CHAPTER V

METHODOLOGY:

OBJECTIVES, CONCEPTS, RESEARCH DESIGN, PROCEDURES

The literature reviewed in the previous chapters has aided in the conceptualization of choice, the related concept of the self-society relationship and how this concept is best analyzed through the concept of the self or identity with its individual and social components. The review briefly spanned over the different approaches to the self-society relationship in psychology and sociology before locating the study in perspectives that consider the manner in which how the individual relates to society is influenced by the larger cultural and material-structural society that he/she inhabits. This has been through an examination of literature in two disciplines – psychology (especially cross-cultural psychology) and sociology. In cross-cultural psychology, literature on individualism/independence and collectivism/interdependence and in sociology, the literature on modernity and tradition and the nature of the self in these contexts, have been useful in the understanding of “choice”. Next, the review located the self-society debate in the area of youth research; specifically, in the transition to adulthood literature where the identity relevant sites of love/marriage and work offer important play-grounds where these relations play out. Again, the review considered approaches to transitions to adulthood that considered the larger sociocultural dynamics and the self. Finally, the review considered literature on the relationship between choice and well-being against the larger sociocultural context.

This chapter first presents gaps identified in the literature, in both substantive and methodological terms, which the study attempts to address. This leads to a statement of the objectives of the research and the research questions. In the next section, the terms “choice”, “culture” and “society” are conceptualized as they are understood in the study. The following section presents the research design. Here the choice of the research sites, the participants and the methods and strategies used for data collection are detailed. This is followed by an articulation of the research paradigm. The last section describes the procedures I adopted to gain access to the research sites, collect the data and analyze the data. I now describe the gaps identified in the literature.
GAPS IDENTIFIED IN THE LITERATURE

A shortcoming of the traditional cross-cultural approach to the individual-society relationship is that its largely quantitative survey methodology reduces complex cultural processes into independent variables like “individualism” and “interdependence”. This follows from the mainstream practice in cross-cultural psychological studies where culture is operationalised as an index that can be unpacked into cultural processes such as values and behaviours (Greenfield 1997). Such studies are unable to understand the complex “web of relationships” between various relevant concepts (choice, culture, society, well-being) in a rich descriptive manner. A study that seeks to address this shortcoming will necessarily be of a qualitative nature which employs a more direct examination of these in the life events of people as opposed to a de-contextualized understanding of culture in experimental and survey studies.

A related criticism of work in this tradition is that it has failed to include a differentiated view of culture; elements of individualism and collectivism co-occur at the individual level as well as the cultural level (Miller 1997 Sinha and Tripathi 2001). It has also ignored the contested character of cultural meanings and denies the agency of the individual (Shweder 1991). Culture is portrayed only at global levels of generality such as individualistic or collectivistic nations, which finds disconfirmation at the individual level as well as at the level of different sub-groups within a society. This has also been attributed to employment of quantitative methodologies not suited to the analysis of cultural practices. Thus, relatively little attention has been paid to the effect of power and politics of social class and gender on the access to cultural resources (Miller 1997).

In a similar line, the grand theories of modernity and tradition of the 1950s and 1960s have been criticized for their empirical disconfirmation at the level of cultural practices and individual level realities, particularly in terms of the co-existence of tradition and modernity (Gusfield 1967; Rudolf and Rudoph 1967; Tipps 1973). More recently, in the field of youth research, theories of high-modernity, and especially the individualization thesis as propounded by Beck (1992, 1999) and Giddens (1991) have also come under criticism for generalization so that it remains true for only the privileged in society and does not match the subjective reality of the disadvantaged (E.g., Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Brannen and Nilsen 2005; Cooper
The present study contributes to the growing corpus of qualitative studies that attempt to create theories of the relationship between self and society or agency and structure in the contemporary world from the ground up.

The sociological studies of conditions of choice in high modernity and the consequences of it for the self are typically situated in the advanced industrial societies of the world or the high modern societies of excess choice. This study, through its comparative approach would supplement this knowledge. Comparative analysis with societies of lesser choice would throw light upon the relationship between not just individual psychology and excess choice but also its relation to lack of choice or little choice. The study would aid in understanding the processes whereby globalization and concomitant choice influences the lives of people living in a developing society that is newly exposed to forces of modernity. The dearth of studies examining the effects of large-scale societal changes such as liberalization and globalization on youth lives in developing societies has been noted by (Furlong 2000) and (du Bois-Reymond 1998).

The review shows how transitions into adulthood as influenced by the larger social and cultural context are an under-researched theme in developmental psychology. In recent years, it has received some attention through Arnett’s (2000) theory of emerging adulthood. However, these studies are still undertaken under the positivistic, survey tradition which is unable to understand the processes whereby young people negotiate their age-related developmental tasks. Galambos and Leadbeater (2000), in their review of research on adolescents point to a need for qualitative research and an understanding of transitions from the point of view of the people experiencing it. While a contextualized, processual understanding of child development is a thriving research tradition (E.g. Greenfield 1994; Morelli et al 1992) such an approach is glaringly absent in the understanding of the youth stage of life-span development research.

The study also supplements Indian literature on youth transitions into adulthood and studies of the tradition-modernity interface in youth values. The literature review demonstrated the near absence of life-course perspectives in youth research in India, both within psychology and sociology. While child development is researched, adolescence research has received little attention in Indian psychology with adolescence and youth being seen as a continuation of childhood (Sharma and
Choudhary 2009). In sociology, Jayaram (2000) points to a methodological gap in sociological youth research in India wherein there is very little qualitative research on youth. He also emphasizes the need for a comparative dimension into research designs on youth. Substantively too, most of the Indian works on youth have focused on student/urban youth and there is a need to study non-student and rural youth. Finally, Jayaram (2000) also points to a need for research that looks at how rapid social change affects youth, the nature of their negotiations with conflicting values and the sociocultural construction of the concept of youth. These aspects can be addressed by the current research.

An area of investigation that has had little research done across disciplines is on how larger sociocultural processes influence love and marriage. Bawin-Legros (2004) points to how sociologists have historically ignored love and personal feelings because they “feel uneasy with the realms of fantasy and imagination” (ibid.:243). Similarly, youth transitions research from the advanced nations have primarily focuses on school to work transitions and has ignored the transitions from singlehood to partnership (Pollock 1997; Molgat and Vezina 2008). Psychologists too point to a gap in cross-cultural research about the nature of love and marriage and an understanding of the manner in which couples enter relationships across cultures (such as love and arranged marriages) (Myers et al 2005; Madathil and Benshoff 2008)

The empirical study of SWB across cultures in the cross-cultural psychological tradition suggests that, for the individualistic self, doing one’s own thing to achieve self-actualization is what is important for happiness, whereas meeting social obligations and fulfilling social norms is what is important for the collectivistic self. This strong relativistic stance has to be cautioned against by defending the view that even while ideas of the “ideal life” are culturally defined, the tasks that such a definition sets can itself be such that they may be more or less difficult to attain. Following this, it may be possible to define societies as more or less conducive to the well-being and happiness of its members. Such an argument follows in the face of a plethora of studies that suggest that in societies that offer excess choice, the individual is confronted with tribulations and uncertainties in the construction and maintenance of a coherent identity. Thus, cross-cultural psychological approaches to well-being adopt a relativistic perspective that seems to overlook the very “real” malaises that individuals living in different types of societies
face as described by sociologists (Gergen 1991/2001; Giddens 1991). The objectives of the current study attempt to address this oversight.

**THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

The research objective is two fold. First, to understand the processes whereby the material/structural features of different types of societies are in a dialectic relationship with the culture of the society, as is negotiated with/ constituted in the selves or the values, goals and practices of its people. And second, to understand the consequent potential for well-being/satisfaction that such value configurations hold.

Thus, one objective of the study is to understand the self-society relationship across sociocultural contexts. The above statement also suggests certain assumptions about social reality that the study makes in meeting this objective. First, material structural features are understood to be in a dialectic relationship with the culture of the society which itself is understood as the values, goals and practices of its people. Moreover, the culture of a society, while providing lessons as to how life in a particular society is to be conducted and what is to be thought “good” or “worthwhile” do not determine the values, goals and actions of its member entirely – they are actively negotiated with by the members. Thus the relationship between self and society is viewed as dialectic in nature; neither determines the other and mutually constitutes one another.

The study adopts the concept of choice to understand the self-society relationship in the lives of members of a society and as a convenient framework through which to compare different sociocultural configurations. Choice, as we saw in the literature review, is an umbrella concept that structures self-construals, the related value-goal configurations, and related definitions of happiness. In this study, the choice framework is applied to the realms of love/marriage and work through a life-course perspective that tries to understand the manner in which young people make meaning of love and work in their past, current and envisaged future lives. Following from this, the research objective can be reformulated. Specifically, the objective of the study is to understand the choice available and embraced (or not) in the life courses taken by young people in their work and love/married lives, against the larger context of the culture and the material/structural characteristics of the

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10 Culture and society are conceptualized in detail in the following section

11 Choice is conceptualized in more detail in the following section.
society that they inhabit. And secondly, to understand the potential for well-being that meaning-making associated with such choice and non-choice contexts holds.

The findings of the study would provide answers to the question of whether different sociocultural configurations influence the well-being of its members through psychological processes specific to each culture. The research objective affirms cultural relativism in its understanding of individual reality as culturally constructed (and cultural reality as individually constructed); at the same time, it allows for the possibility of findings that point to varying potentials for happiness that different sociocultural complexes can have for its members – a standpoint that moves away from relativism.

Subsidiary Objectives
The broad research objective can be broken down into three subsidiary research objectives:

Cross-cultural psychology understands the construction of the self (and the accompanying value-goal complex) as an important way in which cultures differ. The self-construal creates action-feeling meaning-making packages that vary in relatively systematic ways across cultures (Hofstede 1980; Triandis 1989; Markus and Kitayama 1991). The self with its individual and social aspects is also a way of studying the self-society relationship or choice. Thus, studying the self-construction in various life-realms of an individual is a way of studying choice or the relationship between self and society in various types of societies. Following from this, a subsidiary objective is to understand the processes whereby the selves of young adults in diverse sociocultural contexts (such as an advanced industrial society, an agricultural society, and a transitional society) is constructed through the framework of “choice”, in the important sites of identity such as work and love/marriage. This links to questions of what meaning is made of “work” and “love” and “marriage” across sociocultural contexts through an understanding of the action-feeling-meaning-making packages in relation to “work” and “love/marriage”.

A second subsidiary objective follows directly from the first one. As the literature review demonstrated, across the world and across the disciplines of psychology and sociology, adulthood is understood as the making of certain commitments in the realms of love/marriage and work. Since the study aims to look at the socioculturally embedded processes whereby young people living in different types of societies make the choices (or not) in the identity relevant realms of work
and love which take them into adulthood, another objective of the study is to understand youth transitions into adulthood across choice contexts through the framework of the self-society relationship.

A third subsidiary objective is to examine whether these different self-construals, value configurations and culturally defined goals in the realms of work and love/marriage involve culture specific psychological processes that influence the well-being of its members. This will provide answers to the larger question of the relationship of choice and well-being since the different self-construals, value configurations, happiness sites, etc., are analyzed through the framework of “choice”.

The research questions that follows from the above objectives are:

1. How do young people living in different sociocultural contexts enter the adult life-realms of love/marriage and work?
2. What are the various paths taken by them and what are the motivations and influences underlying the manner in which this happens? To what extent are these processes representative of exertion of choice or individual agency versus processes largely directed by tradition or “how things are”?
3. What are the paths envisaged for the future and how are these representative of choice or individual agency versus processes largely directed by tradition or ‘how things are’?
4. What are the consequences of such processes for what is sought for in these realms and how experiences within these realms are evaluated?
5. And relatedly, what is the consequence of such processes for potentials for satisfaction in these realms?

**CONCEPTUALISATION OF CHOICE, CULTURE, SOCIETY**

**CHOICE**

To begin with, choice was conceptualized as a sensitizing concept. Sensitizing concepts can be thought of as the background ideas that inform the overall research problem (Charmaz 2000). In qualitative research, these are seen as starting points for research providing a direction to look at while at the same time seeking other emergent meanings that refine the concept or displace it altogether (Bowen 2006).

As the literature review showed, the term resonates with themes that many theories articulated across the disciplines of psychology and sociology. Indeed, the
idea of the self-society relationship or the question of agency-structure/communion is commonly found in theories that straddle the content matter typically dealt with by the respective disciplines – self or personality in psychology, and society and structure in sociology. The term choice was deliberately chosen for its relative neutrality, so that it is rendered the most sensitive to ideas built from the ground up rather than bottom-down – an approach in alignment with the research objectives of understanding social reality through the meaning made of it by the research participants. The features of choice, as detailed below, are derived from both my personal experience and observations, on the one hand, and the literature review, on the other. These features initially briefed the research questions. As the study progressed, the concept achieved further dimensions.

As has been indicated many times previously, a broad stroke conceptualization of choice is in terms of the relationship between the individual self and society. There are many nuances to this relationship. Choice can be understood, both as a verb (“make a choice”) and as a noun (“choices”). As a verb, choice is defined as the extent to which an individual exercises her/his will in charting her/his “way-of-life” suited to her/his preference, inclinations, interests, potentials and talents. Choice can play out in many different realms of an individual’s life – from choosing his/her work/career, life-partner, friends, life-style adopted, future plans, etc. Exercising choice is dependent on the number of alternatives and opportunities open to an individual in any course of action open to him/her. Here, choice is conceptualized in terms of a noun.

The number of opportunities and “ways of doing thing” open to an individual is seen here as being influenced by two important factors – the cultural values and norms of a society and the material/structural features of a society. The concept of choice can be related to cultural values and norms that favour the individual versus the society. When there are tight norms for doing things, e.g., as is found in traditional societies where gender, religion or caste circumscribes an individual’s life-partner, friendship and occupational choices, the society dominates. Again, cultural values and norms in such societies favour the collective – to belong, fit in, etc. Thus private life is invaded by the collective – parents, the extended family, the neighborhood, etc, who act as enforcers of societal norms. On the other hand, in modern societies, there are multiple ways of doing things and faced with situations for which there is no one norm directing action, there comes the question of what do
I, the self, like or prefer. Here the individual or the self dominates. Thus the concept of choice can be related to the self-society relationship.

There is also another sense in which “society” as opposed to “culture” influences choice – in terms of the varying levels of opportunities and avenues offered by the material, structural features of different types of societies such as a village or a city such as the levels of stratification, population density, type and variety of educational and occupational opportunities, technologies for communication, avenues for leisure, presence of a variety of mass media, modes of transportation, etc. As seen in the review of literature, culture exists in a dialectic relationship to the experiences offered by such material, structural features of a society.

Cultural value systems and opportunities as offered by the structural features of society are not the only influences on individual lives. Before going to the field, it was anticipated that power and politics may influence the participation in cultural practices and access to cultural resources. The literature review suggests that the social positioning of the individual in terms of class, ethnicity, caste, gender, etc., presents objective constraints on the exercise of choice, even in modern societies where, theoretically, with the weakening of tradition and deliberate affirmative action to uplift the disadvantaged, there is more equality of opportunity.

This differentiation of these influences (culture vs societal structures) on choice in the life of an individual is essential because one can exist without the others. For example, in transitional societies, culture can retain traces of tradition whereas the material structures increasingly approximate the material structural features of modern societies. Similar is the case of migrant populations from cultures/societies described as collectivistic who settle down in individualistic cultures and modern societies of the West. The point is that it requires a certain liberal individualistic value system for an individual to partake of choices as offered by an advanced industrial society. Likewise, even with such a value system, an individual in a traditional society can be constrained by the very little material choice that such a society offers. Finally, all these relationships are also mediated by the social positioning of the individual in society.
THE DIALECTICS OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The approach adopted here, drawing from the review of literature, makes a distinction between the material aspects of a society and the culture of the society, broadly defined as the shared value/meaning system of a people, lending a relative consistency to ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. Moreover, the experiences afforded by different material/structural features of society are seen as in a dialectic relationship with the culture of a society or what is valued by the people of that society. Starting with this premise, the concepts of culture and society and their relationship to each other and to the individual living in society need to be explicated further.

Society

A methodological problem that should be acknowledged is that of defining “society” – the question of whether a certain unit, such as an Indian village or Mumbai or Glasgow should count as a part or a whole. Also, in reality, societies are not distinguishable, discrete entities as often parts of different societies flow into one another (Beteille 2004). Secondly, there is the problem of matching empirical reality to ideal types such as “traditional society”, “capitalist society”, “modern society”, etc. However, as pointed out by Weber, an “ideal type”, should be seen as a construction of the mind rather than as a “natural kind” that finds existence in empirical reality (Beteille 2004; Mac Farlane 2004).

Society enters the analysis in three ways. First, society is understood in terms of the larger social-structural or material context in which individuals live that broadly classifies societies into traditional or modern societies. The literature reviewed on modernity and tradition as well as the sociological theories on the relationship between self and society is explicit about these differences in the material structural features of modern and traditional societies. Thus, a modern society such as a city has features that distinguish it from a traditional society such a village or a small town. A city is a more complex society than a village in terms of means of production, the levels of social stratification, which in turn provide people with more avenues for work, leisure, etc. Moreover, technology such as television, channels offered on television, telephone, mobile phones, computers, the internet, and various modes of transport as well as the sheer number of people living in a big city exposes
people to multiple ways of living and conducting life that is unmatched by village life.

A second way in which society enters the analysis is in terms of the social positioning of the individual in terms of SES and gender – these are the most visible and/or ascertainable qualities along which societal stratification takes place and could have a bearing on the choice experienced in the life of individual.

A final understanding of society is in terms of the people that individuals directly or indirectly (e.g., through mass media) relate to in their lives. These could be parents, peers, neighbours, or other characters in films, books, television, etc. These are characterized here as social-agents that transmit values of a culture.

Society, as it is conceptualized for the study, can be thought of as the hard contextual factors in the life of a person: that is, what he is born with. A person is born either male or female, into a family with certain levels of resources in terms of education/occupation, etc., and into a society that can be called primarily agrarian, industrial or advanced industrial.

Culture

The word “culture” has a wide variety of meanings, often prescribed by disciplinary interests. Raymond Williams (1976 cited in Giles and Middleton 1999) differentiates between an understanding of culture as a state of intellectual development (in the sense of civilization) and an understanding of it as the works and practices of artistic activity to an anthropological understanding of culture as a whole “way of life”. This location of culture in the realm of lived experience marks the treatment of it in disciplines such as anthropology and cultural psychology, as also the field of cultural studies. Cultural studies looks at the political economy of cultural institutions and ways in which everyday culture becomes the site of reproduction (and contestation) of inequalities and exploitation (Oswell 2001) with a focus on the “processes by which culture is produced and the forms it takes, rather than simply the ‘structure of feeling’ or ‘way of life’ it reveals” (Giles and Middleton 1999:24). It is the latter treatment of culture, which aligns with treatments of it in anthropology, specifically, psychological anthropology, that the study aims to adopt.

Psychological anthropology contributes to the field of cultural psychology, a field which has its characteristic way of defining culture – a definition well-suited to
the aims of the current study. Here we adopt a semiotic approach to culture which focuses on meaning making by individuals. This is exemplified in Clifford Geertz’s classic definition of culture as “an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols” (Geertz 1973: 89 cited in Miller 1997). Here culture is seen as an inter-subjective reality embodied in symbols, artifacts and practices. According to Greenfield (1997), the creation, acquisition, transmission and use of culture are psychological and inter-psychological processes with two component parts: the creation of shared activity (cultural practices) and the creation of shared meaning (cultural interpretation or symbols). This is reflected in the definition of it as a “symbolic and behavioural inheritance”. “The ‘symbolic inheritance’ of a cultural community consists of its received ideas and understandings, both implicit and explicit, about persons, society, nature and divinity…[T]he ‘behavioural inheritance’ of a cultural community consists of its routine or institutionalized family life and social practices” (Shweder et al. 1998: 868). Sometimes there is a contradiction between cultural values that are overtly acknowledged and what is revealed through practices (Miller 1997).

In this perspective, it is also recognized that, whereas there are many rational bases for cultural meanings and practices, cultural forms are also sometimes beyond reason and empirical evidence. Also, these cannot be discerned by mere observation of practices but can only be understood through being “let in” into the meaning through verbal communication (Shweder 1984). In addition, some components of culture might be below the level of conscious awareness where they are not explicitly endorsed by the individual but which nevertheless directs his thoughts and actions (Hatch 1985). In this context, Miller (1997) distinguishes between transparent and non-transparent cultural media.

Miller (1997) calls attention to the differentiated and dynamic view of culture that such a definition entails. Such a perspective approaches culture in less monolithic terms where cultural meanings and practices are not always consistent and sometimes even contradict each other within the same individual (e.g., Sinha and Tripathi 2001) as also at the level of sub-groups within the population (Miller 1997). This is because individual appropriation and learning of culture is an active and innovative process.

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12 Although sociology does not use the language of ‘culture’ similar themes underly symbolic interactionism (Cooley, 1902/1968; Mead, 1934) social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) where self and society are seen as inter-subjective realities.
D’Andrade 1984). And this emphasizes a characteristic approach of cultural psychology to the individual – where he/she is seen as an intentional agent (Shweder 1991). Here the individual is seen as both an en-cultured being whose subjectivity is in part culturally constituted, but is also an agent who is capable of reflecting and modifying on cultural meanings and practices (Miller 1997).

The heterogeneity of cultural meanings and practices does not mean that cultural meanings and practices are so un-integrated that one cannot discern meaningful thematic differences between cultural groups. Geertz provides a middle-ground when he says, “Its possible to overthematize, and its possible to underthematize...the elements of a culture are not like a pile of sand and not like a spider’s web. Its more like an octopus, a rather badly integrated creature – what passes for a brain keeps it together, more or less, in one ungainly whole” (Geertz 1973 cited in Miller 1997). Such a stance allows for the drawing of meaningful contrasts between cultural communities.

Such a conception of culture also has consequences for how it is seen in relationship to social structural, material, and socio-political factors in society such as systems of power and hierarchy. A purely functional view of culture runs the risk of rendering it superfluous because to the extent that it is thought to have a one-to-one relationship with environmental and social structural constraints, it has no explanatory force and possesses no independent effects (Miller 1997). Functional accounts of culture have also been criticized for focusing on only the values and norms of the dominant culture in a society and ignoring the many conflicting interests and values of different cultural groups in multi-cultural societies (Marvin 1995). In response to this, the study adopts an alternative proposed by Miller (1997), where it is recognized that the adaptive requirements and resources presented by particular social structural aspects of a society does not fully determine cultural meanings and practices, but they still function as “sources of regularity in human behaviour that afford a range a modes of behavioural adaptation” (p. 106). Such an account allows for individual variation in the appropriation of culture.

Considering the specific aspects of culture that are relevant to the research objectives, the study employs the themes that constitute the individualism/independence and collectivism/interdependence value complex as convenient handles on cultural reality. As we saw, these are constructs with implication for the self, as well as for the behaviour, goals and nature of relationships
with the other. Therefore, the study aims to use these constructs as sensitizing concepts – it directly informs the concept of “choice” as it was formulated at the beginning of the study.

**WELL-BEING**

The study draws from the concept of SWB to conceptualize the well-being of the participants. As described in the literature review, SWB refers to how people evaluate their lives – on their own terms. In the psychometric conceptualization of SWB, there are two components: evaluations in terms of cognitions or satisfaction judgments. E.g., life-satisfaction, when a person judges his or life as a whole or about specific aspects of his life such as work life, relationships, leisure, etc. The evaluation can also be of the affect experienced, online and/or retrospectively over weeks or months. E.g., when a person reports on his current mood state – joy or anger or boredom (Diener 2000). The study primarily employs satisfaction judgements to understand evaluation of participants’ love/marriage and work lives.

A hallmark of the SWB conception of happiness is that it is a democratic scalar, based on the premise that there are certain universal elements in the understanding of happiness such as broad positive and negative emotionality even while recognizing that the basis of such emotionality is subjectively defined. Such a conception allows for cross-cultural comparisons while also allowing for culturally grounded patterning to well-being. This approach under-lies the goal based approach to SWB as propounded by Oishi (2000) according to which values and goals that are important for well-being are highly culture specific and in each culture, people are happy to the extent that they can conform to these goals and values. The study adopts this approach to understanding the nature of the cultural goals as it plays out in the life stories of its members and the potential for well-being that these goals hold.

**RESEARCH DESIGN**

In brief terms, the comparative method using case studies and life-story interviews were employed to find answers to the research questions. The objectives of the study justify the need for qualitative methods; also, the literature review also showed a gap for qualitative research in the areas of investigation. The study examines the life-stories of 32 young people between the ages of 25 and 35 across three research sites – Dharmadam, a village in India; Mumbai, a city in India and Glasgow, a city in the United Kingdom.
RESEARCH SITES

The selection of Dharmadam, Glasgow and Mumbai as sites for research is primarily theory driven and secondarily, convenience driven. It is theory driven in that these represent societies that can be placed on a continuum of factors that are constraining or enabling of choice, the key theme of the study and collectively provide the maximum variation in the degree of choice that influences individual lives. Theoretically, in an ideal typical sense, as a result of a combination of limited opportunities as offered by its social-structural features and the tighter hold of tradition and collectivistic values, a village in Kerala represents a sociocultural configuration with minimum choice. Likewise, a metropolitan city in an advanced industrial society like the U.K. represents a sociocultural configuration with maximum choice. The third site, a metropolitan city in a primarily agriculture based, developing country like India, can be seen as lying in between the other two in terms of the degree of choice. This is because although it has structural features that are shared by large cities in advanced industrial societies around the world, such similarities become lesser when one goes into the corresponding value realms of these societies. Having been subject to the forces of modernity for relatively shorter periods of time, people living in a city in a developing society like India often hold more traditional values than for instance, the people living in a city in a developed society like the U.K.

It is emphasized that it is the general features (and not the particular features) of a village/small town in Kerala and metropolitan cities in India and the U.K. that is of relevance to the study. In the sense that, any metropolitan city in India/UK and any village/small town in Kerala or any other Indian states could have served as a site for the study. It is the differences of experience offered by the three types of sites that is of interest to the study. The selection of these sites is justified by their difference from each other in terms of social structural features and dominant culture and not by the extent to which their features match the definitions of a “city” or a “village”.

13 The choice of the particular sites was determined by practical considerations which is described in the research procedures section.
RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Why Youth?
Youth as a category are harbingers of change in a society and reflect the ‘newest’ values in a society. In this sense, they represent the future of a society. They are the harbingers of change because, as a group in society, they make choices in charting lives based on values that are different from the old. The youth of a society are also at an age when they have to make important choices/commitments in realm of work and love/marriage. It is for these reasons that they have been chosen as subjects of the study.

The Concept of Youth
There are two definitions of youth – age based and the social definition. The age-based definition of youth is primarily used for statistical or demographic purposes. For example, the U.N. defines youth as the functional age group 15-24. Moreover, chronological definitions of youth can be further refined by distinguishing between adolescents (persons aged 15-17) and young adults (persons aged 18-24). (Youth: A Global Perspective 1996). The Planning Commission of India designates youth to include individuals between 15 and 35 years of age (Kohli and Narula 2004). In the Draft National Youth Policy, youth refers to all people between the ages of 10 and 35 (Verma and Saraswathi 2002). A survey of Indian studies of youth reveals that researchers generally define it in terms of a group of people lying between a “lower” and an “upper” age-limit with former as low as 11 years and the latter as high as 34 (Jayaram 2000). Thus, we see that youth as a category can be used to span three overlapping stages in an individual’s life – childhood, adolescence and adulthood.

Apart from this age based definition, youth/adulthood has a social dimension too—where it is achieved not through physical maturity but in terms of earning a livelihood and/or marrying and setting up a family (Gore,1977). This sociological definition of adulthood and relatedly youth, is closely related to the psychological definition. Psychologically, autonomy and a sense of coherent identity are understood to be chief features of the adult individual (Gore, 1977). Erikson’s fifth and sixth stages of life, the stage of adolescence (12 to 18 years) and young adult (18 to 25 years), prescribe the psychological developmental tasks of youth: commitment to a
career or occupation and to concrete affiliations, both in terms of a life-partner as well as strong abiding friendships (Erikson 1963).

Defined in terms of these aspects, youth experience differs across the world because the timing of these transitions, their meaning and their order of occurrence finds variations depending on gender, class, region (urban/ rural) as well as the type of society in which an individual resides (Wyn and White 1997). For example, advanced industrial societies require a longer training and education period before their youth can become economically independent. Again when youth is defined as a period of transition between childhood and the adult world of work, it ceases to exist for certain groups such as children who live and work in the streets of India.

An alternative to the categorical approach to youth is the understanding of youth as a relational concept which emphasizes the social processes whereby age is socially constructed in culturally specific ways. Such a perspective gives visibility to cultural variations as well as opportunities that youth occupying different social positions have (such as is determined by gender, ethnicity, class, place of residence(urban, rural) etc.). A metaphor for such a conception of youth might look like a prism, which “changes the relations between the central elements with each specific situation (or movement of the prism) but in which the elements retain a presence” (Wyn and White, 1997, p. 3), thus allowing for the retention of the category called “youth”.

**Inclusion criteria**

Since the life issues facing people at different stages of their life will be different, for the sake of comparability, young people around the age-range of 25-35 years were decided to be selected at the design stage of research. In practice, as the interviews proceeded and there were more participants around their mid thirties and because a couple of interviews done of 25-26 year olds suggested that their life experiences could not compare with those of the majority of the other participants, the lower limit was set to 28 years and the upper limit set to 37. Thus, except for 3 participants each in Glasgow and Mumbai, who were between 28 and 30 years of age, all other participants were between the ages of 30 and 37. Selection of young people aged towards the higher limits of age-based definitions of youth rather than the lower limits was also in alliance with the objectives of the study. Young people in their mid-twenties, especially in advanced industrial societies and increasingly so in cities in
India as well are in still in the process of making adult commitments in the arenas of work and love or have just started living their new roles. Selecting such youth who are in the process of making their choices (or initial choices) would mean that the entire youth transition process cannot be charted. Selection of post-choice youth is also important since the study tries to understand evaluation of choices made and living with choices made as a way of ascertaining satisfaction or well-being. Thus, sampling towards the higher limits of ages (towards 35 years of age rather than 25) ensured that the participants had some experience of living the roles offered by their adult commitments.

Influence of particular sociocultural configurations on the selves of members of that context is understood as evolving over the life of an individual. Thus, an individual who has primarily lived in a village in India most of his or her life and somebody who has lived in a city most of his or her life will likely have different world-views. Since this inter-linkage between self and society is a core area of study, selection criteria considered the kind of societies that participants lived in for most of their lives. Thus, while sampling in Mumbai, only those people who were born and brought up in Mumbai or other cities in India were selected. Likewise, cultural values and world-views are also historically transmitted so that even second and third generation immigrants retain traces of the pre-dominant cultural values of the country of origin of their parents and grandparents—either in opposition or acceptance. Thus, while sampling in Glasgow, which had populations of immigrants, the inclusion criteria considered ethnicity and inclusion was limited to only the white British population.

Social structures like gender and SES limit choices in their prescription of feelings, behaviours, values and goals. As the literature review suggested, even in the advanced industrial societies such as the U.K., their influence continues, though to a lesser extent than in traditional societies. Thus, using these as sensitizing concepts, both men and women as well as people occupying different levels of SES were sampled. At the beginning of the data collection phase, the plan was to sample widely across SES by including participants with little education and doing unskilled work such as manual labour. However, an examination of the interviews suggested that given the time and resource limitations, and the breadth of the study in terms of 3 differing sociocultural contexts, such a plan would be too ambitious—and saturation would be hard pressed to come by within the 10-12 interviews realistically envisaged
in each context. Moreover, since the broad objective of the study emphasizes making comparisons across sociocultural contexts for choice and its consequences, setting limits to the variation according to SES within a particular context found further justification.

The study operationalizes SES in terms of the education and occupations pursued by the participants as well as those of their parents. In terms of boundaries to SES, all participants are educated to at least junior college level (10+2 years) or corresponding years of schooling up to 16-18 years in the U.K., and are employed in semi-skilled jobs (such as clerical work) and above. Given these wide parameters the respondents were selected to be varied in their SES (which can again influence one’s values) with education ranging from a junior college education to post-graduate education (one Ph.D.), with parental education ranging again from primary school education to post graduate level education. Thus, in the rural setting, the participants pursued occupations such as lecturer in college, doctor, corporate trainer, bank employee, government surveyor, business man, school teacher, and university administrator. In Mumbai, the occupations pursued included university administrator, school teacher, business man and woman, corporate employees, social worker and lecturer. In Glasgow, the occupations pursued included university administrator, corporate employees, writer, business man, social worker, and school teacher. As may be noted, an attempt was made to match occupations across contexts and people employed in university administration, lecturing, teaching, corporate managers and business occur across all three or at least two contexts. The tables 3.1., 3.2., and 3.3. show the educational levels and occupations of the participants as well as their parents’.

14 Names have been changed to protect identity.
Table 5.1: Occupation, Education of the Participants and their Parents in Dharmadam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Parental Education/Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anil</td>
<td>Bank Cashier</td>
<td>HDC Bank</td>
<td>Primary/Politician/Weaver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sahadevan</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>M.A. History</td>
<td>Primary/Farming/Security-man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suneesh</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>M.A. Malayalam</td>
<td>Secondary school/Police</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abdul</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>B.A. History</td>
<td>Primary school/Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rahman</td>
<td>University</td>
<td>M.A. Business Administration</td>
<td>Primary/Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prasanna</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
<td>Diploma.</td>
<td>Primary school/Construction work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nursing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheela</td>
<td>Govt. Surveyor</td>
<td>B.A Malayalam</td>
<td>SSLC/Military/Pvt. Bus worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangeetha</td>
<td>Govt. Doctor</td>
<td>Bachelors,</td>
<td>B.Ed./Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Homeopathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jasmine</td>
<td>School Teacher</td>
<td>B.Sc. Mathematics</td>
<td>Pre-Degree/Military/Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susheela</td>
<td>University Lecturer</td>
<td>Ph.D. History</td>
<td>Secondary school/Railways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.2: Occupation, Education of the Participants and their Parents in Glasgow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Parental Education/Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gary</td>
<td>Optical Store Assistant</td>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>Secondary school/ Home Maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>School teacher</td>
<td>B.Sc. Maths. PGCE</td>
<td>B.Sc. Nursing/Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon</td>
<td>Charity Organization Manager</td>
<td>B.Sc. Economics No</td>
<td>No information/ Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>information/ Doctor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>Freelance web-developer</td>
<td>Diploma Music</td>
<td>Post-graduate/ Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colin</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>M.A. Political</td>
<td>Post-graduate/ Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private Company</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Undergraduate/</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>Clerk/ Charity org.</td>
<td>HND Digital Design</td>
<td>Secondary school/ Runs B&amp;B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhona</td>
<td>University Clerk</td>
<td>HNC Business</td>
<td>B.Engg./ MBA/ Home maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administration</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Parents Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Support Worker</td>
<td>M.A. Psychology</td>
<td>No information/Metallurgist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>B.A. English Litt./Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Diploma hair-dressing/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hair-dresser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pippa</td>
<td>Writer</td>
<td>B.A. English Literature</td>
<td>Secondary school/Home refurbishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary school/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ph.D./Writer/Artist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.3: Occupation, Education of the Participants and their Parents In Mumbai
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Parental Education/Occupation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Suman</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>M.A. History, B.Ed.</td>
<td>Secondary school/Graduate/Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vrushali</td>
<td>University Clerk</td>
<td>B.Com. Secondary school</td>
<td>Secondary/Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandana</td>
<td>Business woman</td>
<td>M.BA Masters/Business</td>
<td>Shop floorworker/Home maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohini</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
<td>M.Phil. Post-graduate/Army/Business</td>
<td>Masters/Counsellor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manisha</td>
<td>Manager/Lecturer</td>
<td>B.Sc. MBA MBBS/Doctor</td>
<td>MBBS/Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandeep</td>
<td>University Clerk</td>
<td>B.Com. Secondary school</td>
<td>Primary school/Cleaner/Home maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deepak</td>
<td>Business Man</td>
<td>Diploma, Secondary school/Industrial Business</td>
<td>Secondary/Electronics/Home maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pradeep</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>B.Pharm, MBA Post-graduate/Engineer</td>
<td>Secondary/Engineer/Home maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>M.Phil. No information</td>
<td>No information/Service/Home maker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vijay</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>B.Tech. MBA Post-graduate</td>
<td>Graduate/Engineer/Home maker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Besides the opportunities that SES opens up or closes, these educational/occupational arenas were chosen for the specific experiences they offer that might
have a bearing on choice. For instance, it was reasoned that somebody highly educated in certain liberal arts (such as Literature, Sociology, History) being exposed to the science of societal or cultural values and the relativity of values will be more critical of tradition (in a traditional society like rural India) or more open to different ways of leading their lives or being, thus also with a stronger sense of the individual self. Therefore such “intellectuals”\(^{15}\) were consciously included in all the three contexts (Susheela in Dharmadam, Mohini and Joseph in Mumbai, and Pippa in Glasgow). Identification of such participants were attempted initially through choosing participants with advanced degrees in the Humanities or Social Sciences, e.g., a Ph.D. However, in the course of interviewing, there were people without training in the liberal arts, but who were well read in the arts, social sciences and literature and who gave better interviews than the ones originally identified; therefore, they were chosen for analysis instead (Sahadevan in Dharmadam and Oscar and Alan, in Glasgow).

Secondly, an attempt was made to include corporate employees (people with MBA training) in all the contexts. It was thought that an exposure to the ethos of a large-scale organization – the kind of creativity and individual decision-making and planning that business-administration training instills in people and the kind of systematic scope for advancement that a corporate environment provides – would demonstrate a certain kind of attitude to life. An attitude that may be differentiated from that held by an “intellectual” or someone doing a “routine” job, like an administrative job. Thirdly, administrative jobs and school level teaching occupations were also included in all the geographical contexts. Finally, self-employed people or business entrepreneurs pursuing careers that require self-reliant individual initiative and drive can also be assumed to have a certain attitude to their work (and therefore their life) which can be contrasted with someone who is pursuing a teaching career or a career in administration.

These occupations along with the socio-economic background of the participants’ parents as well as the particular cultural ethos that participants made for themselves (through their leisure pursuits of reading, art, etc.) intersect in complex

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\(^{15}\) The term “intellectuals” will be used for referring to the six people identified thus across contexts (Pippa, Oscar, Joseph, Mohini, Sahadevan and Susheela). The same term is being used across the contexts because, as will be demonstrated, their specific social-cultural-material-experiential contexts are related to remarkably similar value orientations that remain little affected by the material structural differences across the three contexts studied.
ways to influence the value orientations of the participants. These intersections also achieve different meanings depending upon the larger sociocultural context. Thus, in Dharmadam, a college administrator, though not having the same SES as that of a university lecturer or a doctor, is still of a higher standing relative to the prevailing means of livelihood and occupations in a rural context. Likewise, a school teacher, considered ‘middle class’ in Mumbai and Glasgow when compared to corporate employees or university lecturers, has a relatively higher standing in a rural context. However, for purposes of comparison across social contexts and for an understanding of how the larger sociocultural context influences individual level values, these selections earned rich research dividends.

Finally, since the objective is to understand how young people across sociocultural contexts approached intimate relationships, another inclusion criteria was that participants have been married or been part of an intimate relationship for at least a year. In alignment with a relational model of youth, with sensitivity to cultural practices, selection in Glasgow was not limited to married young people, but also to people who were/had been cohabiting as a couple.

**RESEARCH STRATEGIES /METHODS**

The case study method using life-story interviewing was employed for data collection. The overall research strategy is comparative: the study compares three types of societies with characteristic cultural and structural features.

*The Comparative Method*

Mac Farlane (2004) cites the three types of comparisons that one can make of societies as described by Emile Durkheim: (a) a single society could be considered at a given time to analyse broad variations in particular modes of action or relationships within it (b) several societies of similar nature which differ in certain modes of action or relationships, or (c) several societies of widely different nature yet sharing common features. *The proposed study falls in the last category of comparison.*

Beteille (2004) differentiates between two classical approaches to comparison between societies. Durkheim saw society as something that had a life of its own and which could be observed from outside and described objectively. Societies could be categorized according to similarities and differences in a manner similar to categorization of plants and animals in the natural sciences. The comparative method
can then be applied to arrive at general conclusions about the structure and functioning of societies. Weber, on the other hand, took up as the subject matter of sociology not just objective facts observed from the outside, but also the subjective understanding of component individuals in society. Weber used the concept of “ideal types” for making extensive historical and sociological comparisons and contrasts. Whichever the approach to comparison of societies, there are certain problems inherent in the methods that has been raised by critics and that a comparative researcher has to be conscious about.

First is the comparability of the units of comparison within these societies. Most comparative studies start with the idea that social phenomena in like settings, such as countries, regions, cultures, etc., parallel each other sufficiently to permit comparing and contrasting them (Ragin 2004). According to MacFarlance (2004), in comparison of societies, the units compared must roughly be of the same magnitude and same order. Thus, to quote his example, it makes for poor research to compare marriage in America with tea-drinking in China. However, even comparing what seems equivalent is problematic when one considers the differing cultural meanings that underpin units such as “marriage”, “leisure”, “love”, etc. One way out of this impasse as often suggested by anthropologists is to avoid comparing “things” in themselves but instead compare the relations of things (MacFarlance 2004). This means a contextual understanding of phenomena wherein bits of culture are only understood against a systemic whole, wherein comparison of values is done between systems taken as wholes. Relatedly, according to MacFarlance (2004), the recommended kind of comparative research would be one which compares not institutions but systems of social relations such as feudalism, mercantilism, colonialism, etc. Applied to the current research, although it compares comparable constructs such as “marriage”, and “work”, this is done through the framework of the self-society relationship (as conceptualized by “choice”).

A common critique of Weber’s use of ideal types is that they served to accentuate the differences between societies while overlooking the similarities (Beteille, 2004; MacFarlance, 2004). Moreover, as much of such research was done by researchers from the West, they took as their vantage point western civilization, so that these exaggerated the contrasts between the Western and the other civilizations against the rest. And this served to bring into relief the unique, defining features of
the latter while obscuring the differences among the latter. MacFarlane (2004) sees this as stemming from the binary poles of comparison that most comparative studies adopt and instead suggests that using a triadic mode where there are three poles of comparison can to some extent mitigate this effect. Secondly, researchers can take a conscious effort to delineate not just for differences between cultures and societies, but also similarities between them. *The analysis here takes precisely such an approach in its comparative method.*

Finally, there is the influence of researcher’s values. As Weber himself acknowledges, ideal types are formed by ‘the one-sided accentuation of one or more points of view’ (Weber 1949:90 cited in Beteille 2004). Since ideal-types were constructs of the researcher’s mind wherein certain features of the empirical reality were given more importance than the others, it is particularly susceptible to the researcher’s stand-point. “Much depends upon what kind of ideal types are used, how and by whom they are constructed, and with what ends in view”. (Beteille 2004). This is an unavoidable problem of every comparative research study. Herein arises the importance of reflexivity in the research process which calls upon researchers to recognize that what he or she writes about a society tells about not just the society but also the researcher (Beteille 2004). *This study makes explicit the stand-point of the researcher*\(^{16}\) *while also acknowledging that the findings represent only one perspective on reality among many.*

**The Case-study Method**

The case study method has many features that make it the best research strategy for the proposed study. One, it is the desired method when a small number of cases are studied in considerable depth. This is in contrast to the survey method which considers a large number of cases but usually gathering only a relatively small amount of data about each one, focusing on specific features of it (Hammersley 2004). Case-studies allow for detailed and subtle understandings of people’s lived experiences, involves extensive interviews, and require that the researcher immerses herself/himself in the lives and concerns of the persons/communities, and/or organizations they study (Miller 1992). *The research questions of the current study seek a contextualized understanding of value and belief configurations of people, and*

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\(^{16}\) This was detailed in the introduction to the thesis.
seek to understand the various processes that link these to various psychological consequences such as well-being. This is best answered through the in-depth empirical exploration that the case-study method allows.

Secondly, case studies are the preferred strategy when “how” or “why” questions (the purpose of explanation) are being posed. It has been described as amongst the best methods for theory building (Yin 1984; Neuman 1997). Experiments are also the preferred strategy for how and why questions. However, these questions are answered in case-studies in a manner different from how these are answered in experiments. In experiments, there is greater control over variables; also they relate variables outside of their natural context. On the other hand, case-study researchers identify cases out of naturally occurring social phenomena (Hammersely, 2004; Yin, 1984). This study aims to develop explanations that are grounded in the “real world” of its subjects and the case study method is, therefore the most suitable method.

Finally, the case-study allows the researcher to connect the micro level or the actions of individual people to the macro-level or large-scale social structures and processes (Vaughan 1992 in Neuman 1997). This feature is especially useful for meeting the current research objectives of relating individual values and well-being to the larger cultural and societal variables.

In the context of theory building, there are many techniques proposed by various case-study researchers to develop theory through case analysis. Two common features of these techniques are that (1) theory is developed through induction and, (2) theory is developed through the systematic comparison of cases. Such an approach, called analytic induction, sees inquiry as in iterative process starting with an definition of the phenomenon, examination of a few cases, formulation of a hypothesis, study of further cases to test this hypothesis and if the evidence negates the hypothesis, either redefinition of the phenomenon to exclude the negative cases or reformulation of the hypothesis so that it can explain it (Hammersely, 2004). A method that is explicit in its endorsement of analytic induction and comparison to make theories is the grounded theory method, the basic features of which are explicated in a later section.

*The Life-Story Interview*

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17 This issue and the controversy surrounding it is dealt with in a later section on generalization and causality through the case study method.
Psychologists often use the individual case-study as the unit of analysis. Here, a life-story or life-history itself constitutes a case that can be studied for meeting the research agenda (Atkinson 2004). The life-story is known by many names such as life history, oral history, life narrative, autobiography, personal statements, etc., all with their own slightly different meanings, the central definitional aspect being the first persona accounting of life (Atkinson 2004; Plummer 2004). McAdams (1988) extends Erikson’s idea of identity as a psychosocial construct into a theory of life-story theory of identity where he claims that the life stories that people forge in their narrations of it constitute identity and that moreover, the ingredients of the story derive from the larger culture – family, community, literature, art and other media. Thomas and Znaniecki’s, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* is credited to be the first major sociological work using life histories, which are famously claimed to “constitute the perfect type of sociological material” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-1920/1958 : 1832-1833 cited in Plummer 2004). This is because life-stories go beyond the story told to talk about the social reality existing outside the story, described by the story. According to Atkinson (2004), “A life story narrative can be a valuable text for learning about the human endeavour, or how the self evolves over time, and becomes a meaning maker with a place in society, the culture and history. A life story can be one of the most emphatic ways to answer the question, ‘Who am I?’” (ibid.:567). This demonstrates the appropriateness of the life-story interview in meeting the research objective— an understanding of the self-society relationship through an understanding of the meaning made by people of their love lives and their work lives. Life story interviews can be categorized according to length where the long life story is a comprehensive life document of the entire life; it can also be short, like in this study, where specific areas of an individual’s life are examined (Plummer 2004).

*Grounded Theory*

Strauss and Corbin (1994) define grounded theory as a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data that is systematically gathered and analyzed. A central defining feature of grounded theory is that throughout the research process, there is a constant interplay between analysis and data collection. This means that throughout the research process, analytic interpretations of data is done which guides further data collection, analysis of which further refines the
theoretical insights. This is done through what is called a method of “constant comparative analysis” (Strauss and Corbin 1994; Charmaz 2000).

Like other qualitative approaches to research, there is an insistence on interpretive work and that these interpretations must include the perspectives and voices of the people studied (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). However, according to Strauss and Corbin (1994), the major difference between this methodology and other approaches to qualitative research is that there is emphasis upon theory development, an emphasis that is useful for the meeting the research objective of linking sociocultural contexts to certain ways of meaning making to certain potentials for satisfaction.

Theory is defined as “plausible relationships proposed among concepts and sets of concepts” (Strauss and Corbin 1994: 278). A grounded theories is conceptually dense, that is, with many conceptual relationships; it is embedded in a thick context of descriptive and conceptual writing and it describes a process – “of reciprocal changes in patterns of action/interaction and in relationship with changes of conditions either internal or external to the process itself” (Strauss and Corbin 1994:278). In addition, grounded theories are traceable to the data that gave rise to them (fit) and are also very fluid (modifiability) because of their consideration of multiple actors as also their continuous sensitivity to new empirical data.

**THE RESEARCH PARADIGM: ASSUMPTIONS BEHIND THE RESEARCH**

The study conceives itself as falling within the constructivist paradigm. As described by Guba and Lincoln (1994), such a paradigm assumes relativist ontology and a transactional subjectivist epistemology. Among the various constructivist approaches, the study locates itself within the social constructionist approach to knowledge creation.

Social constructionism is understood as an account of knowledge creating practices – both scientific and otherwise (Gergen 2004). In either approach, it is contended that people's (the social scientist's and an individual's) account of the social world or people's knowledge is not determined in any principled way by what is there (Gergen 2004) or “by a simple imprinting of sense data on the mind” (Schwandt 2004:197). Thus, objects and events do not have an essential universal meaning and people's perceptions are not a matter of internalizing a truthful representation of the world (Burr 2004). Rather, people are actively engaged in the construction of their
own subjective world through concepts, models and schemes. People do not find or discover knowledge as construct or make it (Burr 2004; Schwandt 2004). Moreover, significantly, there is a sociocultural dimension to this construction: these interpretations are not constructed in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, language and so forth (Schwandt 2004). Thus, knowledge of the world (social scientist's and the lay individual's) can be understood as “social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people” (Gergen 2004:183). Such an understanding of reality (and knowledge) as is espoused by social constructionism is adopted by the research in its understanding of the meaning made by research participants as culturally and historically embedded as well as created and changed in interaction in the story telling to the interviewer (myself).

Schwandt (2004) claims that this “ordinary sense of constructionism is also called perspectivism in contemporary epistemology”(ibid.:197) which opposes a naïve realist and empiricist epistemology according to which knowledge simply reflects what is “out there”. This is distinguished from other philosophies of social constructionism which while rejecting this naïve realist view of representation, go much further in their opposition to the realist ontology. Social scientists of such a persuasion are concerned with how an idea achieves the status of the real and the natural through social practices, and the “rhetorical strategies in play in particular kinds of discourse” (Shwandt 2004:197). And these are not done merely through an analysis of how mental versions of the world are built, or of an empirical analysis of the semantic content of narratives or an analysis of the syntactical relations of words and sentences.

Schwandt (2004) also makes a useful distinction between weak and strong forms of social constructionist research. Both these forms acknowledge the ideological, political and value permeated nature of knowledge. However, the weak form, even while rejecting such positivistic notions as objective knowledge, verification, justification, evidence, etc., recasts these notions in a different epistemological framework that still allows for a way of distinguishing between better or worse interpretations. On the other hand a strong or radical social constructionist perspective is often nihilistic in its stance. For instance, such a perspective endorses the view that the meaning of a particular event or social action is embedded in the particular meaning system of a culture or society so that they can be understood only
against this system and cannot be compared with events and social actions embedded in other meaning systems (Schwandt 2004).

From these various perspectives adopted by different researchers who claim to locate themselves within constructivist and social constructionist perspectives, it is evident that a continuum can be discerned between positivist/objectivistic approaches and constructivist approaches. The current study proposes to undertake a middle ground – it positions itself within the perspectival and weak form of social constructionist approach. It does this in two senses. First, in the understanding of the psychological functioning of human beings (or the research participants of the study). It is social constructionist in the socioculturally embedded value and belief configurations of members of various societies that it intends to familiarize itself with. For example, constructions of the self, of “work” and “love”. Moreover, although it is recognized that the psychological functioning of an individual can only be understood against a larger sociocultural whole, leading to cultural variations in the meanings associated with even comparable constructs such as work, love, marriage, etc., it is asserted that there are enough commonalities of experience across cultures to warrant comparisons of sociocultural systems. This is in direct opposition to the assumptions of strong social constructionism.

In addition to understanding of human psychology and functioning, the study is also social constructionist in its understanding of the kind of knowledge that it seeks to construct (not “discover” or “unearth”). This is explicated further in a consideration of how constructivist approaches can be reconciled with grounded theory approaches that the study aims to use in its theory construction.

**Objectivist versus Constructivist Grounded Theory**

Traditional grounded theory approaches have faced criticism from the post-modern camp for their objectivistic assumptions. In response to this, Charmaz (2000) proposes a constructivist grounded theory in which researchers can use grounded theory methods to further their knowledge of subjective experience while neither remaining external from it nor accepting objectivist assumptions. A constructivist grounded theory, while retaining the main tenets and methods, also answers some of these criticisms to reach a middle ground between positivism and constructivism, a position that the current study finds well in line with its aims and methods.

Objectivist methodology underlies the original grounded theory approach as propounded by Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss. Glaser and Strauss, (and
later Juliett Corbin in partnership with Strauss), since the publication of the classic *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (1967) has taken the theory in somewhat different directions although both remain imbued in positivistic assumptions (Charmaz 2000). For instance, some of the ideals that grounded theory practitioners strive towards include unbiased data collection, verification of hypothesis, discovery of causal laws, and rigid prescriptive technical procedures that goes towards the meeting of these objectives. Charmaz (2000) notes the use of positivistic language in the major texts of grounded theory methodology, such as concern about validity and reliability and employment of appropriate measures to minimize the intrusion of subjectivity of the researcher into the research. According to Charmaz (2000), Glaser as well as Strauss and Corbin assume an external reality that researchers can discover and record. Glaser demonstrates this through discovering data, coding it, and using comparative methods step by step and Strauss and Corbin through their analytic questions, hypotheses and methodological applications (ibid.).

This objectivist grounded theory has come under attack from the postmodernist and post-structuralist front who propose an alternative in constructivist grounded theory. Some of the characteristics of this approach can be delineated in comparison to objectivist grounded theory. First, objectivist grounded theorists often concentrate on overt actions and statements. However, a constructivist grounded theory goes beyond to look for subjects' unstated assumptions and implicit meanings, because what respondents assume or do not assume may be much more important than what they talk about (Charmaz 2000).

Second, objectivist grounded theory assumes an objective reality that can be “discovered” or “unearthed” unfettered by the biography of the researcher. On the other hand, a constructivist grounded theory recognizes that the researcher's values and biography enters the research process at every stage – the selection of the research questions, the creation of categories, the integration of the constructed theoretical framework, etc. (Charmaz 2000). A constructivist grounded theory also recognizes that interpretations are co-constructed: “findings are literally created as the investigation proceeds” (Guba and Lincoln 1994: 111). The valued mediated, co-constructed nature of the theory means that, the research products are not seen as constituting the reality of the respondents' reality; knowledge reflects the viewed as well as the viewer (Charmaz 2000). Thus, a constructivist grounded theory does not seek a single, unidimensional, universal truth. Theory is seen as a rendering or one
interpretation among multiple interpretations. However, importantly, a constructivist grounded theory remains realist in the sense that it recognizes that people's constructions of reality, though they remain “constructions” are real in their consequences. “If human beings define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (Thomas 1928 cited in Charmaz 2000:572).

Finally, objectivist grounded theory aims for prediction through systematized procedures that allow for reproducibility, hypotheses testing, and exertion of controls. This is based on the assumption that different observers will discover the world and describe it in similar ways. However, a constructivist grounded theory asserts that “this is correct only to the extent that subjects have comparable experiences and viewers bring similar questions, perspectives, methods and subsequently concepts to analyze those experiences” (Charmaz 2000:524). Thus, in constructivist grounded theory, causality is incomplete and indeterminate; the constructed theory remains open to refinement.

Allegiance to these assumptions is demonstrated in the thesis in many ways. These strategies are in a large part guided by Holliday (2007). (1)The personal positioning of the researcher in relation to the field has been made transparent. As the introduction demonstrates, the research objectives or the specific frames through which the study looks at social reality drew directly from the researcher’s personal experiences as well as her professional training in the social sciences, psychology and sociology specifically, with its characteristic approaches to the age old question of the relationship between self and society. (2)The manner in which the researcher’s social identity influenced the research process is detailed further in the research procedures touching on gaining access to participants and relating to the participants. The manner in which the researcher’s identity influenced the response to certain areas of questioning is also pointed to in the analysis chapters. (3) The manner in which reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched is also pointed to where it is evident in the analysis. (4) The language used also demonstrates the manner in which the subjectivity of the researcher in the use of the “I” in the introduction to the thesis, where the overall research agenda and the rationale behind the research is specified as well as in the procedures of data collection. (5) In the analysis, a separation is made of the data or the participants’ voices as can be heard through the data extracts and the commentary where the researcher’s interpretation of this data is presented. (6) Finally, the data is presented not as evidence for the theory,
instead through the use of “I interpret”, the theory is presented as one way of seeing the data.

**RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

Here I report on the research procedures that put the research design into action in order to answer the research questions. This includes going to the field, gaining access to participants, setting up relations with the participants, collecting the data (interviewing) and analyzing the data.

*Gaining access to participants: A sociocultural process*

In a post-modern interpretivist study with the stated assumptions of reality and theory of knowledge, it becomes important to be reflexive during all these steps described (Holliday, 2007). Reflexivity refers to the researcher’s understanding of the manner in which her/his identity, both personal (her/his biases, presuppositions) and social (what she seems to the world) interacts with the research setting and participants who come to the study with their own socially and culturally based suppositions. In this section I describe research procedures while at the same time demonstrate the reflexivity I engaged in during the procedures.

The choice of the research sites was directed by practical considerations given that theory demanded choosing any village/small town in India and a city each in India and the U.K. for reasons stated earlier. Mumbai was an easy choice since I have been pursuing my Ph.D. at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. As regards choosing a village in India, since an overwhelming majority of rural residents in India do not speak English but only their regional language and since Malayalam is the only regional language that I’m proficient in (I grew up in Kerala) and most confident interviewing in, my choice was limited geographically to Kerala, where people speak Malayalam. In Kerala, Dharmadam village was the location of one of the campuses of Kannur University and I had two contacts at the anthropology department at the University – one Professor who was known to my co-guide and another Professor who was a colleague’s friend. Choosing Dharmadam thus seemed ideal for the contacts as well as the university presence which gave me some credibility to approach participants. Glasgow, again was convenient for me. My supervisor in the United Kingdom during my tenure there as a Commonwealth scholar was in Glasgow and my official home in the United Kingdom was Glasgow University.
The first interview was done in August 2007 and the last was done in March 2009, thus data collection and analysis and some part of writing of the thesis was done simultaneously. I lived most of this period in Glasgow and the rest in Mumbai. Dharmadam was visited three times totaling a period of about 6-7 weeks; the first time I stayed in Dharmadam for a little more than a month. Some participants, especially, the ones whose interviews were conducted in the beginning had to be visited again because of the subsequent focusing of interview areas which required some areas of investigation to be revisited. Moreover, there was also a shift in the boundaries of the defined contexts for research – closer limits were set to SES in each site and this meant that more participants had to be interviewed for variation and saturation within the newly set limits. This too meant that sites such as Mumbai and Dharmadam were revisited even after data collection was presumed to be over.\textsuperscript{18}

My identity as a researcher and affiliation with reputed educational institutions located at all the three sites eased my way to the research participants – at all the three sites. However my identity as a brown, “middle-class”, city-dwelling, English and Malayalam speaking Indian woman meant that the data collection process achieved its own character in each site. My social and cultural positioning matched those of the upper SES participants in Mumbai. Also, all big cities across the world have certain common features which bring certain superficial commonalities at least to the young people of a certain SES as me. Therefore, I was not entirely an “outsider” for participants in Glasgow either and did not have to change myself much to fit into the situation. On the other hand, in Dharmadam, I took care to dress appropriately and only wore traditional \textit{salwar kameez}, in spite of which people expressed surprise that I could converse in Malayalam and in the words of one of the participants, “such chaste Malayalam”.

Locating participants and achieving consent for the interview was relatively easier in Dharmadam and Mumbai and the most difficult in Glasgow. In part, this stemmed from the personal resources that accumulate from living in a city for a long while – one participant was a friend and there were a few acquaintances. At first I was wary of how these relations would influence the interview in terms of openness. Whereas the interview with the friend went well, as well as the interview with two of the acquaintances, one of the interviews had to be dropped because the interviewee

\textsuperscript{18} The further details of this shift in focus of analysis and shift to the limits of the context are provided in the analysis procedures section below.
was uncomfortable talking about some things – especially with regard to questions such as “When thinking of the future, what makes you afraid, what gives you hope?”, etc. These questions, did not inform the core categories that the theory eventually developed, however since better interviews were available for analysis, the interview was dropped. Other interviews were arranged through friends (for the corporate-sector employees), through my parents and through my guide. Indicative of the different social worlds that people of different SES occupy in India, participants of a lower SES were not located through friends but by directly approaching them; a couple of them worked in the university administration, one was a teacher located by going to a nearby school and the other was a shop owner located through a shop-owner that I knew. A total of fifteen interviews were done, out of which 10 were chosen for analysis.

As contrasted from Mumbai, Glasgow and Dharamadam represented relatively unfamiliar locales with few personal resources that I could draw from such as acquaintances, friends or relatives. In Dharmadam, I got acquainted with some of the law students at the University who lived in the University hostels or in rented houses in the village. Some of the participants were located through these students and were approached directly at their homes one evening accompanied by a couple of the students. One of the student’s (now my friend) cousin was a coconut feller named Bijooty, who volunteered to help me; most of the participants from Dharmadam were contacted with Bijooty’s help. Since Bijooty knew many people in the village, he could also identify the participants according to the required inclusive criteria. Although I felt reluctant to go to people’s homes and approach them directly, this was seen as unproblematic by Bijooty and the other students and everybody I met thus were very hospitable. It needs to be emphasized that the volunteering to help locate participants and accompanying me to their homes was done spontaneously, I only had to state my research agenda and the students or Bijooty and his family would actively discuss amongst themselves, suggest names and set a date and time when we could all go visit the participants. While a part of this had to do with the general culture of hospitality extended to outsiders, I felt that this also had to do with my identity as a woman; indeed Bijooty’s mother would insist that I not go alone and her son accompany me to the participants’ homes. In Dharmadam, a total of twenty interviews were done, of which 10 interviews were chosen for analysis.
In contrast to the relative ease with which I negotiated the unfamiliar terrain that Dharmadam represented, Glasgow presented a tougher picture in terms of locating participants for the interview. Whereas in Mumbai I knew people who could then put me in touch with others and in Dharmadam, this lack of intermediaries was quickly overcome by the culture of hospitality and protectiveness towards women, I had neither in Glasgow. One of the participants, who worked in the university administration, was contacted through my supervisor in Glasgow for whom she had worked many years ago. My landlady’s daughter was another participant, as was her colleague. Another participant was a friend of a friend. The rest of the participants had to be contacted through other means. Although I put up notices describing the research and inviting participation at many notice boards in the university, this proved to be futile. When I considered giving money for participation, my supervisor advised against this saying that though that might be a practice in psychology departments, it was not the practice in sociological studies and that the participants should volunteer out of interest. I then turned to the internet. I first went to blogger, a popular web log hosting site and put up the same notice on the comment space section of close to 60 blogs written by people residing in Glasgow. Although about six to seven people wrote back, only a couple of them fit the inclusion criteria. I joined the Mature Students Association and the Glasgow University Research Club mailing lists to send the notices to members, out of which I could locate two participants. Finally, a dating site I was using personally at the time was also used to locate the intellectuals – the writer and the web-developer as well as the teacher. Sixteen interviews were done in all, out of which eleven interviews were selected for analysis.

As the analysis chapters will reveal, a central theme amongst high-choice participants such as those in Glasgow, is the importance of personal inherent interest in something (whether a career course or a potential partner) for it to be chosen in the life trajectories followed by the participants. In line with this, the primary motivation for participation in the research for a majority of the participants in Glasgow was interest. On the other hand, in Dharmadam it was the idea of helping a student pursue a worthy cause – research – that encouraged participation.

The interview process
Where I introduced the study to a participant face to face or on the phone, as happened in Dharmadam and Mumbai and sometimes in Glasgow, I described the study as a cross-cultural study of marriage/love and work. When the participants
asked further questions, I would elaborate more on the idea, for example, by taking the arranged marriage/dating example. The notice that I used in Glasgow and which I also mailed to people online is attached as an appendix (Appendix I). I felt that a signed informed consent form will only make the participants more uncomfortable and therefore I ensured this in practice by informing the participants of the nature of the study and assuring them of confidentiality. Moreover, a signed contract was also at odds with the culture of some of the contexts investigated, in particular the rural context as well as in Mumbai where the interviews were set up through friendships and relations or in other words, personal good-will. The participants were also informed that the results of the study will be communicated to them once I write a paper on it.

The first four to five interviews were conducted over two and even three sessions. As the interviews achieved some more focus and I too became more familiar with the process, the latter interviews were all done in one session when possible. Sometimes this was not possible when I had to interview participants during work breaks, like it happened in Mumbsi and Dharmadam. I used a digital recorder to record the interviews; none of the participants expressed any discomfort with it. Most of the interviews in Dharmadam were conducted in people’s homes, a few at their work places during breaks. Interviews in Mumbai were conducted both at the work place and at people’s homes. In Glasgow, most interviews were conducted in coffee shops or pubs/bars and some were done in my office at the University. In all cases, the participants decided a place and time of convenience to them.

I used an interview schedule with broad open-ended questions for each area of interest; this served only as a broad guide, interest areas were spontaneously explored as the interview progressed. Some of the questions were sourced from Atkinson’s (2004) life-story interview guide and the others I created as fitting the research objectives. Nearly all interviews (except two interviews towards the end) recorded information of all the interview areas mentioned in the interview schedule. As analysis progressed, several areas received lesser emphasis and were subsequently excluded from analysis in the later interviews.19 (The final interview schedule is attached as Appendix II). The questions and analysis subsequently focused on three areas covered in the interview schedule – work trajectories, the love trajectories and

19 This reasons for this shift is detailed in the first part of the data analysis section.
what I titled “over-arching life themes”, which eventually embellished the developing
theory of cultural goals and potentials for happiness. The following section examines
in greater detail the progressive focusing of the interview areas and the development
of analytical categories.

**Data Analysis**

One way by which the quality of qualitative research is assessed is by an examination
of the extent to which transparency is maintained as to the research procedures, and
especially transparency with regard to the analysis process from which the theory
emerges. Since in grounded theory analysis and data collection proceed side by side,
decisions in analysis affected directions taken in the field. Therefore, this section
describes not just data analysis but also how this intertwined with practices in the
field.

I first describe the manner in which there came about a shift in the original
objectives of the study and the consequent shift in the areas of interviewing.
Following this is described the development of the analytical categories and the
subsequent theory which is described in the analysis chapters. As may be noted from
the original schedule, at the beginning there were 6 areas of interviewing. 1) Work
trajectory 2) Love/marriage trajectory 3) Important Relationships 4) Leisure 5) Over-
arching life themes 6) Ideas of Happiness. These interview areas were chosen in
alliance with the objectives and research questions with which I set out to the field
but which in response to the field reality, shifted in focus.

How did this happen? To revisit the objectives briefly, at the outset of
research, one of the subsidiary objectives was to understand the development of the
self (and its relationship to society) in the important arenas of love/marriage, work
and play/leisure. Love and work stories followed a clear trajectory in time from
aspirations (or not) in school to college/university to work. Similarly, intimate
relationships too followed a trajectory from past relationships to current ones to an
anticipated future of the current relationships. However, the arena of leisure did not
follow a trajectory from the past to the present and moreover was not a site for
identity in some contexts (in rural India and among the lower socio-economic choice
participants in Mumbai). Thus, this area was dropped from the analysis. Likewise, in
the “important relationships” arena, it was aimed to investigate friendship,
relationship with relatives, neighbours, etc. This was with an aim to understanding
choice in the arena of relationships and with a hunch that relationships are chosen in
individualistic cultures and a given (relatives) in collectivistic contexts. However, this information also did not feed into the final theory developed which focused on work and love/marriage and was dropped from analysis as it progressed.

A core shift in objectives occurred in the area of understanding a culture’s potential for well-being. A subsidiary objective at the outset of research was to understand cultural constructions of happiness by understanding participants’ experience of it in terms of happy and unhappy times and what makes them happy and unhappy across cultures. The idea was to then link culturally based ideas of happiness that might arise from an analysis of these to cultural constructions of the self as arising from the work and love stories. However this took the focus of research away from the work and love stories per se and the potentials for satisfaction in these realms that culturally grounded meaning making within these realms would entail. This theory was already taking shape as analysis progressed and derived little richness from an understanding of general cultural constructions of happiness. For this reason, the objective shifted in emphasis from understanding of cultural constructions of happiness through what people report as happy and unhappy times to a more focused understanding of it as it plays out in the core areas of investigation in research – the love and work realms in life.

Thus, for the final analysis, only three areas of interviewing were retained – the work trajectory, the love trajectory, and what is titled “over-arching life themes”. These contribute to the three analytical chapters in the thesis – the first two looking at choice and its consequence for work and love/marriage respectively and the third chapter that considers what the stories and the meaning making inherent in them portend for satisfaction in the realms.

**Coding the data and deriving categories**

I used the NVivo software for qualitative data analysis for organizing and managing the data. I debated between merging and differentiating the three geographical contexts and in the end, decided in favour of differentiating the contexts. Thus, there was a work node, a love and marriage node and an over-arching life themes node for all the three contexts.

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20 In NVivo, nodes can be thought of as concept bags, when hierarchically organized, the nodes at the lowest level will be coded to interview extracts, so that one node can be coded at many extracts within an interview and across interviews. The higher levels of the nodes in a tree node represent higher levels of abstraction.
The broad areas of interview and the corresponding analysis areas gradually achieved prominence in the analysis and interviews simultaneously. At the beginning, the manner in which time, with a past, a present and a future was not evident in the interviews/narratives nor in the nodes so that the interviews were not envisaged as a trajectory although gradually, this orientation gained emphasis and the analysis ordered the nodes accordingly. As mentioned, the broad headings mentioned earlier formed the highest tree nodes within the broad areas of work and love. The analysis started with a single case, where I did line by line or paragraph level coding, attaching labels to these segments, what in grounded theory is called open coding. As further cases were considered, constant comparative method was applied to compare interview extracts across the cases asking questions such as “What ideas are similar or dissimilar across these extracts?” As more and more interviews were coded and the similarities and differences between extracts considered, higher levels of abstraction based on grouping of similar nodes were done – what in grounded theory is called axial coding. When new data were coded that revealed new aspects, the older data were sometimes re-examined again to code for variations on a node property. Also sometimes, as interview areas became more focused, or when relations between categories emergent, participants whose interviews were done in the beginning were revisited again to probe deeper. The final stage in coding is called selective coding. This is where I related the higher level nodes or categories to each other and the contexts – to form the theory. Selective coding refers to “the process of selecting the central or core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development” (Strauss and Corbin 1990:116). For the categories developed, theory saturation could be achieved within 8-10 interviews, within each geographical context itself, which were further confirmed across high and low-choice contexts across geographical contexts. The categories developed and the manner in which they relate to the choice contexts are detailed in the analysis chapters that follow.