

The Stories We Tell: Social Media as Intersection between Self and Society

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Background and Context

- Social media challenge emerging adults to reflect on who they are in this world.
- In South Africa, a transforming country, media stories provide a range of diverse spaces where individuals can identify with stories that resonate (or not) with their self-story.

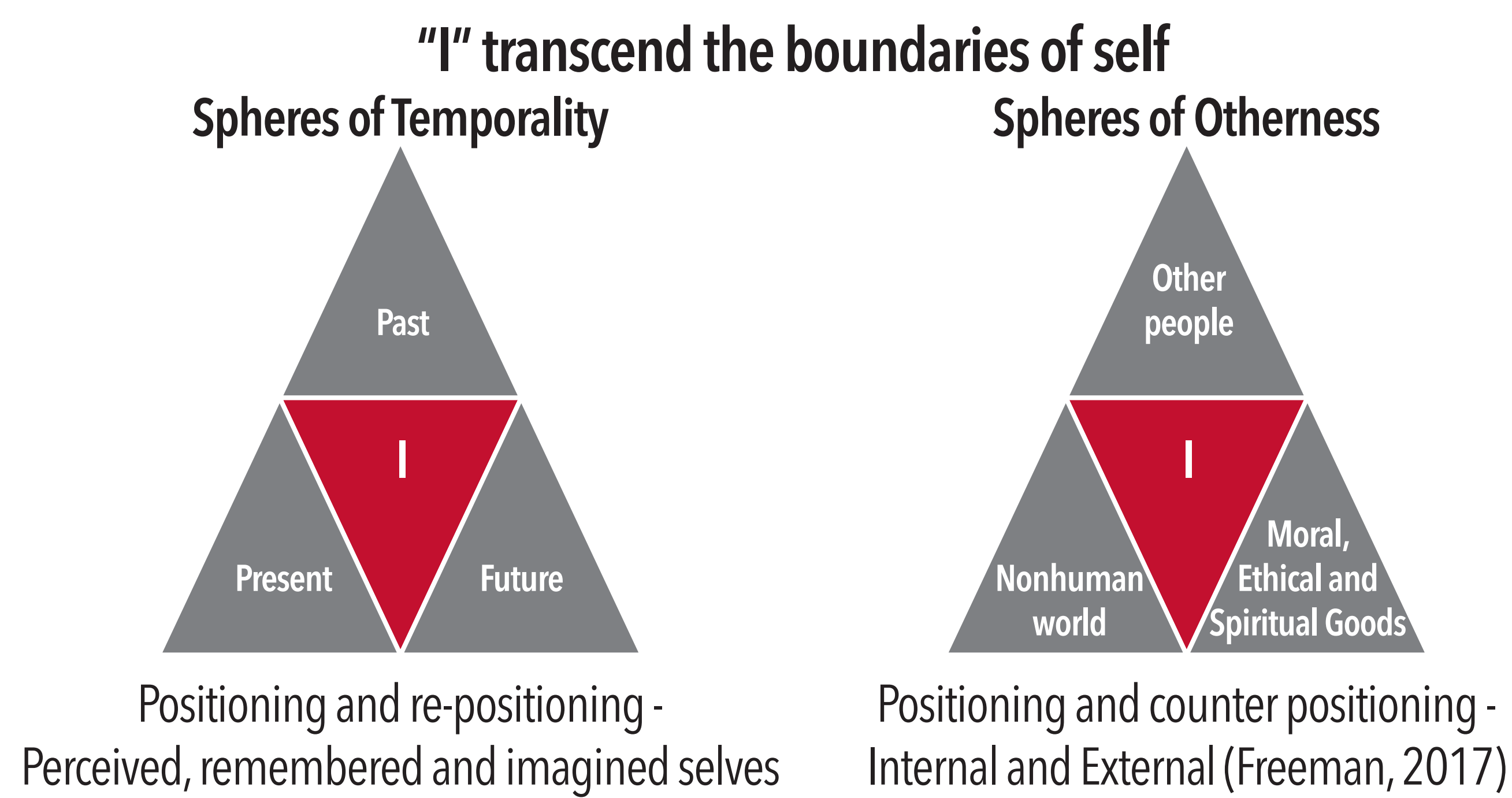
Aim of this Research Study

The aim of this research study is to explore social media as a platform where South African emerging adults shape and refine their sense of self.

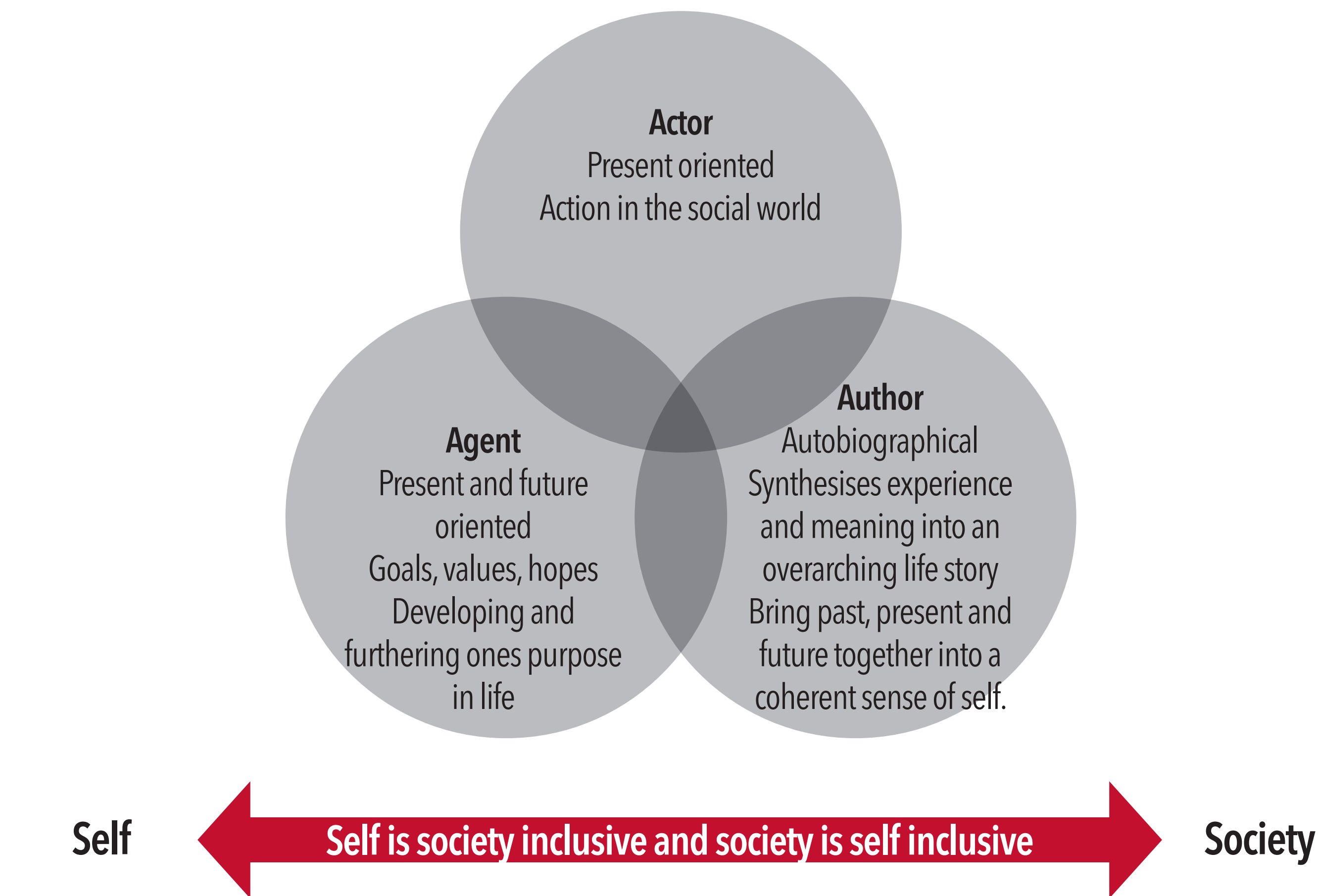
Theoretical framework

Dialogical self theory (Hermans, 2012)

Self = A society of mind = Complex, multi-voiced, narratively-constructed



Narrative identity theory (McAdams, 2013)



Social media provides a platform for

- multiple stories and multiple audiences (McAdams, 2013; McLean et al., 2007).
- distinguishing the self from others, but also to see oneself in others (McLean & Breen 2016).

Research Methods

Paradigm: Ontological relativism and narrative constructionism.

Approach and Design: Qualitative; Explorative and descriptive.

Participants: 41 emerging adults between the ages of 18 and 29, relatively equal gender representation, from various ethno-linguistic groupings (Afrikaans, Xhosa, Tswana, English, Sotho, Zulu, Tsonga, Swati, Pedi and Ndebele).

Data collection: Individual interviews based on autobiographical narratives related to three recent and salient media engagements (Breen, McLean, Cairney, & McAdams, 2016).

Analytic strategies: Thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005; Smith 2016).

Interview Schedule

Participants were asked to reflect on how the media event prompted them to think about who they are, to reconsider certain aspects of themselves and to shape their self-views.

Introductory questions:

- What forms of social media do you engage in?
- What do you enjoy about social media?

Main question:

- Think about three "stories" you encountered on media / social media (TV, facebook, etc that made an impression on you...
- How did these "stories" impact your view of yourself / who you are?

Possible follow up questions:

- Why do you think did this story make an impression on you?
- Why is this story important to you personally?
- What does it say about you?
- What did it make you think of?

Results

NARRATIVE THEMES		PARTICIPANT QUOTES
	Social media IS the story...	<i>You cant live in an incubator... You need to know... You need to keep up... I google them... cause it says a lot about you... Technology becomes part of us... otherwise you live in ancient Greece.</i>
Chasing the "good" story	Looking for stories of inspiration, courage, motivation, love, and hope	<i>... ... to give me like a paraffin to keep moving and to keep going... Wow, this person is really winning at life... The love and laugh icon – I am experiencing the joy with you. I hope you are as happy as your social media post...</i>
	Chasing likes: Finding validation	<i>... I would so like go there to go and check how many likes and oh my goodness it doesn't have enough likes.</i>
Silencing	Silencing the stories of others	<i>So I block, I mute, I unfollow...</i>
	Censoring the self-story	<i>I always think about my digital footprint... Whatever you say now might just come back and bite you in twenty years' time. It is not my complete being or my complete self... You are aware of your followers and then to some extent you cannot be... it is a matter of choosing what you reveal. You need to consider your circle...</i>
Worlds within and without - Relational themes	The "other" as alter-ego - self extended to the other	<i>The people that I follow, I identify so much with them even though we are not on the same level. Like they are on Kilimanjaro and I am just like below sea level. ...watch videos that speak to... your soul or the inner you. You know it actually awakens that person inside of you. So I think those videos helped me to get connected with who I am really inside, who I think the world does not know...</i>
Collective Voices	Sense of collective identity, critical consciousness and an overarching life philosophy Identifying with a truly South African story that resonates	<i>I feel connected to the continent. Me being proudly African... Dancing to the beat... there is so much potential and goodness in our continent, it is time that we realise this and take it to a next level... I am representing Africa. It is something that touches you inside because it is so real, ... we hear a lot of stories where people come from disadvantaged backgrounds just make it in life, while others do not... it is a South African story, you know, it is part of our narrative and we should actually celebrate it... I am of mixed ancestry and I belong to the soul of Africa and I would rejoice in it, you know. The whole thing about... I was born here and Africa goes so much deeper, you know ... it's not just related to your ethnicity or your race or whatever. It is something that comes from inside. She understands the pain her mother is going through. I am like: that is actually the South African narrative you know. A lot of parents work extremely hard just so that their dreams and aspirations for their children can realise. Like that's something very touching, you know, to witness.</i>
Master/ counter-narratives	Dominance and social power	<i>I am a woman and I feel like being a woman, my nature,... this story should affect me, it could happen to me... you are reminded that sometimes you are a minority amongst, you know, this big manly world.</i>

In Conclusion

- Narrative selves are created as a co-construction between self and society.
- 'Situated stories' - narratives are products of contexts.
- Emerging adults as autobiographical authors of their lives have to integrate and organise a multitude of salient and subordinate stories (Hermans, 2012; McAdams, 2013; McLean et al., 2007; Mclean & Breen 2016; McLean & Syed, 2016).