theory (Powers 1973). Four main components make up the identity model each time an identity is activated: input, the identity standard, comparator, and output. Each component is a process linked together in a cyclic arrangement of processes about meanings within the environment and the self, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Basic Identity Model



Source: Burke and Stets 2009:62.

The individual's reflected observation of their self in the situation are the inputs to the system. Perceptions are meanings relevant to an identity in a particular situation. The identity standard is a set of several meanings that make up an identity and may be viewed as defining the character. The comparator compares the inputs to the identity standard. An "error signal" (Burke and Stets 2009:29) is produced when there is a difference between the input and the identity standard and this might cause stress and negative emotions. The person's behavior, which is based on the error signal from the previous process, is the output of the model. If an error signal was experienced in the previous process, this might cause the person to modify their behavior to reduce the discrepancy, which is the ultimate aim of this model. The cyclic process keeps on going until the perceptions match the identity standard within the comparator and the identity is verified, which leads to positive emotions. People become distressed when they are not able to verify their identity (Burke and Stets 2009).

Role identity guides the perceptions, expectations, and behaviors of people by providing structure and meaning to their lives and situations (Burke and Stets 2009). Thus, when there are certain goals or aims relating to a role, an expectation is set. However, the way to achieve a goal is not specified (Burke and Stets 2009), and, therefore, the level of achievement could affect the perspectives of individuals in terms of their role identity.

Research Design

The Maltese Case-Study under Consideration

The main participants of this study were TEs in the Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL) program

(MQF level 7) at the Faculty of Education (FoE), University of Malta (UoM). This program has been in operation since October 2016. It replaced two former pre-service teacher education programs and is an entry-level qualification for teachers in early childhood education, primary education, and secondary education. It is a two-year full-time course where students should have an undergraduate degree in the subjects they will teach. From October 2017, the FoE started offering the MTL in VET, specializing in various vocational subjects as part of the government's "My Journey: Achieving through Different Paths" education reform (UOM 2017). This reform will be implemented in lower secondary schools in the school year 2019-2020 to move from a 'one size fits all' system to more inclusive and equity-oriented programs catering to pupils' aptitudes (Ministry for Education and Employment—Malta 2016).

This reform aimed to promote inclusion and respond to diversity by allowing students to choose from several education routes, which include general, vocational, or applied subjects for their elective subjects beyond the core curriculum. The intention of this reform, apart from promoting inclusion, was to diminish the number of early school leavers by making education relevant to various students in response to a changing labor market. VSTs graduating from this MTL in the VET program are then eligible to teach VET subjects in secondary schools. Currently, VSTs have their teaching practice at MCAST, where they teach students who are following foundation certificate programs that lead to MQF levels 1 to 3 (secondary education level). This reform included TEs specialized in VET, who are the participants within this study. Even though the main focus of this study is on the professional role identity of the VTE, MTEs are interviewed to see whether there are any differences between these groups.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The philosophical stance taken in this research comprises a subjectivist ontology and a constructivist epistemology. A qualitative methodology located within an interpretivist paradigm was chosen as this approach concentrates on interpreting and understanding "human actions and cultural products" (Benton and Craib 2001:182). Moreover, SI is an approach within the scope of interpretivism (Bloomer and James 2003:252).

Methodological Approach and Research Methods

The semi-structured interview technique was chosen as it was felt to be the most appropriate one to allow participants the freedom to add more information when required (Drever 1995). Considering that the perceptions of TEs needed to be investigated, semi-structured interviews helped in gaining a deeper understanding. Moreover, they were felt to be more appropriate considering the small-case study within Malta.

Convenience and purposive sampling were adopted for selecting a small number of participants. The main criterion for the purposive sampling in this study was ideally to include all the VTEs teaching on the MTL in VET program. Convenience sampling was undertaken for the other participants (MTEs) who were willing to take part.

Data were collected during the academic year 2018/2019. The MTL program within a VET context was offered in only two disciplines: Health and Social Care (HSC) and Media Literacy. The dean of the FoE circulated the researcher's request via e-mail to all faculty members within the MTL program to participate in the study. Six VTEs and seven MTEs from various subject disciplines agreed to take part in the study and contacted the researcher via e-mail to proceed with the inter-

views. All participants requested to be interviewed in their natural working habitat, that is, their offices. All educational research guidelines and ethical rules have been followed and approved by the University's research committee.

Participants

Tables 1 and 2 give a brief overview of the participants.

Table 1. VTEs.

VTE No.	Subject Discipline	Full-Timer (FT) / Part-Timer (PT)	Experience in industry
1	VET General Pedagogy	FT	N/A
2	Media studies	PT	Yes, as a media producer
3	Psychology	PT	N/A
4	HSC	PT	Yes, in HSC
5	HSC	PT	Yes, as a social worker
6	HSC	PT	Yes, as a scientist

Source: Self-elaboration.

Table 2. MTEs.

MTE No.	Subject Discipline	Full-Timer (FT) / Part-Timer (PT)
1	Physics	FT
2	Chemistry	FT
3	Art	FT
4	Italian	FT
5	Philosophy of Education	FT
6	Business Education	FT
7	Sociology of Education	FT

Source: Self-elaboration.

Data Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were approximately an hour in length and audio-recorded. These interviews were all transcribed verbatim. Data analysis started in conjunction with the data collection as it is one of the essential attributes of qualitative research compared with quantitative research (Merriam 1998).

Thematic analysis (TA) was the method used to identify themes and patterns of meaning across the transcripts of the semi-structured interviews (Braun and Clarke 2013). Specifically, a mix of inductive and theoretical TA was used. Inductive TA “aims to generate an analysis from the bottom (the data) up; analysis is not shaped by existing theory (but analysis is always shaped to some extent by the researcher’s standpoint, disciplinary knowledge, and epistemology)” (Braun and Clarke 2013:175). This type of inductive TA was mainly used for the participants’ responses. On the other hand, theoretical TA was also used, as the interview questions were constructed on Burke and Stets’ (2009) identity model, so the analysis was also guided by its theoretical concepts (Burke and Stets 2009). According to Braun and Clarke (2006:87), TA reveals “experiences, meanings and the reality of participants.” Their guide to conducting TA was followed (Braun and Clarke 2013:202).

Findings

The section outlines findings that emerged from the semi-structured interviews conducted with both MTEs and VTEs. The overarching themes: aims and principles; ideal TE (identity standard); and role identity are presented below. Each theme has a clear focus, scope, and purpose, based on Burke and

Stets’ (2009) identity theory as discussed previously. Together, they provide a rich, coherent, and meaningful picture of what it means to be a TE in Malta. Specifically, this section explores how TEs construct their role identities and how emotions shape these identities, and the consequent outcomes for their practice.

Aims and Principles of TEs

An overarching theme is the “aims and principles” or perceptions that TEs in Malta have about their role identities. VTEs viewed them in terms of: time; reflecting on their practice; and having the adequate knowledge, skills, and competencies (KSCs) to produce vocational teachers of high quality. For example, VTEs portrayed time through current affairs and context. The influence of time and context is captured in the following comment from VTE 1:

VSTs should be given a context where they can apply the theory and skill into practice. You need time management, be creative, be aware of industrial skills. You have to keep abreast with today’s society.

VTE 1’s comments provide examples of how important it is that VTEs and student teachers remain aware of current affairs, in terms of technological changes and advancements. Thus, both VTEs and VSTs’ role identities involve interaction with wider society, particularly industry and hands-on approach to apply theoretical concepts in practice. VTE 2 also refers to the notion of time and claims that it is the responsibility of VTEs to remain up to date with what is happening within the industry. VTE 2 states:

How can we understand the criticism that the media highlights, if we do not know our own context inside

out? Therefore, apart from our own local context, it is within our responsibility to also tell them [student teachers] what is happening within the EU context. How can we know the reason why Malta took a certain direction, if we don't know what's happening in the EU? A vocational teacher at the end of the day needs to know what's happening within the industry at a local and also at a broader context to remain up to date.

This extract demonstrates that it is crucial for educators within a VET context to keep abreast with what is happening around them and in the wider context and communicate this to their student teachers. In addition, the spillover of the commitment to VTE 2's former professional role identity in the industry can put tremendous pressure on the current role identity of a VTE to complete its expectations and responsibilities. VTE 2 feels that if the industrial context is omitted from the teaching, the role expectations of a VTE will not be fulfilled, which might trigger a discrepancy in the future when vocational student teachers become fully qualified to teach. In fact, this study is based on the premise that the role identities of VTEs are similar to those of vocational teachers due to the nature of the subject discipline. Thus, VTEs are aware of their responsibility to pass these attributes to their student teachers. The meaning of their role identity is created through interaction with other parties beyond the VET context. This is linked to the next two sub-themes about self-reflection and KSCs.

Self-reflection offers educators an opportunity to think about what works and what does not work in their professional practice. VTEs said that this made them think deeper and reflect on their practices and about why certain decisions were taken. They described how it results in effective teaching as they improved their practice thereafter. For example,

VTE 3 emphasized the importance of self-reflection and states:

Another responsibility that we, TEs, have is to tell our student teachers that we must constantly evaluate and reflect on the vocational education system and the lessons.

This extract links with the previous sub-theme of keeping up to date with what is happening in the industry and reflecting and evaluating the current practices. This demonstrates the intensive commitment to meeting the aims and principles of a VTE. VTEs need not only to reflect on their teaching practices but also know what is happening in the labor market, which is linked to the next sub-theme.

As discussed previously, it is within the VTEs' interests to remain abreast with what is happening in the labor market. That leads the VTE to explore different approaches to the KSCs that are required within it. Learning for employability is considered essential by the VTEs. The word "industry," which refers to the labor market, was constantly being mentioned by them. For example, VTE 4's aim was to make sure that student teachers were well prepared within the vocational stream and in the pedagogical aspect, which would lead to high-quality vocational teaching. In fact, VTE 4 said:

[My] aim is to produce vocational teachers of high quality.

VTE 1 concurred with this aspect:

Vocational education is different. Apart from providing them the skills, you also have to pass on the competencies. That is, there is the theory, there is the skill, then you should be capable of applying that theory and that skill to unfamiliar situations.

Here, both VTE 4 and VTE 1 demonstrate the importance of being competent in the skill and not only being knowledgeable. In fact, VTE 4 emphasizes that it is within their responsibility to prepare students both in the vocational and pedagogical aspects, that is, teach them how to transfer that knowledge to others. Similarly, VTE 1 explains the importance of linking theory to practice, even in unfamiliar contexts.

These extracts indicate that occupation-specific skills are not enough for VET students to adapt to new life situations and engage in further learning; key competencies are also required. VTEs described why these are essential for employment. Moreover, these extracts also depict how the professional role identities of VTEs are not static as they gain experience and constantly need to adapt to the changing requirements of the labor market.

On the other hand, MTEs viewed the “aims and principles” as: helping student teachers become good teachers; helping future teachers become reflective practitioners; and “loving” the subject discipline and then teaching its pedagogies. For example, MTE 1 and MTE 2 describe how helping student teachers is their main focus. MTE 1 says:

I would like my student teachers to think of the learners first. That is my main thing. What does it mean to learn? What type of teaching should I do for that learner? I, as a lecturer, would have failed. I don't want them to have the knowledge just to pass their exams.

Here, MTE 1 sees teaching as student-focused, both in the TE's work and that of future teachers; and teaching and learning should not be about passing exams but based on reflective practice and adapted to their learners.

Like MTE 1, MTE 2 described how student teachers should always put the needs of their learners first and says:

Teachers should think about their students and not just about the content. They need to connect the needs of the subject to the needs of the students. You cannot emphasize the learning outcomes and forget about the realities you have in front of you. If that happens, learners start losing their focus. So, the challenge for the teacher is to be flexible and adapt to the situation.

MTE 2, like MTE 1, is student-focused. Flexibility is key to adapting teaching content to the needs and abilities of students.

Similarly, MTEs describe ways how they help future teachers become reflective practitioners. This sub-theme explores how MTEs evoke their aims and principles with their student teachers. For example, MTE 3 says:

My aim as a TE is to help my student teachers become reflective practitioners. My desire is not to have teachers who go to class and teach their subjects, and that's it. I want them to be reflective practitioners in the sense that whatever they do in class, they need to reflect upon, prior to going in class and after going out of class.

This extract demonstrates MTE 3's ambitious aim that one has as a TE. MTE 3 suggests that to be a good teacher, reflection before and after teaching is necessary. MTE 3 aims to engage the student teachers in reflective practice.

MTEs highlight the importance of knowing the subject profoundly before teaching its pedagogies. This sub-theme captures the underlying aims of MTEs

regarding content knowledge. According to them, a teacher is not able to teach a subject if they understand it at a superficial level. In addition, a teacher cannot communicate any enthusiasm, and teaching would be pointless. For example, MTE 4 says:

The subject has to be ingrained within you. It has to be in your blood; you have to know it really well.

MTEs highlight the importance of knowing the subject profoundly before teaching its pedagogies. In addition, both MTEs and VTEs shared a common aim and principle, that of supporting student teachers. Regardless of which role identity is, the fact that they appear to be so interconnected on this aim and principle shows how strong the commitment and thus salience of the role identity of being a TE. It is, therefore, logical to suggest that this study is based on the premise that the role identities of VTEs are also similar to those of MTEs, bearing in mind the nature of teacher training programs.

Ideal TE (Identity Standard)

According to Burke and Stets' (2009) identity model, each identity contains a set of meanings that defines the character of that particular identity and makes up the identity standard. This theme, "ideal TE," portrays the set of meanings that TEs have, which characterizes an ideal of their role and serves as a point of reference in the identity process within the identity model.

VTEs viewed the ideal TE in three different ways, all of which were directly related to the VET context. According to them, the ideal VTE should be pragmatic and dynamic; must have industrial and teaching experience; and should maintain practical links with the labor market to keep informed. For example,

The person needs to be very pragmatic and very dynamic; someone who's capable to bridge theory to practice and relate it in a very relevant mode. It cannot be something that remains theory on paper. [VTE 1]

The emphasis of vocational education is hands-on. [VTE 4]

Here, VTEs emphasize that VTEs' teaching approach should be practical not only theoretical; and bridge the gap between the two. In addition, the need for teaching to be exploratory in nature and have a "hands-on" approach is crucial. Vocational teaching needs to be pragmatic, dynamic, and practical to develop and maintain the highest standards in students' technical competencies, pedagogical skills, and transversal competencies. The latter are those skills and attitudes, such as organizational skills, that are relevant to a broad range of occupations.

Considering that technological changes impact future job trends, they suggest that VTEs should be flexible in their practice and explore new ways that accommodate these changes. The implication is that their professional role identities are constantly changing, which is linked to the next sub-theme where according to VTEs, TEs working in a VET context should have industrial experience. The connection with industry was also highlighted in the aims and principles of VTEs. For example, VTE 6 says:

They definitely need to have industrial experience and then teaching experience. So, you need to have both kinds of experience.

Considering that the aim of VET is learning for employability, the ideal VTE should have industrial experience within the subject field and also experience within pedagogy. They argue that high-quality

teaching in VET is guaranteed by having teachers who have prior occupational experiences. That leads to the next sub-theme where VTEs describe the importance of links to the labor market. For example, VTE 6 states that:

TEs should make sure to remain up-to-date, to know what is being done out there.

One way of achieving this would be through industrial visits to help VTEs to remain abreast with the latest knowledge and allow them to discuss future skills trends in the labor market. This depicts how the role identities of VTEs are internalized by social role expectations. VTE 6's emphasis on remaining up-to-date may indicate uncertainty of their role identity if they do not keep abreast with the labor market. VTEs' role identities are not solely set by them as a professional group, but also by the expectations of the labor market. As a result, there may be tensions and dissonances in verifying their professional role identities as their identity standard.

Thus, the interviews show that identity is not only about how VTEs perceive themselves, but how the labor market and society perceive them. Moreover, it suggests that within a SI perspective, the focus in the case of VTEs is on how identities are developed and ascribed in interactions with the labor market.

For MTEs, the ideal MTE should be enthusiastic about the subject discipline and keep abreast with the latest research. These were also highlighted in the aims and principles of a TE. In addition, both VTEs and MTEs have stressed the importance of keeping good TE-student teacher relationships. That is likely to help in the learning process of student teachers. They also emphasize the importance

of the personal quality of caring over the academic ability of teachers or TEs. This quality relates to "person identities" in Burke and Stets' (2009) identity theory and they may guide the role identities.

Role Identity

This theme explores the role identity of the TEs in this study in terms of three sub-themes: roles; prominence; and salience hierarchy of identities. It considers how TEs construct meanings for their different roles. According to identity theory, a role is "the set of expectations tied to a social position that guide people's attitudes and behavior" (Burke and Stets 2009:114) and provides structure, organization, and meaning for TEs.

Roles

This sub-theme captures more than one characteristic that TEs used to describe what their role meant to them. Burke and Stets (2009:115) claim that role identities have different meanings for different people. Each role is described in depth below. It also explores how TEs cope with multiple roles and which they consider conflicting. Both VTEs and MTEs mentioned curriculum development, teaching/lecturing, and examining student teachers as their multiple roles. VTEs distinguish themselves in their teaching approach, considering that their subjects are vocational. They emphasize that starting from the practical aspect and moving to the theory was their adopted approach when compared to the traditional way of teaching that is more content-driven and students are passive learners. Specifically, VTEs consider that the most effective learning in VET is by giving importance to learning through the application of knowledge in realist contexts. VTEs feel responsible to ensure

that learning is connected to the workplace and that students would be learning for employability. This type of learning approach is also in line with the findings of Said (2018) where authentic learning was the preferred learning environment for higher vocational students following a vocational bachelor's degree program. The difference between this current study and Said's (2018) study is that the participants were not student teachers in VET but were higher vocational students following a vocational bachelor's degree program. However, the comments of the VTEs of this study suggest they know exactly what type of learning approach vocational students prefer, and that is why authentic learning is emphasized to student teachers.

VTEs also mentioned supporting student teachers and MTEs mentioned administration, researching, and dissertation supervision as part of their roles.

The above findings concur with other researchers, suggesting that people can activate multiple meanings to their role identities (Burke and Stets 2009). Both VTEs and MTEs have attributed multiple meanings to their professional role identity. Thus, the next sub-theme discusses how these TEs cope with the multiple roles.

Coping with Multiple Roles

Support from colleagues, relevant experiences, self-reflection, and personal characteristics were the main coping mechanisms between various roles. VTEs specifically described how their former occupational identity guided them in their role as a VTE. VTEs suggested that their former occupational identity was not replaced by their new role identity as a TE, but it has helped them to transition. With regards to the latter, person identities are also recog-

nized by identity theorists (Burke and Stets 2009). They are based on the qualities and characteristics that define the person as a unique individual rather than as a role-holder. Thus, the person identity is seen to be operating across various roles and situations, and at times is likely to be activated more than the role identity. In certain situations, individuals rely on their person identity, which serves as the identity standard, and which eventually guides the identity-verification process (Burke and Stets 2009). For example, VTE 2 specifically states:

It was not difficult to cope with multiple roles. My motto is that the things you wish for yourself, do them to others. Therefore, I always give my best. Being honest and transparent is my way.

This suggests that the character of the individual plays an important part in every role identity that is taken. Moreover, person identity is like a master identity since the meanings within it influence the meanings within one's role identity (Burke and Stets 2009).

The next sub-theme discusses how the roles TEs mentioned might conflict with one another.

Conflicting Roles

Multiple role identities could be related to one another and are set to different levels. That could result in identity conflicts where there is a role conflict. A discrepancy between these role identities can occur when they are activated at the same time. Identity theory suggests that levels of distress are felt because of these discrepancies (Burke and Stets 2009). TEs experienced conflicting roles and mentioned the examining role, as opposed to the teaching/mentoring role. For example, VTE 3 says:

Honestly, in the beginning, I was afraid that my roles do conflict with one another as I was first teaching them, and then the time arrived when I had to assess them during their exams and teaching practice visits. However, the fact that all student teachers were respectful helped me overcome this fear.

It is suggested that when a TE manages conflicting roles successfully, such as the ones above, they can build a good relationship with student teachers; it not only helps student teachers in effective learning but also impacts positively on the identity formation of the TE.

Moreover, MTEs describe how the mentoring role conflicts with the examining role. For example, MTE 4 says:

There's a very fine line when being a mentor and an examiner at the same time. I'm referring to the teaching practice here. But, the fact that I keep constant communication with my student teachers, very often, they already know what my judgment will be. I discuss everything with them. After each visit, I discuss the report I give them and invite student teachers to my office to discuss it thoroughly.

This extract also suggests the benefits of building a good TE-student teacher relationship and how the role identity of a TE is verified through open communication with both parties (Burke and Stets 2009).

Prominence Hierarchy of Identities

This sub-theme within "role identity" captures how important identity is for TEs. Since TEs have multiple role identities, as was explained above, this sub-theme explores which role or roles are more prominent in the way VTEs and MTEs think about

themselves. The higher the identity in the prominence hierarchy, the more important it is. However, where an identity appears in the prominence hierarchy depends on three factors (Burke and Stets 2009). One of the factors is how much individuals obtain support for the identity they are claiming. The more support they have, the higher that identity will be in the prominence hierarchy. Another factor that affects it is how committed individuals are to their role identity. The placement of identity in the prominence hierarchy is also influenced by the rewards individuals get from that identity, both extrinsic and intrinsic (Burke and Stets 2009). Intrinsic rewards are the gratifications that individuals experience internally for that particular role they perform, whilst extrinsic rewards are things such as money, prestige, and favors. Therefore, this sub-theme is divided into three categories: support; commitment; and rewards, and each category explores which roles are prominent for TEs.

Support

VTEs described four main roles that were most supported. These were: (1) administrative, (2) curriculum development, (3) examining role during teaching practice, and (4) writing exam papers. The support was either from their colleagues or from the department they worked in. The one and only role that was given the least support for VTEs was the teaching role. All VTEs said that they could not receive support on lecture preparation when compared to other roles. TEs felt reassured when they received the necessary support. The more support they received from the department or from their colleagues, the higher that role identity is likely to be in the prominence hierarchy. However, support is not the only factor that impacts prominence hierarchy. Another factor that affects this is commitment.

Commitment

This sub-theme explores which roles TEs are most and least committed to. VTEs and MTEs have suggested that the role they were most committed to was the teaching/lecturing role. Moreover, VTEs were also committed to the examining role during the teaching practice. Administration was the role that many MTEs found they were least committed to.

The administrative role does not appear to add any value to the role identity of a TE, but it is still recognized as needing to be done.

The final factor that affects this are rewards.

Rewards

The extrinsic rewards that both VTEs and MTEs received were from the student teachers. For example, VTE 1 says:

I feel very happy when students appreciate what you do with them.

It is suggested that appreciation motivates TEs in the role identity. Similarly, other MTEs also feel rewarded when student teachers thank them for the work they do. For example, MTE 4 says:

Sometimes I get ex-students who come up to me and tell me "thank you" or give me a gift as a form of appreciation. These give me the courage to go on.

MTE 4 admits that when student teachers appreciate the work, it motivates them and gives them an incentive to carry on. Moreover, such appreciation also acts as a verification for their role identity as a TE and confirmation that one is on the right track.

In addition, MTEs receive extrinsic rewards in the form of positive emotions when other researchers acknowledge their work.

The intrinsic rewards were the positive feelings VTEs and MTEs felt when they overcame certain challenges, when a lecture turns out well and when student teachers follow their advice during teaching practice. This suggests that commitment and perseverance help in identity verification. Both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards motivated TEs to keep on striving, which helped them in their professional role identity formation.

Salience Hierarchy of Identities

This sub-theme within the broad theme of "role identity" captures which role or roles TEs had to activate in a situation because of norms or pressures from others. According to identity theory, identity salience reflects the situational self rather than the ideal self. It is the likelihood of identity being invoked across situations.

Both VTEs and MTEs emphasized that their teaching and mentoring roles were the most important, which need to be activated across situations. Participants feel that they aim to teach student teachers well and to support them in their needs.

The least important role for both VTEs and MTEs was the assessing role. For example, TEs mentioned that their focus is on the learning process rather than the grade they give during the teaching practice. In addition, one participant also mentioned the counseling role as the least important as it was not a priority and is seen beyond the remit as a VTE. However, as a professional, this participant responded to the expectations of the situation rather than to their desires (Burke and Stets 2009).

In summary, the VTEs' perceptions of their professional role identity prioritized not just knowledge but also skills and competencies, distinct from the pedagogic practice. The identity standard that represents the professionalism of these VTEs may be influenced by their biographies, including their former occupation identity and training, together with their educational and personal experiences, and person identity. Moreover, how VTEs viewed their understanding of their professional role identity will frame notions of effective vocational teaching and ideas of what makes student teachers become "good" teachers in the VET context.

The last two sub-themes show that the more prominent a role identity is for the VTEs, the more likely it will be invoked in a situation. Moreover, the more support and rewards VTEs receive for a particular role, the more that role is activated across other role identities. In these findings, VTEs remark that they are mostly committed to their teaching and examining roles, amongst other roles. VTEs experience positive emotions from having good relationships with their student teachers and being responsible for bridging theory with practice and learning for employability. These may be associated with their identity standard.

On the other hand, the perceptions of MTEs on the role identity prioritized knowledge of the subject matter and the research that underpins their teaching. In addition, they attributed multiple meanings to their roles and not all of them managed to cope with their different role identities. The two role identities that were seen to be conflicting were the lecturing and examining roles; MTEs are mostly committed to the lecturing role. In addition, they find the administrative role least important as it is time-consuming.

Discussion

The experiences of a small group of TEs within the MTL program were examined. It was observed that the educational contexts in which they teach differ not only in the subject disciplines but in terms of their cultures. Findings show that both VTEs and MTEs played roles in interaction with their student teachers and their colleagues. The internalized meanings of the roles that participants apply to themselves help to construct their professional role identity as TEs. These varied slightly between and among both groups of participants. That is because the meanings are derived from the individuals' distinctive interpretations of the role. VTEs put most emphasis on KSCs, bridging the gap between the theoretical and the practical components, and on industry outreach. On the other hand, the MTEs emphasized content knowledge and research, considered as a key characteristic for university TEs in Europe to develop a researcher identity (Swennen, Jones, and Volman 2010).

There was also a difference between full-timers and part-timers in the roles they described within the same group of participants. Full-timers described an additional administrative role when compared with the other roles that were described. Respondents drew on similar discourses when discussing that their priority is to care for student teachers.

Moreover, it was observed that the institutional context and previous experience left an impact on their identity standard. MTEs portrayed how the community of practice influences their professional role identity. However, since all but one VTE were part-timers who spend less time on campus when compared with full-timers, their identities are not necessarily influenced by the UoM as an academic

institution. VTEs are more influenced by the labor market and their full-time occupation, which have an impact on their identity standard. In addition, the employment status of VTEs as part-timers did not have any influence on the underpinning of their teaching. Although VTEs saw research as important, they felt that it was not a necessity for them due to the nature of VET.

As the findings depict, the professional role identity of TEs contains a large set of meanings, showing that more than one characteristic was used to describe what their role means to them. However, the participants within the VTEs' group appear to think alike and act alike, showing that there is uniformity of thoughts and actions, indicating their social group identity (Burke and Stets 2009). As their perceptions and behavior were similar, this shows that VTEs took on a clear group-based identity. Findings show that they acted in concert; they identified with and evaluated themselves positively in the group, all giving importance to the needs of industry and adopting a hands-on teaching approach.

It can be observed that the role identities are integrated with the group identities, which makes it difficult to disentangle them from each other as identity theory suggests (Burke and Stets 2009). Findings show that VTEs, although having discussed and enacted their roles individually, share very similar ideas on what it means to be a VTE. Moreover, this study echoes previous attempts to theorize ideas that vocational teachers should be conceptualized as "dual professionals" (Orr and Simmons 2010), bearing in mind that they hold the identity of a teacher, or in this case, a TE, as well as that of their former or other occupation (which is their vocational expertise). This shows that VTEs are more distinct when compared with the differ-

ent role identities of MTEs, which are more related to content knowledge.

Concerning TEs verifying their identity, some participants felt unable to perform well in their role and experienced negative emotions, just as is predicted in the identity model (Burke and Stets 2009). For example, TEs from both groups felt negative emotions when student teachers do not follow their advice. TEs felt that they needed to act on this and discuss issues with their student teachers. Both groups experienced positive emotions when they felt that their work was being appreciated by their student teachers. That led TEs to continue behaving in the same way as their identity was being verified.

Both groups have ranked the meanings they attributed to their role identities differently. Some participants gave their primary importance to teaching, showing that identity prominence was on that component. Then, others were mostly committed to the role of examiner during the teaching practice. They also described moments when identity salience had to be invoked in certain situations. For example, even though their least important role was that of a counselor, there were moments when they had to activate and prioritize this role over their prominence identity to help student teachers in particular situations. These situations affirm the claim that whilst identity salience and identity prominence are correlated with each other, they are still different in the underlying concept (Stryker and Serpe 1994).

Conclusion

The study particularly focused on the professional role identities of VTEs and compared them with MTEs' on the island micro-state of Malta where re-

spondents were Maltese and all delivered courses within the MTL program at one institution.

This study contributes to the understanding of TE identity standards by demonstrating through analysis of interview data the multiple-meanings TEs assign to their roles, how they cope with multiple roles, conflicting roles, identity prominence, and salience.

The introduction of this paper discussed the reasons why it is important to understand the professional role identities of this target group. Primarily, VTEs are underrepresented in research and policy and misapprehended as an occupational group, and not recognizing their importance may result in poor teaching behaviors. In addition, failing to understand their role identities, policies in the VET sector might be based on flawed assumptions, which may then have unknown consequences for the VTEs, the VSTs, vocational teaching in general, and the labor market. VTEs are the backbone of initial vocational teacher education, as key individuals who deliver teacher training programs and influence future vocational teachers. Hence, they are in a position to regulate the vocational teaching profession, the professional conduct of vocational teachers, and establish professional standards in VET.

This research has shown that there are differences between VTEs and MTEs about what underpins or should underpin their teaching. For VTEs, it is industrial experience and industries' needs, whereas for MTEs, it is knowledge based on research and teaching experience. These differences are influenced by the perceptions they have about their professional role identity, even though it was happening within the same institution. The findings in this study show not only what their professional roles

are but also why VTEs perform such roles, some of which were a matter of choice. Roles were also affected by employment status, as full-time staff had additional administrative roles.

This study is unique by presenting the results of a qualitative study on VTEs' perceptions of their professional role identities. This professional group has been neglected in the research literature and policy. Through the exposition and conclusions derived, it demonstrates what actions and policies are suited to the characteristics of an island micro-state.

Through the qualitative findings of this study, it is concluded that the professional role identity of VTEs is diverse and dependent on multiple sources of identification: their former occupation/profession; the labor market; and VET. Thus, VTEs are better understood as having a multi-dimensional identity, and should not be imposed with established policies borrowed from other educational contexts.

Strengths and Limitations

A thematic approach was used to analyze all interviews. A clear and consistent definition of identity was used throughout this paper to guide the analysis. Stryker's (1980) definition from the SI perspective to define identity as "what it means to be who one is" was used in this study. Moreover, analyzing the professional role identities of VTEs from a SI perspective offered the ability to go in-depth and examine them at a granular level.

A limitation that is important to highlight is that this study focused on the role identities of TEs. Although social identity theory (Burke and Stets 2009), that is, the group identity, was referred to in the discussion, and professional background details were

given for all participants, the primary aim of this research related to role identity, as it depicts the professional identity and not the social or person identities. Moreover, it was not in the scope of this study to analyze the data according to age, gender, race, or other forms of social status.

Contribution to Theory and Policy

Most researchers have examined the identity process using the survey approach (Carter 2013). It is very difficult for the researchers to capture the context within which the identity emerges using a survey approach. Thus, using a survey approach results in learning about identities in isolation from their surroundings (Burke and Stets 2009). This empirical study moves identity theory in a new direction by examining the role identity process of TEs, using a qualitative methodological approach and capturing the context within which their role identities emerge, based on a case study.

Findings from this study indicate that policies need to be established to support the professional role identity of VTEs and their professional development. This study paves the way for contributing to a shared understanding of what it means to be a VTE.

Further Research and Recommendations for Policymakers

Future work could examine the interaction and the relationship of role identities to social and person identities from the structural SI perspective and how such an interaction could impact the behavior of VTEs. Examining how multiple identities interact with each other extends the study of the professional identities of VTEs.

Considering that VTEs are better understood as holders of multi-dimensional identity and that they are under pressure from employers to diversify and expand their roles, policymakers should pay attention to limiting VTEs professional role identities. One suggestion is to have VTEs that are specialized in the teaching of general vocational pedagogy, and others who can specialize in collaborating with industry partners. That will guarantee that the ethical and epistemic status of the vocational teaching profession has a far wider significance than it currently has, and future vocational students are better prepared for the workplace. This will have a positive impact on society and the economy. This would guarantee that all professional roles are performed irrespective of which VTE performs them. Additionally, having VTEs specializing in one area will make it easier for them to develop their skills in more depth and keep abreast with the new developments in the areas they specialize in (whether it is new teaching methods, new technologies, or business practices). That also helps them to take control of their professional needs and manage their professional support as it is essential that VTEs become active agents in their development and be more able to verify their role identity and its prominence in their hierarchy of role identities. With this recommendation, it would be possible to keep up with the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution. The aim of all this is to have an effective vocational teacher training program that will produce exceptional vocational teachers who are well-equipped to help vocational students make the move from school to work.

To conclude, this study has given a voice to a group that has too often been neglected in teacher education policy and research in Malta. Building an understanding of the professional role identities of VTEs is crucial and by exposition and recommendations,

this research shows how this can be enhanced. This research will, therefore, influence policymakers in small states such as Malta to be cautious of uncritically taking on board concepts and policies from much larger geographical contexts, which may not be suited to the characteristics of micro-states such as Malta and from mainstream education contexts.

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“If Things Really Go On as They Are at the Moment, Then I Will Work Illegally. End of Story.” Pandemic Realities in Marginalized Entrepreneurships

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Abstract: Micro-enterprises and self-employed individuals have been hit particularly hard by the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but few studies have tackled the issue. This paper is based on four in-depth case studies of self-employed people from different sectors who have been greatly affected by measures taken to control the pandemic. By capturing shifts in the perception of institutional and economic pressures, as well as precarity after the outbreak of COVID-19, we gained profound insight into crisis management among entrepreneurs working in niche or marginalized fields of business. We found parallels in their biographies and attitudes, but their perceptions of the COVID-19 pandemic differ. We observed paradoxes and hybrid logic, as well as different ways of coping with the crisis. Having a “plan B” helped in some cases, while all of them benefitted from the solidarity of networks and communities.

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In spring 2019, we began a study of self-employed individuals and freelancers to explore "deviating biographies." We were interested in people whose biographies and personalities largely diverge from the stereotype and archetype of the "successful entrepreneur," which have been criticized for quite a while (e.g., Gerpott and Kieser 2017; Johnsen and Sørensen 2017). However, after we collected a considerable amount of data on four individual cases, COVID-19 emerged. The pandemic changed the working routines and lives of people across the world and impacted our investigation. By accident, our sample of four cases included entrepreneurs in professional fields that were severely restricted by measures taken to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. We soon realized that we should capture this disruption. Hence, we added another round of data collection to the existing individual case studies, (re-)setting the focus on recent developments.

Therefore, the aim of our study evolved to capture shifts in the perception of institutional and economic pressures, as well as precarity after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, and gain profound insight into crisis management among entrepreneurs working in niche and marginalized fields of business. The research questions are as follows:

R1: Are there specific ways of reacting to the new constraints and requirements imposed by various interest groups during the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, what are they?

R2: How are new institutional demands experienced in these specific fields of business, and how is reality individually framed or constructed in the context of COVID-19?

Although nearly every sector of the economy has been affected by the crisis, micro-enterprises,

self-employed individuals, and entrepreneurs have been hit particularly hard (Cepel et al. 2020; Fabeil, Pazim, and Langgat 2020; Fairlie 2020; Kartseva and Kuznetsova 2020). Depending on the sector, they have faced a total loss of earnings or extremely precarious conditions. Initial studies conducted in different countries and regions have dealt with how these groups coped with the crisis (Bartik et al. 2020; Blundell and Machin 2020; Shafi, Liu, and Ren 2020); however, only a few of these studies have adopted a qualitative approach (e.g., Rukti Tanaya and Ekyawan 2020; Wijaya 2020). Shepherd and Williams (2020) emphasized the need for studies focused on entrepreneurial activities in the context of the current crisis, especially as it relates to individual resilience. The role of resilience for entrepreneurs and ways of responding to precarious and uncertain circumstances seem to be very prominent matters among scholars who have conceptualized and called for studies on the ongoing crisis and its impact on entrepreneurship (e.g., Hite and McDonald 2020; Portuguese Castro and Gómez Zermeño 2020; Ratten 2020). This is why our study focuses on how entrepreneurs are responding to and coping with economic and social burdens during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theory

Given the strong institutional pressures and demands on business owners resulting from measures and regulations enacted to control the spread of COVID-19, we propose approaches of new institutionalism as a theoretical perspective to frame the analysis and acquire knowledge about current events. The neo-institutionalist approach claims that organizations adopt dominant practices of other—successful—organizations (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Following the original approach, institutionalized "techniques" and "policies" are strong

myths that organizations are forced to implement (Meyer and Rowan 1977:340).

Taking this as a basis, studies on organizational responsiveness and organizational logic help to understand how various institutional pressures embodied in regulations, norms, laws, and social expectations stemming from various sources, such as the state and public or private interest groups, are managed (Delmas and Toffel 2008; Greenwood et al. 2008; Greenwood et al. 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic and the urgency of containment have led federal and regional authorities to impose numerous constraints, such as regulations on social distancing, border closures, the prohibition of mass events, and the temporary closure of numerous businesses during the lockdown. Additionally, social expectations regarding business policies focused on protecting the health of employees and customers have risen. The new prioritization of health protection logic represented by institutions, such as the state and community, has led to criticism of organizations that failed to protect their employees, knowingly endangered them, or caused outbreaks (e.g., at Tönnies meat processing factories¹). This not only illustrates the increasing public pressure but also shows how questions of mismanagement and resulting precarity can enter the discourse.

Studies have shown that organizations develop diverse strategies to respond to their environment, and not all organizations experience institutional demands in a given field in a similar way (Oliver 1991; Kraatz and Block 2008; Greenwood et al. 2011; Crilly, Zollo, and Hansen 2012). Moreover, an institu-

tional perspective in research on entrepreneurship is well established and proven to be helpful (Bruton, Ahlstrom, and Li 2010; Su, Zhai, and Karlsson 2017), and some qualitative studies have taken this stance (e.g., Eijdenberg et al. 2019). By drawing on this theoretical framework, the current study takes a micro-perspective focused on individual behaviors and mindsets (e.g., Wicks 2001). This approach will provide new insights into the perceptions and reactions of entrepreneurs in fields of business strongly affected by COVID-19 pandemic-imposed institutional pressures and suffering economic precarity. Thus, this study contributes to the evolving scientific discourse tackling the questions arising due to COVID-19 from a managerial viewpoint (Hite and McDonald 2020; Spurk and Straub 2020).

In addition, several studies have begun to examine the identities of entrepreneurs (e.g., Leitch and Harrison 2016), including research on conflicting identities (e.g., Pécoud 2004; Slay and Smith 2011; Schediwy, Bhansing, and Loots 2018) and hybrid ones, for example, within the context of migration (e.g., Essers and Benschop 2007; 2009; Barrett and Vershinina 2017). Since our study follows a narrative, biographical approach, identities also play a role here (Czarniawska 2004; Ozasir Kacar and Essers 2019), and concerning the field of “non-typical entrepreneurs,” questions of identity formation may arise. As Laclau (1990:39) concludes, “every identity is dislocated insofar as it depends on an outside which both denies that identity and provides its condition of possibility at the same time.” By drawing on this notion, this paper also seeks to trace facets of individual identities.

Data and Method

Our research design is a multiple case study (Stake 2013; see also: Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; Yin

¹ In June 2020, a major outbreak of COVID-19 occurred in one of Europe’s largest meat processing plants in Rheda-Wiedenbrück. Its primary causes were the catastrophic and unhygienic working and living conditions for the workers, most of whom are migrants (*Deutsche Welle* 2020; Paul 2020).

2018) based on four in-depth case studies of self-employed people from different sectors: a fitness instructor, who is also the owner of a CrossFit gym; the head and founder of a catering company; a retailer and importer, who owns a small clothing store; and a sex worker, who also works as a sexual assistant. All four case studies focus on people who run their business in the eastern part of Germany and belong to two cohorts of the so-called *Wendejugend* (the youth of the transformation) and *Wendekinder* (children of the transformation). These individuals were born during the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) between 1971 and 1980 or 1981 and 1985 (Ahbe and Gries 2006a; 2006b; Kubiak and Weinel 2016; Lettrari, Nestler, and Troi-Boeck 2016). All of them spent most of their adolescence during the final years of the GDR or the years of transformation during the 1990s. Hence, they all share the experience of ruptures and fluctuations in the course of the transformation or its results. To date, numerous studies have investigated the distinctive characteristics of these generations (Bock 2000; Lettrari, Nestler, and Troi-Boeck 2016; Kubiak 2020) but also raised the question of whether these generations have common features (Benkert 2016). A broader perspective was adopted by Banalieva and colleagues (2017), who argued that the long-term effects of communist societies on individual behavior continue to the present day and, for instance, shape management practices (see also: Vadi 2018). Other authors have examined the transition of East German identities after the reunification with West Germany, focusing on somewhat marginalized Eastern German perspectives (Maclean, Harvey, and Stringfellow 2017).

Our study focuses on entrepreneurs by accident (Sarasvathy 2001; Görling and Rehn 2008) and the so-called “necessity entrepreneurship” (Brewer and

Gibson 2014) within this context (see, e.g., Welter, Smallbone, and Isakova 2006; Blokker and Dallago 2017). We followed the four cases over a period of 18 months, starting in spring 2019. We conducted multiple interviews, as well as participatory observation and shadowing. We had the unique opportunity to directly accompany self-employed people dealing with the crisis in “real-time.” We used the autobiographical-narrative interview approach (e.g., Schütze 1983) and extended it by splitting the interviews into two parts to stimulate people’s reflexivity between sessions and make it possible for us to prepare for the second session based on the first, which supports sociological reflexivity (Caetano 2015). This procedure allowed us to capture people’s reflections on the ongoing pandemic and doing business under these circumstances.

A special feature of this study is access to the field and respective sampling. We were able to draw on personal contacts and thus a sense of trust. The selection of cases was, therefore, also based on pre-existing (while fragmentary) knowledge of their biographies, or at least the knowledge that their biographies and, perhaps, their intentions differ considerably from those of a “prototypical” entrepreneur. Thus, they “fit” the original aim of our inquiry in its focus on biographies deviating from the “prototypical” entrepreneur. We used MAXQDA and followed an inductive approach to analyze all the transcripts and documents. Nonetheless, our theoretical lens sharpened the focus on response strategies and interpretations of entrepreneurs concerning the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, in the discussion of the results, we will draw on approaches of new institutionalism. Based on the coding and respective categories, comprehensive case descriptions were elaborated, and triangulation was used (Patton and Appelbaum 2003; Den-

zin 2009; Flick 2011; 2018; Stake 2013; Natow 2020). Both authors were equally involved in the analysis, and their interpretations were discussed regularly (Stake 2013; Kuckartz and Rädiker 2019). In the next section, we will present our four cases in detail, focusing on their biography and the effects of the COVID-19-pandemic.

Results

Case #1: Tom

Tom was born in 1981 in the former GDR and grew up with two siblings. He is interested in many things, which are reflected in his biography. In early childhood, he was active in sports. Contrary to his ambitions, his school career ended early: "I was...very sad when I had to leave school. That was, as one would say today, chicanery by the school management, or it was just a lack of motivation." He then began an apprenticeship as a carpenter and discovered his passion for wood-working. After a phase of burnout, he decided to take a break and traveled to the Philippines. What started as a holiday in Asia ultimately became nine years of his life. After returning home from the trip, he immediately quit his job, sold his property, and returned to Asia. In the Philippines, he met his former partner and entered the hotel business, where his training as a carpenter gave him a foothold. His way of working and his ideas were well received, and he was promoted to general manager of the hotel within three years.

After the hotel was slated to be sold, Tom and his partner decided to go to Australia. Drawing on their contacts with boutique owners and manufacturers, they set up a business engaged in importing accessories from Asia. This was a great success: "It was

really fantastic. During the sales weeks, I drove two and a half thousand kilometers every week across Australia, so it was really great." During this period, Tom tried to visit Germany once a year. One summer, he arrived home just as his father became ill. After returning to Australia, he received word that he died. The early death of his father prompted him to return to Germany, as he wanted to support his mother. He separated from his partner and left all their joint businesses to her. However, the financial loss did not seem to make him feel bitter, and this stance illustrates his general attitude quite well:

When I left Australia, I left a relatively large amount of cash behind. It was clear to me that I would never go back...I liked working there, and I liked the life there, but I did not care about the money.

In Germany, Tom had to build a new life for himself, without money or his partner. Living on his parents' farm, he had no major expenses. Based on his experiences in Asia, he began working in the hotel business again while also working as a personal trainer. Looking for a new challenge and passion in his life, he thought about CrossFit, a sport he discovered abroad and a megatrend that had not yet arrived in his hometown. His training space, the "CrossFit-Box" as it is called, is very important to him, and he invested all his money and time in the project.

In explaining his motivation, he describes himself as a person who had a lot of luck in life, which he would like to share with others. His travels and various activities equipped him with a lot of experiences, for which he seems grateful. The CrossFit-Box is run as a non-profit business, where he gains satisfaction from doing something he likes to do and getting positive feedback from clients.

My profit is when I make people fit, my profit is when I make people healthy, my profit is when people like to come to me. And that was also a criterion for me, why I said, "Ok, I don't offer memberships." Because I really want to see that people want to be here! If someone doesn't want to be here, then I don't want his money either.

As he shows little interest in material possessions, he also has a less capitalistic view on work and entrepreneurship. Money seems of little value to him:

What do I do with the money when I get it? I have no children, I have no family, I own my property, all I have is mine. Why should I make money with it? I don't know what to do with it.

His motivation is also driven by the search for new challenges, even if they are risky. Due to his experiences in Asia and Australia, he is used to dealing with major changes. He describes traveling as giving him "the courage to risk things." He is not afraid to leave things behind and start over; if a business model does not work, he does not consider it a failure but a "sign that brings something new with it." For him, it is not important to be self-employed or to earn a lot of money per se, but he emphasizes that it is a matter of doing what you like to do on a professional level. In his opinion, people should ask themselves the following:

If the money is worth nothing anymore, are you in the situation where you would like to be, or have you chosen the wrong way? Because if you do that from the beginning, then no matter what happens to the business, no matter how bad your income is, you are always on the winning path. You are always happy... You are good at what you do, you get good feedback, and that's it.

With this positive attitude towards life, his interpretations of economic restraints and challenges are positive. His stance also seems to have helped him throughout the COVID-19 pandemic so far. Tom's gym, his training space, had to close down abruptly, as did similar businesses. Nevertheless, he benefited from his strategy of hybrid entrepreneurship: always relying on hybrid forms of income, including wage jobs and self-employment. Though this is not necessarily a distinctive aspect of COVID-19, it is important as a "backup" in precarious times:

That exact situation is why I kept the workshop for years, why I stayed at the hotel part-time for years if ever such a situation comes up. That it [the business] is just not over all of a sudden, right?

Although his turnover is zero, he saw no reason to worry about his finances. This is why Tom did not apply for any funding or loans, which he generally perceives critically. In his opinion, the state will reclaim much of the disbursed COVID-19 aid after audits have been completed. In his opinion, this will cause severe problems for many small businesses.

Moreover, Tom seems to have been well prepared in terms of logistics and what was about to come in the winter and spring of 2020. According to Tom, he relied on personal contacts in Asia, who gave him updates on the pandemic, so he took the situation seriously from the outset. Assuming that the pandemic would reach Europe soon, he started to prepare online tutorials in January 2020. Throughout the "first year of the pandemic," Tom was constantly adapting to the situation and found alternative solutions (e.g., outdoor training sessions). However, the changes are mostly temporary, and he does not consider them to be long-lasting business developments (e.g., digital sport offers a temporary solution

but does not fit his concept of personally assisted training and direct contact to the workout group). Solidarity, networks, and the support of friends and customers helped considerably. His customers continued to pay their fees for training sessions even though they could not take place. However, people who could not afford to pay for lessons or equipment rental fees were not obliged to do so. In addition to online lessons, he offered personal meetings, especially for people in need or difficult circumstances. In an interview in summer 2020, Tom states the following:

It must go on now...and, um, since this month, we have been going on step-by-step in small groups. Um, sluggish, challenging, and so on. But, yes, I say, if it goes on now, if no second wave comes now, or if we don't have to go back or whatever, um, it wasn't that hard for me.

His rather positive baseline might have led Tom to frame the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to slow down his routines (like another case, Hans, the caterer):

What I liked about the whole thing was that it was all slowed down. At first, everyone just stopped, stayed at home, stayed calm, stayed...no fear of missing something or feeling the need to go somewhere. I don't think that was so bad. That brought us a little bit back to the basics, you know?

As a matter of principle, Tom is in favor of adopting measures to prevent the spread of infection. He criticizes both imprudent and irresponsible behavior. After all, he also considers his branch to be in danger and pleads for more caution:

That's also what I told my people: "We better do a little too much. Um, the worst thing that could happen

to us is that someone gets infected, that someone gets sick or has long-term damage, or worse ((clears throat)). We have all ages, from five to 65...or that sports are completely stopped."

Again, his rather "cosmopolitan" perspective seems to have shaped his judgment. Perceiving the crisis as a global rather than an individual problem may lead to the greater acceptance of measures and restrictions: "I've considered this to be a worldwide problem, right from the beginning." His stance towards the reality of the pandemic is even more interesting when compared to questions of regulations and bureaucracy in Germany. When talking to him almost one year before the COVID-19 outbreak, he drew comparisons with Asia and Australia, stating that in Germany, it is difficult for founders who want to comply with all guidelines and regulations: "If you try to stick to any guidelines we have in this country, then you won't get anywhere." His compliant position on corona, however, may be due to his anti-materialistic and people-centered values. He is very aware of the seriousness of the infectious disease and the resulting problems for those affected, and he is happy to accept business shortages in return. In contrast, he shows a rather indifferent attitude towards other regulations, perceived as "pointless" and simply a way of over-bureaucratizing processes.

Case #2: Hans

Hans was born in the early 1970s and grew up during the GDR. As a teenager, he was sent to a "reform school" (*Jugendwerkhof*) known for the inhumane and degrading treatment of its juvenile inmates. After his release, he worked for *VEB Kombinat Robotron*, which was the largest computer manufacturer in the GDR at the time. His youth, family

background, and possible experiences of repression seem to have had a significant impact on his career:

Well, I went through several factories in my youth. With... ((pauses 4 sec.)) some rather unpleasant... ((3 sec.)) uh... situations, or circumstances... where it was clear to me at some point... that I would not end up in any factory. I mean, well, that's actually a result of... you'd have to go back as far as into the family and how things were in the GDR and how... how circumstances led to the way I developed.

After East and West Germany were reunited, Hans joined the local punk scene in a major city in eastern Germany. He lived in a quasi-commune with other squatters in a house and was unemployed: “And after that [the fall of the iron curtain] it was just total collapse. So...for ten years, I was busy with... being anti, basically ((laughs)).” Later, at the end of the 1990s, he started working freelance and doing several jobs (e.g., in construction and as a stagehand), including catering for different regional organizers and concert hosts. His contacts within the local music scene helped him considerably. Initially, his start-up as a self-employed person was motivated by the pressure the employment agency exerted:

...at that time, we did not become self-employed because...we had the idea to build up a business, we had been looking for a way to escape the clutches of public employment service ((both laughing)) after uh... ten years of unemployment or not knowing which way to go.

Hence, the beginning of his business was rather unsystematic, and he started without having a plan, as a greenhorn, so to speak. Over time, his current catering company developed, which employs four to five people. His clients are primarily larger concert

agencies and tour operators, for whom he provides the tour catering. In this context, it is important to mention a social aspect—his employees include several people he has known for many years. Some of them might have difficulty finding similar jobs in the “free” labor market, especially since Hans offers his employees a relatively large amount of freedom and “takes care” of them. This has been seen in the case of employees who have lost their driver's license, but continue to be employed or hired freelance, even though having a driver's license is extremely important in the (touring) catering business.

As for his motives, independence and autonomy are central aspects of his narrative. He started not only to free himself from the public employment agency but also to avoid becoming part of the industrial machinery (*Fabrikräderwerk*). However, he wound up entering the daily “rat race” of entrepreneurship, as he calls it. His early years as a self-employed person were financially precarious, and the growth of the company inevitably increased the bureaucratic burden. After a tax audit a few years ago, Hans was forced to hire some of his former freelance employees permanently. Subsequently, the reciprocal effect of incoming orders and monthly (wage) costs seem to have become a burden. In the past, he could simply turn down orders; he now feels obliged to achieve a certain monthly turnover. This demand for constant income is also due to his family situation, which has changed over time. Being a father of a 15-year-old boy and having a family alters daily routines and demands a stable income: “but when there's a family, it's a whole different thing. The business must be running somehow, right?” Therefore, before the COVID-19 outbreak, his will to lead a largely autonomous life collided with economic and bureaucratic necessities, especially health in-

surance. However, we cannot discuss this in detail here, although there is a considerable body of data on it.

For Hans, who was working in the event sector, the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic was quite naturally followed by an immediate and very sudden end to all activities. Within weeks, most festivals, concerts, and scheduled tours were canceled, and his turnover fell to almost zero. However, at this point, the solidarity and support of friends or customers came into play. Friends ordered catering for smaller weddings, anniversaries, private events, and other outdoor events that were possible under “corona circumstances” during the summer. Although Hans was very optimistic and had a somewhat positive but pragmatic outlook on the whole situation at the beginning of the pandemic, his attitude seemed to change during autumn 2020. As he is running out of savings and forced to file for social welfare, he finds himself back in the institutional scheme he once wanted to escape. Another factor of uncertainty is the employer-employee relationship. COVID-19 affects the employees of Hans’ catering company, as they are working short hours. Furthermore, Hans is unsure whether his employees will still be willing to work for him after extended periods in this status.

In addition to these fears and difficulties, another factor played an important role in the narrative of Hans and his catering company: being prepared for whatever might happen. Hans was well equipped in the sense of having financial savings, which means that initially, COVID-19 was perceived as less of a threat from a financial standpoint. However, as the pandemic and our inquiry moved on, the financial situation caused by the crisis worsened. On a later occasion, after our second interview, Hans

told us that he was planning to file for social welfare (which he had always ruled out before), primarily because the situation has worsened. Scheduled concerts and the orders that accompanied them were still canceled. From Hans’ viewpoint, the missing (proper) funding forces self-employed individuals to find regular jobs, whereas big companies (e.g., large concert agencies) can extend their credit line easily. Nevertheless, the idea of taking a smaller job was rejected by him, as it would mean losing time for his other project.

Even more important than his (constantly shrinking) savings is his “escape plan” or “plan B,” which existed before the COVID-19 outbreak. Hans bought an old inn in the country some time ago and is currently restoring it. The inn and its grounds will be his future home, as well as a restaurant, a space for recreation, and a venue that could host artists, seminars, and other types of gatherings. Part of this plan is to turn his original business over to someone else and withdraw from the organizational side:

Well, rock’n’roll is a nice experience, and it’s also fun. And it’s a big family...so it’s nice, but it’s also incredibly exhausting, you know?...When you’re at the venue, you work 16 hours, 18 hours a day. And I believe that at some age, I no longer have to do this to myself.

His strategy to escape from the daily “rat race” and structural obstacles has become even more important. Similar to another case (Case #1, Tom), Hans has framed the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportunity to do something different or be freed from the burden of day-to-day business:

Apart from that, I can say that I am...I have been, over the years, when the machinery has always been running, when events have taken place all the time, and

you ask yourself at certain times of the year or on certain days, “When you will ever again spend a day without a concert?” like December 25 or bank holidays, and so on. And so, it partly was also a relief not to have to do this as every year, as usual. And yes, Corona gave me the chance to continue my work here [at the construction site].

Case #3: Rosie

Rosie was born in 1971 in the former GDR. After she finished school but had not sought any subsequent training or work, she was forced to apply for the only remaining positions at *VEB Kombinat Robotron*, the largest computer manufacturer in the GDR. She began a vocational training program there as a metalworker but only worked for Robotron for a short period before fleeing to West Germany via Prague in 1989. Soon after she arrived in the Federal Republic of Germany, she started working for a company there. This job (producing shades and marquees) was not only physically exhausting but she was also humiliated by her superiors. As a result, she found another job at an environmental technology office. The working conditions were better, and the staff consisted mainly of students, foreigners, and people from the Eastern part of Germany. These years, during the early 1990s, seem to have been shaped by experiences with degradation at work and social exclusion:

It was so racist, also towards the people from the Eastern part [of Germany]. It was my first personal contact with people when I noticed “there are several sensitivities here, you don’t diminish them...” So, eventually, this system simply pissed me off. I didn’t become comfortable with the Westerners...you were sitting in a pub, and they heard how you talk, your dialect, then you were, of course, the “Ossi” [a person

from the former GDR], the freeloader who scrounges from everybody.

Eventually, Rosie moved back to eastern Germany and worked as a “day laborer,” to quote her own words (e.g., cleaning, catering, and flea markets). In 1994, she began running a small business selling clothes and accessories at fairs. During the first few years after the political change, she traveled to Asia frequently, primarily to India, Nepal, and Thailand. Over time, she began importing clothing and accessories from these countries and selling them at markets, and started her shop in a university town in eastern Germany. After giving up this store a few years ago, she established a similar retail shop at her place of residence in another city in eastern Germany. However, it was not as profitable as her former business, resulting in a heavier workload and precarious financial situation. Rosie describes the phase when her business ran “smoothly” as her “golden times” compared to today’s rather tense state.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, she continued to travel to India and Thailand to buy and import goods to Germany. Over the years, she established a very well-organized network of manufactures and “knows her way around.” These almost 30 years of traveling, bargaining, and buying in Asia are very important to her as she compares cultures:

...this is actually my favorite kind of business, you know...Because I started there as a little girl, and they [the merchants and manufacturers] said to me, “Do your stuff, but you might buy only ten necklaces this time...not twenty. Take it easy! Others have done that already.” Very old men, they are mostly men I have to deal with there. They practically taught me how to do business. But, maybe it’s an Asian... a different

mercantile perspective. And, unfortunately, you can't practice that around here.

Returning to the subject of motives, a central reason seems to be the possibility of avoiding the "machinery" and, at least partially, bureaucratic procedures, as well as gaining autonomy.

And that's probably the main reason why you're self-employed. Because you... probably want a bit more of yourself...I can't even imagine being somewhere else again; that would be difficult ((MT laughs)). That somebody tells me what to do... And that [autonomy] is probably the basic idea.

Besides the will to lead an autonomous life, Case #3 shows an interesting attitude of refusal. For example, although Rosie's business has not been very profitable in recent years, she is unwilling to introduce fair-trade labels. Although her products would probably be considered fair-trade (following her interpretation), she refuses to "play this role." This attitude also seems to be reflected in her refusal, upon starting her business, to accept public funding or cheap public loans, except for unemployment benefits for several months and a funding package by the Chamber of Commerce (German IHK): "I never wanted anything from them." This rather refractory mindset seems to be a very important motive for Rosie, who, as an entrepreneur, does not have to yield to mainstream practices of impression management, and does not have to rely on public loans.

Rosie was already in a rather precarious situation at the beginning of our inquiry. The pandemic was another hit to her financially stricken business. At first, she perceived various reasons for this situation. First, the increase in online trade has caused problems by gradually displacing smaller shops.

Second, there has been a general social change in consumption. Consumers, in particular, are increasingly aligning themselves with appropriate labels, especially regular customers. Refusing to use labels (such as fair-trade) could lead to a loss of customers. International trade has also changed to her disadvantage. Interestingly, increasing globalization has displaced her original niche, which has been taken over by large clothing chains whose scouts are operating in the same countries in Asia. This has led to some curious situations; for example, some time ago, she discovered a dress she had designed in a high-priced catalogue at about five times the price. A dressmaker in Nepal had simply sold "her" design due to a financial "emergency." Besides these changes, she faces very high overhead costs despite low turnover. All of these issues had made her think of ways to get out of the business before 2020. Now, facing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, problems are accumulating:

Prices go up steadily, my storage will also be more expensive next year...it's going straight up, so I have to think about that one, too. I have to find something smaller somehow, which is hard... because I can't afford it anymore then... pfff... well, I should have studied something proper.

After the first lockdown ended, during the summer of 2020, Rosie's business began doing quite well again. However, as autumn arrived, her turnover dropped again. At first, she could count on friends and regulars: "People checked on the community a bit more; that was quite good. When it was over [i.e., the first lockdown in spring], they came and made some purchases and showed solidarity."

However, some customers do not follow the COVID-19 regulations, and business owners like

Rosie bear the consequences. Therefore, the new restrictions also cause uncertainty and fear at different levels:

There are a lot of deniers and refusers; they come in without wearing a mask, without asking if it's possible or not. So, even the fine of 60 Euros does not help. I have to pay two and a half thousand if some official comes in and checks; nobody cares, though.

As for her financial situation, Rosie (as well as Hans, Case #2) is confronted with bearing the costs of health insurance while having little or no revenue. Due to the lack of alternatives, she is forced to pick up a regular job. As mentioned above, it is something she had previously ruled out:

But, the woman from health insurance told me that I definitely need a job. And I'll have to start looking for it in January. Then I'll go and get some work for a while. Keep my trading license as a small business. And then maybe I'll go on doing fairs. Because the costs are too high, it doesn't add up here.

Compared to the first two cases, Rosie expresses growing anxiety about the future. The idea of working a regular job seems to fuel this anxiety:

Rosie: I feel a bit nervous about it.

I: About what's coming next or because of taking up a job and so on?

Rosie: Of course. Sure. How that could go... doing housekeeping.

Rather frustrated, Rosie assesses her business and the closing of her shop:

You have to reinvent yourself somehow. And there is simply an oversupply of clothes and outfits. I mean...

it's not really needed. We have too much of everything. It might be a wise decision to reduce it slowly. I've put a few offers on eBay now: "closing-down sale" blah, blah, blah, blah, let's see if anyone is interested. I mean, there may be people who still need stock because they can't travel right now.

Case #4: Tamara

Tamara was born in the early 1980s and grew up in the countryside, which she regards as a sheltered upbringing in the former GDR. During adolescence, she started to feel a sense of non-conformity that seems to have persisted:

Quite soon, I realized that I somehow had a strong desire for... from today's perspective, self-determination...quite soon, I realized that I somehow don't really fit in anywhere because I think about certain things differently or deal with certain things differently, and these things are not very well accepted.

After graduating from high school in the late 1990s, she worked at a theatre for some time, which she perceived as a "small window to the world," primarily because of the staff there. She met like-minded people there who were free spirits:

...not fitting into this classic role model... into this classic everyday life picture uh working Monday to Friday, working nine to five, having the weekend off, living in uh heterosexual family structures... just very different or very much very different.

She then moved to a major city in eastern Germany, enrolled in a university, and completed a humanities degree. Financing her studies with a small student loan and part-time jobs in restaurants, she started working for a public institution on a contract

basis (“bogus” self-employment²) after the birth of her first child. During this period, she did not earn much money, which meant that she was covered by her husband’s health insurance, for example. In the meantime, her second child was born; since her husband was the main breadwinner, Tamara was inevitably left to look after the children, which she increasingly perceived as a burden:

And then it came to a sudden interruption in all respects, a turning point... um... I separated from my husband, which was quite unexpected for him. I mean, it was obvious that I am not satisfied with the situation as it is, but I think he believed that it was mainly these daily routines that I am dissatisfied with, um... but I didn’t feel like myself at all anymore... And I said to myself, “This can’t go on like this, now it’s over, over! That’s it!”

After separating from her husband, she continued to work on a bogus self-employment basis, as well as at a permanent job for 20 hours a week at a restaurant. However, the workload of two jobs caring for her two children mostly alone led to a sense of overload, and “from a logistical point of view,” it was “the worst case”:

And I realized...that this is not going to work out in the long term because I simply do not have the strength and stamina to do it. And with the help of my new boyfriend... with whom I talked a lot about role models and sexuality and relationships, I decided to try sex work. In other words, pretty late. I was in my early thirties.

² Bogus self-employment or false self-employment is a form of “disguised” (Thörnquist 2011) employment. These self-employed workers often have only one client, and working conditions are similar to those of permanent employees. From the employer’s point of view, the aim is to avoid taxes, employee rights, or collective agreements (Thörnquist 2011; 2015).

Starting small and keeping the restaurant job at the beginning, Tamara became a self-employed sex worker; she is now working as an escort in a brothel and as a sexual assistant.³ Tamara’s motives for starting sex work are quite complex, so it is impossible to describe them in detail here. There is abundant room for further investigation of biographical aspects, especially considering the amount of data on hand. However, Tamara emphasizes how becoming a sex worker was her path to self-realization. She describes the first time she ever met a customer as follows:

About an hour later, I walked out again, and it felt so incredibly good. It was great. I thought, “This is exactly the feeling you always imagined during your studies, how it could be when you are totally self-determined,” and, well, how should I put it? I didn’t do it for anyone else but me.

Her professional activity is socially stigmatized, and she tries to hide it in certain contexts. However, it is not always possible to do so (e.g., legal regulations force her to permanently carry an ID that identifies her as a sex worker). According to Tamara, the lack of knowledge and negative attitudes toward the profession in society make dealing with public institutions challenging. Working in a highly stigmatized sector or branch, Tamara is forced to keep up a kind of parallel identity, at least in some contexts:

When I’m asked what I’m doing, and it’s in a context where I cannot speak openly about it, then yes, I always find some modifications that make it compatible with this very situation. This is absurd, of course, because I should be able to go anywhere and say, “That’s

³ Sexual assistance is a specialized sector of sex work mainly aiming at people with disabilities. For further information, see, e.g., Garofalo Geymonat (2019).

what I do.”...For instance, I certainly wouldn’t tell anyone at my kids’ school that I am a sex worker. I don’t think that would be a good idea.

From the moment the pandemic hit Germany, the entire sex work industry was subject to a ban. Tamara, as well as all other sex workers, were required to stop working. This situation caused a whole range of problems, but we can only tackle a few of them in this paper. Given the stigma mentioned above, a crucial issue is the possible outing as a sex worker when filing for social benefits:

If you take the least strong restriction, so to speak, it is stigmatization. Because it is a forced outing you have to undergo if you apply for something like that. And many people just do this job secretly, uh, and get embarrassed to have to explain to their husband, ex-partner, mothers, whomever why they suddenly don’t earn money anymore and suddenly have to fill out such applications and what kind of job title it says in there.

Furthermore, the vast majority of sex workers do not have health insurance. Although this issue does not apply in Tamara’s case, it, nevertheless, illustrates the precarity of this line of work. An association of sex workers Tamara is involved in provides special training in hygiene; however, there is currently no way to implement such regularities and re-open the industry:

What’s the difference to an erotic massage? There is no difference. But, massages are allowed. What is the difference between BDSM and a tattoo studio? There is none. And yet, everything that we dare to push forward gets rejected.

The ongoing prohibition of sex work leads to an uncontrolled black market with diverse negative effects:

You criminalize something, right? And when you do so, it becomes much, much more problematic. Because if something actually happens in such a situation, like an assault, like, uh, I don’t know, like an illness. Well, like hell I am going to say: “This happened to me” because I did it illegally. And right now, that’s not being considered at all.

In this case, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the criminalization of a whole line of work, as there are no real alternatives for those who want to do this job the way Tamara does:

Well, there is no plan B for me, so to speak. Because plan B, C, D, E, F, and so on—I’ve already ticked everything off before. I am finally at a point where I can live and work the way I want to, right? No other option for me. If things really go on as they are at the moment, then I will work illegally. End of story.

As for her earnings, the situation is very tense. She still meets regular customers, even though it is illegal. Personal networks seem to have been more important than in the other cases in our study:

And if it wasn’t for my private social network, I honestly wouldn’t know how to pay for school lunch for my kids, for example. But, I do have my private network, which, uh, helps me, I have a partner who has a regular job and who hasn’t lost his earnings. But, that makes me privileged, highly privileged. Only very few people in my line of work have that.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, she openly spoke about the advantages of being a white, somewhat well-situated woman:

If I, as a woman, also have this, one might say, “power”... well, if you want to call it power, which is very

questionable, uh, has “power” over the male sex, so to speak, due to certain role distributions and certain sexualities, why shouldn’t I use this to my own benefit, on the one hand? And, on the other hand, perhaps also undermine it by using it to my advantage?

Despite being in a very precarious situation, she still emphasizes her attitude towards her profession and life, particularly when it comes to questions of legality and conformism:

I’m not going to let this self-determination, my life, and my being be taken away from me. That simply is against all my understanding of a decent life.

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a considerable impact on the lives of all four individuals in our study. Within a few weeks, the caterer lost all orders, the sex worker was not allowed to work at all, the fitness instructor had to close his training space, and the retailer eventually decided to close her shop permanently. Our study revealed several parallels in the biographies and attitudes of the self-employed. However, the perception of the COVID-19 pandemic as a business disruption differed.

All four cases had an initially skeptical attitude towards the state and its institutions (e.g., the employment office, the tax office, and health insurance). This is evident in the rejection of business plans and public financial support, as well as a desire for independence from these institutions. Their low opinion of the state as a trustworthy authority might have been fuelled by their experience with the transformation of the former GDR and all of the accompanying uncertainties. Some of them also had negative experiences with public authorities, especially

during adolescence. Growing up in the GDR and the experiences of working there at a young age, for instance, were mentioned several times in the interviews; even a certain feeling of being at home in the East (*Ostgefühl*), as Tamara put it. However, these findings must be interpreted with caution.

According to institutional theory, each individual is influenced and shaped by different institutional logics to varying degrees. This means that logics function as “guidelines on how to interpret and function in social situations” (Greenwood et al. 2011:318), even though they sometimes can be competing (Brandl and Bullinger 2017).

Due to their life experiences, all four cases, in particular Rosie, have distanced themselves from public logic. Perhaps, also, for this reason, their central individual logic is shaped by principles of self-realization and autonomy. With their self-employment, all four cases strive for the possibility of “individual freedom.” Tom stated that he wants to pursue the activity that fulfills him and in which he can give something back to society. Hans and Rosie explained that they wanted to escape from the “rat race” and “wheelworks,” and Tamara mentioned that she has finally found a way to live a self-determined life with which she can identify.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the situation for everyone. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, the logic of self-realization and autonomy was still somewhat compatible with necessary legal constraints, but business owners must now comply with multiple new restrictions. Doing this for the common good limits their autonomy and creates additional economic pressure. Consequently, the measures taken to contain the virus are not fully appreciated by all. One exception is Tom, who

is a strong advocate of the legal restrictions linked to the COVID-19 pandemic and proactively took initiatives early on in his CrossFit-Box business. His ability to implement early measures was partly due to his contacts in the international community. This enabled Tom to evaluate the situation and react based on information from other countries, where tougher measures had already been taken before COVID-19 reached Germany. The others accept but do not agree with all the restrictions. Rosie criticizes the implementation and control of the rules, in particular, her obligation as a business owner to ensure compliance with the rules on the customer's side. At this point, the pressure and potential sanctions on shop owners do not seem to be fair to her. Tamara is highly motivated to comply with good hygiene measures, as they were quite naturally part of her business as a sex worker before the pandemic. However, she considers the absolute ban on working in her entire line of work to be unjustified. In her opinion, the new legal requirements will only force sex workers to disobey and lead to the criminalization of this activity in the long term. Nevertheless, none of the four cases are “corona deniers.” All of them support the restrictions, despite the restrictions causing financial problems for some of them, as they are aimed at protecting the common good.

At this point, we observe an interesting paradox. Our cases are strongly oriented towards the logic of the common good, perceiving themselves as anti-materialistic, caregivers, or protectors of the vulnerable. For example, Hans retained one of his employees after he lost his driving license, despite it being one of the basic requirements for being a caterer. From an economic viewpoint, this would not be rational. From the perspective of institutional theory, this is an example of reacting to multiple and incompatible logics. As self-employed, they seek to achieve both

financial independence and social impact by intentionally incorporating economic and social principles. By doing so, they are continuously forced to fight against pressures stemming from capitalist logic and embrace tensions other business owners normally seek to minimize. The social logic of health protection has suddenly become the dominant logic determining business and daily life, thereby displacing the logic of profit maximization. Consequently, some people who have adopted social logic, as in our four cases, are suffering due to the current situation. The conflict for organizations confronted with hybrid logic has been thoroughly examined in previous research (e.g., Kraatz and Block 2008; Reay and Hinings 2009; Greenwood et al. 2011; Besharov and Smith 2014; Gümüşay, Smets, and Morris 2020). However, beyond the existing literature, our study provides insights into how self-employed individuals deal with hybrid and changing institutional logics, leading to a conflict between their desire to lead an autonomous life and defend social principles.

On the other hand, our study shows how entrepreneurs with a strong individual desire for self-realization and autonomy constantly challenge existing social or cultural hegemonies by distancing from certain logics. These demarcations thus constitute the basis of “new” identities in Laclausian terms (Laclau 1990:9, 39; Reckwitz 2008:77-81). Tom consciously distances himself from a fixation on purely material values, and by taking a different stance and opposing (seemingly) universal hegemonies, he emphasizes anti-materialistic and people-centered values. Hans questions the centrality and dominance of work and, at the same time, reflects on his entrapment in the processes and structures. Rosie rejects certain forms of marketing and refuses common labels. And finally, Tamara associates her work with the idea of liberation from a life determined

by others, which—in her line of work—also implies distancing oneself from social conventions.

Brandl and Bullinger (2017) have pointed out that, in the case of conflicting logic, the individual response corresponds to a process of “self-verification” (Brandl and Bullinger 2017:187). In this process, the logic that is more important for the respective identity prevails. This can be observed in the case of Rosie, for example, whose refusal to accept labels and marketing opposes the idea of selling goods and insofar the identity of being a retailer. Her attitude, however, ultimately dominates. This may even lead to distancing from other identities, just as mentioned above and as described by Brandl and Bullinger, as well (2017).

Concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, all four cases reacted with conformism during the first lockdown, as the federal restrictions fit their core principles of the common good. Furthermore, supporting compliance with the new regulations reflects the basic principle of solidarity in their communities. Friends and regular customers helped them buffer economic hardships, especially at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this helped during the first lockdown, solidarity certainly has limits and is not perceived as a solution to overcome the crisis. One could assume that public support takes effect at this point. However, as for COVID-19 aid programs, our cases draw a critical picture. Whether it is the consistent rejection of public funding due to skepticism about possible demands for repayment, as in Tom or Rosie’s case, or a lack of programs for specific niches, as in Tamara’s case, public funding plays a minimal role in our cases. The problem of sex workers not being included in the current COVID-19 aid programs may be linked to the fact that sex work, although it is a historically long-established institution, is a very ambivalent-

ly discussed and stigmatized occupational field in Europe (Kilvington, Day, and Ward 2001; Weitzer 2018; Grittner and Walsh 2020). With our case study, we would like to emphasize the seriousness of the situation for many of those affected. Marginalized in two ways, sex workers are often foreign women without permanent residence or health insurance. According to a press release by the Federal Statistical Office in Germany in July 2020, only 19% of all officially registered sex workers have German citizenship (Statistisches Bundesamt 2020). The closure of brothels not only means financial losses for them but in some cases, even the beginning of homelessness. However, Tamara, due to her relatively stable situation and social network, has not suffered this extremely precarious situation.

Without sufficient financial support, it is all the more interesting that across the four cases, which were similarly affected by the COVID-19 restrictions, different assessments of the situation were expressed. The self-employed who already had a “plan B” or “escape plan” before the outbreak of the pandemic perceived this event as a less dramatic disruption, and framed it as an opportunity to leave the “wheelworks” of daily business and turn to other business activities. However, those without alternative plans experienced particular economic pressure from legal regulations accompanying the outbreak. Consequently, and from an economic viewpoint, all of our cases could use the strategy of having something to fall back on, including those who were working in a seemingly safe sector. With increasing economic pressure and uncertainty linked to the second lockdown, evaluations of the situation slightly changed and led to a wider range of response strategies, ranging from conformism to the deliberate undermining of certain rules and measures, up to neglecting and decoupling.

In a wider context, our four cases significantly differ from the rather few existing qualitative case studies on “successful,” “traditional,” and prototypical entrepreneurs and how they are depicted—often as excessively working (Duchek 2018), passionate (Lombardi et al. 2021), and highly self-confident, emphasizing the strong desire for success and an orientation towards entrepreneurial goals, even at a young age, paired with a very strong tendency towards perfectionism (Göbel 2000). In contrast, the motives of our cases relate primarily to self-realization and autonomy, and also their relationship to work is by no means free of doubt. Though passion may play a big role in Tom’s case, his standards for success—making people happy—are different from those of a prototypical entrepreneur. A surprising aspect is the experiences during childhood and adolescence; these support evidence from previous observations of rather typical entrepreneurs, showing that experiences at an early age can have a decisive influence on the later development becoming an entrepreneur and might lead to a need for autonomy and independence (e.g., Kets de Vries 1996).

Conclusion, Limitations, and Future Research

Our data offer a large amount of material for future research, including the topic of autonomy. The analysis of all four cases so far shows biographical simi-

larities that seem to have shaped the personalities of self-employed individuals and entrepreneurs (e.g., their striving for autonomy is reflected in their orientation towards subcultures or “foreign” cultures). Moreover, it could be hypothesized that the resilience of individuals is related to their biographies and motives, especially their striving for autonomy. Another fruitful area for further work could be the role of networks and communities, especially in times of crisis.

We were able to identify differences, particularly in the interpretation of day-to-day economic challenges and coping strategies used to deal with them. Limiting our study to four (nevertheless extended) cases and covering very different economic sectors might be considered a limitation. However, it enables an in-depth and profound analysis of individual interpretations and actions in this very heterogeneous sample and brings to light numerous interesting results. Drawing on the perspective of entrepreneurs working in niches, the four cases sketched in our study highlight the variety of manifestations the COVID-19 pandemic can take. They furthermore show the diversity of reactions to this external shock and the understandings of the effects of this global pandemic within these specific fields of business. Nevertheless, the small sample size results in further research potential, and it certainly would be worth incorporating additional cases.

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Stressors and Coping Mechanisms among Extended-Stay Motel Residents in Central Florida

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Abstract: Not having a permanent home means living in a constant state of stress. Though much has been written about homelessness and its stressors, very little research has focused on the experiences of those living in liminal housing, such as extended-stay motels. As affordable housing units dwindle in the US, more individuals and families with children have moved into extended-stay motels. In this study, I explore stressors that low-income families living in extended-stay motels experience, as well as their coping mechanisms. Through semi-structured interviews with 18 families with children living in extended-stay motels in the Central Florida region, consistent financial and emotional stressors were identified among all families. Additionally, gender and the community feel of a motel impacts the magnitude of the stress, as well as the ability to cope. Findings from this study suggest that, although families in motels experience constant environmental stressors, community building among precariously housed families may create an informal safety net for the families and thus, alleviate the financial and emotional crisis.

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Homelessness usually does not occur overnight; it is often the result of an accumulation of stressors such as the loss of a job or partner, loss of transportation, lack of healthcare, bad credit, et cetera (Milburn and D'Ercole 1991). These hardships and stress are more pronounced in families with children. According to Banyard and Graham-Bermann (1998:485), "stress and coping processes may not

be different for homeless and housed mothers, but they experience it at different magnitudes.” For those in an emergency shelter, the surroundings are a constant reminder of a lack of housing and hence, serve as a constant stressor. However, those who are struggling financially but stably housed may not be surrounded by others in the same situation and could potentially “tune out” their struggle. The existing literature has studied stressors among low-income individuals and/or those experiencing homelessness (see: Klitzing 2004; Wadsworth 2012; Scutella and Johnson 2018), but not much has been published about people in precariously housed situations, such as extended-stay motels. The present study seeks to address this gap in the literature by identifying the stressors experienced by families living in extended-stay motels with children, as well as some of their coping mechanisms.

Methodologies for enumerating homeless populations vary drastically by jurisdiction. Most estimates of homelessness rely on the annual point-in-time (PIT) counts conducted by agencies that receive funding from the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). These PIT counts are largely done by volunteers in each city or county, mainly in urban areas, and thus make it difficult to compare numbers across the board. To complicate matters, the definition of homelessness varies such that if using HUD’s definition, an individual or family living in a motel may not be defined as homeless. But, according to the McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act, which provides the definition utilized by the Department of Education to identify homeless children in schools, a family living in a motel *is* defined as homeless. For example, a study of Central Florida’s homelessness among children found that, for the 2013-2014 school year, there were nearly 4,000 students who were

identified as homeless—of which it is estimated that about 800 of them were living in motels (Donley et al. 2017). The neighboring county had nearly 6,000 students identified as homeless, with close to 1,200 students living in motels (Donley et al. 2017). These figures provide a rough estimate of the number of families with school-aged children who live in motels in the Central Florida area—though this is not the only area where families are finding themselves living in a motel. For example, a recent New York Times report (Frazier 2021) stated that the Las Vegas school district had 2,035 students living in motels for the 2019-2020 school year.

Most people experiencing homelessness or transitional housing experience chronic stress from accumulated traumas over their lifetimes in addition to their current situational stressors. These traumas and stressors are particularly salient for women experiencing homelessness or transitional housing (Banyard and Graham-Bermann 1998; Klitzing 2004). In shelters, people experience stress not only due to a lack of permanent housing but also a lack of independence, having to meet shelter curfews and rules, as well as potential conflicts with other shelter users (Klitzing 2004; Fraenkel 2020). Those who live in extended-stay motels experience similar stressors due to the constant worry of overpaying their weekly rates to avoid street homelessness, but they do have more privacy and independence than those who live in an emergency shelter. This liminal housing situation, not stable enough to be considered permanently housed but not homeless (or “roof-less”) in a literal sense either, is one that needs to be explored further to identify the stressors and how they affect people in different situations.

There are only a few social scientists who have explored the experiences of those living in extend-

ed-stay motels (see: Brownrigg 2006; Lewinson 2010; Dum 2016; Gonzalez Guittar 2017). Lewinson's (2010) research on extended-stay motel residents focused on the "environmental" stressors that individuals experience, such as limited space and privacy in the motel room and the psychological distress that comes with those physical restrictions. In Lewinson's study (2010), residents coped by making physical changes to the rooms to make themselves more comfortable, changing their behaviors to accommodate their small living spaces, and getting away from the motel at times for distraction. Gonzalez Guittar (2017) focused on the stressors stemming from food insecurity among motel residents.

Brownrigg (2006) found that motel residents come from a variety of different socio-economic backgrounds and, as such, it is difficult to identify general patterns, particularly in their social networks and how they join or distance themselves from communities of residents. Some extended-stay motel residents avoid contact with others as a way to protect their privacy and anonymity, while others form or join social groups within the hotel ("cliques") or socialize with others outside the hotel (Brownrigg 2006). The function of these "cliques" in extended-stay motels has not been explored beyond providing some socio-emotional support. This is an area that needs further exploration since we know that social support can reduce stress and contribute to better mental health (Schutt, Meschede, and Rierdan 1994; Turner and Lloyd 1999; Klitzing 2003; Monroe et al. 2007). Ward and Turner (2007) found that informal networks were an important predictor for not relying on welfare benefits. However, it is not clear whether the numbers of social networks are serving as a substitute to welfare benefits or whether the numbers of social networks are related to ineligibility for Temporary

Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits. There are still gaps in the literature on social support and homelessness. Except for Lewinson (2010) and Brownrigg (2006), who focused specifically on extended-stay motel residents, most of the studies have focused on street homelessness or those in emergency shelters.

There are also differences in stressors by family type and other individual circumstances. Parents who are experiencing homelessness with their children commonly report worry over their children's safety and well-being (Choi and Snyder 1999; Ryan and Hartman 2000; Averitt 2003). Parents stress not only about childcare arrangements, children's development, and academic progress but also about their emotional well-being, including how others may react and treat their children if they found out they were homeless (Averitt 2003; Klitzing 2004). Studies have shown that the perceived financial stress that parents experience can lead to depression, anxiety, feelings of guilt over not providing for their families as they would like to (Conger and Donellan 2007; Paquette and Bassuk 2009; Holtrop, Mcneil, and Mcwey 2015).

Although caring for children while living in poverty is a source of stress, children also provide emotional support for their parents, which serves as a motivator and coping mechanism for the parents (Milburn and D'Ercole 1991). Studies of homeless families found that when parents were asked what kept them going through the hard times, they often replied that their children and their hope of a better future for them made them push through the difficult times (Milburn and D'Ercole 1991; Ryan and Hartman 2000; Vandsburger, Harrigan and Biggerstaff 2008). Also, homeless families often credit God, their faith, or prayer for getting them through dif-

difficult times (Milburn and D'Ercole 1991; Ryan and Hartman 2000; Vandsburger et al. 2008).

The present study expands the literature on housing insecurity and distress by focusing on the experiences of extended-stay motel families with children, their stressors, and related coping strategies. Furthermore, it elaborates on the findings from Brownrigg (2006) by exploring the functions of the cliques that may develop among extended-stay motel residents, as well as the function of these cliques and how they provide emotional and instrumental support for the families.

Methods

The Setting

Data collection occurred at various extended-stay motel locations in the Central Florida area, particularly the old highway (192) that leads to the theme parks in the area. In their heyday, these motels were filled with tourists visiting the local theme parks. As theme park companies designed and built their resort areas, the motels lost their appeal, and their clientele shifted. Today, as one social worker said to me, "these motels are *de facto* homeless shelters." The county where data collection took place does not have a housing authority or an emergency homeless shelter. Thus, when people are evicted or have nowhere else to go, the motels offer a semi-affordable short-term option. For the participants in this study, that "short-term" fix ended up becoming an over-extended stay that has made leaving the motel very difficult.

Sample

Data for this study stem from semi-structured interviews with 18 families with children living in ex-

tended-stay motels in the Central Florida area. The participants had lived in a motel anywhere from 2 weeks to a little over 3 years, with an average stay of 11 months. Participants were recruited through flyers posted at social service providers, charity organizations, and motel lobbies, as well as referrals from social service providers and participants. Two families were referred to me by a social service provider, seven families responded to the recruitment flyers, and the other participants were either directly recruited by the author or were referred by a previous participant.

All but one of the households interviewed had children living in the motel room with them at the time of the interview. Ten of the 18 households (56%) were Latino. Two families were non-Hispanic Black, and the other six were non-Hispanic White. The high proportion of Latinos in this sample is representative of this particular region. The city where the study took place has a minority-majority population where 58.9% of their population is Latino, and the county population as a whole is 46.3% Latino (Census 2010).

Except for the one childless couple, the smallest household was made up of three persons and the largest consisted of seven people in one room (three families had seven members each). The median household size was four members per room. All families paid relatively similar weekly rates regardless of the motel where they resided or the number of people in the room. The rates ranged from \$160 to \$190 per week.

All but one of the households had some income coming in either from employment or social security disability income (SSDI). Not all income was earned legitimately. In a couple of cases, the jobs or side jobs

were done under the table for cash payment, but no one reported engaging in illegal activities for money. The employment histories of the motel residents were concentrated in three industries: construction, hospitality, and retail. Within the two-parent families, women were more likely to stay at home caring for the kids, but they still talked about having worked or looking for work in hospitality or retail.

Most of the interviews were done with one parent (only three were single parents) but there were five interviews conducted with both adults in the household, which led to a total of 23 participants. The participants came from seven different motels along the same highway in Central Florida. At the time of data collection, there were close to 100 extended-stay motels and/or hotels along this highway, which leads to the Lake Buena Vista area, home of the Walt Disney World complex. It was not uncommon for the families to move from motel to motel to seek a better environment or if they had issues with management. The motels were typical in their appearance, mostly two-stories with doors facing the parking lot. However, one location was a multi-story, two-tower hotel where one tower was “reserved” for extended-stay residents and the other for tourists. The practice of having sections reserved for tourists as separate as possible from the extended-stay guests was not unique to this location, which shows the awareness of motel staff of the use of motels as a form of affordable housing. Most, but not all locations, did have a pool that was maintained and available for the families to use regularly. There were no other entertainment areas or playgrounds for children at these locations. Outside of the pool, there were few amenities but an ice machine and maybe a laundromat room available to residents. These motels are all located in commercial zones and thus, are removed from the amenities that families need and/or fre-

quent regularly, such as supermarkets, parks, playgrounds, libraries, or their children’s schools. All of these motel locations were school bus stops, picking up children in the morning and dropping them off in the afternoon as part of the McKinney Vento Homelessness Assistance Act benefits the school district provides to the families in transition.

The initial plan for this study was to conduct interviews in a public location chosen by each participant, but transportation and child care constraints presented a challenge. Thus, five interviews were conducted outside of the motel, and the rest were conducted in the participants’ motel rooms. Zussman (2004:360) states the benefits and importance of studying people in natural settings because it allows the researcher to not only be “alert to what people said not just in interviews but also in vivo. Interviewing slops over into observation.” Spending time in the motel room with the families was beneficial for my understanding of the families’ narrative, experiences, and frustrations.

Analysis

All interviews were conducted by the principal investigator. These interviews were digitally audio-recorded and later transcribed into Microsoft Word documents for analysis. The average interview lasted a little more than an hour, with the shortest interview lasting 35 minutes and the longest interview lasting three hours. All participants were assigned a pseudonym, and any identifiable characteristics were removed during transcription to protect participants’ privacy.

Given the limited data on extended stay motel residents, this study was primarily exploratory in nature. The study was designed to explore the expe-

periences of persons living in extended-stay motels in a more recent context and including families with children—which is a population that had not been the focus of previous studies of extended-stay motel residents. Following a constructivist grounded theory framework (Charmaz 2014), the goal of the broader study was to limit the use of a priori theoretical frameworks to emphasize letting the salient issues and experiences of these families emerge from the interviews organically. The constructivist grounded theory recognizes that narratives are mutually constructed phenomena, which develop between interviewer and interviewee. As such, care was put into crafting an interview schedule that included questions that are “sufficiently general to cover a wide range of experiences and narrow enough to elicit and elaborate the participant’s experiences” (Charmaz 2014:65). Analyses began with line-by-line open coding, followed by more focused coding. Themes were segmented into conceptual categories with the assistance of sensitizing concepts—groupings that served as starting points to help organize and understand the data. Across the course of data analysis, clear themes emerged—themes that were not purposively sought via questions in the interview schedule. Many of these themes became prominent themes in the current study.

For example, though “stress” was a prominent theme for every participant, this emerging theme did not stem from a specific question (i.e., they were not asked about stress or coping with stress). All interviews began with the question, “Tell me about your experience living in the motel.” From that very first prompt, stress was such a prominent theme that subsequent coding was focused on forms of stress, and later—coping mechanisms for the stressors. After initial coding, the “stress” theme was sub-categorized into the themes presented here: financial/

physical stress and emotional stress. As participants discussed their stressors—it was common for them to also mention what “kept them going” or ways in which they coped with the stress. Thus, the themes emerged organically and became the coping themes identified here of perpetual hope, children as motivation, and community building as coping mechanisms.

Results

While the families in this study reported similar stressors as the individuals in Lewinson’s (2010) study of extended-stay motel residents (i.e., lack of space and privacy), the families in this sample expressed stressors that could be divided into two main categories: financial stress and emotional stress. Lack of space and privacy were prevalent and added to the stress of maintaining a household and caring for family members. For example, the motel rooms did not have kitchens, and so the families had to do all of their cooking using a microwave or small appliances and using the bathroom sink. The lack of privacy increased stress between family members, and especially for the parents as there was no separation from the children. However, here I focus on the worries they experienced related to finances and emotional concern for their family’s well-being.

Financial Stress

Though most of the households had at least one employed adult, they lacked stable income and/or benefits (e.g., food stamps). Most had jobs that paid hourly wages, but others were paid by production instead (e.g., housekeepers, contract workers). This meant that even if they were assigned full-time hours, that did not always yield full-time pay. Mara,

a single mother of three, was a housekeeper paid by production. She described her job as physically demanding and for very little pay.

There are days where I feel I can't even get up. But, I have to go to work, and when I feel down, not motivated, I can't do all the work I have to do, I just can't... And there it's by production, sometimes I do one or two [rooms] and I can't anymore. There have been times where I've come home with \$13, that's it. One room and I couldn't do anymore, but I show up, so they don't say anything, \$13. Look, last week I got \$75 for 3 days. It's too little.

The motel room rents ranged from \$160-\$190 per week, depending on their location and conditions. The inconsistent income made it difficult for the residents to know whether they would be able to pay their weekly rent, and while this would not necessarily be different if they had permanent housing, the weekly hotel billing format did heighten their stress. When asked what the worst thing about living in the motel is, Luis, a father of one, responded:

Getting that money every week. Basically. Because it's not like you've got your house when you got a whole 30 days to come up with that money, you know what I mean. You can set aside a little every week. Nah, with these people it's, "you got it, or you don't."

Luis believed that if he had a monthly rent agreement like in an apartment, he would feel less stressed because there would be more time to gather the rent money rather than be at risk of eviction every week. While the families struggled to pay for their basic necessities (e.g., food, toiletries, transportation), the rent weighed heaviest on them, and most of the time was paid first above all other

needs to secure the roof over their heads. Laura, a mother of two, felt similar to Luis:

Figuring out how we're going to get through the week. That's how we've been. How are we going to get through the week? If he gets paid \$500 and we got \$400 to pay for the room, we have \$100, how are we going to make it through the week? Does the baby need diapers? Especially with the food situation...

The weekly formatting of the rent dues placed these families in a continuous state of housing insecurity and fear of being on the street. The motel rooms included utilities, so they did not have to worry about electricity, water, or even Internet in some motels, but the stakes were high each week having to come up with "rent" to avoid sleeping on the street.

Furthermore, these families were extremely precariously housed in that they were paying more than 50% (for some 80-90%) of their income towards their room rates. Despite their desire to obtain permanent housing and their vigilant scouring of resources, this made it extremely difficult to save the money necessary to exit the motel and move into a rental housing unit. Previous evictions, criminal records, and/or bad credit all made moving into a rental apartment or home much more expensive, and this created a sense of frustration. For example, Sunny, a mom of four and a grandmother of one, all in one motel room, said:

I told him [her spouse], I'm looking on the Internet [for rentals], I mean, as of Friday I have \$1200, but I want to be able to move right into a place and not sit here [and] get hollered at and wait, then I have this much money, but another 2 weeks here shortens my money to get a place. I told him, I got \$1200, I can get

a place, but then there's the deposit issue...it makes it really tough.

Sunny's situation depicts the endless cycle that these families find themselves in. While her spouse was employed, she worked at home caring for her kids and grandchild and procuring services, assistance programs, and potential housing options. Even though at the time of the interview she had \$1200, that money would not last beyond two weeks after she would pay her rate at the motel and necessities, and they would be left without savings to cover rental and utility deposits for a rental.

Further complicating matters were the lengthy wait times for assistance programs, which took up precious time and often without any rewards. As Pedro, a father of four kids (including an infant and a preschooler), explained:

One of the things is that when we call for help, I wish they didn't run. You know, I wish they'd tell us, "Here, we're giving this to you." If they can't give it to us, don't tell us, "Listen, make an appointment here, and then go there," please, you know? Our time and the time of the people behind the desk is valuable. Sometimes we don't have the chance to get there, we don't have transportation to get to the offices, why? Because we don't even have 2 cents to get on the bus, you understand?

Pedro is referring to calls he had made to different social services for rent assistance and/or transportation assistance where he was told to fill out an application but did not receive any assistance. He, along with others, was under the impression that an application meant there were funds available, that they had a chance. But, the timing of the need versus the timing of the dissemination of assistance

most times did not align and thus, created a crisis for the families. For example, multiple families reported applying for food stamps but not receiving approval for food stamps until two to three months later. This hurt the family's restricted budgets and did not help their immediate need for food until months later, further contributing to the financial and mental stress of the household.

Emotional Stress

Besides being stressed about finances, the families worried about their physical and mental well-being and that of their children. The lack of space and privacy took a toll on everyone at some point. Aida, a mother of two, explained how the lack of physical space affected her marriage and the mental state of everyone in the family. She said:

But, I don't know, I know he's [spouse] depressed, too. We're tired of living here. And then we, we got in a, I got him arrested because he tried to choke me or whatever, but after we fixed it, we got back together because of the kids and plus I love him but living like this, anyone would be like...crawling up the walls, it's horrible, it's depressing, um, just you don't have privacy, you don't have time for yourselves, the kids don't have room to play, they don't have a backyard to run around in, and it's just, it's very stressful because everybody is crammed up in here, we're always, not always arguing because we get along pretty well, but like we get into arguments, we argue with the kids, they get tired, they got attitudes...

Natalia, a new mom, also discussed how living in the motels gave her extreme emotional stress due to her constantly feeling unsafe. This led her and her boyfriend, along with their newborn, to move

motels frequently, trying to find a better environment where they felt safer. She said,

I used to cry 'cause I was scared and it was 'cause I get real emotional, I was really emotional when I was pregnant. But, yeah, I wanted to move, and I was like, I was also stressed out, so like it wasn't good, it was, it got to the point that I was about to take therapy, but I cooled down, so when we left the [hotel 1], we went to the [hotel 2], and that's where the drug addicts come and stuff like that, so like, yeah, it wasn't good.

Aida and Natalia are not alone—the connection between emotional stress and safety was a recurrent theme for many participants. Motel hopping was common among participants. Nearly all of the families had lived in multiple motels by the time I interviewed them. Sometimes they moved because they were not able to pay the week, but, most often, they reported moving from motel to motel looking for a better environment where they felt safer with their kids. They were aware that motels are home to families like themselves but also to people with criminal records unable to obtain housing and that worried them (although some of the parents in this study were convicted felons themselves). One resident, in particular, Laura, felt like she had finally found a motel with an owner who cared about the residents and had some screening questions before renting out a room. This made her feel a little bit more comfortable. During conversations with motel managers, I only found one motel manager who did a “background check” before renting, and that consisted of checking the name on the ID against the state's registered sex offender website.

For the families that moved often, the additional moves added financial and emotional instability. The emotional stress seemed to take a bigger toll

on the mothers in the sample since they tended to spend the most time in the motel room either alone or caring for their children. Sunny, a mother of four plus a grandson in the room, talked at length about how living in a motel increased tensions within her household, mainly due to a lack of space and privacy. When asked about what it was like to live in the motel, she explained how difficult it was to live with seven people in one room:

The most difficult...being all crammed in a room. Putting up with the attitudes [laughter] [unclear] I deal with her, my daughter, she's got the same disorder as her dad, so to yell at her and say something at her, she fights back, and then I'm a total mess, and I'll pull all my brains out. She's outside throwing herself around somewhere, and this one, now she's 12, she's getting into that teen stage, and you just want to hang her by her toes and say swing at it...

The lack of perceived safety by the families meant they kept their children in the room most of the time, which heightened stress and emotions among all members of the family. The mothers in particular, like Aida mentioned, were concerned about their inability to provide a “traditional” childhood for their kids where they could play outside or at least have a dedicated play area and their rooms with a door and/or cook and bake with their children. Another mother, Ellen, lamented the fact that her daughter could not have sleepovers while her friends often could.

According to Somerville (2013), women may view homelessness as a disruption of their daily lives and routines, whereas men view it as a loss of property. Furthermore, homemaking is typically regarded as a motherly role (McCarthy 2020) and one that the mothers in this sample reported struggling to ful-

fill in the ways that they could. The mothers in this sample tried to maintain routines, family traditions, and celebrations as they would or had when they had a permanent home, sometimes successfully and often not, and this was a source of emotional distress for them.

Most of the emotional stress was bared by the mothers since the majority of the fathers (all but three in this sample) worked outside the home and tried to work as much as they could to provide for the family. This allowed the men some distance from the motel environment and the daily disruptions to home life. It also allowed them to focus on things they felt they could control—like work to earn money to hopefully have the ability to move to permanent housing, which was also a way for them to cope with the stress.

Coping Mechanisms

The first two themes: perpetual hope and motivated by children were expressed by all of the participants in different ways. The last theme discussed in this section, building community with others in the motel, was something experienced by a sub-group of the motel residents, all from one location.

Perpetual Hope

All of the families, regardless of the length of stay at a motel, remained hopeful that something would come through for them (e.g., a new job, promotion, a tax refund, or a new housing program) that would change their housing situation. Most times, participants did not have concrete evidence that any of these things would manifest yet they still allowed the participants to remain optimistic and hopeful that the motel room was, indeed, a temporary place.

As Joe said, “it’s gonna get better, I know it is. It just takes time.”

For Mara, who worked as a housekeeper, the hope was the new job she would start the week following our interview. This new full-time job would pay her an hourly rate of \$9 plus benefits instead of production. During the interview, she was doing the math in her head and figuring out how she would be able to cover her rent and expenses. Even though she realized her new income would not cover all of her housing plus transportation and childcare expenses, she believed she would be able to make up the difference by selling handmade crafts on the side.

Donna, a working mother with two teens in the room, had applied for a housing program with the county and was placed on a waitlist. She said, “I’m on the list to be helped in July when the funding comes through,” and she told me that she had been looking for rental homes and had found 12 affordable ones in the neighborhood where she wants to live. Having these potential breakthroughs served as motivation for the residents, and it helped them remain hopeful that their situation would only be temporary.

These hopes and opportunities that the participants shared with me not only served as coping mechanisms for their financial stress but also helped their self-image. Laura commented multiple times of her uneasy feelings anytime she had to interact with someone and disclose her living situation and the reactions or judgments that she encountered. About seeking assistance, she said,

But, it’s just some places that I have gone to, they treat you like that, like, you know, they see you in a situation and assume that you’ve been in that situation

all your life and, you know. Like I told them, you pay taxes in case you're ever in that situation, you know you're able to go and apply and receive it again. And it's like bothersome to some people.

Laura was a cosmetology student, and she said, "After all of this, I'm still going to school." Laura was very proud of maintaining her studies despite living in a motel and living an hour away from her school. She also referred to the certifications she had from her previous job working with the Head Start program in a different state.

Several residents pointed out how they were different from others because they were actively working to get out and not "getting comfortable" in the motel. Donna was adamant about that for herself. She explained:

Like I said, I came in here with one black duffle bag as if I came from wherever and moved in. People that come here have those rollaway carts with their lives on them, their lives, like I said, [name of another motel resident], big freezer, oven, 3 of these refrigerators all over the place, his own flat-screen TV, his own... it's up to the yin and yang. Not me. I'm not making it my home. I'm not, I refuse to. And I feel like when you bring things here, and then you bring more things [13-year-old son yells out: "You feel too much at home," she nods in agreement], and this isn't home, this is just a place to lay your head until you can lay it in a permanent spot.

Donna felt that if she moved in a lot of stuff into their room, then she would get comfortable and complacent with her living situation. She wanted to stay uncomfortable so that she would stay motivated to move out. She compared herself to other residents whom she felt had become too comfortable

in the motel and thus, had lived there for multiple years. Her comfort with the discomfort stemmed from her perpetual hope that she would soon be able to move into her place. On the other hand, Jackson, a single dad of three, had all his belongings packed in boxes in the room like a storage unit (this was unique for this sample). When asked how it was to live in the motel, he said, "Small. Crowded. Crazy. It's all right, I'm going to make it all right until I can do better." Jackson was an unusual case in that he consistently referred to the room as "the house," and the hallway as "the porch" where the kids played, and he did not seem as bothered by the small space as others in this sample. Jackson spent nearly 90% of his monthly fixed income from social security disability on the monthly room rate. Despite there being little chance he would be moving out of the motel soon, he was optimistic that everything would be all right and he and his kids would be ok.

Motivated by Children

Parents worried about how the motel environment would affect the children in the long run. However, children forced the parents to have, or at least present, a positive outlook. Many of the parents, especially those who were able to be interviewed away from their children, talked about how depressing and difficult their situation was and how they hated that their children had to endure that because of their (parents') failure to provide. At the same time, the kids motivated the parents to persevere every day. Aida said,

I don't even want to get up half the time...I get up because I have to because I have to get my son to school, because I have to feed my daughter. If not, I would probably die there.

For Aida, who reported suffering from clinical depression, her children forced her to get up and greet the world each day. She was motivated to find resources to provide better for her children despite her personal challenges with her mental health.

As mentioned earlier, several families discussed how the motel environment was not ideal for children and they felt unsafe. Inocencia and her daughters experienced some distress over the incidents at the motel, but she tried to keep a positive outlook to help her kids get through the tough times and help them and her cope with her situation. She said,

My youngest, sometimes her nerves would be uncontrollable when the police were in the area, she was so uncomfortable, it was tough. But, Mami (referring to herself) always managed to explain and, you know, "Let's go for a walk"...and we would have some quality time with whatever activity we could do...Those are the little moments, I value...But, it is tough! It's just that I'm the type of person that always tries to look for the positive side...

Orphee and Joe said it hurt them when their daughters asked for stuff that they could not buy for them. But, they also said those moments become teachable moments for them, too. Joe said, "but it's kinda good in a way for them 'cause as my older daughter, they'll see now what it takes to survive in the world, you know. It's kinda teaching them as well." Dee, who thought similarly about her six-year-old daughter, said, "for 6 years, whatever she pointed at, she got. So, maybe God wants us to learn to live a little more humble."

These parents coped by reframing their situation as a character-building experience for their children. Our society expects parents to have the ability to

provide necessities and a healthy environment for children to develop and grow. Sometimes the parents felt like they were failing to do so, and that generated guilt and stress. However, during the interviews, parents discussed how they were doing everything they could to provide a loving and safe environment for their children. Each one had high hopes for their children's futures, and that hope helped them cope with their current situation.

Building Community

Though the majority of the participants felt a general mistrust of other motel residents, six motel families found great comfort in meeting other families in the motel that they could relate to and build relationships they considered stronger than their ties to family members. Though the larger clique in this sample was a result of the snowball sample, two other participants in different motels reported very similar bonding experiences to other families in their motels. In Brownrigg's (2006) study, there was no discussion of anything beyond emotional support for these cliques, but in this sample, the families reported receiving instrumental and emotional support from these neighboring families.

In reference to the community feel of one motel, one participant said, "you know, everybody kinda knows everybody. It's like, I call it 'the happy hotel' from The Muppets." The families reported each other as their support system. When asked whom they would go to for help, these families would say they would talk to their neighbors rather than their relatives. Despite her comments about how other motel residents felt "too comfortable" living in the motel, Donna said:

The other thing about the hotels is that everybody understands one another, doesn't judge anybody

about having no money, having no food, or what kind of situation we're in. Everybody understands 'cause they're living it, so everybody bends over backward to help each other.

While some of these families may hesitate to ask family for money for rent or food, they rely on each other to avoid judgment and perhaps repercussions, such as being reported to child protection services for not having enough food for their kids.

A resident at another motel, Inocencia, had a network of four families who also lived at her motel. She said they became very close, like a family, and she could count on them for emotional support, as well as during any crisis. Inocencia explains:

On occasion, the other girls have lent me money, I would pay [rent], and then when I got paid, I would pay them back. Also, when I had money and another person was short, I would give them money, and we would keep each other in this exchange to survive.

Ward and Turner (2007) suggest that social networks can prevent welfare. In these cases, the social networks were not complete substitutes for their TANF benefits, but they did provide assistance that would not be available to them through TANF or available on time. For the majority of residents who found themselves in a motel with other supportive families, these relationships filled the gap that their families would have filled and eased their stress during a crisis. Some completely replaced them by calling them their family. At an outreach event where I met two of the participants, Ellen and Jeanette, they introduced themselves as "neighbor sisters." After talking to them a bit, I learned that they had met only a couple of months before at the motel when they became next-door neighbors. Jeanette told me,

"she's like my sister, man, I don't know what I would do without her." Ellen and Jeanette, as well as their husbands, became so close in that short period that they were planning to move into a house together. These fictive kin relationships were the residents' safety nets when the traditional bonds were broken or non-existent. For these motel residents, knowing they were surrounded by people in the same situation, who understood their struggles and did not think of them as any less because of it, was a beneficial factor in helping them feel optimistic about their future.

In contrast, some residents either were not in a motel with other families (or at least ones they could relate to) or had been through some bad experiences that made them hesitant to interact with others. These residents reported that they felt it was best to keep to themselves and interact with others as little as possible to avoid being caught up with "bad" people or having others gossip about them and know "their business." While they felt that isolating themselves was best for their family, these residents were more likely to report feeling down, depressed, and overall unhappy with their current situation than those who talked about their close relationships with neighbors. Sunny describes why she prefers to keep to herself:

I've met other people, but I try to keep myself distant not to get too involved with other people. Like we have a few people that we talk to, but other than that, we don't get involved with other people. We try and keep our distance. I find it's easier that way, no one knows your business, they don't have to know your business, my kids don't have to deal with other people saying your kids are doing this and that..I'm right here, I can tell what my kids are doing, we don't need these people coming in here, run in here, yapping making it worse than what it is.

For residents like Sunny, keeping to themselves was a way to not add stress or “drama” to their already stressful living situations. This also meant they did not forge positive social relationships for emotional or instrumental support if needed. They only depended on their partners, if they had one, to talk to and vent their feelings. The lack of a social network made them more susceptible to negative feelings and general unhappiness.

However, I found through their narratives that they reported knowledge of other families in the motel. They did not “know” them, but they knew of them and either had observed the families in the common areas or had some interaction that gave them the ability to tell their story. In other words, even though the families said they did not know anyone, they still speculated about the lives of others during their interviews with me. Sometimes these details or experiences were reasons for them to not interact with others in the motel. The families were speaking of other residents and comparing other residents’ decisions to their own and using those judgments as justification for their choices. Even some of the residents, who said they avoided others, tried to learn about and find a connection to the others around their motel room. This pseudo connection served as a coping strategy for them by reinforcing their beliefs, values, and providing some affirmation that they are different (better) than other motel residents.

Discussion

Families in extended-stay motels experience a great deal of stress from multiple factors that affect their subjective mental health, physical well-being, and their daily routines. Financial pressures are the main stressor for these families, but the financial instability affects their housing alternatives, relation-

ships with partners and children, perceptions of safety, as well as their physical and mental health. Notably, stressors vary by gender. While most of the fathers in this sample worried about providing for their families, the mothers had additional stressors stemming from their inability to perform motherhood the way they would want to and also because of their social isolation since most of the mothers in dual-partner households did not work outside the home and had no respite from the motel room. The lack of transportation, money, childcare and even mental healthcare placed greater weight on the mothers.

The findings showed how small networks within motels or “cliques” serve as an informal safety net for the families when assistance from extended family or social service providers is not available. Moreover, it was evident in this data that those who were able to forge social relationships in and out of the motel had a more positive outlook on their situation. Though, consistent with Brownrigg’s (2006) findings, some motel residents keep to themselves to protect their privacy while others socialize and form cliques with other residents. Given the potential benefits of these small social networks within a motel, social service providers could attempt to hold more outreach events at the extended-stay motel locations to encourage interaction between neighbors and facilitate these social connections that can improve instrumental and emotional support for the families.

In this data, there is some indication that the type and location of the motel encourage or discourage social interactions with neighbors. For example, there were single-story and two-story traditional motel locations where the doors faced the parking lots. In these locations, the residents were more like-

ly to report noise disruptions, police presence, and overall feelings of uneasiness about their surroundings. Other locations were more mid-range hotel style with multiple stories, and the rooms were only accessible from the inside of the building through the main lobby entrance. Two of the three “cliques” discussed in the findings section were based in locations with the mid-range hotel layout, and the other was in a two-story motel layout. The style and layout of the locations should be a variable to consider in future research as it relates to not just community building among residents but also for adequate trauma-informed care of extended-stay motel residents and their children.

As with any qualitative study, there are limitations in the present study. The sample consisted of families with children living in extended-stay motels. The stressors and coping mechanisms may differ by different demographics and life circumstances. The motels may be the only housing option for individuals with felonies, drug charges, registered sex offenders, or individuals on fixed incomes. Future research should explore the experiences of the various sub-groups that live in extended-stay motels. It is important to understand how each sub-group constructs a “home” in their situation, how they attempt to manage the stress and stigma associated with their living situation, and how they cope with the stress of it all.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the lack of permanent housing is the most pressing stressor for these families. The participants believe that once they acquire permanent housing, all other stressors will decrease or be eliminated. The bad news is that affordable housing units are dwindling across the nation. According to the National

Low Income Housing Coalition (2019), there is not a single state where a minimum wage employee can afford a two-bedroom apartment. This housing crisis will inevitably maintain some of these families in the extended-stay motels and lead to more people seeking shelter in extended-stay motels.

This study reveals the consistent and persistent stress levels that the parents living in extended-stay motels experience daily. Future research in this area should pay particular attention to the temporal challenges families who live in extended-stay motels face. As explained here, the quick turnaround time for rent payments in a motel yielded high concern of being on the streets on a weekly basis. While common rhetoric may portray people living in poverty as complacent and unmotivated, this is simply not the case for these families. The families spend considerable amounts of time hustling, working at their jobs, procuring goods and services from non-profit organizations and food pantries, looking for assistance programs to help them obtain basic needs including housing options. This is all the more challenging for families with young children, limited childcare, and/or without transportation. One of the families in this sample walked two hours each way (with an infant and a toddler) in full Florida sun to an agency offering emergency assistance because they did not have any other transportation or childcare. Thus, there is a level of stress and frustration that occurs when everything they can and need to do to improve their situation takes an unrealistic amount of time, and it feels like their efforts do not yield any or enough benefits (Fraenkel 2020).

While extended-stay motels residents may be perceived as “housed” individuals and not homeless, they experience similar stressors as those living in emergency shelters and/or liminal housing. It is dif-

difficult to establish routines and plan when there is so much instability in their lives. Furthermore, the gendered stressors are also heightened in this housing setting as families are isolated from residential areas and amenities (e.g., green spaces, playgrounds) that can provide some respite from the “four walls” of a motel room but are difficult to reach without transportation. As the housing crisis persists in America, low-income individuals have fewer and fewer housing options, and as the recent New York Times (Frazier 2021) article title suggests, “When no landlord will rent to you, where do you go?” Extended stay motels are the band-aid to the housing crisis, and it is peeling. Social service agencies and city governments in this area are discussing turning to motels as affordable housing units. But, from the experiences of the families here, as they exist,

extended-stay motel rooms are not healthy for families with children. These motel units could work as affordable housing if: 1) motels were converted into traditional rental units with leases that afforded tenant rights, 2) rooms were retrofitted to create delineated living spaces where families can cook, eat at a table, kids can study, and have private sleeping quarters, 3) they were rented at affordable rates based on income, 4) based on the narratives shared about the significance of informal social networks, it would be wise to build opportunities for residents to commune together and facilitate these connections. Ultimately, extended-stay motel residents want to be “seen,” as they are largely overlooked by housing/rent assistance programs and they need assistance to break their “payday loan of housing” (Frazier 2021).

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Child Disciplinary Practices versus Child Rights in Zimbabwe: Viewed through Social Work Lenses

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Abstract: Although parents are a vital cog in instilling and maintaining child discipline, very little information exists about the methods they employ. Using a qualitative approach, this paper explored the methods used by parents in Zimbabwe—an African context—to discipline children, elucidating their implications on children's rights. The findings show that parents in Zimbabwe use both violent and non-violent disciplinary methods such as verbal reprimand, beating, and spanking, which, at times, violates children's rights in the process. The use of non-violent means has also depicted a violation of children's rights through deprivation of food, denial of playtime and shelter. Evident from the findings was, again, the existence of multiple-layered contestations on child discipline within the socio-cultural discourse—the most popularized being the debate on corporal punishment versus child rights violations. Through social work lenses, the paper provides a basis to dispel an anachronistic thought, which rationalizes the instrumentalization of punishment to achieve child discipline, underscoring the need for child rights-oriented discipline.

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Introduction and Background

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) mandates member states to ensure child protection through the legislature, sound administration systems, and socio-educational means. As such, the High Court of Zimbabwe declared corporal punishment on children illegal, citing inconsistencies with the Zimbabwean Constitution (Mushohwe 2018). The first declaration of constitutional invalidity of corporal punishment was on the 31st of December 2014 by Justice Muremba in the case of *State v. Chokuramba*. On the 1st of March 2017, Justice Mangota made a similar declaration, also citing inconsistencies of the practice to the provisions of the Zimbabwean Constitution Amendment Number 20 of 2013. The decision preceded a similar judgment on the 31st of December 2014 and was positively appreciated by child rights defenders, although contentiously perceived by parents and guardians as it constitutes part of the disciplinary methods parents employ. This contention, therefore, created a need to understand the parenting practices used in Zimbabwe during the disciplinary process and their effect on children's rights.

Discipline is meant to instill the "do's and don'ts," as well as the "what to" and "what not to" differences when faced with various circumstances. The word discipline is extracted from the Latin word *disciplina*, which entails teaching or giving guidance. However, it is frequently regarded as being synonymous with control and punishment. Straus (2004) notes that child discipline is an exercise that aims to achieve positive social conduct through the setting of behavioral limits and self-control. It can, thus, be argued that discipline is a process of imparting knowledge and skills needed to navigate through life's challenges. According to Evans (2006), disci-

pline involves activating a conducive atmosphere underpinned by positive relations between the parent and the child. It has also been understood to encompass knowledge, as well as developmental training that mold character, self-control, and orderliness.

At birth, Duschinsky (2012) argues that the human mind has no innate ideas, preconceived goals, or predetermined values. It is the process of socialization through different mediums that fills in this gap primarily through the parenting practices, which are adopted during the disciplinary process to instill the desired outcome (Baumrind, Larzelere, and Cowan 2002). It can then be argued that the socialization process is anchored on socio-cultural norms that discourage deviant behavior such as stealing, talking back to elders, being disrespectful derived from shared values such as integrity, respect, and family cohesion. Thus, the process of discipline tries to introduce and reinforce these values in a child, which might, at times, result in the violation of their rights.

UNICEF (2010) notes that principal to any culture is the process of child-rearing, which involves the schooling of self-control, together with behavior that is acceptable to the society. The family setup is the primary institution for socialization and a critical disciplinary entity that builds character and molds favorable norms within the society (Mugumbate and Chereni 2019). The UNCRC (1989), article 5, records the vital guiding role parents and alternate caregivers play in the nurturing course of children's development. Through a structured apprenticeship-like relationship, children anywhere in the world amass their culture to become socially apt beings (Vygotsky 1978). From basic language skills to grooming and deportment, as well as

couture, this complex process concretizes a child to become a person befit for society. The rationale behind the use of discipline is, therefore, premised on curbing deviance within socially set boundaries derived from a communal set of norms, values, and beliefs (Sadik 2018). Various tools are engaged around the globe to make this possible, inclusive of verbal instruction, coaching, storytelling, proverbial instruction, as well as spanking, which has invoked intense debates surrounding its legality (Amos 2013).

In the African way of life, children are a shared responsibility of everyone in the community (Amos 2013). This position is grounded within the notions of *Ubuntu*, which envisions the totality of a human being as based on the other. Hence, the maxim, “I am because you are” (Mugumbate and Chereni 2019:28). It is then imperative to note that children and concepts of childhood are not mere abstracts but phenomenologies constructed and born out of the social interpretations of the indigenous folk. The African child-rearing system makes use of folktales and, at times, violent methods, which violate children’s rights, such as beating, in an attempt to inculcate positive discipline in children (Amos 2013). Dawkins (1951) defines folktales as a story that is passed from generation to generation through oral tradition. Emery (2012 as cited in Amos 2013) concurs that a folktale is a traditional account, usually mysterious, passed down verbally as a means of instilling virtues in children.

In Zimbabwe, likewise, folktales (*ngano*) would be narrated by the elderly people to the younger ones to encourage qualities such as giving and caring for one another. Sone (2018) also notes that elderly people would assume the parental role in their word of advice during the storytime, molding the young

ones. Thus, the extended family would also come in to discipline the child. Shumba (2001) contends that traditionally, non-violent methods such as proverbs, riddles, folktales, songs, legends, and myths played a critical role in disciplining children aside from corporal punishment. Proverbs are generalized truths that have been accumulated through the experiences of preceding generations with an educational value derived from the past for young ones to emulate or avoid. According to Shumba (2003), these teachings through proverbs also cultivated a sense of responsibility in young persons. For example, *Rina manyanga hariputirwe*, translating to mean that there is nothing bad done in secret that can be hidden forever, would then encourage the child not to do bad things and act deceptively, assuming that no one will find out as it would always come to light. Sone (2018), however, argues that while the culture of storytelling has since become extinct within the African culture, sustainably beating is still existent. The contemporary era reflects this typology through a mix of both verbal and non-verbal means of discipline.

It can be argued that within this discourse, possible gross child rights atrocities and violations might occur under the guise of producing a well-behaved and socially acceptable person. Hence, the need for further exploration of parental practices employed during the disciplinary process in this context. Regarding this, UNICEF (2010:vii) notes that,

the protection of children from violence is a fundamental right the international community has solemnly pledged to safeguard for all children, everywhere and at all times. Unfortunately, however, violence remains a harsh reality for millions of children around the world and leaves long-lasting consequences on children’s lives.

This is because harsh disciplinary measures, such as corporal punishment, are often used in the African context. Mapara (2009) also notes that from a cultural perspective, beating a child, as well as employing corporal punishment, is generally acceptable. The United Nations General Comment No. 8 (UNCRC 2006) of the UNCRC defines corporal punishment as punishment where physical force is dispensed in anticipation of inflicting a certain level of pain or distress, however light. Straus (2004), in agreement, argues that corporal punishment denotes the deliberate use of physical pain as a means to alter behavior. According to Gershoff (2002), this punishment may constitute slapping, pinching, hitting, kicking, shoving, punching, and choking. Paradoxically, positioning discipline within this context has led to debates on the state of the discipline, corporal punishment, and parental control (Zindi 1995; Shumba 2003; Maphosa and Shumba 2010; Matope and Mugodzwa 2011; Makwanya, Moyo, and Nyenya 2012; Mugabe and Maposa 2013; Gudyanga, Mbengo, and Wadesango 2014; Gambanga 2015; Durrant and Stewart-Tufescu 2017).

According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), children's rights are inalienable and should be guaranteed without compromise. The realization of this state of "personhood" is attested by the paradigm shift through the UNCRC (1989), which mandates member states to ensure child protection through the legislature, sound administration systems, and socio-educational means to curb any form of corporal punishment. In Africa, this is affirmed by the *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of Children* (ACRWC) Article 1 (OAU 1990), which also ensures that state parties undertake necessary steps consistent with their constitutional processes to enact legislature and other measures necessary for the realization of children's rights.

In Zimbabwe, children's rights formulate part of the national objectives in the Constitution of 2013, under Chapter 2 Section 19. These rights are further detailed under Chapter 4 Part 3 Section 81. The concept of pro-child rights is salient but implicitly stated. For example, Section 81 1 (e) provides for the protection of children from all forms of abuse. This is buttressed by the general provisions for fundamental human rights and freedoms in Chapter 4, which ensures the protection of children. These rights include the right to life (Section 48), the right to human dignity (Section 51), the right of freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment (Section 53), and the right to healthcare (Section 76). More so, Chapter 2 Section 19 (1) obligates the state to adopt policies and measures to ensure that children's rights are upheld, realizing the importance of protecting and supporting the family as the basic unit for society (Chapter 2 Section 25). It is within this context that the High Court of Zimbabwe outlawed corporal punishment on children, citing inconsistencies with the Constitution (Mushohwe 2018; Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment [No. 20] Act 2013). Concerning this, Durrant and Stewart-Tufescu (2017:57) beckons for,

a reframing and restoring of "discipline" as a process of facilitating the development of children's knowledge and understanding, thereby optimizing their development and strengthening their evolving capacities to actualize their rights.

Furthermore, the Children's Act of Zimbabwe (2002), in consistency with the Constitution of Zimbabwe (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment [No. 20] Act 2013), provides the practical guidelines to safeguard the welfare and well-being of children in Zimbabwe. The Act obligates social works as the legal guardians for all children. For Ife (2012), social

work as a human rights-based profession and the vanguard of children's rights is mandated by the law to uphold children's rights (OAU 1990; UNCRC 2006; Children's Act of Zimbabwe [Chapter 5:06] 2002; Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment [No. 20] Act 2013). This is also validated by the value of social justice, which anchors social work practice. As advocates, social workers are further obligated to protect children from any harmful practice embedded within the disciplinary processes. This, then, positions social workers to ensure that children's rights are upheld at micro, meso, and macro levels of interaction. Given this, the research sought to explore parental practices employed during the disciplinary process and ultimately the impact of these on children's rights.

Problem Statement

In 2015, Zimbabwe outlawed corporal punishment, a position that was viewed as compromising the role of parents in child discipline. The outlaw was attributed to inconsistencies of corporal punishment with the provisions of the Zimbabwean Constitution Amendment No. 20 of 2013. This decision was judiciously influenced by a few case reviews (Mushohwe 2018), consequently disempowering parents of their disciplinary function. Parents and educators who perpetrate corporal punishment face possible imprisonment under child rights violations or the latter can be suspended from service. However, although the law is clear, there is the persistent use of corporal punishment at different levels in society. This is as a result of the contextual dissonance between the law and indigenous disciplinary practices gravitated by limited knowledge on the subject area. Numerous studies have been done in the country in support of and against corporal punishment (Zindi 1995; Shumba 2003; Chemhuru 2010;

Maphosa and Shumba 2010; Matope and Mugodzwa 2011; Makwanya, Moyo, and Nyenya 2012; Shumba, Ndofirepi, and Musengi 2012; Mugabe and Maposa 2013; Gudyanga, Mbengo, and Wadesango 2014; Gambanga 2015) but fundamentally missing was the parents' narrative and an examination of the varied disciplinary methods they employ (UNICEF 2010). The law adopts a westernized approach to child discipline, which is not harmonized with indigenous parenting practices that uphold the family as the primary disciplinary conduit. This dialectic highly compromises the child protection function, which is a responsibility of multiple stakeholders, including the social work profession in Zimbabwe, because there is a lack of mutual understanding and harmony. As a result, ethical dilemmas emanate in designing evidence-based and culturally-sensitive interventions that enhance child discipline. Social workers handle cases on child delinquency inclusive of drug abuse, truancy, theft, as well as children in conflict with the law. In ensuring sustainable interventions it is, therefore, critical to note the importance of the family as an institution of primary care to ensure positive parenting practices.

Theoretical Frame

The study was underpinned by Vygotsky's (1978) Social Cultural Theory. The theory postulates that social interaction is principal in the growth of thought and consciousness molding as the individual interacts with the external world. Vygotsky (1978) thus coined the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), where learning refers to apprenticeship guided by capable peers. The theory's relevance in this study is in the exploration of the learning process that concretizes disciplines through three key elements: (1) discipline as a socially-mediated outcome, which results from social

interactions; (2) children as apprentices or subjects who know nothing but rely on external guidance to master socially acceptable behavior; and lastly, (3) the inter-linkage between child behavior, child discipline, and the society. The theory, therefore, allowed for the exploration of methods employed by parents in disciplining children because it enabled the researchers to understand the interplay of social and cultural influences on what shapes the process of discipline and what defines the standard of what is perceived as a discipline. The theory also allowed researchers to understand the role parents play in the disciplinary process in which they act as guides to children who rely on them to conceptualize what society perceives as acceptable. Lastly, the theoretical framework allowed for an analysis of the methods that parents employed (child discipline) and the greater legal framework of child rights (society) that influences child discipline and child rights violations.

Study Methodology

The section will cover information on the research participants, the data collection methods, ethical issues, and data analysis.

Methodology

The study employed a qualitative approach that was descriptive and exploratory in nature, underpinned by the social constructivist paradigm to explore the methods parents in Chimanimani use to instill discipline in their children. A phenomenology design was preferred because it enabled the subject of parental discipline to be studied exhaustively within a natural setting (Neubauer, Witkop, and Varpio 2019). In-depth interviews were used to gather qualitative information from parents of

children, as well as from various key informants. Two (2) separate interview schedules were used for the parents and key informants. Chimanimani district was considered appropriate for this study because it has a polarized urban and rural divide in the district, which made it possible to gain insight into both traditional and contemporary disciplinary methods.

Sampling Procedure and Techniques

Purposive sampling, which is a non-probability technique based on the judgment of the researcher (Engel and Schutt 2009), was used to select the parents and key informants. A selection criterion for parents was developed first to identify study participants with the required characteristics. This was then employed to purposely pick parents who had children under eighteen (18) from the target population in the Chimanimani district. A pastor, a traditional healer, a school principal, and a social worker were selected as key informants based on their expertise and manifold experiences on child discipline, child protection, and children's rights in the targeted district.

Study's Selection Criteria and Sample Size

The inclusion of study participants was dualistic as it was informed by a selection criterion for the parents and expertise on the part of the key informants. For the parents, the selection criterion was married or single parents with children under the age of eighteen (18) in the Chimanimani district. For interviews, sixteen (16) parents were included based on the principle of saturation. The four (4) key informants were included to give a holistic view of child disciplinary practices. This resulted in a cumulative sample of twenty (20) participants.

Table 1. Parents' biographical information

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Level of Education	Marital Status	No. of children
A	Female	35	Primary	Married	3
C	Female	42	Secondary	Married	4
E	Female	27	Secondary	Single	2
G	Female	54	Secondary	Married	4
I	Male	32	University	Single	3
J	Male	38	Secondary	Married	4
L	Female	30	Technical College	Single	1
N	Female	41	Primary	Married	4
P	Male	45	Primary	Married	3
R	Male	49	Secondary	Married	5
S	Female	33	Secondary	Single	3
T	Female	29	University	Married	4
Q	Male	36	Secondary	Marred	4
W	Male	28	Secondary	Single	2
Y	Female	27	University	Married	1
Z	Female	39	Technical College	Separated	3

Source: Self-elaboration.

Table 2. Key informants information

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Level of education	Occupation	Marital status
M	Female	63	Primary	Traditional healer	Widowed
D	Male	48	University	Social worker	Married
U	Female	39	University	School principal	Single
X	Male	55	Theological College	Pastor	Married

Source: Self-elaboration.

Data Gathering and Analysis

Data were gathered through a total of twenty (20) interviews that were done over a period of three (3) weeks. The medium of communication was the local language called *Chindau*, which the researchers

were also conversant with. Sixteen (16) interviews were conducted with parents making use of an interview schedule. Also, four (4) key informant interviews were conducted at participants' residential areas and workplaces, according to their preferences, using a different interview schedule with open-end-

ed questions and probing areas. The interviews lasted between thirty (30) minutes to forty-five minutes (45) due to the nature of the open-ended questions that were asked.

Thematic analysis using steps proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze data. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data by manually transcribing the recorded interviews. These were read through, making notes on the initial impression, after which initial codes were generated. Open-coding was used as there were no pre-set codes. A review and modification of the themes identified during the initial coding were undertaken to assess their coherence and distinctness. Data relevant for each theme was gathered manually from the transcribed interviews by copying and pasting them to a worksheet (Bree and Gallagher 2016) where themes were defined and analyzed as presented in the findings and discussion.

Ethical Issues

The study appreciated the sensitivity of the subject under investigation with regards to disclosure of harmful disciplinary practices against children by parents and in observance of the no-harm principle, and deontological-oriented precautionary measures were put in place to protect children if the need arose. This involved the use of social work professional ethics that implore upon the social worker as a researcher to inform relevant authorities if there is a risk of harm or loss of life. To protect the parties involved, informed consent and the voluntary participation of study participants were also observed. Before enrolment, the researchers explained to the prospective study participants the purpose of the study. An effort was made to clarify that participation was voluntary upon which the partici-

pants were free to withdraw if at any point they did not feel comfortable proceeding (Engel and Schutt 2009). Confidentiality and anonymity ethics were also employed in safeguarding the identity of the study participants by assigning codes to all participants. There is no legal action that was taken against participants that testified to abusing their children because their confessions were made in retrospect, way after the incidents. To satisfy the ethics of legality, the study got clearance and permission from the District Development Officer, the officer responsible for overseeing any activity conducted in the district. Permission and ethical clearance were also granted by the researchers' institution.

Limitations of the Study

The study focused on a small sample drawn from the Chimanimani district. This may pose limitations for the transferability of the findings across Zimbabwe. Nonetheless, the triangulation of data sources is believed to have augmented the credibility and dependability of the study findings (Shenton 2004). Furthermore, direct quotes from participants provide insights from study participants as a way of augmenting the trustworthiness of this study and can thus be used to carry out a wider study, which can give a broader understanding of the phenomenon.

Findings and Discussions

The results generally showed that parents discipline their children with the belief that they will be acting in the best interest of the child. The study further indicated that parents use various dysfunctional methods to discipline children, including beating and spanking, and sometimes burning. These methodologies varied according to parents' prefer-

ences, their understanding of the discipline, as well as their different temperaments. Parents also employed verbal reprimand and deprivation to achieve child discipline. The study further established the prevalence of discord between the provision of the law and the context. These are explored further in the findings and discussion section below.

Beating and Spanking

Findings from the study showed that parents beat and spanked their children to achieve desired discipline. This was usually undertaken within the discipline hierarchical system when verbal reprimand was perceived to be ineffective. There were differences in the level of beating, depending on the issue at hand. This was determined by the type of mischief, as well as repetition of a particular offense after a verbal reprimand. Mischief and offenses such as stealing, coming home late, lying, and the use of vulgar language called for a beating. The number of strokes was also determined on count or with the level of remorsefulness of the child. Children from the age of three up to ten were mostly beaten because it was noted that they barely understood concepts when engaged in conversation. This is attested to by the verbatim below:

Personally, I do not like to beat up children and, nowadays, we hear the government no longer allows us to do so, but it is necessary, especially when they continue doing the same thing or when they steal. My husband works away from home, and most of the time, I am left with the children. At times, when you talk to them when they have done mischief, they tend to undermine you. So, at times, I just beat them to gain their respect. I use a belt or a stick, but sometimes, when I am angry, I can use my hands to slap them. I stop beating them when I am satisfied that the pun-

ishment has been served or when they apologize during the beating. [Participant A, Interview]

My boy is just five. He is an only child and still too small to understand stuff when you talk to him. He has a tendency of taking you seriously when you change your voice tone or spank him using your hands. I do not beat him because of his age, but I just give a small spanking, only like when he lies or refuses to do something I would have instructed. [Participant R, Interview]

A key informant echoed the importance of explaining the disciplinary process to children before beating them, he noted that,

The Bible says, “spare the rod and spoil the child,” and this is what we teach at church. This, however, does not mean parents should just beat up their children for the sake of it. It should be done with love and after it has been explained why the child is being beaten. When a beating is done well, a child should never be left confused about the reasons why they were beaten in the first place. In the country, the beating of children was forbidden because of excessive use of corporal punishment, we know it is also good, but the rod should not be spared too. [Participant X, Key Informant—pastor]

The findings above indicate that parents make use of more than one disciplinary method. This versatility is seen in that they may make use of both non-violent and violent means to discipline children in varied magnitude and hierarchy, with the latter being antagonistic with the provisions of children’s rights. The power dynamics argument is also highlighted when mothers use beating to demand respect from their children as the patriarchal leaning in Africa often accords fathers or men disciplinary powers. From the findings, it appears as if this so-

cial inclination pushes some mothers to adopt harsh disciplinary methodologies to rubber-stamp their authority and the need to be heard, as well. The findings, again, indicate that parents selectively and knowingly make use of spanking and beating to discipline their children, despite knowledge of its illegality in Zimbabwe. It also shows the subjectivity of discipline in that what some parents may perceive as “small beating” is a violation of a child’s right. It can, then, be argued that although there is a solid legislative framework, which upholds child rights, physical punishment is still carried out. This is further validated by the Afro Barometer (Ndoma 2017:1), which recorded that 72% of adults in Zimbabwe supported parents’ use of physical means to instill discipline. The church doctrine, as well as socialization traits, seem to justify the use of beating as an acceptable behavior modification route, which is a worrying phenomenon. This violates the right of children to be protected against torture and cruel, inhumane, and degrading treatment or punishment according to Article 19 of the UNCRC (1989), Article 16 of the ACRWC (OAU 1990), and Chapter 4 Section 53 and Section 81 1 (e) of the Zimbabwean Constitution of 2013 (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment [No. 20] Act 2013).

Burning

The study findings established that parents, at times, use methodologies with lifelong consequences, such as burning, to discipline their children. Burning charcoal and a hot iron are some of the tools parents used to burn children to instill discipline. The findings also revealed that, in these situations, parents concealed the incidences and would not seek medical attention for the children. Parents who sought medical assistance, however, asked their children to lie about the cause of the burns because they were

aware of the legal implications. The key informant, a social worker, lamented that children were getting abused through disciplinary measures within their homes and that it was difficult to apprehend the cases since they were hidden or represented falsely. He revealed that children were often threatened or manipulated into silence. They only get to know some of these cases after receiving tips from the victims’ neighbors or when the child has been relocated to some other area.

I do not want to speak about this because it makes me feel bad, and I was only young, I did not know how to deal with my first child. Back then, my son stole something from the house, and I noticed it but decided to keep quiet. He then went to play with his friends and came back at the end of the day. In the evening, when I had finished cooking, and he was seated there, too, I took burning charcoal with a spoon and placed it on his hands to punish him. I did not seek medical attention for the child then because I was scared of getting arrested. It is something that I regret a lot, especially now that I am born again. I feel bad every time I see my son, who is now grown up and based in South Africa. [Participant C, Interview]

I suspected my child to have stolen sugar in the house because she had other episodes of doing that. I really never verified, and whilst I had finished ironing, I called her and used the iron to burn her once on those hands that steal. When we went to the hospital, I instructed her to lie to the nurse that the iron had accidentally fallen on her. I did not want any trouble if the truth became known, and I even sent her to my sister’s place for a holiday to avoid people asking about it. [Participant N, Interview]

Children can get physically impaired after a heavy beating, and some are traumatized for life. What is

sad is that the perpetrator will be a trusted parent, and the child usually does not betray this trust relationship by reporting the incident. They can get further threats if they speak out. Some of these cases have come to light through community tip-offs or when death has occurred. [Participant D, Key Informant—social worker]

These disturbing cases are a sad reality of our contemporary society and indicate the unrecorded abuses that children experience in the home environment where they are supposed to be loved and cared for. UNICEF (2010) validates these findings, contending that most violence against children occurs in the home, and very little information about this exists. In this position, children seldom have any power, which leaves them vulnerable and dependent upon the adult, in this case, who is the parent not only for protection but also for guidance. According to this existential state, it can be argued that Vygotsky's (1978) theory is concretized as it reinforces the idea of children being second to adults and acting as apprentices to be socialized about life. The findings further show a parental information and skills gap where some parents end up violating their children's rights because they are unprepared for parenthood. Although there is an existence of a robust legislative framework against corporal punishment, parents still employ this because they are unaware of pro-child rights disciplinary methodologies. Burning a child not only violates the notion of "acting in the best interest of the child" but is also against Article 16 of the ACRWC (OAU 1990) and Article 19 of the UNCRC (1989) on violence and abuse against children. Further, it infringes on the rights of the child to get medical attention according to the Zimbabwean Constitution Chapter 4 Section 76 (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment [No. 20] Act 2013), as well

as Article 14 of the ACRWC (OAU 1990) and Article 24 of the UNCRC (1989). It can be argued that, in the process of instilling discipline, parents, at times, violate children's rights and underplay their responsibilities as provisioned for by the UNCRC Article 18 (UNCRC 1989) and ACRWC Article 20 (OAU 1990) to ensure that domestic discipline upholds the human dignity of the child.

Verbal Reprimand

Parents who participated in the study also made use of verbal reprimand, either in its singular form or alongside another disciplinary method when disciplining their children. The findings affirmed that parents' religious affinity influenced their verbatim, which is used when disciplining a child, with some using Bible verses and teachings. This was done to equip and empower children with the life skills needed to navigate between right and wrong behavior. Some parents explained that they would talk, engage, and discuss disciplinary issues with their children. In some instances, scolding, proverbs, and exemplification were also used to get the desired behavior, depending on the gravity of the matter.

We make use of Bible counseling. For the greater part of it, Bible counseling is good and has wisdom. As parents, the Bible gives us the responsibility to do so. Proverbs 13:14 states that those who spare the rod show this, and the Bible says we should train up a child in the way they should grow, and they will not depart from those ways. I feel like the more you talk with your child, they get to understand you better as a parent. This way, mischief can be avoided altogether, because aside from guiding them, you are also giving them the life skills to differentiate between good and bad, and also to be responsible. [Participant E, Interview]

Personally, I scold my child, sometimes I simply use *pfutsek* [translating to mean silly], or even at times, when I am really angry, I can compare their behavior to that of a dog. [Participant G, Interview]

In our tradition, we always go back to proverbs, which are wise words with a hidden meaning that is a life lesson. Also, we use similes drawn from real-life experiences within generations. These days, there is rarely the use of folklore because the way of life has changed. It is sad, this generation is lost. I do not know about these things they call rights, a child just says they have them, but they are not old enough to understand. You see, they lack the *unhu* [humanness] in *munhu* [person]. Back then, a child was everyone's child, and you would get corrected by anyone on the road. Nowadays, they are too wayward, and we just look at them if they listen, that's it, if they do not, that's it. [Participant M, Key Informant—traditional healer]

The study findings show that there are various forms of verbal reprimand, depending on the parents' choice of approach. More so, the verbatim above testifies to the truism that the use of verbal reprimand does not necessarily mean the absence of child rights violations. Scolding children, and also the use of demeaning or foul language equally constitute child abuse. Contrary to this, the key informant lamented over cultural erosion due to modernity where nuclear families are now the *modus operandi* for child care. The findings suggest the need to revert to traditional methodologies that could mold holistic behavior where child discipline was every elder's responsibility. There was the unearthing of the existence of rich latent indigenous knowledge derived from African culture, which could be re-adopted as an alternate method of discipline. The extended family and society in its totality would together raise children in society, thereby

grounding children in acceptable ways. Such disciplinary methods were applauded for their ability to respect the dignity and rights of the child during a verbal reprimand. This is in line with the values upon which the UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (OAU 1990) are founded, with particular bias on *Ubuntu*, which underpins the ACRWC. The use of proverbs in African Tradition Religion augments Shumba's (2003) argument that proverbs and folklore play a critical role in disciplining children. Findings also affirm Amos' (2013) contention that within the African family setup, there exist alternatives that can help to cultivate positive discipline in children, such as folklore and proverbs. Likewise, Vygotsky's theory postulates that child discipline is a socially mediated outcome that results from social interactions. This is evident in the engagements parents make using verbal reprimand underpinned by indigenous knowledge reflective of this society's culture to yield desired behavior. In line with the notion of indigenization, therefore, there is a need to harmonize social work practice with culturally viable methods whose efficacy has been proven in maintaining and promoting child discipline and children's rights.

Deprivation

The findings from the study showed that parents made use of deprivation of certain amenities and privileges to impart discipline to their children. The most common type of deprivation noted was that of food and playtime. More so, the deprivation was situational and depended on the mischief thereof. Parents also reported on having employed lockouts as deprivation in instances where their children came home late after the curfew. The duration of the lockout lasted for an hour or overnight. The parent simply denied the child leeway to gain access

to the house. Parents noted that their children had rights and instead of beating them out of fear of being arrested, would resort to other methods, such as deprivation. Some parents felt that deprivation was more effective compared to other methods.

My child stole some pieces of meat from the stew that was being cooked for supper. I was outside in the garden plucking vegetables. As I was walking back into the kitchen, I caught him in the act. That night, I did not give the boy supper because he had eaten his ahead of dinner. I explained to him that by stealing those pieces of meat, he had already had his supper. He cried and then apologized the following morning. [Participant L, Interview]

My son had not done the homework and went on to play with his friends. When he got back, I simply withdrew playtime and banned him from playing with his friends for a week. The other time he came back home from playing after our agreed curfew, I locked him outside from 19:00 to around 22:30. [Participant W, Interview]

A key informant from a local school noted that,

Children should not just be left to wander around. They need firm guidance, and it is not always that they misbehave that they should be beaten because they get used and get hardened. Parents can even take away favors and minimize things they like to do so that they learn that if you behave badly, you can lose something. However, this should not infringe on the rights of the child. [Participant U, Key Informant—school principal]

The findings above further depict the assumption that non-violent disciplinary methods do not violate the rights of children. It appears from the quotes

above that parents avoid physical methods, such as spanking, out of fear of being arrested, not necessarily because of the negative implications such methods have on children. This is reflective of a translation gap where the public has to be educated of the adverse psychosocial effects of violating children's rights, instead of simply threatening parents and guardians with legal actions. Again, evidence from the study suggests that despite the state having put in place measures to curb physical abuse of children at a policy level, its measures have not been undertaken to avail alternate positive disciplinary methods. It is for this reason that parents end up still abusing children with the utility of non-violent methods because the issue of child abuse and rights might not have been properly contextualized. Since the African culture may tolerate some form of disciplinary measures that are a violation of children's rights, these need to be dispelled to ensure child protection to uphold culture relativism. Ife (2012) also argues that cultural relativism is inalienable to the human rights discourse since human existence is meaningless without the culture upon which human survival is anchored on. Therefore, any meaningful interventions that protect children in disciplinary settings should be underpinned by cultural relevance to enhance effectiveness.

Implications and Recommendations for Child Protection

The conclusions drawn from this paper have various implications on child protection because the term discipline is multi-layered cartilage, influenced by various social indices and thus, affecting the behavioral, emotional, and social facets of a child. This positions the social work profession as the legal guardians of children at the forefront of the discourse of child discipline and child rights

violations. Firstly, despite the outlawing of corporal punishment, the study established the continued prevalence of child rights violations through violent “disciplinary” measures, such as burning and spanking. According to Article 19 of the UNCRC (1989), children should be protected from all forms of physical and mental violence, even if it means self-inflicted harm. This, therefore, questions the operationalization of child protection laws and policies that are meant to safeguard both the rights and well-being of children.

An implementation gap is also noted and this has adverse implications on the psychological, emotional, and physical development of children. Such a finding reflects on the limitation of the legalistic approach to solving social ills within societies (Mafa, Kang’ethe, and Chikadzi 2020). While it is imperative to have a legal position on the welfare of children, there is a need to look beyond the law and consider methodologies that can ensure the attitudinal change in the way that parents discipline their children. Since the findings also showed that some parents employ these because they are unaware of any alternative disciplinary practices they can adopt, social workers, through their roles as educators and advocates, in partnership with other child-friendly professions, may conduct massive educational and advocacy workshops to teach guardians and parents on child rights, child development, and child discipline. Such a holistic approach is both preventative and educational as it seeks to bring awareness instead of adopting a rather punitive approach.

From the human rights and law in social work standpoint, advocacy should go beyond mere radicalism but should be evidence-based and also framed within the legal context. Thus, social work as the pinnacle of child protection should also be

a hallmark of quality research that feeds into national child protection policy frameworks and programming. As such, a recommendation is made that social policing should be grassroots-driven and be native-oriented to curb disharmony between the law and social norms. Fundamentally, the study findings indicate a contextual dissonance between the law and the lived realities of parents. The contestation as perceived by the study participants emanates from child protection policies that do not embody the indigenous culture, which incorporates religion, as well. In this regard, it can be argued that in the context of discipline, culture can be a key determinant in both the methods employed, as well as the interventions instigated to protect children.

A key indicator is the finding that reports the continued beating of children as a method to amass these objet d’art that ultimately shape how they behave despite the provisions of the law. This augments Vygotsky’s (1978) proposition that the acquisition of culture to which one belongs is key in psychological development through these artifacts. *Objets d’art*, which are societal and cultural symbols, are contrived and created by people in the culture, including the simplest of tools, such as cutlery and furniture graduating, to complex psychological *objets d’art*, such as speech, customs, beliefs, amongst others. Thus, positive cultural reorientation is a necessary intervention to dissuade negative disciplinary practices influenced and backed by culture. The paper, therefore, suggests that social workers, through research, should take due diligence in conducting comprehensive appraisals to establish the alternative disciplinary methods and their efficacy, without which children may continue facing child rights violations in the name of discipline. Such a study may also assist in identifying existent parenting capacity gaps realizing the important role that parents

play in the disciplinary process to help them adopt positive parenting practices.

Further, the findings revealed that parents may sometimes threaten or manipulate their children into secrecy when their rights are violated. Looking at this from a child protection view, such a finding is worrying and raises questions on the visibility of child protection services. While the study has already highlighted the limitation of the legal approach to handling child protection cases, there are instances where the law has to be invoked and arrange for alternative care for the child until the caregivers are socialized into good parental and disciplinary practices as stipulated in the Children's Act of Zimbabwe (2002). This is with the conviction that every decision made should be done in the best interest of the child. There is, thus, a need for community-based models that are accessible to identify and coordinate such cases for intervention through the case management system within communities and the immediate environment of the child. Such radical programming and advocacy are needed to strengthen and respond to this concealed scourge.

The study established that the absence of physical abuse does not necessarily translate to the absence of child abuse. Efforts should be made, therefore, to explore the extent to which alternate methods to discipline can also be tools for child abuse and child rights violations. From the study, certain children's rights were being violated in the absence of corporal punishment, such as the right to food, shelter, and play, amongst other things (Constitution of Zimbabwe Amendment [No. 20] Act 2013). The research contemplates that the discipline of children is a composite of innumerable factors, which emanate from the micro home environment. Henceforth,

this research contends that what is made manifest within the society as a whole is a reflection of what transpires at home. Pursuant to this, social workers should advocate for sustainable policy development that is not only pro-blue print-oriented, but that has a robust monitoring and evaluation framework that holds the state, as well as child protection actors accountable for the funding of the annexure that come with policy or law interpretation, awareness campaigns, and parental capacity development.

It is consequently recommended that there is a need for further research on contemporary debates on child discipline and child abuse towards child rights-based disciplinary practices. It also calls upon the profession through its regulatory bodies to come up with robust coordination, as well as a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to ascertain the extent to which child policies are understood and applied within communities. A recommendation is, therefore, made that child rights activists review programming to focus on holistic mitigation, preparedness, and response measures to deal with child protection issues in Zimbabwe. It can, thus, be argued that the social work profession should advocate for the use of alternate positive disciplinary methods within a guided framework, which is in sync with child protection provisions as enshrined in various statutory instruments.

This will, therefore, lead to programming that empowers both children as rights holders and also builds community resilience to child abuse. Interventions should also be culturally sensitive and embrace the principle of *Ubuntu*, which strengthens them. For this reason, Mupedziswa (1996) argues for developmental social work that is not only remedial but pro-active. At the center of it all, the protection of children should always be prioritized. In line with

the tenets of clinical-developmental social work, child discipline should not only be child-focused but thought of rhetorically in long term implications on society at large. Investments should be made at micro, meso, and macro levels to curb disciplinary issues escalating and advancing at the macro level into child delinquency.

Conclusion

The study has elucidated various methods that parents employ to instill discipline in children. Implications of such methods have also been discussed from both social work and child rights perspectives. It has been established that in the wake of achiev-

ing child discipline, a myriad of child rights violations occurs in Zimbabwe, although they are rarely documented. The paper has advocated for the need for child protection actors to ensure that parental child discipline is anchored on the humanness of children, their dignity, as well as their rights. Social workers as custodians of children who have been mandated to protect children by the law have been challenged to spearhead the establishment of alternative child rights-oriented disciplinary practices and viable child protection policies in line with cultural diversity. The profession has also been encouraged to reform its service delivery to safeguard the children of Zimbabwe against the infringement of their rights.

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