Millennials' Lived Experience of Navigating Having a Voice in a Collective Country: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Approach

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Statement of Authorship

This thesis is written by Magdalen Cheng and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University for the Degree of Doctor of Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling. The author is wholly responsible for the content and writing of the thesis and there are no conflicts of interest.

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Abstract

A key facet of authenticity in many conceptualizations is true self-expression. In fact, it has gained the modern reputation in recent times for being almost synonymous with being true to one self. Existing research has questioned if this is solely a Western ideal as this seems to contradict with the collectivistic values that Eastern cultures hold. Even though findings have shown that people in collectivistic cultures equally value authenticity, a question remains. Does non self-expression or silence necessarily mean one is being inauthentic? This project is the first study to explore the way people in an Asian culture are striving towards authenticity. It applies Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological lifeworld approach and explicates four themes: "Barriers and Boundaries", "Being Invisible", "Striving to be More" and "Breaking Point". Findings reveal that authenticity is for everyone, but it may be experienced in different ways. The millennials in this study choose to not let their voices be witnessed in certain settings or with specific others. A understanding of the participants' lifeworld allows one to appreciate the ambivalence and complexity of their voluntary silence. Silence, as much as true self-expression, could equally be an act of authenticity. This research makes one question the impact of seeing authenticity through dualistic lens which has implications for the therapy profession.

Key Words: Authenticity; Voice; Silence; Hermeneutic-Phenomenology; Lived Experience; Existential; Lifeworld Analysis

Contents

1. Introduction

This research began as a personal quest to understand if authenticity as a value holds universal importance or one that is only applicable to societies that hold an individualistic ideal. If the former, does it display itself differently across Western and Eastern cultures? Afterall, authenticity has gained the modern reputation in recent times for being almost synonymous with being true to one self (Harter, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Wood et al., 2008a). There seems to be a single, unique, inner, real 'me' that we hope to find or develop. This phenomenon, observed by many authors and philosophers alike (e.g. Taylor, 2003), is said to be a result of a profound transformation and drift of authenticity towards an extreme individualism and narcissism pervading contemporary culture. How will then being true and real look like in an Eastern culture that encourages a more enmeshed identity of self and others?

1.1 Personal interest in this study

The idea for this thesis first sprouted at a time when I was travelling back and forth between London and Singapore during the first two years of my doctoral journey. This was in 2015. I was fortunate to have a job that allowed me to travel multiple times per year to complete my modules in person in London. I remember these trips were often short, two weeks or less each time. Yet it often felt as if I was transported into a different world every time I sat in the classroom. I found myself part of a group of international students who were never afraid to speak their mind and let their thoughts and disagreements show. Conflicts with classmates and tutors were a common sight. During these times, I often found myself thinking "It is so exciting to see how they are not afraid to have their individual voices heard!" Yet, it is in the presence of their voices that I am most sensitive about my own inhibitions. I have thoughts, critiques, and questions but they don't seem to as fluidly as those of the others. I looked at my classmates with curiosity, enticement, and wonder, still unable to seize an opportunity to speak up.

Slowly, I found myself hearing my own voice in class as well – asking questions, critiquing, and exploring. It felt like I was settling more into the world of self-expression and self-individuation. Yet, each time I returned to Singapore, it was like being back in a world where having a voice is often viewed as opposing authority, being defiant, and choosing to be

disobedient. As time passed, this feeling of straddling two different worlds intensified. At that time, I described it as having one leg in the Western individualistic world of 'rights' and another in the Eastern collectivistic world of 'harmony'. For me, the Western world represented independence and individuation while the East embodied familiarity and fitting in.

Over time, my interest in making sense of this "East versus West" dichotomy grew. It was the specific experience of not being able to replicate my London way of being in Singapore that led me to wonder if true self-expression was indeed impossible in Singapore. What did it mean for me to be authentic as a Singaporean if I could not express myself? This question led me to question if authenticity was even a value that applies to the East. What was authenticity anyway? From the way I viewed it at that time, if it was true self-expression, authenticity was going to be an uphill challenge most of the time. It was these questions that led me to want to understand two things: Is authenticity a universal value? If yes, how might authenticity look similar or different in different cultures?

Perhaps it is wrong to say that this thesis topic took root during those travels. Through my own processing in therapy and immersing myself in the continual straddling between two worlds, I believe this topic traces its roots back to my upbringing, school days and work as a young adult.

1.1.1 Early influences: seen but not heard

My family of origin comes from Hong Kong. As part of the British colony, Hong Kongers were already more westernized than those on mainland China. When my parents moved to Singapore in the early 1980s, they were considered among those who were more open to change. Yet, they continued to retain strong Chinese values: for example, belief in collectivism and harmony.

Although my parents may not have used these exact words, I grew up with the knowledge that children are meant to be seen and not heard. Crying was frowned upon. I was often told not to shame myself and my parents by crying in public: how would we be seen if I did so? Going against their word was a sign of disobedience. For my family, to be a good child (乖 Guāi) is to be obedient or to do what one is told (听话 Tīnghuà). Children must be servile; they must not question. I grew up hearing labels like 不乖（Bù Guāi,) and 不听话(Bù Tīnghuà), otherwise translated as being a bad or a disobedient child, as a daily occurrence. This

assumption that I was often not good enough remained with me for many years and informed many of my social interactions, where I often thought about how my behaviour affected others. As for my interaction with my family, it remains one where the children keep quiet when my parents speak.

1.1.2 Formative schooling days: do not question

In my formative years, it was instilled in us to not question the teacher. To excel in school was to come top in our exams. Coming top meant being able to memorise and regurgitate information from our textbooks. Early on, it was obvious I was just an average student. I had difficulty remembering information that I did not know how to use. Furthermore I was rarely guided in attaining the skill of questioning and speaking up. Even so, I felt a strong motivation to improve myself. Very early on, I started reading self-help books and found myself particularly interested in psychology. Perhaps, this was due to seeing myself as not being good in many things: I wanted to know why. Still, for a large portion of my education, I knew only how to absorb information. This changed when I started my honours year in psychology; I started questioning things and wanted to know how and why things worked for me. There was a hunger within me. I started out by questioning the state of daily affairs within me but slowly I let them be known. I see this as the birth of my conscious awakening. Embarking on my doctoral journey was one of the ways by which I expanded my need to question and find my voice.

1.1.3 Work: To speak or not to speak

I began my career as a behaviour therapist. Fresh from university, I went into my first job with lots of enthusiasm. However, I soon found myself overcome with feelings of guilt at work, especially in relation to my bosses. I felt as if I had done something wrong even when this was not the case. Expressing my thoughts in the moment would often turn into a day of rumination: Had I phrased something correctly? Had I unintentionally upset someone? Yet, not speaking up felt as if I was not allowing myself to be seen.

To put it differently, it feels like when I cater to preserving the harmony of others, I lose myself. Yet, when I focus on expressing my thoughts without the care for others, I feel selfish and self-centered. I notice a constant tension within me in each decision I make, small or big. At times,

this tension was unbearable as I found it hard to commit to anything for fear of making wrong decisions. I often felt handicapped and frozen in the midst of making decisions. Yet it was also this phenomenon that got me interested in why I was the way I was. It made me question if there were other ways of being. It made me look at those who have no qualms about speaking up with wonder, awe and some reverence.

It was these past experiences, as well as my subsequent travel between London and Singapore, that shaped my experience. Speaking up felt good but I was also afraid of ruffling feathers in Singapore. Over time, as I built up my skills as an existential therapist, I noticed that many clients, especially those of my generation, told of coping with similar issues of individuation and belonging. This phenomenon intrigued me even more. Through this thesis, I wanted to find out how other millennials cope with this tension and what authenticity look like for them. I wanted an insider's view, to understand what it means to express ourselves without losing our connections with others.

This thesis is mainly an academic one but it also examines human experiences. I cannot let go of the idea that my personal voice needs to be included in as well. Just as much as reflexivity is an important element in the robustness of a qualitative piece of work, it will be inconsistent and ironic to exclude my voice on a topic that examines what it means to navigate authenticity and one's voice. I am struck by Peter Schmidt's (2001b) words about authenticity:

"Communication is both the reason for, and the consequence of, community. In a dialectical process, authenticity fosters encounter and encounter fosters authenticity. Thus, authenticity is the foundation for communicating with each other instead of talking about each other — in other words, to enter dialogue." (p. 221)

Thus, even though it is unconventional to include the author's personal thoughts in between paragraphs, especially in literature reviews, I strive to be transparent and allow myself to be seen. I do not want to stay quiet. I want to make my presence and role in the research transparent for both methodological integrity and as an ethical [1]imperative of authenticity. I

[1] Ethics should not be misunderstood in a moralistic way. From a phenomenological and existential point of view, it points to the challenge of living responsibly.

want to have a dialogue with my readers. I want to reveal and open up, me as truly the Other to others and in this, I find **my** voice. As I give space to the positivists to engage in a dialogue with the existentialists on this research topic, I insert these voice boxes throughout the thesis with the hopes of walking alongside them in the same dialogue. And I invite my readers to decide if they want to engage in this dialogue with me or skip these sections.

To initiate this topic, I hope to engage in the readers' embodied experiences before delving into theories, empirical research and philosophies. When we can connect directly and personally with the world we live in, our engagement to the topic is more sustained. This will form the basis of the whole thesis and I hope to start by engaging our senses with a few quotes from both fiction and non-fiction that will further clarify the interest for this research topic. I have found resonance in a Singaporean literature, 'Fistful of Colours' (Lim, 2003), on what it means to be a Singaporean through a single day in the life of a young Singaporean teacher. A particular sentence disturbed me, *"but it was something like I had no tongue of my own and that I had to use a borrowed tongue." (p. 78).* This statement provoked a response within me as it questions what an authentic voice is.

I am also struck by Franz Kafka's (1953) powerful voice in his letter to his father. In a section, he described his own muteness, *'I lost the capacity to talk… Your threat, "Not a word of contradiction!" and the raised hand that accompanied it have been with me ever since. What I got from you — and you are, whenever it is a matter of your own affairs, an excellent talker — was a hesitant, stammering mode of speech, and even that was still too much for you, and finally I kept silent, at first perhaps out of defiance, and then because I could neither think nor speak in your presence'* (p. 170). The irony of his clear expression in his letter and the description of how silence became his being is strikingly ambivalent. It prompts the question of whether having our real voice heard in environments that punishes or ignores the individual self is worth it.

This reminds me of yet another quote by Qasim, a client in Saddique's (2019) vignette, "*I found it easy to be a silent author narrating my existence as though a mime, to exist between the silences and invisibility and hope not to be discovered too soon*" (p. 131). This gets me thinking whether it is enough for me to know I am authentic if I decide that my voice will never be heard by anyone except me alone.

1.2 Some perspectives on Singapore

A number of authors have argued that Singapore lacks a sense of a constitutive authenticity (George, 2009; Tan, 2012; Yang, 2014), The island nation found itself having to fight for its survival after the failure of the British to protect it during World War II. In 1965 it was abandoned again, this time by Malaysia, which ended an earlier a merger. The Singaporean sociologist Chua Beng Huat (1995) provides an apt summary:

> "Singapore as an independent nation-state was first and foremost a political reality foisted on a population under conditions beyond their control. Once this was a fait accompli, a 'nation' had to be constructed" (p. 69).

With a mounting urgency for survival in the midst of crisis (Koh, 2005; Yang, 2014), Singapore found itself in a 'do or die' situation. However, unlike its Asian neighbours, the immigrant-formed country never enjoyed stable, deep-rooted cultural traditions, ethnic homogeneity or a common language (Kymlicka, 1995). Consequently, the Singaporean government embarked on a two-stage process of creating an authentic national identity, one with collectivism at its core. During the first stage, pragmatism and economic realism were the focus as the island nation embarked on an aggressive project of modernization.

By the 1980s, however, Singapore's rulers concluded that ideological pragmatism and economic values alone were insufficient to hold the nation together or act as an adequate foundation for a strong sense of belonging and togetherness amongst the people (Yang, 2014). Along with 'Westernization' came values such as liberalism, hedonism and individualism Chua, 1995; Seong, 1989). Furthermore, as Singapore's citizens became more educated, the government feared the loss of specifically Asian identities, values and culture (Vasil, 2000) to an assertive individualistic ethos. Such a shift was seen to come at the cost of solidarity, potentially sabotaging the economic nation-building efforts (Yang, 2014). Consequently, nation building strategies changed their focus to building a collective national identity through cultural efforts.

Of the many government-led strategies, the main one was aimed at creating 'good citizens' who as in many other Asian societies could preserve social harmony through a set of prescribed values (Tan, 2008). Five Shared Values, eventually adopted in 1991, stipulated: (1) Nation before community and society before self; (2) Community support and respect for the

individual; (3) The family as the basic unit of society; (4) Consensus in place of conflict; and (5) Racial and religious harmony. Based on a Confucian perspective of communitarian value of society and harmony, these Shared Values sought to "evolve and anchor a Singaporean identity, incorporating the relevant parts of our varied cultural heritages, and the attitudes and values which have helped us to survive and succeed as a nation" (Parliament, 1991). These values were to be mainly transmitted through citizenship education in schools.

Millennials make up 22% of the population in Singapore today, representing almost one fourth of the total population (Singstat, 2019). Striking a balance between autonomy and interdependence poses a real challenge for this generation. Singaporean millennials grew up under an authoritarian government which applied unvarying principles of 'right' and 'wrong' regarding the direction of citizens' lives. With the further development of Singapore, this generation has found itself caught between the collectivistic ideologies promoted during its childhood and youth and an ongoing pull towards more individualistic values.

Intergenerational studies have shown that conformity and collective orientation values are significantly lower among young people when compared with their parents, and that independent values are given greater weight by the young (Chang, 2009; Goh, 2016).

1.3 Thinking about authenticity

Authenticity has been widely explored across fields like philosophy, psychology, science, anthropology, tourism, marketing and even art (Kernis & Goldman, 2006a). The purpose of this introductory section to set the tone for the literature review by narrowing down and refining the scope of authenticity on which this research intends to focus.

This section opens with a short exploration of the difference between authenticity in relation to objects and the notion of 'authentic individuals'.

There follows a brief introduction to the history of authenticity in relation to people. This shows how the conceptualisation of authenticity has undergone many developments to reach its modern form. It also sheds light on the evolution of the understanding of self and others, which is essential in our conceptualisation of authenticity.

Finally, the relationship between authenticity and well-being is briefly explored. This is a developed area of research, with many empirical studies supporting the view that authenticity leads to many positive effects. This thesis has neither the intention to dispute it nor add to its discussion but rather a brief introduction to it will connect readers better to the wider contribution of this study: a culturally sensitive psychotherapy and training.

1.3.1 Authentic objects and authentic persons

As a concept, authenticity has been widely explored across fields like philosophy, psychology, consumer products, anthropology, tourism and even art (Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006) often originating from different conceptualisation of the topic. Likely due to its multifaceted history, which will be discussed in the next section, its meanings become elusive and unstable across this varying literature. The aim of this section is to delineate the different camps of understanding, towards the goal of clarifying how and why this research has chosen the working definition of authenticity used in the literature review.

Multiple definitions of authenticity have been adopted along the realist-constructionist continuum (Vannini & Williams, 2009). These are differing ontological perspectives that have bearings on its epistemological position, methods of study and hence conclusions made about them in the specific fields. To expound on this further, I expound on the English definition of authenticity. The English word 'authenticity' derives from the ancient Greek 'authentikos', meaning 'principal, genuine.' In the Oxford English Dictionary (Stevenson, 2010), authentic is defined as '*of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine'* (p. 1957). It is understood as an object, event or person having an essential nature and to be authentic is to be in accordance with that nature. Consider an authentic antique, authentic ruby or an authentic Chinese cuisine. The thing in question is either authentic or is not, period (Vannini & Williams, 2009). This stems from a realist ontological where materials have immutable characteristics and functions that cannot be stripped away. As Trilling (1972) puts it, this way of conceptualising authenticity is a process of testing whether *"[objects] are what they appear to be or are claimed to be, and therefore worth the price that is asked for them"* (p. 92).

Taking a realist perspective on the authenticity of objects is sensible where one can identify whether it is a genuine artefact or an imitation by assessing its truth or verification. Yet, this becomes complicated when authenticity as a characteristic is considered in persons. Issues of

metaphysics, epistemology, moral and ethical issues are inescapably implicated (Newman & Smith, 2016; Taylor, 2003). To apply a realist perspective to authenticity in persons is to be able to distinguish between a real and a replicated or fake self. This brings up a problem: Who should be the one deciding and how does one decide?

Rather, this thesis leans towards a constructionist and existential concept of authenticity where it is a way of being which cannot be judged behaviourally or psychologically. It is more transient and less conforming to a prototype of what makes an authentic person. One's authenticity cannot be separated from their lifeworld and their lived experience. It is neither a permanent nor binary state. Here, existentialism, social constructionism, interpretivism and phenomenology is drawn on for inspiration to discuss what authenticity is in the literature review.

1.3.2 History of Authenticity: from the Greeks to the Existentialists

Through a review of the empirical research on authenticity in the recent years, it is observed that there is a tendency towards a realist perspective in their definition of authenticity. These authors (e.g. Ito & Kodama, 2007a; Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; F. G. Lopez & Rice, 2006; Wood et al., 2008a) have chosen to understand authenticity based on its modern interpretation. However, it is important to be aware that the history of the development of authenticity is rich and complex. Where we are in our current situation is derived from our inheritance of different ways of being from the past.

What is understood about authenticity as expressive, congruent and sincere (Lindholm, 2013a; Trilling, 1972) has gone through multiple iterations, stretching far back into the Greeks or possibly further back, to get to where we are today. It will take us too far afield to give in depth attention to the history of authenticity here. Existing literature is available dedicated to its development (e.g. Guignon, 2004; Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Lindholm, 2013; Umbach & Humphrey, 2017) and readers can refer to these articles for a better understanding. Yet, a summary of it is considered important to recognise the evolving nature of this topic. If we can chart history, we will have a far richer appreciation and sense of wonder for what we hold today and how it could further evolve into in the future.

The history of western understanding of authenticity stretched far back into the premodern times where there is a cosmocentric or theocentric view of reality (Guignon, 2004). There was a plan, either a cosmic or a God given one, which determines what and how things ought to be; knowing oneself here is knowing where one fits in the larger scheme of things. Being oneself, or authenticity, then is aligning oneself to the cosmic plan human beings are made for. Fast forward to the 16th century, the predominant worldview had changed from one that sees the world as a value-filled cosmos to one that sees everything as merely matters in causal interactions (Umbach & Humphrey, 2017).

The rise of a new Christian interpretation in Europe shifted an inwardness to another level wherein salvation had more to do now with one's inner state- feelings, desires, motivations and intention. Modern science was also developing at this time. The divine plan was slowly overtaken by the view that the universe is only a collection of objects with causal interactions. This allowed humans to adopt a position of an objective observer who has power and mastery over nature (Guignon, 2004). This naturally leads to a third momentous event influencing the modern outlook of the Self, which was the developing worldview that society was something manufactured and unnatural. If the real self was the inner self that the new religious scene claims to be, society is thus the 'other' that is set against individual human beings (Guignon, 2004). This led to the fruition of the split between the inner and the outer. The authentic self is the inner self while the persona or the mask that one wears in public is a direct consequence of how modern science has dehumanized everything that is outside of us, including society (Guignon, 2004).

The concept of authenticity once again took another turn in the Romantic period when the rationalist and instrumentalist faced criticisms for the loss of the wholeness and connectedness to life which the premodern period enjoyed. The emphasis on procedural reason over feelings in approaching the outside world, while placing importance on the inner states in one's private lives have led people to feel torn within themselves. This brought about the Romantic idea that knowledge about the world should not be discovered through rational reflection but rather through one's subjective truth (Guignon, 2004; Rousseau, 1994). Here, being congruent to one's emotional reality regardless of the societal rules and regulations (Lindholm, 2013b) and believing in one's own unique way of being human and being true to oneself means living life that is my way and not others inaugurated the beginning of a distinctly modern concept of authenticity : one that moves away from an essentialistic and realistic view of the self. By the

twentieth century, their ideas had taken such deep roots that it formed the basis of thinking in the existentialist movement.

With authenticity's evolution, the concept of self revises along with it. Through the years, the construal of the self-developed from an essentialistic one where there is a grand plan of the self that we to abide to one that demands for us to exist by standing out. Interestingly, current research on authenticity and the self centres on mainly empirical research that implies a realist and essentialistic perspective roles (e.g. Tafarodi *et al.*, 2004; Slabu *et al.*, 2014a; Wang, 2015a; Rathi & Lee, 2021). Also, it is an interesting trend that the concept of authenticity has evolved from the earlier times where the self was considered in relation to a grand plan rather than others to the modern idea that separates the self from others. Additionally, it is another thought-provoking and fascinating observation that the value of personal expressive authenticity that has taken hold of modern consciousness was never a part of its concept until recently.

These movements suggest a few things that are important to regard in the literature review. For one, it must consider the construal of self in the modern times and whether this research chooses to view the self. In other words, any consideration of authenticity must equally examine the concept of self. A second consideration, more closely related to the personal motivation of this thesis, is the value of expression in authenticity. The case of explicit expression of truth as a requisite or merely desirable within the concept of authenticity makes an interesting point of exploration as it questions if one can still be authentic if we choose not to have our voice heard.

1.3.3 Authenticity and mental well-being

There is a wealth of empirical research and literature connecting authenticity and well-being (e.g. Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Robinson et al., 2013a; Sutton, 2020; Wood et al., 2008a). Some of them have also looked at its connection to psychotherapy and counselling. As Mary Watkins (1992) observed, how a client or the therapist view the self, including authenticity, in therapy contributes to either a healing or socialisation process for the former. And this is a moral dimension of therapy and even training that psychotherapists ought to be concerned about (Guignon, 1993). If this is so, there could be huge implications on how Asian millennials, the focus of this research, experience their outward expression which in turn can impact on their mental well-being and possibly cater to a more informed culturally sensitive psychotherapy.

As an existential psychotherapist working in Singapore, I worked with many millennial clients coming into sessions discussing life transitional issues. They may come into the room with symptoms of stress, anxiety, worry, depression in therapy. Yet, a common observation is often that their issues stem from a struggle in balancing between satisfying their needs and the needs and expectations of others, including their parents, bosses, colleagues, and friends. Through my existential phenomenological approach with these clients, I see how their world is first and foremost relational. It becomes obvious over time that existentialism and phenomenology's basic assumption that we are always part of a world or as Heidegger (1962) uses the term Being-in-the-World to establish our interconnectedness of *Dasein* and the world shows up in our conversations. Our participation in the world opens us up into a world of richness and provides us with values, ideals and ways of being human. Yet, this interconnectedness is also Janus-faced such that my clients are often limited, overpowered, and restricted by their relations to them as I witness them suffer from an external muteness yet internally deafening. This often leads them, including myself, to wonder what being authentic means to them.

1.3 Research question and objectives

This doctoral research aims to shed some light on two questions by exploring *the lived experience of Singaporean millennials navigate their voice in a collective society*:

1. Is authenticity a universal value?
2. Is silence necessarily a form of inauthenticity?

. The objectives of this research are:

1. To explore the value of authenticity within a specific Southeast Asian demographic
2. To provide a rich, deep and evocative description of a Southeast Asian lived experience of authenticity
3. To complement and enrich our current empirical understandings of authenticity through a hermeneutic phenomenological approach

4. To gain a better understanding of how Southeast Asians experience their self in relation to others
5. To explore how an appreciation of a Southeast Asian interpretation of authenticity impacts on psychotherapeutic practice and training

2. Literature Review

2.1 Literature review: parameters

The literature review for this thesis was conducted in a number of stages. At the beginning, a scoping review was conducted to establish what was already known and help refine the research question and methodology. It was decided that Van Manen's hermeneutic phenomenological method would be used to study the lived experience of this research's participants hence, there was also a concern that a thorough literature review at the beginning of my work may influence and limit the horizons of the findings during data analysis (Fry, Scammell & Barker, 2017).

In the initial stages of the literature review, key terms like 'authenticity', 'individualism', 'collectivism' 'agency', 'belonging', 'Asia' and 'generational differences' on standard search engines and databases were invested on (see Appendix 1). In subsequent iterations of the review process, especially after data analysis, search terms were expanded to include other terms like 'autonomy', 'relatedness', 'millennials', 'culture', 'interdependent', 'self-construal', 'culturally-sensitive psychotherapy' and 'phenomenology'. Relevant materials, limiting empirical research limited to the last two decades, were collected through the snowballing method where the relevant ones were first read and then scanned its reference lists for other pertinent and relevant resources. One was also introduced to books and research papers informally through colleagues, supervisors and random browsing that have widened and deepened the understanding of the topic.

2.2 Voice of the empiricists

2.2.1 What is authenticity?

In the introduction, the delineation between authenticity in objects and persons was clearly identified. Epistemologically, it is difficult to use the realist approach to understand authenticity in persons, which is the main focus of this study. With persons, the concept of authenticity become more multifaceted. Yet it is still essential that adequate space is given to examining what this concept is about so that both readers and myself as the researcher are in sync with what we are studying throughout the paper.

What exactly then is authenticity? It has been referred to as the extent to which one's feelings, thoughts and behaviours reflect our true or core self or deepest convictions, beliefs, values and goals (Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Jacobsen, 2007). Schmid (2001) defined it as the person as his or her own author. Albeit sharing similar qualities, authors and empirical researchers have come up with differing definitions of what authenticity is. While some others have skipped over the definitions and went directly into describing it. For instance, Wood *et al.* (2008) describes it as a tripartite construct involving self-alienation, authentic living and accepting external influence. Guignon (2004), Trilling (1972) and Taylor (2003) wrote extensively on what authenticity is and is not through the lens of history and other philosophers without a clear definition of it. Yet, readers of these literature will have gotten a clear idea of what it is through their clear descriptions.

A definition is like a boundary that narrows down a concept into a set of necessary and sufficient properties in order for us be on common grounds and to facilitate further discussion on the topic. However, definitions are not the only way to advance a discussion. Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953) famously argued that some concepts do not necessarily have essential definitions, nonetheless one can still get to know about them through describing its 'family resemblance'. Authenticity in persons is one such concept. In this study, I am deliberately choosing to not define authenticity but to describe it sufficiently to point out to the readers what it is and under which parameters this research will be working with.

In the Western world, authenticity as a concept has its origins from the Greeks and developed through essentialist and existentialist philosophy (Sutton, 2020). The former approach perceives authenticity as finding, discovering and acting according to a core self or essence while the latter stresses on self-creation. Ownership of one's choices and taking responsibility for them is paramount.

These two understandings form the foundation of most research out there on authenticity where the concept tends to fall into two broad perspectives: trait and state authenticity (Lenton et al., 2013). The trait perspectives follows closely to essentialist philosophy, owing itself much to humanistic constructs like Maslow's (1968) 'self-actualisation and Rogers' (1961) 'fully-functioning person'. This is also the perspective that most laypersons hold in modern culture where authenticity is to be consistent with our 'true selves'(Knobe, 2005; Lenton et al., 2013; Slabu et al., 2014b).

The consistency approach according to the trait perspective is not without criticisms. For one, it holds an overly rigid understanding of the self-concept (Sutton, 2018 & 2020). Contrary to the trait approach, research has shown that people display inconsistent behaviour across different social situations, relationships and cultures yet still report experiencing a sense of authenticity (Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Robinson *et al.*, 2013a; Sutton, 2018). For instance, people in Asia equally values and sought authenticity as their Western counterparts despite not showing consistency in their behaviour as they change them depending on their roles (Tafarodi *et al.*, 2004; Slabu *et al.*, 2014a; Wang, 2015a; Rathi & Lee, 2021). Here, the state perspective accounts for a more flexible sense of self. Harter (2002) advocates that despite displaying inconsistent and changing behaviour, the self can still be seen as developing a sense of continuity and coherence. Through this way of looking, the idea of the self expands from a belief in the singularity and boundaried sense of self to one that is relational. In making this point, I am beginning to introduce the notion that one cannot fully grasp the concept of authenticity without at least a discussion of the concept of the self-construal. This will be further discussed in the next section.

I struggled to decide if it is the right choice to do away with a definition of authenticity and go with merely describing it. This is the single most challenging decision to make since I

started this research thesis 7 years back. Over the years, I deepened my understanding of what authenticity is and means. There are certainly certain descriptions that I prefer over others. One of them is Guignon's (1993) understanding that authenticity is 'a resolute reaching forward into a finite range of possibilities, gives coherence, cohesiveness, and integrity to a life course.' There is a sense of anticipation, forward-directedness, unity and owning one's existence but not in the 'ontological individualistic' sense that many empirical positivistic science view it.

Yet the whole time, I know that I do not yet have a single working definition of it. What are the examiners going to think? I put it off many times, thinking that it will come to me, or I will find a suitable one. Eventually but surely. Yet, it never came.

Introducing a topic with a working definition does not sit right with me, especially with a concept like authenticity. I am in agreement with Ken Bradford (2019) that full authenticity 'requires a letting go of seeking and letting be the unfindability of an authentic something or someone. The unfindability of our true nature is the radical finding of authenticity as such' (p.121). By coming up with a working definition, I am falling back into the realist, truth seeking perspective that I am intentionally staying away from in this research. It does not feel authentic to me that I am doing exactly what I am trying to refrain from. However, producing a piece of research without boundaries set in place seems naive and superficial.

Here is just one of the many experiences of navigating authenticity during this research journey. How do I set stay true to my values as a researcher while fulfilling the requirements of a thesis research? It took a long time to come to peace that there will not be a definition of authenticity, but description is sufficient. Not only that, it too stays consistent with the methodology of this study.

I am convinced this is the right approach to take. Still, it does not stop from occasionally wondering if I have done the right thing. Who decides what is the right thing though?

2.2.2 Measures of authenticity

In existing empirical research, several self-report measures are available, based on different theoretical models, in assessing the perception of authenticity. In a recent metal-analysis of authenticity, well-being and engagement, Sutton (2020) highlighted at least eight commonly used self-report measures. Examples include as the Individual Authenticity Measure at Work (Van Den Bosch & Taris, 2014) to measure state authenticity at work, Integrated Authenticity Scale (Knoll et al., 2015) to measure authentic self-awareness and authentic self-expression and, the Authenticity in Relationship Scale to measure balanced authenticity against personal satisfaction in relationships (Wang, 2016a).

The two most widely used measures are the Authenticity Inventory 3 (AI3) and Authenticity Scale (AS). Kernis and Goldman (2006b) developed the 45-item AI3 with four facets seen as essential to state authenticity: awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational orientation which values openness and truthfulness in close relationships. With the AI3, it takes into account inconsistencies across situations and contradictions in the self-concept as it measures authenticity as a subjective sense of congruence (Sutton, 2020). On the other end, the Authenticity Scale (AS) developed by Wood *et al.* (2008) assesses the authentic personality with consistency on three subscales: self-alienation, authentic living and acceptance of external influence. Based on Roger's person centered psychology, the AS differs from the AI3 in that authenticity is founded on the aspect of trait authenticity.

It is noteworthy to recognise, through Sutton's (2018) meta-analysis of 51 studies and 75 independent samples with a total of 36,533 participants, these measures' substantial contribution to our understanding of authenticity and well-being. At the same time, she raised three interesting suggestions based on her findings that serves as a prompt for this research study. For one, each of the authenticity measures show different strength in relationships with well-being, highlighting the need for studies to choose carefully according to the aim of their study. A search on the key studies (they will be more fully elucidated in the later parts of this literature review) of this thesis research showed that most of them have utilised the AS to assess authenticity. However, AS is founded on a single theory of authenticity rather than the broader bases of other measures (Sutton, 2020) which I challenge if it is too narrow a measure considering that the history of authenticity is so rich and complex.

Second, Sutton's meta-analysis indicates that individualism is a positive moderator of the relationship between authenticity and well-being. In other words, the studies included in the meta-analysis demonstrates that a collective culture will have a weaker positive relationship between authenticity and well-being. Considering that this research thesis is looking at authenticity in a collectivistic culture, I question if the authenticity measures have a natural biasedness towards an individualism even though it claims to take into account inconsistencies across different situations. This concern had been similarly raised by Boucher (2011) in which measure of authenticity could be less likely suited to cultures that encourage dialectical thinking.

Lastly, it was suggested that the measures of authenticity are fairly simple where participants are asked to indicate "the extent to which X feels authentic" (Sutton, 2020). In a case where we want to explore what it is like to feel authentic or the experience of being authentic, the brevity of the measure is insufficient in capturing the complexity and richness of the experience. With these considerations in mind, it is important to take them into account when I decide the methodology used in this study.

2.2.3 Self and authenticity

Up till this point, the line of thought is that authenticity cannot ignore the different conceptions of the self. Believing in an essentialist true self, which emphasises on the process of self-discovery of one's essence, or an existentialistic self, which focuses on self-creation and taking responsibility for how one chooses to live, has implications on how one navigates authenticity, finding or creating it. The case gets more complex when one takes into account the multifaceted conceptions of selves: core self, minimal self and narrative self (Gallagher, 2000), ecological self (Neisser, 1988), no self in the gestalt literature, postmodern self (Gergen, 1991), divided self (Laing, 1960) or true and false self (Winnicott, 1965). In addition, researchers use the term self in multiple ways. The working definition of selves could be referred to as *the self as measured by relatively objective criteria, the phenomenologically experienced self and the idea of self that people store in their memory* (Chen, 2019). For the latter, some has referred to it as self-concept while others call it as self-construal (Markus *et al.*, 1991a; Singelis, 1994; Cross & Madson, 1997).

Self is a contested concept with different assumptions and values placed on it which in turn informs the practice of healing within psychotherapy (Watkins, 1992). In addition, if one holds that authenticity involve being either aligned consistently or congruent with the self (Harter, 2002; Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Wood *et al.*, 2008a), when the working self-conception changes, so too does the experience of the self shifts. Hence, this research is in agreement with Chen (2019) that it is important that we are schooled in the diverse conceptions and perceptions of self in an authenticity study.

Using the three working definitions of selves, it is hoped that three objectives in this section is achieved in the following order.

1. Illuminate how the self as conceptualised by the different fields of study influence the direction of epistemology
2. Achieve a deeper understanding of self-construal in the context of culture and power
3. An appreciation of studying the phenomenologically experienced self

2.3.1 Ways of studying self

A literature search on authenticity studies and articles shows awareness on the different conceptions of the self, namely whether it is a monolithic or a multifaceted psychological entity (Markus *et al.*, 1991a; Strohminger & Newman, 2017; Chen, 2019; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019). Yet, so far, no papers that systematically review findings that include quantitative and qualitative research that studies authenticity based on how the self is constructed differently has been found. Similarly, there is a gap in the field where few existing papers has examined the various epistemological methodologies and measurements authenticity is studied. Chen (2019) and Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2019) are the few studies that tackled this very issue. A paper of this length cannot hope to achieve this gap however, it is essential that a brief discussion on it is included. It is the opinion of this research that our epistemological stance determines how the research is going to choose the appropriate method to draw their findings.

Looking through index of *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, readers will find more than 60 items listed under self (Fiske, Gilbert & Lindzey, 2010). At the heart of psychology and its research is the concept of self and the drive to understand the self. Yet, amongst all the different

ways that the self can be conceptualised, it is the true self that the bulk of authenticity scholarship are most interested in. It this idea that the true self is a unitary self, the homunculus or the little human in our brain. This unitary self has been called different names: true self (Winnicott, 1965), real self (Rogers, 1961), actualised self (Maslow, 1968) or the essential self (Strohminger & Nichols, 2014) in psychological theories. There seems to be a commonly-held belief amongst contemporary culture that to know the true self, we only need to go in search of this little human in ourselves. This little human has unchanging characteristics which has originated and continued on from the theocentric view of reality during the premodern times (Guignon, 2004). When we find the self that is positive, moral, actor-observer independent and cross-culturally stable, we will have found our true self (Strohminger & Newman, 2017). To be authentic is then to either act in consistence or congruent to this true self.

Within mainstream psychology, the measure of authenticity as congruence or consistent to the true self is anchored on positivistic methods. The most commonly face-valid measures of self are the self-report measures. We see that the two commonly used authenticity scales, AI3 and AS, are in fact based on Roger and Humanistic models respectively. These kind of self-reported subjective feelings of authenticity, trait or state, are at the moment the most direct measurement of authenticity guiding most empirical authenticity research (Chen, 2019). They are quick to administer and can reach out to many respondents at a time. These empirical scales are founded on a certain level of scientific truth that is out there and authenticity can be measured accurately as long as they have high enough validity and reliability.

A growing group of researchers (e.g. Chen, 2019; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Lenton et al., 2014; Oyserman et al., 2012) recognise that the self is more complex than it seems. For them, the self is multifaceted instead of unitary. Instead of the self being a homunculus, it looks more like a symphony. Neither does the conductor or any single musician make up the self. Rather, it is the effort and combination of all that comes together that make up the self. Harter (2002) noted that this self is fluid, dynamic and adaptable instead of fixed and stable. In fact, according to her, recognising that one has multiple selves that can be authentic yet contradictory at the same time is an important developmental milestone. Typically, those who believe in the idea of the self are, but not limited to, those who are interested in how authenticity is displayed across cultures or social situations and roles. Some of these authenticity research and literature that give us a clue that they are adopting a multifaceted idea of self are those that address the independent and interdependent selves (e.g.

Tafarodi *et al.*, 2004; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Ito & Kodama, 2007; Markus & Kitayama, 2010; Chen, 2019; Sedikides *et al.*, 2019). This subject will be returned to in the next section on culture.

A phenomenon noticed in the scientific research that acknowledge a more multifaceted self is the use of a wider range of measures. On top of self-reported measures, qualitative measures like case studies, phenomenology, ethnography and thematic analysis were employed. Tafarodi *et al.* (2004) was one of these researchers studying whether the inner self, the intimately familiar me, is consistent across time and place in Western and East Asian cultures. Using a mixture of self-administered categorical questionnaires and two opened ended questions of recent experiences wherein their behaviour was consistent and inconsistent with the inner self, they found that the Western and East Asian cultures valued socially appropriate expressions of the inner self but the latter experienced a weaker sense of continuity. Unfortunately, the paper did not describe how they analysed the open-ended questions but by employing a mixed method research, they are attempting to capture a deeper experience of the multifaceted self which may not have been captured in quantitative research. Another study that employed a mixed method design was Ito and Kodama (2007). Investigating the relation between subjective life experiences with a sense of authenticity, they invited 238 Japanese university students to fill in the Sense of Authenticity Scale and a free description of one subjective life experience which made them feel *'I would never have been myself without this experience.'* The descriptions were analysed using a method that went through five steps of analysis and coding to generate categories which were then compared with the authenticity scale. The results once again showed that authentic experiences described by the participants is consistent with an interdependent self-construal, an instance of the presence of a multifaceted self. In general, free descriptions of life experiences allow for more complexity and richness of data to emerge, especially important if there are many factors that make up the self. A fixed scale is limited by their horizons of factors that they deem important in authenticity or the self and even if they believed in a multiplicity of self, it is hard to capture nuanced and subtle aspects.

It could be this reason that some studies employ only qualitative methods. Counted (2016) employed a case study design to observe self-regulation coping mechanisms as they remained true to their borderline, promissory and hyphenated self. Sedikides *et al.* (2019) examined state authenticity through a phenomenological study. We have anthropologists like Arthur Kleinman (2011), who holds a more social constructionist approach, conducting ethnographic work as he

investigates investigates the emotional and moral lives of the Chinese people which culminated into his book *Deep China*.

The objective of this section is not to analyse which studies referenced provide more accurate, reliable and valid results based on their design methods. Hard verifiable truth is not what this research is seeking out here. Rather, the citing of these studies are to show when studies take up a conception of a multifaceted self, the research methods employed are not limited to only self-reports. Qualitative research methods, more than quantitative models, have more potential to sift out a deeper understanding of a multifaceted self in relation to authenticity as they can capture phenomenon that occur in complex and interactive ways.

In fact, there are burgeoning arguments that the unitary true self is merely a fiction rather than a scientific construct (Sedikides *et al.*, 2019). Tafarodi *et al (*2004) asked a pertinent question that should not be ignored: are our inclinations for certain and more natural ways of thinking, feeling and behaving indications of our true self? It is a question that raises more questions than answers: How do we measure the true self? Are these self-reports an accurate and objective measure of the consistency or congruence with the True self or the idea of the true self according to the respondent?

2.2.4 Self-concept

The definition of self-concept used here is that of Chen (2019): "that subset of knowledge that is activated, recruited into short-term or 'working memory'" at a given moment in time and place' (p. 61). Overlapping terms for this idea include self, self-schema, self-construal, self-narrative, ego, psyche, mind, identity, personal identity, social identity, and agency (Markus & Kitayama, 2010a). The self-concept is the 'me' at the center of my life experience which guides, influence, and determine a person's perceptions, evaluations, behaviours and affective responses.

An important detail of the self-concept that to be highlighted here is relation of the self and others. The self is always situated (Markus & Kitayama, 2010a). The self cannot be a self without others. As Singelis (1994) highlights, this concept is a constellation of thoughts, feelings and actions which shapes how the self sees oneself relating to others as collaborating or distinct from others. This way of viewing the self is socially rooted where we inference our

working conception of ourselves across environments like in homes, work, school and social settings and in turn regulate ourselves in these same places (Cross & Madson, 1997). And it is in the dynamic and iterative process of organising and integrating these our self-concepts through social situations that the human being becomes a person. Supporting Markus and Kitayama (2010), this research calls this agency or autonomy.

A couple of social variations are popular in the understanding of the self in authenticity literature (English & Chen, 2011; Keltner et al., 2003; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Wang, 2015b). They include power, cultural, social roles and gender influences. These variations influence our beliefs, values, social interactions and stereotypes and experiences in social interactions. All their influences on the self-concept are recognised however, in this literature review, only both power and cultural variations across the self and its impact on authenticity are covered. More specifically, the attention is directed to the discussion towards the self-expression aspect of authenticity.

A key facet of authenticity in many conceptualisations is true self-expression. This aspect was defined, according to Bettencourt and Sheldon (2001), in terms of aspect of autonomy within authenticity. The true expression of the self is important to the extent that the person is recognised, valued, accepted and understood by others (Neff & Suizzo, 2006) and it is important in satisfying the basic human need of relatedness. Later on, we will understand more in-depth in how this manifests itself under the influence of power and culture and how authentic self-expression mediates these factors and relational wellbeing. I will also be tackling an important, yet under the same vein, question along the way: is not displaying true self-expression a failure in the exercise of autonomy and hence one is inauthentic?

2.2.4.1 Self-expression and power

Often, I wonder if our true self-expression has not been received by those whose message is meant for, are we still being authentic? Undelivered letters are one such instances. In a book of short stories written by Singaporean Malay women, *Growing up Perempuan* (Aware, 2018), lies a series of letters from a daughter to her parents which were most likely never read by the latter. I shall quote a short section of it here:

> Dear mama,

> … I'd always wanted to tell you this but you'd walk away before I could say anything. You'd always have that disapproving face that agonised me because it made me feel like I was wrong for feeling this way, because he's your father and you're supposed to love him regardless of his behaviour. Because in Islam, blood matters more than what one did to justify that status.
>
> " you don't deserve this too," I wanted to tell you, but the words were sticky in my throat. Are sticky in my throat, still.

The power held by her parents and religion were palpable. It felt like being held hostage and one loses the personal power to express herself. These letters were clearly meant for her parents but the recipients are instead her readers of this book. We can only imagine that the overriding power of her parents prevent her from being understood even if they'd read it. There is a striking similarity to Franz Kafka's (1953) letter to his father where a part of it was quoted in the introduction section. Personally, I see letters like this as an authentic true self-expression of himself but the fate of the letter was such that it was never read by the father as his mother had decided to return it to him. We can only guess why his mother chose to do so, perhaps knowing that her son will once again be disappointed by her husband and she has chosen to protect her son in this way. Yet, her power to decide what is best for her son makes me wonder if true self-expression has been achieved. I hope to return to this discussion towards the end of this section.

This section is focused on the interplay between power and the autonomy aspect of authenticity, self-expression. Consistent empirical research findings have shown that power and self-expression shares a positive correlation and this has an impact on our subjective and relational well-being in both Western and Eastern cultures (Neff & Harter, 2002; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Kraus, Chen & Keltner, 2011; Wang, 2015b). In the following paragraphs, the concept of power and its relation to self-expression will be further elucidated, through the use of existing research. After which, it will address two main gaps in existing research: 1. can silence be a sign of authenticity, 2. can power be seen as an internal sense rather than having the control to influence things on the outside?

In most research looking at power and authenticity, the former is widely characterised as the capacity to modify, influence, control others' outcomes or valued resources in social relations by providing or withholding resources or the administration of punishment (Kraus, Chen &

Keltner, 2011; Kifer *et al.*, 2013; Chen, 2019). It can come in the form of an objective situational characteristic (e.g. a boss and his subordinates), a dispositional one (possessing. Stable and consistent sense of power or an episodic psychological state (e.g. recalling a recent experience of power) (Kifer et al., 2013). Most relevant to this section are research adopting this related view of power and interested in looking at its relation to authenticity. Many of these research have chosen to focus on the autonomy aspect of authenticity- the outward self-expression of one's internal states, traits, beliefs, values, and attitudes (Chen, 2019).

One central claim across these research is that lacking in power leads to less authentic self-expression and this lack of authenticity is associated with lower relational well-being which is connected to lower self-esteem and more depression with a relationship (Neff & Suizzo, 2006). Their study looked at the impact of gender and power on authenticity within romantic relationships across two cultures-European Americans and Mexican Americans- and found a positive correlation between power inequality and authentic self-expression in both men and women. Similar results were found by Kraus, Chen and Keltner (2011) and Kifer *et al.* (2013). The former found that individuals with more power exhibited great self-concept consistency than their lower-power counterparts which explained their higher reports of authenticity as they gain more control of their environments and freedom of self-expression. Results were similar across different social roles (work, friendships and romance) where self-expression as a measuring variable of authenticity is a mediator between power and subjective well-being (SWB)- the affective and cognitive evaluation of one's own life in general and in specific roles (Kifer et al., 2013). With most of these research being conducted in the West, Wang (2015b) replicated Kifer's study on East Asians and found similar results, showing a possible universal phenomenon cross-culturally.

Possible explanations are given to explain this phenomenon. One of it is that higher power engenders approach tendencies while lower power triggers inhibitory behaviour (Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003). High power gives people more freedom to pursue rewards and less on guard towards threats since they are more capable of satisfying their desires, beliefs, goals and less dependent on others for acquiring and maintaining resources. This frees them up to express their true feelings, thoughts, attitudes and values without being too concerned with how they are seen. Whereas, the powerless feels more susceptible to external forces (Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Neff & Suizzo, 2006). Feelings of inauthenticity has been associated with accepting external influences (Wood et al., 2008a). In a workplace setting, employees may

choose to stay silent knowing that speaking up to a problem at work is pointless since nobody is interested in listening to their constructive voice or that passing comments will lead to negative consequences like possible increased workload. Knoll and van Dick (2013) terms this as acquiescent and quiescent silence respectively. Similarly, in a romantic relationship, it was found that when one party feels restricted in making their own decision in the relationship or if they fear repercussions from the more powerful partner, they choose to remain silent (Kernis & Goldman, 2005).

The findings of the existing research leave one wondering, if lack of power leads to decreased true self- expression, can choosing to stay silent in certain circumstances be a result of high power and authenticity. There is reason to believe so but literature for it is scarce. Knoll and Van Dick (2013) suggested a reason why silence may be valuable in an organisational setting; it may be beneficial to their colleagues or the organisation by diverting harm from them which they term as prosocial silence. Albeit not examining power directly, it seems reasonable to assume that it takes one to exercise autonomy to protect others. Drawing from other indirect studies in the field of social psychology can elucidate this point.

Rather than seeing autonomy and communion as contradicting ideals, studies have shown that they are both necessities and significant predictors of SWB (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001; Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita, Reyes, *et al.*, 2008; Wang, 2015b). Autonomy is different from independence such that the later involves the separation of the self from others while the latter is the whole-hearted volition for authentic self-expression (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Participating in social roles, conceptualised as a *behavioral repertoire, characteristic of a person or a position; a set of standards, descriptions, norms, or concepts held for the behaviors of a person or social position"* (Biddle, 1979*,* p. 9*)* does not mean that one has no control over how the role is carried out. There is power in improvisation and personalising one's response to the situation in different degrees of authenticity (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001) even if it means prioritising communion with other.

In an older study, Chen, Lee-Chai and Bargh (2001) proposed that power leads to higher authenticity by fostering the alignment of people's thoughts and actions with their valued goals. For some the valued goals could be a communal relationship while others prefer more independence. In their study, Chen et al., (2001) tested this idea with participants who have either a communal or exchange relationship orientation. The former approach relationships by tending to respond to others' needs and desires while the latter prioritise a more equal

partnership role and value their interest above others. Through their study, they found support that communally oriented high powered participants looked out significantly more for others (study 3) than those with low power or the exchange-oriented participants who were primed with power.

In a more recent study conducted by Wang (2015b) on Chinese participants, similar results were found. Interested in understanding if authenticity mediated power and communion on feelings of satisfaction across work, romantic and friendship roles in a Chinese sample, she proposed that communion, just as much as power, is associated with role satisfaction across social settings. This comes with the assumption that the Chinese value communal-oriented relationships and their findings supported the hypothesis that authenticity mediated the effect of communion. Additionally, supporting Chen, Lee-Chai and Bargh's (2001) study, power and communion contributed to relationship satisfaction in different ways depending on the goals with power social situations. For instance, people wielded power in a communal sense in close relationships while in business relationships, they are more likely to wield power in a more self-oriented sense given that there is a more transactional element at work.

Few studies have directly studied whether the choice to remain silent could equally be an act of authenticity however, there is reason to believe that it is not true self-expression that directly determines authenticity. Rather, inferring from the studies, it is in the exercising of our autonomy to decide the best choice of action in a specific social situation and the power to align our actions to our values in that situation that possibly determines the extent of our authenticity.

Attention is next directed to the second issue relating to power and self-expression. The definition of power in existing literature focuses on the ability to change things on the outside by influencing or punishing others. Power in this sense is externalised. With curiosity, one cannot help but wonder what about in situations where an individual have very little power to influence his environment or to speak up but displays strong internal sense of power to change his own attitude towards his situation. How will authenticity look like in these situations? As far as existing research is concerned, few studies have examined whether authenticity can be experienced in relation to low true self-expression and low external power. The closest related study comes from Gan, Heller and Chen (2018). They suggested and found that visualising oneself as behaving more authentically increases the feeling of power. In other words, state authenticity breeds power. This power seems to be different in quality to other studies, such

that the locus of control is internal rather than external- in ones control independent of external social influence (Deci & Ryan, 1995). The internal locus of control being an important aspect of subject power(Fast et al., 2009), Gan et al. (2018) had suggested that the experience of authenticity is connected to the experience of feeling powerful in the sense that one can still be true to ourselves regardless of external constraints. More studies will be needed to examine this relationship between internal power and authenticity.

2.2.4.2 Self-expression and culture

The introduction to this research started with the question of whether authenticity is a universal human value or something endorsed by the West since the modern conception of authenticity holds promotes a more independent view of the self. If it was a universal value, will it look the same across all cultures? Based on empirical research (Ito & Kodama, 2007a; Lenton et al., 2014; Rathi & Lee, 2021; Slabu et al., 2014b; Wang, 2016a), the simple answer is yes, even Asian cultures value and experience authenticity even if they do not endorse the modern popular conception of authenticity.

This section focuses on expanding on the above question, thereafter having a discussion on how the person being embedded in a larger social context like culture have implications on our self-concept and hence authenticity. This second discussion is organised in two main areas of inquiry- the first focuses on how an independent or interdependent schema directs and organises our sense of autonomy and the other links it to the exercising of this autonomy. The central argument is that our self-construal is influenced highly by our culture. How we construe ourselves can both serve as an encouragement and deterrent to authenticity. Throughout, relevant research and literature are highlighted to support the arguments of this section.

Up until roughly two decades ago, much of the research on authenticity was conducted in relation to Western cultures. The resulting studies have shown authenticity to be associated with higher positive affect and lower negative affect (Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Kifer et al., 2013; Lenton et al., 2013), greater self-esteem (F. G. Lopez & Rice, 2006), more life satisfaction (Goldman & Kernis, 2002), greater well-being (Kifer et al., 2013), and lower levels of stress (Wood et al., 2008b). However, these advantages of authenticity seem inseparable from the values of Western individualistic culture and its specific conceptualisation of the 'true and real'. In general, Western culture promotes a more independent and less interdependent

view of the self than do cultures elsewhere, particularly in the East (Markus & Kitayama, 2010b).

In recent years, however, a number of empirical cross-cultural studies (Lenton et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2013b; Slabu et al., 2014a) along with some conducted in non-Western societies (Ito & Kodama, 2007b, 2008) have suggested that authenticity is a key indicator to self-esteem and subjective well-being even in cultures usually placed higher on the collectivistic scale: those of China, Japan and Singapore.

The following few paragraphs hope to draw the readers' attention to the empirical work of several studies. With the intention of examining how authenticity is affected by the construal of the self – independent or interdependent, Ito and Kodama (2007a) invited 287 Japanese university students to rate themselves on three scales (Sense of Authenticity Scale; the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule, and the Scale for Independent and Interdependent Construal of the Self). Results showed that the sense of authenticity is important in affectivity for these participants regardless of individual differences in the construal of the self.

Here, the empirical work of Slabu and colleagues (Lenton et al., 2014; Slabu et al., 2014a) has played a key role in exploring cultural variability in the experience of authenticity and inauthenticity. These researchers have critically explored the question of whether authenticity should be regarded as an exclusively Western phenomenon or whether it constitutes a universal phenomenon that can be experienced by people everywhere. In Slabu *et al.* (2014b), university students from three Eastern cultures (China, India, and Singapore) and one Western culture (United States) were recruited As part of the study, the participants completed three measures: (a) the Analysis- Holism Scale (AHS; (Choi, Koo & Choi, 2007)), (b) the Self-Construal Scale (SCS; (Singelis, 1994), and (c) the Authentic Personality Scale (APS;(Wood et al., 2008b). They were also randomly assigned to a most-me narrative (an event during which "you felt most like your true or real self"), a least-me narrative (an event during which "you felt least like your true or real self"), or control narrative (what "you did yesterday"). Next, participants were administered measures of mood (International short Positive Affect & Negative Affect Schedule (Thompson, 2007), self-esteem (Self-Esteem Scale: (Rosenberg, 1965), and, private and public self-consciousness scales (Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975). Lastly, participants rated the experience to which state (in)authenticity (vs. control) aligned with their ideal self (10 attributes from the Self-Attributes Questionnaire; (Pelham & Swann,

1989) and on the degree to which these 10 psychological needs were satisfied (Sheldon et al., 2001). Their results suggest that all cultures experience authenticity, even if they place less emphasis on Western notions of autonomy and independence in the sense of knowing and accepting who one is regardless of others' expectations.

In another series of empirical studies conducted by Wang (e.g. 2015b, 2015a, 2016), she examined authenticity in relation to different factors like power, communion, subjective well-being and satisfaction on Chinese population. Similarly, Rathi and Lee (2021) conducted their study on an Indian population with the goal of investigating the relationship between authenticity and life satisfaction and well-being. The commonality amongst these researchers were in their interest in whether authenticity contributes to positive constructs in an Asian collectivist contexts, considering that most previous researcher were conducted in Western countries. Similar to other findings, these studies found a positive correlation between authenticity and well-being and life satisfaction in the sense that authenticity is a common essence in the prediction of the latter two. All the studies mentioned made use of standardised scaled measures such as Ryff & Keyes' (1989) Psychological Well-Being Scale, Diener et al's (1985) Satisfaction with Life Scale and Fleeson & Wilt's (2010) authenticity scale to assess the research constructs.

Authenticity may be universally experienced as a value in all cultures yet, it does not seem to be experienced in the same way across. I am employing Markus and Kitayama's (2010a) description of the word *culture* to further our discussion where it is a vast and expansive set of material and symbolic concepts, including world, environment, contexts, cultural systems, social systems, social structures institutions, practices, policies, meanings, norms, and values, that give form and direction to behavior. They are not fixed set of beliefs that reside in people but they have an influence on our self-concept. A self-concept that is frequently explored in cross-cultural studies is the independent and interdependent concept of self.

There is a growing body of research suggesting that the Western world is characterized by increasing individualism, including within written language (Twenge & Campbell, 2012; Greenfield, 2013), and the generalised tendency for individuals to speak out and draw attention to their defining attributes (Markus et al., 2006). People in the West are seen as less concerned with moral rules which restrict individual behaviour (Kesebir & Kesebir, 2012; Twenge, Sherman & Wells, 2015; Twenge, Campbell & VanLandingham, 2017). If individualism is a

cultural system which places a greater focus on the self than on social rules (Heine & Hamamura, 2007), those living in this culture are more like to have an independent schema of the self: one which organises one's behaviour according to one's own thoughts, feelings and actions (Markus & Kitayama, 2010b). The independent view of the self stems from the conception that one is autonomous, whole and unique. This way of seeing the self leads one to achieve 'self-actualisation', 'realising oneself' or 'developing one's distinct potential' (Markus et al., 1991a).

In contrast, Eastern countries such as China, Japan, Korea and Singapore have often been characterized by a form of collectivism where behaviour relating to filial piety (Schwartz et al., 2010) and maintaining traditional social roles and attitudes (including opposition to homosexual or premarital sex) (Markham *et al.*, 2010; Ven-hwei, So & Guoliang, 2010) is valued more highly. Such societies have been found to prioritise harmonious relationships, social duties, group cohesion and cooperation, and group achievement over truth-seeking within conflictual progress of interest (Markus *et al.*, 1991b; Triandis, 1995; Matsumoto & Kupperbusch, 2001; Asad, 2006; Markus & Kitayama, 2010b). The interdependent self sees oneself as embedded in social relationships and recognising that the self's thoughts, feelings and actions cannot be separated from others in the relationship. One is guided by cultural expectations that encourage more fitting in with others: for example, through reading the expectations of others, adjusting to others, taking the perspective of others or using others as referents for actions (Markus & Kitayama, 2010).

These two ways of construing the self are like blinkers that direct our attention towards certain form of relations and not others. In other words, they constructs and serves as a source and direction of our agency. In Markus and Kitayama's (2010a) review of both theoretical and empirical studies conducted on culture and self, he described how the self and the sociocultural symbols and concepts mediate one another. They are mutually constituted. The culture shapes the self by providing input from sociocultural meanings and practices. With an independent schema of thinking, the reference point of agency is frequently on the self's thoughts, feelings and actions. When the schema of the self is interdependent, the agency is directed towards fitting in with others, fulfilling obligations and, adjusting and accommodating to the environment (Tafarodi *et al.*, 2004; Markus & Kitayama, 2010a). In turn, these inputs can be reinforced and changed the very forms that shape their agency. Markus and Kitayama's seminal work is important as it lends credible support to a few points important to this study. For one,

silence need not be a sign of a lack of authenticity. The tendency can '*reflect an acknowledgement of one's role or obligations in a particular situation and an awareness of the significant others with whom one is interdependent and who define the self*' (Markus et al., 2010, p. 425). Their work is not examining the concept of authenticity but one can infer that an acknowledgement in specific contexts could well be an intentional act of exercising one's agency to include others. According to existential philosophy, the exercising of agency is an important component of authenticity. More on this will be touched on in the next section.

Second, inferring from Markus and Kitayama (2010a), it makes one wonder whether just as much as the schema of self directs our agency, it is also the same schema that directs one's attention towards what is important and hence a product of external influence. For an interdependent self, the relationships that construes the self could serve as the same external influence on how the self behaves. In Wood *et al.* (2008b) and many other studies who have employed on their AS scale to measure authenticity, external influence has a negative relation to authenticity. As far as research has been conducted, there are no existing studies that have examined this aspect in relation to authenticity. It is in the hopes of this research to substantiate this original point with other cultural studies.

Schwartz *et al.*'s (2010) study indirectly contributed to the knowledge that in addition to knowing that individuals from collectivistic cultures with an interdependent self-concept put social ties over individual desires and success, each culture places different attention on different cultural family/relationship primary construct. They found three separate constructs- communalism (emphasis on social relationships and ties to friends and families over individual achievement), familism (prioritising the needs of family members over one's own needs and remaining respectful and obligated to one's family well into adulthood) and filial piety (bestowing honour upon one's family, caring for aging parents and carrying out parent's wishes even after their deaths) patterns- to be positively related to collectivism rather than individualism. This point is important in providing evidence that our reference point to how individuals fulfil obligations, accommodate to and fit in with other differs greatly even in collectivistic cultures. The strength of this study comes from knowing that extant studies have relied mainly on single ethnic groups and cultural constructs when they examine collectivism and individualism whereas they have decided to use ethnically diverse samples (e.g. Africans, Caribbeans, Hispanics, Chinese, Filipinos and Vietnamese) and measuring more than one cultural specific values.

In a different but related vein, there is evidence that self-expression is lower and displayed in fewer activity domains in cultures that promote interdependent rather than independent sense of self. Or to put it in another way, individuals in collectivistic cultures have been found to express less than those in individualistic cultures (Tafarodi *et al.*, 2004; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Robinson *et al.*, 2013a; Lenton *et al.*, 2014). Some of these studies speculated why this could be so. For instance, Tafarodi *et al.'s* (2004) study had speculated that the Japanese are more concerned with the social harm or discord that might result if suppressed aspects of the inner self are expressed. The Chinese are less likely to achieve expression in the context of family interactions possibly because of the obligations, duties and responsibilities that characterises the Chinese family. Similar findings were found in a phenomenological study (Hsiao et al., 2006) where suicidal Chinese women are vulnerable coping in relationships because their Confucian value of obedience and submission is prescribed as appropriate behaviour in Chinese families and hence influences these Chinese women's suppression of emotional expression. The specifics reasons underlying lowered self-expression is not the focus here.

Rather, what is interesting is the implication that it is worth considering how individuals navigate their self-expression when their relationships are equally their direction of agency and their external influence. There are existing discussions and studies that point out the importance of a relational or balanced authenticity where autonomy and relatedness are balanced (e.g. Kagitcibasi, 2005; Fletcher, 2013; Wang, 2016). These include the optimal distinctiveness theory (Brewer, 1991), functional flexibility theory (Paulhus & Martin, 1988) and Eastern dialectical thinking (Peng & Nisbett, 1999; Cheung *et al.*, 2003). Along the same vein, Helgeson and Fritz (1999) established the importance of both agency and communion for subjective well-being and psychological well-being and the focus of the self resulting in the exclusion of others (unmitigated agency) or the focus on others while excluding the self (unmitigated communion) will lead to many health hazards. Again, this comes back to the idea that both agency and communion are equal psychological needs and need not be conflicting each other (Bettencourt & Sheldon, 2001; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Wang, 2016a).

Closer to our times today are two distinct and notable papers relating to this similar topic but written from two separate cultures, East and West. Supporting this dialectic ideal from the Western culture is Natalie Fletchers' (2011, 2013) theory of relational authenticity. Her main concern of the contemporary ideals of authenticity was that it is too narrowly defined, thus falling into the simplistic reduction of helping people evade conformity and affirm

individualism which Taylor (2003) had argued against. Similar to the foundations of this research, Fletchers (2011 & 2013) had conceived the self as relational where persons can both reflect on their agency while also appreciating that their actions have an effect on other individuals' life projects. It is necessary that one finds a balance to which Fletcher's (2013) draws inspiration from taken from Ancient Greek philosopher, specifically Aristotle's concept of the Golden Mean.[2] With this understanding, Fletcher's (2013) understanding of authenticity was defined as the '*ideal intermediate between the excess of egoism and the deficiency of heteronomy*' (p. 83) where '*relationally authentic people strive to develop the discernment necessary to use rationality, emotions and intuition at the right times*' (p. 90).

In the East, Wang Yi Nan's (2016) psychological study was grounded in the similar principle that authenticity required both autonomy and relatedness. Instead of drawing inspiration from Aristotle's Golden Mean principle, Wang based her ideas on the Eastern concept of dialecticism (Cheung et al., 2003). This concept primarily advocates the joint consideration of opposites and contradictions to gain optimal results (Nisbett, Peng, Choi & Norenzayan, 2001; Cheung *et al.*, 2003) which led Wang to consider authenticity to be a process term which includes both unity and plurality in the contribution to the 'fully functioning person' (Schmid, 2001b). In other words, a highly dialectical person will find solutions that maintain a balance between internal pressure to maximise self-interests and external pressures to meet the expectations of others (Wang, 2016b). With this foundation, Wang went on to develop the Authenticity in Relationship Scale (AIRS). This is the first study to quantifiably reveal that balanced authenticity, as opposed to ego-centric authenticity, is responsible for subjective well-being such as self-esteem and satisfaction with life. Although Fletchers (2013) and Wang's (2016) publications vastly differ on their cultural influence and mode of delivery with the former being a philosophical discussion and the latter a quantitative psychological study, both came to the similar conclusion that a balanced authenticity is superior to one that only focuses on the inner experience of the self.

[2] The Golden Mean (Aristotle, 1998) is a balance between two extreme vices. On one end, too little puts us in a deficit to help us pursue our potential, as can be imagined in places of extreme famine where people's ability to stay alive is frustrated. On the other extreme, an excess prevents us from reaching our full potential, as can be seen in the extreme consumption of material wealth, food and alcohol. To reach a golden mean in any actions, the virtue of prudence is essential. Also, known as practical wisdom, virtue is required in the flourishing of the human person where its work is to direct one's action to an appropriate end.

In summary, this section on culture and authenticity tried to argue for three points. Authenticity is important for our psychological and subjective well-being, regardless of culture. Despite so, the impact of culture on one's self-concept should not be dismissed in relation to authenticity. Our self-concept, independent or interdependent, provides one with schemas that directs our actions yet it is equally the same source of external influence which may draw us away from our authenticity. Proposals for a balanced authenticity are put forward to take into account the importance of both agency and relatedness.

2.2.5 The phenomenologically experienced self

Taking into account all that is discussed in this chapter, there is an appreciation of the contributions that empirical research have made in extending the knowledge of self and authenticity. However, a huge gap still remains in the field. As most existing research is empirical in nature, little is known about the phenomenologically experienced self in the contexts of authenticity, power and culture. Power and culture are specific self-concepts that have been found to influence self-expression but there is a lack of findings on how this is experienced or how one experiences the navigation through these factors to find self-expression. More knowledge in this area of the phenomenologically experienced self may advance the field of authenticity studies in ways that have never been explored and this is an area that this current research plans to contribute to.

2.3 Voice of the existential phenomenologist

Up till this point, I have been speaking through and about the voice of empiricist on the topic of the self, self-expression and authenticity. This got me thinking how I should begin to introduce the existential phenomenological perspective. I do not view writing up a literature review as merely flashing out different perspectives through a critical lens so as to provide a rationale at the end for why this warrants this current research. Certainly, this is important. However, I question too how are voices being flashed out through this literature review? How much of my voice is within the voices of these empiricists and now the existential phenomenologists?

For instance, I imagine an existential phenomenologist will respond to a positivistic empirical researcher with something similar:

'This thing called self does not exist. To say that there is a self implies that our selves are separate from the world we live in. It is a romantic ideal to think that we have a real true self that we choose and then to enact that in the social roles and situations we find ourselves in. Rather, I choose to call this 'self' a way of being. Like it or not, we are embedded in the world. This self is never finished and we are not working towards a completion. Instead, I see the self as a process, a verb and not a noun. We are constantly informed by our inherited world but at the same time it is only through living in the world that our self is manifest.'

Have I appropriated rightly what the existential phenomenologists think about the self? This question reminds me of a quote which my supervisor has shared that inspired him:

> "A reader does not seek to capture the original intentions of the author but instead to expand their own horizons by actualising the meaning of a text… Appropriation is the act of capturing the meaning of text, not through identification of authorial intention, but through 'a fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1975), with the potential to expand our knowledge of ourselves through engagement with the text" (Langdridge, 2004).

This is how dialogues and an expansion of ideas begin. This is a beautiful thing to witness yet, I wonder at what point do we draw the line of totally misinterpreting the voice of the other? Here, I begin to question the moral issues related to authenticity and self-expression. Where does our responsibility to stay true to the voice of others begin and our interpretation of their voices end?

Supporting Finlay (2016), there is an array of perspectives concerning the nature of the self. The self in most of the studies discussed in the previous chapter comes from a person-centered or behavioural perspective about having a 'core' true self. However, psychoanalysis, transactional analysis and postmodern perspectives maintain a multiple, fragmented self that surfaces across different social contexts; while the existential perspective as seen in the reflection above emphasises the self as a way of being that is always in motion of becoming, depending on how it relates to the world and others.

Depending on the perspective taken, it will be a gamechanger in how the two questions posed at the beginning of this research - is authenticity a universal value? Is silence necessarily a form of inauthenticity? - are approached and studied. This section focuses mainly on how the existential perspective changes the way one views the self in relation to others, no longer just a source of external influence but something more. Authenticity no longer becomes a condition that one social context achieves easier than others. As long as we are human beings, we are equally faced with the tension of socialization and individuation (Hatab, 2015) and authenticity a possibility for everyone. Finally, the issue of non-self-expression or silence as inauthenticity cannot be judged based on its ontic behaviour. It is only possible to make any sort of assessments through an engagement with the self interacts in his or her lifeworld. This is an area that empirical research has failed to take into account.

This chapter will expand on what has just been discussed with a focus on four existential issues: self as embedded, self as never finished, relationality and lifeworld. These discussions are mainly informed by Heideggerian thinking but it recognizes that many other existentialists have held similar views.

2.3.1 Self as embedded, relational and never finished

Unlike what is seen within empirical research that frames the self using a Cartesian division between of self and object, the self as self-made, self-defined and a self-enclosed unity that deals with what goes on the in the world (see Burgess & Rentmeester, 2015; Hatab, 2015), the existential phenomenological concept of the self is primordially already embedded in the world. The self is not a '*what*' but '*a way of being of this entity*' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 153) engaged with the tools, objects, people and environment of our experience.

Heidegger (1962) names this idea of the self as Dasein. It is a worldly-situated self with the unarguable fact of 'being there' – being-in-the-world and being-with-others. Dasein is '*thrown*' into its world where we become acutely aware that we cannot escape the sense that we are the product of the time, place and culture within which we are born, lives and dies. Dasein is an engaged agent, not simply a 'mind', that interacts with the environment. Also, Dasein has the essential constitution of a relational being: *'being with Others belongs to the being of Dasein'* (Heidegger, 1962, p. 160). This inverts the ontological priority of what most empirical research

had assumed by ordering first the subject in the communal world rather than an ontological self-contained self. As Burgess and Rentmeester (2015) had put it vividly in imagery, human beings are better off compared to as a group of bees or ants than seeing them as rugged individuals.

To know the self is to thus take on a '*manifestationist*' perspective (Guignon, 1993). Our being remains amorphous until our action becomes manifest in the world. Dasein is an unfolding event of happening- the '*movement*' of a life course '*stretched out between birth and death'* (Heidegger, 1962, p. 427). This essential constitution of Dasein also means that the self is self-constituting. This is what Heidegger means by *'the essence of Dasein lies in its existence'* (p. 67). Our identity is an *'emerging-into-presence'* or a *'coming-into-being'* (Guignon, 1993). Linda Finlay (2021) been termed this as a process of self-ing: a coming into being when-in-relationship. It is a constant process of working out who we are and what we are and our choices. Dasein is neither finished nor sees the self as working towards a completion. Rather, the self is a process of constant evolving.

2.3.2 Role of others

The existential self as embedded provides some support to the positivistic idea of self-concept where the self is always situated in a larger environment (Markus & Kitayama, 2010a; Chen, 2019). The involvement in public and social forms of life and interacting with the different environmental contexts will always encompass the danger of *'falling'* and *'forgetting'* if seen as an external influence on the self.

Existential thinking provides adequate explanation here. Being involved and engaged in the public forms of life threatens to flatten all choices to what is acceptable in the specific social context; it restricts "*the possible options of choice to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable - that which is fitting and proper*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 237). To drift along with the public demands, fall into taken-for-granted practices of average everydayness and absorbed by the rules of the socially approved practices encouraged by culture and powerful relationships is to fall into our natural state of inauthenticity. What makes it more insidious is the self-forgetfulness that exacerbate the absorption and falling that makes us forget that we are agents in the world with the choice and power to take a coherent stand in

what makes life worth living and in things that are genuinely at stake (Guignon, 1993). As a result, the inauthentic Dasein "*dwells with things, gets entangled in its own self, and lets itself be drawn along by thing"* and through it "loses itself within itself, *so that the past becomes a forgetting and the future an expecting of what is just coming on*" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 287). Heidegger goes on to suggest that Dasein's preoccupation in the everydayness is a form of *'evasion'* or *'fleeing'* from our own '*thrownness toward death'* or finiteness.

Tying back to the discussion on how self-concept is moulded by the social contexts we are in, it makes sense how strong forces like culture and power of others direct our decisions in ways that "*satisf[ies] the easily handled rules and public norms of the 'they' "* (Heidegger, 1962, p.334) while not taking responsibility for our ourselves. It seems to hold water that the more influence we have externally, the more we are pulled into the temptation of engaging a series of strategies for coping with practical concerns and living with *"one damned thing after another"* of mere functioning or *"getting by"* (Guignon, 1993). This reminds one of Sartre's (1955) famous line *"hell is other people"* where others is always a source of external bad influence to which one must resist if authenticity is to be had. It explains how authenticity measures like the AS (Wood et al., 2008a) experience others where accepting external influence is connected to lower authenticity. However, as much as many of these positivistic research base their understanding of self-concept on a relational self, they still hold on to the concept of 'ontological individualism'- the view of the self as self-encapsulated individuals who are only contingently aggregated into social systems (Guignon, 1993).

Appreciating the existential phenomenological concept of the self as embedded, relational and never finished brings one much further than just viewing others as having a negative influence on us. Our embeddedness also means Dasein is rooted in a shared history which could be a *"wellspring"* of a *"heritage"* which provides guidance for encounter one's possibility through the lives of models and stories circulating in our cultural world and drawn from history (Heidegger, 1962, p. 435-436). He goes on to say "*our fates have already been guided in advance in our being with one another in the same world"* (p. 436). The significance of this includes creating a strong sense of community and solidarity with others where we can draw inspiration from others and share common goods like fairness, honesty, dignity, benevolence, achievement, and so on (Guignon, 1993). In other words, the presence of others and the social milieu we are born into can be a force that alienates us but equally a power that helps us reach

closer into a range of possibilities, and gives coherence, cohesiveness and integrity to our live story through being guided in the footsteps of generations before.

Previously mentioned studies like that of Markus and Kitayama (2010) seem to show some support, even if indirectly, to this idea that others could be a source of inspiration and resource to the self and not only an enemy against the self when they explored the idea of how cultures mediate one's agency. Both Fletcher (2013) and Wang (2016) used both Aristotle's ideas and empirical experiment to show that authenticity necessarily require the presence of others. However, there still remains a majority of empirical research and a general consensus in popular culture that view others as a source of pressure, burden, influence or barrier towards authenticity.

2.3.3 Understanding silence through an existential phenomenological lens

Silence or non-self-expression can be explained in very different ways depending on how the self is construed. Both empirical and humanistic existential approaches treat the self as a project that can be completed. Self-expression is thus seen as an ontic behaviour where it is a genuine outward display of the self in its finished product. Interestingly, as much as the latter reacted against the objectification and instrumentalism within naturalistic theories of the former by developing the romantic view of expressivism, they still held on to the assumption of ontological individualism (Guignon, 1993 & 2004; Burgess & Rentmeester, 2015). Expressivism relies on the normative ideal of completion, wholeness, unity and totality (Escudero, 2014; Guignon, 1993) where each self is gifted with values, talents and potentialities characteristic of a true self and the action is seen as a more or less transparent and genuine expression of this self.

Existential phenomenology sees it differently. Since the self is never finished and neither is its goal to work towards completion, self-expression or the lack of it is not an expression of authenticity or inauthenticity. If one truly sees the self as a way of being, self as primordially ontological, silence or self-expression is also necessarily a way of being. Silence may not mean just being voiceless. It could mean many things depending on one's relation to the action and context. As shown by (Bindeman, 2017) in his book *Silence in Philosophy, Literature and Art,* the nature of silence is experienced differently in theological matters, creativity, music,

spirituality and even in times of oppression. The value of this book is on how specific existential writers (e.g. Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Foucault and Kierkegaard) approach silence, especially from the perspective of phenomenology. Unfortunately, there are not many similar writings available.

Drawing inspiration from Guignon's (1993) interpretation of authenticity here to illustrate this point, he highlighted two ways to understand our relation of actions to the whole of life-instrumental (means-end) and constituent-ends approach to activities. The first approach treats decisions in life as a matter of producing a desired end. The means are external to the desired outcome and hence expendable if it does not get what we want. On the other hand, the constituent end approach is *'undertaken for the sake of being such and such'* (p. 230). To put it in the context of choosing non-self-expression, a person in the instrumentalist approach may say, 'I keep quiet in order to avoid negative consequences or to be seen as a good colleague.' Whereas a person tending towards the constituent approach may engage in the same silence with a different reason: ' I remain quiet as part of being a good colleague or for the sake of being a person who chooses to not hurt others'. Guignon described the second person as being more authentic than the first by engaging in activities that throws us intensely into the present moment as the arena in which our coming-to-fruition is fulfilled. This may be true but this is not the main point in which I am using this illustration.

We can never judge a person's authenticity just by looking at the ontic behaviour. To understand whether one is being authentic, we necessarily need to go into the lifeworld of the person. This lifeworld can be defined as the often taken-for-granted world that we experience through our body and relationships that is lived out in time and space (Finlay, 2011). It is not an objective world "out there" (Todres, Galvin & Dahlberg, 2007, p. 55) but a humanly relational world that we do, be and exist but often times happening pre-reflectively.

If the existential position is taken up that the self is always socially embedded and we are always in the process of self-ing, then the process of silence can only be seen relationally.

Hence, if one wants to analyze the self, or silence in this case, one should begin looking at how the person experiences oneself in what they do, in their concerns and in their relations with others instead of searching inside their consciousness for some kind of abstract I (Escudero, 2014). Even so, if the self is always in the process of self-ing, one is constantly evolving in the

process of working out who one is and what one is through one's choices. Going into the lifeworld of a person is hence not about finding the truth on whether one is authentic or not. Rather, it allows one to have a finer appreciation of the ambiguous, complex and rich meanings inherent in our pre-reflective actions, in this case the decision to remain quiet with our opinions or express them.

2.4 Reflection

The literature review presented here is the 5th iteration in the last 7 years. With each iteration, I rewrote from the beginning. It often felt like the version that I had written is better than the previous but is never good enough. It was never perfect enough. Unbeknown to me in the earlier days, feeling silenced through having a writer's block was a consistent theme throughout this research journey. This was evident in how I have only decided on my working definition of authenticity at the end of this research process.

Even this literature reflection that I am writing now is written after I have finished all the other chapters. I struggle with the idea that there are so many ways to carry out a reflection piece. I am aware I could have approached it in through many forms, styles and typologies, according to different recommendations (e.g. Wilkinson, 1988; Lynch, 2000; Finlay, 2012). However, the question that continually tugged at me was what makes one lens of reflexivity more important than another? What was I trying to achieve by choosing one over another? What is happening is a parallel process of struggling to give voice and assert my identity while giving justice and integrity to the voices of others, in the case of the literature review it is the voice of the positivistic and existential authors.

Over time, I recognize that what is at stake here for me is integrity. Integrity is not important only in producing a good piece of qualitative work but it has become an essential part of understanding what it means to be authentic. For me, I have grown to become more confident of my stand that authentic self-expression is not just being transparent and honest. From very early days, I was drawn towards the idea of what it means to have dialogue. I am inspired by Buber's (1958) description of a true dialogue as one where the integrity and autonomy of both self and other are preserved. Neither the self nor others drowns out the other's standpoint. Such dialogues between an I and a Thou can be evidenced in speech or in silence. As much as I

resonated with the existential phenomenological perspective, I was excited to see that empirical researchers like Wang (2016) recognized the importance of the self and others, independence and interdependence or agency and belonging.

As I developed together with the research, I started to see that having to take a break from my research and remaining silent with my words was part of my struggle to give voice to not only mine but to others. I very much wanted to honour my own journey while doing the same for my fellow colleagues in the academic field and my participants. The pieces of knowledge that I needed for this literature review had been with me for a long time but I was never satisfied with how I had structured them.

For me, a good piece of literature review is more than just flashing out the existing arguments, gaps and rationale for this research. A systematic review can help achieve that however, it conventionally involves a technical process that aims at neutrality and objectivity. This is fitting for a quantitative paradigm however a qualitative approach requires a more open and flexible method which a systematic review does not offer with its boundaried and highly structured approach (Jesson et al., 2011). Rather, phenomenological research is fundamentally relational. Relational research, according to Wertz (2011), *'inevitably includes and expresses the orientation, methods, values, traditions and personal qualities of the researcher'* (p. 84).. As I select the type of literature review method fitting for phenomenological research, I eventually settled on a conceptual review (Jesson et al., 2011). By comparing and contrasting the different ways which different studies have used a specific word or concept, this method explored the existing conceptual knowledge of a phenomenon while ensuring that the researcher is fully aware of the shared meaning and understanding of the words used within the topic of research (Fry et al., 2017; Jesson et al., 2011). In the case of this research, I was attempting to provide a review of the different views and understanding of the Self within authenticity and self-expression through the eyes of empirical and existential-phenomenological research. As I distillate the concept, it became clear that there was a dearth of evidence in the existing literature that looked at the lifeworld of those that are navigating their self towards authenticity, providing the justification for this study.

Aligned with my own personal interest in this research topic, it was important to me that I tried my best to respect the integrity of voices that has come before me. I hope that by organizing my literature review through three voices- the empirical, existential and researcher's- to give

context to my research question has allowed me to show my commitment to letting each be heard in their own right. Furthermore, by being transparent with my reflexivity and reflections, I hope this process reinforces the methodological rigour of the research by increasing its trustworthiness.

The literature review has shown that as humans, we value authenticity regardless of culture. Through the existential phenomenological voice, it also highlighted that there could be a moral value to authenticity, more than just fulfilling the need to be transparent and true to ourselves. Despite this, little research has been conducted on the existential phenomenological perspective of self-expression, authenticity, power and culture.. What has been useful and informative in the realm of phenomenological research has been based on studies related to mental health (Fuchs, 2005b, 2005a), finding meaning in careers (Elley-Brown, 2015), bullying (Corney, 2008; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2015) and non-vocal patients (Carroll, 2007; Lindahl et al., 2006). These studies provide insight into the nature of expression and silence in different life circumstances yet, there is little information on the nature of navigating their self-expression. This thesis is thus the first study of its kind exploring the nature of navigation.

Post Phenomenological Retrospection

During the process of writing up this research, I played with the concept of marshalling different voices. I allowed different voices to speak about my piece. And each voice helped me in my own navigation journey of the topic and the methodology.

As I reread my research and having gotten even more voices into the piece in the form of feedbacks, I find myself still on this navigation journey. In particular, I am navigating my own relationship with hermeneutic phenomenology as a method of experiencing and understanding the world I am engaged in.

The voice boxes that I had initially used were my way of including my personal reflexivity. From early on, I contemplated whether to put these reflexive moments **after** or **beside** the paragraphs. If my reflexivity came after writing a sentence, it made sense to have these boxes after. This was something I had not done initially fearing that a voice box in a literature review was too much unconventional for an academic paper. I took a risk. It was understood by others and made sense.

Here, I am taking a further risk. It makes sense that if my reflexivity happens concurrently with a thought, I should place them side by side.

The thought here pertains to the idea of authenticity as universal or existential. I had used 'universal' to describe how authenticity has no cultural boundaries and is a value that applies to all of us. The perspective does not change but I would replace 'universal' with 'existential' in describing authenticity. Existential here is not in the philosophical sense of the word. Rather, it is seen as a condition that concerns human beings. It doesn't mean that all human beings have the same experiences, but it means that the experiences are recognizable because we are human beings.

Perhaps being authentic requires one to constantly take risks and stretch ourselves.

I am aware of my own ontological inclinations towards the existential phenomenological underpinnings of the self and this research will be aligned with it. Considering that this research chooses to align itself with the phenomenological perspective of self, it does not matter whether the research is conducted on a Western, Asian or any other cultures as we have established that as long as we are beings-in-the-world, we are capable of either being silenced and having a voice. However, I have chosen to conduct this research on Singaporean millennials, recognising that there is a personal interest here as I seek to understand my participants' experience, I can have a deeper appreciation for my own experience.

3. Methodology

3.1 Quantitative vs Qualitative

Important to the conduct of any research is the choice of methodology. Previous research on authenticity has been mainly quantitative studies and had certainly contributed much to the understanding of the field. However, my philosophical assumptions and beliefs as a researcher, the concerns and opportunities identified in the literature review and the type of question of interest to this research points towards a qualitative methodology.

Central to any choice of methodology is the researcher's position on reality and knowledge (ontology and epistemology). Being a researcher and a practitioner steeped in the existential phenomenological tradition, I see the self as necessarily relational and embedded. There may be objective truths but attempts at explaining the agency of the self is bound to be fallible if we do not take into account our historical, social and cultural embeddedness (Scott, 2005). Quantitative research explains causal processes but it is not designed to explain decisions in relation to a self's lifeworld. In isolation from a lifeworld, a quantitative psychological research is unable to differentiate between instrumental and constitutive actions and decisions because taking a stand explanations require agency in how one projects themselves in a particular time and space (Fower, 2015).

Through the literature review, it is highlighted that a realist debate can be used on authenticity in objects but not in persons. If the self is constantly evolving and everything is in relation to others, authenticity in person will necessarily be relational as well. Quantitative research is, afterall, looking for truth and although most existing research recognizes the value of contexts and influences on the self, it still treats authenticity as expression of the true finished self rather than a relational process. For persons, it necessitates a critical realist ontological stance and not a realist one where it recognizes that knowledge is not formulated in isolation (Willig, 2008). Therefore, it is in view of these considerations that I believe that qualitative research is more suitable for this research.

The type of knowledge a research seeks to uncover and understand will also influence the research methodology engaged. It provides a general approach to the particular research question which thus have consequences on the methods to approach the study later on (Finlay, 2011) Guiding this research is the lived experience of navigating finding a voice in a collective society. The quantifying measurement of evidence that a quantitative methodology focuses on to gather knowledge seeks to reduce a self's experience to a set of variables which would be statistically significant and generalizable to the population as a whole. Yet, the current research questions hopes to expand the subjective meaning of self's experience and to make more sense of how a person is in the world. It will necessarily be different for each individual with their different experiences of thrownness and projection in the world. This is another reason why the quantitative is unsuitable in this case as these approaches do not produce the phenomenal richness a phenomenological research seeks for. This is not to say that empirical research is irredeemably flawed. They have contributed much to the study of human behaviour, but the value and the fidelity of the understanding sought will be limited by a quantitative methodology. A qualitative methodology is more fitting for this research as it puts focus on the textures, meanings and qualities of phenomena. It recognizes the historical and cultural embeddedness, how the self is conditioned by a variety of cultural, ethical, and political influences, and what that says about any claims one may make about the truth, validity, or ethical soundness of the findings and interpretations (Richardson & Bishop, 2015).

This research recognises that there are many methodologies within the qualitative tradition, each with its unique philosophy and method. Characterizing these qualitative methodologies are its ability to capture rich descriptions of subjective experience (Creswell, 2013). Even so, each of these methodologies differ in their aims.

For example, Grounded Theory aims to discover and reveal meaning through the emphasis on the views, values, beliefs and assumptions of participants than on the research method (Charmez, 2003). In addition to being aligned with its interpretivist stance, it has the potential to with the potential of revealing complexity of emergent findings. Yet, its aim is to generate theories wherein the focus of this research is on explicating human lived experience of navigation finding our voice. This makes Grounded Theory an unsuitable approach for this research.

As for Narrative Research, it is interested in weaving participants' experience into a narrative and looking at its causal links (Holloway & Freshwater, 2007) which will interfere with my ability to witness the experience of navigation as a phenomenon in itself.

Narrowing down the options, Heuristics (developed by Clark Moustakas (1994)) was considered. It matches the criteria of explicating human lived experiences and revealing the phenomenon of navigation. Using this methodology will require the researcher to engage in extensive reflexivity on his or her relation to finding their own voice which will be central to the research findings. It is acknowledged that no studies are assumption free and value neutral (Fower, 2015; Richardson & Bishop, 2015) but this research is not looking at how the researcher's experiences contribute to the phenomenon. Rather, it is interested in looking at how the phenomenon is experienced by each participant while acknowledging the researcher's role in the explication of findings. Heuristics is thus also discounted as options t does not support and align with my world view as a researcher and the research question are further narrowed down.

Ultimately, it is the methodology of phenomenology which seeks to uncover human lived experiences as it appears to us in our preconsciousness that is most suitable. Its focus on going "*back to the things themselves*" (Husserl, 1970) to capture the ambiguity and richness of the experience responses most to comes closest to giving expression to the lived experience of navigating finding our voice.

3.2 Phenomenology

Phenomenology was first pioneered as a research methodology in the 1970s by Amadeo Giorgi and the Duquesne Circle (Wertz, 2005). Their aims were two-fold: to retain the traditional

scientific principles like replicability but yet to go further to acknowledge that knowledge necessarily includes how we understand the lived world.

Today, phenomenology continues to be seen as a methodology, rather than a method, which holds a specific orientation towards research (Osborn, 1990). As a methodology, it "does not produce empirical or theoretical observations or accounts but rather offers accounts of experienced space, time, body, and human relation as we live them" (Van Manen, 1990a), p. 184). Importantly, as a methodology for human sciences, it remains faithful to the etymology of the term, phenomenology, which was derived from the Greek word *phainomenon* meaning to appear (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). Thus, the main goal of phenomenology is allowing the researcher to focus on things or experiences as they appear and obtaining vivid and rich descriptions of human experience as it is lived in the context of space, time and relationships (Van Manen, 1990).

The roots of the phenomenological methodology originated mainly from Husserl and Heidegger's philosophy of phenomenology. Both figures had contributed significantly to the research methodology but in different ways. One can say that the former's contribution was towards the epistemology while the latter's input was towards the ontological stance of the methodology. In the following sections, a brief account of both Husserl and Heidegger's philosophy of phenomenology will be outlined, with the explicit intention of leading readers to the understanding of how it is congruent with my research question and my values as a researcher.

3.2.1 Husserl's phenomenology

Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) was known for his contribution towards descriptive phenomenology. He was guided by this central question of "*what do we know as persons*?" Holding on to the assumption that the human experience has value and qualifies to be an object of scientific study, Husserl embarked on a project to construct a new science that allow for persons to be observed in their natural context and to fully honour their lived experience in the world (Cohen, 1987; Dalhlberg, Drew & Nystrom, 2011).

As a methodology, phenomenology aims at stripping away all extraneous concerns to get to the essence of each phenomenon of experience. Whilst recognizing the interaction between perceiver and phenomenon, Husserl believed that we can still return '*to the things themselves*'

(Husserl, 1985, p. 6) through the employment of careful description and bracketing. Bracketing, otherwise also known as epoché, is the reduction practice of consciously peeling off any personal biases, experiences judgements, preconceptions or theoretical leanings such that it does not influence the description of the present phenomenon that the participants are presenting (Laverty, 2003; Tymieniecka, 2003).

In addition, Husserl bases his phenomenology on another assumption that he calls universal essences. It refers to how phenomenon is experienced through different acts of consciousness but the essence of these experiences is shared among those who have the same lived experience. As such, for phenomenology to work, the common aspects of the lived experience need to be generalised in order to contribute to the science (Lopez & Willis, 2004).

3.2.2 Heidegger's Phenomenology

Being a student of Husserl, Heidegger share the same idea that human experiences can be examined but epistemologically, they differ widely on how these phenomena can be studied. Heidegger does not believe that researchers can completely bracket out their experiences, conceptions, or theoretical leanings. On the contrary, he believed that the context of the person experiencing the phenomenon should be included. This includes the person's history or background, including what the culture of the person from birth and is handed down influences how one understands the world and determine what is 'real' (Laverty, 2003). By using the term 'lifeworld, Heidegger seeks to demonstrate that all our experience can only be interpreted within the social, cultural, and historical context of the phenomenon.

The departure of Heidegger's understanding of phenomenology from Husserl comes mainly from the different ontological perspectives of reality that these individuals hold. For Heidegger, consciousness cannot experience itself in the absence of the world (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). Reality is not one thing 'out there' to be found. Rather, multiple realities exist where it is constructed by the knower. This belief stems from his fundamental ontology of 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger, 1962). Our experience only makes sense through our experience in the world where we share them with others through one's speech and language. Since we are beings of relatedness, interpretation of our reality is an ongoing and interactive process as individuals co-constitute meanings.

This ontological stance affects how phenomenology as a methodology in significant ways. First, if research is a human activity, the researcher as knower plays an important role in the arrival of meaning at an experience too. It is inevitable that the researcher's background and experiences will colour the interpretation of the experience of the participants. Unlike Husserl, Heidegger's phenomenology recognizes the ongoing interconnection between the researcher, their background and context, and the interpretation of the research theme. Furthermore, claims made in phenomenological research is to be cautioned as neither the researcher nor participants 'have privileged access to the reality' of one's lived experience (Finlay, 2008, p. 107). Rather, there is an element of concealment in any phenomena where something does not show up in all its entirety right from the start. Hence, a Heideggerian phenomenological methodology involves the use of interpretation and basic structures of hermeneutics to uncover the aspects of concealment and gain an expansion of proper meaning of the lived experience.

3.3 Phenomenological methods

3.3.1 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

As a method, IPA seeks to understand individuals' lived experience. It seeks to investigate how meaning is attributed to particular experiences by particular people in a particular context (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009a) and thereafter, search for commonalities in these experiences. It is also an interpretative approach in the sense that throughout the research process, meaning is co-constructed between the researcher and the participants as well as how the researcher relates to the transcripts.

IPA is designed to be an idiographic and inductive form of analysis (Smith, 2004). It is idiographic in the sense that interviews are first conducted for each participant, analyzing them separately before extracting the themes through a cross case analysis. This way of working allows the uniqueness of each individual to be acknowledged while also appreciating that human persons share common lived experiences (Langdridge, 2007; Willig, 2008). Next, it allows common major themes to emerge which gives the analysis its inductive characteristics.

3.3.2 Hermeneutic Phenomenology (HP)

Like IPA, HP is a research method that focuses on describing and interpreting individuals lived experience. As Van Manen (1990, p. 180) said, HP *"is a descriptive (phenomenological) methodology because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves; it is an interpretive (hermeneutic) methodology because it claims that there are no such things as uninterpreted phenomena."* Similarly, HP sought to search for themes.

However, the various phenomenological methods exist differently on the descriptive and hermeneutic (interpretive) continuum (Finlay, 2011) with HP incorporating more of the latter. It does not have as many rules as IPA but aligns itself more with the act of understanding itself. As such, there is more flexibility in how text is interpreted with the researcher choosing steps that is most suited for the process of bringing to light meaning which has previously remain hidden (Thayer, 2003).

HP's interpretative inclination draws more influence from Heidegger's understanding of hermeneutics. As mentioned earlier, the meanings attributed to texts is impossible to be bracketed totally. Rather, the researcher "*moves from parts of the experience, to the whole of the experience, and back and forth again and again to increase the depth and level of understanding from within the text*" (Laverty, 2003, p. 30). This process is called the hermeneutic circle where lived experience is described by the participants; their accounts are then examined by the researcher while also considering his/her own lived experiences and context. This process is performed by the researcher initially within the individual texts and subsequently across the texts in order to identify common themes and patterns. This circle of examining is continuously carried out where the texts are examined and re-examined until the end of the spiral when the researcher has deemed that interpretation has reached a level of sensible meaning, at least for that moment (Laverty, 2003). In the HP method, '*truth*' is seen to be subjective, tentative and context specific so interpretation is only valid up to a point where there are no new reflections (Finlay, 2008).

Another aspect of HP is the interpretation and understanding of meaning through language. This idea is mainly attributed to Gadamer (1976) where he asserted that understanding and interpretation are inseparable. Also, understanding cannot be separated from language as they are both indivisible aspects of humans 'being-in-the-world' where language is the medium to which understanding occurs. Through dialogues and questioning, one opens up more possibilities of meaning (Gadamer, 1976). Instead of merely asserting one's view, being in a dialogue allows both researcher and participants to transcend their own thinking on the subject

and transform to see beyond the topic. Important here, however, is to be vigilant of one's own biases and assumptions through ongoing reflexivity such that "*the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings*" (Gadamer, 1989), p. 270-271).

3.3.3 Rationale for HP

This research considered both IPA and HP as choice of methods. Ultimately, the decision rested on the best way to bring out the phenomena being studied, the topic's ontological stance and my position as a researcher. From these considerations, it was a conscious choice to pick HP over IPA.

My understanding of authenticity is fundamentally a relational one, founded much on Heidegger's being-in-the-world and being-with-others. Thus, the method picked will also have to complement the ontological stance of my research topic. Both IPA and HP suit this research as they take into account the relational aspect of the participant in meaning making.

However, IPA as an approach *"committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences"* (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 1) which, supporting the opinion of Van Manen (2017), is not phenomenology. The interpretation of our lived experience is engaging in psychological sense making or reflection. For sure, IPA has its place in research studies however, the focus of this research is on the phenomenon itself rather than on making sense of how the participants makes sense of their lived experience. This is more an interpretive psychological analysis than pure phenomenology.

In addition, I connect the topic of authenticity and navigating one's voice with the desire of hermeneutic phenomenology: to give voice to that which experience speaks of- memories of moments lived through (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009). Again, with IPA focusing more on how participants make sense of their life experience instead of recalling the lived experiences in an event, the method at best gives voice to what one thinks of the lived experience through present lens but fails to give voice to the experience as immediate lived through before it is reflected. Therefore, in discounting IPA, HP is chosen as the choice of method.

4. Method

Within the notion of hermeneutic phenomenological method, there are numerous techniques or procedures which can be employed. Van Manen's (1990) Researching Lived Experience method will be employed in this research.

Supporting Heidegger's way of viewing phenomenology, the aim of hermeneutic phenomenology for Van Manen is like a 'clearing' where the phenomenon can be shown, revealed or clarified in its essential nature. This, he argues, cannot be achieved constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts, '*indeed it has been said that the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method!'* (1990, p.30). Yet, Van Manen equally qualified that even though there is no method, there is tradition, a body of knowledge and insights and a broad field phenomenological scholarship which can serve as a guide to phenomenological research.

An important reason for why I am inspired to use Van Manen's (1990) Researching Lived Experience method is my resonance with how he makes use of description and interpretation, or the intertwining of science with art, through various non-verbal expressions like artwork, action or texts to evoke lived experience which challenges, unsettles and reverberates us a heart-soul level.

Van Manen (1990) suggested six dynamic research activities which give hermeneutic phenomenology research its methodical structure:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

Below, the researcher's engagement with each of Van Manen's methodological activities and the orientation of the is-ness of the phenomenon are explored before this paper moves on to the specific procedures of carrying out the research.

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world

For Van Manen (1990), what is important behind every project of phenomenological inquiry is to be driven by a commitment to an abiding concern. This is a commitment of turning towards a particular aspect of human experience and never wavering from thinking deeply about it. Yet, it is also a kind of thinking that is not disembodied, taking into account the historical, social and individual context of a person which will help the research make better sense of the nature of the lived experience of interest to the research.

Relating this to the current research, the lived experience I am inquiring into is about navigating finding their voices for millennials who live in a collectivistic country. When I was orienting myself to a phenomenon, I asked myself what deeply interests me. Even within the field of authenticity, there are many areas I can explore. Was it really about whether people in collectivistic countries value authenticity? Was it about how authenticity is experienced in specific social relationships? And I found myself thinking more deeply about what it means to have a voice in the midst of being silenced and what that experience is like. I recognise that every person will share some common experiences but will equally have their own unique experiences and I was interested in exploring this in my research. Turning towards my life as a researcher, therapist and more importantly as a millennial who has grown up in an Asian society but who has also been immersed in the western world, I realised my own historical, social and cultural context of finding a voice or self-expression cannot be separated from my interest in human science and helping others like me.

2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it

The aim of phenomenological human science is, as Van Manen quotes Merleau Ponty (1962), *'re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world'*- the world as immediately experienced (p. vii). What we want from investigating individual lived experiences is to increase understanding and not to pass judgement, to tell the story that the data is telling rather than using the data to tell the story that the researcher has already held a priori (Glesne &

Peshkin, 1992). This requires the researcher to stand in the fullness of life to get a full understanding of the lived experience in all its aspects. It is also important to clarify the notion of 'data' is ambiguous here (Van Manen, 1990b). In positivistic social science, data is related to 'objective information'. Even in qualitative methods, we use the language of data collection, data analysis, data capturing etc (Van Manen, 2017a). However, it does not make sense to use the objectifying term "data" for phenomenological inquiry as phenomenology focuses more on meaning and meaningfulness over "informational" content. It is important for researchers to be aware that 'lived experiences' are the data of phenomenological research. Examples of lived experiences are collected however, they not used to make theoretical knowledge more accessible, concrete or intelligible like in natural and social sciences. Rather, phenomenological examples are obtained to discover what is phenomenal or singular about the phenomenon of interest (Van Manen, 2017a).

Van Manen has cited many ways of collecting and investigating lived experiences. In this research, I have decided to use interviewing as the main means to gather pre-reflective experiential examples. Through interviewing, I asked each of them a similar open question of *"describe a time when you had, attempted or struggled to have a voice?"* and giving them the space to open up about their experiences. I recognise that the lifeworld, the world of the lived experience, is both the source and object of phenomenological research (Van Manen, 1990b). Through these interviews, I focus on Van Manen's lifeworld existentials of lived space, time, other and body to guide my exploratory questions with my participants

3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon

For Van Manen, the grasp of a phenomenon does not come only from reflecting on what is said. Phenomenological research distinguishes between the 'things of our experience and that which grounds the things of our experience' and a true reflection on lived experience is to be able to grasp what gives a particular experience its special significance. Themes are what Van Manen have used to capture the phenomenon one is trying to understand. However, the challenge of phenomenological research is to not fall into the trap of objectifying or turning lived meanings into positivistic themes, sanitized concepts or objectified descriptions (Van Manen, 2017a).

In this research, I am guided by Finlay's (2014) suggestions to arrive at the essences of the phenomenon of navigation finding our voices. I constantly remind myself that my goal is not to '*find'* themes. What I am doing is not a thematic analysis where I seek to code my data or construct a theme based on the frequency of times it appears across my data. Even though the word 'themes' are being used in my findings, the aim is to explicate the phenomenon holistically. The 'themes' that I find are at best a simplification, fasteners or threads around which the phenomenological description of navigation is ultimately facilitated (Van Manen, 1990b). Again, I allowed Van Manen's lifeworld existentials to guide my dwelling with the data. Throughout, I asked myself which phrases or passes stands out to me more particularly. I tried not to focus on what the participants are saying literally but to look for implicit meanings and to pay attention to how the relationship between my participant and I is influencing how the former describes their experience?

4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting

Writing is another way to explicate the phenomenon in all its richness, ambiguity and complexity. All research needs to ultimately communicate its findings. In quantitative research, findings tend to be a reporting activity where it can be rigorous and scientific but the work can feel sterile (Barthes, 1986). Whereas, a good piece of finding within phenomenological research strives to evoke the lived world through its writing. Van Manen (1990) says, "*to write phenomenologically is the untiring effort to author a sensitive grasp of being itself*" (p. 132). A good piece of phenomenological text is one where the readers feel directly addressed by it: *"Textual emotion, textual understanding can bring an otherwise sober-minded person to tears and to a more deeply understood worldly engagement"* (p. 129). I am tempted to add that these persons include both the readers and myself as a researcher.

I had asked myself throughout the research process how I can express my findings in such a way that displays systematic rigor while yet being graceful, poignant and elegant (Polkinghorne, 1983). Writing was an iterative process where with each reiteration, I recognise myself as cultivating a deeper form of thoughtfulness of the phenomenon, bringing more justice and depth to the fullness and ambiguity of the lifeworld of a person who is navigating their voice.

5. Maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon

For Van Manen, carrying out a phenomenological research is a huge undertaking. It demands a lot from the researcher as he or she strives to maintain a strong relation to the research without being distracted by preconceived opinions and conceptions. To be strong in our orientation also means not to settle for superficialities or to fall into the trap of scientific disinterestedness.

My understanding of this activity is that this research could be a long drawn process of consistently reigniting my passion and interest in the topic across the research stages. This allows me to continually be mindful that I am not completing this research as a means to graduate from the doctoral program but rather, it is a dedication and commitment to both the topic and the phenomenological spirit of the research. Further, as time went by, I begin to recognise that real hermeneutic phenomenological reflection is ultimately revolutionary. More than just a personal interest in understanding what it means to be authentic, there is a moral element in undertaking such a project where I begin to ask how our position on authenticity and self-expression impacts on my work with clients in a psychotherapeutic setting. As I gain a stronger orientation to the idea that psychotherapy and training is not a moral and value free activity, I cultivate a stronger relation to the topic I am studying.

6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

The last activity, for Van Manen, is to not get swept away by the lived experience of the research that it forgets about how it contributes to the research as a whole. The researcher needs to constantly balance the design of the study and the significance of it playing in the total textual structure.

I see this as a dance between stepping into the data and stepping out to see how the findings contributes to the understanding of the topic. Agreeing with Crowther *et al. (*2017), this way of working reveals how the ontological and ontic nature of data analysis unfolds. I am not working on the data but working with data.

I draw inspiration here from Finlay's (2008) idea engaging in a dance between reflexivity and reduction from the literature review stage all the way to the final stages of writing up my

research. This was an iterative process which was helpful especially towards the end of my research where the writing up of the findings revealed fresh insights for my literature review.

4.1 Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee by the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University.

In the rest of this section, a detailed account of the procedure followed in the current research is given. It will be covering on details related to participants, data collection, data analysis, ethical consideration and evaluation criteria.

4.1.1 Participants

As I thought about the adequate participant size for this research, I am guided by Van Manen's (Van Manen, 2014) question *"how many examples of concrete experiential descriptions would be appropriate for this study in order to explore the phenomenological meanings of this or that phenomenon?"* (p.353). The goal of phenomenological research is not to look for generalizations but rather to offer sufficient evocative and rich examples to offer insight into the lived experience of navigation of finding a voice. Neither does it reach for saturation of data nor truth in the sense of capturing all the themes surrounding this phenomenon. As (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009) noted, regardless of the effort researchers put into describing an experience and interpreting its possible meaning, phenomenological texts can never be completed symphonies. Alternative interpretations always exist. Thus, my aim is not to describe all the themes that exist through the interviews. Rather, I would prefer to capture three to four themes and bringing them alive through the findings, recognizing that other researchers may see come up with different findings even with the same participant interviews. Based on this stance, 8 participants are ideal to yield enough rich textural data with depth.

In order to be eligible for this research, participants had to fulfil these inclusion criteria:

1. **Participant had or still consciously experienced tension between autonomy and interdependence.** The plan is to have the participant describe a specific situation

he or she was or is still in. Through the description, emerging themes relating to what it takes to balance between being oneself and being with others will be extracted. As such, this criterion is important in helping the participant to situate him or herself in a particular context in the interview process.

2. **Participant must be either Singapore citizen or permanent resident of the country.** This is to ensure that the participant identifies oneself as a Singaporean.

3. **Participant is a Singaporean millennial born between 1981 to 1996.** The years defining the millennial generation fluctuate across studies. Even for studies conducted by the same organisations, the cut-off years changes. An example is the Pew Research Centre, known for its studies on this generation, where they had reduced the cut-off for millennials from 1998 to 1996 (Dimock, 2019). The criteria for this age group is picked based on millennial reports conducted in Singapore (e.g. (M. G. Singapore, 2020)) and those by Pew Research Centre.

4. **Participant must have grown up in a local school up till at least his/her secondary school years.** Asian values, in particular relating to filial piety and loyalty towards the family and the country, was a political ideology that was common to Southeast Asia and East Asia in the 1990s. It aimed to use commonalities to unify people for economic growth. In Singapore, the Asian values were proposed as five Our Shared Values in 1991 (Tan, 2012). These Shared Values were most widely disseminated in the local education system, taking advantage of the mouldability of a child's worldview in their crucial developmental years. Thus, including this criterion helps to make the participants more homogenous as it ensures that they are inculcated with the same values in the growing years.

5. **Participants lives/lived in public housing.** A 2017 survey, called '*A Study on Social Capital in Singapore*', was conducted by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) of Singapore (V. Chua et al., 2017). It examined social ties in the country and found that public housing dwellers showed strong tendencies to mix with those of the same social class. This was the same for private housing dwellers, showing that there are few interactions between the two social classes. As class has shown to explain differences in how Singaporeans see themselves and make decisions (Yong, 2015), it is essential that this study recognizes this aspect. The choice for choosing those living in public

housing rather than private housing is mainly the fact that it is the type of dwelling for 80% of the population in the country (D. of S. Singapore, 2016).

The participants were recruited via a poster advertisement for research participants (see Appendix 2) on social media, particularly Facebook, and through word of mouth. The poster included the nature of study, my contact details and the recruitment criteria. On first contact, I confirmed if he/she was appropriate for the study by checking his background against the criteria. The interview time and place were then scheduled.

4.1.2 Data Collection

A face-to face phenomenological interview was conducted with the variation of the same question of *"describe a time when you had, attempted or struggled to have a voice"* posed to the participants. To ensure that my data was focused on lived experience of navigation, I had intentionally prepared my participants before the interview began by explaining what I needed from them: to describe a particular experience, as much as they can in present tense and in the first-person pronouns, and to try not to analyze or interpret their experience. The rationale behind this preparation was to help my participants access as much as possible the pre-reflective zone of their concrete lived experience while staying away from an introspective reflection. I know this is impossible as soon as we reflect on an experience, we have already stepped out of that lived experience, much less so that they are recounting an experience that has already happened. However, that does not mean we cannot try out best to get back into it and when my participants start to generalize their experience, I will attempt to bring the discourse back to the level of concrete experience by prompting them with questions like: *"what is that like?"* or *"can you give me an example?"*

With my first 3 participants, I had conducted my interviews with an interview schedule (Appendix 3) with open-ended questions and prompts. However, as I built a stronger orientation to the phenomenon and a greater appreciation for the goal of hermeneutic phenomenological research, I did away with the interview questions and went into the interview with only the main interview question. Following the list of question distracted me from entering into and engaging with lifeworld of my participants as I was too focused on finishing the list of questions before the hour ended. It was facts, not story, that I was unconsciously collecting. Yet, facts, as Van Den Berg (Van Den Berg, 1961), a psychiatrist known for his works in phenomenological psychotherapy, holds, are the "*skeleton of the past*".

Describing facts of the past is not the same as recalling memories. The skeleton is not the lived-through experience of the accounts. Lived experiences are often hidden deep down in our memories which can be elusive and difficult to reflect on (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009). Van Den Berg goes on to say that "*the past is not unavailable to us… only a word is needed, a chord, a small constellation of things, something incidental, whatever it is. It seems as though the past can only come to us through a back entrance; the front door is closed"* (p. 34). This word, chord or a small constellation of things can be triggered by many things. Just as it has happened in my psychotherapy sessions many times, an attentive listener who is genuinely interested in the client's stories and hearing back from their therapists what they have said can be what Van Den Berg calls "*a back entrance*". I see this also as one of the role of a phenomenological researcher which is to facilitate the participants to get into a space where they can get past the elusiveness of their memories and recollect them in all its vividness. Thus, removing the interview questions and attuning myself to the participants' particular lived experience was a good methodological decision. It resulted in better quality interviews with the latter 5 participants where it did not result in just collecting facts or recollection of a time past but came as concentrated and rich lived experience that informs me about their lived existentials – corporeality, temporality, spatiality and lived relations.

The interviews occurred in different places, depending on my participants' convenience. Some were conducted at my therapy practice, a couple were conducted at my participants' homes and two others were conducted in my house. This decision to be flexible with the interview locations was made on the basis that it was not a very sensitive and vulnerable topic to discuss about and conducting these interviews during Covid times meant we had to adhere to the restrictions posed at the time. Many of these participants were either working from home or not comfortable to travelling out of their comfort zone for fear of catching the virus. I felt I had to be flexible and balance between safety and quality of interviews. As such, I was open to conducting my interviews anywhere if both the participant and I can ensure that the location picked was a quiet, safe and confidential space for the both of us.

The interviews were about an hour long, audio taped using a phone and an iPad for transcription later. With permission from the participant, the recorders were placed on a table or any surface in view of the both of us.

At the end of the interview, I thanked my participants for their time and conducted a debrief. This was an opportunity where they can talk about his experience of being interviewed and

how his interview will be used in the research. This is to ensure that they do not leave with any negative feelings or misconceptions. A debriefing sheet was also given to these participants (see Appendix 3), containing a list of mental health organizations he could refer to if he felt that issues arose from our interview.

4.1.3 Data analysis

Following the interviews, each were transcribed from the digital recording by a professional transcriber. Care was taken over ensuring confidentiality of the participants by replacing their real names with pseudonyms.

Gadamer (1989) argues that there is no one best way of working with data. In fact, an overreliance on specific methods or procedures keeps the meaningful hidden and is antithetical to the pursuit of unconcealing the lived experience. This is resonated by Finlay (2009) where following a recipe of procedures distracts us from engaging with the phenomenological attitude and our attempt to 'see afresh'. Equally, Van Manen (1990) recognizes this, suggesting that hermeneutic phenomenology has different myriad ways of working with data. Following these phenomenological researchers who have paved the way before me, I let go of my need for certainty of a structured procedure. Instead, I allowed for a more organic approach with one aim in mind: to bring out the lived experience and evoke the phenomenon. In the process, I held on to Heidegger (1971) words: *" It can only be grown, and that takes time. One must immerse oneself in the process, awaiting. "Time times—this means, time makes ripe, makes rise up and grow"* (p. 106).

As much as I recognize there is no fixed method, there were commonalities in how I engaged with the data starting from analyzing to writing up the findings. Upon receiving the transcripts, I read each of them with and without the recordings. This was a lengthy process of dwelling with the data with the intention of ultimately feeling like I live the experience of my participants'. In the process, I was guided by two approaches suggested by Van Manen (1990).

4.1.4 Selective approach

I first engaged with the highlighting approach where statements or phrases that are particularly revealing or essential to the phenomenon of navigation are highlighted. These sections were then cut and pasted onto a table (see Appendix 5). An example of it would look like that:

I am always like thinking out of the box or I am out of the box in first place (Marcus, 2)

I approached the second step by arranging the highlighted sentences into clusters so that each section seem to relate to a certain aspect of the phenomenon. Each section was assigned a tentative theme. For instance, the theme of *Breaking Point* from Marcus' transcript had these following sections grouped together:

always resulted in me just being, just saying yeah, I'm done (47)

I think I've had enough of this…probably wouldn't want to spend too much time around this person again. (48)

I was done trying to be sentimental about our previous friendship; I was done trying to see the best in him (65)

During these two steps, I left the wordings exactly as found in the transcript. I found myself engaging in a sort of Tai chi where I would gain some distance from the interview to allow for any flow of key phrases, metaphors or descriptions to return to me. This process was iterative, following the principles of the hermeneutic circle: moving between whole and parts so that implicit meanings were brought to the fore for me.

These two stages were again repeated in other transcripts. At times, I weaved in and out of idiographic interviews and at other times, I dwelled on multiple interviews at a time. During this whole time, I paid attention to Van Manen's advice to sustain a strong and orientated relation, not only to the sum and parts of the transcript, but also my relationship to the process For each participant, I kept a diary with a record of my reflections as I dwelled in their lived experiences. At each moment, I kept a reflexive awareness of how my own narrative of the self and lived experience interacted with my participants' interviews and recorded them in these diaries. Below is an example of how I became aware that I held notions of self-expression as being authentic and used it to view one of my participant's voluntary act of keeping silent:

'I feel like there's a rebel in me' (Lyndsay, 3). I had a huge reaction in me hearing that. What does she mean by being a rebel? I obviously tied it to her not eventually telling others what she wants. Do I consider that as being a rebel? There's something in me that indeed wants to rebel against what she said. I see her as weak when she chooses not to speak up for herself.

4.1.4 Van Manen's Lifeworld

I had also approached highlighted sections from another direction, relating to them through Van Manen's lifeworld existentials of lived body (corporeality), lived relations, lived time (temporality) and lived space. An example of these two approaches put together could look like this for one of the participants: there was a strong corporeal feel when Marcus described himself being in a different educational environment as being *'Superman movie from Krypton to Earth'* (17). This description captured Marcus' visceral sense of being jolted from his natural attitude when events call forth a different way of being-in-the-world. An example of the lifeworld existentials analysed on the highlighted sections can be seen in Appendix 6.

This way of interacting with the data slowly allowed for lived experiential findings to emerge and unfold even more. The lifeworld approach helps me to narrow my focus more on the lived experience of my participants. As a result, some themes were taken out while others stood out more as the themes from the highlighting approach went through the lifeworld approach of analysis.

I am mindful that hermeneutic researchers recognize that truth is never fully revealed. In fact, there are multiplicity of meanings that can be unconcealed. Holding a strong orientation to hermeneutics puts my bearings on truth into question where one version of truth is not more significant than another (Gadamer, 1997). Another researcher may come up with different findings even with the same interviews. As such, again I had to let go of the need to reach a saturation of findings and pick three to four themes that were most meaningful to the lived experience of navigation.

During the process of picking the themes, I found it helpful to keep the following points in mind. Firstly, the themes must be meaningful and significant for the participants while evocative and relatable to the readers. Furthermore, the themes must evoke an 'aha' moment that Van Manen (2017) speaks about. It's a sense of 'that's it!'. Whereas there were many other themes that evoke a sense of 'yes but not there yet'. It helped that these emerge more as I engaged in dialogues with my mentor. Dwelling in the data is both an active and passive activity which took a lot of time. It was in this phase where I wrote and rewrote to explicate the phenomenon through its themes. Themes were sifted and filtered at every point until four major themes were settled upon- *Barriers and Boundaries, Being Invisible, Striving to be More* and *Breaking Point.*

Thus, even though the method of analysis was deliberately non-prescriptive, it was not a random picking of themes. There were guidelines to help me as I seek to maintain the robustness and quality of analysis. It was a process of maintaining a phenomenological attitude to the data and my own reflexivity the whole time. It was a dance, stepping into each participant's life and stepping back to gets a bird's eye view of the whole phenomenon. At other times, I step sidewards to look within me and how I relate to it. It was through this way of unstructured approach which has resulted in a more evocate re-telling of the lived experience of navigation.

4.2 Pilot Study

Prior to the implementation of the full research, I undertook pilot project interviewing just one participant as part of a Middlesex University requirement. A pilot study is a small-scale methodological test conducted with the aim of preparing for the main research by investigating if the main components of the study is feasible in practice (Van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2002). These main components include the research protocol, recruitment strategies, interview questions and data collection and analysis process such that potential issues can be identified and rectified prior to the implementation of the full study.

Reflecting on my experience in the pilot study, I learned that there was a huge gap between my theoretical understanding of the hermeneutic phenomenological approach and the ability to carry out such the research. Most crucially, I became aware that I was not attuned enough to the main aim of hermeneutic phenomenological research which was to evoke lived experience. I fell into common mistake of allowing the method to rule my research question rather than allowing the research question determine the kind of method is most appropriate for this project. Bakan (1967)would refer to this as methodolatry, in which I had unknowingly idolized adherence to fixed methods rather than flexibly utilizing methods suited to the research question. This is reflected in subpar findings that I felt did not do justice by capturing something of its is-ness of the phenomenon under study. Completing the pilot and receiving feedback from my examiners finetuned my attunement to what it means to work from bottom up and engage in hermeneutic and phenomenological work.

4.3 Ethical considerations

4.3.1 Ethical Awareness

I am aware that all research carries risk. There is an especially higher risk when it comes to qualitative studies as a researcher is getting participants to open up themselves and their stories to a stranger. The data revealed may pose risks to both participants and researcher likewise. Hence, awareness and sensitivity to how data is collected, interpreted, and presented is paramount to conducting this study ethically.

4.3.2 Confidentiality

Measures were taken to assure the participants that confidentiality is maintained throughout the study. Prior to the interview, the participants were given a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix 4), detailing the purpose of the research and how information is being used and stored. A Consent Form was also given to sign (see Appendix 5).

On the interview day, the participants are again explained about the limits of confidentiality. It is clarified that the interview is conducted as part of my doctoral research and has the possibility of being published in various sources. They were informed that the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Their data will be anonymized within the interview transcript. The audio recordings will be securely stored and deleted after it is transcribed verbatim. Lastly, the participants were reminded of their rights to withdraw from the study anytime up to the point when the research has been written up.

4.3.3 Risk to Researcher

Seven of the interviews were conducted during the Covid times when mobility was still much restricted. For that reason, I was open to conducting the interviews at either my home, the participants' home or my office. The place of interview was considered carefully to balance the risk to myself and the participants and the quality of the interview. I am mindful of the risk related to letting the participant know where I live or going to their houses thus, I ensured that we were not alone at home. All these were discussed with my participants prior to meeting. The interviews were always conducted in a private and quiet space but I made sure too that

there was always another adult in close vicinity. I has also let my family be aware of where I am and kept my mobile close to me.

4.3.4 Risks to Participants

Albeit authenticity may not be a contentious topic, I recognize that the nature of the interview can open up spaces that are emotional and vulnerable. I ensured that the participant was aware that he could stop the interview at any time. I was attentive to situations when the participant may possibly need more space to feel heard and supported.

The PIS clarified any deception issues by clearly explaining the purpose of the research. It was also clear in its explanation of the possible disadvantages of taking part in the research. As we wrap up the interview, a debriefing sheet was given with a list of referral resources, in case they feel troubled after the session.

4.4 Evaluation criteria

Across the research, I have mentioned that truth is not what I am looking for in my findings. Drawing on the Greek word alḗtheia (ἀλήθεια), Heidegger defines truth as unconcealment. Rather than concerning itself with agreement, correspondence or/and correctness, truth is the unconcealment of something hidden and covered up (Heidegger, 1962). Hence, unlike quantitative research, qualitative studies do not look for validity, reliability and generalisability.

Qualitative researches need evaluation criteria distinct from quantitative ones. They need a criteria that acknowledges that ‘*trust and truths are fragile’* and a good piece of work is one that captures *‘the messiness and complexity of data interpretation in ways that… reflect the lives… of participants’* (Savin-Baden & Fisher, 2002, p. 191).

There are many criteria ensuring good quality research. When I was looking for ways to ensure a good quality phenomenological research, I continually returned to Finlay’s vision that hermeneutic phenomenology need to maintain its scientific rigour but must equally be evocative and enriching. There must be a good balance between artistic and scientific element when I try to capture and access meanings and the evaluation criteria should acknowledge these two dimensions.

In evaluating the artistic side of the research, I am using Finlay's (2011) 4Rs, especially resonance. As I write up my findings, I constantly ask myself if I am 'touched' by the findings? Does the findings have enough texture to draw my readers into the lived experience emotionally or will it help to resonate with their own lives? Resonance taps into the emotional, artistic or spiritual side of us as we feel intimately the ambiguity, richness and ambivalence of the lived experience. The rest of 4Rs include rigour, relevance and reflexivity which I view as more aligned with the scientific side of the research. Here, I draw on Levitt *et al.*'s (2017) APA recommendations for reviewing qualitative research to guide my evaluation of these three areas.

Levitt *et al.* (2017) introduces the concept *methodological integrity* to describe the degree to which a researcher and readers are confidently convinced that the methodological basis has captured a significant experience or process related to the study's topic. Integrity is shown when the research design supports the research goals (i.e., the research problems/ questions); respects the researcher's approaches to inquiry (i.e. paradigms, or philosophical/epistemological assumptions); and are tailored to the subject matter. Two processes are used to evaluate the integrity of the research: 1. Fidelity to the subject matter, described as an intimate connection that researchers can obtain with the phenomenon under study; 2. Utility in achieving goals, referring to the effectiveness of the research design and methods, and their synergistic relationship, in achieving the study's goal.

A detailed evaluation of my research based on these criteria outlined above can be found in the discussion section.

4.5 Reflection

The choice to pick hermeneutic phenomenology as my methodology and Van Manen's method started out as merely something I resonated with. This was at the beginning of this research process 7 years ago. I had fantasies about what it means to work hermeneutically. I liked that I was part of the research process and not just an objective observer yet I need not reflect too much on myself as how heuristic research requires.

They all remained as fantasies until I was woken up from this dream when I received feedback from my examiners of my pilot study that I was not doing Van Manen's research. I needed to

brush up on my knowledge of it if I wanted to do hermeneutic phenomenological research using his method. That was a turning point for me. What does this research mean to me? How much do I want this research to help me on this personal quest for authenticity?

It was important enough that I decided to take a year out to brush up on my methodological knowledge. I played with the idea of using other methods but each time, I came back to Van Manen's method. Along the way, I had the fortune of a great mentor that journeyed through with me as I delved into this initially murky confusing method. However, the more I was acquainted with it, the more I appreciated the beauty, complexity, and value of finding the essence of our lived experiences.

I am a novice researcher. I recognize I am doing two things at one go- revealing the phenomenon of navigating our voices while learning a new research method. As much as in research, I was challenged as a therapist in how I practiced engaging with a phenomenological attitude and epoche. The hermeneutic process in the process of reduction was also something that took a while to grasp.

Fortunately, my efforts paid off and I am confident to say that my liking for Van Manen's method has since matched up to how I have honored it in my research. I am very clear that the goal of his method is to bring out the essence of lived experiences. It was not to find hard objective truth in the empirical sense. Thus, every decision I have made in the methods section, I had made sure I was aligned, coherent and consistent with his method.

I am clear I am not doing a thematic analysis. Even though Van Manen (2016) had written about themes, themes as he understood it aims to bring out the facets of the phenomenon as it is. In choosing to employ my phenomenological attitude and hermeneutic reflexivity throughout the data collection till writing up, rather than doing so at specific stages, was one of the deliberate attempts to continually respect the spirit of the method to allow the lived experiences to emerge in all its glory.

I could have gone down a variety of methodological routes, each bearing me in a different direction. However, I have chosen Van Manen's method, and I choose to own it. I recognize it is not necessarily the best one, but I believe that through each decision I have made in my methodology process, I have given my study methodological integrity.

4.6 Post phenomenological retrospection

I have been challenged to consider that phenomenology in Van Manen's approach is more than a qualitative method. I am in full agreement that phenomenology works with a different aim and perspectives, and has different evaluation criteria from qualitative methods like grounded theory, ethnography or even anthropology. For one instance, qualitative research methods are typically oriented to a specific social issue or concept but not to a phenomenon in the phenomenological sense. In addition, phenomenology, as a philosophical oriented method, employs the reduction and epoche which other qualitative methods do not use.

I cannot say if I fully understand and appreciate this idea that phenomenology is more than a qualitative method at the moment. As I write this reflection, there is still a gnawing question at the back of my mind whether this is an idealist debate.

Yet, this is certainly something that has peaked my interest that I believe its understandings will take a while to unfold. I am considering the impact of this idea on methodological integrity as my evaluation criteria. Methodological integrity as a criteria was created specifically for qualitative research to evaluate their trustworthiness. It is dawning on me that fidelity and utility are important but insufficient in phenomenology. There are more criteria for phenomenology that goes beyond what a typical qualitative research will use. An instance is the phenomenological nod that Van Manen often talks about. This resonance is on an embodied level. When a phenomenological text speaks to or touches me, it is showing me that this is a possible human experience. As such, a phenomenological text points out the existential phenomenon; whereas, typical qualitative research reflects mainly the psychological or social phenomenon.

Just the phenomenological nod alone has multiple influences on my research. Firstly, to stay closer to the phenomenon at hand, navigation of authenticity, I could have directed my attention more to thinking through how I write up my findings. Reflecting on it now, writing up the participants' stories was a way for me to make my thinking more transparent. It was me trying to live up to the methodological integrity of the research, rather than trying to do phenomenology. It was an innovative way to do so. However in mixing the methodological integrity of a qualitative research and trying to do phenomenological work at the same time, I veered away from focusing on the phenomenon of navigation which I have done a good job in

the themes and the lifeworld discussion. I can see now that as much as I was very clear about my aim in my methodology section which was to bring out the phenomenon in all its ambiguity and complexity, I could have executed it in a more stringent way.

5. Findings

5.1 Participants' voices

This section opens with a succession of voices. Each participant's lived experience of their navigation towards finding their own voice is presented in the form of an idiographic summary, in which the words used are those of the participants themselves. The decision to attempt an idiographic summary of each story seeks to honour each individual's lived experience, as expressed through their own words. In order to stay close to the purpose of this research, the summaries focus on each participant's lived experience of feeling silenced, and how they navigated a way through this.

Table 1 below provides demographic data on the eight individuals who participated in this research:

Table 1 Participants

Name	**Age**	**Ethnicity**	**Occupation**
Marcus	34	Chinese	Entrepreneur
Lyndsay	38	Malay	Civil Servant
Raphael	25	Malay/Chinese	Designer
Nathaniel	39	Eurasian	News Producer
Tammy	26	Chinese	Auditor

Debbie	27	Indian	Software engineer
Jenny	28	Indian	Engineer
Sophia	35	Chinese	Copywriter

While there are multiple ways in which my participants' experiences can be presented, I am concerned to ensure their voices remain active, rather than their stories being told in the third person. In a piece of research that is all about voices and silences, a third person perspective gives the sense that the author is someone associated with objectivity, authority, and value neutrality. I have no wish to mute my participants' real voices. I can't help but think that I am just like the many other people in my participants' lives who decides what their experience will be.

I have therefore deliberately opted to let my participants to tell their stories in their own words. Will this improve the quality of my findings? I certainly hope so. But more than this, I want my participants' voices to be witnessed and honored. I see this as an ethical responsibility As I get deeper into this research, I begin to agree more with Taylor (1989) that how we live our lives unfolds in moral space. For me, the need to value my participants' stories is as important as the light the stories may shed on the phenomenon of voice and silence.

However, implementing this decision was far from straightforward. The more I thought about it, the more conflicted I became. On the one hand, it seemed to be the right choice. Yet the moment I started writing these idiographic summaries, the more aware I became of how difficult it was to capture and convey participants' experiences, even when using their own words. After all, it is still I who decides what to include or exclude in light of the limitation of words in this research. I can't separate myself from my participants even if I wanted to. This further drives home my being-in-the-world.

I thought about inviting my participants to read these summaries and give me feedback, but then wondered whether this would serve any useful purpose. This certainly challenges my

stance as a hermeneutic phenomenological researcher as I witness how meaning changes each time we come back to reflecting on a phenomenon. As my mentor mentioned, life is like living a spiral: we often find ourselves coming back to the same point, but our view of things will have changed, given that our meanings are always changing due to our exposure to life. Given the probability of endless contextual variations how can anyone decide that a story shared at a particular time and place as "true", complete, or accurate? Being loyal to the hermeneutic tradition, I recognize that "*there can be no single correct interpretation because one's interpretation of the facts – indeed, the facts themselves – are products of one's interpretative stance*"(Flaherty, 2002, p. 479).

All these reflections make me think about what it means to have our voices. As much as I hope I have not, I may still have unintentionally misrepresented my participants' voices. For even if we have found our voice, there is still a chance that what we express (or omit) will not be received the way we intended. In this case, what does it mean to have found our voices if we are heard wrongly? Are my well-meaning intentions to try engage multiple ways of representing my participants' voices enough to fully bring out the complexity of their lived experience?

Marcus

I was dating [a girl in 2011-2014 who was] highly sociable and there would always be plans to actually get along with her friends. To her, a relationship didn't only mean it had to be someone who got along with her friends but it was meant to be someone who would definitely set both days of the weekend aside for her as well. It was hell.

Recurring in all these [social] scenarios would be the decision of whether to just go along with the group or whoever or the decision to just make a stand and call it quits. [My] decision [was often to] try to put up with it, try to go along with it. Either it was for the sake of giving certain relationships a shot or especially for things that I [was] not actually sure about, the only way that I actually get a benchmark of what would be socially acceptable or not would be from observing or learning from other people. I didn't really know much when it came to actually even interacting with certain people. So a lot of it was based on what others did or say. The outcome after processing all the signals that I got would actually be very conflicting. I guess it's some form of hope that I still hold. Maybe I'm wrong [about] certain things, maybe it's not

as bad as I think things to be. Maybe I'm just wrong about how shallow some of them are, maybe it's just me being too harsh in judging them. Just give me more time to get to know them more. But at the same time, [I] feel a certain level of …[disdain], contempt or passing judgement because I still saw a lot of them as pretty shallow people. I would still try to hang out but always resulted in me just saying yeah 'I'm done'. I've had enough of this and probably wouldn't want to spend too much time around this person again.

It was around this period [of dating] that it was actually the first time that I started exploring basically, different ways of going about life. At that time, a few of my friends and I were exploring different businesses to go into. I did already have that innate disdain for the system, for going through the matrix so to speak. And I want to explore a different way of going about life. Fortunately, for me, I [met] a couple of people with a similar mindset. So, trying to balance that with school and this (business), and that girlfriend back then, was (pause) pretty stressful and draining. That was the first time in my life that I was actually working really long hours, whether it was on the business or school. It was my first taste of working from 9 a.m. to midnight every day. And at the weekends, instead of work or sleep, it would be her time. This really pissed her off especially [during] the initial stages of the business. Things weren't really that fruitful yet. Income wasn't great. [When I spend] time with her, I will just be really tired. In the end, the business didn't work out. I wanted to do more than just having a job. I needed purpose again. So, I [joined] a non-profit organisation, so every other Saturday [I] would be busy with them. Eventually, she couldn't take it and left.

[When she left,] I just buried everything, any negative feelings or emotions. It just felt like I needed to get better at anything that I was doing. I didn't want to deal with [other things]. [All these] just made me more cautious in general. At one point, I was not a trusting person at all. I wouldn't actually trust anyone with anything. I [kept] to myself, not only in terms of interacting on a personal level. It was hell.

There's definitely the tinge of regret (laugh) when I think back about it. Especially because…if I had just listened to my instincts from the get-go, I wouldn't have wasted that much time and effort on things that just resulted in nothing.

Lyndsay

Four months into my new posting, I felt my organization was using me to show others "Hey, look! She is adjusting well from policy and research to being thrown to Woodlands Checkpoint and survived the whole posting." I almost felt like there was an expectation of me to be their poster girl. Initially, it was flattering that I was chosen to be someone who they could use to exemplify values which the organization stood for: adaptability and loyalty. But it is also a two-way thing. Like why choose me to be show-cased? Why me?! (putting fist to her chest) I really thought we could have worked out this time, why couldn't we? I'm supposed to be that girl with high potential. I am so personally invested. I chose to come back and you accepted me with open arms. I knew I was going to be posted out but to be operating from a strategic mind-set and doing nice fancy projects to being downgraded to flipping revenue statements, I asked myself 'have I really come to this?' (tears) Oh my gosh, a fresh grade can do this. Why am I, with a six-year-plus strategic portfolio experience, doing this? Is it normal for someone of such calibre to be treated in this manner?'

[I have] that feeling [having] so much to give and [I] can do so much, but circumstances don't permit [me] to. So, it's a bit like feeling a bit caged in [my]own self…not being able to unleash my true potential…[but] I'm not the type to complain. Sometimes some people would take it up to management and say 'look, you know, I just had a baby -- I'm not going to do shift work. Can you please get me out?' I didn't put up any resistance. I felt that if I were to do so there would be penalties. Obviously because the whole system was designed to test [our] ability to adapt to different portfolios in the organization. My understanding, through what I've observed, is that when they post someone out it's also a measure to see how the person adapts, whether they adapt well to what has been given to them. And if there were attempts to, say, appeal or go against that posting, somehow there would be a black mark.[I will] be kind of known as the person who kind of put up resistance towards that change which has been given to [me].

Raphael

I remember sitting her down. It was very formal because that's the only way I can talk to my mom. It's like talking to a client. I sit her down, bring her water, "Hey mom, we need to talk." That's the best method after a lot of trial and error. [Laughs] When you set the mood,

she understands that it's serious. Because she's like this wall, and I need to soften the wall first and then tell her, "Hey, yeah. my degree is this -- my job is this." So, I was just staging it up for the real deal. But my mom was just like going back and forth between conversations. Imagine I'm talking about A, and then she'll talk about B and you go back to A and B is unrelated to the conversation we're having. And along the way, there were parts where I feel, okay, now's the time for me to say this. This is a weird gut feeling... like 'Fuck it'. So, when that happens I'm like, "Mom you're not getting the point. This is what I want to say." So, I'll just say it.

It was draining. I entered [the] conversation telling myself that if it doesn't happen today, it will never happen at all. Because I am going to start school [and] I needed to tell the director, "Hey, I want to work for you". If it doesn't happen that day, IT means like I'm not doing anything for myself in my life anymore. I'll be just a 22-year-old with big dreams thrown in the bin and just carry on in my life as normal.

Debbie

One week before the wedding, I went to my supervisor and said, "It's a very stressful period, but I do need a bit of break in this week. I don't think I can work till 2am everyday because I've got lots of wedding preparations to do." And he basically said to me, "Yeah, you could just leave work. There's no problem, just leave, but just give your work to someone else."

By this time, I've been getting up at eight and going to work and coming home at 2am for at least four months. I am very tired. [However, they have also told me if] I leave, I won't be able to get promoted that easily. I will basically be given bad work, because they can't depend on me. So I will just [be] stuck with boring and brain dead jobs. They [wont] give me the meaty stuff. My conflict is why should I give up something that I enjoy because someone else is making it hard for me? It's just one of those things where I want this [job] really badly so I'm going to fight through it. I'm going to push through. I'm going to take what's mine.

But eventually, it was the lead-up to the wedding that was the biggest thing that made me leave, because I was incredibly unhappy. My then fiancé had told me "It's not worth what you're doing. You should be happy. So, enjoy yourself, go for a girls' night out, you're going to get married." How am I supposed to say no? How am I supposed to set my boundaries? I have no voice in this office. I'm the lowest ranked employee. How am I supposed to go to my supervisor to communicate that I need the week off? Because I have said that directly. If they can't understand me, [what] else can I do?

Tammy

I reached out to my coaching manager and told [that] I feel stressed out juggling two jobs, yeah, and because of that I also can't really perform very well in my current job. I had this expectation that [she] would help me, because a coaching manager is basically in charge of overseeing our career [and] well-being at work. She said she was very sorry to hear that, that she empathized with my situation. She told me to hang in there and reach out to the director who's in charge of our secondment. So I wrote him a very long email telling him about my situation. He replied, asking for us to have a video call and for me to explain more about my situation. So, during the video call, you know, he wanted to make sure that I wasn't just whining or not wanting to do my work. I don't feel trusted. After he confirmed that with me he had a call with my HSBC director. And after the call, he emailed me and said, "Oh I had a talk with your director, maybe you should talk to her." (laugh) It's like going back one circle. I reached out to my coaching manager in the hope that I do not need to associate with the director [of this job] anymore but [they are asking me to have a chat with her].I felt I shouldn't have maybe talked to my coach manager about this because now I'm afraid they might have this impression that I'm whining.

Nathaniel

The act of holding hands is such a simple act. But as a gay couple, doing it in public [in Singapore] is a very visual declaration of who we are and a moment of defiance. For the longest time, we walked side by side with each other, but we never held hands. We couldn't hold hands because he didn't want to. If I tried to hold his hand, he would push me aside. [It was] extremely frustrating because this is the person that I really like and love and I want to hold his hand. But he's not ready. So it's just trying again and again to hold his hand. As we are walking, [I started with] walking really close. [I will be] brushing the back of his hand [and] he will respond in ways that he knows. If he doesn't like it, he will move away. But if he is okay, he will just leave his hand there. At least the backs of our hands would be touching [even if we couldn't hold hands]. [After] period of time, we just held one finger. It was progress. It's slow and frustrating but it's progress. If I can hold one finger now, soon, I can hold a hand.

Jenny

No one knows that I can understand and speak Chinese. I'm not going to tell anybody. No one in my office knows I can speak the language. Because now everyone's so happy and comfortable saying things without realizing that I understand. I just kept quiet for four years. And then I just suddenly hear everyone say everything. So, I knew [their] opinion of me from the day one of me walking in, because [they] were very vocal about it in another language. And today, [they are] still my colleagues and telling me nice things in English. So, do I take [them] at face value [when they are] not speaking English? Or are they only [their] true selves when [they are] speaking [their] mother tongue?

Sophia

I was in Copenhagen for a conference and I stayed [on] to explore Europe. [When I was there, I] stayed in an Airbnb owned by two ladies. They were around my age, in their late 20s. [Through our conversations, I found out that these] two ladies were the kids of parents who are partners but not married. Deep inside me, my Asian side went "How can it be?" I [tried] not to show my Asian side. I [didn't go] like 'oh my gosh, your parents aren't married!' But appearance-wise, I [showed] that could be cool. "Okay, wow, tell me more because Asia is not like that." They were telling me that in the Nordic countries such partnerships can happen. And you can have children from these partnerships. And then I asked them, "So what happens to the kids when the partnerships fall apart?" And they tell me, "Oh, well, I mean, the kids can go on living independently by renting like their own apartments, there's no like, fear." [They said all] these things as if it's the most normal thing in the world. However, I've never seen this sort of societal structure before where partnerships happen without marriages, kids can happen. And when the partner separates, they can find new partners and everything goes on as normal. There's no trauma for them. So, I try not to appear shocked.

5.2 Themes

Four overarching themes emerged through the process of iterative analysis: **Barriers, boundaries and being stuck; Being Invisible; Striving to be More;** and **Breaking Points.**

These four themes should be seen as emergent, tentative and partial, rather than stand-alone or fixed. The notion that people's lived experiences can be described in themes seems paradoxical, given the complexity and ambiguity of human experience. As Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) notes, "Things and instants can link up with each other to form a world only through the

medium of that ambiguous being known as subjectivity" (p. 388). However, themes provide fasteners or threads, facilitating phenomenological description (Van Manen, 1990b).

Quotes taken from the participant interviews will be used throughout the findings. They will be referenced by their names and a number (e.g. Debbie, 12) which references the line in which the quote is found in their interview.

5.2.1 Barriers, boundaries and being stuck

To navigate, according to the Oxford English Dictionary (Stevenson, 2010), is to 'plan and direct the route or course of a ship, aircraft, etc., especially by using instruments or maps'. This implies that navigation is far from direct, straightforward or even visible at times. Reaching a destination requires maneuvering around, through or over certain obstacles or barriers. And there is always the possibility of finding oneself stuck in the shallows or on the rocks.

Barriers; boundaries; feeling stuck: these emerge as salient features of many participants' accounts.

In Debbie's case, she speaks of how stuck and powerless she feels when it comes to setting her own boundaries:

> *I would come home every day before the week of our wedding [feeling] stressed and tired. And [my then fiancé] told me, "It's not worth it, what you're doing. You should be happy. So, enjoy yourself, go for a girls' night out." In my head, I was [thinking] how am I supposed to say no? How am I supposed to set my boundaries? I have no voice in this office. I'm the lowest ranked employee. How am I supposed to go to my supervisor [and] convey that my wedding is coming and I need the week off? Because I have said that directly. If they can't understand me, how else can I do?* (Debbie, 17)

There is a palpable sense of stuckness in Debbie's narrative, a sense that she cannot move forward if others do not acknowledge her voice. It is as if she is trapped in quicksand, unable to move. Being stuck in quicksand is metaphorically and literally *'soul crushing'* (Debbie, 5) as it sucks the life out of us if we don't get out in time: oxygen and blood supply are slowly cut

off from our extremities and lungs. The body starts to feel like a heavy '*burden'* (Lyndsay, 175) as we feel pulled further down into our stuckness.

Raphael mentions feeling '*the weight of the world on my shoulders…forced to carry it along…*' (Raphael, 123).

Nathaniel describes how his '*body becomes very tense very tight…and [we] have to make sure to remember that I breathe in'* (Nathaniel, 31). Even as we were speaking about it, the air felt suffocating in the room and Nathaniel seemed to be breathing harder.

Once they get beyond this sense of being stuck, participants describe feeling relief (Lyndsay, 173), (Raphael, 123), and able to breathe (Lyndsay, 175). '*I just want to escape*' (Tammy, 199) feels like a plea for life. To move is to live. To be stuck is to cease to survive.

Power emerges as a major barrier to the exercise of personal agency. In Debbie's interview, she told of her supervisor's response to her request for time off: *"Yeah, you can just leave work. There's no problem, just leave, but you just give your work to [someone] else."* I said, *"I worked on it for two months."* They were like, *"Yeah, but if you can't get it done..."* (Debbie 18) The supervisor here seems to be giving the employee the freedom to choose, but the choice to go ahead is more like a power play. Whatever choice is made, she will still be at the losing end:

> *So, [I will be] basically given bad work, because they can't depend on me…because [I] might be gone anytime. [I will] just be stuck with…very boring and brain-dead job. They don't give the meaty stuff. So, there's this conflict of if I do I want, then I wouldn't be involved in this project in a way that I want to. It's very difficult because I'm not in control of anything, I'm just going [to work] and existing.* (Debbie 21)

Barriers can appear in a variety of forms: a particular person, a friend or family member, or even the culture or norms of one's society. Here, the lifeworldly elements of sociality predominate; the presence of barriers objectifies, fossilises and dehumanises the self, and the lived experience of the self becomes invisible.

As the self exists as an object for others, as a being-for-others, the experience of time becomes disjointed. Their striving in the world is in danger of ceasing to become a constant succession of Nows. For some, it is uncertain if decisions made in the present will contribute to hoped-for future projects. Ambitions, aspirations, and hopes for deeper sense of belonging with others are all threatened.

Tammy's account of experiences at work captures this sense of frustration:

> *There are times where they tell me, at the very last minute, that tomorrow 'let's go through this part of your work.' I [don't] have time to prepare myself. And because I'm new, I don't really know what's the right thing to do. Sometimes. I just follow what was done the previous year... I don't even know if I'm doing it correctly, I'm just following last year's work with the assumption that last year was correct, so it's going to apply again this year. I felt very lost sometimes, I didn't know what I was doing and then I was scared like there will be negative repercussions because I feel like I'm not performing up to standard.* (Tammy, 40-42)

Time is compressed. Past, present and future merge, yet the moment does not feel timeless. One moves towards the future in fear of negative repercussions; a lot is at stake if one does not perform well in the present. '*Bad impressions*', '*bad performance review*', '*promotions*' contribute to feelings of being *'not good enough' (Tammy, 49)*. Yet the past provides little direction on how one should prepare for the meeting.

One is able to determine if projects are possible only through '*buying some time*' (Lyndsay, 61) or '*[giving] more time*' (Mark, 57). Time is experienced as long and slow, without the certainty that it will lead to anything in the future. This experience of time is also conveyed by Nathaniel's account of his experience of holding hands in public with his gay partner:

> *It's just trying again and again. As we are walking, it starts with [me] basically walking really close. I am brushing the back of his hand like that. He is not an expressive person. So he will respond in ways that he knows, right? If he doesn't like it, he will move away, but if he is okay, then he will just leave his hand there. And then for a period of time, it was just holding one finger. Maybe. So, then we just hold the one finger. You know, it [is] progress. It's slow and frustrating.* (Nathaniel 53/54)

Being gay in Singapore is difficult. Holding hands is an expression of love and personal intimacy, yet it is also a '*visual declaration of who you are*' and an act of '*defiance*' (Nathaniel 57). Being a '*familiar foreigner*'(4) in the country has normalised Nathaniel's experience of being judged ('*Fuck if I care*' (46)). But being in a relationship means that he must '*negotiate his lived experience as well*' (46). It is not enough that he wants to express his love publicly if his partner is not ready or willing.

It is difficult to pinpoint what the barrier exactly is in this case. It could be the partner who is keeping Nathaniel from feeling a sense of belonging through physical intimacy. It could equally be Singaporean society, still not accepting of gay relationships. Or is the barrier simply the sum of both these elements? Either way, the holding of hands here acts as a metaphor for how time progresses slowly when barriers are faced. Time seems to take on a pace of its own. Time moves forward but only time will tell if one's strivings will bring one closer to one's future self.

Movement between past, present and future may or may not involve meaningful transitions; we never know for sure until we are in the future. The pace of time is not within our control. This way of being-with-time is '*frustrating*' (Nathaniel, 48).

Tammy, too, feels frustration at being stuck in her job:

> *I do get upset, like frustrated. I just have to do this… I just feel like it's never ending because I've been on this job for about two months and I still have to do it and I just want it to be over soon.* (20-22)

The 'it' is a symbol of being pulled by time. In this space, time leads us along, rather than walking alongside us. Our agency to decide how time is used is taken away. Time becomes a matter of 'wait and see'.

A sense of stuckness can also be felt when we try to move forward in time but find barriers keeping us in the past. As Debbie notes, entering the future only to see that nothing has changed is '*soul-crushing*' (Debbie, 5). For Debbie, the future represented greater autonomy and

independence. Yet when the future finally arrives, in the form of Debbie entering the workforce, it is as if she has not moved:

> *When I was growing up, I thought, okay, well after school, maybe the work environment will be different. Because I'm an adult now, [I can] be a bit more independent, and have my own voice or thought…[I] can be more creative… So, when I started working, it was just so soul-crushing… it's just the fact that like nothing's changed since school…I felt it was still in school*. (Debbie, 5-7)

Stuckness feels as if we have been taken back to the past, time and time again, against our will. Progress feels like one step forward but two steps back. Lyndsay describes this falling back as unjust:

> *…am I not dumbing down, toning down, am I compromising my personal growth? To know that I'm kind of a bit of a downgrade…from doing nice fancy projects like environmental research…[to] now flipping through revenue statements and making sure everything tallies…it's very manual and I feel like, "oh my gosh, a fresh grade can do this? Why am I, with a six-year experience plus strategic portfolio experience … doing this?"* (Lyndsay, 63-65)

On the face of it, the mandatory departmental rotation of employees sounds like an opportunity for those employees to grow and learn. Yet Lyndsay's posting tugs her back in time, rather than pushing her ahead. The past is where one comes from. Going back is regress, a downgrade and a compromise. It brings us down, rather than helping us transcend who we are. This feels especially painful after experiencing what Lyndsay calls it her employment '*nice sweet spot*' (34/37): work in which she could shine:

> *… I am comfortable in the domain of knowledge. I know how things work…I look forward to going to work. No matter how difficult or challenging the tasks are, I am ready to jump on them head on. I know how to work around, look for solutions and contribute…* (Lyndsay 37)

After a positive spell at work, Lyndsay now feels she is *'back to square one again*' (Lyndsay, 154). Time teases. It punishes. To have tasted the future and known what life could be, only to

realise it is only '*temporary*' (154) seems cruel. The future seems within reach but always slips out of our fingers when we touch it. Time is elusive.

Just as one can get stuck in the past, one can get stuck in the present. The latter, though, has a different flavour: being stuck in the present is to be fossilised and mummified, to be seen as a '*poster girl*' (Lyndsay, 111), or a '*token*', (Jenny, 10) or someone who becomes '*featured*' (Lyndsay, 115). How we are in the present is cut off from our past, leaving us no agency to determine our future. Even this present self is moulded by others, like a wax figurine. We are '*chosen*' (Lyndsay, 114) to be someone '*to exemplify values which the organization stood for: adaptability, loyalty…*' (Lyndsay, 113). Or we are to be that '*Indian child that speaks Mandarin*' (Jenny, 44). We are made to feel like a sideshow attraction, *'like Dumbo … the only elephant with huge ears.'* (Jenny, 44). When the self within the mould asks, '*are we all not normal?*' (Jenny, 110) or '*why me?*' (Lyndsay, 116), this underlines the sense of being confined to just one way of being, one that is not even self-chosen. Stuckness feels as if we are trapped in our own bodies, or in a shell created by others.

Barriers keep us stuck not only in time but also in space. Stuckness feels like being in a space where one has little power or strength to hold boundaries to protect the self from others. People constantly push us and disrespect our boundaries:

> *Just a couple of years back, I met up with some old friends from church and some of them are married and have kids. So they did the typical Chinese New Year relative questioning: "when are you getting married?" "When [will] you have kids?"* (Marcus, 98)

The questions may seem innocent, but what is really being asked is whether one is the same as everyone else. As one participant notes, these questions assess if you are in the *'same circle'* as others:

> *I [decided] to buy this HDB (Housing & Development Board; referring to public housing in Singapore) myself. My partner is not going to put a cent in. So… concerned naysayers will [ask] me, "Sophia, why do you want to buy alone? You know you going to marry [person] right, so [shouldn't] you should buy together? Why should a girl buy a HDB alone?" In my mind, that is so small like why should I put myself in a circle? …*

> *I see what he can offer me. He has a house in Japan. He [can do so many things.] And that feels like such a big world to me…[but] when naysayers say, why [do] you want to buy the HDB alone? I literally feel like they burst my bubble and I have to shrink into their bubble and go into that small bubble of theirs. My big circle becomes a small bubble and suddenly I have all these concerns I never ever had before… I am put into this jail. [I] must worry about whether he can pay, I don't want to worry about these things…* (Sophia, 48-51)

Sophia's decision to purchase a house on her own results is linked to the widened horizons she has acquired through her nomadic days of travelling. To have her bubble burst means to be trapped in the circle she came from. There is a sense of being forced, shrunk or fitted into the same circle as others. The boundaries close around us. This small circle becomes a jail.

A jail is a place where one is not at home. It is a place of worry. It is '*hell*' (Marcus, 85). Being trapped in this small circle is hellish because one is doing things *'for the sake of it, not because [I] actually do have a relationship with that level of intimacy with someone'* (Marcus, 110). This space is hell also possibly because it is not big enough in which to feel a sense of belonging.

People's glances and other reactions only reinforce this sense of being trapped. Raphael tells of how he waits to be targeted by his relatives every Chinese New Year:

> *I was this guy on the sofa…and [my relatives] went, "Raphael, where do you go for [school]?" "Oh, I go to [a particular school]". But [they] think that [this particular school] is for law... I'm like, "No." "Chemical engineering?" "No, I do design." Then the whole crowd literally went, "Oh..." That was very new because [in the past] even [if] I failed …. there's still noise in the atmosphere…But at that time, nobody said anything. It was like a very long silence and [I thought] "…did I do something wrong?*" (Raphael, 50)

This conjures an image of people zoning in on a particular person, causing the latter to shrink under the '*spotlight*' (Raphael, 45) of others. People's remarks and glances bring to consciousness how significant or insignificant one is. In this context, Raphael's relatives hold immense power. Their presence reminds him of the *'prophecies'* (73) he is supposed to fulfil for the family as the eldest son on his paternal side, with the responsibility to carry on the

family name. It is as if their glances have the magical power to zap the self. The self, rather than the space, shrinks. When one shrinks, the space should feel bigger. However, it does not feel airy and ventilated in this space. It almost feels as if the space is too big to fill up. No amount of meeting family members' expectations (in Raphael's case) or fulfilling one's responsibilities at work (as with Tammy and Debbie) can ever seem enough. Space seems to lack boundaries, yet being in this space is suffocating. It feels "*demoralising*" (Raphael, 43), "*scary*" (Raphael, 53) and '*pressurising*" (Raphael, 53) to be in such a space.

Yet the situation is not static. As Nathaniel notes, '*the definition of who is a Singaporean expands and contracts all the time*' (Nathaniel, 74). While individuals may try to expand their identity through dialogue, a debate in parliament on whether Singapore should support LGBT people can threaten the idea of Singapore as a home. There seems to be an interplay between space and self. Within the stuckness, the self is a '*constant tug and pull*' (Nathaniel, 72) between tight boundaries and lack of boundaries (boundarylessness). Having too many boundaries suffocates. Yet being in a place without boundaries is equally scary. To be stuck in these spaces is to not feel a sense of belonging, to not feel at home.

However, almost all the participants find consolation in having something or someone to hold them together in this space of stuckness. For Raphael, the simple act of holding a glass of water can help keep him focused:

> *I walk past my mom…look at her and think, 'oh shit'. Then I go [into] the kitchen, take a glass of water, then go back to the living room… I look at her again, stand there for [a] few seconds… "Hey, mom, you want water?" She said yes. I go back to [get another glass of] water. I asked her because I was just trying to delay the confrontation in a way… Holding the water is of course for me to drink, so I can talk more... it's [also] a distraction for me to … think twice when I go back to get water.* (Raphael, 108)

The glass of water here acts as a symbol, a means to control one's anxiety and nervousness when one speaks up. The incident evokes the image of someone whose soul feels threatened, who fears being crushed by revealing their voice to others. Holding the glass is an attempt to hold it together.

Without others at our side, an object feels better than nothing; it helps us compose ourselves and calm ourselves down. It makes sense to think of objects as acting on behalf of families, friends or allies: acting as '*anchors*' (Nathaniel, 69). An anchor provides stability, security, foundation and grounding when one feels out of place. Seen through this lens, a dining table no longer serves simply the purpose of serving food; it also brings people together:

> *…it was very intentional that we want a large table, right, because we wanted to gather our friends around it… Not everybody has their own space. Most people live with their parents, their parents don't know [or] they may not be welcoming of gay people…when we hold dinners, it is that feeling that you are somewhat family at the table…we have a good time, [we] laugh, [we] cry, [we] scream, [we] lip sing you dance. (Nathaniel, 70).*

Here, the table has transcended its use as a space to hold our food or drinks. It is the soul of a home where people come together to connect. In a space where we are either too boundaried or unbounded, the table becomes a safe space where we are free to be and to express ourselves. It acts as a bond and provides a tangible space of belonging, especially at times when one feels '*pushed away*' (Nathaniel, 72).

A bond, in the sense of a relationship and a connection, runs like a thread through most participants' accounts. Aside from objects, people in the form of families, friends and colleagues form these safe boundaries by *'[holding] our hands together*' (Lyndsay, 54). They are a source of '*comfort*' (Lyndsay, 67), '*support*' (Debbie, 36) and *'empower[ment]'* (Raphael, 79). Camaraderie and solidarity seem important in making this stuck space more tolerable and not too punishing. The presence of strong support reminds the participants that they are not alone, even if they feel '*lonely*' (Raphael,133; Debbie, 52) in this space. One gets a sense from the interviews that the stronger the support, the more one is able to borrow strength to bear heavy '*burdens*' (Lyndsay, 175) or '*weight*' (Raphael, 115) imposed by others.

5.2.2 Being Invisible

There is a sense in which being invisible, against our will, can be worse than being dead. At least when we are dead, there is still the possibility of being remembered: obituaries, prayer

altars and festivals are among the many ways we remember and venerate thosese who have died. Loved ones may have passed on, but their presence may linger, sometimes for generations.

Being invisible makes us feel that we do not matter. It is like not having a form. A form allows one to act in the world. It gives one the chance to steer their course of life. Having no form is to be neither seen nor heard.

For Tammy, being invisible means being listened to but not heard. It's about not being taken seriously, such as when she tries to speak out about being transferred out of her current project:

> *[My coaching manager] said that she's very sorry to hear [and] empathizes with my situation. She told me to hang in there and reach out to the director who's in charge of [my] secondment. So I wrote him a very long email telling him about my situation and he asked me to … confirm [I] did everything [I was] supposed to do… I felt like his impression of me was that I'm whining and I just don't want to work hard… After that conversation I had with him… he emailed me and said, "Oh, I had a talk with your [project manager], maybe you should talk to her." (laugh) It's like going back one circle.* (Tammy, 117)

Tammy has reached out to her coaching manager in the hopes of not needing to *'associate with her [project manager] anymore'* (118). Instead, she is directed back to this very individual. She experiences this as *'going back one circle'.* To go in circles is not to make any progress, to hope for movement only to find oneself returning to where one started out. It seems futile to speak out; employees should only follow instructions, not question authority. Powerlessness runs through the entire interview. Tammy's act of voicing her concerns is interpreted out as her shirking responsibility rather than taking the initiative. There is also a sense of being passed around. In the end, she returns to where she started out. Or possibly worse off if she is now seen as someone who '*whines*' (Tammy, 257). Nobody wants to assume responsibility for her; she cannot even take responsibility for herself. In this situation of helplessness and frustration, laughing about it seems to the only appropriate way to cope.

Jenny, too, experienced this sense of being passed around when she had to switch classes in Primary one. *'Out of convenience'* or because '*it operationally makes sense'* for the school, they '*just took me and then put me here*' (76). Being passed around, or '*throw[n]*' (77) is to

not be taken seriously. Not being taken seriously is to not see the person and their experience. One is present but not seen. Jenny gives a flavour of it when talking about how she considered asking or a switch back to her original class: '*No one is going to sit down [and ask], "Oh, let me see your well-being. Are you mentally okay?*"' (85). One's experience and the impact of it is invisible to others.

Being invisible by neither being seen or heard can also be experienced as being passed over. One is not significant enough to go the extra mile for. One gets a feel of this through Debbie's story of getting married in a foreign country:

> *The wedding dress needed ironing because we transported it in a bag in the airplane and it got a crumpled on the bottom…my family are all out in the countryside and didn't have a proper iron and didn't want to burn it. We had one week there. So, [my fiancé] asked my mother-in-law to help us with the dress…but there were so many [defences] like 'oh but we've got to come and pick it up. We got to do this, we got to drive there.' And it was lots of back and forth to the point where even the day before the wedding the dress was just not done, and we just had to make do with it. We just hung it out and hoped that the creases would just come out*. (31)

As beings-in-the-world, our actions and our material world are extensions of us. The focal point at a wedding is the couple. A wedding dress is often one of the highlights, helping guests to focus their attention on the people they are celebrating. The wedding gown is a celebration of the bride. Being refused help with the presentation of such a symbol is an experience of being disregarded. One is not *'special'* (Debbie, 28) enough to be kept in mind or *'supported'* (Debbie, 32).

Our agency is also threatened when we are not treated as having a form. For Tammy, it was pointless to take a stand by speaking out. Debbie found herself *'demonised'* (Debbie, 21) for taking a stand:

> *So, you are basically given bad work, because they can't depend on you… And so, you're just stuck with all these small bugs and very boring and brain-dead jobs. They don't give you the meaty stuff…it's very difficult because I'm not in control of anything, I'm just going there and existing.* (Debbie, 26)

The etymology of the word 'exist' or 'ex-ist' (Latin: ex-sistere) is to 'stand out'. To exist was originally meant to have an active element to it (Macquarrie, 1972). Yet, Debbie's usage of the word 'exist' feels far from this; it evokes lying around waiting to be used. In her own words, to exist is to *'have everyone else play your day for you'* (22). One exists to be used. What is invisible is the agency of a person. Debbie's phrase *'soul crushing' (5)* takes on a richer meaning in this context, where the deepest part of us that makes us human is stifled and our agency is invisible to others.

To have our souls crushed is to be like the walking dead. When we are restricted from participating in life, when our passion to celebrate life is met with people telling us *'everything cannot-cannot-cannot-cannot'* (Raphael, 13), life is *'depressing'* (15). To exist is also to '*sit down and do nothing so it's just like me wasting my entire day*' (Raphael, 16). A conflict arises between two choices: to remain invisible or to be visible but penalized.

Or being invisible is to take on a form that is not ours. When we are fitted into a mould: for example, that of a *'poster* girl' (Lyndsay, 111) or a *'token girl'* (Jenny, 89), or a *'good girl'* (Debbie, 47), our individuality is buried, hidden, concealed or masked. Marcus describes it thus:

> *Everyone is a different type of Khong Guan biscuit* (a brand in Singapore*). [We] can only be this one type …so then you try to press and squeeze and fit the biscuit into a certain mould even though it does not make sense to do so at all*. (Marcus, 103/104)

One is mummified, fossilised, curated and *'showcased'* (Lyndsay, 114). According to societal expectations, the best path for anyone is the one most travelled: fulfilling societal expectations relating to marriage; being a *'happy bride'* (Debbie, 27); starting a family; making career choices; *'represent[ing] [the] family name'* (Raphael, 38). Here, the person is seen through a shared societal lens or filter. Only '*if you can give something to someone, then you will be seen'* (Debbie, 53).

Pain suffuses most participants' stories. What is this pain? The pain of invisibility is to feel alone, deserted, lonely and isolated. On multiple occasions, participants teared up when hearing themselves speak of having to hide parts of themselves. The support of others, in the form of

family, friends or colleagues, eases but neither removes nor normalises the pain of not being seen and heard. It lives within us as a heavy thingness in our bodies. Whether expressing itself as digestive issues (Tammy), heaviness in the heart (Lyndsay) or difficulty breathing (Nathaniel), being invisible seems to eat us from within, draining the body of life and denying us being recognised as unique individuals.

Being invisible to others is to experience that being-with-others, that feeling of a sense of belonging, is accessible to everyone else except us. One feels like an *'outcast'* (Marcus, 106), a *'familiar foreigner'* (Nathaniel, 4), a *'follower'* (Jenny, 78) or a *'backbencher'* (Lyndsay, 21). If one plays the game of *'conform[ity]*' (Marcus, 106), there is a chance one can fit into a group. Maybe one will *'stick out'* less if one *can 'just be a sheep with the other sheep'* (Jenny, 78). Even then, fitting in is not the same as having a sense of belonging, which, as Nathaniel observes, is

> *… all the kind of peaceful moments that we have… having breakfast and reading the newspaper, going back to bed and watching a movie, making dinner together. it's those …small mundane moments, … but you feel a sense of calm. It is these moments where [I] don't have to debate, [I] don't have to negotiate…* (Nathaniel, 77)

When one feels a sense of belonging, one does not need to do anything; one only needs to be. Whereas, with fitting in, there is a sense of having to actively try to be part of a group. For Nathaniel, this means having to educate others about the diversity of accents in Singapore. He is constantly asked, *'Are you local? What exactly is your race? But did you go to school here?'* (64). By repeatedly having to '*expand the definition of who is a Singaporean'* (Nathaniel, 66), Nathaniel is reminded of his invisibility every time he tries to assert his presence.

Not feeling belongingness engenders a feeling of loneliness. Even if there are supportive people around, one is not fully understood. Consider Debbie's account of the run-up to getting married:

> *Nobody understood what it's like to feel redundant every day. During work for one half years, [I was] everyday going in and like not being seen for a whole … one and a half years. And then…it is my wedding. I'm some somehow meant to be really happy now. But I can't just switch. (*26)

While family and friends were supportive, Debbie was still expected to be a *'happy bride'* (Debbie, 27). This suggests that even those closest to us does not see us. We are seen in terms of predicted behaviour in life events, rather than our own lived experience. This is also seen through Lyndsay's experience of her parents as, unhappy at work, she contemplates changing her job:

> *...in my parent's mindset for example, work is just work. It's an iron rice bowl with the government. [My parents' would say] "Why are you making such a big fuss? You know this happens everywhere, kind of like just suck it in."* (26)

Her parents' critical, unempathetic tone comes across strongly. Families may mean well and have good intentions but one cannot help but feel pushed away here. Isolation fills the air. As Lyndsay expresses in the following sentence, *'it was a battle I've always faced alone, I kind of didn't have much like support'.* (26)

Being invisible strips us of our agency and denies our need to feel a sense of belonging. To be in such a place is lonely and isolating, even if we are still surrounded by supportive people. To be invisible against our will is in this sense worse than being dead; we wonder if, at the end of the day, we will ever matter.

5.2.3 Striving to be more

All the participants described how they strove to move forward, despite the barriers and pushbacks. Through striving to be *more*, possibilities open up. There is a drive to transcend as well as a reaching to attain what feels deservedly mine.

As one seeks transcendence, there is a sense of wanting to achieve one's potential, to find a different way of being. For Raphael, having *'big dreams'* is the starting point:

> *...I entered the conversation telling myself that if it doesn't happen today, [it will] never happened at all... [it will mean] I'm not doing anything for myself in my life anymore...I will be just a 22-year-old with big dreams, thrown in the bin and just carry on in my life as normal.* (Raphael, 98)

Passion drives an individual forward, urging that individual to continuously surpass him or herself. It is the fuel that propels one forward and higher. This passion could come in the form of loving the nature of a job:

> *I love programming. I shouldn't stop what I'm doing. I love the job. So, when I went to Europe, like that was in my head, I was missing work, I was missing coding. I felt like I shouldn't be doing this, I shouldn't be out here, I want to work. I'm going to take three months out of my life to go on this trip, but I really want to work.* (Debbie, 14)

Passion is the pull towards a dream. Debbie's love for her job is a force that encourages her to ask for more guidance. It develops into a desire to do better, one which brings her to *'[her] supervisor and make sure I take all the requirements because I just want to make sure that I know what I'm doing'* (Debbie, 9). Passion is also a desire to *'grow'* (Lyndsay, 19). To grow is to *'see a bit more'* (Lyndsay, 6), to not *'confine myself' (7), 'to be moved around'* (10), to not *'stay stagnant'* (10). There is '*purpose... in doing more than just having a job '*(Marcus, 37). This is well-worth the '*long hours'*(36) , '*tired[ness]'* (37) and far from great income.

Sometimes, passion is ignited when one is placed in a new environment. This allows one to become aware that people live differently and place values and importance on different things. One's assumptions are also put to the test. For Marcus, it was his shift to a completely different environment in his formative years:

> *The analogy I can use is… in terms of academics standards is like, is really like Superman movie from Krypton to Earth..., it really wasn't that, that big of a step up, to be honest. The toughest homework would be bringing the Math textbook home. Do 20 minutes of Math. It doesn't matter how many questions, just do 20 minutes (laughs). I don't think it's because I was that intelligent or anything but… maybe the word is… surprising. It was pretty surprising when I did top the class at both Math and English. I didn't quite expect to top English students at English and Maths. … I guess the focus over there was more on the all-round development. So, we come back, that's when I guess grades and performance significantly dipped. And ever since then, the rest of primary school, it was just something I questioned. Like why is there just one, just one system? Just feels like I'm lacking in other areas.* (Marcus, 17-19)

Eyes are widened and perspectives broadened. With that, possibilities for a different way of being are put into our consciousness. It is as if the veil over our eyes is finally lifted. It is an *'eye opener'* (Marcus, 8).

Sophia describes how her nomadic lifestyle in her early 20s have exposed her to *'see so much diversity that I realize I don't have to stick with a singular narrative or voice that has been imposed on me, but so assumed of me as a Singaporean.'* (3). She continues:

> *I was… in Copenhagen once. [There], I stayed in the Airbnb of two ladies. [They] told me that they were the kids of parents who are partners but not married. I was like oh my gosh your parents aren't married. Deep down inside, my Asian side [went] "How can it be?" But appearance-wise, [I acted] cool. "Okay, wow, tell me more, you know, because Asia is not like that." So, they were telling me that in the Nordic countries, partnerships can happen. And you can have children from these partnerships without marriages. And then I asked them, "So what happens if the partnerships fall apart, what happens to the kids?" They tell me "the kids can go on living independently by renting their own apartments… then their parents who are now separated, they find new partners, and everybody just accepts each other." [They said it] like there's no fear." [I] see all these things as if it's the most normal thing in the world. When I encountered that, I realize I started thinking about what marriage is to me, why is it that these Nordic countries can have such a different societal structure?* (21-29)

Transcending the self also involves a *'liberation, the feeling of being presented with more choices and going through the thought process of choosing what is best for myself'* (Sophia, 32). It is to be free from needing to conform. It is *'a sense of freedom'* (Lyndsay, 142) that calls for a *'celebrat[ion]'* (Raphael, 123) because *'[I] finally got my life back' (Lyndsay, 173)*.

Another aspect of striving for more is the sense that I am getting what is deservedly mine. Whereas transcending self is about reaching beyond where we already are, 'getting what is deservedly mine' starts from a place of being lesser. There is something here about asking to for one's dignity to be respected.

When facing barriers and experiencing invisibility, there is a sense of endless struggle. Not being able to be recognised or accepted for who we are seem like obstacles to be overcome.

They slow us down and chip away at our fighting spirit. Becoming more *'cautious'* (Marcus, 83), we close down to protect the self: *'I wouldn't actually trust anyone with anything. I would just keep to myself in terms of interacting on a personal level.'* (Marcus 84). We feel *'caged'* (Lyndsay, 73) and *'guarded'* (Jenny, 68), unable to know *'how to handle the situation'* (Raphael, 77) or*' unleash [our]true potential'* (Lyndsay, 74). We resemble a flower that is wilting and losing its charm.

In contrast, when we strive to get what is deservedly ours, we fight to remain open. To remain open is to stay hopeful that one still has agency, that one can still choose a path even when the going gets tough. We know that *'at least I tried'* (Jenny, 70), that *'trying my best'* (Tammy, 56).

Patience seems to be a virtue here. Nathaniel recounts how he responds when questioned about his national identity:

> *...the topic of race always comes up in conversation. "So, what race are you?" "Are you local?" "So, did you serve [the army] here?", "But you don't really have an accent." It's all those questions that are trying to either tick or box [me] into categories. And then [I] tell them, "Oh, actually, my mother's Chinese, father is Belgian. [And they go on asking] "But did you go to school here?" they are trying to decide in their minds whether [I am] Singaporean… I understand [they are questioning] out of curiosity, but the reflection back is they are trying to decide whether [I am] Singaporean… it becomes [them] trying to decide if it is for me, [but] I have to stop looking at that. Rather, it should be the other way around. Why can't I be Singaporean? So basically [gently explaining that]"even though my father is Belgian, Singapore is a diverse country, it is a country of immigrants, you know, so Singapore was built by immigrants….[As for my accent, I say,] " Oh, many people speak differently, there are many kinds of accent in Singapore.* (Nathaniel 63-65)

For Nathaniel, getting what is deservedly his involves striving not to be excluded from the category 'Singaporean'. Nathaniel has a powerful voice which can sometimes come across as aggressive and assertive. Yet, there was also a certain gentleness to his voice. The pain he had experienced in Singapore by being excluded as an Other and a gay seemed to bring on this gentleness. This dance between assertiveness and gentleness seems to guide his efforts to be

included and to expand *'the definition of who is a Singaporean'* (Nathaniel, 66). Accepting a shrunken definition of what it means to be a Singaporean would mean giving up his national identity. In contrast, remaining open is to believe that the cause is not lost.

Staying open involves a lot of hard work. It takes grit to stay true to what one stands for in the face of strong forces. Such forces could be government policies that are perceived to exclude (as in Nathaniel's case), authority figures (in the cases of Lyndsay, Tammy and Debbie), social norms (as for Sophia, Jenny and Marcus), or family traditions (as with Raphael). This sense of grit is a *'fight'* (Nathaniel, 34). It is a fight to not back down. It is not a fight-against but a fight-for. This fight-for resonated in Tammy's description of what happened when she *'[took] matters into [her] own hands'* (Tammy, 322) after realizing that speaking to her bosses was futile:

> *… now I'm searching, trying to ask around, "Hey, do you know anyone who needs an associate in this job, can you put me in?" It hasn't worked out very well but there is still some time. I try my best to get out of that, but if I can't, then I'll just have to accept it and go through [the] three months. At least I tried so when I look back, I won't regret* (328-344).

The fight-for involves fighting for what the self considers it deserves. It is not about bulldozing one's way through; rather there is a sense of not giving up on the self, of finding other creative ways to be autonomous.

To fight-for need not be seen; being a *'rebel'* (Lyndsay, 145) need not be announced or acknowledged. For Tammy, taking control of the situation by silently asking around is a way of fighting-for her rights. Equally, fighting-for oneself quietly is to learn how one is truly being seen, as evidenced by Jenny's account of her decision not to reveal to her colleagues that she can speak Mandarin:

> *I'm just going to use it as a hidden armor. Now no one in my office knows I can speak [Mandarin]. Because now everyone's so happy and comfortable saying things without realizing that I understand them…And I suddenly hear everyone say everything. So, I know [their] opinion of me from the day [I walked] in because they were very vocal about it in another language. And today, [they are] still my colleagues and telling me*

nice things in English. So, do I take you at face value that you are when you speaking in English, or your true self when you're speaking in your mother tongue? (Jenny, 104)

Depending on how one views Jenny's choice, it is either lying or merely withholding the truth. If the former, her authenticity is put into question. Yet, when things are placed in context, her decision to keep her knowledge of Mandarin secret merits a level of respect. This was revealed as the conversation progressed. How could Jenny know how to be if she *'didn't give people the chance to be their true selves …and they don't have another outlet for them to say something about [me] without [me] realizing'* (Jenny, 104)? Sometimes, what seems like two-faced behaviour is the only way to thrive or even survive in a world where some people only speak their minds in our absence. Only when we know others are acting truthfully do we know how to respond in kind. Having this kind of grit is far from being self-centered.

'Striving to be more' was not an experience that participants explicitly discussed. Rather, it was felt in the emotions behind their words, in their responses as they recounted their lived experiences. It seemed to radiate from their very being.

5.2.4 Breaking Point*s*

At this point a certain image comes to mind, one from my weekly stand-up paddle along Singapore's east coast. The current is sometimes calm, sometimes very rough. As I do not yet know how to read the wind and clouds, I may be moving ahead fast as I head for Singapore's city centre. Yet there may come a point where I find the currents against me. No matter how much I paddle, the board is stuck at sea. It is one thing to understand that currents move in circular patterns beneath water but it is another to know how they move and when we should move further out to sea or closer to shore to ease fighting against the current. Sometimes, the only way to progress is to stop and consider other paths. At other times, especially during the monsoon season when the weather turns stormy quickly, all I can do is paddle hard against the wind and rain that constantly push me off course.

Much the same applies to navigating one's voice in the context of Singapore. The system, the cultural dogmas, the racial stereotypes and generational expectations: these are the wind, currents and rain that prevent a paddler moving forward. Navigation may require one to stop.

Stopping is not giving up at moving forward amid the stuckness. It is necessary for repositioning, reorientation and realignment. It asks whether the current path is the right one, the best road ahead.

In this question-permeated atmosphere, three forms of questioning are experienced.

The first form involves confronting challenges. There is an air of disbelief and contempt for the barriers placed before us, as when Marcus describes having to fit into social groups in order to please a loved one:

> *I guess the main thing that goes through my head is, "Are you kidding me?" Like, [my] life just revolves around social meet-ups.. And spending time with [my] friends and to you, that is the meaning of a fulfilled life? Are you really that shallow?!* (26)

These questions around social gatherings reveal a rich array of messages. The questions are not in search of an answer; they are purely rhetorical -- an expression of discontent and resentment at being stuck with meaningless activities.

Every location brings with it specific sets of acceptable values and behaviours. A certain way of being is common sense in a shared world. What happens when we stop to question how our own values fit with those of our current locality? Such questioning serves the purpose of confirming our own position, in with Marcus and his *'disdain'* (Marcus, 35) for the familiar world shared with others. Here, there is a slight sense of disbelief in the values others hold in this shared world. It is as if one questions with incredulity and bewilderment how other paddlers continuously try to move forward on the same path, despite being stuck by underlying currents.

This sense is shared by Raphael, whose perspective on the purpose of a job clashes with that of the older generation:

> *I really dislike… that I need to spend… three hours fighting with my mom about a small topic like, "hey [this] is my future…I do whatever I want. It's time for you to not say something about it... If I get a paper and I don't like it, I give it to you, meh? You study, meh?"* (77)

Being an architect, lawyer or doctor brings honour to the family name. Unlike social workers or interior designers, these professions (according to Raphael's family) are the measure of a successful and respectable man, one who can hold down a stable, well-paid job. Like Marcus and Sophia, who have also been brought up with ideas around the normal phases of life (having a good job, getting married and starting a family), Raphael's outlook on life differs from that of the older generation. Here, the difference in values is clear between the younger and older generations.

Yet Raphael's use of the term *'meh'* also hints at the shock and sense of challenge he is experiencing. 'Meh' is a term that is unique to Singaporean slang. Originating from Cantonese, a Chinese dialect, and typically used at the end of sentences, the term is often used in a setting where the information provided triggers disbelief. Using it turns a question into a challenge. Raphael's challenge is directed at his mom, who personifies the typical mindsets or worldviews held by Singaporeans, especially older ones. By using this term, Raphael disputes the point and meaningfulness of following in others' footsteps just because this has worked in the past.

Interestingly, the questions posed by Marcus and Raphael, while directed at others, were not actually voiced. They existed as interior musings, inner statements of uncensored thought. There was no intention of letting these innermost thoughts be heard by anyone other than the self.

Navigation here seems to involve an individual using questions as a means to develop more confidence in their differentiated position, to reinforce their distinct bearing or values in this shared world. Through questioning, individuals attempt to strengthen their conviction that the 'familiar path' is not right for them. Despite this, doubt, uncertainty and hesitancy remain:

> *Maybe I'm wrong in certain things, maybe it's not as bad as I think things to be (Marcus,56)*
>
> *...maybe it's just me being too harsh in judging them (Marcus, 57)*
>
> *Maybe it's all in my mind, maybe it's not race (Lyndsay, 125)*

The second form of question is one that explores an individual's ability to fit in and experience a sense of belonging. If the previous questioning is about 'Do I want to fit into this way of being-with-others?', this second one asks 'Will others accept me?' Consider Nathaniel's account of yearning to feel accepted as a true Singaporean:

> *...one of very clear things that I remember from my childhood is watching National Day. My parents loved to watch it: Every year we ... watched national day from start to finish. But as I grew older, National Day involved a lot of mixed feelings for me, because I didn't see myself represented on screen... this was like the one sort of event that is supposed to represent all of Singapore and celebrate Singapore, but I never saw us there... I definitely consider myself Singaporean. But does Singapore see me as Singaporean?* (8/13)

An air of sadness and '*heartbreak*' (Nathaniel, 12) attends Nathaniel's questions here. '*Mixed feelings*' give the sense of someone who does not know where to stand in relation to others. It evokes an atmosphere where one asks 'Where do I stand?' or 'what do I stand for?' It is as if the ground under one's feet has been shaken, as if one no longer finds oneself welcomed on home ground.

This experience is related to *Feeling Invisible* (we will return to this later). For the purpose of this section, the focus is on how this relates to the navigation process. Participants express a sense of '*confusion*': for example, Lyndsay (116) and Jenny (142). For Lyndsay (115), being seen as *'poster girl'* makes her question whether she is where she should be. Consciousness is raised when we see differences or feel a lack of belonging, a disconnection from our roots.

We do not stop to think of ourselves, and our relations with others, when the world around us makes sense. When we feel at ease, we continue with life's flow, paddling along the same path, without much questioning. Then, as with Jenny, we may suddenly become aware of being different: like '*Dumbo...like the only elephant with huge ears'* (Jenny, 144). This revelation leads Jenny to stop and consider which path to take: should she be an Indian child who can speak Chinese or an Indian child who pretends not to understand Chinese?

Sometimes, this awareness of difference is like a slap in the face: once felt, it cannot be ignored. Here Nathaniel describes his struggle to feel like a Singaporean:

> *I took like a look at my hair color, which at the time was really light. it was this…almost slightly blondish kind of hair color…I remember looking at the color of my eyes and I would like look left and…right. I would look at like the various parts of my face and my features. I would study them as the lift was like going down. I then realized that, oh, my hair isn't black, my eyes are not black, my skin is not the same as the rest of the other boys at school. So, at a very young age, that age, I became very conscious of the way I looked in relation to how other people saw me as well.*(3)

An individual who has been continuing along a certain path suddenly experiences a jolt. The individual stops to look around and, as if for the first time, a question poses itself. Should one continue on the same path or take another?

Jenny confronted this question in relation to her dual heritage (Tamil and Chinese) and her realization that she felt a sense of belonging to neither side:

> *It was very confusing for me because I couldn't pick a side. And I realized when I went home, [my parents] couldn't get it…because they didn't understand what it meant for me because they did not have the same situations growing up…They [went] 'just learn a language, learn your Tamil.' I felt like I had to make a choice…that was just very alien to everybody. To pick a side. Either I…pick a side where I can…choose to be at limbo where I just don't fit in. And then just stick out like a sore thumb. Or just fake it and stay under the radar. (*Jenny, 42-44)

The third kind of questioning relates to how one's future life. One's continuation of life in the same form is questioned: "C*an [I] live with this*?"(Lyndsay, 153*)* "*Will [I] be okay … having this repeat itself again when it comes around again*?"(Lyndsay, 162). Such questions appear packed with energy, with a desire for movement and a change in direction. If previous questions sought to explore one's position and direction in relation to others, this type of question demands that a choice be made. It is fuel for change. It calls for action. It is a potential moment for '*self-defini[tion]*', a moment when we ask 'D*o I want to stay this way?*' (Jenny,169). It signifies a turning point; it is as if we are saying 'yes' to refashioning who we are and where we are headed.

A turning point can also be a breaking point. It is like a sharp pivot turn on the paddling board, as a result of which the familiar path is abandoned: *'I'm done'* (Marcus, 65); *'screw this'* (Lyndsay, 175); *'fuck it'* (Raphael, 91); *'I had enough'* (Tammy, 207). Unlike giving up, one

relinquishes what was for what can be. This comes with the sense of an opening of the self, not a closing down of opportunities and potential. The self recognizes that to move forward, it is no longer possible to continue on the same path. It would be insanity to continue doing the same thing over again while expecting different results.

The veil is lifted, and one cannot ignore what is seen. As Raphael observes:

> *...if it doesn't happen today then it will never happened at all. Because I was going to start school, I needed to tell the director that, "Hey, I want to work for you.' So, like, if it doesn't happen that day, right, [that] means like I'm not doing anything for myself in my life anymore. I'll be just a 22-year-old with big dreams thrown in the bin and just carry on in my life as normal. The first wall is my mom. If I cannot go through then how will I talk to [my Chinese side of the family]? How do I even convey the message that, "Hey guys, I am the eldest. This is what I want to do and I will be okay. I will earn money. Don't worry." How do I convey that when I cannot convey to that family member whom I see every day?* (101)

Raphael exercises his agency to steer the paddle in a different direction. Having to cope with his and his mother's emotions regarding his father's passing makes the new direction tricky. Yet he knows he has to have that conversation, and that there will be *'more in the future to remind her what we're doing is for each other and for the family'* (102).

It is only by articulating one's real needs that there is a chance to change things. At times, assertiveness regarding one's own needs is called for. In Raphael's case, it is not enough to decide to enter a confrontation. To '*fuck it*' (91) is to stop '*cushioning the blow for [his mom]'(94*), for without that there will never be *'a fruitful conversation [and] whatever I want to convey or we want to convey to each other will never be said because her mindset is set in a way*' (97). There is forcefulness in Raphael's way of being here. The turning point is not just a gentle bend. Even if one hoped it might be so, sometimes it takes considerable power and grit to turn one's back on the familiar path and stride forth along a new one.

Yet even after such a breaking point, one may not have the necessary know-how to construct a new way of being. Life may not become easy once one decides to be more authentic. Switching paths in search of greater authenticity should rather be seen as an evolving process, one in which an individual is always '*still on the road to discovery*' (Marcus, 94).

Debbie describes learning from her husband's experience '*as a kid growing up, where you test your boundaries, you share a bit with your friends, you break up, you're learning and growing*' (67). It takes time to become skilled in a new way of being. Sometimes, we can find ourselves swinging to extreme ends of the self. Marcus describes how the tension between being-with-others and being-with-self can become too extreme to cope with; in such situations, one '*bur[ies] everything*' (38) and does not '*trust anyone with anything'* (84). One may go to the '*extreme in the way I actually went about things' (86)* before finding the balance between feeling '*like it was fine just … having certain opinions that I honestly felt' (98)* and '*understanding that nobody is perfect*' (86).

5.3 Reflection

My decision to select only 3 or 4 themes for my data analysis was a deliberate one. I recognize that there are more I could have distilled. Given the word limitations of a thesis, however, going for more themes was likely to dilute the richness, ambiguity, and complexity of each phenomenon. In addition, my aim is neither to reach saturation of data nor find 'truth'. Other researchers may come up with different themes from the same interviews. If I had interviewed a different group of participants, most likely different themes would have emerged.

For the purposes of methodological integrity, I need to maintain fidelity to the goals of hermeneutic phenomenology. For this reason, I am intentionally choosing quality over quantity of themes. Following Van Manen's (1990, p. 27) spirit, I want the way the findings are written up to stimulate in readers "*a sense of connection to actual or potential experience*". Resonance is what I have sought in my writing: a situation where a particular experience leads readers (and myself) into an aspect of their own experience, confirming deeply held thoughts, experiencing the 'phenomenological nod' or seeing their life with fresh eyes.

I played with different ways of writing to bring out the lived experience of my participants. Early on, I was inspired by Glesne's (1997) poetic transcription approach and sought to form poem-like compositions from the words of my participants. For me, this experimental form of portraying my findings combines the *'strengths of science with the rewards of the humanities'* (Stoller, 1989, p. 9) while allowing me to stay close to the data. That said, I am aware of my lack of training in poetic work. Reading Piirto's (2002) piece on judging the quality of poems

within qualitative research gave me a deeper respect for those who represent their data through poems while prompting me to consider the quality of work I might produce without formal training in this form of representation. It was not so much about fitting the research to the experimental forms of writing but finding a form which best brings out the resonance for myself and the readers. Even though I abandoned poetic transcription as a way of presenting my data, I once again drew lessons from my attempt to align my research goals with the method chosen and my abilities as a researcher.

The iterative process of writing and stepping back to consider how the form is doing justice to bringing forth the lived phenomenon has helped me produce research I regard as trustworthy. Through much exploration and discussion with my mentor, I settled on representing my data in three ways: my participants' stories through their own words; my analysis as set out in the findings section; and a more thorough-going discussion (the next chapter). Exploring the phenomenon from these different vantage points will, I hope, bring to light a variety of textures and perspectives relating to the same lived experience.

6. Discussion

This study has shed some light on two basic questions: 1) Is authenticity a universal value? 2) Is silence necessarily a form of inauthenticity?

The discussion which follows attempts a critical examination of the findings of this study in relation to the existing literature (as set out in Chapter 2) and to Van Manen's lifeworld analysis.

6.1 The findings in the context of the literature review

This section begins with a discussion of the methodology used in this research in comparison to existing research. I will show how this research provides support for existing research while also addressing significant gaps: in particular, the mediating impact of power and culture on authenticity and self-expression.

6.1.1 Methodology

Through its use of the hermeneutic phenomenological method, the current study has yielded results that concur with those of past research regarding the importance attached to authenticity by Asians as much as Westerners. For example, the findings support those of Slabu *et al.* (2014) and Wang (2016), which suggest that authenticity is important for Asians, and other cross-cultural studies that have highlighted the importance for Asians of both personal agency and interpersonal relatedness (Kwan, Bond & Singelis, 1997; Kumashiro, Rusbult & Finkel, 2008; Uchida, Kitayama, Mesquita & Morling, 2008; Kitayama *et al.*, 2019).

While the participants in this study had their own personal dreams and opinions, their lifeworld tended to centre on others. This supports previous research indicating that Asian cultural practices tend to be organised in terms of interdependence of the self with others, with individuals more motivated to adjust themselves to the expectations and needs of others (Morling, Kitayama & Miyamoto, 2002). This provides support to the notion that in the Asian context, agency needs to be mitigated by communion with others (Wang, 2015c). To sum up, the findings of the current study support the view that the experience of authenticity is equally felt by Asians, even if they do not endorse levels of 'independence' similar to those characteristic of Western cultures.

A key issue to emerge from the literature review involved the limitations of the positivistic methodologies employed in most existing research, resulting in a simplistic focus on an essentialist single dimension of the true self. In contrast, the phenomenological method in this research has allowed for more complexity and greater richness of data. As Craig (2009) notes, being-in-the-world is not to be alone-in-the-world. Our self is always situated (Markus & Kitayama, 2010a); our authentic existence necessitates a social dimension, and we cannot escape from the paradox between being uniquely individual and inescapably being-with-others (Macquarrie, 1972). This appears to be the source of the ambiguity and tension that the participants experienced.

6.1.2 Power

Two kinds of power are apparent in the findings of the current study. Firstly there is what previous researchers (e.g. Chen, 2019; Kifer et al., 2013; Kraus et al., 2011) have conceptualised as lack of power: the powerlessness conveyed by the themes of *Barriers, Boundaries and Stuckness* and *Being Invisible.* Such lack of power relates to the capacity to control others or valued resources by providing or withholding resources or the administration of punishment. In all the interviews, participants described their experience of being unable to assert their will on the world. External forces, whether the mind-sets of the older generation, the educational and political system, or the authoritarian culture of the workplace, seem too strong for the participants to overcome.

Such findings lend some degree of support to (Keltner et al., 2003) idea that having little power triggers inhibitory behaviour and that the powerless are often more susceptible to external forces (Kernis & Goldman, 2006b; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Wood et al., 2008a). This was particularly apparent for four of the participants (Marcus, Lyndsay, Tammy and Debby), all of whom chose to speak about their experience in the workplace. Providing support for the findings of Friedman & Label (2003) and Reis et al. (2016), the relatively junior positions occupied by these participants at their workplace came into conflict with their desire to do something meaningful. This led them to engage less – and eventually quit their job. Their dwindling engagement in their workplace seems in line with the findings of Knoll and Van Dick (2013) where they choose to engage in acquiescent and quiescent silence knowing that speaking up does not solve their problems and instead giving them more issues.

In a workplace setting, employees may choose to stay silent knowing that speaking up to a problem at work is pointless since nobody is interested in listening to their constructive voice or that passing comments will lead to negative consequences like possible increased workload. Knoll and van Dick (2013) terms this as acquiescent and quiescent silence respectively.

The second form of power experienced by participants is that explored in the themes *Striving for More* and *Breaking Point.* Rather than being externalised, power is here internalised. For these millennials, their personal sense of power comes from their capacity to adjust their attitude towards a situation they cannot change. One is reminded here of Frankl's (Frankl, 1984) idea about having the power and freedom to choose our stance even when circumstances seem against us. This seems to concur with (Gan et al., 2018) when they argue that striving towards authenticity breeds power. As set out in these two themes, participants' experiences

seem to contradict research suggesting that authenticity mediates the effects of a personal sense of power on self-esteem (Wang, 2015b, 2015a, 2015c). This contrasts with studies (Chen et al., 2001; Neff & Suizzo, 2006; Wang, 2015a) whose findings suggested that power leads to more authentic self-expression.

As the participants progressed towards this change in their experience of power, it is likely that their navigation process involved making sense of their position on autonomy versus solidarity and fellow feeling (communion). One participant (**NAME?**) described how he withdrew from everyone for a period before realising that not trusting others was too extreme a response. Other participants discussed how best to speak up to get their point across while still caring for the needs of others. Here, participants seemed to be trying to make sense of the difference between separating themselves from others (independence) and being with others (communion). Just as (Deci & Ryan, 1991) differentiate between autonomy and independence, participants seemed to be demonstrating how they were drawing this distinction through their navigation process. As time progressed, they came to recognise their need for both autonomy and communion; indeed, this seemed to be the goal of their journey from powerlessness to feeling powerful.

In response to the question 'Can choosing to stay silent in certain circumstances be the result of high power and authenticity?' the answer appears to be 'yes'. For participants, relinquishing full self-expression for the sake of themselves or to protect their loved ones was an act of autonomy, one that resulted from a high degree of internal power.

6.1.3 Culture

Among the findings of this research, one stands out: participants' desire for both autonomy and communion. The themes capture how they resisted external pressures to conform to a certain way of being, how they made multiple attempts to stand up for themselves while also navigating the experiences of those around them. This finding seems to be echoed by studies that suggest that people cannot be boxed into either an individualistic or a collectivistic culture (e.g. (Abbas et al., 2005; Lee et al., 2010; Moleiro et al., 2017).

While an evaluation of Singaporean culture was beyond the scope of the current study, the findings tentatively suggest that Singapore's millennials in Singapore currently find themselves within a transitional culture**.** This contrasts with the findings of previous research, which tended

to perceive these young people **as** coming from a collectivistic culture based on their nationality (e.g. Asad, 2006; Schwartz *et al.*, 2010; Markham *et al.*, 2010; Ven-hwei, So & Guoliang, 2010; ; Markus & Kitayama, 2010b; Kesebir & Kesebir, 2012; Twenge, Sherman & Wells, 2015; Twenge, Campbell & VanLandingham, 2017).

Using Markus and Kitayama's (2010a) concept of 'blinkers' to understand how culture has shaped participants' self-construal, it seems that their collectivistic tendencies derive from their Asian upbringing and have been cultivated through cultural narratives and representations on several levels. While the family contributes to this cultural input, there are also events like National Day Parade, an annual parade held to commemorate Singapore's independence, and interactions in Singapore's 'heartlands': areas beyond the city centre which include schools, markets, shops and places of worship. The findings suggest that participants attach a high value to communalism and familism (Schwartz et al., 2010). Seven of the participants' lived experience of navigation was influenced by the perceived needs, expectations and social judgements of their friends, family, romantic partners and people encountered in social settings, such as colleagues.

However, individualistic tendencies on the part of participants were just as prominent. This emerged most strongly in the themes *Striving for More* and *Breaking Point,* which revealed how participants sought to act on their desire to exercise autonomy in respect of ambitions and dreams and how they were treated by others. Yet, little can be inferred from the interviews regarding the source of such individualistic tendencies. One can only surmise that Singapore's history, in particular its contact with the West, has encouraged a certain degree of exposure to individualism, the attitude of focusing more on the needs of the self, and a willingness to speak out. It is not the goal of this phenomenological study to look for causations or correlations on the how either individualistic or collectivistic values come about for these participants. This would involve a separate project. However, knowing what schemas these participants hold allow us to better appreciate how they direct their agency towards independence or interdependence (Markus & Kitayama, 2010a).

As far as one is aware, no qualitative research has been conducted on navigating between individualism and collectivism towards a more authentic being. The closest one gets is Kleinman's (2011) anthropological study of China's changing moral landscape. A striking feature of this study is the phenomenon of silence Kleinman detects among Chinese citizens,

steeped in ancient traditions of individual sacrifice and the subordination of personal interest and pleasure to the needs of the larger community. This phenomenon appears to have emerged in the context of the gradual exposure of the Chinese to a more individualistic morality involving rights and self-cultivation. Kleinman highlights this ambivalence when observing that the Chinese face an existential demand to negotiate a pull and push between the pursuit of self-interest and an altruistic concern for the common good. The following excerpt sheds light on this phenomenon of silent protests and resistance:

> Ethical aspirations and actual local experience for these professionals on the individual level, as for hundreds of millions of other Chinese, may not be in harmony. The conflicts between the two may seriously limit what they can hope to achieve. Few individuals are able to change their institutions, let alone their societies… For the Chinese, like the rest of us, just muddling through is an achievement. Yet, an anti-heroic model may be more relevant. Individuals can (and do) perturb and disturb their local worlds, challenging and resisting an ethos that they find wanting and yet not putting themselves at substantial levels of personal danger (Kleinman, 2011, p. 26).

6.1.4 Towards a balanced or relational authenticity

If the participants are understood to be straddled between individualistic and collectivistic cultures, it makes sense that their actions involve both *an awareness of the significant others with whom one is interdependent and who define the self'* (Markus & Kitayama, 2010a) and a desire to stay true to their own desires. This acknowledgement of independent and interdependent schemas of self makes the navigation process richer and more complex. The richness of the findings presented here can be said to derive from this duality, this attempt to explore how individuals navigate both their autonomy and their need for communion. As such, they echo the findings of Fletcher (2013) and Wang's (2016) regarding the journey towards a balanced authenticity.

The findings support Fletcher's (2013) suggested features of a relational authenticity. Throughout the navigation process, as participants sought to decide whether to speak out or stay silent, they *fostered personal integrity by avoiding self-deception* and *being responsible for their choices and the resulting outcomes.* They strove as far as possible to be honest in their

self-assessments and actions, avoiding lapsing into bad faith. They took time to reach the place where they could say 'I'm done'. Each decision they made was not a hasty one.

The interviews also showed that participants *had a sense of adventure.* This emerges from the lived world discussion of spatiality, where participants sought to expand their bodily motility and horizons. The theme *Striving For More* underlines Fletcher's point that *relationally authentic people are determined and perserving* in their desire to exercise their autonomy without losing their tendency to *feel empathy.* Throughout the process, all the participants showed some degree of awareness of how their actions might impact on those around them. This reflects Taylor's (Taylor, 2003) dialogical argument that relationally authentic people are sensitive to others in their self-creation.

No clear pattern emerges from the findings regarding how participants created life projects that simultaneously supported their individuality while complementing or supporting the individuality of others. While two participants were vocal about their own needs, the rest chose to either keep silent or take a wait-and-see approach. The fact that more than half of the participants chose to remain silent or at least not rock the boat too much by being too assertive has resonance with the findings of Tafarodi *et al.* (2004), Neff and Suizzo (2006), Robinson *et al.* (2013a) and Lenton *et al.* (2014), to the effect that individuals in collectivistic cultures tend to express less. Even so, the navigation journey was unique for each participant, regardless of whether they chose to remain silent or speak up.

Reflecting on the findings of the current study, together with those of Fletcher (2013) and Wang's (2016), once again raises the question of whether authenticity can be clearly defined. It is encouraging to see existing works acknowledging the attainability of a relational or balanced authenticity. Such findings reinforce the ethical demand for authenticity by improving ties among and between people or the natural world while helping them become the best versions of themselves. As Owen Flanagan (Flanagan, 1991) notes, "It may be that trying to meet impossible demands, or at least recognizing that such demands exist, helps agents to be better than they would otherwise be were they left without such goals."

6.2 The findings through Van Manen's lifeworld analysis

In this section, I attempt to elucidate the lifeworld of my participants through Van Manen's (1990) lifeworld approach, guided by his four *'existentials':* lived body, lived spatiality, lived time and lived human relation.

6.2.1 Embodiment: regaining the lived body

Perhaps the most significant theme underlying participants' narratives relates to their continuous striving towards transparency between their body and their world, despite being made invisible by the people around them. While the body is usually embedded in the world, barriers put up by others can interrupt this lived contact with the world and others. Navigation here is about regaining and re-owning the lived body.

Merleau-Ponty (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) speaks of the continuous dialogue between the body and world. For us as individuals, our body is the vessel of all our experiences (Fuchs, 2005a). Our being-in-the-world is embodied. Merleau-Ponty calls this the lived body (corps vivant), where lived bodiliness is our constant outward relation to the world as lived through the body.

It is worth noting that our process of perceiving, acting and interacting with the world is an unconscious process, implicitly present in our relation to the world. Albeit invisible, the lived body, as a medium of revealing the world to the self, fulfils the important task of establishing a reciprocated connection between the subject and the world without collapsing into one. Drawing on Fuchs' (Fuchs, 2005a) phenomenological description, the lived body has to be able to carry out two tasks in order for an effective connection between the subject and the world. The first is a self-affection of the body (bodily resonance) which is triggered by the sense of touch. Yet, occurring at the same time is the task of distinguishing between the perceiver and the perceived. This implicit awareness of the body's own movement, or the source of action, can be seen as the sense of agency. The lived body has its own corporeal intentionality, its own sense of potentiality where it provides "a certain gearing of my body to the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Here, Merleau-Ponty shows how the dual ability of the lived body for self-affection and self-movement forms the foundation of embodiment.

In the embodied lifeworld of the participants as they navigate the road to having a voice, two themes -- *Barriers and Boundaries* and *Being Invisible* -- highlight how the connection between their body and world is clouded and interrupted. Three participants speak of being objectified:

into a '*poster girl'* (Lyndsay, 11), a *'token girl'* (Jenny, 89) or a *'good girl'* (Debbie, 47): that is, something be shown off and exhibited. Some share how they are not taken seriously even when they speak out. Debbie feels '*demonised*' (Debbie, 21) for taking a stand, while Raphael talks of being made to fulfil societal expectations by *'represent[ing] [the] family name'* (Raphael, 38). Their lived bodies are inhibited from acting in the world as they want to, their bodily intentions undermined. Furthermore, these experiences make the participants invisible by restricting, frustrating and silencing their agency.

Participants in other research, too, have experienced voicelessness as a form of physical restriction (Carroll, 2007). They felt a great loss, as if a part of themselves were missing. Being voiceless through no choice of their own was *'like hell'* (Marcus, 10). Relatedly, Lindahl, Sandman, and Rasmussen (2006) found that participants dependent on ventilators experienced a closed-in mode of being at times. When this happens, it is as if their lived bodies are being corporealized.

For the lived body to be corporealized is to deny the body access to the world. The connection or exchange of body and environment is arrested; drives and motivations are thwarted. A metaphor for corporealization is the idea of the 'walking dead'. The body may still move but it more resembles a corpse than a human being who can bring intentions to life in the world. Here, corporealization disturbs the ability for self-affection in our lived bodies. As Van Manen (1990) puts it:

> When the body is the object of someone else's gaze, it may lose its naturalness … For example, under the critical gaze the body may turn awkward, the motions appear clumsy, while under the admiring gaze the body surpasses its usual grace and its normal abilities (p. 104).

The participants in the current study spoke of experiencing bodily symptoms: digestive issues, heaviness in the heart, and difficulty breathing. This embodied physiological response seems relevant to the phenomenon of bullying in the workplace, where victims have reported similar symptoms (Corney, 2008). Corney too, identified this type of response among participants whose experience of stress led to them question their confidence in their performance level.

However, unlike people who are melancholic or schizophrenic (Fuchs, 2005a), people who are in navigation are still able to get in touch with their lived body, despite having the connection between their body and world interrupted. This ability of the corporealized body to find a way to regain its lived bodiliness emerges as an important aspect of the lived navigation experience.

Phenomenological theorists such as (Sartre, 1943) and (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) have drawn a distinction between body-subject and body-object. The body-subject is the body-as-it-is-lived -- the body that is 'passed-by-in-silence' (Sartre, 1943). As Van Manen underlines, we live in a mode of self-forgetfulness; the body is taken for granted. We are not aware of our voice until its potentiality is under threat. In the case of the participants in the current study, the body goes through a process of being made invisible through the disapproving, critical gaze of others. The subjective lived body is corporealized and turns into an objective body. Yet, in this process, the participants become aware of the body as a material physical thing; in other words it no longer becomes a body that is *passed-by-in-silence'* (Sartre, 1943). In Nathaniel's case, he realizes how different he looks after becoming aware of how he is being treated differently from other Singaporeans because of his minority ethnicity:

> *I took a look at my hair color, which at the time was really light... And, I would look at like the various ... parts of my face and my features. I would study them as the lift was like going down. I then realize that oh my hair isn't black, my eyes are not black, my skin is not the same, you know, as the rest of the other boys at school. So, at a very young age, that age, I became very conscious of the way I look in relation to how other people saw me as well (3).*

This seems to be the point (in the attempted corporealization by others or disruption of the lived body) at which participants awaken to a new reality: *I do not simply possess a body; I am my body':*

> When the body is the object of someone else's gaze, it may lose its naturalness … or instead it may happen that I grow enhanced in its modality of being. For example, under the critical gaze the body may turn awkward, the motions appear clumsy, while under the admiring gaze the body surpasses its usual grace and its normal abilities (Van Manen, 1990, p. 104).

In the theme *Breaking Point,* participants' self-questioning could represent the start of their becoming aware that the interruption of their agency involves a partial loss of self. The familiar taken-for-granted body now holds both an absence and a new, unfamiliar aspect: one that participants must start to question if they want to continue living this way. They now understand that they have the choice to negotiate with their contexts, to decide if remaining invisible is acceptable.

For most participants, this process of negotiation seems to assume a similar vein. The lived-body is continuously directed towards the world (Finlay, 2011). There is a drive to transcend and to act in the world, as described in *Striving to be More*. To negotiate and decide is to regain the lived-body and all its agency. There seems to be no other option but to direct its intentionality outwards. At the same time, participants experience a certain degree of angst from wanting their voices heard. "The sense of void imminent makes my life pulsate for me with anxiety, that is, more palpably, more keenly, more ardently" (Lingis, 1989). This is like a push for them to acknowledge 'I'm done' (as in the theme of *Breaking Point)*. The lived-body or the subjective-body successfully resists getting corporealized through alienation and objectification; it restores participants' bodily intentionality by enabling them to choose a new way of being-in-the-world.

6.2.2 Sociality: Moving from oppression to a choiceful being-with-others

Our embeddedness in the world, as described by Heidegger (1962), includes the social world. Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasized that "we must re-discover the social world" (p. 379), arguing that the social is a dimension of our being regardless of whether we try to cease our relation to it. For him, the true field of intersubjective experiences is not the body but language, with it being our primary means of relating to the social world. Heidegger, too, argues that language is constitutive and that being voiceless puts limits on language and has an effect on interpersonal relations. The participants' lived experience of being silenced, as evoked in the themes *Barriers and Boundaries* and *Being Invisible,* and the silence they choose to maintain (as in the theme *Breaking Point)* points to this aspect of sociality.

Merleau-Ponty paid special attention to the relationship between silence and language. In The Prose of the World (1973), he wrote:

> "we should consider speech before it has been pronounced, against the ground of silence which precedes it, which never ceases to accompany it, and without which it would say nothing." (pp. 45-46).

For Merleau-Ponty, silence and speech are a kind of dialogue, one that reflects the dialogue between human individual and world. Our embodied subjectivity is to be found in the intertwining of touching and being touched: that is, in the intersubjective realms of our lives. His logic of 'chiasm' refers to exactly this intertwining of intimacy and opacity between the Self and Other in which the latter's perception and thoughts guide and are guided by one's perception and thoughts. This forms a phenomenological understanding of an authentic dialogue: one which involves the intertwining of the thoughts of each participant, so that the thought of each makes the dialogue possible and is also made possible by the dialogue (Bindeman, 2017).

This suggests that authenticity cannot be achieved in isolation from others. It is possible only when our being-with-others is respected, where the self experiences the Other in a direct and immediate way from a second-person perspective. This seems to be reflected in the participants' experience of their self-other relationships. In some instances, the unequal power relationship between them and others renders them unable to speak up for themselves. Power comes from the Latin word *potere* (to be able). In the stories that these participants have shared, there is a sense of the self being unable to be heard, of individuals feeling unable to express themselves in particular relationships. The navigation experience becomes heightened and intensified in situations of hierarchy between two parties, where the subordinate party feels obliged to accommodate the demands of the one who is in a position to control, dominate and dictate. This power is like an invisible force; whether in the form of family traditions, government systems or tight work cultures, it handicaps, weakens, and petrifies the self, even if only temporarily. Even if one speaks up, the power imbalance means that one's words go unheard and thus unwitnessed. The capacity to express oneself through language is diminished. The autonomy of the self is threatened. One's very existence can feel at stake when under the power of others.

In participants' accounts of lived experiences at their workplace, standing up for oneself in the midst of injustice risks incurring greater costs than staying silent. The unequal power relationships characteristic of many workplaces have been highlighted in studies relating to

bullying, betrayal and discrimination in the workplace (e.g. (Corney, 2008; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2015; Elley-Brown, 2015). For example, participants in research by Corney (Corney, 2008) felt constrained about speaking up for fear of being identified as troublemakers. At other times, however, individuals navigate this power imbalance by calculating that even if the relationship is damaged, the energy spent on self-expression is worth the effort.

Feeling powerless in the presence of others points to Clair's (1998) assertion that certain social positions carry privilege, resulting in the closing off of emancipatory forms of communication. Factors such as age, sex, race and religion can reinforce disadvantage while strengthening the ability of the Other to dominate and control. Consistent with Clair's view of being silenced is Foucault's (2006) understanding of silence as a form of oppression, and as such a crucial part of the discourse of power relations, in which some groups are marginalized. Just like authenticity, silence is never merely personal (Bindeman, 2017).

For the participants in this study, this element represents just one facet of their navigation process: the one in which they try to transcend their silent selves (brought about through their self-other relations). Another aspect of the process is their recognition of their own intersubjectivity. As Nathaniel puts it, *"When you're in a relationship, you have to negotiate his lived experience as well"* (Nathaniel, 46). Whether it is loved ones, colleagues, or even a stranger, the Other is experienced an extension of oneself. The hurt and pain of Others becomes our hurt and pain. For participants who were experiencing stress at work, it was tempting to voice it and perhaps get out of the situation. But that would mean putting a colleague in the same situation and obliging them to experience the same levels of stress. Rather than that, participants would adopt a position of solidarity with them. As Merleau-Ponty observes, "If my consciousness has a body, why should other bodies which I perceive not 'have' consciousness?" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 367).

Pursuing this discussion of intersubjectivity, I turn to what Levinas (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) termed the ethical call or appeal to care for others and to Edith Stein's (2002) discussion of Being-with-others in community. This ethical call is not an abstract concept but a concrete one where the face of the Other, vulnerable or not, bursts upon my world and calls for me to take responsibility for the Other. For Levinas, responsibility is the pre-conscious response to the unalterable integrity and dignity of the Other, experienced as 'being there' for the other (Van Manen, 2016). Thus, a son seeking to live his own life but aware that this risks a hurtful

confrontation with his mother makes sure to pick the right time, to prepare her and soften the impact of his words in order to protect her feelings. Here, respect and love for his mother ensure that the young man informs her of his future plans. He recognizes that the Other has a body which can equally feel pain, love and desire -- and that it is his responsibility to protect it.

Participants also seem to think of themselves as being better people as a result of standing alongside others and taking their experiences into account. This emerges with special clarity in the theme *Barriers and Boundaries.* Here, participants expressed gratitude for having someone to hold them together when they were in a place of stuckness and told of sharing that need for belonging with friends and colleagues. Some spoke of keeping their thoughts and needs to themselves while patiently waiting for their loved ones to be ready for them. As Stein pointed out, having individual purpose and meaning is not a process of separating ourselves from our community. Rather, it is a process of finding our unique ability and role within that community. Authenticity is not a lonely way of being; it is to be recognised as oneself by one's peers. As Stein wrote,

> According to its being the human being is co-originally individual and community oriented, but its conscious life as an individual begins later than the communal life in time. The human being acts with and like what he sees others do, and is led and drawn by this. And this is perfectly in order as long as nothing else is demanded of him. A call is needed to awake the ownmost and most authentic being. If this call has been felt and understood, and if it has not been paid attention to, then the flight from authentic being and from responsibility first begins. And only then does being-with become 'inauthentic' being: or better said perhaps 'counterfeit' being. Being-with is not as such counterfeit. The person is just as much called to being a member as to be an individual; but in order to be able to be both in its own particular way, 'from within,' it must first step out of the imitating mode in which it lives and is bound to live at first. Its own most being is in need of the preparation provided by the being-with others in order to be, in its turn, guiding and fruitful for others (Mette, 2007, pp.72-73).

Participants have at times experienced the Other as an oppressive force; they have had to fight for their voice to be heard and their agency to be acknowledged. This suggests that Singapore as a system and culture is unready to acknowledge and respect the autonomy of these millennial participants, despite their ongoing efforts. Yet at times these young people have experienced

the Other as a relationship of solace and belonging. Here, keeping silent is done in the spirit of caring for their community and preserving a sacred sense of belonging. Van Dan Berg's phenomenological discussion of *The Conversation* (Van Den Berg, 2021) is relevant here. The nature of togetherness that is constituted by a conversation lies not with whether the parties speak up or remain silent. It resides in our ability to be accountable and faithful to self and to conversational partner at the same time. The lived experience in the participants' social world is therefore a navigation between individuality and belonging, between being silenced to keeping silent: the intersubjective intentionality from being in oppressed relationships to a choiceful being-with-others.

6.2.3 Spatiality: Expanding bodily motility and horizons

One participant described how he felt he was in a '*Superman movie from Krypton to Earth'* (Marcus, 17) when he moved to the UK for a year to study. This led him to question the narrow-mindedness of the education system in Singapore; he had experienced a widening of his horizons.

According to Bollnow (2011), the horizon (in geographical terms) is the line where the vault of heaven rests upon the surface of the earth. As a phenomenon, it is a paradoxical one: it can be both an inaccessible boundary and a potentiality. For the ancient Greeks, the horizon was something 'which bounds or limits' (Bollnow, 2011, p. 72). It was an absolute limit that man as a being could not cross. We can never reach the horizon, for the further we wander, the further the horizon recedes. Yet the horizon is not necessarily a restrictive boundary. On the contrary, as it extends ahead of us, it opens up a space where we can move forward freely and push forward.

Bollnow (2011) goes on to discuss the indissoluble relationship between horizon and perspective. Perspective orders things within the horizon and allows us to function in space. A narrow-minded perspective, where one holds fast to preconceived opinions, is tied to a limitation of horizons. Yet, as horizons shift and open up through contact with different ways of being in our exposure to the world, our perspective also widens. In a different but related vein, Merleau-Ponty's (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) concept of the phenomenal field is a transcendental field which is a space of possibilities and impossibilities. Taken together with

his concept of bodily motility, where the potentiality for action expands one's perspective on potentiality, this helps us better understand participants' experience of self in space.

For the participants, navigation in spatial terms is about going from feeling restricted to feeling more able – and entitled -- to move forward toward their horizon. There is an element of horizons widening as participants accumulate more life experience. For some, this widening of horizons is experienced as a shock to their system: for example, when are exposed to other people's different ways of being. This was the case with Marcus and also with Sophia, who noticed how people overseas organised their lives differently from what she was used to. Others participants experienced a more gradual broadening of horizons, perhaps through their realization that their current way of being no longer served them. At the same time, this widening of horizons, when combined with continuing barriers, could result in participants experiencing feeling of stuckness and restriction.

As Bollnow (2011) notes, "[s]pace [...] is not already in existence, but is created only by human activity" (p. 34). The space in which participants had to live was a constricted and punitive one. One had to tread carefully in this space. If one disagreed with the older generation on questions of marriage or career choices, one felt in the wrong. At work, standing up to the boss or calling out wrongdoing could result not only in being silenced or not listened to: it could raise the possibility of a bad performance review. In this space, participants could not move forward towards their horizons, despite their dreams of a new way. In Merleau-Ponty's (1962) terms, they could see the potentiality of ' I can' while also experiencing an ' I cannot'; they see potentiality, but they face a world of "restrictive potentialities".

In participants' lived space, navigation involved a constant loosening up of their restricted potentiality through *Striving to be more*. In research involving participants who were voiceless due to a physical limitation, Carroll (2004) found that participants tended to give up after recognizing the futility of being understood. However, a follow-up study by Carroll (2007) found that participants did not feel they had to give up if their message was self-perceived to be important enough. They persisted with respect to getting important messages across.

Despite the difference in contexts, the participants in the current study revealed a similar motivation to not give up. By reaching their individual '*breaking point',* by saying 'I'm done', participants seemed to give themselves permission to choose and occupy spaces – spaces to

which they had not felt entitled before. Such spaces are liminal ones, attained after a long period of questioning: Do their values fit with those of their local world? Do they fit into this society? Do they want to continue living the way they are used to?

As much as one's status is socially ambiguous, liminality is for Victor Turner (1967) also a '*realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise'* (p.97). It is the '*grand pause on the other side of life… the mysterious space that is entirely unfamiliar yet filled with extraordinary potential'* (Carson, 2019, p. 225). Participants' stories recount their navigation of the liminality of their way of being, a transitional period where their old ways of being no longer serve them but a new way of being has yet to be found. It is *'a process of constant questioning'* (Nathaniel, 15); one is '*still on the road to discovery'* (Marcus, 94). Participants are still 'betwixt and between' two identity constructions (Turner, 1967).

Through their stories, some participants reveal how they have found new ways of being, be it expressing their needs or deciding to keep silent. Others still find themselves in this liminal space. Yet all participants provide evidence of their fighting spirit, their determination to be more empowered, to transcend their barriers and expand their bodily motility as they continue their journey towards their horizon.

Stepping into a liminal space on the navigation journey seems akin to these lines from Maya Angelou's poem "On the Pulse of Morning" (Angelou, 2015, p. 266):

> The horizon leans forward,
> Offering you space
> To place new steps of change.

6.2.4 Temporality: Staying faithful towards being-towards-death

In different ways and with varying degrees of intensity, participants spoke of the decisions they needed to in order to fulfil their dreams or break free from restrictions.

For Raphael, his use of an expletive (91) when telling of how he realized having a conversation with his mother about fulfilling his dreams as an designer could no longer be postponed signified his attempt to seize hold of that particular present moment – to secure his future.

For Heidegger, being is time (1962). 'Being' means to exist temporally in the stretch between birth and death. Since time is finite, our being comes to an end with our death. Thus, to understand whether one is being-authentic is to understand how someone is projecting their lives onto the horizon of their deaths.

While none of the participants spoke directly about their deaths, almost all of them experienced a sense of anticipation *(Vorlaufen)*: a waiting for death in the active sense of mobilizing mortality in the process of freely making decisions, and thereby bringing about more possibility in fashioning our selfhood. This is what Heidegger means by 'being-towards-death': in anticipation of death, the self is not confined to the present but is always projecting towards the future. Here, the present is not just some endless series of 'now' points that come and go. It is in the present that one can seize and make one's own path forward with resolution.

For Raphael, 'being-towards death' is evident in his seizing the moment to speak up about what he wants for his future. For others, such as Debbie, Lyndsay and Jenny, this dimension expresses itself in their decisions to keep silent (whether in respect of leaving their jobs without voicing their discontent or not revealing certain personal information about themselves to others). For these participants, silence is a way of protecting themselves amidst all the alienation and objectification they face. It is also a decision of non-expression, made when an individual knows of no sure way to speak up. As Wittgenstein (1961) said, ' what can be said at all can be said clearly, and what we cannot talk about we must pass over in silence' (p. 3). However, this capacity to be resolute in the present and recognise their being-towards death had not always a feature of participants' experience of time. As described in the theme *Barriers and Boundaries,* navigation had involved disjointed episodes and a sense of stuckness. Navigation as part of their being-towards-death was threatened when time was separated into individual parts of past, present and future. Participants experienced the opposite of what Heidegger (1962) conceptualised as 'lived time': a unity of the past, present and future in what he called "ecstasies". In this conception of time, instead of a linear and infitnite series of "now points", anticipation is made possible. The self projects towards the future. Yet, emerging out of the future is our past, historicity and personal and cultural baggage, which Heidegger terms

as “having-been-ness”. This is not the same as being condemned to our past but it is from the past that one can make a decision in the present moment, a decision to freely determine one’s selfhood. This is what Heidegger calls “resoluteness”: the very quality participants had difficulty experiencing when faced with impenetrable barriers. Past, present and future do not yet form a unity. This disjointed experience of time made it difficult for the self to make decisions. At this point navigation manifests a start and stop quality.

Yet as a theme, *Breaking Point* points towards self-expression as a form of authenticity, one that reveals its temporal nature. There seems to be a ‘right time’, a moment when all the questionings come together and answers are revealed in respect of whether one wants to continue or change one’s ways of being. Time is needed to own one’s choices. Time is required to trust that the self can trust oneself and others. Time is even needed to decide if one wants to stay silent. Seen through this lens, authenticity is a process and an unfolding of becoming. It is an arrival that takes time to feel right. For participants, what has opened in their anticipation of the future is that their ‘having-been’ has released itself into the present moment, the moment of resolute action. This aligns with Minkowski’s (1970) conceptualisation that our experiences are constantly accompanied by a feeling of moving towards the future: of becoming.

7. Critical reflections

7.1 Contribution of this research

There are many learnings that can be gleaned from this key contribution. The beauty of a phenomenological research is its endless learnings each time one returns to read the interviews or the findings. Five key points will be further delineated in this section but by no means should it be limited to these points. It is recognised that a different researcher may uncover and resonate with different parts of the phenomena or at a different phase in life with a different horizon, the same person may see something within the lived experiences of the participants that was invisible to us previously. The key points are:

1. The need for authenticity is universal, but it may be experienced in different ways.
2. Lifeworld approach encourages appreciation and empathy for the lived sense of tensions and polarities that millennials have to navigate.

3. Choosing to remain silent may be just as authentic as true self-expression.
4. Authenticity has a temporal nature.
5. Step out of ourselves to know ourselves.
6. One is more of a person through community.

As mentioned in the previous section, the lived experience of the participants point towards how authenticity is equally felt by those in collective societies even if they do not endorse similar levels of 'independence' as the Western cultures do. This universal aspect of being an individual in the society contributes to Heidegger's (1962) understanding that authenticity is an ontological dimension of our existence.

The universality of authenticity is a bold claim to make. In the literature review, I had refrained from providing a working definition of authenticity as it felt like I was falling back into a realist perspective of the concept. However, since this ontological investigation is affirmed by the ontic which Heidegger (1962) had said there is always a 'relatedness backward and forward' (p. 28) between these two levels, making this bold claim at the end of the research warrants a discussion of what the structure of authenticity is or what it encompasses. Firstly, the themes have pointed out that authenticity is a process of becoming. This aspect will be discussed in more detail below when the discussion of how authenticity has a temporal nature is held. Authenticity is also a process of gaining power. It may not be in terms of overpowering others but it could be am empowering process of gaining power to exercise one's agency, becoming more visible and meeting one's potential.

However, as much as the need for authenticity is universal, self-expression as a form of authenticity may be bounded by cultural borders. Emerging from the findings is an interesting phenomenon: many of the millennials choose to not let their voices be witnessed in certain settings or with specific others. They prefer to stay quiet underground even when they have their own thoughts and ideas. If the millennials were given the opportunity to fill up the psychometric scales for measuring trait authenticity like Kernis and Goldman's (2006) multicomponent measure and Wood et al's (2008) Authenticity Scale, specifically on subscales that measure self-expression, they may receive a low score on the psychometric scales Taking this on a surface level, we may prematurely conclude that they have less need for authenticity or have lower levels of authenticity.

Yet, a certain level of empathy arises when we begin to appreciate how the lifeworld description captures the experience of ambivalence at the heart of their lived world. This echos Finlay's (2011) words, "*The best phenomenological accounts capture the ambiguity, ambivalences and paradoxes of human experience. Rarely if ever, is an experience simple or clear-cut; our emotions are invariable mixed, our experience layered*" (p. 232). Standing next to each other for these participants is a sense of rootedness and alienation, being-there-for-others and being-there-for-oneself and, living for the future while constantly being pulled back in time. It is a divided self and a divided world that these millennials find themselves in and the tension is felt within the contradicting experiences as they navigate through this complexity. What stands out is a lived sense of tensions, polarities and barriers that the millennials have to learn to navigate around or to live within them if there is no way around them. Producing this richer representation of an Asian's lived experience in navigating through ambiguity in the journey towards self-expression in a country that values conformity more than standing out is the key contribution of my research to this topic area.

The second point leads to the next point where choosing to remain silent may very well just be as authentic as true self-expression. Some of these millennials have chosen not to reveal what they truly think or feel despite their circumstances. What stands out is not so much their decision to remain silent or not but in their choices. To put it differently, silence or self-expression seems to be an ontological way of being rather than an ontic behaviour. When one see it this way, authenticity is no longer seen through dualistic lens. Silence or the lack thereof makes sense when one takes into account the lifeworld of the person. When one takes that into account, it allows us to appreciate how silence or self-expression may have equal potential to be authentic or inauthentic acts. This is especially evident in the theme *Breaking point* as it points towards an intentional choice that some participants have made to stay silent.

The role of staying silent at the Breaking Point echoes Heidegger's (1962) idea of call to conscience. If Dasein's experience of the world is related to its state of mind and there are times where Dasein is very open to the opinion of others which may easily lead to the possibility of losing oneself, another kind of hearing is breaking away from this threat of falling into the they is just as possible. Hearing voice of conscience was possibly what the participants were doing as it called out to them. And in Heidegger's (1962) words: "Conscience discourses solely and constantly in the mode of keeping silent. In this way it not only loses none of its perceptibility,

but forces the Dasein which has been appealed to and summoned, into the reticence of itself (p. 318)."

It seems too that authenticity has a temporal nature. It is an unfolding, a becoming and an arrival to what feels right at the right time. At times, being silent seems like just the right thing to do to prevent oneself from being objectified. The moment we speak up, we position ourselves. One is then stuck with an identity or in a position in social interactions that may not fit or uncomfortable. However, when we remain silent or not allowing oneself to be known, others may not have any material in which to objectify or position us quite so easily. Staying silent retains the possibility of becoming. One is not being seen, fixed or limited. Not voicing out can also be authentic in the sense that it keeps one's being open and fluid until one arrives at another turning or breaking point in which one can commit ourselves to make a different choice. Authenticity can very well be lived out in our 'not-yet-being'. Thus, silence can very well be a form of self-preservation until the right time arrives to make another authentic choice.

The second last contribution points towards authenticity as contrary to our modern day understanding of it being merely an individual project to stand out or to express our true selves. In all of the interviews lie one common thread which is the recognition of their being-in-the-world with others. The millennials understand themselves more fully when they see themselves through the eyes of others. This can come in multiple forms such as the broadening of horizons when we are exposed to different cultures and perspectives or when being seen as invisible involuntarily. Although we are breathing air all the time, it remains invisible to us until it is taken away. The implication of this is to start questioning if we have to step outside of our ways of being to see what it is like and know ourselves.

Lastly, there is also a sense that authenticity, aside from being an agent of one's life, is about being more of a person through community. Standing alongside each other through sufferings and considering the experience of not only the self but also of others in their choices that is shown mostly through the Lived Sociality section shows the self as how existential phenomenologists understand it. This reveals a more collective and mutually negotiated way of being that can too equally be authentic. It is possible that this key finding provides support for Edith Stein's (2002) suggestion that being-with-others in community is a prerequisite on which human beings become responsible agents.

Stein's work on community and her critique of Heidegger's existential philosophy is beyond the scope of this research. However, what stands out from the findings of this research is how navigation is not divorced from our relationships. In addition to showcasing Heidegger's (1962) belief of relationality by showing that navigation of whether to be heard or to stay silent can be understood through their relationality in the world, the importance of relationships and community as described by Stein was exhibited through the millennials' lived experiences. It was shown that authenticity is not a lonely way of being (Martell, 2013). It is neither a process of separating ourselves from our community nor an individualistic affair. Rather, it is about finding a unique role with our community of peers and to be recognised as oneself by our peers.

7.2 Critical Evaluation

This chapter will start with an overview of the strengths and weakness of this study before conducting a critical evaluation of whether it has preserved the methodological integrity of a hermeneutic phenomenological research. This second section will elaborate on the first by applying a critical eye on the different stages of the study from within and outside of the research methodology. In the final section, I will be examining the implications and relevance of the findings of this study to specifically psychotherapy practice and training.

7.2.1 Strengths and limitations

This is my first attempt at conducting qualitative research. Having come from a quantitative background, it was a challenge to conduct a study that had no specific technique. It was a journey where I am achieving two things at the same time: bringing out the phenomenon of this research topic and learning what it means to be a hermeneutic phenomenologist. I recognize that mistakes are inevitable as I, as a novice researcher, learn to cope with the lack of confidence, live out a new way of being rather than doing that is at many times confusing and uncertain and, embody the purpose of phenomenological research. As a result, adjustments were made on each different stages of the research along the way.

Despite being so, I am confident that this research is trustworthy. It has demonstrated methodological integrity (Levitt et al., 2017) by displaying both fidelity and utility as I

effectively used the hermeneutic phenomenological method to bring out the rich lifeworld of being in a collectivistic country. Through that, I have embraced the phenomenological project's commitment to description, maintaining a dance between reflexivity and reduction and captured well the complexities and ambiguities of the phenomena involved. As Finlay (2011) mentioned, the power of phenomenological research lies in its ability to *'capture the ambiguity, ambivalence and richness of lived experience while touching the diversity and complexity of the social world'* (p. 270). I believe that the findings of this study have uphold the vision and spirit of hermeneutic phenomenology by showcasing the richness of human experience.

7.2.2 From epistemology to methodology

Hermeneutic phenomenological research is an ontological project in itself where the researcher studies how lived experiences subjectively appear to us. The aim of my phenomenological study is to bring out the lived experience of those who are finding their voice in a collective society in all its richness and complexity. For this, I found using Van Manen's (2014) lifeworld approach to be most useful for this purpose as it allows my reflection to be guided by the participants' pre-reflective experiential meanings. My focus is on getting my participants to describe their immediate lived experience in a way that it be brought to life through four fundamental existentials: spatiality, corporeality, temporality and relationality.

However, I am also aware of my epistemological position. Grounded in a critical realist position, I believe in our inter-relatedness in the world. I cannot separate the world from my experience of the world. The world and myself are co-constituted and it was this intersubjective space between subject and object that I have to probe (Finlay, 2008). As such, the more I dwell in my research, the more I come to realise that my hermeneutic reflection was crucial to the quality of my analysis and findings. As a Singaporean Millennial researching other Singaporean Millennials, I am attempting to bring out their experience while making sense of my own at the same time. The starting point of most phenomenological research is for the researcher to 'bracket' prior assumptions or understandings. I worked hard to put aside my assumption that speaking up and allowing ourselves be heard is desirable. I was cautious against assuming that my experiences as a Singaporean was similar to most of my participants, especially those whom we share the same race. Yet, my pre-judgements can both be my closedness and openness to the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Just as much as my fore-

understandings may bias the findings, allowing myself to reflect on any resistance from my participants' material helps me reinterpret my fore-understandings and exploiting what I have learnt as a source of insight. This is the dance between reductive focus and reflexive self-awareness that Finlay (2008) discussed about and I find myself resonating with.

I have chosen to adopt this hermeneutic dance throughout the research stages starting from the conception of my topic. Doing so was not immediately apparent to me at first even though I had kept a reflexive journal right from the beginning. However, it was only in the later stages of the research that I understood that reduction was not an act that I practiced only at certain stages of the research. It was the iterative and hermeneutic dance between reduction and reflexivity that brought me closer and closer to understanding my participants' and my lifeworld. This is evident in the later stages when my grasp of the phenomena became more acute over multiple iterative enquiries over time.

I am mindful that the phenomenological findings that I produce will only be tentative, partial and emergent (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006). It can only be taken as a *'tentative statement opening upon a limitless field of possible interpretations'* (Churchill, 2000, p. 164). The quality of my findings depends on how well I have exercised my critical self-awareness, allowed myself to engage in intuitive '*dwelling*' (Dahlberg, 2006) , wonder (Seth, 2017) and openness in this hermeneutic dance.

Different methodologies and epistemological theoretical perspectives will view how my findings are generated in different ways. A positivist, taking on a realist position, will find my findings invalid and unreliable as it is impossible to replicate. In addition, with each of my interview being so different, they are neither comparable and generalisable. A social constructionist may question if I have attempted enough on discourse. Essentially, if I put on a different epistemological lens, I will generate different findings.

I am clear that this phenomenological project focuses on Van Manen's lifeworld approach. I am not trying to conduct a study that is valid, reliable or generalisable. That is not what phenomenology aims to achieve. It is the underlying meanings and the being in the world that I am trying to capture in an embodied sense.

Reflexivity has been outlined in the methodology section where I described why and how I engaged in it to aid in phenomenological reduction. I have chosen to engage in this hermeneutic dance consistently through the stages rather than just in the data collection and analysis stage. This is an iterative and dialectical process of hermeneutic reflexivity that has helped me to gain a deeper understandings as more ground is re-covered with each revision (Finlay, 2008). As part of my audit process, I had written my thoughts, ideas, reactions and pre-understandings in my journals and had discussed this with a mentor. Through this process, I recognise my influence of my perspective upon data collection and how it guided my analysis. This strengthens the relevance and rigour of my findings.

Even though I had employed epoche and engaged with a phenomenological attitude throughout this reflexive process, there were still aspects that I was surprised to find out about my influence on the research. For instance, it was humbling to become aware that I had internalised the view that authenticity was true self-expression when I reacted strongly to a participant who had chosen to remain quiet deliberately. On another occasion, I was made to see during one of my supervision sessions that I still carried a positivistic lens to view my findings when I was trying to impose a sense of a divided or multiple self on my findings. I am critically aware how adopting a phenomenological attitude and a sense of openness was especially challenging for me. It is one thing to carry out reflexivity as it takes time, commitment, care, and skill to go into a reflexive mode. Even for seasoned phenomenological researchers, it can be a painful and uncomfortable process and attention needs to be paid to engaging in self-awareness without falling into undue navel gazing (Finlay & Gough, 2008).

As a novice researcher, I was honing this reflexive skill while engaging with the data. It was both an active and passive process here which I had decidedly devoted more time into. Moments of feeling muddled in my head would overwhelm me at times and this took a while for me to grasp that I should take a break from the research process. It was a period of active passivity (Van Manen, 2014) , allowing myself to embody their stories while living out the rest of my life. The challenge for me was in trusting the process. At times, I questioned what I was doing. It was with the support of my mentor that I hung in there and slowly, rich insights. Below is an example of how I arrived at my findings of invisibility, barriers and breaking point:

‘I am noticing my own ambivalent responses. I sense a deep emotional pain and confusion which is powerful enough to knock me off even my daily routines. This is again one of those

moments where to go further is to pause and reflect on what is happening. I do not like it. It slows me down but I know better now that the longer I persist in hanging on, the longer I remain stuck. Yet, when I let go, I allow those 'aha' moments to hit me. This is when I realize that the pain I was experiencing belongs as much to me as my participants. By allowing myself to enter my pain, I grew cognizant of the journey of invisibility, barriers and breaking point that I have gone through myself as a Singaporean Millennial. I was feeling my pain but also feeling pained by my participants' experiences. There are times I am not quite certain if I'm imposing my experience onto my participants but this, I am confident in my bones that it's a lived experience we both share. This is an experience I understand as an intertwined embodied reaction.

7.2.3 Data Collection

Whether my data is adequate is a question of fidelity. Fidelity is improved when my data are collected from diverse sources that can produce as much variations in the phenomenon (Levitt et al., 2017). I started off with the idea that my eight participants will reflect the proportion of each ethnic groups, Chinese, Malays, Indians and Others (CMIO), in Singapore. I carried this mindset even up till I started my interviews but I was aware that something does not sit well with me. I had discussed this with colleagues and my mentor who had different views but it was the latter that reminded me about going back into my epistemological position to help me with my decision making.

Having my participants reflect the ratio of the CMIO population was buying into a positivistic mindset where I am trying to get a representational data. Since I am not conducting an empirical study that is evaluated on its validity, rather I am trying to find rich lived experiences of being in a collectivistic country, I only had to ensure that I recruited participants that has or had the experience of struggling to have a voice or had successfully allowed their voice to be heard. For my data to be adequately rich in lived experience it became more apparent over the course of the interviews that it was my responsibility to prepare my participants sufficiently before our interviews. I had ensure I had a phone call with each participant before our interviews which I had explained what I needed from them during the interview:

1. Choose a concrete experience where they have or have not had a voice
2. Describe it as vividly as possible in present tense.

3. To not analyze or interpret why they have chosen to act in certain ways.

I recognize that my interviews were of better quality in terms of richness of data at the end than at the beginning. One attribution is how I improved at preparing my participants for the interview as I clarified issues of uncertainty and helping them to be in the space to share. It is also crucial to mention that I had stopped using the interview questions after my third participant. Even though the questions were informal ones which served more as prompts, it felt like a survey and stopped me from being fully present with my participants. Instead, I chose to merely start the interview with variations of 'tell me about yourself' and we eased into the research topic. I then prompted them through the interview by asking to describe a time when they had attempted or struggled to have a voice. I chose to go with the lived experience using open and non-leading questions. I felt that my participants opened up as I allowed the conversation to flow more naturally. My skillset as an existential phenomenological therapist certainly was an advantage here in being a catalyst for insight as I engaged (Finlay, 2005) understanding of a reflexive embodied empathy in

Post Phenomenological Retrospection

As I reviewed the main interview question, 'describe a time when you had, attempted or struggled to have a voice', I realized that inviting my participants to describe a 'time' is to get them to talk about something at head level. For instance, they may answer ' it was ten years ago when this happened…' Time is objectified and they have to look at themselves from the outside. They're not in the phenomenon but in a reflective space. Whereas, by asking 'describe a moment…', it would have been easier invite them to enter and reveal their pre-reflective experiences.

As a novice researcher, it was a subtle difference that I did not catch. In fact, it took a while to get it. And when I say I 'get it', I meant getting it in my flesh and bones and not just in a cognitive sense. I now appreciate how this subtleness is essential in phenomenological research. It is in returning to the aim of phenomenological research, understanding the pre-reflective experiential meaning before it is made sense of to bring out the phenomena, that makes this subtle difference not a subtle one.

There is more appreciation to the art of a phenomenological interview. More than that, I've become more sensitive to what it means to bring out the pre-reflective experiential meaning every step of the way in research. It brings to the fore the importance of Van Manen's suggestion of maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon.

helping my participants and myself to attune more in our conversations. I recognize times where the boundary between a researcher and therapist blurred during the interviews as I was tempted to provide interventions. This is a common mistake that novice researchers make and I had reflected on them in my reflexive journal after each interview. With this way of working, I believe that my data collection phase has allowed me to draw out phenomenon that had not been considered previously, thus improving the utility of the research.

Lastly, I consider the contextualization of my data to be important in contributing to the utility of the research. I am aware that the interviews are conducted with Singaporean millennials who are describing a uniquely Singaporean and generational experience. Their experience may differ from those from other generations in the same country or the same generations from other collectivistic countries.

7.2.4 Data Analysis

Van Manen (1990) has termed phenomenology as a method without techniques. To fully embrace phenomenological project is to commit to describing the lived experience in such a way that does justice to the phenomenon. In as much as a work that is rigorous contributes to its trustworthiness, Barthes (1986) warned us that '*a work which constantly proclaims its will-to-method is ultimately sterile*' (p. 318). This was a difficult concept to grasp at the beginning as I considered whether to write it up as a thematic analysis or poetic transcription. The challenge was partly due to my inability to fully grasp what phenomenological research requires. It took months of support from my mentor and multiple times of writing and re-writing in different ways to finally come to an 'aha' moment. This was a moment where my own embodied understanding of the research method as not having a method has caught up with my intellectual understanding of it. The guiding question that I had as I began my final write up was: *'with the way I have chosen to write it up, have I evoked the phenomenon in which the readers and myself have a better sense of it?'*

In my attempt to produce phenomenological research that resonates, I have written it up in such a way where I appealed to both the artistic and scientific side of research. For the former, I was guided by Van Manen's idea that to write is to author a sensitive grasp of being itself through

description. Writing was an artistic activity to which I evaluated against Finlay's criteria of resonance and supplemented by Polkinghorne's (1983) recommended criteria of vividness, accuracy, richness and elegance. I believe I have met these criteria.

However, I am aware that in the process of writing up the findings that also evokes resonance may lead one to think if the findings are mixed with my opinions. More specifically, the phenomenology orientation by Max Van Manen (Van Manen, 1990b), as followed by the Utrecht School, has been considered as an arcane, impressionistic and exclusive form of phenomenology. For the scientist, a poetic piece of work can transform us but it can be evaluated as *"it's just make-believe"*, something not valid (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009). The dilemma of whether aesthetics language is ethical is put into question. Here, I looked to (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009) for guidance as I sought to maintain the methodological integrity (Levitt et al., 2017) had called for and evaluate if the claims I have made in the findings are warranted.

The process of producing the findings led me to choose expressive words that I feel comes closest to bringing out my participants' lived experiences. In this process, I have used words that sounds 'beautiful', lyrical, meaningful, poignant, strong and poetic to the senses. I am aware that it is the 'beautiful' that phenomenologists have at times been criticized for being subjective and relative (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009). Yet, as Heiddeger noted, beauty can be one of the many passages to truth. For the Greeks, to know something was to uncover its being. It has been called *aletheia*, translated as truth or unconcealedness (Heidegger, 1998, p. 11). Beauty is this unconcealedness of truth. In the context of truth and beauty, Heidegger (Heidegger, 2001) elaborates:

> Truth is the unconcealedness of that which is as something that is. Truth is the truth of Being. Beauty does not occur alongside and apart from this truth. When truth sets itself into the work, it appears. Appearance—as this being of truth in the work and as work—is beauty. Thus, the beautiful belongs to the advent of truth, truth's taking of its place. (p. 79)

Thus, as with fine arts, phenomenological writing is not only written for enjoyment or admiration purposes, but it is another way to let truth happen. In other words, through unconcealing its beauty through words, it allows the 'is-ness' of the lived experience to shine through. The hermeneutic phenomenological writing endeavor is to constantly go beyond the

natural attitude of things and *"re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world"* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). It is also this reason that writing up a phenomenology text goes beyond a traditional scientific report by "writing the lived experience" rather than writing "about" the lived experience (Henriksson & Saevi, 2009). A utilitarian and analytic writing style fails to bring readers on either a meaningful wondering into a more reflective understanding of the taken-for granted, ambivalence and complexity of any lived experience. I would like to think that I have achieved this and provoked anyone reading this research to question how their own experience of navigation impacts on their existence. This is not a flaw of academic writing but it is just not the aim of a pragmatic objective matter-of-fact truth way of reporting to evoke reflection in the same way a phenomenological text does.

Establishing that expressive writing in phenomenological texts has ethical and aesthetic virtues of truth and beauty has provided justification as to why I wrote up my findings in the way I did. However, I remained steadfast to maintaining fidelity to my research by ensuring that the meanings in the findings are grounded in data (Levitt et al., 2017). Here, both rigour and resonance were crucial in the analysis stage, making sure that the analysis section is systematically worked through with Van Manen's way while keeping in mind that a good phenomenological finding is one that resonates with the reader's own experiences and understandings. Both dwelling in the data and writing up were intricately intertwined together to provide both rigour and resonance.

In the process of dwelling, I allow myself to immerse in the data by listening to the transcript multiple times with and without the audio. At the beginning, I would read the whole transcript to get an overall sense of the context. As I lingered and allowed myself to be more absorbed in each participant, I went back to smaller chunks of sections, which includes phrases and passages of texts that Van Manen (2014) termed these as 'meaning units', to get a better sense of the paradoxes, contradictions, patterns or nuances in tones and emotions that emerges. The focus remains at sifting and refining aspects of meaning units that relate to the existential dimensions: lived time, lived space, lived body and lived relation. I start with the idiographic accounts but gradually move on to explicating the emergent phenomenon together to be pulled into more overarching lived experiences. Throughout this whole process, I kept a journal for each participant and a separate one which helps me to engage in the dwelling process through eidetic analysis, imaginative variation and reflexively engaging horizons between myself and the participants (Finlay, 2014).

To maintain rigour and transparency, I had justified my interpretations with participants' quotes. Furthermore, my findings are written using two voices. The findings makes use of the participants' voice and is an embodied phenomenon whereby the readers can appreciate how the participants are feeling through their accounts. On the other hand, the discussion uses a more formal voice but takes it one step further by capturing the experience of ambivalence and complexity of the participants' lifeworld. I have chosen to do it this way to enhance the coherence within the findings and its utility by putting on different spectacles as I describe through different lens the lifeworld of these participants.

7.3 Future research

Given the evidence supporting the contribution of balanced authenticity to optimal well-being, Wang (2016) has suggested that future research should seek to identify specific mechanisms that may mediate this relationship. It is certainly important for more studies to be conducted if we want to further our knowledge and understanding of the lived experiences of navigating towards a balanced authenticity. However, the findings and the lifeworld discussion have shown that the lived experience of one who is in navigation can be very complex, rich, ambiguous and ambivalent.

Attempting to find a formula or theorise about this navigation process is to risk falling into a positivistic conception of authenticity where the self is fixed and a true self can be found. What makes a balanced or relational authenticity ethically significant is precisely in its respect that each person to pave their own way through their unique stresses and distractions of everyday life and allowing them to err and fumble to find their own relationally authentic attitude that suits them (Fletcher, 2013). As Guignon (2004) wrote:

> Most people would agree, I think, that becoming and being authentic is an arduous process, and that authentic people are not necessarily the happiest people in the sense of having pleasurable feelings most of the time. The ideal of authenticity makes a very heavy demand on you, one that outweighs concerns about sustaining good feelings in all situations (p.148).

Thus, in light of this study's findings, it is with more conviction that future studies continue to uphold that ideal that we should strive to learn more about balanced authenticity but to resist making firm conclusions on how to achieve it. Navigating a balanced or relational authenticity

is a process that seems to keep evolving and this supports the concept that the self is always never finished.

7.4 Theoretical and Practical Implications

The key contributions from this thesis were found through two aspects that deferred from existing studies: a qualitative methodology and drawn mainly from Asian participants. The findings are original and the richness, ambivalence and complexity of the participants' lifeworld have challenged our position that authenticity is not merely an ontic responsibility to have a voice by showing that it is part of our ontological existence. More importantly, it shows the importance of diversity in methodology and recognizing cultural differences as a principle of sensible research.

Findings from phenomenological research will always remain tentative and partial. It does not seek for generalizability from just eight idiographic accounts. However, having shown that it is achievable to uncover such richness in the phenomenon through a lifeworld approach, future qualitative research can investigate if there are other contradictions or ambivalence that contributes to the navigation experience of finding one's voice. It will be interesting to look into it in future studies and how the phenomenon of silence and intersectionality issues impacts on the field of psychotherapy.

Intersectionality and diversity issues in psychotherapy has been recognised over the years such as that of Dwight Turner's (2021) book *Intersections of Privilege and Otherness in Counselling and Psychotherapy: Mockingbird. In fact,* Audre Lorde (2007) said, '*There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives*.' This will also mean that the richness and complexity of this phenomenon will most likely increase as we acknowledge and include the diversity and intersectionality of our identities such as gender, generations, culture, class, etc in future research. This has equally been supported by Stewart and McDermott (2004) and Neff and Suizzo (2006).

Yet many of these research and literature focus on Western cultures. Supporting this comes from Henrich et al. (2010) who have argued that broad claims of many human psychological behavioural disciplines are drawn mainly from Western, educated, industrialised, rich and democratic (WEIRD) participants. They are only "representative of 12% of the world's

population" nonetheless, the findings are often generalised worldwide. This results in a lack of appreciation in diversity and intersectionality issues within psychotherapy. As Siddique (2011) reflected on how as a black therapist, she sees the lack of diversity and cultural differences in the therapy room. Equally, as an Asian therapist, I encounter a similar issue. I agree with her that as psychotherapists, we need to work and research across cultures, and I add to that researching across methodologies, to remove the artificial boundaries created in communicating the rationalist tendencies of Western scientific thoughts and judgement.

In the realm of practice and training, psychotherapists will benefit much from such phenomenological studies as it provides another alternative when it comes to engaging and understanding clients. Especially when working with Asian clients, psychotherapists can profit from the research by having a better understanding of their need for harmony through their lifeworld. This could be especially significant for those who are less familiar with the Asian culture. When working with Asian clients, therapists should consider the importance and contexts of self-expression through their client's life experiences. There is finer appreciation for the person in the room- their sense of relatedness, relationships and considerations- when the attention is on their lifeworld rather than on clinical symptoms and outcomes. This leads one away from a medicalized view of the client, from labelling them as either authentic or inauthentic based on their ontic reality. For the therapist, this way of working also encourages developing a sense of empathy, openness and wonder (Seth, 2017) when we appreciate that the person in the room are equally beings-in-the-world working hard at exercising their ontological existence.

Silence, defined as a pause during which neither the therapist nor the client is speaking (Hill, 2014), within therapy has been researched extensively in the field of counselling and therapy from a plethora of different paradigms (Levitt, 2002; Ladany, Thompson & O'Brien, 2004; Barber, 2009; Daniel *et al.*, 2018). The concept of the ellipsis, a grammatical tool (. . .) to indicate a pause or silence and to indicate the omission or suppression of a word or phrase, has been cleverly used by Salma Siddique (Siddique, 2017) to work with silence by seeing it as a metaphor for different spaces that emerge. She discussed about how recognising the experiential spaces between doing and being is an opportunity to negotiate boundaries for meaning between self and others (Heidegger, 1962). In the therapeutic space, this metaphor is useful in illuminating the spaces between words, feelings and thoughts for the client. The findings show that the lived space for one who feels silenced is a constricted and punishing

one. Recognising the ellipses and working with the in-between spaces between two people, in this case the therapist and client, can help the latter expand this space through the recognition of the existence or absence of power and the challenge of fixed binary opposition of communicating that he or she may be used to (Siddique, 2011). This allows the client to negotiate new ways of being with power as one opens up space, which being silenced, marginalized and oppressed by others had shut down, through a more fluid encounter and dynamic dialogue. The therapy room presents itself as a liminal space between the outside world and the life-world of the client (Siddique, 2019). As new skills in negotiating spaces are picked up, the therapist can encourage the client to apply them outside in their lives.

Existing literature have produced varied results on the use of silence in psychotherapy which can range from facilitating processing of emotions (Ladany, Thompson & O'Brien, 2004; Hill *et al.*, 2019) or a way for clients to avoid difficult emotional experiences (Frankel & Levitt, 2006). In fact, it has often been described as 'deafening' or 'golden with Van Deurzen (2009) entitling one of her chapter ' *Speech is Silver and Silence Golden*'. It is not unfamiliar in the field of therapy to know that silence can hold as much importance as words in our communication and counselling trainings often include the teaching of the use of silence in the therapeutic setting.

It has been said that in therapy, it is often the relationship that heals. To have relational depth, "*Neither they nor their clients were wearing masks. Just 2 very naked people, a touching of souls*" (Cooper, 2005, p. 92). Yet, not one therapy is the same, even with the same therapist. When two people come together, they bring along multiple and intersecting forms of identities. Each identity brings along a different lifeworld and lived experiences. As Dwight Turner (2021) wrote, in psychotherapy, we see identity and ego as if it was just one ego. Yet each identity has its own structure around it. In existential phenomenological terms, there is no self but in how it relates to the different aspects of their lifeworld. Navigation is more complex when we take into account differences and diversity. It is not as simple as polarising them into just one issue – race, gender, sexuality, etc. It is thus important that psychotherapy practice and trainings become more sensitive to recognising the complexity and nuances of diversity, intersectional and multicultural issues particularly around issues of prejudices, power, microaggressions and silence.

However, the experience of silence in the therapeutic setting for both the therapist and client has not been as extensively researched or understood. This research, albeit not focused on counselling and therapy, can provide some direction in this aspect, particular the Asian client's experience. Very often, clients sees their therapists as more powerful than them. In addition, power has often been experienced in a destructive way. As shown in Barber's (2009) work, clients will normally reenact what they know about power and silence in their everyday life in the room. It is important that therapists are responsive to that. This is especially so in Asia where counselling is still a developing field in Asia. Asian therapists could very well have similar experiences of power and silence as their clients which is a double-edged sword. Having similar experiences may allow the therapist to relate and resonate as equals with the client. However, for a newly qualified therapist or for one who has more inner work to do, therapy could potentially become more of an agent of socialization than of healing (Watkins, 1992). As Mearns and Thorne (2003) write, "*As therapists we are concerned at all costs not to add to this destructiveness*" (p. 217).

7.4 Post Phenomenological retrospection

I return again to my decision of not defining authenticity in my paper. I still stand by my choice, with even more conviction that it was the right one. At the beginning, it was a hunch and a gut feel that led me to the decision. However, looking back now at my own research journey with a finer appreciation for hermeneutic phenomenological as a method, it feels like my body understood something about the method which I didn't yet know consciously.

At the same time, now that I am more aligned with the method, I'd like to reflect on my conclusion that balanced authenticity is more ideal. I wonder if doing so is falling back into a realist way of thinking which I have been consciously avoiding throughout. Is this a delimiting way of understanding authenticity? It seems so.

On my research journey, I was seeking to expand my understanding of authenticity. Through my findings, especially when it comes to concluding that silence can be a form of authenticity too, it's shown to me that authenticity or not depends very much on the context. We can be authentic when we are unbalanced, being courageous or when we take care of others' needs above ours. Authenticity does not depend on how it is seen on the outside. It's a phenomenon that no one can pin down. It is an existential phenomenon that belongs to the human being.

It begs my question if Western or Eastern cultures display authenticity differently was a valid one. Most likely not. Authenticity as a human quality is in us because we are human, not because we are Western or Eastern. And all of us have the capacity to be authentic, even if it is expressed in very different ways or seemingly unbalanced ways. More than a universal value, it is an existential value.

I realise that arguing for a balanced authenticity then is like going from an expanded understanding back to a limited one. Perhaps more sophisticated but nonetheless it is a contracted one. It brings to the fore that at every step of my navigating my hermeneutic phenomenological journey, I can be at risk of falling back into a cartesian and positivistic mindset.

7.5 Conclusion

When I embarked on this research journey, I began by asking a question: whether the Western concept of authenticity might also apply to Asian cultures. This question was ignited during a transitional period in my own life, when my own personal experience of feeling silenced as a Singaporean young woman (and daughter) of Chinese ethnicity had undergone an expansion of horizons. During my doctoral studies in the UK, I witnessed my classmates' refreshingly different way of being: they seemed much more outspoken than me, and far less fearful of speaking up. Watching them take pride in being seen and heard, I wondered why this was so hard to achieve in Singapore. Now that I have reached the end of my doctoral journey, I can say that, while authenticity applies universally, it is enacted and experienced in different ways. For my young research participants in Singapore, self-expression is perhaps not quite as necessary as it is for millennials in the West. Having a voice can mean both speaking up -- and choosing to keep silent.

My hermeneutic phenomenological research has specifically explicated the struggle of millennials who are navigating authenticity in a Singaporean context. Their lived experience was one that was rich, complex and at times ambivalent as they sought to navigate their way in a context where they exerted little power and were expected to conform and/or maintain harmony in work, social and family settings. Feeling stuck and invisible was something many

of them had to grapple with. However, emerging out of these experiences was the resilience and determination to continue being the author of their own lives.

As demonstrated in the millennials' lived experiences, authenticity is a process. Just like the self, it is constantly emerging and is never finished. I believe my findings have brought out the messiness and indeterminacy of this emerging process, in part because of my refusal to say what authenticity really is or to make a neat box out of it.

Concluding a work suggests that there is an 'answer' or even a 'solution' on offer. However, I choose to see a thesis as a long essay, an extended exploration of a thought or idea. As such, it also involves a quest to uncover more.

Just like authenticity, this thesis is an emerging process. I am putting a full stop here to mark the end of this thesis, but it is not the end of this research journey. As I continue to grapple with the notion of authenticity, whether in our research or in our personal lives, further revelations -- and questions – are certain to surface. This much I have learned during my seven-year-long research journey.

One such aspect may be to look at how people in a collectivistic society experience this navigation process in the past. As my findings have shown that authenticity is an ontological dimension of our existence, we should get similar results. This is especially pertinent as I recognise that my research is positioned in a particular period of time where millennials are more aware of the value of authenticity. The findings make sense in the age of social media but I wonder what would be found if we explored how people 50 or 100 years back experienced their navigation.

As I become more attuned with the hermeneutic enquiry process, I found myself powerfully impacted and surprised by the recognition of silence in my participants. Although I had similar experiences, I had not framed the research around this aspect; I sought to keep myself open to the findings. However, my exploration of participants' experiences seemed to draw me back into my own journey.

When I started this research, I struggled with my voice. It was not that I did not have a voice; I was afraid of how it would be received if I expressed it. Relationships might be challenged, compromised or even ruptured, and I was not prepared to cope with tensions in relationships

for the sake of my asserting myself. Often, I chose to keep silent, but this silence was life-draining.

As the thesis evolved, I grew with it as well. Today, I have gone from being a daughter to being the mother of a daughter. Caring for her is making me acutely aware of the values and the worldviews I am passing on to her. Like my participants, I have to contend with pain during my navigation journey. I find resonance and solace in Guignon's (2004) words:

> *Most people would agree, I think, that becoming and being authentic is an arduous process, and that authentic people are not necessarily the happiest people in the sense of having pleasurable feelings most of the time. The ideal of authenticity makes a very heavy demand on you, one that outweighs concerns about sustaining good feelings in all situations. (p. 148)*

Aware that my pain mirrors that of my participants, I am left recognizing that I cannot ignore the moral and ethical elements of authenticity. The pain of realizing that my daughter could grow up learning that nobody is around to speak or stand up for her when her voice is challenged, that she must navigate this journey alone: this breaks my heart more than the silence I endured.

By allowing my personal voice to reverberate in parts of this thesis while keeping silent in other parts, I have undertaken my own navigation process. I have made progress towards discerning when to speak up and when to allow my silence to augment my voice; both my silence and speaking up are equally life-giving. I hope that if my daughter's voice ever gets lost or drowned out by others as she navigates her way through life, my voice will be there to lead her back to her.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- Databases Accessed

American Psychological Association: http://www.apa.org/index.aspx

BACP: http://www.bacp.co.uk/research/resources/dissertations.php

Middlesex University Databases: http://unihub.mdx.ac.uk/your-study/library-and-itsupport/study-and-research-resources/journals-and-e-resources/databases

Middlesex University Research Repository: http://eprints.mdx.ac.uk/

National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE): http://www.evidence.nhs.uk/

OpenAthens: http://www.openathens.net/

Oxford Scholarship Online: http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/

Phenomenology Online: http://www.phenomenologyonline.com/

Proquest: http://www.proquest.com/products-services/dissertations/

Researchgate: http://www.researchgate.net/

Taylor Francis Online: http://www.tandfonline.com/

Wiley Online Library: http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/

Phenomenology and Practice: https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/pandpr/index

Appendix 2- Poster Advertisement for Participants

NSPC
NEW SCHOOL OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND COUNSELLING

Middlesex University

Volunteers Needed
For Doctoral Research into:
The lived experience of navigating having a voice in a collective country

Do you find yourself asking about what it means to have a voice yet feeling a sense of belonging?

Singapore as an Asian country still retains much of its collectivistic value of maintaining harmony. Yet, we are also familiar with values from the Western societies such as having our own voices.
This research is interested in understanding *the lived experience of having to integrate the paradox of agency-belonging in Singaporean Millennials.* This is part of a larger aim to conceptualise a Singaporean Millennial interpretation of authenticity.

If you are interested in contributing to this research with your own experience and fit the criteria:

1. **A Singaporean citizen or PR**
2. **Born between 1980 and 2000**
3. **Attended a local school up till at least their secondary years**.
4. **Lives/lived in public housing**

you are kindly invited to take part in a research interview of 60-75 minutes. The interview will take place in Singapore at a time convenient to you.

Please contact **Magdalen Cheng** at paradox.sgmillennials@gmail.com or call **+65 98368928** for further information.

This research is organised by the researcher and it is part of the researcher's Doctoral Program in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling Psychology on the joint programme run by New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling with Middlesex University, from which it has received full ethical approval. Data will be kept in accordance with NSPC data retention, GDPR and Singapore's PDPA. This research is supervised by Dr Simon Cassar (simon.cassar@yahoo.co.uk) and Dr Rochelle Benning (rochellejohnsonbenning@gmail.com)

Appendix 3- Interview Schedule

1. What is it about this research topic that sparks your interest?
2. Can you describe a time when you noticed that there was a contradiction between finding you voice and maintaining harmony in a group? open ended description of a particular struggle.
3. As you reflect back on your decision to act or not act in a certain way, what made you act in that way?
4. Looking back, would you have acted differently/have you ever thought about acting differently?

If yes:

- What would you have done?
- - How is it different from what you did?
- - What do you think have drawn you towards/prevented you from committing to this action in the first place?

If no:

- Why not?
- - What do you think has helped you make this choice? (e.g. people around you, values, beliefs etc)

5. How has the experience of the contradiction between exercising your autonomy and maintaining harmony in a group impacted you?
    - - Did it change you as a person?
    - - How do you feel about the person you are right now?
    - - Has it been helpful in understanding yourself?
6. Have these experiences of the contradictions told you anything about yourself?

Appendix 4- Debrief Sheet

Middlesex University London

NSPC

Debrief

Title: The lived experience of navigating having a voice in a collectivistic country

Researcher: Magdalen Cheng
Supervisor: Dr Simon Cassar
Dr Rochelle Bennings

Thank you for taking part in this research and making a valuable contribution towards the aims of the study. This debrief is your opportunity to talk about your experience of being interviewed. If you feel you would like to talk more about the issues which have arisen in the interview process, or any difficult feelings you have experienced in relation to this, there is a list of organizations at the bottom of the page.

This research aims to look at how Singaporean millennials' experiencing of integrating autonomy and belonging in the lives and what has been helpful or unhelpful in helping them do so. It is hoped that the results of the study can allow the therapy field to understand this population group and cater better to their needs.

Should you be interested in the results of the study, either a brief summary or full publication can be either emailed or mailed to you. You could indicate your preference at the bottom.

If you have concerns or would like to make a complaint please contact my supervisor at:
Dr Simon Cassar
New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling Ltd
61-63 Fortune Green Rd
London NW6 1DR
+44 (0) 207 435 8067
Admin@nspc.org.uk

If after you leave the interview, you feel troubled by what you have shared, below is a list of resources that you can contact

SOS – Samaritans of Singapore	SAMH Counselling Services	Counselling & Care Centre	IMH Emergency
Helpline: 1800 - 221 4444 (24-hr) Email Befriending: pat@samaritans.org.sg www.samaritans.org.sg	Helpline: 1800 - 283 7019 Tel: (65) 6283 1576 (4 lines) Email: counselling@samhealth.org.sg www.samhealth.org.sg	Tel: (65) 6536 6366 www.counsel.org.sg	Helpline Tel: 6389 2222 www.imh.com.sg

Appendix 5- Sample Transcript and Highlighting analysis

Reflexive comments	Transcript	Highlights
People overseas will not know the context of the schools in Singapore. Importance of context. But I notice this is my own assumption from being a Singaporean. Interesting he used the word contradiction here even though I didn't use it. Being put into a different environment. Worldviews expanding. **Eye opener** Being different from others. didn't fit in. seeing things differently from others. not just different ideals or interest	**Mark 8**: I guess one of the (slight pause) earliest times I actually experienced such a **contradiction (3)**, I guess it was when I was studying at Temasek Poly. Before that **I was actually from an all-boys school la. (4)** So **switch to a mix setting (5)** where **you get just a much wider range of different characters was quite an eye opener for me in terms of social interactions. (6)** Uh (thinking).. I guess **we just come from different background (7)** in general, **I just didn't fit in. (8) It wasn't really just about having different ideals or different interests**, **(9)** that kind of thing. **I guess it was quite an eye opener. (10) I realized I just saw things in life differently from them la. (11)**	**3. Contradiction** **4. I was actually from an all-boys school la** **5. switch to a mix setting** **6. you get just a much wider range of different characters was quite an eye opener for me in terms of social interactions.** **7. I guess we just come from different background** **8. just didn't fit in**. **9. It wasn't really just about having different ideals or different interests** **10. It was quite an eye opener.** **11. I realized I just saw things in life differently from them la.**
I wonder why? What did he thinking about?	**Mark 9**: **Quiet.. keeping to myself constantly (12)**	12. **Quiet.. keeping to myself constantly**
	Magdalen 10: Right.	
Started to know himself better even at secondary school. Having different worldviews from others. Possibly expansion of worldviews related to doing different things from others.	**Mark 10** Um.. I guess it was… (muffled).. I realised that **I actually saw things that are different from quite a bit of Singaporeans (13)...**for me **back then I was just starting to understand myself better, find my voice (14)** and **at that time, it was also when I was actually quite an active dancer. (15)**	**13. I actually saw things that are different from quite a bit of Singaporeans..** **14. back then I was just starting to understand myself better, find my voice** **15. at that time, it was also when I was actually quite an active dancer.**

Appendix 6- Van Manen's Lifeworld Existentials

Existential	Short example	Reflection
Sociality	"…work was not appreciating me. I felt unappreciated in general, even though my family was trying their best. And obviously, my husband was trying his best as well to make me happy. And I was just so stressed. I felt like nobody understood what I was going through. Nobody understood what it's like to feel redundant everyday. During work for one half years, everyday going in and like not being seen for a whole like one and a half years. And then now okay, it is my wedding. I'm some somehow meant to be really happy now. But I can't just switch." (Debby, 26)	So much conflict within herself. Carrying all these burdens into a new life. Thinking about it, I feel like pulling my hair out. It feels like she's just made to accept that she feels this way. It is that sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Power is being stripped away. Being-as-powerless.
Sociality	"all the Chinese kids stay in class, all the non-Chinese speaking kids leave the class. Yeah, it took me a while to realize that because they did register me as a Chinese speaking student because of the correlation with kindergarten. Yeah. And then after that, it became my mom had to transfer me out because my tamil was horrendous… I felt really weird…just because I spoke a different language you transferred me out of class? Like, I was transferred to a whole new class." (Jenny, 11/12)	Seeing she's different from the rest through her compassion with others. she sees the difference between herself and others when she literally has to move spaces while seeing others stay.
Sociality	"I definitely consider myself Singaporean. But does Singapore see me as Singaporean?" (Nick, 12)	A belonging that one constantly have to work on to secure its place. Doesn't just feel like it's a deepening but a securing.
Temporality	" I do remember that it was a bit of a culture shock. (31) The analogy I can use is… in terms of academics standards is like, is really like Superman movie from Krypton to Earth lah. (32) over there, it was a Catholic Primary School. So it was, it was just a small, it was a small university area of a city town, North of UK. They didn't have space in the Primary 3 class so they put me in the Primary 4 class. (interviewer-mm) And yeah. It was then that I actually realize that it was true that Singapore's education system is really much tougher." (Marcus, 17)	An enlarged, expansion of horizon. But it didn't feel gradual. There is a sense that time in compressed. It feels like being thrown into a whole new experience. He only went overseas for 6 months but it had a long term effect.

Temporality	"…booking out [of army] every week, I really dislike the point that I need to spend like three hours fighting with my mom about a small topic like, "hey it is my future you know like I do whatever I want. It's time for me to not say something about it already." If I get a paper, I don't like it, I give it to u you meh. You study meh. But I just didn't want to talk about it it because I wasn't prepared for the conversation, and I didn't know how to handle the situation so, I just avoided it all the way. " (Raphael, 77)	An element of time is present here. Time is not ready? He needs time to prepare himself. Feels like he wants to be sure of things himself. Background is that people always had a say in things. There's the element of background being too noisy.
Embodiment	"My body becomes very tense very tight and I had to make sure to remember that I *breath*e in. I mean, because I am very easily that anxiety can overwhelm you." (Nick, 31)	The body is already mimicking a sort of death? Lifeless. His voice is there for survival.
Embodiment	" I was this guy on the sofa, this kid or teenager, young adult that's there and people were just like, "eh Raphael, where do you go for poly ah?orhh.. I go Tamaesek Polytechnic (tertiary education). But people think that TP is for Bio medical science, lawyer, " Wah Study law is it?" I'm like, "No." "Chemical engineering?" "No. I do design." Then they're like "..." the whole crowd literally- the whole crowd said, "Oh..." (Raphael, 44)	His self comes into awareness when he is targeted. The spotlight is on him. His self is felt, maybe forgotten much in the past but when the spotlight is on him, he becomes aware of himself.
Spatiality	"this table, it was very intentional that we want to a large table because we wanted to gather our friends around it. Not everybody has their own space. Not everybody has their own space. Most people live with their parents, their parents don't know, they may not be welcoming of gay people. Because we have that privilege, we should then extend that to other people. When we hold dinners, it is that feeling that you are somewhat family on the table. We have a good time, we laugh, we cry, we scream, we lip sing ,we dance." (Nick, 70)	Table as an anchor. Finding different ways to continue taking space and occupying space.

Appendix 7- Participant Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

The lived experience of navigating having a voice in a collectivistic country

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the research?
The purpose of this research is to look at the contradiction between collectivistic Asian values of maintaining harmony in communities and the individualistic value of claiming autonomy for oneself. This research aims to explore what it is like for Singaporean millennials, having grown up in Singapore, to experience this phenomenon and investigate if a conflict arises for them based on the two values.

What will happen to me if I take part?
Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. The completion and return of your consent form will be taken as your informed decision to participate. This will take place in a face-to-face interview conducted by the researcher and should last approximately 60 -75 minutes. The interview will be semi-structured. There will be a set of interview questions, but they are mostly open-ended, allowing you to talk openly and freely. It will take place in a private and confidential space.

What will you do with the information that I provided?

Our interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Your transcript will be analyzed together with other transcripts from other participants using a qualitative methodology.

Audio files will be transferred to an encrypted USB stick for storage, deleting the files from the recorder. All of the information that you provide me will be identified only with a project code and stored on an encrypted USB stick. Data will only be viewed by the researcher, researcher's supervisors and University markers/moderators for the purpose of this research and it will not be used for either other research or personal use. Excerpts from your data may be published verbatim in my final thesis but your name or identifying details will be anonymized.

Appendix 8- Informed Consent

Informed consent

Title: **The lived experience of navigating having a voice in a collectivistic country: A hermeneutic phenomenological approach**

Researcher: Magdalen Cheng

Supervisor: Dr. Simon Cassar
Dr. Simon Wharne

- I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.
- I have been given contact details of the researcher in the information sheet.
- I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will be kept anonymous, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.
- I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.
- I understand that an audio recording is being made of this interview and will be securely stored until a verbatim transcript has been made.
- I understand that should I be indicating that I intend to cause harm to myself or another person, a third party may be contacted.
- I wish to receive results of the study when it has been completed Yes
  No

If yes, please provide an email or mailing address and indicate below one option on how you would like to receive it:

- A brief summary (emailed) ☐
- A brief summary (hard copy in post) ☐
- the entire thesis (emailed) ☐

Email (if emailed copy of results requested):

Mailing address (if hard copy of results requested):

Print Name: _____ Signature: _____

Date: _____

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits.