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Exploring Four Hong Kong
low achieving Cantonese students
evolved into
high achieving HE learners through
the Lens of Higgins' Self-and-Affect Model

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Master of Philosophy

University of Bristol

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Abstract

This qualitative study relates to four Cantonese graduates from a non-traditional overseas university (University X) who prior to their Bachelor's degrees achieved very little academic success. In each case they evolved to become high achievers, graduating with First Class Honours awards. The research addresses the question as to whether their experience can be used to shed light on the situation of other learners in Higher Education from similar backgrounds. It is investigated from the perspective of a Cantonese-speaking graduate of the same university whose learning trajectory took a similar shape.

Established theory on self-efficacy frames the study, which revisits and reflects with the graduates on the journeys that each has undertaken. In the first section, a review of relevant literature is undertaken and used to justify the main theoretical foundations of this inquiry which has two dimensions: i) the human development dimension (Harris, 1998; Deci et al., 1996), and ii) the expectancy dimension (Higgins, 1987). The human development dimension probes the fields of goals, motivation, self-efficacy and performance, while Higgins' expectancy dimension supplies an analytical framework through which the underlying patterns and connections between low/high-achieving-learning, academic/non-academic goal, own/other effect and the entwining "relational-dependent selves" of Cantonese learners.

From this elaboration, three research questions are set and explored empirically using nonstructural interpretative inquiry interviews with participants and related persons. These are explored using thematic analysis, whereby the research findings from two periods are compared, contrasting a period of "underachievement" (before entry into University X) with the period following their enrolment in University X, in order to explore the factors facilitating this evolution.

Following Higgins (1987), I draw the conclusion in section 6.5 that the learners studied in this paper are affected more significantly by the "other", than the "own", and that the effects these relations produce often escape awareness. The study opens up an avenue towards understanding the ways in which higher education can create a supportive environment that enriches the experience of Cantonese learners.

Keywords: Higher Education, Hong Kong Cantonese learners, Expectancy, High-achieving, Low-achieving, Relational-dependent

Dedication and Acknowledgements

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and many friends. A special feeling of gratitude to my wife, Lanna whose words of encouragement refresh my mind day by day. My kids, Isaac and Alvin have never left my side and are very special. I also dedicate this dissertation to my many friends (David, Caroline, Carmen, Jill, Mark, Kevin, Joe, KB, Nin and Mary) and church family who have supported and prayed for me throughout the process. I will always appreciate all they have done, especially Dr. Janet Orchard and Dr. Felicity Sedgewick for leading me to develop the research process, Dr. Ben Simmons for the development of my methodology chapter, and all teaching and administrative staff in this EdD programme. I dedicate this work and give special thanks to four research participants, Coffee, Water, Sugar, Magic and their outsider witness participants for providing their valuable stories for me. Besides accomplishing an EdD dissertation, I have learnt a lot from each of you.

I would like to acknowledge and thank University X for allowing me to conduct my research and providing any assistance requested. Special thanks goes to Alice, Matthew and Kenneth for their continued support.

Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work.

Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such.

Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: _____  _____ DATE: 13th November, 2021

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Topic of the Study

This study aims to explore the ways in which achievement can be enhanced in the field of higher education (HE) in Hong Kong. One critical reason for selecting Hong Kong is the drastic increase in the higher education enrolment rate from 19% to 69% within the span of 20 years (comparing 1995 and 2015¹). Besides changes in the field of policy, there are plenty of other factors for educational researchers to explore. The target group studied by this paper is that of Hong Kong Cantonese learners, because they are the majority population in the territory, with around 88.7% of the population being Cantonese speaking in 1991².

Many studies have discovered that Asian students (including Chinese/Cantonese students) are not only simply diligent, as popular stereotypes would have it. Coupled with this work ethic, they also have a high motivation to achieve. Invariably they have a high regard for education (Ho, 1986; Yang, 1986 as cited in Lee, 1996:25). This explains why education lies at the heart of what it means to “achieve” in the eyes of Chinese students.

Furthermore, this observation is further stimulated and strengthened by effects exerted by groups such as the family or by culture at large. When we speak of a “group-effect” affecting the decisions made by a given individual, the standard of achievement is often

¹ For details, refer to section 1.2.3, Table 1B

² For details, refer to section 1.2.2, Table 1A

established by other people rather than the individual themselves (Yang 1988; as cited in Salili, 1996:88). The question of “who” sets the goal is answered here. Meanwhile, goals and achievements in Chinese culture are often treated as being pursued for the benefit of the group (e.g. one's family) rather than the individual (Yang 1988; as cited in Salili, 1996:88). This explains “whom” the goal is set for. Under the influence of the “cultural-effect”, goals achieved through the cooperation between individuals in a group result in an increased sense of mutual obligation among the members of that group (Stevenson and Lee, 1990; as cited in Salili, 1996:86).

When we study the ways in which they plan their lives and develop throughout their education, we find that Chinese learners behave differently to Western learners. Chinese culture is deeply marked by collectivistic habits and is centred on “obedience” and “devotion towards familial and kinship group” (Salili, 1996:86). Consequently, two entwining and entangling effects appear at the same time. On the part of the students, they are driven towards arduous study by their parents and inheriting cultural values emphasising the need to endure the travails of “hard work” and “endurance”. Chinese students assume almost exclusive personal responsibility for their success or failure (Salili, 1996:89). Their families, immediate and extended, offer them protection in exchange for their loyalty. Ultimately, the identity of the individual is a derivative of the social group to which he or she belongs, rather than traits that he or she feels responsible for sculpting and cultivating (Hui, 1988; as cited in Salili, 1996:86). In this way, the students and their families are entwined and entangled with one another.

Four Hong Kong Cantonese were screened as research participants to ascertain certain facts/“raw matters” (Spinelli, 2005:13) in an effort to investigate the factors that led to their evolution from “underachieving learners” to distinguished “graduates with First

Class honours awards”. This study aims to probe and uncover the effects that took place during this process. These effects will be classed into 2 aspects: (1) effect from “self” and (2) effect from “other”. Furthermore, each aspect will be divided into 2 periods: (a) before studying at University X and (b) during HE study at University X. These create 2 x 2 quadrants where three research questions will be set to investigate the relationships among these 4 quadrants. In order to strengthen the authenticity for “inter-relational conflicts” (Spinelli, 2005:119) and “relationally-dependent selves” (Spinelli, 2005:80) among Hong Kong Cantonese learners, Higgins’ Self and Affect concept (Higgins, 1987) will be adopted.

This research attempts to satisfy Tracy's (in Tracy, 2010) criteria of “resonance”, which will render it of use to Hong Kong Cantonese learners, low achievers, learners’ family members, teachers and policy makers in higher education.

1.2 Context/Policy

In sections 1.2.1 and 1.2.2, after elaborating upon the general cultural and traditional background of Chinese learners, a target group (for the current research), that of Hong Kong Cantonese learners, will be defined.

In sections 1.2.3 and 1.2.4, the historical background of Hong Kong higher education and the students’ sociological perception of higher education will be explored.

1.2.1 Human Development of Chinese Learners

Besides referencing academic research for universal learners (Lerner, 1998; Harris,

1998; Alkire, 2002; Bandura, 1977, as cited in Bandura & Schunk, 1981), we must mention that Chinese learners possess different ideologies and adopt different learning styles to Western learners. For Chao (2000:246), the values that inform parenting styles across different cultures have a pronounced influence on the academic achievement and development of children. Regarding ideologies, human development (Bandura & Schunk, 1981), goals (Harris, 1998), motivation (Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Pajares, 1995) and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, as cited in Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Zimmerman, 2000; Bandura & Schunk, 1981; Pajares, 1995) will be adopted for the current study. In order to explore the difference between the ideologies of Chinese learners and those of Western learners, Higgins' five selves model, "Self and Affect" (Higgins, 1987; section 2.7), will be adopted.

This study discovers that Chinese learners have a tendency to set and achieve goals for the sake of other people, instead of aiming at acquiring benefits for themselves.

Chinese students tend to regard variables within their own control, such as effort and study skills, rather than any innate ability or talent, as being integral to academic success (Hau and Salili, 1989; Salili, Hwang and Choi, 1989; as cited in Biggs & Watkins, 1996:92).

It can be said, then, that "effort and endurance" are paramount values among Chinese students. Success achieved through hard work is valued more than accomplishments that are achieved through the exercise of talent. Beyond this, the establishment of goals that lie beyond one's current capacities is regarded as a virtue (Yang, 1986; as cited in Biggs & Watkins, 1996:93). While causal attribution to effort is congruent with the Chinese belief that effort is virtuous, attribution to ability is in conflict with the Chinese

cultural value of modesty. When learners attribute any success they may achieve to strength of will and effort, they are effectively effacing their own person, enacting a sort of humility that is characteristically Chinese.

Existing Situations of Asian Learners and Hong Kong Cantonese Learners

In Asia, standards of excellence and success are established by the individual as well as “significant others, the family, the group, or the society as a whole” (Yang, 1986:114; as cited in Biggs & Watkins, 1996:274).

In the current teaching and learning climate, Hong Kong students have developed rather adaptive attributional patterns, relying on the self-discipline required of assiduous effort and the cultivation of effective study skills. The assistance that teachers supply has also been recognised as being of considerably importance in determining success or failure (Salili, 1996:97). Chinese teachers do not offer praise readily and tend to consider it detrimental to a child's development if given too cheaply. On the other hand, however, severe discipline and punishment are considered to be indispensable in education (Salili, 1996:94).

During the teaching and learning process, it is rare for students to receive feedback or positive reinforcement on their efforts in class. In such classroom contexts, students learn from an early age to work hard without any expectation of external reward or praise (Salili, 1996:94). When positive feedback and praise are luxuries, incentives towards achievement usually come in the way of titles given for services rendered to one's school (e.g. monitors, prefects, chairmen of clubs and societies) or awards for outstanding achievement (e.g. coming first in one's grade, being a champion in a

competition) (Salili, 1996:94).

As a result, Chinese teachers and parents tend to be excessively harsh towards their students. Much is expected of their students, and if the students fail to adhere to certain standards, they are often admonished. When they do manage to accomplish something, praise is seldom forthcoming. While this may enhance their motivation to achieve, it can affect their social and emotional development as well as their mental health (Salili, 1996:100). Being accustomed to the authoritarian nature of their classrooms, students no longer anticipate praise or reward for their efforts (Salili, 1996:95). The pressure on students to study hard and do well in examinations is relentless, regardless of the educational level of their own parents (Ho, 1986:30; as cited in Biggs & Watkins, 1996:274).

1.2.2 Hong Kong Cantonese Learners

According to Bacon-Shone & Bolton (1998:48 & 54), the population and usual language of Hong Kong are shown in table 1A.

Usual Language	1911	1961	1991
Cantonese	81%	79.02%	88.7%
English	Unknown	1.21%	2.2%
Total Population (million)	0.457	3.13	5.17

Table 1A: Table of HK Population and Usual Languages (1911-1991)

The current study will focus on the majority group, the language group of Cantonese speakers. Although Hong Kong received a few million immigrants from different regions of the Mainland between 1911 and 1991, most of them assimilated and used

Cantonese, which can be seen in Table 1A. This unique mixture of immigrants composed and established a specific local culture. In this research, the group studied has been given the name of “Hong Kong Cantonese Learners”.

1.2.3 Higher Education in HK

Casual Learning & Life-long Learning

According to Cushner (1990:100; as cited in Tang, 1996:8), the moment a child enters the world, he or she is immediately initiated into a process of learning what a cultural group or society requires from them.

Upward Social Mobility & Major Screening Device

According to Kwok (2004), education acts as a “major screening device” and remains the means by which social advancement can be accomplished.

In table 1B³ below, it can be seen that the tertiary enrolment ratio of several countries/regions increased between 1995 and 2015.

Countries /Regions	Tertiary Enrolment Ratio 1995	Tertiary Enrolment Ratio 2015
United States	79.0%	88.9%
Hong Kong	19.0 %	69.0%
Germany	45.2%	66.3%
China	4.5%	45.4%
Asia	10.4%	43.1%
World	15.6%	36.7%

Table 1B: Table of Tertiary Enrolment of 6 Countries/Regions (1995 & 2015)

³ The World Bank; Washington. Retrieved at 18-06-2019 from <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/education-statistics-%5e-all-indicators>

The increasing trend can be observed in all countries/regions.

1.2.4 Chance for Higher Education in HK

Ever since its days as a British colony, Hong Kong society has been stratified by an elitist system, with these “elites” being promoted to higher education (Tsang, 1999; Lee, 2010). The remaining students have had to enter the job market. From the 1970s to 1990s, the growing economy (a typical stage of a developing country) was able to absorb most of the secondary school graduates. This was reflected in a low unemployment rate, which was below 5% during the 1980s (Census and Statistics Department, 2008).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the structural change of Hong Kong’s economy affected the entire situation (CPU, 2010:5). This was partly due to globalisation and partly related to developments in the city itself. For example, the Pearl River Delta region experienced an influx of migration because of developing industries in the area. This exerted an influence upon middle-aged members of the workforce before expanding to include younger groups and this was in turn reflected in the high unemployment rate, which reached 12.9% for the 15-24 age-group in 2002 (Ip, 2002).

Besides the bachelor’s degree, the desirability of “higher diplomas” and “associate degrees”, seen as pathways to higher education, is well-established in some certain countries. According to Davies et al. (1997:10-12):

‘....The question of who higher education is for is clearly related to the qualification routes available....The development of the vocational routes was

clearly linked to the economic imperative of educational policy....'

This is not only an “academic” concern, but also a “vocational” and “political” concern. These countries intend to divert and produce vocational labour to meet their local needs. Previously a British colony for almost a century, Hong Kong has unique characteristics and a unique international role. For example, before the 1980s, Hong Kong was production-oriented or trading-related, and manufacturing and experts in the field of trade were in demand. Since the 1990s, Hong Kong has evolved into a financial and service-oriented economy. As a result, an acute change occurred in the human resources market. Trends of professionalisation and academic migration (from manufacturing/trading-related shifting towards financial and service industry) began to appear. Academic inflation also deteriorated. Fortunately, the Chief Executive, Tung Chee Hwa, grasped the trend and initiated policy reform in higher education in 1998. Per table 1B in section 1.2.3, the percentage of enrolment in higher education escalated drastically from 19% to 69% within the space of 20 years (between 1995 and 2015). In 2001, a critical education reform was implemented at the secondary school level, reducing the five bands/streams of the secondary school system to three. According to Poon & Wong (2008), this was intended to treat the problem of elitism. Unexpectedly, it led to increased inequality, unfairness and keen competition, which imposed further pressure on students. It seems, then, that the transition period from elitism to egalitarianism is far from over.

The abovementioned data describes not only the full-time higher education students in local universities, but also part-time and mature students.

After the policy reform launched by Tung in 1998, higher secondary students began to

access and enjoy different higher education programmes in various combinations of higher diploma (HD)/associate degree (AD)/bachelor’s degree level through full-time/part-time mode.

Table 1C⁴ shows the tertiary enrolment ratio of Hong Kong from 1985-2015:-

Year	Tertiary Enrolment Ratio
2015	69.0 %
2005	33.2 %
1995	19.0 %
1985	4.0 %

Table 1C: Table of Tertiary Enrolment Ratio of HK (1985 - 2015)

There is a clear increasing trend, especially between 2005 and 2015.

Coincidentally, University X established a branch campus in Hong Kong in 1996 and provided finance and service-related subjects, such as the Bachelor of Science major in Psychology. The university positioned itself well amidst changes in the academic market of the time. For details, please refer to section 1.7, *The Setting – About the Research Field*, P.28.

1.3 Aims and Guiding Research Questions

This study aims to explore ways in which we might study better in higher education. The current work has taken a step in the direction of turning our attention to the potential

⁴ University Grants Committee (2017); Hong Kong. Retrieved on 18-06-2019 from <https://www.ugc.edu.hk/eng/ugc/about/publications/report/hervw/ch6.html>

of those typically considered to be “low achievers”. Based on this premise, I hope the findings within will have considerable impact on encouraging low-achieving Cantonese freshmen in Hong Kong higher education.

Though the four research participants featured in this paper come from diverse backgrounds, they all had modest academic records (low-achieving) prior to entering higher education. Hence, the first question I would like to pose is this:

What were their learning obstacles before?⁵

All of the participants evolved and finally became high-achieving graduates. Their previous efforts and abilities were recognised, in term of testimonials, and their achievements paved the way for further success, whether that would involve further study or a career after graduation. Regarding their evolutionary study process, I would like to raise the following questions:

Were there any intelligences (or abilities as successful experiences) in their stories?⁶

What are those intelligences (or abilities as experiences)?⁷

Therefore, the current research is highly focused on their higher education study journey who induced effects, what were these effects and how were they able to evolve within a few years? Harris’ work is limited in that most of his studies are based on non-Chinese participants. This means that several factors particularly evident in Chinese contexts, such as that of “parenting”, are absent from Harris' studies, reducing the

⁵ For details, please refer to: *Problematic Stories* [section 2.7.2]

⁶ For details, please refer to: *Sparkling Moments* [section 2.7.2]

⁷ For details, please refer to: *Self-efficacy* [section 2.7.1]

reliability of his work for our purposes. However, this limitation may be overcome by conducting more local researches with Chinese participants. During the study, with the help of Higgins' concept (chapter 2.2), two unexpected questions arose:

For whom did the four learners achieve the award?

Did the four learners initially set achieving First Class honours as a goal?

All in all, three core research questions were established in an effort to investigate the factors associated with academic achievement among Cantonese learners from non-traditional teaching learning environments in Hong Kong:

1. What were the participants' **self-guides** during the periods? For whom and why were the **self-guides** set?
2. What were the participants' **self-concepts** during the periods?
3. What were the relationships between participants' **self-guides** and **self-concepts** during the periods?

1.4 Significance of the Study

In order to answer these questions, an in-depth qualitative methodology will be employed. Gray (1998:1 as cited in Bell, 1999:16) mentioned that narratives afford space for different voices – that of the researcher, the participants and cultural groups – and in this sense they may be able to develop a decidedly political and powerful edge. Likewise, Connelly & Clandinin (1990:11) contend that when presented in an “inductive mode”, data is given the space to tell its own story, but in the “demonstrative mode”, data tends not to speak for itself. Therefore, the current study will record and replay the stories of the participants in an “inductive mode”.

Coincidentally, the combination of the current topic, field of research and involved concepts is unique and has not been covered by previous researchers. Blaxter et al. (2006:13) concluded Phillips, Pugh and Francis' findings and listed fifteen definitions of *originality of research*. This study satisfies six of the fifteen criteria:

- Carrying out empirical work that has not been done before;
- Making a synthesis that has not been made before;
- Taking a particular technique and applying it in a new area;
- Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies;
- Looking at areas that people in the discipline have not looked at before;
- Adding to knowledge in a way that has not previously been done before.

Therefore, I can claim originality. Last but not least, there is plenty of room left for exploration in the current study and this should stimulate further research. Although the scale of the current research is small, it acts as a good starting point. As mentioned in section 1.2.3 and 1.2.4, lot of resources were being allocated into higher education sector in Hong Kong, despite lots of researchers have focused and contributed, for examples, Yau & Leung (2018), Mok, K.H. (2018, 2008, 2005), Jacob, W.J. (2018), Chao, R.Y.Jr. (2012) and Mei, L. & Bray, M. (2006), etc., qualitative studies regarding low-achieving students, or especially focusing on successful cases evolved from low to high-achieving are rare. This urges the need to have more attentions to fill the gap.

1.5 The Setting – Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

This dissertation is concerned with the learning of four first class honours graduates in

a typical academic environment, University X. The study will, through the establishment of interpretive inquiry, endeavour to understand how they were able to evolve from low achieving to high achieving students within a few years. In section 1.2 and chapter 2, a number of key issues from the literature have been explored, including Goals, Self-efficacy and Sparkling Moments & Problematic Stories, as well as Higgins' model. Among these concepts, Higgins' (1987) self and affect model will be at the core.

Among a group of learners (e.g. Cantonese HE learners), it is usual to have only a small proportion of them perform outstandingly. Why is it that only some of them can perform outstandingly? What are the differences between the minority (high-achievers) and the majority (normal and low-achievers)? **Although this statement is generic, it can specifically cater for any confounding factors in a local situation.** Therefore, the current study focuses on four high-achieving learners, and it is supposed that there should be something different about them in comparison to other mainstream learners (from the same batch), especially if they had previously been low-achievers.

In summary, four participants started their study journey as low achieving learners and became high achieving learners. In this sense, the current research fulfils the “meaningful coherence” criterion, according to Tracy (2010).

1.6 The Setting – About the research field (University X)

University X organised a series of subjects (financial and servicing industry oriented) as a response to changes in the academic market during the 1990s (as mentioned in section 1.2.4). These options acted as pioneers in the Hong Kong HE market, which fulfilled the needs of secondary school graduates and even mature students. Moreover,

University X provided both full-time and part-time courses. This allowed working students to study at their leisure. Most importantly, they did not need to give up their careers. It is important to note here that the study plan system was flexible. Students were able to select their subject of interest (preferred subject) in various combinations. Secondly, the accreditation of the bachelor's degree was well recognised by official Hong Kong organisations, meaning that most employers (including government and private organisations) and even local universities were willing to admit University X graduates.

According to University X, graduates of the university with a GPA higher than 3.50 are widely welcomed and accepted on to Master's degree courses at different local universities. Another remark for the current study concerns the required GPA to achieve a First Class honours award at University X, which is 3.90. Before 2016, the required GPA was 3.80. In conclusion, it is highly probable that First Class honours graduates from University X will be admitted by most local universities as Master's degree students.

1.7 The Setting – Four Hong Kong Cantonese Participants at University X

A summary of the participants is shown below:

	Ms. Coffee	Mr. Water	Ms. Sugar (S)	Ms. Magic
Gender	F	M	F	F
Age	Mature	Mature	Young	Adult
First Class Honours	Yes	Yes	2 nd Honours	Yes
Type of Public Exam in senior secondary school	HKAL ⁸	HKAL	HKDSE ⁹	HKAL
Possessing first degree (before University X)	Yes	No	No	No
Studying Mode	Part-Time	Mixed Mode ¹⁰	Full-Time ¹¹	Part-Time
Graduation Year	2016	2014	2016	2017
Further Study (after University X)	No	Yes	Yes	No
Marital Status	Married	Married	Single	Married
Sequence of interview	2	3	4	1

Table 1D: Summary Table of 4 Participants of current study

Gender. Both genders are covered in the current research, although the majority (3 to 1) are female. In Chinese culture, gender (including the interviewees' role in their

⁸ Previous public examination system in HK, HKCEE & HKAL, on or before 2011.

⁹ Current public examination system in HK, HKDSE (Hong Kong Diploma of Secondary Education Examination), since 2012.

¹⁰ Water started from part-time study mode. In the middle of his University X journey, he shifted to dual mode, attending both day and evening courses.

¹¹ Sugar is the youngest participant among the four. She studied at University X as a full-time student, but she still engaged with different part-time jobs occasionally.

family and workplace) is a significant factor that affects the perception of successful learners and the fairness of learning opportunities. Spinelli (2005:64) also described this as “the effects of dispositional and biasing factors”.

Age. Sugar is in her 20s, Magic is in her 30s and the other two (Coffee and Water) are in their 40s or 50s. The breadth of this range lends a sense of variety to the current research.

First Class Honours graduates. First Class honours achievement is the core requirement of the current research, but, as shown in the above summary, Sugar had only achieved Second class honours. After conscientious consideration, she was finally accepted as the fourth target. There are two reasons for this choice. As mentioned in chapter 1.6, the first reason is that the new honours system was implemented at University X in 2016. The GPA of Sugar was between 3.8 and 3.9, which would be considered a First Class honours in the old system. However, Sugar was among the first batch of graduates under the new system. The second reason concerns the new public examination system, HKDSE¹². Sugar was the only respondent who had experienced DSE. In order to include both A-level¹³ (old system) and HKDSE (new system) participants in the current research, Sugar was subsequently recruited as the last participant.

Other Significant Factors. For the remaining three factors: “Possessing first degree”, “Further Study” (Master’s degree), and “Marital Status”, both types of participant (possessing first degree or not, further study or not, and married or single) were covered

¹² As footnote #9 on p.28

¹³ HKAL, as footnote #8 on p.28

in the current research.

Generalisations of screened participants. I would like to state that the current study **will not derive any generalised findings from the four case studies presented here.**

However, it is fortunate to come across different participants by critical case sampling, which allows the research questions to be approached from different angles and contexts.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2

Higgins' model (1987) is selected and focused on this study. There are 5 essential reasons for this: i) it intertwines with other concepts as shown in section 2.3 to 2.7; ii) there has been sufficient quantitative evidences in the past 30 years; iii) its simple nature, containing as it does just 6 elements for interview; iv) the “/other” elements of Higgins' fit the collective Chinese values; v) qualitative studies to supplement Higgins' model are rare and none of them are related to Chinese higher education learners. The contribution of this study, by applying Higgins' model, sheds light on the qualitative research of particular Cantonese Chinese learners in higher education in Hong Kong. Up to this moment, no researcher has conducted a similar study, especially focusing on a private HE university. By a well-published quantitative model (Higgins'), the current research closes the loophole of its qualitative aspect – although it was conducted through semi-structured study, the research provided a real, rich, deep and understood data. In the current study, four participants were very close demographically to me, of whom they were also really trusting, as I had experienced similar a similar academic trajectory – all of which contributes to the current study's academic uniqueness.

2.2 Higgins' Model

Self-state representations. There are 6 basic types of self-state representation (1989, Higgins): 1) actual/own, 2) actual/other, 3) ideal/own, 4) ideal/other, 5) ought/own, and

6) ought/other. The self-state “actual/own” constitutes what is typically known as a person’s self-concept (Wylie, 1979; as cited by Higgins, 1989). The self-state representations #2-#6 are self-directive standards or **self-guides** (see Higgins, Strauman, & Klein, 1986b).

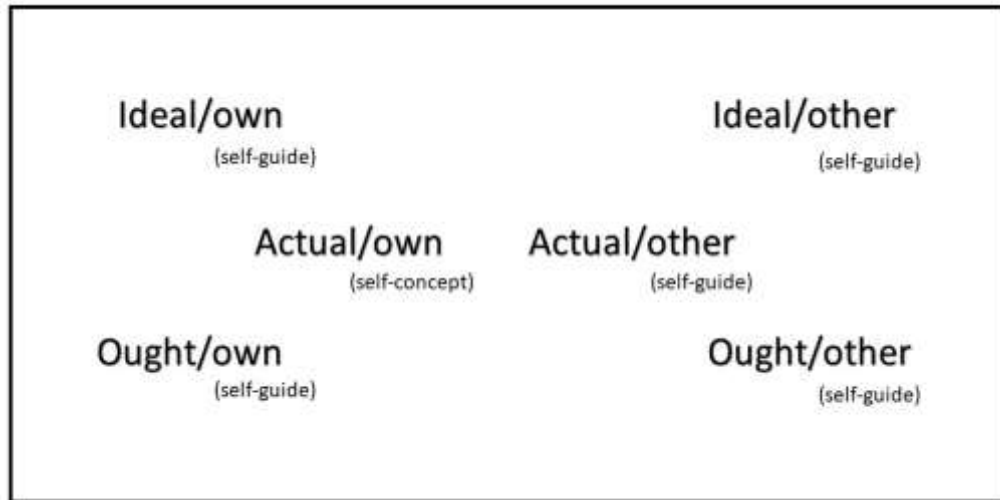


Diagram 1: Diagram of 6 Self-States of Higgins’ “Self and Affect” Model

(the model has been schematised by the author)

In order to understand the 6 basic types of self-state representation, they can be organised by means of 2 aspects: i) self-domains; and ii) standpoints.

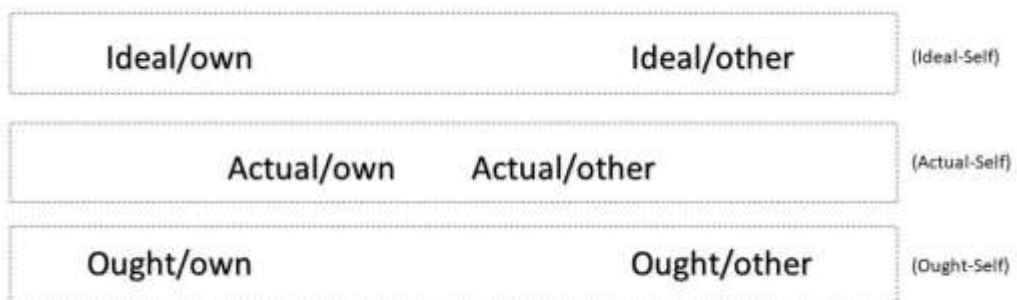


Diagram 2: Diagram of 3 Self-domains

(the model has been schematised by the author)

Self-domains. According to Higgins (1989), 3 types of self-domains were identified:

- **The actual self:** people’s representation of the attributes that someone believes you actually possess;
- **The ideal self:** people’s representation of the attributes that someone would like you, ideally, to possess (i.e. aspirations, hopes, or wishes);
- **The ought self:** people’s representation of the attributes that someone believes you should or ought to possess (e.g. obligations, responsibilities, or duty).

Standpoints. According to Higgins (1989), 2 types of standpoint on the self were also identified:

- Your **own** personal standpoint
- The standpoint of some significant **other** (e.g. mother, father, spouse, close friend).

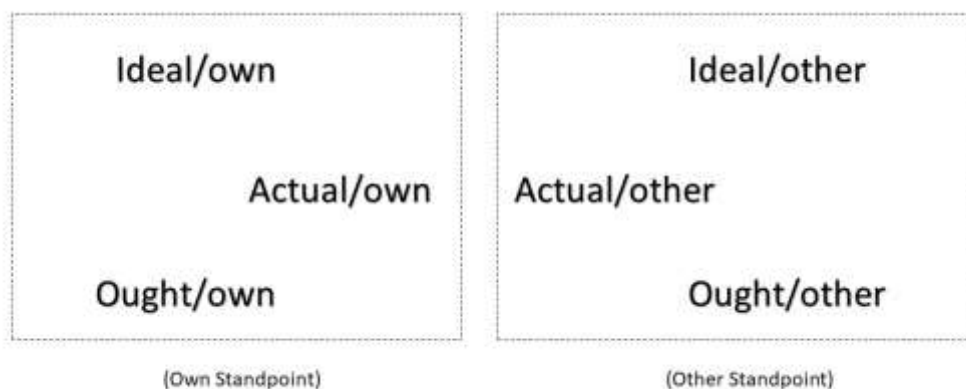


Diagram 3: Diagram of 2 Standpoints

(the model has been schematised by the author)

Self-Discrepancy theory. Higgins (1987) concluded that:

‘.... a relation between discomfort and specific kinds of “inconsistency” among a person’s belief....’

Higgins (1987) also discovered that:

‘.... self-conflicts and self-inconsistencies produce emotional problems....’

Finally, Higgins (1987) presented **self-discrepancy theory**, which has close ties to this historical tradition.

Self-beliefs. According to Higgins (1989) elaborated current self (actual self) includes all “can” and “cannot do” and expanded the concept further into “might become” or “expect to become”. These aligned with the concepts of potential selves (James, 1890/1948) or possible selves (Markus & Nurius, 1987).

Two Assumptions of Self-discrepancy theory. There are two assumptions of Self-discrepancy theory: I) Motivational; II) Information-Processing

Motivational assumptions (1989, Higgins). Self-discrepancy theory assumes,

‘.... that people are motivated to reach a condition in which their self-concept matches their personally relevant self-guides.’

Self-discrepancy theory differentiated different self-state representation (psychological situation), where each carried distinct emotional-motivational states. This provides a

clear and distinct foundations for researchers to understand human's mind under different occasions.

Information-Processing assumptions (1989, Higgins). The theory assumes:

'.... that a self-discrepancy is a cognitive structure interrelating distinct self-beliefs. Second, it assumes that the likelihood that a self-discrepancy will produce psychological distress depends on its level of accessibility.'

Similar to "self-beliefs", two new domains of "can self" and "future self" also cover similar concepts to "potential selves" (or "possible selves"). There are 2 apparent differences compared to "self-beliefs". First, "new domains" extend to cover "other", where "self-beliefs" only focus on "yourself". This enriches the "other" arm of Higgins' self-discrepancy theory. Second, with a clear isolation of "other" to "yourself", this provides a new platform for people to rethink the relationships between different "selves".

2 New domains (Can Self / Future Self). Higgins (1989) admitted that *"self-discrepancy theory needs to be expanded to include additional types of self-beliefs and their relations to other self-beliefs"*. Specifically, two new domains of the self need to be added:

- The **Can self** (1989, Higgins), *which is your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you can possess (i.e. a representation of someone's beliefs about your capabilities or potential)*
- The **(expected) Future self** (1989, Higgins), *which is your representation of the attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you are likely to*

possess in the future (i.e. the type of person someone expects that you will become).

Now self – Probable Possible Self vs Actual self – Future self. Markus and Nurius (1986; as cited by Higgins, 1989) assessed and concluded “now self” as “actual self” and “probable possible self” as “(expected) future self”.

Ideal Self. Boyatzis & Akrivou (2006:625-626) proposed that

‘... once the force of the ideal self is activated, it plays an executive or motivational function within the self. It monitors and guides all actions and decisions in a direction which ensures deeper self-satisfaction through the articulation and direction towards either: the emergence of a new state of being with self-actualisation....or as evident to others through one’s accomplishments; or the maintenance of a current character (i.e. way of being)....with increased clarity and mindfulness....’

Linking between Self-Regulation and Higgins’ Model. Neck & Houghton (2006:276-277) concluded that *self-regulation theory* distinguishes between a *promotion* and a *prevention* self-regulatory focus (e.g. Carver, 2001; Carver and Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1987, 1989, 1996, 1998; Higgins et al., 1994). Comparing the self-regulation concept from Deci et al. (1996), although Higgins’ “/own” and “/other” classification match well with Deci et al.’s “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” concept. Furthermore, Higgins’ “promotion focus” opened up the “ideal” aspect, where Higgins’ “prevention focus” opened up the “ought” aspect. Most importantly, Higgins’ “prevention focus” cover those obligations and responsibilities elements positively.

This 2 x 2 matrix constructs a comprehensive and systematic foundations for understanding human's complexity.

Linking between Bottom-Up Goal attainment and Higgins' model. Shah & Kruglanski (2003:1109) concluded that "*goals have long been assumed to play an important role in regulating our everyday behavior and to have a significant impact on our emotional experiences and well-being (Carver & Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1997)*". This was in agreement with Higgins' statement (1997) that "*psychological research on these phenomena traditionally focused on goals' contents, examining, for instance, the fundamental regulatory needs that bring different categories of goals to mind*".

Linking between Intrinsic Motivation and Higgins' Model. Boyatzis & Akrivou (2006:625) concluded that

'.... ideal self is a psychological component of the self partially conscious and partially unconscious, varying from individual to individual. It is both privately conceptualised and socially influenced... the ideal self (IS) is not considered a defensive function; it is the core mechanism for self-regulation and intrinsic motivation.'

This aligned with Higgins' **self-guides (own)** well, especially the **ideal/own**. In order to have a better alignment of **self-guides (own)** and **actual/own**, a health **self-concept** is expected. In this sense, there is not any "defensive function" under Higgins' model as well.

Critics of Higgins' Model. Gollwitzer and Oettingen (2001:10101) pointed out that most recent studies about goals are tend to achieving positive outcomes. They focused on people tend to avoid negative outcomes and describe those “compelled” goals as “ought”. This implies the “ought-selves” of Higgins are being neglected in the trend. Furthermore, Gollwitzer and Oettingen (2001:10101) also emphasized when people are being affected by their rational manner of goal commitments, the commitment effect will be moderate due to expectancy-independent. In other words, people will consider the possibilities of success and leave those with low and migrate to those with high possibilities. Logically, this line of thought seems impacting Higgins’ “ought-selves” concepts directly.

2.3 From Golden Needs Theories to Self-Efficacy

Starting from human needs, the current research will examine goal setting, goal implementation, high attainment in (higher) education, demographical situation in the Chinese region (Asian countries/territories – such as Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore and Taiwan), the inherent self-efficacy, whether there are any sparkling moments to establish (foster) learners’ performance, and finally how Higgins’ self-discrepancy theory will be used as a conclusive model for the study.

From Needs to Self-Efficacy. Gollwitzer and Oettingen (2001:10109-10110) concluded that there were two central issues of motivation: basic human needs and action control, and published a brief and typical summary for the relevant topics:

'....Under human needs, starting from two Basic Needs from Sigmund Freud, 18 Basic Needs from McDougall (1932), 20 Psychogenic Needs from Murray's (1938) Explorations in Personality, 5 levels of Hierarchy of Needs from Maslow's (1954), and then followed by Need for Achievement and the Power Motive from Atkinson (1957) and McClelland (1985). Under action control, some early recorded theories: Psychoanalytic Theory of Freud, Hull's Learning Theory and Lewin's field Theoretical Approach. Some modern theories: Expectancy-value Theories (Atkinson 1957), Expectation-related Concepts and Attribution Theories (Weiner 1992). More recently, the motivational importance of control beliefs has been analysed, where Self-efficacy Theory (Bandura 1997) was a typical example....'

From Satisfying Self Need to Other's Need. This line of theoretical development started from basic instinct needs (like Freud, McDougall, Murray and Maslow) and extended up to Bandura. Most of the descriptions are single action related. In other words, most actions are microscopic and in narrow scope. If we expand the topics and further explore by means of another line of theoretical development, a definition of human development, according to Lerner (1998:2), is as follows:

"Development" understood as a property of systemic change in the multiple and integrated levels of organization comprising human life and its ecology

With reference to Lerner (1998), Harris (1998) and Alkire's (2002) findings, four reasons for human development were identified: 1) satisfying personal needs; 2) satisfying others' needs; 3) satisfying family needs; and 4) satisfying community needs. In this sense, the mentioned "need" represents the "need for human development".

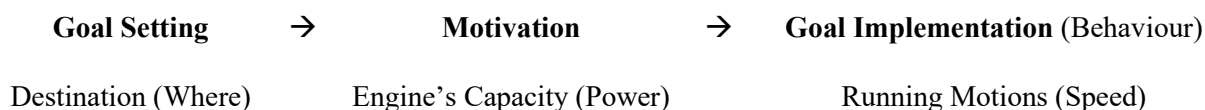
Linking the “other” elements with Higgins’. As per this second line of theoretical development, it expanded from a single action to multiple actions (even a series of actions). The descriptions are macroscopic and cover a wider scope, from personal needs to community needs. Three elements out of six from Higgins’ are “own”¹⁴ related and the remaining three are “other”¹⁵ related. Thus, Higgins’ model provides a handful of reliable tools for interviewing and analysis in the current study.

2.4 Goal Setting & Goal Implementation

Three steps of Goal Implementation. In this section, goal setting, motivation and goal implementation will be discussed. Before involving scholars’ theories, I interpret “goal” as a destination of a car and “motivation” as the power of the engine. With reference to academic theories, Bandura & Schunk (1981:586) concluded that:

Self-motivation relies on the intervening processes of goal setting and self-evaluative reactions to one’s own behavior.

It can be noticed that motivation is relying on goals, and behaviour is the outcome (goal implementation), which establishes a structure for this section. The sequence of three concepts can be clarified as:



¹⁴ “own” is defined by Higgins’ as one of the “Stand points” [Diagram 3, section 2.2]

¹⁵ “other” is defined by Higgins’ as one of the “Stand points” [Diagram 3, section 2.2]

Returning to the car metaphor, the first concept (goal) is relatively clear and understandable, where destination is a definite location, e.g. Bristol. It seems to be a fixed and static topic determined by the car driver himself. The middle concept (“power” of the engine) is easily confused with the last one (the “speed” of the car) in reality. Making a distinction between them is akin to comparing the engine’s capacity with the running motions. As cited by Gollwitzer and Oettingen (2001),

‘...evolutionary theory, the study of learning ...have been committed to see motivation as a primary cause of behaviour....’ (Cofer and Appley 1964)

The running motions of the car are a kind of “behaviour”, whereas the engine’s capacity is similar to “motivation”. In the current study, the “goal” of the four participants was achieving FCH¹⁶ and their “motivation” was supposed to be their strong “desire” to achieve during the HE journey. In this metaphor, their motivation for achieving the goals is similar to the “engine capacity” of the car, and their learning actions are similar to the “running motions” of the car.

Internal vs. External Goals (Aims). In HE, students spend a few years completing their bachelor’s degree, where achieving FCH is not essential. Therefore, students may struggle with whether or not to persist with FCH. This depends on their internal urges (e.g. satisfaction or increasing competitiveness), which belong to the personal realm. Besides intrinsic goals, Lerner (1998) illustrates humans’ relationship with the “system” and describes it as “multiple”, “integrated”, “overarching”, “developmental” and “contemporary”. Alkire (2002:182) concurs with this, adding that to speak of “human development” in a full sense requires us to pay attention to multiple facets of human

¹⁶ First Class Honours

enrichment; material and spiritual, public and private. This is broader than some definitions of well-being. Therefore, the realm of extrinsic aims cannot be neglected.

Linking Goals and Cognitions with Higgins’ “Own” vs “Other”. Starting from “human development”, elaborated up to here, it can be concluded that besides development for one’s “own goals”, humans develop different goals “for others” or are “affected by others”. Spinelli’s study (2005:118-119) concurs with his self-concepts of “being-for-itself” (own goals) and “being-for-other” (goals for others). Again, the “/self” and “/other” elements of Higgins’ model (Higgins, 1987) can provide a solid academic platform for the current study.

Linking Cognitions/Perfectibility/Education with Higgins’ “Ought”. Writing on the subject of “self-related” cognitions, Lee (1996:33) posited that the orientation of education can only be understood by reference to the supposition of human perfectibility. That is, education is worthwhile because it is the process through which the self is perfected. Alternatively, this can be described as the “intrinsic motivation of learning”: learning for self-realisation. This can explain “why” humans develop.

Intrinsic motivation as the means that enables us to define and pursue what is “meaningful and worthwhile” (Biggs, 1987, as cited in Biggs & Watkins, 1996:273). In other words, this “deep motive” qualifies as an “ought”¹⁷ in Higgins’ model. Compared to Chinese learners, this “ought” domain can be elaborated by different cultural aspects such as “filial piety” (Murphy, 1987:43; as cited by Kennedy,

¹⁷ “ought” is defined by Higgins’ as one of the “Self-domains” [Diagram 2, section 2.2]

2002:431), “unquestioning acceptance” (Murphy, 1987:43; as cited by Kennedy, 2002:431), which will be illustrated in section 2.6. Rather than waiting for an ideal combination of conditions, this “deep motive” may be activated by a combination of motivations. According to Biggs & Watkins (1996:273) these may include, but are not limited to: personal aspirations, the support of one's peers, material reward and incentives, and the need to preserve the reputation of one's family.

Socialisation and Goals. Before making their discoveries in 1998, Harris and her team had previously (in the early 1990s) asked whether the influence of one's parents has any significant long-term effects on the development of a child's personality. In an attempt to answer this question, Harris developed a new theory, “Group Socialisation” (Harris, 1995) and argued that conventional reliance and over-emphasis on parenting is to the detriment of a child's growth. The current research focuses on Hong Kong Cantonese. In the Hong Kong of recent years, both parents often have to work long hours, while students face long hours at school and in tuition classes, private and commercial. As a consequence, the quantity and quality of parenting is affected by all these things. Therefore, Harris’ (1998) proposal of three realms is adapted in order to widen the learning orientations for the current research.

Moreover, I will describe Harris’ structure in order to argue that the affective learning orientations (channels) will not be fixed and static. Instead, depending on the specific context and life stage, the learning channels will be multiple and dynamic. Paying attention to these aspects is crucial if we are to begin to grasp the uniqueness and

singularity of humans, and the trajectory of their evolution. This dilemmatic nature serves as the impetus as well as the challenge of the current research.

Goal vs Willing. Gollwitzer and Oettingen (2001:10111) recapped Ach's (1935) statement that "*the importance of goals was assumed to be critical for choosing between goals, whereas the implementation of set goals was an issue of willing.*" According to the different nature between goal and willing, "what is the goal?" and "how to achieve the goal" can be discussed separately. Furthermore, Gollwitzer and Oettingen (2001:10111) suggested that:

'... the distinction between motivational issues of goal choice and volitional issues of goal implementation is reflected in recent research on goals that distinguishes between goal setting and goal implementation.'

Therefore, section 2.4.1 will be focused on "what is the goal?" (goal setting) and section 2.4.2 will be focused on "how to achieve the goal" (goal implementation).

2.4.1 What is the goal? (Goal Setting)

In the literature review chapter, focus will be on the theoretical nature of "goal". Although the "pre-assumed goal" of participants in the current research is "achieving FCH" related, their precise and exact goal will be discussed in chapter 4 (Findings) and chapter 5 (Data Analysis).

Learning Goals vs Performance Goals. Deci et al. (1996:178-179) concluded:

‘.... Dweck (1986) distinguished between learning goals, in which the aim is to increase one’s competence, and performance goals, in which the aim is gain a favourable (or avoid an unfavourable) judgment about one’s competence.’

This brings us to focus on two categories of goal: performance goals and learning goals.

Performance Goals. According to Grant & Dweck (2003:542), there are three distinct forms of performance goals:

- (a) *goals that are linked to validating an aspect of self (e.g. one’s ability),*
- (b) *goals that are explicitly normative in nature, and*
- (c) *goals that are simply focused on obtaining positive outcomes (i.e. doing well).*

Besides the initial meanings of these three points, some factors are not only promising with performance goals, but will definitely magnify the effect. Some examples for those factors are: “filial piety” (Wang et al., 2006:2; Kennedy, 2002:431), “loss of face” (Wang et al., 2006:2; Kennedy, 2002:431), and “parental expectations” (Wang et al., 2006:2). Detailed discussions will be illustrated in sections 2.5 and 2.6.

Grant & Dweck (2003:542) referred to the goal of wanting to do well on a particular task as an **outcome goal** and listed an example: “...it is important to me to get good grades in my classes....”. Grant & Dweck (2003:542) concluded:

‘.... A closely related construct is “competence valuation”, or the degree to which a task is perceived to be important (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), which has been found to relate positively to intrinsic motivation and performance (Barron & Harackiewicz, 2001). We find this type of goal particularly

interesting, because “wanting to do well” can also be an important part of a learning goal framework.’

“Performance goals”/“outcome goals” are noticed from Chinese learners. In the current study, the four participants had previously been low-achievers and experienced academic failures. Why were there no “performance goals” in their initial round and how did they evolve in such a way that led all of them to re-activate “performance goals” in the second round? The findings of this study will help answer these questions.

Learning Goals. Compared to “performance goal”, “learning goal” has more initiative. The former seems to be working for others or seeking recognition from others, whereas the latter is working for or satisfying own-self. Grant & Dweck (2003:542) described that:

‘...those who adopt learning goals are found to engage in deeper, more self-regulated learning strategies, have higher intrinsic motivation, and perform better, particularly in the face of challenge or setbacks.’ (Ames, 1992; Dweck & Leggett, 1988; Kaplan & Midgley, 1997; Pintrich, 2000a; Printrich & Garcia, 1991; Utman, 1997; see also Barron & Harachiewicz, 2000)

This provides more room for the current research to investigate a few years’ study journey of four participants. Furthermore, considering our participants were innate low achievers and then evolved into high achievers, Dweck’s (1986:1042) descriptions of learning goals provide a solid foundation to fill the gap:

‘...with learning goals, even if children’s assessment of their present ability is low, they will tend to choose challenging tasks that foster learning’ (M Bandura & Dweck, 1985; Elliott & Dweck, 1985).

This can explain why the four participants dare to set a challenging goal for themselves. Dweck (1986:1042) further contrasted with performance goals:

'.... children with learning goals tend to use obstacles as a cue to increase their effort or to analyse and vary their strategies' (Ames, 1984; Ames et al., 1977; Elliott & Dweck, 1985; Leggett, 1986; Nicholls, 1984).

This can explain how the four participants were able to overcome such a harsh time in their HE.

Linking Learning Goals and Intrinsic Motivation. Grant & Dweck (2003:552) concluded that whenever people face a prolonged challenge or setbacks, learning goals will generate a positive influence on both intrinsic motivation and performance. This is in agreement with the statement in the last paragraph, “learning goals is: working for or satisfying ‘own-self’”.

Linking Performance Goals to Higgins’ model. Grant & Dweck (2003:542) reiterated for some researchers that performance goal (also named ability goal) is important for people to validate their ability. As mentioned above, these types of validation or recognition tend to satisfy “other”. Referring to Higgins’ model, satisfying others relates to “ideal/other” (Higgins, 1989) or “ought/other” (Higgins, 1989), which belongs to the “/other” standpoint¹⁸ of Higgins. Furthermore, Grant & Dweck

¹⁸ “/other” is defined by Higgins as a “Standpoints” [Diagram 3, section 2.2]

(2003:542) further clarified the importance for the performance goal is a kind of normative comparison, but a non-normative goal cannot be considered as a performance goal. In this sense, normative goals are similar to “ought/own” (Higgins, 1989) or “ought/other” (Higgins, 1989) under Higgins’ model.

2.4.2 How to achieve the Goal (Goal Implementation)

Goal commitment or Goal progress. Once the goal is set, Fishbach et al. (2006:233) proposed that *on the basis of the initial goal-relation action, a person can infer either goal commitment or goal progress*. For example, on the affective side, a person starts to focus and energise to become more fond of the goal, which is considered as goal commitment. Alternatively, on the practical side, in order to accomplish the set goal, a person starts to implement any task, which is considered as goal implementation.

Before the goal is achieved, it is still existing in a vague or abstract format (like a dream or picture), which Fishbach et al. (2006:233) named as a superordinate goal (commitment). This is a kind of macroscopic view of the goal, but with the head looking up to it (like aspiration or imagination). On the contrary, if s/he starts to shift the focus elsewhere, before the superordinate goal is achieved. Fishbach et al. (2006:233) described this as:

‘.... goal process (partial attainment). S/he may be side-tracked by multiple goals’ (disengagement, Fishbach et al., 2006:233).

This is also a kind of macroscopic view of the goal, but with the head moving around and tries to search any other alternative to replace the superordinate goal. And s/he is

satisfied by the mixture of partially attained goal those multiple goals. Fishbach and Dhar (2005; as cited by Fishbach et al., 2006:233) concurred with these two dynamics. In this sense, the initial superordinate goal may be ruined.

Subgoals and actual actions (top-down). Following the line of commitment, Fishbach et al. (2006:232) describe that:

‘.... self-regulation process often involves breaking an ongoing goal into many individual, constituent subgoals that monitor actual actions.’

For example, s/he would break down a 20 km journey into 4 sections of 5 km, so that there are 3 middle stops (milestones) before arrival at the destination. Fishbach et al. (2006:233) described this by using the terms “concrete level” (subgoal itself) vs “abstract level” (link to the superordinate goal). I try to name this concept as “top-down”, which will be contrasted to another “bottom-up” concept later.

Self-Regulation vs. Internalisation. The distance between goal setting and goal achievement is not short on many occasions, e.g. four years for a Bachelor’s degree in Hong Kong higher education. There are many exits and opt-out junctions. For example, suspending all the actions is also one of the options. During the process of goal implementation, although Deci et al. (1996:179) described, “*self-regulation is evident when individuals are either intrinsically motivated or have fully internalized and integrated extrinsic motivation*”, Deci et al. (1996:179) also said:

‘.... Internalization that is only partial, taking the form of introjection, does not represent true self-regulation. Considerable research was reviewed indicating

that self-regulation is associated with the acquisition of cognitive skills and the development of self.'

This means that, providing two identical people, if one had acquired relevant skills and was properly developed, he would be able to perform the self-regulation well and would eventually achieve his goal. However, this may not happen to another person who lacks the relevant skills. This provides room for the current research to examine the difference between four participants whether they bore relevant skills, especially by comparing the periods of being low-achievers and the subsequent period of being high-achievers.

Bottom-Up Goal attainment. Contrasting with the “top-down” concept from Fishbach et al. (2006:232), Shah & Kruglanski (2003:1109) studied the opposing concept of “bottom-up”, that *goals* may be automatically brought to mind by the means that serve them, and explored when such “bottom-up” *goal activation* may actually aid *goal attainment* and when it may undermine it. According to Shah & Kruglanski (2003:1109):

'.... The notion of “mean” was discussed in its broadest sense, as any activity, event, or circumstance perceived as likely to contribute to the attainment of a goal. Thus, a behavioral strategy aimed at improving task performance, or a situation regarded as an “opportunity” for advancing one’s objective would both qualify as means in the present sense.'

Shah & Kruglanski (2003:1121) concluded that if people can keep their eyes on their objective, they will be strive more to maintain the goal-related continuance. Under the bottom-up strategy, a person may not grasp the goal clearly and accurately in the initial stage. However, during the goal implementation process, s/he is struggling to explore

and tries to do as much as s/he can. That means that keeping the person focused on milestones would help them to discover the final destination later.

Self-leadership from Self-management. Beyond the publications from mainstream goal theorists, one more concept will be illustrated as a reference. Neck & Houghton (2006:270) expanded the self-management concept to self-leadership, where people are expected to control their behaviour, to influence and to lead themselves, provided they possess specific sets of cognitive and behavioural strategies. In other words, Neck & Houghton (2006:271) restated:

‘... Self-leadership is a self-influence process through which people achieve the self-direction and self-motivation necessary to perform. Self-leadership strategies were classified into three primary categories: behaviour-focused strategies, natural reward strategies and constructive thought pattern strategies.’

According to Neck & Houghton (2006), there are some debates on self-leadership with certain theorists (e.g. Guzzo, 1998; Markham and Markham, 1998) arguing that it is unique and solely related to personality traits, while other theorists (e.g. Manz, 1986) argue that it is a kind of “learned behaviour” instead of a “fixed trait” (p.282).

Although the concept of self-leadership demonstrated its feasibility, it is simply mentioned as a reference to the current research. Similar concepts of the four essential steps of the “self-regulatory process” (Pajares, 1995:7) will be further illustrated by different aspects in section 2.7.1, **Self-Efficacy**.

2.5 High Attainment in Higher Education

Low achievers. According to Veas et al. (2016), “*there is no agreement within the scientific community of what ‘underachievement’ means precisely*” (McCoach & Siegle, 2011, as cited in Veas et al., 2016). In the scientific literature, however, it is broadly agreed that, “*the term ‘underachievement’ indicates a gulf between what can be expected from any given person and what is concretely accomplished by the same individual*” (Phillipson, 2008; as cited in Veas et al., 2016). According to Selwyn (2011), they are described as “less-able learners”.

Low-achievers might have faced a low sense of efficacy. Bandura (1993:144) observed that people who feel they have a low sense of efficacy in a given domain tend to avoid difficult tasks, treating them as threats. Per Bandura (1993), “low aspirations” and “weak commitment to the goals” are two common obstacles for them. Instead of concentrating on how to perform successfully, they would tend to maintain a self-diagnostic focus. Bandura (1993) described “diagnostic focus” as excuses or explanations for failure generated in order to relieve their guilt rather than concerning themselves with finding ways to perform tasks successfully (p.144).

High achievers. According to Selwyn (2011), they are described as “more-able learners”. Instead of having a strict and precise definition, the best batch of students (relatively) will be discussed as “high achievers”. In the current research, according to the records of University X (Hong Kong campus), less than 3% of students are able to

achieve a First Class honours award (“summa cum laude”). The most common adopted scale for measuring overall academic performance in HE is the GPA system.

GPA. According to Zimmerman et al. (2002),

‘... Scholastic grade-point average (GPA) is one of the most frequently used measures in academic achievement research.....’

Different institutes will set their own scales to recognise students’ performance. At University X, for example, a GPA higher than 3.8 would be considered as a First Class honours award, and any GPA between 3.6-3.79 would be considered as a Second Class honours award, and so on.

Linking Chinese Perfectionism, High Attainment & Higgins’ model. Wang et al. (2006:2) had conducted a study of Chinese university students from Taiwan and discovered that:

*‘.... Studying perfectionism among the Chinese may be particularly relevant due to the role of parents in this collectivistic culture, especially given the importance of parental influence on the development of **perfectionistic tendencies**’ (Hamachek, 1978).*

According to Alkire (2002), this arouses concerns of about the essence of parental effect for Chinese learners in higher education, and whether it is a kind of extrinsic motivation (p.182). Furthermore, parental effect or extrinsic motivation will be illustrated in two aspects. Firstly, as a topic under Chinese learners’ culture, which will be discussed in-

depth in section 2.6. Secondly, as a topic of “expectancy effect” (Higgins, 1989) under “/other” (Higgins, 1989), which have been illustrated in section 2.2.

2.6 Higher Education in Hong Kong, Macau, Singapore and Taiwan

The Essential Nature of Education in Chinese Culture. According to Chan (2019), under ancient Chinese culture, social status is ranked as: gentlemen¹⁹, farmers, artisans and merchants (p.51). The essential and superior nature of “gentlemen identity” can be noted. Li & Bray (2007) concluded that parents’ perspective of this effect is still robust, thus higher education is considered as an academic ladder to climb to the upper-middle social class (p.804). On the other hand, another typical aspect of Chinese culture is the concern with loss of face (Wang et al., 2006:2), which is a typical kind of conservation of image (identity). All factors as mentioned above can explain and reinforce how parental expectations (Yang, 1997; as cited by Wang et al.,2006:2) are exerted on children. From a child’s perspective, with a deeply immersed culture of filial piety (Wang et al., 2006:2), where obedience and full acceptance of parental opinion is an essential virtue among Chinese, most children would consider the parents’ values and view them as “/other” (Higgins, 1989) or extrinsic goal (aims) (Alkire, 2002:182). This explains why Chinese students struggle for a chance to attempt their higher education.

Studying/Learning Styles of Chinese Learners in HE. According to Crawford (2015:19)

‘.... Chinese students failed to develop “deep and strategic learning approaches” in their second and final year where they relied on “surface

¹⁹ the historical interpretation of “gentlemen” is scholars and those who work as government officials

learning approach” in their first year. Chinese students mastered their “surface learning approach” before their entry.’

Kennedy (2002) described that partially due to filial piety, Hong Kong Chinese learners display an almost unquestioning acceptance of knowledge from teachers (p.431). Kennedy (2002) also discovered that similar to their parents, with the consideration of “face”, students do not want to disclose their academic deficiency in front of teachers and classmates during questioning (p.431). As a result, Kennedy (2002) concluded that rote learning become their usual learning style, where attentive effort is necessary in repetition (rote learning and deep memorising of content are much more common among Hong Kong Chinese students by compared to German students (p.433-434)).

Learning vs Asking. Kennedy (2002:433) mentioned that the Chinese term “knowledge” is made up of two characters: One is “xue” (to learn) and the other is “wen” (to ask). This is an apparent contradiction between “to ask” (Kennedy, 2002:433) and “unquestioning acceptance” (Murphy, 1987:43; as cited by Kennedy, 2002:431). Secondly, Kennedy (2002:433) mentioned:

‘.... Education is only meaningful if it leads to the perfection of the self: “the purpose of learning is to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous being”’.

The above mentioned “perfection of the self” drives the performance goal (Deci et al., 1996:178-179) towards learning goals (Deci et al., 1996:178-179) and induces confusion for Chinese learners (children as learners) whether learning perfectly is their intrinsic (Lerner, 1998) or extrinsic goal (Lerner, 1998). In the current research, Higgins’

concept of “/own” (Higgins, 1989) and “/other” (Higgins, 1989) could contribute to clarifying this “intertwined” relationship.

Linking between Asian Culture and Higgins’ Model. Since the design of the current study focuses on innate low-achievers, if there was any parental expectancy (Yang, 1997; as cited by Wang et al., 2006:2) or extrinsic goals (Alkire, 2002:182) really exerted on them, it is supposed that there would be an actual-ideal discrepancy. Higgins and colleagues (Higgins, 1987, 1989; Higgins, Klein, & Strauman, 1985: as cited by Heine & Lehman, 1999:917) demonstrated that “*actual-ideal discrepancies correlate positively with depression*” (see also Marsella et al., 1973: as cited by Heine & Lehman, 1999:917). Heine & Lehman (1999:917) mentioned that “*such a relation between actual-ideal discrepancies and depression is consistent with the idea that large discrepancies signal individual inadequacy*” (see, e.g. Marsella et al., 1973: as cited by Heine & Lehman, 1999:917). In this sense, how those four participants in the current research could evolve successfully is worth investigation.

Heine & Lehman (1999) mentioned that if one’s culture encourages actual-ideal discrepancies, not only should such discrepancies be more common, they should be less debilitating (p.917). As Kitayama, Markus, and colleagues (e.g. Kitayama, Markus et al., 1995, 1997; Markus et al., 1996: as cited by Heine & Lehman, 1999:917) have theorised:

‘.... such a focus on actual-ideal discrepancies may serve, in part, as a means for Japanese to improve themselves in order to accomplish the tasks associated with interdependence.’

In order to explore the above mentioned “interdependence”, the “standpoints”²⁰ of two “/other”, “ought/other” (Higgins, 1989) and “ideal/other” (Higgins, 1989), will be adopted for the current research.

2.7 Self-efficacy & Sparkling Moments

With reference to the brief definition of self-efficacy by Valentine et al. (2004:112) (as illustrated in section 2.7.1), Self-efficacy consists of:

‘....beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations....’

In this section, we will explore “**self-efficacy**” in two aspects. For those relating to “beliefs”, they will be discussed in section 2.7.1, **Self-efficacy**. For those relating to “those prospective situations”, they will be discussed in section 2.7.2, **Sparkling Moments**.

2.7.1 Self-efficacy

From Self-belief to Self-efficacy. Zimmerman (2000) observed that research had begun to evaluate self-belief in a more task-specific fashion, and that one of the most significant developments from this tendency lay in the examination of “self-efficacy”, a project that originates from the late 1970s (Rogers, 1951; Wylie, 1968; Harter, 1978; Bandura, 1977) (p.82). The concept of “self-efficacy” provides a comprehensive

²⁰ “other” is defined by Higgins’ as one of the “Stand points”[Diagram 3, section 2.2]

explanation of the “goals” and “motivations” of humans. In the current research, I have dedicated myself to differentiating between the “motivation of graduating with First class honours” and the “motivation of learning”. The former is more task-specific and relates more closely to “self-efficacy”. This may explain how the four research participants were able to evolve so quickly. They improved their “motivation of learning” with the help of additional momentum from “self-efficacy”.

Perceived Self-efficacy. Zimmerman (2000:83), in his recapitulation of Bandura’s (1977) formal definition of perceived self-efficacy, states that self-efficacy can be understood as the personal judgment of one's capacities to accomplish goals that one establishes for oneself. Zimmerman then seeks to assess the ways in which the magnitude and level of self-efficacy affects individuals across activities and contexts. For example, once a student is determined to achieve a First Class honours award, his “self-efficacy” drives, guides and energises him throughout the process until the award is finally obtained.

Self-efficacy vs. Goal. Bandura (1993) has elaborated upon her previous work, stating (Bandura, 1991) that the stronger the perceived self-efficacy, the more difficult the goals are that people set for themselves, and the more resolute they are in committing to their fulfilment (p.118; as cited by Bandura, 1993). For example, a HE student sets a goal to get good grades (A or B) in year 1. After consecutive achievements of grade A (increased self-efficacy), s/he may revise the goal and aim to get all grade As in year 4.

Four Essential Steps of the Self-Regulatory Process. If the self-efficacy of participants can be improved, then Zimmerman's observation (2000:87) holds that self-efficacy imbues students with a sense of agency and motivation, and Zimmerman describes this through the use of such a self-regulatory process with the aid of four essential steps. These are: 1) goal setting, 2) self-monitoring, 3) self-evaluation, and 4) strategy use. This is also described by Pajares as self-efficacy and self-regulated learning variables (Pajares, 1995:7).

Self-Efficacy and Future Achievement. Expanding upon Bandura's (1997) findings, Zimmerman (2000:86) adds that there is evidence that students with a high sense of self-efficacy are more enthusiastic about participating, work harder and more persistently, especially when they encounter challenges or setbacks in their pursuit of knowledge. By comparison, those who lack confidence in their own abilities are more easily discouraged. Macroscopically, Zimmerman (2000:89) made the conclusion that the variable of self-efficacy, when studied independently as a mediating variable, is correlated to improvements in teaching and learning methods. In this way, future achievement is correlated to self-efficacy levels. Likewise, Pajares (1995) agrees that global self-efficacy has a direct and pronounced effect on achieved grades (p.13).

Clarification of Terms under Self-Efficacy. Discussions of self-beliefs, achievements and their correlations were extensive, but confusions were also noticed in the academic field. Valentine et al. (2004:112) tried to identify several concepts simply and elaborate clearly, and these are:

Self-concept: *a person's self-perceptions formed through experience with and interpretations of his or her environment (Marsh & Hattie, 1996:58; see also Shavelson, Hubner, & Standton, 1976).*

Self-esteem: *Valentine et al. (2004:112) encompassing evaluations of the descriptive components of self-concept (Beane & Lipka, 1980; Brinthaupt & Erwin, 1992; Rosenberg, 1979).*

Self-efficacy: *beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations.*

Linking between Self-belief vs Student achievement. According to Valentine et al. (2004:113),

'.... people actively seek to maintain consistency in how they view themselves (Brown, 1993; Swann, 1997). It has been suggested in this regard that students with positive views of themselves may strive to behave and perform in ways that are consistent with their self-image and thus be more likely to achieve highly in school on this basis (Rosenberg, 1997).'

Re-defining Self-efficacy. Specifically, Valentine et al. (2004:112) also provided a precise summary of perceived self-efficacy:

- a) *More tied to specific areas or domains of functioning than self-concept (Pajares, 1996; B. J. Zimmerman, 1995);*
- b) *Being concerned with judgments of personal capability rather than to the judgments of worth associated with self-esteem (Bandura, 1997); and*
- c) *More directly associated with goals than either self-concept or self-esteem (Pajares & Schunk, 2002)*

Point (a), as mentioned by Valentine, helps to explain why participants are able to become high-achievers, because the subjects (area of major subjects or domains of functioning) they studied in HE were different to those when they were low-achievers, meaning they were not affected by previous “self-concepts”. Point (b), as mentioned by Valentine, helps to explain how their “personal capabilities” were obtained (from **sparkling moments**²¹ in other successful aspects) and were different to their previous failed academic experiences. Point (c), as mentioned by Valentine, helps to explain how their latest set goal (achieving FCH) would not be affected by their previous self-concept or self-esteem. Moreover, this can also explain why they dare to set such a high academic goal, which they had never previously been able to achieve.

Furthermore, Valentine et al. (2004) concluded their research by claiming that self-beliefs are a causal agent of learning and human development (p.127). In order to fill the academic gap of Cantonese Chinese HE students in Hong Kong, Valentine’s findings show the necessity of the current qualitative study.

2.7.2 Sparkling Moments

Some narrative inquiry concepts will be adopted in current research (Chapter 3, Methodology). “Sparkling moments (SM)” and “Problematic Stories (PS)” are concepts under “unique outcomes” (Goncalves et al., 2009) from interviewees’ story. All above mentioned concepts will be illustrated in this section.

²¹ For details, refer to [section 2.7.2]

Unique outcomes (UO). Goncalves et al. (2009) mentioned that the term “outcome” seems to emphasise the idea of an output instead of the processes behind change. Under narrative therapy practices, “sparkling moment” is a typical term applied poetically for those brilliant and positive occasions.

Landscape of action (LOA) and Landscape of consciousness (LOC). Starting from recording the unique outcomes, sequences and involved characters, Goncalves et al. (2009) named this process as “Landscape of action (LOA)” (the factual parts of stories). Then, the interviewer/counsellor can explore the feeling, thinking and reasons of events, which Goncalves et al. (2009) named this second process as “Landscape of consciousness (LOC)” (the meaning parts of stories).

Factual Part of Stories. For the factual part of stories, Riessman (2008) reminds us that researchers could easily allow “lines of inquiry” to escape their attention because there are many ways to narrate experience (p.11). Referring to the “re-authoring” technique (Carey & Russell, 2003), two main lines of inquiry will be focused on: “Problematic Stories” (PS) and “Sparkling moments” (SM).

Problematic Stories (PS). According to Carey & Russell (2003):

‘... Problematic stories are those significant events that make a person vulnerable (e.g. feeling worried, depression, not being good enough, being losers, hopeless, crazy or deserving of unhappiness, etc.) in his/her life.’

Sparkling Moments (SM). According to Carey & Russell (2003):

‘.... Sparkling moments are those moments, actions, events or intentions that go against the current or articulate a different trajectory from that of problematic story-lines.’

Both lines of inquiry will be adopted in the current research in order to focus the essential unique outcomes across participants’ long learning journeys.

Regulatory Focus. According to Grant et al. (2001):

‘.... regulatory focus is a principle of self-regulation that provides an understanding of when “success feedback” is more likely to increase expectancies and maintain (or induce) approach motivation and when “failure feedback” is more likely to decrease expectancies and maintain (or induce) avoidance motivation.’

Referring to the concept of “sparkling moments” and “problematic stories”, “success feedback” is acting as the “sparkling” elements and “failure feedback” is acting as the “problematic” elements.

“Unconscious” Part of Stories. Commenting on the nature of storytelling, Riessman (2008:3) noted that storytellers connect events in a narratorial “sequence”, with each event having consequences for subsequent actions, disclosing a “meaning” that the storytellers intend for listeners to take away. On the side of the researcher, Riessman (2008:11) highlighted the discernment that is required in order to perform a narrative analysis – the investigator has to focus on 'particular actors, in particular social places,

at particular social times'. This method caters to our needs on both sides; the participants and the researcher alike.

In order to explore the “unconscious” parts of personal narrative, Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson (2000a; 2000b, as cited by Sclater, 2003:623) suggest that such exploration is made possible by using specific “data collection” and “analytic techniques”, with “the interpretation of data” being a creative process.

It is foreseeable that when the researcher leads the story telling process retrospectively, the narrator’s experiential engagement may make him “act out the story” (Riessman, 2008:109) during the interview. Simultaneously, the story solicits the emotions of the listening researcher; an exchange which may generate a “two-way narrative contract” between the listener and the teller. This dialogue means that the research is in fact a “co-construction” (Phil Salmon, as cited by Riessman, 2008:31), rather than being driven by a single subject in isolation.

Cultural Part of Stories. For the cultural part of stories, most cultural elements are related to “others”. Therefore, the “outsider witness” (Carr, 1998) is a group interview tool that would suit the triangulation purposes of this study. Further elaborations will be discussed in section 3.4.4 (**Outsider Witness**, *Methodology*).

Linking between Self-Regulation and Sparkling Moments. Neck & Houghton (2006:282) mentioned that, “*one’s self-regulating tendencies may vary across*

situations (Carver and Scheier, 1998; Higgins, 1998)". For instance, although people may have established tendencies, according to Higgins (1996, 1998), "*regulatory focus varies from 'promotion' to 'prevention' across momentary situations*". This acts like packaging the situation and the framework of self-regulation together. If this experience is constructive and helpful, it will be impressive and memorable, like a **sparkling moment**. Following this line, people are supposed to have a "promotion" tendency towards "**sparkling moment**". On the contrary, people would have a "prevention" tendency away from "problematic story".

Linking between Sparkling Moments and Higgins. For those constructive and helpful sparkling moments, people are supposed to apply or to learn some knowledge during the process. Higgins (1996:164) mentioned that "*applicability depends on the overlap between knowledge features and the attended features of the stimulus, knowledge units can vary in their applicability depending on which stimulus features are salient in the **momentary situation***". The ultimate successful experience would help to construct people's self-efficacy.

2.8 Chapter Summary

Higgins' model splits the intra-relationship of humans into two aspects: **Self-domains** and **Standpoints**. **Self-domains** cover "ideal", "actual" and "ought" (Diagram 2, P.32) and **Standpoints** cover "own" and "other" (Diagram 3, P.33). The Self-domains concept provides an insight with which to understand the intensity of the motivation, where "ought" represents urge and essentiality. The standpoints provide another insight

with which to understand the initiator of the thought. In other words, they help to understand “from whom” or “for whom”. These concepts definitely provide a concrete space for us to reflect on the complex and dynamic intrareationship of humans, especially Cantonese Chinese HE learners.

Higgins and his colleagues kept on expanding the models by conducting quantitative researches. There are three major deficits in Higgins’ project: First, besides the hedonism-related aspect, the aspects of human development and learning are seldom covered. Second, imbalanced efforts were allocated to the quantitative stream, but the qualitative stream has been neglected. Third, the researches have not covered Asian and Chinese participants thus far.

In order to fill the academic gaps as mentioned above, the current research is designed intentionally and delicately. First, concepts of human development, motivation and self-efficacy were considered, compared and contrasted. It is noticed that without the assistance of other concepts, Higgins’ model is hardly suitable to illustrate the difference between situational changes (comparative or longitudinal). Most importantly, the current research is rooted in higher education. Second, it is a pure qualitative research, conducted by interviewing 4 cases with three rounds of discussion, covering more than 3.5 hours per case. Thirdly, all participants were Cantonese speakers. As a result, this provides valuable qualitative field data for ongoing polishing of Higgins’ model.

There are not many contradictions in the literature adopted in the current research. It can be briefly concluded that Higgins' models are too conceptual – although they are generic, they are easily applicable. Regarding the precise mechanism, Higgins' models are still young and loose. With the help of relevant concepts, I hope future researchers might consider Higgins' model and contribute in order to polish it further.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction to Chapter 3

In this chapter, I will outline the aims of this study, before discussing the philosophical, interpretivist and qualitative approaches adopted, I will explain the representation of four critical cases and the sampling method. Methods used in the research design will be outlined, including semi-structured interview (Berg & Lune, 2012) and outsider witness (Carr, 1998). Before discussing the approach taken for data analysis: Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006), I will then reflect on my insider role as a researcher, having experience as a student myself. Finally, I will conclude by reviewing the ethical considerations of this study.

3.1.1 Research Aims

The premise behind the current research concerns the evolution of four Cantonese learners and the extent to which Higgins' model accounts for this satisfactorily in the context of Hong Kong.

As an academic gap identified in the research, this study aims to explore how the relationship of Cantonese learners' selves, self-concept (Higgins, 1987) and self-guides (Higgins, 1987) affected their academic performance in higher education. Chapter 3 outlined past researches related to Self-Discrepancy Theory (Higgins, 1997; Heine & Lehman, 1999; Grant, et al., 2001; Freitas & Higgins, 2002; Higgins, 2006) along with

Asian students' academic performances (Chan, 2019; Wang et al., 2006). However, there appeared to be a gap in relation to the significant people effect and most existing studies of Higgins' self-concept model were quantitative.

Therefore, I aim to provide qualitative research data so as to enrich empirical research in the field of Cantonese higher education.

3.2 Philosophical Perspective

3.2.1 Philosophical Orientation – Interpretivism

Considering the small scale of current study and the research aim is set to understand four participants' stories deeper, instead of aiming at the exploration of any new knowledge academically. Among the many possible philosophical paradigms that can inform research in education the most relevant one in this case is interpretivism. Interpretivism is concerned with investigating human experience in depth and as social beings distinct from other physical phenomena. Interpretivism considers difference with regards to culture, circumstance, as well as time, leading to the development of different social realities (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). In this sense, interpretivism fits well with the current study to understand how four participants were affected by CHC under their higher education journey. Furthermore, Thanh & Thanh (2015) concluded that the interpretive paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Therefore, considering the uniqueness of the four targeted Cantonese participants, bearing their own learning trajectories and

the distinctive meanings of their First Class Honour awards, the current research would adapt an interpretivist philosophical perspective.

3.2.2 Research Paradigm – Qualitative

Following the interpretivism philosophical perspective, I will select the qualitative research paradigm for this study for three reasons:

Only Four Critical Case Studies. Due to the special screening criteria for the current study, only four participants were successfully invited. Willis (2007, as cited by Thanh & Thanh, 2015) described that “*interpretivists tend to favour case studies under qualitative methods*”.

Better understanding of context. Although I am an insider with a similar background to the participants, different learning trajectories and generations are still a barrier for understanding. According to Willis (2007, as cited by Thanh & Thanh, 2015), “*qualitative approaches often give rich reports that are necessary for interpretivists to fully understand contexts*”.

Common practices for interpretivists. Thomas (2003, as cited by Thanh & Thanh, 2015) also concurred that

‘... qualitative methods are usually supported by interpretivists, because the interpretive paradigm “portrays a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing...”. Being a new interpretivism researcher and

facing complex and long retrospective study, qualitative study will be a safe option.'

As a qualitative type of research, the current study aims to generate detailed accounts rather than brief answers or general statements, which is backed up by Riessman (2008:23). Berg & Lune (2012:337) described this approach as “*being that of an ‘exploratory case study’*”. Bassey (1981:85; as cited by Bell 1999:12) also concurred that, “*the relatability of a case study is more important than its generalizability*”.

3.3 Methods, Data Collection and Related Issues

3.3.1 Interpretative Inquiry

I chose to adopt the interpretative inquiry method using a semi-structured interview. The upcoming paragraphs will illustrate this further.

1. **Grounded nature provides further openness.** A specific mindset is a prerequisite for the proper conduct of an interpretative inquiry, which engages in research and evaluation projects grounded in action, meaning and agency (Morehouse, 2012:10).
2. **Tools for meaning exploration.** Interpretative inquiry requires us to be alert to questions of agency, of what constitutes an action, of the ways meaning is produced for multiple actors inside complex relationships. It is therefore value-based. Interpretative inquiry treats these meanings as establishing horizons that are significant for both our inner as well as our outer lives, directing the conduct

of life that takes place between people and giving shape to a shared world (Morehouse, 2012:3).

3. **Tools that engage with the exploration of meaning provide a platform between the researcher and the interviewee.** Interpretative inquiry seeks to understand shared meanings and shared concepts that are created through discourses and activities that allow us to negotiate differences in meaning and interpretation (Morehouse, 2012:22).
4. **To uncover the covered.** Wallace et al. (1998:91) mentioned that there are many stories we have not yet told and very many that may never be told. In short, the qualitative interview provides a compatible and flexible platform for the recounting and archival of stories for the furtherance of qualitative research.
5. **Interpretative Inquiry as an exit for the current research.** Interpretative inquiry is a term chosen to circumscribe or limit the field of scholarly inquiry to a specific type of investigation (Morehouse, 2012:21).

I suspect that most participants may have had no chance to experience a systematic reflection on their First Class honours path so far. If this is the case, it would be meaningful for them to participate in the current study.

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

Interview Schedule. In the current research, each participant was interviewed over three rounds, and a brief summary is presented below:

Interview	Involved Parties	Duration (minutes)	Main Objective
1 st	Participant only (1-on-1)	60-90	Main exploration and identify participant's significant people. Make appointment with significant people for group interview.
2 nd	Participant and Significant Person (1-on-group)	30-45	Second exploration, execute triangulation (outsider witness) and counter checking of participant's story.
3 rd	Participant only (1-on-1)	60-90	Explore reflections and meanings.

Table 3A: Design of Interview Schedule

Data Collection. All interview discussions were note-taken, audiotaped and then verbatim transcribed. Since the language for the interviewer and participants is Cantonese, initially transcription will be in Chinese. Those sentences essential for this dissertation will be translated into English afterwards.

Semi-structured Interview Questions. In order to balance the breadth and depth of the current study, a retrospective semi-structured type of interpretative inquiry will be adopted. Six types of interview question will be asked. Examples of interview questions are listed.

1. **Probing questions** (Berg & Lune, 2012:121). Questions of this type are more effective in getting the participants to provide more substantive accounts of their experiences. For example:
 - *Before studying at University X, had you previously missed any chance to attempt higher education?*
 - *During the study period at University X, were you suspended for a certain period?*

2. **Schedule questions** (Berg & Lune, 2012:113). These are similar to the upcoming type of question, “essential questions”, but they act as “signposts” and appear whenever the topic is changed.
 - *What are the reasons that led to you applying for higher education?*

3. **Essential questions** (Berg & Lune, 2012:120). These relate exclusively to the central concerns of the study. They are pointed and direct, designed to elicit information that would be of use in illuminating (Morris, 2006 as cited by Berg & Lune).
 - *What was your “academic expectation” at University X?*

4. **Unscheduled probe** (Berg & Lune, 2012:113). These are generated in the course of the interview, rather than being planned. They help to further elucidate points of interest that emerge from dialogue.
 - *In response to the “obstacles” you faced during the course, could you describe your feelings then?*

5. **Extra questions** (Berg & Lune, 2012:121). These are effectively rephrased, more nuanced variations of essential questions. They are included to assess whether a change in phrasing would affect any answers a respondent might give.

- *Are you sure the goal is from “you”, and not from the “other”?*

6. **Throwaway questions** (Berg & Lune, 2012:121). These are used to facilitate dialogue and to help develop rapport and chemistry between the interviewer and interviewee, to “keep the conversation going”, so to speak.

- *Did you attend the graduation ceremony and party?*

Semi-Structured Approach vs. Unstructured Interview. An interview in “structured” form is akin to a questionnaire conducted in person, the interviewer simply reciting from a list of pre-fabricated questions and collecting answers. An “unstructured” interview, by contrast, would be largely spontaneous, abandoning the script at whim. “Semi-structured” interviews are a compromise between these, and it is the term that applies to the format that is typically used. For the purposes of this study, though, we will retain the term “unstructured”, though it should not be taken in the literal sense that the interview will be plunged into chaos (Brown & Dowling, 1998:72-73).

I am primarily concerned with understanding how the interviewee relates to the world in a unique and singular way, piecing together a picture of how the interviewee makes sense of their experience (Brown & Dowling, 1998:72-73).

One Pilot Test before formal survey. I prepared a list of questions and conducted a pilot interview with the fifth participant, who was also a First Class honours graduate

from University X. The reason behind not selecting her for the current study was that I knew her, which violated the power principle as mentioned in section 3.3.3. Actually, this pilot was conducted before the first official participant was interviewed. In order to establish a “set of guidelines” for the current research, a hierarchy of: research questions (format as shown in section 3.3.2), key themes and sub-themes were established in section 3.4.2 (table 3B). Questions (semi-structured) on the list were reviewed and modified based on this pilot. In the meantime, I also adopted “unstructured” (through open questions) techniques for the formal interviews with the four participants.

3.3.3 Representation and Sampling

According to an informal enquiry made to the University X administration (around the summer of 2016), there have been around 50 First Class honours graduates from the Hong Kong campus, since its establishment in 1996). In the current study, 4 of these were screened and considered as “critical case sampling”²² (Patton, 2002, as cited in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:80).

Invitation emails were sent to all potential participants through University X. Any positive respondents would then have a scheduled phone meeting with me directly. A brief “research plan” was reviewed and confirmed by all potential participants. Then, a form indicating “written informed consent” (sample per Appendix 1) would be signed before the interviews began. These documents were kept confidentially, and would not

²² Participants for the current study are not normal graduates, as all of them achieved extremely good results at University X. In other words, they can be considered as *Extreme case* or *Deviant Sampling* (Patton, 2002; Robson, 2002 as cited in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:79).

be reported to University X, but only to the research supervisor (UOB) under an anonymous format. Schedule compromises and commitments were essential at this stage. Respondents were then certified as “confirmed participants”. For details about the four participants, please refer to section 1.7, *The Setting – About Four Hong Kong Cantonese Participants at University X*.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic Analysis (TA). The researcher was required to select a method for research analysis, once qualitative interview information had been gathered. Aronson (1995) proposed that thematic analysis (TA) might be one of the ways researchers might use to make sense of the experience informants would talk about (Mahrer, 1988; Spradley, 1979; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; as cited by Aronson, 1995).

Braun & Clarke (2006) described thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) that appear within a given data set, organising and describing this set in rich detail. There are various different methods, narrative analysis being one of these, that share a search for patterns across an entire set of data, rather than simply within an isolated item of data (e.g. Murray, 2003; Riessman, 1993; as cited by Braun & Clarke, 2006:8) (p.6). Braun & Clarke (2012:57) added that thematic analysis, through a focus on the emergence of meaning across the breadth of a data set, affords the researcher a means to chart and interpret the interaction between emergent meanings different participants may share. Furthermore, TA often goes even further than that, facilitating the interpretation of various aspects of the research topic

(Boyatzis, 1998; as cited by Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). Hence, an outline of thematic analysis has been given and its aspirations have been set forth (Benner, 1985; Leininger, 1985; Taylor & Board, 1984; as cited Aronson, 1995).

3.4.2 Establishing Themes and Sub-Themes from Concepts

Aronson (1995) argues that thematic analysis, which focuses on themes and patterns that emerge from interview data, is better equipped to understand and analyse such data. Emergent patterns are sorted and catalogued into “themes”, with “themes” being defined as units derived from emergent patterns, and examples being “*conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings or folk sayings and proverbs*” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989:131; as cited in Aronson, 1995). Following this, an argument is constructed to justify and substantiate the choice of themes. This is done through a review of related literature. Once this has been done, all the elements are in place to begin formulating theme statements with a view to constructing a narrative. This narrative is pieced together with the aid of the literature and the data, forging an engaging argument that gives the reader a clear indication of the ways in which the data can be understood, as well as the motivations that guide its interpretation.

Proposed themes and sub-themes can be found in the table below:

Concepts	Theme	Sub-theme
Higgins’ <i>Self and Affect Model</i> & <i>Goals</i>	Self-guide (/other)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ideal/other ● Ought/other ● Actual/other
	Self-guide (/own)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ideal/own ● Ought/own
	Self-concept	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Actual/own
<i>Motivation</i> and <i>Goal Implementation</i>	Motivation and Ability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-efficacy ● Sparkling Moments ● Problematic Stories

Table 3B: Summary of Concepts, Themes and Sub-themes for Thematic Analysis

Braun & Clarke (2012:66) added that a good thematic analysis will have clearly-defined themes that retain a singular focus without attempting to cover too much ground, are related to one another but do not overlap and that clearly and directly address the questions that guide the research.

3.4.3 Epiphanies & Metaphors

“Naming” and “externalisation” are common methods (Tarulli & Frijters, 2009) for participants to express their stories and meanings in more convenient and concrete ways. In the current research, with the help of proper “naming” of participants’ “sparkling

moments” and “problematic stories”, it will be more convenient and comfortable for participants to recall and to express their feelings.

3.4.4 Outsider Witness

In his description of an outsider witness group meeting, Carr (1998:6) noted that, “*significant members of the person’s social network are invited to witness the emergence and elaboration of a new self-narrative*”. Myerhoff (1986, as cited by Carr, 1998:16) expands upon this, noting that the outsider witness group contains, as members of an “audience”, persons drawn from the participants' social network who are familiar with the problems they face, and who may be able to assist the participant in facing or overcoming these problems.

For the cultural part of stories, audiences will understand better if more grounded information is available. Riessman (2008:77) stressed that this information would:

‘.... shift attention from the “told” to the “telling” and from exclusive focus on a narrator’s experience to the narrative itself. Like thematic analysis, structural approaches are concerned with content, but attention to narrative form adds insights beyond what can be learned from referential meanings alone.....’

According to Usher (1996:19), this determination of meaning in the interaction of part and whole is called the *hermeneutic circle of interpretation*. In order to maintain similar “trustworthiness”, group interview sections (outsider witness²³) can be regarded as opportunities for *participants* and their *significant people* to review or to reflect upon the participants’ study process.

²³ For details, refer to section 3.3.2, the second interview as mentioned in Table 3A

By creating this discussion space, I expect there will be 4 advantages: Firstly, both parties can understand and appreciate another party more. Secondly, this arrangement is a nod to Usher's contention (1996:20) that research involves interpreting the actions of those who are themselves interpreters; it involves *interpretations of interpretations*, *a double hermeneutic*. Thirdly, this effectively gives the lie to the "objectivity" of the interviewer and interviewees. Usher (1996:21) in illuminating this problem, examined the ways in which we, as researchers, interpreters and meaning producers, are beguiled by the mirage of "objectivity" when treating the "meanings produced" by those we are researching. Fourthly, an outsider witness can thicken (Combs & Freedman, 2012) the experiences that participants have already undergone in their journey of self-transformation, offering them encouragement to persist in their pursuit. Likewise, Gadamer (as cited in Usher, 1996:21) characterises research within the *hermeneutic circle* as a *fusion of horizons* where differing and even conflicting interpretations can be reconciled.

Intraparadigm/Extraparadigm Critiques. Guba & Lincoln (1994:106-7) have shown that the "*etic/emic* dilemma" is a kind of intraparadigm critique, while the "*inquirer-inquired into dyad*" is a kind of extraparadigm critique.

Regarding intraparadigm critiques, Guba & Lincoln (1994:106) commenting upon the *etic/emic dilemma*, noted that an outsider may not be able to penetrate the depths to which an insider would have access. In reality, I (as an emic) am an alumnus, First Class honours graduate and existing member of the teaching staff (during interviews) who is familiar with the research field. Nevertheless, Guba & Lincoln (Glaser & Strauss,

1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990, as cited in Guba & Lincoln, 1994:106) put forward the argument that, “*qualitative data is useful for uncovering ‘perspectives from the inside’*. *Theories, to be valid, should be qualitatively grounded*”.

Regarding extraparadigm critiques, in the course of building an appropriate rapport for the effective conduct of interviews, the “*inquirer-inquired into dyad*” might occur. I tried to minimise this by means of two methods. Firstly, one round of interviews, out of a total of three, was arranged with an outsider witness (Table 3A, Section 3.3.2). That additional member (significant person of the participant) would be able to act as a counter-check. Secondly, I myself would conduct the survey with all four participants. This measure would reduce the likelihood of falling into the trap of the “*inquirer-inquired into dyad*” with four different interviewees.

Guba & Lincoln (1994:107) asserted that with the careful use of the proper methodology, the inquirer can avoid this gambit, avoiding influencing the phenomena under investigation (and vice versa).

3.5 Ethical Considerations of the Research Method

Starting the research with four extreme cases (Patton, 2002, as cited in Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:80), this research covers an investigation of “teaching”, “learning”, “human development”, “goal setting” and “efficacy”. This background generates three obstacles to the current research.

First of all is theoretical consideration. In order to uncover the intertwined parental effect, an infamous model (Self and Affect; Higgins, 1987) is dedicatedly selected for this purpose. The second obstacle is related to the lengthy research period. All of the research participants were previously academic low achievers. Their evolutionary trajectories covered tens of years, which demanded this research to carry out a longitudinal retrospective investigation. The last obstacle for current research concerns analytical method selection. In order to cater for the above- mentioned obstacles, a simple and flexible tool is needed, especially as the upper word limit of this report is around 50,000 words. By detaching participants' story into different plots and themes, the contribution of "thematic analysis" acts like a saviour of the project.

There are four significant strengths of the current research method:

1. **Same Interviewer for all 4 participants.** In this arrangement, the methods of questioning and interpretation of participants' observation can be maintained in a uniform way and held to a homogeneous standard.
2. **Emic nature.** I am an alumnus of University X and obtained a First Class honours award, like the participants, and can thereby be regarded as an insider. In this sense, I can be considered to be an appropriate interviewer. As per Tracy (2010:840), this fact exemplifies the "sincerity" of qualitative research.
3. **Co-construction during the interview.** With the insider role of me for interpretative inquiry, I admit there are lots of advantages for the process, for example, familiarity with the culture, environment, language and ease of understanding participants' meaning. Moreover, with prompt and effective

communication, the interviewer's response can contribute to the interviewees' responses to a certain extent. This can be considered as a kind of co-construction. I am aware of this and set up a certain procedure to minimise the impact of this on the interview. Firstly, as mentioned in section 3.4.4, the outsider witness interview session can provide counter-checking of deviation. Secondly, as mentioned in the second point of section 3.5 (P.91), the I will further illustrate my emic role for the current research.

4. **Three rounds of interview provide the chance for the researcher to correct the faults of previous interviews.** Two specific characteristics in the current study are: firstly, *semi-structured interviews* rely greatly on prompt interactions between interviewers and interviewees. Secondly, retrospective interviews also rely on interviewees' memory and their emotional condition during interviews. Whenever there are any special deviations (e.g. fatigue, emotional disturbance, unawareness, etc.), the quality of interview will be affected. Therefore, three consecutive rounds of interview provide the chance to supplement any shortcomings that surface in previous rounds. According to Tracy (2010:840), this satisfies the demands of "credibility" and "meaningful coherence" in qualitative research.

On the other hand, there are also certain limitations to the current research method:

1. Researching in my own workplace (Blaxter et al. 2006:47).
2. Certain subjective values and biases of me are invariably present, since the I am an alumnus and bears a similar learning trajectory.

3. An exclusive reliance on me through the interview and writing process.
4. Inaccurate memory on the part of the participants during the retrospective interviews.
5. Complexity of using interpretative inquiry techniques combined with more conventional data analysis.
6. Weak Replicability and Generalisability.

For the first limitation, I was being an existing member of the teaching staff at University X (during interviews) and I was well aware that this might raise concerns. However, I understand that this fact is a kind of trade-off. As an *insider* study, the advantage of my role was that I understood the research field (teaching and learning environment) thoroughly, which is known as an emic study (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:106, as mentioned in section 3.4.4, *Intraparadigm/Extraparadigm Critiques*). At the same time, this fact would arouse concerns over conflicts of power and confidentiality.

Therefore, one criterion for screening participants is that he/she had not previously been taught by me²⁴. Since all of them had graduated already, there would not be any further chance for me to teach them. As a result, bias and power concerns can be minimised. According to Berg & Lune (2012:140), this practice is essential and has been described in their work as being the perspective of an “interviewer as a self-conscious performer”.

For the second limitation, it appears as both a strength and a limitation simultaneously. As an insider, I am intimately familiar with the culture and environment of the

²⁴ See also *Intraparadigm Critiques*, section 3.4.4

participants. Elbow (1986, as cited by Connelly & Clandinin, 1990:4) stated that

'.... we play the "believing game" a way of working within a relationship that calls upon connected knowing in which the knower is personally attached to the known.The believing game is a way of knowing that involves a process of self-insertion in the other's story as a way of coming to know the other's story and as giving the other voice.'

To attenuate the effect of consequent biases, clear elaborations, comprehensive evidence and the triangulation (through the enlisting of outsider witnesses) of the research/report writing process are necessary.

For the third and the fourth point mentioned above, both limitations are due to the reader's reliance on the researcher. Riessman (2008:72) has reminded us that readers, not being present at the interview process, are presented with the "told", the fruit of the interview process, rather than the "telling". Given this, the use that I makes of field notes is narrowed down, limiting the reader's analytic attention to chosen themes.

For the fourth point (inaccurate memory), this phenomenon is unavoidable. However, the interviewer will do his utmost to construct an environment that is propitious to probing and uncovering memories that the participants cannot consciously recall. Moreover, with the help of the outsider witness, the effect of obscure memories on the part of the participants might be diminished somewhat.

For the fifth limitation point, handling four extreme case studies by interpretative inquiry and finally having to consolidate the data and perform analysis is really a

challenge. Furthermore, with the word limits of this paper, there is no chance to illustrate some differentiated findings comprehensively. This is a kind of trade-off training for me, but I have to admit this is also a valuable experience for a new qualitative interpretative researcher.

For the last limitation point, according to Wahyuni (2012), “reliability” and “generalizability” are also two major criticisms to the current study, which belonged to small scale, qualitative nature and conducted by interpretive inquiry method.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the four participants in this research. There are six remarks for this chapter. Firstly, as mentioned in chapter 3, each participant was interviewed over three appointments. The findings in this chapter will be presented longitudinally. Secondly, since the interviews were conducted using the semi-structured method, no strict questioning pattern can be noticed between the presentation of findings among participants. Thirdly, with respect to the current research, the only structure in this chapter is periodic distinction: “before”, “during” and “after” the study at University X. Fourthly, due to the lengthy and retrospective nature of the research, some of stories disclosed by the participants covered a time span of more than 30 years. In order to summarise as much content as possible in this paper, only those critical and relevant dialogues pointing towards the three research questions will be quoted directly. The passages in this chapter were sent to each participant separately, so that they could countercheck whether there were any misunderstandings or improper presentations of their story. Fifthly, the sequence of presentation of the four participants in this chapter does not carry any meaning. Lastly, in order to reflect the participants’ story clearly, all analysis will be arranged and discussed in chapter 5 and 6.

4.1 Naming of Participants

4.1.1 Naming of Coffee

Miss Coffee named herself as “Coffee” during the first interview. There was a significant other (buddy) in her life who had been her classmate twice, during the first bachelor’s degree (in Canada, 20 years ago) and at University X. During the study journey of University X, more than being classmates, they became teammates and soulmates. In the third interview, this buddy attended our group interview, and acted as the “outsider witness” for the current research.

They enjoyed spending time in the restaurants after lessons, where coffee and milk tea were their favourite drinks. Therefore, Coffee named herself as “Coffee” and her buddy “Milk-tea”.

Before and during studying at University X, Coffee’s marriage relationship was bad. Moreover, she claimed herself to be a sentimental lady, which was corroborated by different dialogues and histories during the interview. Seamlessly, Milk-tea appeared, met her needs and accompanied Coffee through many critical moments. Sometimes, they may have stayed in each other’s homes over the weekends, so that they could chat and encourage each other. Coffee recognised Milk-tea’s role as fulfilling her “intimacy” aspect.

4.1.2 Naming of Water

Mr. Water named himself as “Water” and spent plenty time explaining the relationship (his own philosophy) among “water”, “stone” and “river”. Water came from a single parent family and had a harsh childhood. Moreover, he claimed himself to have collapsed at most stages before joining University X. In this sense, he described himself as a small “water droplet” (weak, deficient and power-less).

In order to achieve goals in studying or working tasks, he started to develop his own method and developed some intelligence. The method (philosophy) was how to gather more resources (e.g. teachers, classmates, knowledge) by asking questions and delivering better quality (higher expectations) than the initial requirements (social standard). He described resources as “water converging into a river” and obstacles (problems) as “stones”. He imagined once a sufficient amount of water had been accumulated, the power would be capable to break down any “stones”, especially those stones blocking his way.

4.1.3 Naming of Sugar

Miss S named herself as “S” during the first interview without any special reason. S comes from a traditional farming family and lives in the suburbs. She experienced a special childhood and teenage years compared to typical Hong Kong children (living in urban or public estates). With her father working in Mainland China and mother working for a long time in the market, S grew up with her elder brother. Unfortunately, he was diagnosed with a serious brain illness. Then, she noticed the relationship between her mother and her were changed.

S is tough, independent, strong and clever. But two unsatisfied studying experience (public examination in higher secondary and higher diploma) significantly affected her confidence. Initially, she tended to shut down her higher education plan. Ironically, she was then tricked by an institute, which granted her a year-three offer, but retreated suddenly. Then, she joined University X, re-started her studying dream, and even devoted herself to promote to a master's degree. Finally, she completed and accomplished her plan.

Up to the third interview, she concluded herself as “先苦後甜” (tastes sweet after a bitter experience). Since Miss S was feeling so sweet, she renamed herself as “Sugar” at that moment.

4.1.4 Naming of Magic

As mentioned in section 5.1.1 (Discussion I), Miss Magic wanted to name herself as “Strange” for the current research. After hearing my comments that the word “strange” seems to carry negative meanings, she modified “Strange” to “Magic”.

I admit this might not be a good practice to affect the participant's decision by giving comments. On the other hand, this interaction did divert or expand another perspective for Magic to re-think her history. “Strange” is with reference to other people. If others are considered as “normal”, “Strange” will be interpreted as “abnormal”.

Before the current study, Magic considered her “abnormal” experience as “strange”, thus she named herself “Strange” at the earliest part of the interview. At the end of the

interview, Magic enjoyed the interviewing journey where, with the companionship of me, she explored something “separate but related”²⁵. In these senses, she could interpret her experience/ability as “Magic”. Therefore, she treasured the interview and expressed that the interviewing period was running so (or too) fast for her. This reflects that Magic was unable to comprehend her history thoroughly by herself. Contrastingly, during the interview, she discovered she could explore the bright side of her history with an interview (as a guide), which was a treasurable experience for her. I do not think Magic treasured me, but she was tasting her own story. She treasured this fresh experience, which made her feel that time was running too fast.

4.2 Pen Portrait of Participant #1 (Coffee)

Coffee is a working lady. She currently lives with her husband and two daughters. During her younger days, Coffee lived with her dad, mum and a younger brother. Since her dad and mum are professionals who migrated from Mainland China to Hong Kong, they provided a stable standard of living and a typical Chinese parental relationship towards Coffee and her brother.

Initial study journey of Coffee (primary school & secondary school). Coffee was clever and performed satisfactorily during primary school. Her first sparkling moment was related to academic performance.

‘...I achieved the fifth ranking in my class when I was in primary three. My Dad praised me, “Great job! My dear elder daughter!”, which was very impressive in my mind....’

²⁵ Cohen et al.,2000:184, as cited by Blaxter et al.,2006:74

Unfortunately, Coffee's standard was not good enough to secure a place at a government-funded university. Coffee's mother still struggled for any possibility for Coffee to grasp a chance due to the value a bachelor's degree could have for a prosperous future life.

'.... Mum told me that in order to ensure we had knowledge, she could sell the house as an exchange, because this would be more important in our life.... My life is deeply affected by Mum....'

Initial Higher Education journey of Coffee. Although Coffee finished secondary school with an above average academic performance, she then had to study abroad for her high school and first degree.

During her overseas study journey, Coffee had to take part-time jobs to make a living. Moreover, she spent most of her time with friends socialising instead of studying hard.

'.... I have to study, to do part-time jobs, to enjoy love-relationship.... We were young and we spent lots of time on peers.... There was much attention given to entertainment and part-time jobs....'

'....This (achieving a bachelor's degree) was a "task", I completed it casually, without full effort. Upon graduation, I felt my completed the job. Generally speaking, my performance in most areas was fair....'

As a result, she graduated with average grades.

Career of Coffee. After graduation (first bachelor's degree), Coffee returned to Hong Kong and was soon employed by a multi-national cooperation. Then, her career path

was smooth and successful. She spent more than 20 years at 2 major companies, including the current company. At the moment, Coffee (before graduation from University X) is involved mostly in business development and has travelled frequently.

Coffee's study journey at University X. In 2001, Coffee spent one year on a postgraduate programme, following which she started her second bachelor's degree at University X in 2014. Regarding her learning motivation, it was apparently stronger than during her first bachelor's degree.

'.... Because I was self-driven for this course, my learning attitude was relatively serious..... I would do much research and many preparations concerning the current subjects....'

'.... Everything had to follow the mainstream, from secondary school, then university.... That old "drive" (first degree) cannot be compared with my current "drive" (second degree).... absolutely different!'

'.... My second degree (University X) was my own choice, I had to finish it well....'

Although Coffee had to struggle to balance between career and study, she enjoyed the studying life at University X. She appreciated lecturers and classmates, and treasured her self-selected second higher education opportunity.

'.... Since my job (career) was so burdensome, whenever there was an examination period, I had to study up until 3:00am - 4:00am....'

'.... Some lecturers are very good, very talented.... I can learn a variety of knowledge from them....'

'.... Furthermore, some lecturers are very professional, they can respond and satisfy whatever you ask....'

'.... I enjoyed lessons because we echoed each other delightfully because most of us experienced and came across those topics as recalled in lessons....'

'.... This was a kind of natural job for me as a mother... although there was a lot of support on hand, regarding "daughters' issue", in the role of Mother, it is non-replaceable...This is my "ought/own"....'

In the end, she completed 23 subjects within 2 years at University X and successfully achieved the First Class Honours award in 2016, with a GPA of 3.9. Surprisingly, Coffee shared this joy and success merely with her family. Unlike most high achievers, they would focus on further study or career promotion, but Coffee tended to spend time on her family.

[Researcher] There are many people praising you....

[Coffee] Indeed! You can say so! Especially my family! They did praise me....

*I focus on "ought/own" because all my hardships are for my family....
Usually, my motives come from my family....*

*I examine all "drives" for myself, and all of them relate to family issues.
From my younger days up until now, all my contributions are for my family....*

Career Change and Development. After graduation, Coffee never declared her First Class Honours award to her boss, but only mentioned completion of a psychology-related degree. She was then invited and transferred to the HR department, where she now manages around 1000 staff (including full-time and part-time staff). A psychology-related degree was one of the critical reasons why she was transferred to the HR post.

Up until interviews, Coffee's boss still does not know about her First Class Honours award.

Coffee's prospects. After the three interviews, Coffee was planning to secure her new post and spend time with her parents over the next two years. In the meantime, she is also planning further study in two years: for example, a Master's degree.

Summary of Findings on Coffee

Coffee is the eldest daughter from a Chinese family. Her parents are well educated. Her mother has a conscientious, goal-oriented and problem-solving-oriented personality. Contrastingly, her father has a cheerful, patient and optimistic personality.

Her mother, as a significant person, performed a dual role in Coffee's life. Biologically, she is a real mother. Functionally and mentally, she is a designer and engineer, which may dominate and diminish Coffee's Dad's role. This example had a profound formative effect on Coffee's belief-system and personality. Coffee's mother induced an **Ought/Other** influence that shaped the pathway Coffee would have to follow in her life.

Coffee has experienced different roles and completed different life stages already. At the end of the interview, she prefers to be "Coffee as daughter" and "Coffee as staff". This, in her schema, signifies the **Actual/Own** of her **self-guides**.

All in all, the First Class Honours award at University X appeared as a stepping stone for Coffee in four respects: 1) to change her mind with respect to her relationship with

her parents; 2) to change her mind with respect to her relationship to marriage; 3) to change her career from being business-oriented to human-oriented; 4) to connect the “mother roles” that she played in both her family and her workplace. Without this evolution, Coffee would not have been able to release herself to enjoy the **Actual/own** (being a “daughter” and being a member of “staff”). It seems that the real meanings of First Class Honours are neither reputational, nor economic in nature, but rather academic, functional and evolutionary.

4.3 Pen Portrait of Participant #2 (Water)

Water is a working man. He lives with his wife and two children in Hong Kong. He grew up in a single parent family and has no siblings. He is the only interviewee without siblings. In the first interview, Water spoke of the loneliness that he endured throughout his childhood. Living with his mother, Water did not receive the emotional support that he craved from her.

Expressing emotions by sketching and drawing. Water admitted he was neither keen on expressing himself, nor sharing emotions in his younger days. Later, when he reached primary school, he discovered drawing could be a conduit through which his emotions could be channelled. It was at this point that Water began to draw whenever he was overwhelmed by unpleasant emotions or sadness. If he was not able to relieve his emotion throughout this process, he suppressed it and was unable to cry.

‘... Perhaps growing up in a single-parent family, I was not able to express myself well.... Since I discovered drawing was one of the expressive channels, I became attached to it. Through drawings, I could express different kinds of

emotion and relieved myself well afterwards. Without doing so, I would tend to suppress my emotions. After relief, there was no longer any suppression so that I could cry instead. Without any trustable relatives to rely on, I enjoyed drawing so that I could handle things by myself. There were two noticeable successful experiences: the first was when one of my respectful relatives passed away during primary school and the second concerned about my failure after public examinations at secondary school. I was able to relieve all pressures after drawing....'

Discovering talent of Drawing, becoming Water's strength. This talent did not escape the notice of his classmates and teachers. He participated in events and entered competitions. In one competition, Water received the second runner-up award after being betrayed by a senior classmate, when he was supposed to be the champion. Although he was disappointed, Water was assured about the value of his talent. Drawing became his source of strength.

'.... I was supposed to win the poster design competition during primary school. There was a senior student who stole my design concept and submitted before me. Finally, he drew better than me indeed. I won the second-runner up. Although I lost the competition, I was still happy because I received lots of praise from others.....'

Poor academic performance during secondary school. During secondary school, Water performed poorly and failed his first public examination. He had to repeat and transferred to another Catholic evening school. In this period, Water met a godfather who changed his life and acted like his mentor. Besides devoting extra resources and teaching to Water, the godfather also corrected Water's study habits and took care of his emotional needs. Finally, Water demonstrated drastic improvements in his second attempt at a public examination.

'.... Godfather re-allocated a lot of resources from day school to the evening-section I was taking. Most of my grade in public examinations were upgraded by 3 to 5 levels....'

Art Talents paved the path for Water's Career. Water's first career was art-related. During this time, Water enjoyed his work, which afforded him status as well as a handsome income. He led a team of designers for almost two years.

'.... The praise from others was significant and important to me because I could not understand and grasp myself well. I drew and practised more, I wanted to improve in order to seek more appreciation....'

Two abandonments of higher education. After completing a number of short part-time artistic courses, Water applied to two famous overseas institutes²⁶ across different academic years. He was admitted to both, but Water gave up both opportunities in the end. He withdrew for family and career-related reasons. In those two periods, Water did not dare to negatively affect his family/financial situation.

'.... Yes! Although the offer letter was in my hands already, I didn't respond. Explicitly, lack of response means I rejected the offer. Implicitly, I realised my decisions, which represented the abandonment of getting a bachelor's degree....'

University X as a Turning point shocked Water's life. Although Water prioritised his marriage in his previous forays into higher education, his experience at University X marked a turning point his life, jolting his career as well as his family life. During his time at University X, Water experienced several tough incidents. There are both

²⁶ According to Water, both are world class institutes in the artistic field. Only a few Hong Kong candidates have the possibility to be admitted each year.

positive and negative sides to the shocks. For his career and personal development, it was positive. When it came to his marriage and Water's original artistic job, however, it was negative.

--Career during University X--

'.... I had compromised an agreement with my boss so that I could enjoy a completely flexible working schedule. That meant I could determine when to accomplish my work and to attend office, no matter whether this was day, evening or weekend. The ultimate goal was that I could attend school at any time....'

--Career and Personal development after University X--

'.... Amazingly, I was able to get a grade A for those difficult subjects. This granted me lots of confidence....'

'.... This is very important! This is why I described my achievement as my 'second chance of identity'. Based on it, I built up my own role identity which helped me to look back on my life. There are a lot of things I could not see before....'

--Marriage during University X--

'.... My wife is a significant stakeholder in my life. I admitted her influence was huge to me. She knew I had started to study psychology to solve the "stone" (problem) but she became a new "stone" for me during my study....'

'.... My wife judged that I was not able to resume my initial schedule (before University X), no matter how hard I allocated time to accompany her....'

“Learning” process emphasised by Water. During the interviews, Water shared a lot about his “learning attitude” and “learning method”. Some of this was learnt from his godfather (evening school teacher) and some from lecturers at University X. In this sense, the godfather and one of the lecturers in particular (Mr. Stone) are considered as *significant people* by Water.

--Learning before/after University X--

'.... They (most of Water's teachers before University X) were too stubborn, because they just followed traditional teaching methods strictly. Therefore, they neither tried, nor accepted, ways that were outside of the box, or even any questions raised by students. I would be stopped by "Shut Up". This really blocked my exploration. I awoke and discovered that "raising questions" was allowed later (after joining University X). I am not a monster. Most of my questions are meaningful instead....'

'... After the graduation from University X, lecturers (at University Y) also stopped me. Most questions were considered as nonsense and would be prohibited....'

--Learning during University X--

'.... Those (methods) are from teachers.... Honestly speaking, teachers taught me how to handle a question, how to seek extra resources/knowledge Then, I tried to consolidate and apply....'

'.... They (lecturers) taught me certain methods. Based on the new methods, I was able to resolve my stress. They were so nice. In the upcoming learning process, I applied the new methods, and I was able to handle... Then, I kept using these methods to finish my degree....'

'.... I was so delighted for the lecturers' appreciation of my behaviour (raising questions). They described mine as a kind of meaningful contribution to lessons....'

'.... Besides owning fundamental comprehension of knowledge, teachers encouraged and even inspired me to think more broadly and deeply, for example, I came across so many nice encouragements, such as, "You are capable.... you can try to think more...." Moreover, teachers encouraged me to think in different directions....'

Further study after University X. In the current research, Water is the only male out of four interviewees. Moreover, he was one of only two interviewees who had successfully completed a Master's degree after graduation from University X.

'.... When I was studying the last 10 subjects at University X, the lecturer told me that I have a talent in psychology. If I wanted to pursue it as my career, I had to complete a master's degree. Then, achieving a master's degree became my "ought/own"....'

"Rebirth" of Water. After completing 2 psychology degrees, Water changed his career entirely, from the artistic field to the psychology field. Finally, he achieved his dream (by recovering his self-identity) and described this as an experience of "rebirth". Whenever Water mentioned the word "rebirth" and "second chance of identity" during interviews, he showed delight and hope in his eyes and face.

'.... This is what I told you in my first appointment that I treasure my second chance of identity so much. I recovered those missed stages. For the first stage, Trust, there was someone I trusted definitely. But the Mistrust group was larger. I described it as my "second chance of identity" which shaped my identity. I was able to construct and compensate from my later stages back to those earlier blank stages....'

Summary of Findings on Water

The historical family background (e.g. single parent family, only child) of Water was unchangeable. The "inner self" of Mr. Water remained with him at all times.

If he had not taken the first diploma psychology course, he may have maintained his artistic job until now. If this had been the case, I cannot imagine (predict) that Water,

his wife, his children and family would be very happy. During the interviews, Water had emphasised, *“If I could return to the time before joining University X, even though I know that my wife (and family) would be affected (negatively), I would have to make the same decision because this was the ‘Rebirth’ of my life....”*. This retrospective judgment that “the graduated Water” has passed on to “the previous Water” is resolute, and we have to trust that he knows what he is speaking about.

However, it can be confirmed that his children and wife were facing troubles before he took the previous diploma course (as a user). Therefore, as mentioned above, I cannot imagine a happy family picture, whether he had taken the course or not.

Is there any possibility that the previous Water was the cause of his family troubles? There is insufficient information in the current study (beyond the scope).

This dramatic evolution originated, I feel, from an impetus within Water's inner self. Is it the urge from his inner self? Or, did Water really want to take the honour? Or, rather, did he want to compensate for other failures in his life through this process? Having grown up in a broken family, did he spend his life (in the human service field) attempting to make up for certain deficits that had caused him to suffer?

4.4 Pen Portrait of Participant #3 (Sugar)

Sugar had just finished her Master's degree before the current research. She lives with her parents, elder brother and younger sister. Their home is located in the suburbs because her parents engage in a farming-related business. According to Sugar, her family is of typical Chinese culture and can be classified as being middle class. For

business reasons, the father stays in China and the mother looks after the market stall (far from home) in Hong Kong.

In other words, both parents are not usually in Sugar's company. This special living environment (in the suburbs of Hong Kong) and distant family relationship (insufficient interactions) have exerted both destructive and constructive effects upon Sugar's personality development.

--Destructive Effects--

'.... One day, I was late...The class master punished me and made me stand outside in the rain. I will never forget that. He blamed me a lot: homework was due, late to school,so much blame which is engraved in my memory.'

--Constructive Effects--

'.... I considered that day was my "shame", which was a tremendous level. I told myself, "I will not allow any chance for him to blame me anymore." Since then, I have never submitted late....'

Study Journey at secondary school. Sugar met her significant person when she was at secondary school. It was Mr. N who first encouraged her to attain a high GPA in order to qualify for further studies. This left a deep impression on Sugar. Mr. N continues to serve as a mentor and source of inspiration for her.

'.... Parents never mentioned achieving a degree was a must....'

'.... Besides parents, teachers from different stages also affected me.'

'.... When I was studying at senior secondary, one teacher always reminded me, "it will be very important to ensure your GPA is higher than 3.5.... otherwise, no local universities will grant you an offer...."'

Whenever I was studying, what should my goal be, but studying? Would the goal of studying be becoming a scavenger? The only goal for study was further study....

Besides studying, Sugar performed well in both sport²⁷ and dancing. After secondary six, Sugar performed fairly in her public examinations (DSE²⁸) and joined a higher diploma course (health science related) in a community college, instead of pursuing a bachelor's course directly.

'... The major concern is about the "bachelor's degree". There is no recognition if I have only got a "higher diploma" at hand....'

'...In Hong Kong, there is no other chance except studying.... I had tried to persuade myself this was not true.... Studying should not be the only way for me.... I kept persuading myself.... but it turned out to be a failure....'

Study Journey in community college (higher diploma). Initially, Sugar planned to execute her plan of attaining a high GPA in order to pursue further studies. Unfortunately, she came across two major obstacles. First, she had trouble concentrating – a difficulty that she had never experienced before.

'... I supposed that some subjects (on the higher diploma course) would be very interesting, but it turned out to be the opposite. I could not concentrate, which I was unable to explain. Until studying at University X, I compared and finally realised that this was a kind of "passion" issue....'

'... I thought I had chosen the strategy of "avoidance". About "hard working", I continued for the first 2 terms. When I knew my GPA could not be recovered in the third term, I maintained "avoidance" and expended no more extra effort. I just wanted to maintain my GPA....'

²⁷ Sugar mentioned she was admitted by a HK sport team during primary school.

²⁸ As footnote #9 on P.28

Second, she joined a study group (project group) with a few classmates. In this group, she encountered a girl who aggressively dominated the group. According to Sugar, this girl exerted an influence upon the choice of project topics, duty allocation, and this had effects on the final academic grade.

'.... The concentration (composition) of "avoidance" was very high in the last term (higher diploma course). I contributed the least to my group final-year-project because the topic was determined by a classmate. She was a dominating classmate who always occupied one of the two "A" grades in the class. Finally, she was promoted to a top-up degree....'

The reason why she dominated the grade was because under the college's academic administrative system, the proportion of grade As was strictly controlled. Due to the grade system and the dominating girl, Sugar was hardly likely to achieve a grade A in this higher diploma journey. This discouraged Sugar and she started to hesitate:

*Is the subject (course) suitable for me?
Am I a good learner?
Or is it better for me to start my career after graduation?*

Study Journey at University X. Sugar pursued her initial strategy of attaining a high GPA once more.

'.... In the first term (University X), my learning became efficient. I prepared a notebook and had many pens. I jotted down notes during lectures. Finally, the notebook was full of text. I had understood most of the content at that point. I felt most of the content was simple. For example, in the first term, the subjects were foundation English, critical thinking, basic psychology... I thought they were simple. Whenever reading my fully marked notebook, I recognised my "interest". This picture makes me feel glorious and hopeful....'

She studied at full speed (4 subjects in 1 term²⁹) and got a good grade for most of them. She formed a study group in the pursuit of a good learning environment. In order to ensure the subject openings matched her own study plan, upon enrolment she requested that University X launch certain subjects. This was rare, as subject openings are determined by the institute normally, but Sugar took things in the opposite direction.

'.... When I was studying at University X, we could subscribe to (select) subjects in advance....Whenever there were any subjects they were unable to provide according to my study plan, I would gather signatures from classmates and request University X to consider making these subjects available.'

Finally, Sugar completed her psychology degree within 2 years and achieved a GPA of 3.89.

'.... The normal study period should be two years. But I had figured out an intensive plan so as to complete it within 1.5 years. There were two reasons: first, I had to maintain a long distance love-relationship; second, the graduation time would be suitable for the upcoming Master's degree....'

'.... My target GPA was: higher than 3.7 and lower than 4.0 (could not be 4.0). The reason for 3.7 was because it was the minimum requirement (informal and historical) for a Master's degree at local universities....'

Initially, a GPA of 3.89 (her GPA) was supposed to be awarded a First Class Honours. Due to policy amendments at University X, Sugar was finally considered a “Second Class Honours” graduate, where she was among the first batch under the new policy. I was very delicate when probing her feelings about achieving a Second Class Honours (rather than a First Class Honours). Her only concern was whether she qualified for a

²⁹ According to University X, most students take one to three subjects in each term.

Master's degree or not (3.89 was numerically high enough) and she was not concerned much about the label (First or Second Class Honours).

Study Journey at University Y. Sugar performed steadily throughout her Master's degree. Minor bias and prejudice were noticed from both teachers and students concerning University X (not being a famous local university) but Sugar was not affected. She concentrated and finished her degree through hard work.

Here and where? Sugar attended interviews (current research) just after completion of her Master's dissertation. She was delighted and relaxed. She was forthcoming about sharing her career goals and was preparing herself for job interviews. Further study does not appear to be an immediate priority. Rather, she would prefer to move forward to other life stages: the advancement of her career and her love life.

Summary of Finding on “Sugar”

Born as a younger daughter in a Chinese family, the “picture of Sugar's family” is an auspicious and fortuitous one. The Chinese word “好”, means “good”, and is composed of “女” and “子”. “女” means “daughter” and “子” means “son”. In Chinese culture, a family with a first-born son followed by a daughter is a kind of perfect combination.

Due to career concerns, Sugar's family moved far from the city and both parents had to work outside for a long time. Furthermore, Sugar's elder brother was diagnosed with a kind of brain problem that turned out to be hemiparesis when she was 6. Her family was definitely impacted by this issue. Although Sugar did not describe it in detail during interviews, the special relationship between the mother and Sugar was noticed.

Mentally, her mother shifted care and love towards the son. For the daughter, the mother seldom made demands, but she had diminished expectations of her daughter, investing little attention in her direction. Fortunately, Sugar did not show any jealousy towards her brother, and her mother's smile was motivation enough for her to evolve in a positive direction. These were the formative elements that gave shape to Sugar's values, personality and identity throughout her development.

Physically, the rural living environment provided Sugar with more space and a chance to play and grow. She developed a strong and healthy body, which aided in her studies as well as her pursuit of extra-curricular activities, for example ballet and dancing. Her performances in these activities provided Sugar with many chances to seek “recognition” from her mum (smiles) and from others.

At the same time, her parents had not demanded much of her. Later on, with the guidance of her teachers (both primary and secondary schools), Sugar performed well in her studies. She understood and accepted the importance of good grades. Unfortunately, Sugar performed poorly in the public examinations and her higher diploma course. She developed doubts about her own abilities, where her interests lay and whether she could pursue further education somewhere. She felt lost and wondered whether studying abroad was a feasible solution. Caught in this impasse, her parents became superstitious. They felt that going abroad would not end up well for Sugar. This constricted her choices and left her struggling with her future in Hong Kong.

After an opportunity arrived to pursue a top-up degree opportunity at University X (further HE study), she discovered her real interest in psychology (direction of study) and performed outstandingly (study ability). Moreover, her academic performance was

good enough to see her promoted to University Y for a Master's degree. She had recovered a sense of self-efficacy (Pajares, 1995:7).

Most importantly, Sugar met her boyfriend before joining University X, and he was accepted by Sugar's family. Although he was living in China, he was able to support Sugar both emotionally and as a companion. Besides the love relationship and studying at University X, Sugar was able to manage part-time jobs, taking courses in other interests, all while taking the time to make two long trips to visit her boyfriend, and managing her family relationships well throughout this period.

At the time of the current research, Sugar had just finished her Master's degree. She was satisfied, relaxed and cheerful. She lamented the fact that the three interview sessions were too short, feeling that they gave her a golden chance to consolidate and review her early life. She expressed that she was well prepared for her career.

Sugar affirmed that "S" stands for "Sweet". As she said during the interview, "I would prefer there to be 'bitter' things first, followed by 'sweet' things later in my life." She accepted and treasured most of the tough and harsh issues in her younger life as being "bitter". In her efforts to overcome these difficulties, she developed her own set of skills – a repertoire that would serve her well for the rest of her life. Provided there was a companion, encouragement and recognition, she was willing to meet those challenges head on. In the end, she was rewarded with a sense of enduring "sweetness". This is the pattern of Sugar's learning and development.

4.5 Pen Portrait of Participant #4 (Magic)

Magic is the eldest daughter in her family and has a brother and sister. During the interview, she mentioned only her mother and younger sister.

Finishing works effectively. During her young childhood, Magic was able to be autonomous. Not only was she charged with doing housework, she was able to finish her tasks quickly. Similarly, she was able to complete all her homework, book revision and projects effectively. Sometimes, she would leave work idle and then accomplish it in a rush just before the deadline. Surprisingly, the quality of her work was good.

Academic Performance before Secondary 4. Generally speaking, Magic's academic results in primary school were not so strong. She was then promoted to a secondary school of an average standard. Because of the lower standard, Magic felt relaxed and even enjoyed the casual teaching style, where some teachers tended to tell stories instead of giving formal lectures. Magic's performance was good enough to earn promotion to the best class in secondary 4.

Hearing problem affected academic performance in higher secondary. Magic is a tall girl and her peak growing period was in secondary 4. Teachers relocated her to sit somewhere at the rear of class and she was accompanied by a few talkative students. Unfortunately, it was at this time that a hearing impairment began to develop. As a consequence, she was not able to listen and learn well because of where her seat was located in the rear of class. She was often not able to hear her teachers over the noise of her talking classmates. Not realising that she had developed a hearing problem until

late, Magic suffered from being misunderstood. It took her many years to recover from this.

'.... My learning method was reliance on attending/listening during lessons and I seldom revised after school. Once I had my hearing impairment and grew taller, I was re-located to the rear in the classroom, which omitted the listening (learning) part. Therefore, my performance dropped drastically. If I was willing to do revision, the problem could have been solved partially. But the fact was that I seldom revised....'

'.... I was not aware (recognise) my hearing impairment, and did not realise I was relying on lip-reading for communication. How come I knew nothing about myself? After recognising my impairment, I cried twice in school....'

Study Life of Higher Diploma. After her public examinations in secondary seven, Magic obtained a degree offer from a private university in Hong Kong. At that moment, she did not enjoy studying, and therefore she selected another path: a 2-year higher diploma course, as a stepping stone toward her vocation.

'.... I was admitted by a local university after my form 7 public examination. There might have been alternative chances but I had not explored these further because I was determined to start my vocation-oriented path....'

'.... There were no lecturers delivering my favourite teaching style. Most of them claimed they were but I could not feel that. They even declared that was their teaching aim.... but I could not feel it....'

Career in Private clinic. Besides working hard and effectively, Magic was independent from an early age. Applying her creative judgment, she helped to re-engineer the clinic's work-flow system. Based on scientific figures, she kept track of and modified the system. Unfortunately, no one (neither her boss, nor any colleagues) were able to notice her contributions, therefore there were no oral encouragements, or

incentives. Later, she left and joined the government sector in search of a more stable career. A few years later, she was informed that her boss and an accountant had subsequently discovered the contribution that she had made.

Career in Government sector. After joining the government sector, Magic enjoyed a stable and easy working life. However, she concluded that this was a time-killing and underpaid job, and one that was far from being ideal for her. Because of this struggle, Magic began to contemplate the prospect of pursuing further education.

Study Life at University X. University X was located close to Magic's office. After discovering the psychology-major package, Magic wanted to learn more about human services (a field related to her job) and there were chances to study further for a Master's in Counselling.

She made the decision and enrolled at University X within a week. During the study journey, she met lecturers with different teaching styles. Magic enjoyed the experience and felt that it expanded her mind, satisfying her intellectual curiosity.

[Researcher] Were there any teachers delivering such a type of teaching style from your secondary school?

[Magic] It was rare.... and perhaps not. I hadn't really come across this style until University X....

I like his (lecturer of University X) teaching style... there was lots of homework...I like his teaching style that students could be really motivated to do more, to learn more.... This is real "teaching".....

My favorite teaching style was when the teacher would give me lots of comments after my submission and then I had to put plenty of effort in to enhance it in return....

[Researcher] *Whenever lecturers gave you comments and requested you to do more, after you had reworked it, did they request you to polish it further? And did they give you a second round of comments?*

[Magic] *Usually.... I was aware what was due based on this practice.... In other words, I treasure the perspective from teachers when I am being a student. Our perspectives are different.*

Based on my own perspective, there would be no chance to think outside my own box. If teachers can grant me some inspiration or tips, I can explore further based on their guidance....

[Researcher] *Do you think those comments are a kind of encouragement?*

[Magic] *I think they are “motivation”! If they told me at once, I would have no interest then.... If they set up the topic first, I followed and explored then.... I think this is interesting! My favourite thing is exploration....*

Finally, Magic graduated with a First Class Honours award, but she did not plan and think much about that. Moreover, she felt that the First Class Honours award was just a by-product of the journey. After learning more and exploring herself more deeply, Magic understood that counselling was not suitable for her and she suspended her initial study plan, which was to pursue a Master's degree.

‘.... I don't like/enjoy studying. On the other hand, my attitude is: if you have to study, accomplish it as soon as possible. Otherwise, do not start the course.....’

‘.... One day, when I was chatting with classmates, someone shared a message that one of our graduates was admitted to a Master's in Counselling course. I exclaimed how brilliant he was and they told me he had graduated with a First

Class Honours result. This was the first time I had asked what GPA would qualify for a First Class Honours. They told me the standard was set at 3.8.... which I had never noticed before. At that moment, I thought if that was the standard, I supposed a lot of students would be able to reach that level....'

[Researcher] *Could you foresee you would achieve a First Class Honours?*

[Magic] *I had no feelings (or planning) concerning this label....*

[Researcher] *Had you monitored your GPA closely in order to ensure the final mark achieved got you the First Class Honours?*

[Magic] *Never! I felt that achieving the First Class Honours at University X was normal. There were 1 out of 2 students able to achieve that... Therefore, I felt it was normal. I had discussed with many classmates that lots of them were receiving grade As as normal....*

Volunteer services in the community. After graduation from University X, Magic devoted her time to career-related volunteer services. Throughout the process, she discovered more opportunities for her creativity and derived great satisfaction from exercising her problem-solving skills. During the interview, Magic admitted these achievements.

Summary of Findings on Magic

Born as an elder daughter in a Chinese family, Magic showed a great deal of initiative throughout her younger days. After moving house when she was 9, she changed to a lower-standard primary school, which caused her to be promoted to a secondary school at a similar level. This affected Magic's conception of herself, as she was confused about whether her good performance was due to her cleverness or because of the low standard of the school. Following this experience, Magic remained a humble girl, rather than becoming a proud student. Teachers treasured her and expected Magic to be successful

in the public examinations.

Unfortunately, Magic's academic performance dropped drastically without any discernible reason. Teachers suspected and challenged Magic's family, but her family was blameless. It was discovered later that Magic had a hearing impairment. This induced a trauma in her that lasted for almost 10 years. As a consequence, Magic's "trust" and "identity" might have been affected and/or confused.

Having fared decently in a subsequent public examination, Magic, as the eldest daughter in the family, relinquished an opportunity to enrol at a local university, choosing to take the preliminary steps towards starting her career instead. After completion of a shorter higher diploma technical course, Magic started on her career path.

Although it was stable, Magic became unsatisfied because of its meaninglessness. At the same time, Magic married and participated in different voluntary services. Unlike many of her peers, who were focused on working and investment, Magic remained intent on supporting her mum. On the one hand, Magic did not have enough money to buy her own house, and had to rent one instead. On the other hand, Magic's mother always refused her financial support, persuading her to keep her money so that she could buy a house of her own. Magic used to avoid her mum skilfully and humorously.

With her unflinching humility and desire to contribute without making an exhibition of her achievements, Magic behaves differently in the modern metropolitan environment of Hong Kong.

In order to utilise her time in a meaningful way, Magic started studying her bachelor's degree in 2015 and planned to finish it within a year. Without any specific goal in mind, she finally graduated with excellent grades. Although minor obstacles were reported (for example, disappointments with her grades and giving up her plan to pursue a Master's in Counselling), Magic completed the course within 2 years. After graduation, both Magic's career and daily life remained the same. The bachelor's degree with First Class Honours did not bring her any job promotion, salary increment or increase in reputation.

Before the end of the last (third) interview, Magic bemoaned the fact that the interviews were shorter than she expected, and that time seemed to be running fast during the interviews. She appreciated that I was paying sincere attention to her, with this being something that she had never experienced before. She considered this to be a precious chance to re-visit her study journey in an organised and comprehensive way.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the four participants’ pen portraits and their stories, as presented in the previous chapter, are discussed systematically, first theme by theme, then participant by participant and finally period by period (named as Discussion I, II & III as shown in Map 5-01 below).

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X	
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related	
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG	III
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS→SM	
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC	III
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve	
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align	III

Map 5-01: Signposting Map showing Discussions I, II & III

Discussion Flow indicated by Arrow. The stories are re-read through the lens of the theories highlighted in the literature review, specifically the self-guides of Higgins’ model, **sparkling moments** and **problematic stories**. Also, there is a return to the research questions concerning key individuals, significant events and finally self-efficacy in the form of self-concept. Thus, the chapter follows in three main sections: 5.1 academic period before University X (Discussion I), 5.2 nonacademic period before University X (Discussion II) and 5.3 academic period during University X (Discussion III). They are highlighted by the vertical white arrow in the signposting diagrams at the beginning of each section.

Sequence of Themes. In section 3.4.2, themes and sub-themes were established. Along each Discussion flow, themes and sub-themes are arranged in sequence, which is based on longitudinal criteria. Therefore, participants’ stories can be revisited simply and consistently.

Further Comparison across three periods. In order to compare precisely how participants could evolve, period-by-period-comparison on the same themes will be discussed. They are shown by Discussion IV, V, VI and VII on Map 5-02. They are also highlighted by the horizontal white arrow in the signposting diagrams.

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-02: Signposting Map showing Discussion IV, V, VI & VII

All of discussion IV to VII will be elaborated in the next chapter, Chapter 6. As shown in Map 5-02, through the comparative elaborations of Discussion IV, VI & VII and the help of Discussion V, three research questions can be settled accordingly.

Special remarks to Higgins’ Model before Discussions. In chapter 2, Higgins’ “Self and Affect” model (1987) was introduced, which is also the core theory for the

current research. Diagram 5A below summarized the following:

- **4 Self-Guides.** These are: Ought/own, Ideal/own, Ought/other & Ideal/other;
- **2 Self-Guides (other).** These are: Ought/other and Ideal/other.
- **2 Self-Guides (own).** These are: Ought/own and Ideal/own.
- **1 Self-Concept.** This is Actual/own.

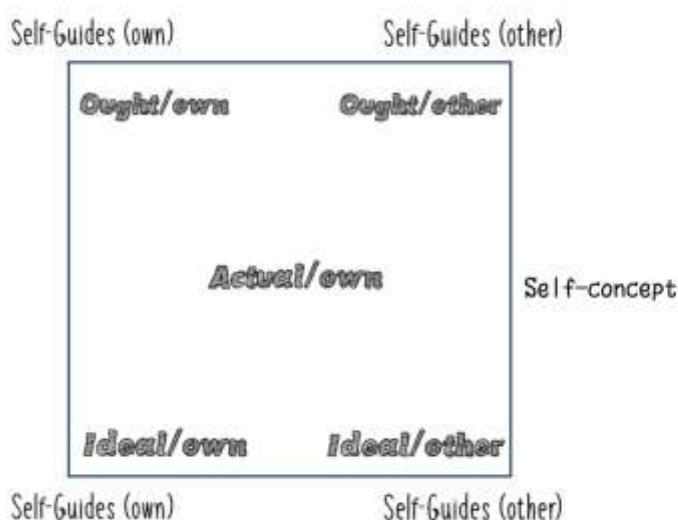


Diagram 5A: Plain Concept Map of Higgins' "Self and Affect" Model

In the upcoming sections 5.1-5.3, a similar diagram to 5A will appear. Based on those diagrams, some remarks will be added so as to indicate the effect (power) and relationships between different elements. Some symbolic remarks will be used:

- **the Dominant Self-Guide.** A thick red dotted circle represents the dominant **Self-guide** (e.g. Diagram 5B, **Ought/other** of Coffee). A thin red dotted circle represents the diminished effect (e.g. Diagram 5G, **Ideal/own** of Water).
- **Location of Actual/own.** The location of **Actual/own** will shift toward the dominant **Self-guide**, which also represents the **Self-concept**. For example,

Diagram 5F, the **Self-concept** of Coffee was **Ought/other**.

- **Dotted Arrow**. This arrow represents the locus of how **Actual/own** changes.

For example, Diagram 5L, from **Ought/own** to **Ideal/own**.

- **Solid Arrow**. This represents the underlining effect of **Self-guide**. For example, Diagram 5J, **Ought/other** affected **Ought/own**.

5.1 Before University X – Low Academic Performance

All four participants were low-achieving learners before their higher education journey at University X. This is the period the current research started with. The theoretical discussions to their learning lives will be illustrated in section 5.1 (Discussion Flow I, as shown in Map 5-03).

Discussion I

According to Deci et al. (1996; as mentioned in section 2.4.1), goal can be classified into two main types, **Learning Goal** and **Performance Goal**. Grant & Dweck (2003, as mentioned in section 2.4.1) expanded the learning goal further by stating that in order to meet **intrinsic motivation**, the learning goal is working for “own-self”. According to Fishbach et al. (2006; as mentioned in section 2.4.2), a person can infer either **goal commitment** or **goal progress** for his **goal-relation action**. With reference to Higgins (1989; as mentioned in section 2.2), **self-guides** contain all 5 self-state representations (except Actual/own) which act as self-directive standards. By applying Higgins’ self-guide concept, I will explore the relational dynamics (especially between “other” vs “own”) among participants and their significant person during their low achieving period.

5.1.1 Discussions through Higgins’ Self-guides (as Goals)

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS→SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-03: Signposting Map highlighting 5.1.1 of Discussion I

In sections 2.3 and 2.4, I have consolidated relevant concepts concerning: reasons for setting goals, types of goal and how to implement the goal. In this section 5.1.1, I will discuss the four participants accordingly (academic related, before University X) with the help of Higgins’ **Self-guide** concept.

Discussion I – 5.1.1

Self-Guide during the low achieving period

[Coffee] According to the interview, Coffee identified her dominant **self-guide** as **Ought/other**. Both Coffee’s parents are working professionals, especially the mother. Coffee’s mum has a dominant personality and leads the family in all aspects. Since Coffee is the elder sister and bears an attaching character, she spends a lot of time communicating with mum and the bond between them is strong.

'.... My Mum really played a very strong role in my family.... Besides having formal job, my Mum did all the housework herself. That's why my Dad had so much time to care for me. On the other hand, my Mum always pushed me... Anyway, our relationships are so good and so harmonious. My perception of Mum is conscientious. But my perception of Dad is playful, he never worries.'

In this situation, mum becomes Coffee's **significant person** from her childhood. Coffee respects, obeys and is willing to share with her mum. Following mum's values, holding a bachelor's degree is important and can secure one's living. Hence, Coffee's mum expressed clearly that she would ensure Coffee accomplished her higher education by all means.

'.... Mum told me that in order to ensure we had knowledge, she could sell the house as an exchange, because this would be more important in our life.'

'.... My life is deeply affected by Mum.'

Although Coffee was finally admitted to a less-interesting course, she persuaded herself to accomplish it instead of disappointing her mum. In this sense, mum is acting as Coffee's **ought/other** in the period, which Coffee admitted herself during the interview. Hence, according to Deci et al. (1996), Coffee treated HE as her "**performance goal**" but not as her "**learning goal**" (as mentioned in section 2.4.1).

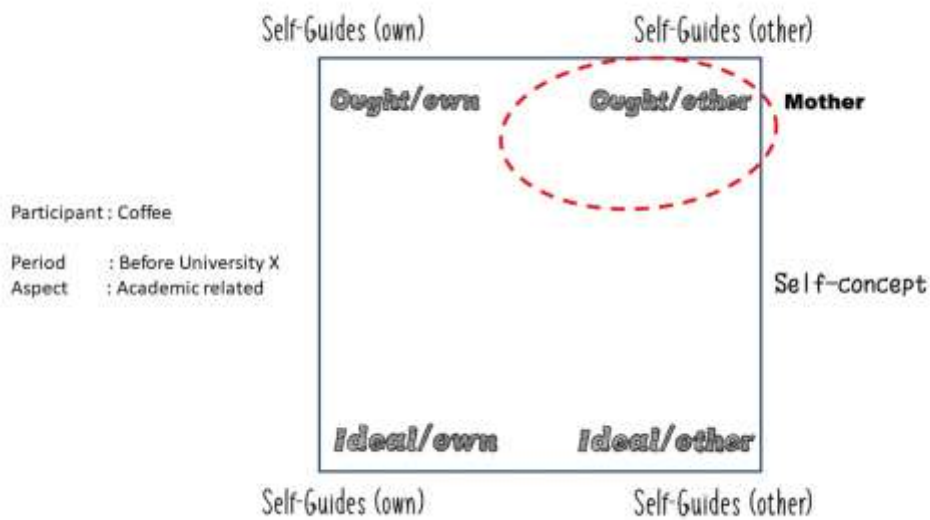


Diagram 5B: Self Guide of Coffee (academic, before University X)

Conclusion: **Self-guide (other)** during low achieving period of Coffee was “strong”, which was **Ought/other** (Mum). The goal was to accomplish higher education because it could secure Coffee’s living.

~ ~

[Water] According to the interview, Water identified his dominant **self-guide** as **Ought/own**. Since Water grew up in a single-parent family, he seldom mentioned any power-dominant experience from the family. Meanwhile, Water was quite lonely and had no way to express his emotion during his childhood.

‘.... Perhaps growing up in a single-parent family, I was not able to express myself well.... Without any trustable relative to rely on, I enjoyed my own discovery so that I could handle things by myself.’

No apparent **significant person** appeared in Water's life until he met Godfather in his higher secondary. Instead of controlling/leading Water, Godfather was quite empathetic and was trying to offer Water all the chances (resources). Anyway, Water also declared there was not an apparent **Ought/other** in his life.

'.... Per my memory, my special learning attitude was induced by Godfather when I was studying evening high school...'

'Godfather re-allocated lot of resources from day school to the evening-section I was taking. Most of my grades in public examination were upgraded by 3 to 5 levels....'

Even considering aspects of Water, for example, stakeholders of his wife and boss, it seemed that these two stakeholders were also willing to follow him. This agrees with the statement in the last paragraph.

One confusing issue was noticed during the interviews. Water had acquired an admission offer from a well-known international art institute twice, but he relinquished the chance on both occasions.

'.... Although the offer letter in my hands already, I didn't respond. Explicitly, lack of response meant I rejected the offer. Implicitly, I realised my decisions represented the abandonment of getting a bachelor's degree.'

Neither Water nor I could determine which **self-guide** it was (**ideal/other** or **ought/other**) during the interviews. Perhaps this is the so-called "intertwined" relationship in Chinese culture. In other words, at that moment, although Water treated his HE as "Goal", the final "Willing" (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 2001; as mentioned in section 2.4) suppressed him.

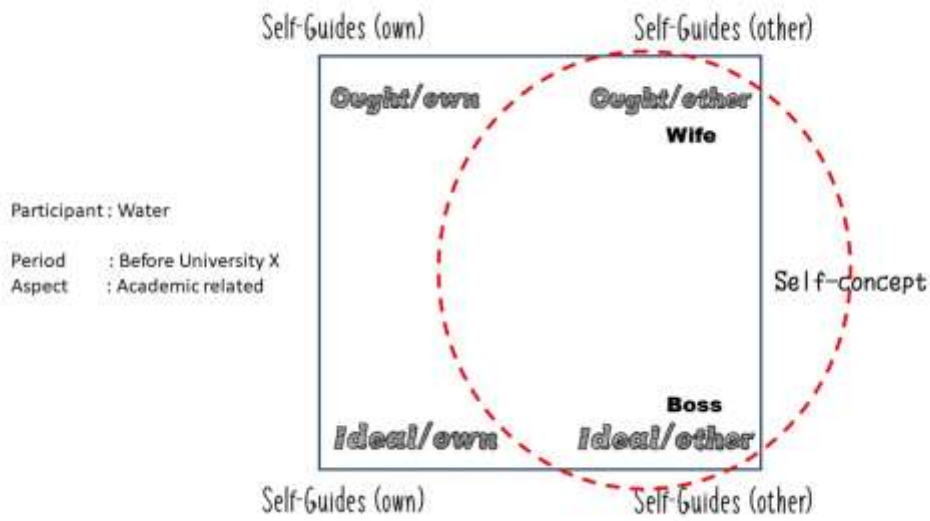


Diagram 5C: Self-Guide of Water (academic, before University X)

Conclusion: **Self-guide (other)** during low achieving period of Water was “ambiguous”.

~ ~

[Sugar] According to the interview, Sugar identified her dominant **self-guide** as **Ought/other**. Although Sugar has an intact family (with parents and grandfather), her parents were busy with their career. Sugar used to play with her elder brother and enjoyed school activities throughout her childhood, until she met her **significant person**, who was her secondary school teacher.

‘.... In our (elder brother and me) childhood, there were only two of us. Children might have neighbours if they lived in estates. But my house is very remote and there is a graveyard nearby. My choice of playmates was restricted to myself and my elder brother only. Therefore, our relationship was very close.... I trust my elder brother absolutely.’

‘.... Besides parents, teachers from different stages also affected me. They reminded me that I was studying at the moment. Whenever I was studying, what should my goal be, but studying. Would the goal of studying be being a scavenger? The only goal for study was further study.’

‘.... When I was studying at senior secondary, one teacher always reminded me, “it will be very important to ensure your GPA is higher than 3.5.... otherwise, there will not be any local universities to grant you an offer....’

She understood and followed his advice to achieve a high GPA as the only choice for higher education. This clear and specific goal led Sugar to pursue her further studies: secondary and higher diploma course.

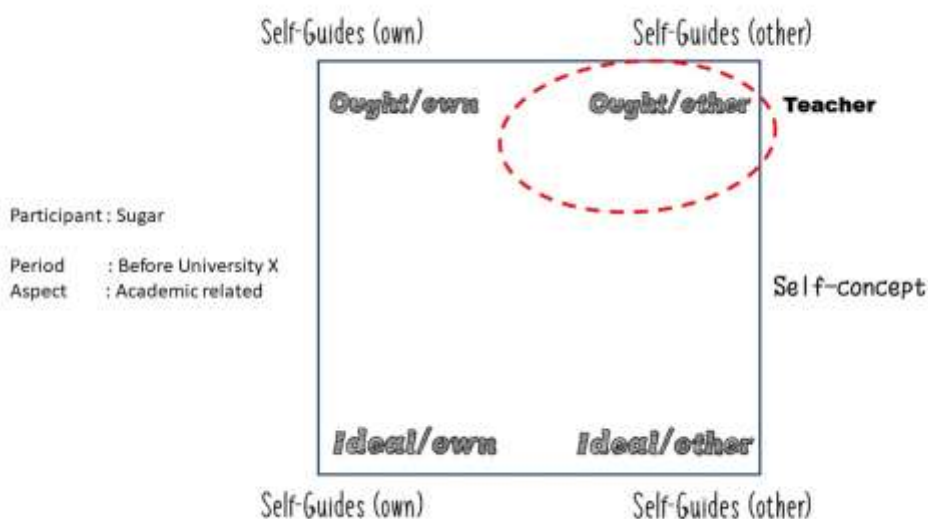


Diagram 5D: Self Guide of Sugar (academic, before University X)

In Sugar’s case, not only did she treat studying HE as her “**performance goal**”, but also as her “**learning goal**” (Deci et al., 1996; as mentioned in section 2.4.1). However, her ability at that moment was not sufficient to support her implementation.

Conclusion: **Self-guide (other)** during low achieving period of Sugar was “strong”, which was **Ought/other**. The goal was to grasp the chance of higher education by achieving a high GPA.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[**Magic**] According to the interview, Magic identified her dominant **self-guide** as **Ought/own**. Magic is the elder daughter in her family. As with some Chinese families, gender bias means Magic (the daughter) is the neglected member. Although she was able to live independently and even willing to contribute to housework, Magic seldom received positive feedback (praise) from her parents.

‘.... I am the first kid who can take care of myself. My mum told me that I didn't like to be fed by others. Instead, I could feed myself and tidied up my bed before studying at kindergarten. I still remember the blanket was heavy but I could handle it myself. I would like to take care of myself and to live independently.’

Until she was diagnosed as suffering from a hearing impairment, nobody (neither in her family nor at school) who had noticed it earlier. Magic evolved into a thinker and started to enjoy exploring knowledge freely. She named herself “Strange (奇怪)” and described her exploring behaviour as “Looking Around (周圍轉)”

‘.... I was not aware of (recognise) my hearing impairment, and did not realise I was relying on lip-reading for communication. How come I knew nothing about myself?’

‘.... I always felt that there was a hole (emptiness) in my mind. Therefore, I would tend to explore freely. I hoped to discover something that I had missed

before, so that I could grasp it and fill the hole. Perhaps the skills I learnt here, which could be useful for me to apply elsewhere.'

I would consider Magic as an inborn learner. According to Deci et al. (1996, as mentioned in section 2.4.1), not only did she treat knowledge exploration as her “**performance goal**”, but also as her “**learning goal**”. However, her behaviour was neither recognised, nor encouraged by others. In other words, it was not supported by “Group Socialisation” (Harris, 1995; as mentioned in section 2.4), which led her to consider herself as “strange”.

During the interview, Magic concluded that motivation was a kind of “curiosity”.

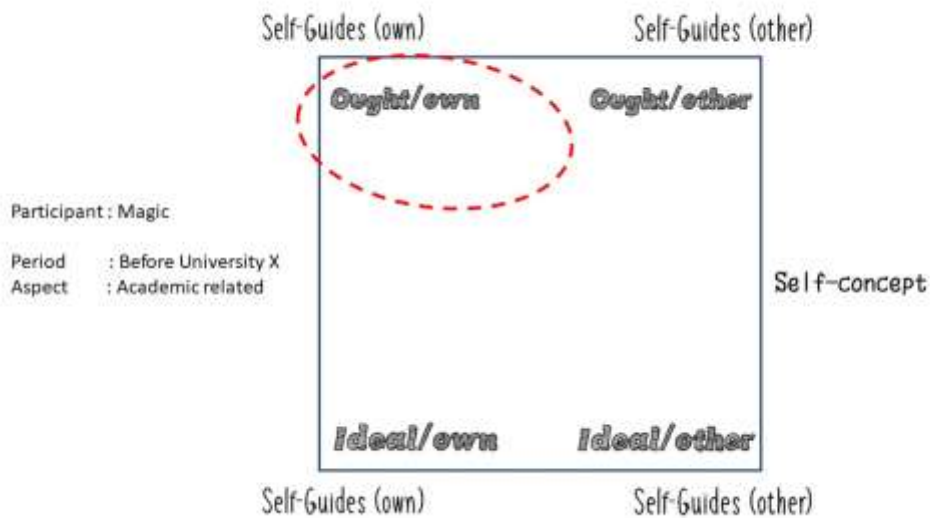


Diagram 5E: Self Guide of Magic (academic, before University X)

Conclusion: Contrasting with the other 3 participants, **Self-guide (other)** during the low achieving period of Magic was “absent”. Instead, Magic was led by her **Ought/own**. Although her goal was not specific (exploring knowledge), Magic

explained this was because of her “curiosity”.

5.1.2 Discussions of Problematic Stories

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS→SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-04: Signposting Map highlighting 5.1.2 of Discussion I

As mentioned in section 2.7.2 in the literature review chapter, “**Problematic Story (PS)**” (Carey & Russell, 2003) is a contrasting element to “**Sparkling Moments (SM)**” (Carey & Russell, 2003). All participants had come across different problematic stories, especially those that were academic related and had emerged before studying at University X.

Discussion I – 5.1.2

Problematic Stories

[Coffee] There are two **problematic stories** mentioned by Coffee during the

interviews. One of them happened before studying at University X. It was not directly related to **academic** issues, but concerned her daughters. During the interview process, Coffee named it as “Exhaustion (虛脫)”. Since “Exhaustion (虛脫)” appeared after Coffee had grasped **self-efficacy** (“Super (好叻叻)”, for details refer to section 5.2.1, P.149), Coffee was able to resolve obstacles by herself.

~ ~

[Water] There are seven **problematic stories** mentioned by Water during the interviews. Five of them happened prior to studying at University X. Among them, only one was directly related to **academic** issues. Specifically, it was about his failure in the first public examination. During the interview process, Water named those obstacles in his **problematic stories** as “Rock” and “Stone”. In section 5.1.3 (P.138) and section 5.2.1 (P.151), the stories of how Water defeated “Rock” and “Stone” by using “Water” and “River” will be illustrated.

~ ~

[Sugar] There are seven **problematic stories** mentioned by Sugar during the interviews. All of them happened prior to studying at University X. Among them, I would illustrate two here, which were directly related to academic issues. The first one was concerned “fair GPA in higher diploma course” and the second one “sudden cancellation of top-up degree course”. During the interview process, Sugar named the obstacles in her **problematic stories** as “Refusal to Surrender (不甘心)” and “Persistence (堅持到底)”.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[**Magic**] There are two **problematic stories** mentioned by **Magic** during the interviews. They both happened prior to studying at University X, but neither of them were directly related to academic issues. Both are related to her “hearing impairment” and the related misunderstandings among teachers and parents. During the interview process, **Magic** named it as “Boring (無聊)”. One remark for **Magic** is that during the period of unawareness of her hearing impairment, **Magic** developed lip-reading skills unconsciously. Since she kept on learning and understood most lessons, this meant that teachers and parents alike failed to notice her illness. At the same time, she started to enjoy the silent world and to think alone.

Conclusion to Problematic Stories

All four participants were able to share their **problematic stories** clearly, where some of their stories were academic related, with the exception of **Coffee**. **Coffee**’s **problematic story** was about her daughters. All of the participants were able to express their stories and to name them, which is evidenced by “Externalisation” techniques (Tarulli & Frijters, 2009) under “Narrative Therapy”. Below is the naming summary of participants’ critical **problematic stories**:

Participants	Name of Problematic Stories
Coffee	Exhaustion
Water	Stone
Sugar	Refusal to Surrender & Persistence
Magic	Boring

Table 5A: Summary of Externalised Names – Problematic Stores
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5.1.3 Discussions through Higgins’ Self-concepts

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS→SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-05: Signposting Map highlighting 5.1.3 of Discussion I

As mentioned in Diagram 5A, self-concept represents “**Actual/own**” under Higgins’ model. Beside **Actual/own**, there are five more **self-guides** (SG) in the system. In the upcoming section 5.1.3 (and also sections 5.2.3 and 5.3.3), the inter-relationships among **self-concepts** (SC) and other **self-guides** (SG) will be discussed. With the help of diagrams (e.g. Diagrams 5F, 5G, 5H & 5I), I expect the struggling forces among the systems to be understood more clearly.

Discussion I – 5.1.3

Self-Concept before University X

In this section, I will focus the **academic-related self-concept** of the four participants. Although most of their **self-concepts** mentioned in this section were weak (participants were dominated by **Self-guide (other)** but their academic performances were low-achieving), I could see this did not represent other aspects of the participants' lives.

Furthermore, in the upcoming Discussion II (under section 5.2, which covers their “**Self-guide, own**” and “**Self-Efficacy**”), all four participants are able to demonstrate the brighter side of their lives in non-academic aspects. They are able to get rid of their weak academic-related self-concept as mentioned in this section.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[Coffee] Before studying abroad, Coffee performed satisfactorily. The major concern was related to insufficient higher education seats in Hong Kong. With support from her mum, Coffee understood she would have alternative opportunities for higher education. As a result, it appears that Coffee's **self-concept** was not affected.

‘.... This (studying a bachelor’s course abroad) was a “task”, I completed it casually, without full effort. Upon graduation, I felt I had completed the job. Generally speaking, my performance in most areas was fair.’

During studying abroad, although Coffee's **academic performance** was not good, she understood that this was her choice because she wanted to treasure her relationship with her peers and boyfriend, Furthermore, she also had to allocate appropriate time for part-time jobs. As a result, it appears that Coffee's **self-concept** was not affected.

‘.... The major subject of my first degree was not my favourite, therefore, I followed the typical route: secondary school, matriculation... At that moment, I was the follower, not much own-dream....’

‘.... At that moment, there were not “like” or “dislike”. Everything had to follow the mainstream, from secondary school, then university....’

'.... I have to study, to do part-time jobs, to enjoy love-relationships.... We were young and we spent lots of time on peers. There was much attention given to entertainment and part-time jobs....'

After graduation, Coffee grasped good career opportunities and performed excellently. In the meantime, Coffee married and had twin daughters. Together with a strong and healthy bond with her mum as usual, there was no chance Coffee's **self-concept** would be challenged.

'.... My earlier part of life was very smooth, and did not burden my family; above average in study; successfully subscribed and finished my first degree overseas; promptly connected to my career after graduation, which is an MNC; afterwards, my second job was also an MNC; most milestones were achieved smoothly in my life!'

This harmony was ruined by her **problematic stories** regarding “husband” and “daughter”. Coffee discovered that there was a need for her to obtain psychological knowledge to helping herself, which was interpreted as “knowledge deficient”. Finally, Coffee's **self-concept** was affected by two problematic stories and her knowledge deficiency.

'.... My friend asked me that why I did not subscribe to the psychology courses by myself and learn more for my kids and marriage... I started looking for psychology-related subjects at that moment.'

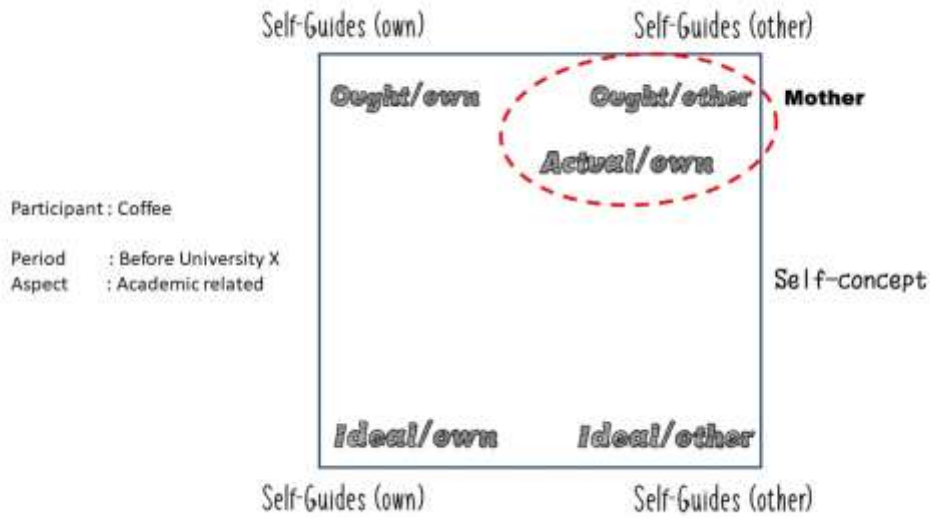


Diagram 5F: Self Concept of Coffee (academic, before University X)

Conclusion: During her low achieving period, Coffee’s **Self-concept** still followed **Self-guide (other)**, which was **Ought/other**. After graduation, besides her marriage and career, Coffee still maintained a very strong and healthy bond with her mum.

~ ~

[Water] Similarly to Coffee, Water had a stable career, marriage and two children. Therefore, there was not any apparent challenge to Water's **self-concept** initially. Although it was an ambiguous **Ought/other**, it provided Water with a stable life. Oppositely, Water was encouraged twice because he was admitted by a well-known international institute. Water was proud to obtain those chances (**Ideal/own** appeared), but he gave up on them because of his wife. Again, similarly to Coffee, Water faced family problems that could not be resolved by school social workers. Water came up with the idea to learn and to solve the problems by himself. Therefore, a “knowledge

deficiency” appeared occasionally. Actually, according to Oettingen (2001, as mentioned in section 2.4), his “Willing” and “Goal” to attempt HE overlapped at that moment. Moreover, according to Deci et al. (1996, as mentioned in section 2.4.1), starting HE became his “**learning goal**” as well.

‘... This study journey was started from self-help to emerging interests. I had never been aware that psychology was my interest. I started the journey for self-help indeed.’

Water admitted he was a slow-learner and had to rely on deep learning. According to Deci et al. (1996, as mentioned in section 2.4.1), Water was still stuck at the level of “**performance goal**”. In Water's history, he faced three rounds of study-lagging: his first public examination, the earlier stage at University X and the earlier stage of his master’s degree. He discovered his own way to tackle this lagging phenomenon by seeking help from others, which he described as “gathering more ‘water’ droplets to form a ‘river’”. In his belief, a “river” has the power to break down any “stone” (obstacle) ahead. Contrasting with “**performance goal**”, Water transformed into “**learning goal**” (Deci et al., 1996; as mentioned in 2.4.1) and was then able to develop new skills to achieve it.

‘... After experiencing challenges, I understood water droplets could be accumulated into a bigger size. This is a kind of metaphor. The huge size of a water stream, as a river, can rush towards and remove any stones.’

Water demonstrated poor **self-concept** whenever he was faced with a “stone”.

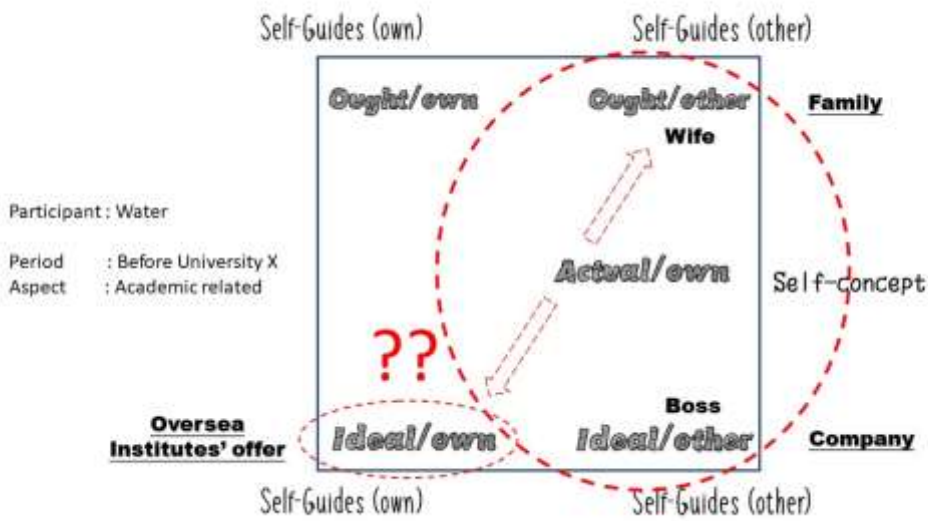


Diagram 5G: Self Concept of Water (academic, before University X)

Conclusion: During his low achieving period, Water’s **Self-concept** was affected by poor academic performance. Besides, his ambiguous **Ought/other** was enticed by **Ideal/own** twice times (oversea institutes’ offer).

~ ~

[Sugar] During interviews, Sugar seldom mentioned her fair performance in public examinations as a problem. Instead, the aggressive and dominant classmate in her higher diploma course affected her the most. Being constrained by the school policy, that classmate not only dominated the group project, but also dominated the grade As in each academic term. As a result, missing those grade As seems to have affected Sugar's GPA.

‘.... The concentration (composition) of “avoidance” was very high in the last term (HD). I contributed the least to my group final-year-project because the topic was determined by a classmate. She was a dominating classmate who always occupied one of the two “A” grades in the class.’

This affected Sugar's **self-concept**. This can also be illustrated by Deci et al.'s (1996, as mentioned in section 2.4.1) concept that although she has set her “**learning goal**”, she was disappointed by her “**performance goal**”.

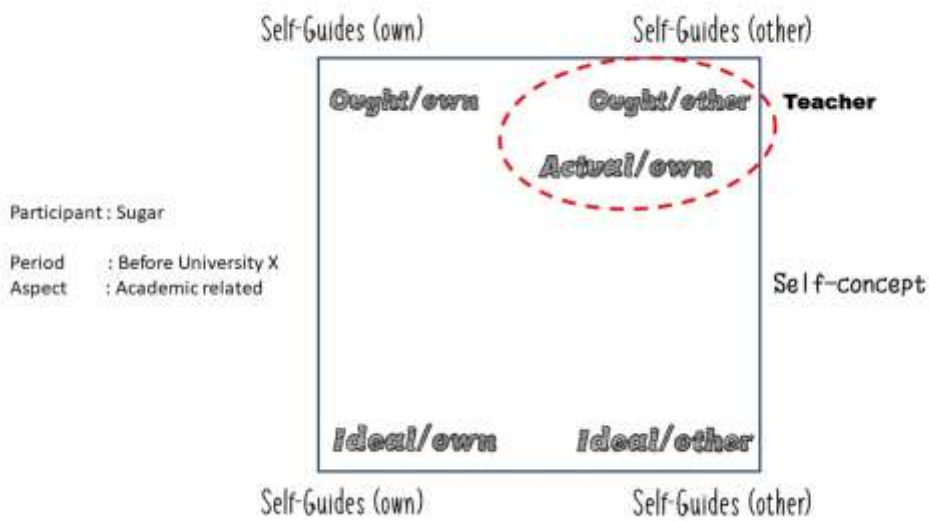


Diagram 5H: Self Concept of Sugar (academic, before University X)

Conclusion: During her low achieving period, Sugar's **Self-concept** was affected by academic incidents. She could not protect her **Ought/other**, which was due to her aggressive classmate.

~ ~

[Magic] Magic claimed she herself always behaved as an independent thinker. Since she made her own decision to study a career-oriented course and start her career

seamlessly, Magic's **self-concept** was aligned thus far. Her major complaints were regarding her under-paid job and the boring working environment.

'.... I am a public servant. The salary of my current post is under-paid, far below (just half) the market standard. Some colleagues describe this is a kind of stable job to ensure one's basic living conditions. In other words, we are exchanging our stable after-work life by getting a low salary.'

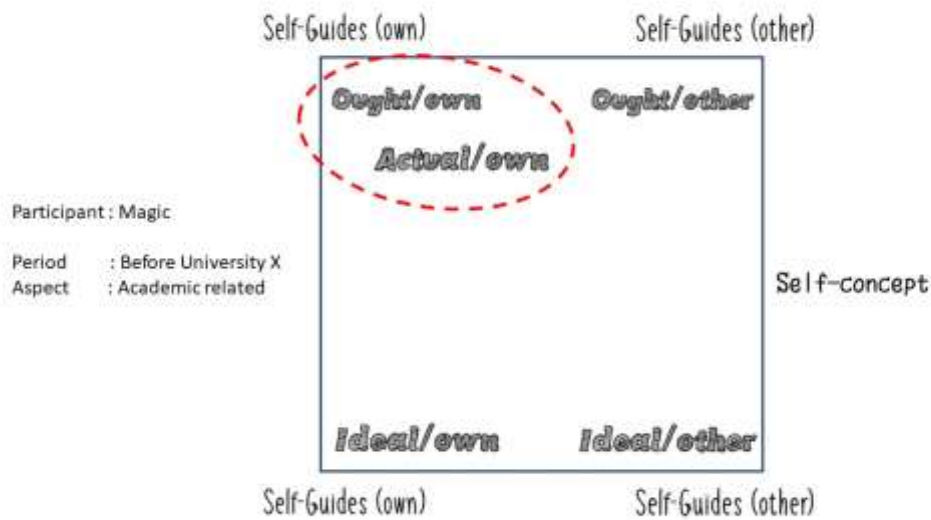


Diagram 5I: Self Concept of Magic (academic, before University X)

Conclusion: During her low achieving period, Magic's **Self-concept** was stable and healthy.

5.1.4 Discussions of Low Academic Performance (Outcome)

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS→SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-06: Signposting Map highlighting 5.1.4 of Discussion I

Referring to prior illustrations, high performance relied on the learner grasping how much **self-efficacy** he/she possessed (Zimmerman, 2000; as mentioned in section 2.7.1). In the upcoming section 5.1.4 (also sections 5.2.4 and 5.3.4), participants’ performance will be discussed with the help of **self-efficacy** and relevant concepts.

Discussion I – 5.1.4

Self-efficacy (academic)

[Coffee] The **academic performance** of Coffee was average.

‘.... The first degree was a “need” (Ought/other). After completion of form 5, I predicted I would not be able to acquire an offer from a local university. Therefore, I went abroad when I was in form 6.’

The higher education openings, during Coffee’s higher secondary period, were scarce

in Hong Kong. Coffee's parents (especially her mother) were worried that Coffee was unable to gain admission to local universities. Therefore, they sent Coffee overseas for higher secondary in order to guarantee her place in higher education. In this research, Coffee is the only participant who had a bachelor's degree before studying at University X. Unfortunately, Coffee's motivation and academic performance during her overseas study were only fair.

'... There was one time... I had to retake one or two subjects in one term, because I spent too much time on my love-relationship.'

She even failed one subject and had to retake it afterwards. In order to avoid disappointing her parents, Coffee never informed them.

~ ~

[Water] The **academic performance** of Water was below average. He failed his first public examination and transferred to a new school to retake one year.

'... during my secondary school, I faced a lot of pressure. I was sick finally which was due to the public examination....'

'... about my failure after the public examination in secondary school. I was able to relieve all pressures by drawing.'

Fortunately, Water met his mentor (Godfather). Full support from Godfather covered resources, counselling and teaching. Water demonstrated improvement in his second attempt at the public examination.

‘.... Most of my grades in the public examination were upgraded by 3 to 5 levels....’

Nevertheless, such an **academic performance** was still not good enough to gain admission to local higher education institutes. Therefore, Water shifted his study path to “design-related” topics and started his career in the design industry after accomplishing a short course.

~ ~

[Sugar] The **academic performance** of Sugar was fair. Compared to Coffee and Water, Sugar and Magic are younger participants and they were able to enjoy more openings and a bigger variety of higher education in Hong Kong. After failure to get a concrete offer from a local University, Sugar was promoted to a higher diploma course and planned to further her study to a top-up degree. Following her **Ought/other**, Sugar had to struggle to get a good GPA, but it was severely impacted by a competitive classmate.

‘.... I spent extra time to survey more information and to prepare for lessons (on the HD course). I established a study group with classmates and we stayed in the library together. Unfortunately, my academic result was only fair.’

‘.... She was dominating classmate who always occupied one of the two “A” grades in the class. Finally, she was promoted to a top-up degree....’

Finally, Sugar was defeated by the classmate and fell into a moody/hopeless situation.

~ ~

[Magic] The **academic performance** of Magic was good. After she experienced a hearing deficit in senior primary, Magic's **academic performance** dropped catastrophically.

'.... There was some physical sickness, which was my hearing impairment. Then, I spent 10 years accepting the truth. After the diagnosis, I understood why there was such a severe retreat in my academic performance.'

After being promoted to a fair banding secondary school, Magic recovered her **self-efficacy** and performed satisfactorily in her public examination. Magic was the only participant who was able to obtain a bachelor's place at a local university in Hong Kong.

'.... Teachers always predicted I would be a high achiever in the public examination. I had not any feelings of delight because I thought my performance was relatively good in a poor school.'

Nevertheless, affected by her family's expectations and fair school life, Magic gave up the bachelor's offer and shifted her study path to a career-oriented higher diploma course. She was determined to start her career straight after graduation.

5.1.5 Discussions through Higgins' Self-guides vs Self-concepts (non-aligned)

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS→SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-07: Signposting Map highlighting 5.1.5 of Discussion I

Discussion I – 5.1.5

Relationships between Self-Guide and Self-Concept (before University X)

Regarding two participants, Coffee and Sugar, their **academic goals** (“**performance goal**” Deci, et al., 1996, as mentioned in section 2.4.1) were deeply dominated by their **Ought/other (Self-guide)**. The other two participants, Water and Magic, did not have strong and clear **academic goals** initially. Instead, they shifted their study path towards career-oriented study and started working straight after graduation.

Regarding **academic performance**, relatively, Magic and Coffee performed better in their higher secondary, where Magic gain a concrete offer from a local higher education institute but Coffee was just able to gain that by overseas’ offer.

Each of them faced different types of **problematic story**. During the interviews, participants were willing to name these (Table 5A in section 5.1.2).

In conclusion, healthy and satisfied **Self-concepts** were not noticed in section 5.1 (learning period before University X).

5.2 Before University X – High Non-Academic Performance

Although all four participants were low-achieving learners before their higher education journey in University X, they came across different topics that interested them. This is the second period the current research recorded, and was unexpected before the research. I would describe them as the “uncovered period”. All four participants developed their self-efficacy throughout the process and performed well. These non-academic performance experiences were essential for their future development, and were also critical for their evolution towards high-achieving academic learners. The theoretical discussions of their non-academic learning lives will be illustrated in the current section (5.2).

5.2.1 Discussions through Higgins’ Self-guides (as Goals)

With a similar pattern to section 5.1 (Discussion I), discussions will be organised on a theme by theme basis (Discussion II).

Discussion II

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-08: Signposting Map highlighting 5.2.1 of Discussion II

Discussion III – 5.2.1

Goals & Self-Guide (own)

[Coffee] Coffee described that this was her first **sparkling moment** in life, and therefore she was able to remember it comprehensively and clearly. She named this feeling “Super (好叻叻)”³⁰.

When did you meet “Super” in your younger time?

[From Researcher]

It appeared when I was learning piano. I was around 8 or 9.

[From Coffee]

As mentioned in section 5.1.1, Coffee’s **academic performance** was not bad, especially during her primary stage. Coffee remembers an episode clearly concerning her outstanding performance at a school quiz:

³⁰ Externalised Names according to Table 5B

*'.... I achieved the fifth ranking in my class when I was in primary three.
My Dad praised me, "Great job! My dear elder daughter!", which was very
impressive in my mind.'*

Since then, Coffee had two changes. Firstly, she started to become eager for the emergence of "Super (好叻叻)". In other words, Coffee's **self-guide** (Ought/own) was set to the aspiration of achieving "Super (好叻叻)".

I was really happy at that moment.

[From Coffee]

*The meaning of "Super" is comprehensive. In other words, there are many
people praising you.*

[From Researcher]

Indeed! You can say so! Especially my family! They did praise me!

[From Coffee]

Secondly, whenever she recalled the feeling of "Super (好叻叻)", even when she was facing obstacles, Coffee found herself possessing a kind of power to overcome the situation.

*'.... The meaning of "Super" is that when I accomplished something
successfully, people around me would be proud of me.'*

Both the achievements with the piano and the quiz were related to "**performance goal**" (Deci et al., 1996, as mentioned in section 2.4.1). Furthermore, after achieving these goals, according to Bandura (1993) & Zimmerman (2000), the induced joy and sentiment could be considered as a kind of **self-efficacy**, where Coffee was able to name

it as “Don’t turn myself down (唔想令自己失望)”³¹. Regarding the **self-guide**, Coffee identified that that was her **Ought/own** according to Higgins’ model.

‘.... I focus on **Ought/own** because all my hardships are for my family.’

In diagram 5J, the solid arrow shows the effect of previous academic **Self-guides (other)** because, as per the script above, Coffee’s **Ought/own** (all hardships) are “for my family”. This is one typical example demonstrating the “intertwined effect” – whether Coffee was achieving the goal for her family, or for herself.

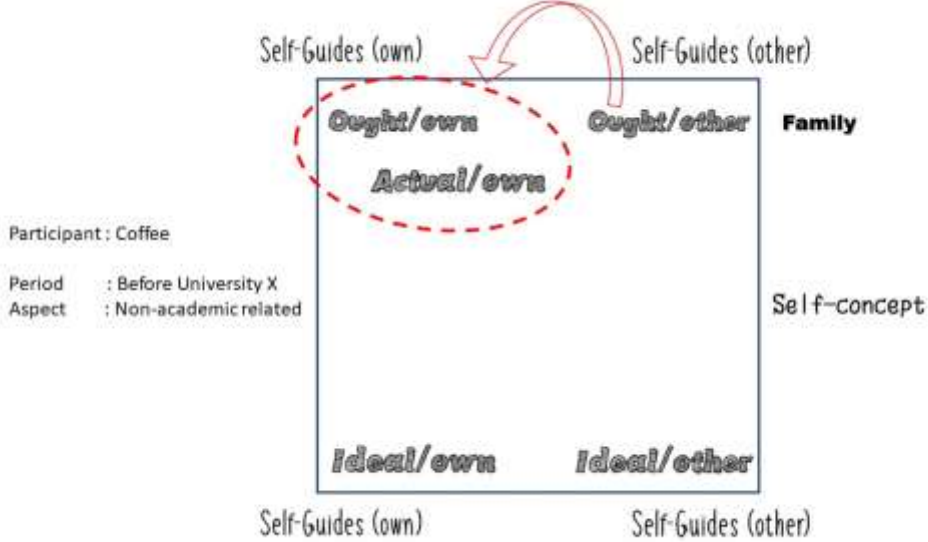


Diagram 5J: Self Concept of Coffee (non-academic, before University X)

Conclusion: During her low achieving period, Coffee’s **Self-guide** was **Ought/own**.
 The reason for this was praise/recognition seeking from her family.

~ ~

³¹ Externalised Names according to Table 5B
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[Water] The **self-guide** of Water can be separated into two parts: resolving his emotion and gaining more resources, where both were related to art. Starting from a lack of companionship and an issue of betrayal in an art competition at primary school, Water discovered that painting was an effective way to express himself and he was able to resolve his emotions by himself. Painting can be considered as Water's "**learning goal**" according to Deci et al. (1996; as mentioned in section 2.4.1). Meanwhile, this was the internal side of Water's **self-guide**.

'.... Since I discovered drawing was one of the expressive channels, I became attached to it. Through drawings, I could express different kinds of emotion and relieved myself well afterwards. Without doing so, I would tend to suppress my emotions. After relief, there was no longer any suppression so I was able to cry instead.'

On the other hand, Water also discovered seeking more resources from other people. For example, by raising questions, more power and knowledge could be obtained. With these extra resources, Water built up his confidence to face/welcome any challenges. This became the external side of Water's **self-guide**.

'.... Honestly speaking, teachers taught me how to handle a question, how to seek extra resources/knowledge... Then, I tried to consolidate and apply....'

Up to this moment, I have to conclude Water's **self-guide** bears a "passive"/"reactive" nature. This is because both emotions and challenges were the initial hopes/goals of Water. He was playing a passive reactor's role to protect himself by solving the problems ahead. Anyway, Water developed a good command of these skills and was able to solve most challenges in his studying, career and family life. In section 5.1.2,

Water named those skills as “water”³² and “river”³³. These became Water’s **self-efficacy**. Thus, he concluded **ought/own** was his **self-guide**.

‘.... Facing obstacles, I would tend to restart. I would try to converge my resources and returned to my “old river”. In order to understand more, I don't mind spending more effort/time. I would tend to meet the challenges head on.... Consequently, thank God I was able to overcome most of them!’

Although Water had not applied this **self-guide** for any brilliant goal, he was satisfied and enjoyed tackling the challenges. According to Water, he was able to recall seven **sparkling moments** in his life, with two of them being before studying at University X.

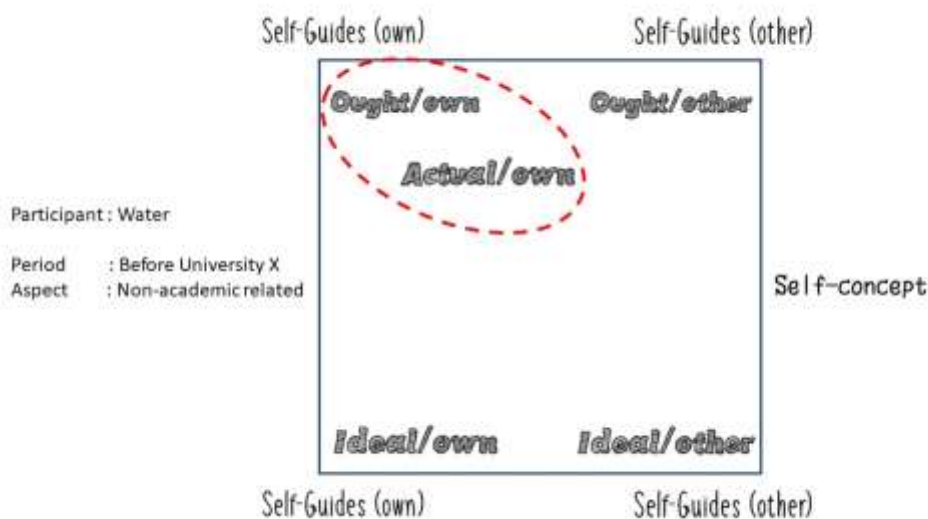


Diagram 5K: Self Concept of Water (non-academic, before University X)

Conclusion: During his low achieving period, Water’s **Self-guide** was **Ought/own**. This was mainly due to non-academic problem solving.

³² Externalised Names according to Table 5B

³³ *ibid*

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[Sugar] According to Sugar, she had a successful experience in physical events in her junior primary.

'.... I was the champion in the inter-school dancing competition...'

Dancing can be considered as Sugar's "**learning goal**" according to Deci et al. (1996; as mentioned in section 2.4.1). On the other hand, study can be considered as Sugar's "**performance goal**" according to Deci et al. (1996; as mentioned in section 2.4.1). Under the academic aspect, Sugar was led by **Ought/other** (as mentioned in section 5.1.1). Regarding the physical aspect, Sugar was a genius. Sugar concluded that her **self-guide (self)** was **Ideal/own**.

The reason why she considered it to be **Ideal/own**, but not **Ought/own** (as shown by the red arrow in Diagram 5L), can be illustrated by the fact that she knew the priority and she concluded:

'.... I believed the chain reactions were: ideal/other affected my ought/other, ought/other affected my Ideal/own, Ideal/own affected my ought/own, and finally ought/own affected my actual/own.'

Between the struggle of **Ideal/own** and **Ought/own**, Sugar shared:

'.... In Hong Kong, there is no other chance except studying.... I had tried to persuade myself this was not true.... Studying should not be the only way for me... I kept persuading myself.... but it turned out to be a failure.'

In this sense, Sugar’s **self-guide (Ought/other)** was always stronger than her **self-guide (Ideal/Own)**. Therefore, the **Actual/own** as shown in Diagram 5L is shifting closer to **Ought/other**.

Swapping along the extremes of academic and physical events, Sugar grasped her **self-efficacy** through lots of **sparkling moments** related to physical events. She named her **self-efficacy** “the Desire to Triumph (好勝心)”³⁴.

‘.... When I was suddenly informed of the cancellation of my offer, I was absolutely not convinced. I would name it as “Refusal To Surrender (唔甘心)”’. This stimulated my aggression, which I would name as “The Desire to Triumph (好勝心)”’. My concept was that if you thought I was unable, I would accomplish it by all means possible in order to prove you had misjudged me.’

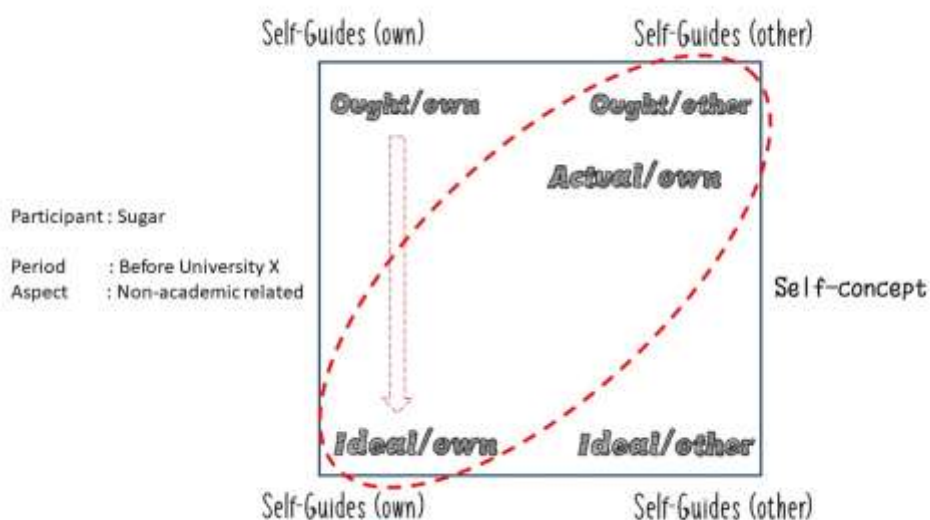


Diagram 5L: Self Concept of Sugar (non-academic, before University X)

Conclusion: During her low achieving period, Sugar’s **Self-guides** were **Ought/own** and **Ideal/own**, where **Ought/own** was stronger.

³⁴ Externalised Names according to Table 5B

~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[**Magic**] Due to the vigorous learning process in primary and secondary stages, Magic followed the mainstream and accomplished different milestones accordingly, such as doing housework, and completion of primary and secondary schools. During the interviews, Magic spent time sharing some volunteer experiences. Most of them happened during her leisure time outside of work (i.e. non-official). Besides contributing time to those volunteer jobs, I can observe that Magic treated all issues with a serious attitude. According to Deci et al. (1996, as mentioned in section 2.4.1), Magic treated all tasks at hand as a “**performance goal**” and she was able to achieve in the end.

She was keen on observing and was able to discover the loopholes of the working system (e.g. the work-flow). Coincidentally, the relevant parties from three different organisations, neither believed in nor concurred with Magic. However, all of them would subsequently tell Magic that they had discovered her initial proposals were precise and envisioning. None of them apologised to Magic, but all shared their surprise and gratitude afterwards. Magic was naïve enough to be enlightened, encouraged and feel satisfied.

‘.... I revised the workflow myself in order to improve the effectiveness. Unlike other staff, if the method was stupid, I would not obey. I would rather spend time thinking of a long-term method. Usually, it would take me half of a day. Then I would hand over the new proposal to the boss comprehensively and clearly. There was one real example, in my previous team, they kept using my proposal up to now.’

I have to emphasise that Magic was not able to enjoy any monetary rewards through

these proposals and this was not Magic's goal either. Interestingly, I notice Magic has been fond of these opportunities. Magic explained this is one of the ways to satisfy her "curiosity" by discovering and solving volunteer projects, where she was always trapped under a boring and routine working environment. According to Deci et al. (1996, as mentioned in section 2.4.1), beyond "**performance goal**", Magic also treated all those opportunities (project) at hand as a "**learning goal**". Of course, Magic enjoyed them because she saw them as a chance to satisfy her "curiosity".

'.... For me, I was determined and devoted myself to the company for the exchange of stable working hours. But I started to understand this was not worth it. I had nothing to do after work, which I considered as a kind of waste.'

'.... my time was being killed. That's why I wanted to find something meaningful to accomplish....'

Magic concluded that this curiosity may be her **Ideal/own**. Compared to Water, although both of them are **Ideal/own**, Magic's is more proactive than Water's, because she observed and generated proposals and disseminated the idea. Even without any monetary rewards, Magic was able to seek fun and identity from the process. This accumulated confidence became Magic's **self-efficacy**.

'.... Based on my own perspective, there will be no chance to think outside my own box. If teachers can grant me some inspiration or tips, I can explore further based on their guidance....'

[Magic]

Do you think those comments are a kind of encouragement?

[Researcher]

I think those are “motivation”! If they told me at the start, I would have no interest then... If they set up the topic first, I followed and explored then.... I think this is interesting! My favourite thing is exploration....

[Magic]

Throughout the interviews, Magic named three self-efficacies explicitly: “Interest (興趣)”³⁵, “Exploration (周圍轉)”³⁶ and “Perfection (完美)”³⁷. Moreover, according to Magic, she considered some of these experiences as her **sparkling moments**.

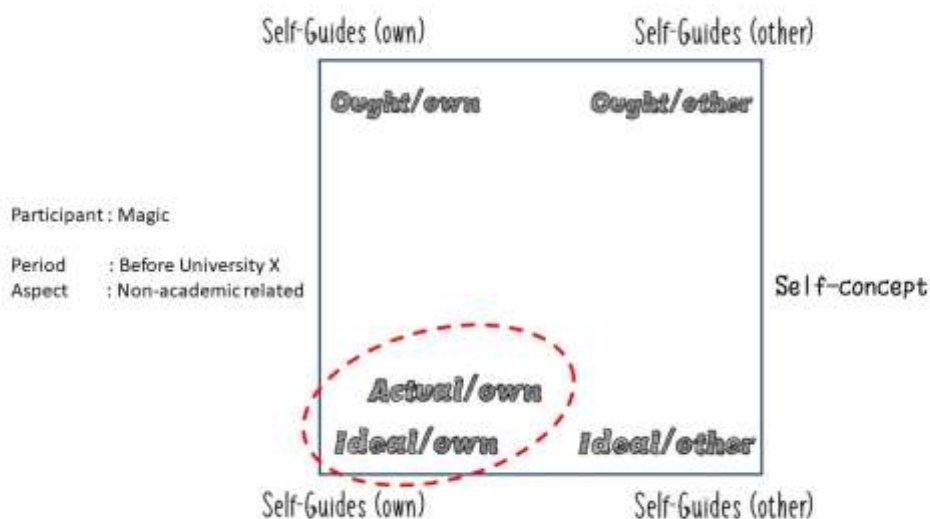


Diagram 5M: Self Concept of Magic (non-academic, before University X)

Conclusion: During her low achieving period, Magic’s **Self-guides** were **Ideal/own**. Magic generated ideas and proposals voluntarily so as to fulfil her “curiosity” and to get rid of her “boring”. This seems like self-enjoyment or self-fulfilment.

³⁵ Externalised Names according to Table 5B



³⁶ ibid


³⁷ ibid

5.2.2 Discussions of Sparkling Moments

Referring to the previous literature review section (2.7.2), “**Sparkling Moments**” are related to some pleasant and successful “**unique outcome**” (Goncalves et al., 2009). This is essential for people’s “**self-regulation**” (Neck & Houghton, 2006; as mentioned in section 2.7.2), which can be adjusted to fit different situational needs.

In sections 5.2.1 and 5.2.2, what participants’ **self-efficacy**, is and how and when they came across it will be illustrated. One essential remark is that most events mentioned in 5.2.1 and 5.2.2 were non-academic related. Then, in sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, similar illustrations and discussions of participants’ academic-related events will be shown. By comparing and contrasting “section 5.2.2 vs. section 5.3.2” and “section 5.2.4 vs. section 5.3.4”, the amazing transformative process can be displayed (as the cross-sectional Discussion V in section 6.1, as shown by two horizontal white arrows).

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / 	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align



Map 5-09: Signposting Map highlighting 5.2.2 of Discussion II

Discussion III – 5.2.2

Self-Efficacy & Sparkling Moments

Under academic aspect, there are two interesting remarks. Firstly, three out of the four participants were not able to gain admission to a bachelor's course in Hong Kong, with Magic being the exception. However, Magic gave it up and shifted her path towards a career-oriented higher diploma course. Secondly, three of the four participants had not completed a bachelor's degree before University X, with the exception being Coffee (she completed hers overseas with a fair result). In conclusion, none of the participants possessed academic **Self-efficacy** before joining University X.



Under non-academic aspects, all of them had faced their **problematic stories** and then followed these with successful experiences. Most of those topics were related to their own interests (non-academic related), which were initiated by their **Self-guides (own)**. Upon their successes, they experienced recognition from others, which they considered as “**Sparkling Moments**”. Throughout the process, they recognised their **self-efficacies** (abilities to tackle their problems). With both recognition and satisfaction (Valentine et al., 2004; as mentioned in section 2.7), they described and shared their stories during the interviews.

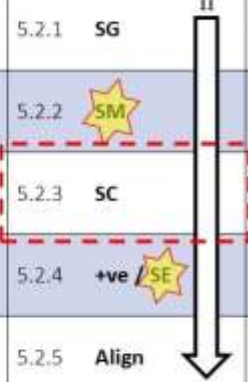
Similarly to when interviewing participants about their “**problematic stories**”, “externalisation” techniques were adopted (Tarulli & Frijters, 2009; as mentioned in section 3.4.3, P.80-81). Each participant externalised their **self-efficacy** by naming it as an object. Below is a brief summary of their **Self-Efficacies**:

<u>Participants</u>	<u>Problematic Stories</u>	<u>Self-Efficacies (appeared when Sparkling Moments)</u>
Coffee	“Exhaustion”	“Super” & “Don’t turn myself down”
Water	“Stone”	“Water” & “River”
Sugar	“Refusal to Surrender”	“The Desire to Triumph”
Magic	“Boring”	“Interest”, “Exploration” & “Perfection”

Table 5B: Summary of Externalised Names – Problematic Stores & Self-Efficacies

5.2.3 Discussions through Higgins’ Self-concepts

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / 	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align



Map 5-10: Signposting Map highlighting 5.2.3 of Discussion II

Discussion III – 5.2.3

In the current research, it can be noticed that without the dominant effect of **self-guide (other)**, participants were able to explore their **self-guide (own)** freely. Finally, all of their **self-guide** types under the non-academic field were “own”.

Further to the discussion in section 5.2.1, once successful experiences had been

captured, these induced their **Sparkling Moments** and froze their **Self-efficacy**. Although this is a small-scale qualitative research, similar experiences were observed from all of them. Participants remembered them clearly and were willing to share them actively. They saw these as a kind of happy memory.

Regarding **self-concept**, Sugar and Water were affected by poor academic performance. Coffee and Magic seemed relatively better in academic issues, where they were able to handle other topics, even when they were faced with obstacles in their studies.

Under the academic field, they were considered as being in their low achieving period.



On the other hand, under the non-academic field, their **Self-guides (own)** were:


	Coffee	Water	Sugar	Magic
Self-guide nature	Own	Own	Own	Own
Self-guide type	Ought/own	Ought/own	Ought/own > Ideal/own	Ideal/own
Who?	Coffee herself	Water himself	Sugar herself	Magic herself
Why?	“super”, recognitions seeking	“River”, solve challenges	“the Desire to Triumph”, champion seeking	“Interest”, “Exploration” and “Perfection”, Satisfying curiosity
Effect?	Strong	Strong	Fairly strong	Strong

Table 5C Summary of Non-academic related **Self-guides (own)** before University X

In this sense, their **Self-concepts** were aligned precisely with their **self-guides (own)**. Further discussion of these alignments will be elaborated in the following section (5.2.4).

5.2.4 Discussions of High Non-Academic Performance (Outcome)

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align



Map 5-11: Signposting Map highlighting 5.2.4 of Discussion II



Discussion III – 5.2.4

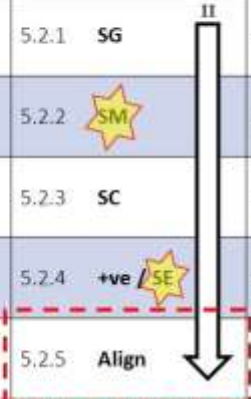
All four participants developed their **self-guide (own)** through non-academic issues. Coffee tended to seek recognition and relationships with people. Sugar tended to perform in physical events. Water and Magic tended to enjoy the satisfaction after solving problems at hand, where Water was passive and Magic was proactive. Throughout the process of satisfying their **self-guides**, all of the participants developed their **self-efficacy** and noticed their **sparkling moments** intentionally.

In the current research, the mentioned **self-efficacy** and experience of **sparkling**

moments are essential milestones/procedures of the four participants for their evolution from **low-achieving** learners to **high-achieving** HE learners in their upcoming University X journey.

5.2.5 Discussions through Higgins’ Self-guides vs Self-concepts (aligned)

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 	5.3.2 PS→SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / 	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align



Map 5-12: Signposting Map highlighting 5.2.5 of Discussion II

Discussion III – 5.2.5

No matter which goals were initiated by **self-guides (other)** or self-guides (own), there is no implication of which one is preferable, or which one is easier. In this sense, people are supposed to treat them fairly. In other words, they should not carry any bias to put more effort into one type and less into another. According to Neck & Houghton (2006, as mentioned in section 2.2), the self-regulatory concepts induced “**promotion focus**” and “**prevention focus**”. This causes people to have different feelings throughout the process, which will probably affect the outcomes. Higgins (1998, as mentioned in section 2.2) mentioned that people would **ideally like to possess** (promotion focus)

under the “ideal” **self-guide**, instead of **should or ought to possess** (preventive focus) under the “ought” **self-guide**.

Therefore, in section 5.2, whenever participants set out their **self-guides (own)**, they tended to use their **promotion focus** for implementations during the process. Once they were able to achieve success, or even achieve an extraordinarily outstanding result, the outcome not only encouraged them positively, but also caused them to feel alignment. Furthermore, if the outcome could be accepted and recognised by others, their **sparkling moments** ignited and were so impressive that they reinforced their prior effort permanently. This effect also froze their **self-efficacy** at the same time.

5.3 During University X – High Academic Performance

After in-depth discussions of how participants grasped their self-efficacy and enjoyed their sparkling moments, the structure of section 5.3 will be similar to 5.2, except the key aspect will shift from non-academic (section 5.2) to academic (section 5.3). Moreover, section 5.3 (“Discussion III” as shown in Map 5-13) will be focused on participants’ higher education learning journey, which they had never attempted (or had not been able to achieve good results) previously. This is the last period the current research recorded, which I would describe as the “transformation period”.

Discussion III

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-13: Signposting Map showing Discussion III

5.3.1 Discussion through Higgins’ Self-guides (as Goals)

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-14: Signposting Map highlighting 5.3.1 of Discussion III

As corresponding and comparative sections, readers are encouraged to refer to sections 5.1.1, 5.2.1 or 6.2 (Discussion IV) whenever necessary.

Discussion III – 5.3.1

[Coffee] The effect of **self-guide (others)** was diminishing in Coffee’s case. Referring to section 5.1.2, the initial **Ought/other** from her mother was about possessing a bachelor’s degree to securing one’s life, which is considered a “**performance goal**” (Deci et al, 1996; as mentioned in section 2.4.1). Since Coffee had successfully obtained hers overseas and her life had been secured by a prosperous career, the effect of **Ought/other** was diminishing.

‘.... At that moment, my Mum and mother-in-law worried me and relaxed me. But I was so nervous, sleepless and restless. I was not pushed by others, I pushed myself instead.’

Another **self-guide (Ideal/other)** appeared, which Coffee named as “Don’t turn family down (唔想令家人失望)”³⁸. Again, since Coffee was able to balance her role of daughter, mum, wife and working lady, most family members were satisfied with her. Normally, the effect of **Ideal/other** should not be strong. But this was the “intertwined relationship” of Chinese, which was about the confusion of **Ideal/other** and **Ought/own**.

In Diagram 5N, the effect of **Ideal/other** was indicated by an inclined arrow. There is another vertical arrow which starts at **Ideal/own** and ends at **Ought/own**. The **Ideal/own** was Coffee’s initial plan to gain some psychological knowledge, but she changed and activated her **Ought/own** in order to achieve the First Class Honours award. Both reasons were also considered as “**learning goals**” according to Deci et al.

³⁸ Similar to “Don’t turn myself down” as mentioned in Table 5B, p.166

(1996; as mentioned in section 2.3.1).

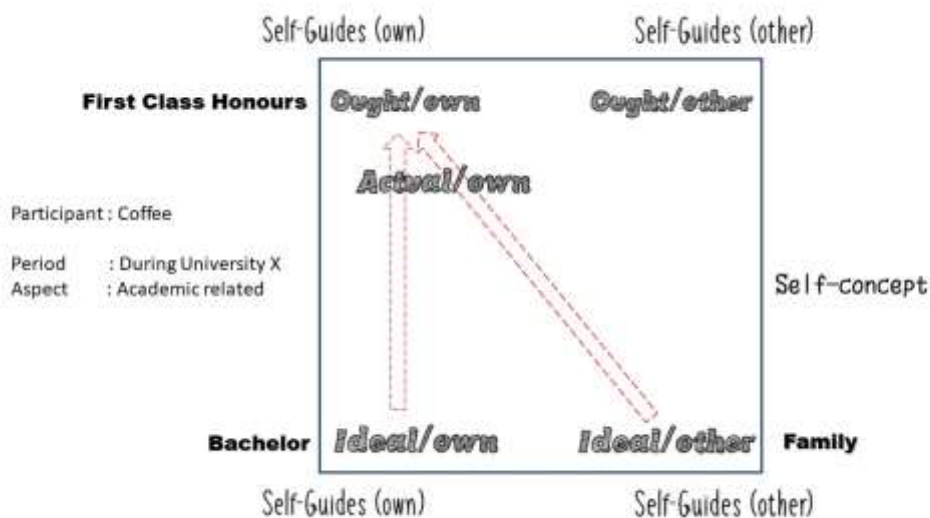


Diagram 5N: Self Guide of Coffee (academic, during University X)

Conclusion: The effect of Coffee’s **Self-guide (other)** during her high achieving period was “diminishing”.

~ ~

[Water] The effect of the **self-guide (others)** of Water was diminishing during his study at University X. In the career aspect, Water persuaded his boss successfully, and thus a rarely flexible arrangement was granted.

‘... I had compromised an agreement with my boss so that I could enjoy a completely flexible working schedule. That meant I could determine when to accomplish my work and to attend the office, no matter whether this was day, evening, or weekend. The ultimate goal was that I could attend school at any time.’

In the marriage/family aspect, Water not only insisted on finishing the course (**Ideal/own**), but also aimed to achieve a high goal (**Ought/own**). This was different to Water’s previous considerations to those two admission offers from an overseas design institute (**Ideal/own**).

‘.... My wife is a significant stakeholder in my life. I admitted her influence was huge to me. She knew I had started to study psychology to solve the “stone” (problem) but she became a new “stone” for me during my study.’

‘.... My wife judged that I was not able to resume my initial conditions (before University X), no matter how hard I allocated time to accompany her.’

Base on the above issues, neither the **Ideal/other** (from his boss) nor the **Ought/other** (from his wife) was unable to affect Water’s studying plan (**Ought/own**) at University X. Moreover, these two aspects were also considered as Water’s “performance goal” according to Deci et al. (1996; as mentioned in 2.4.1).

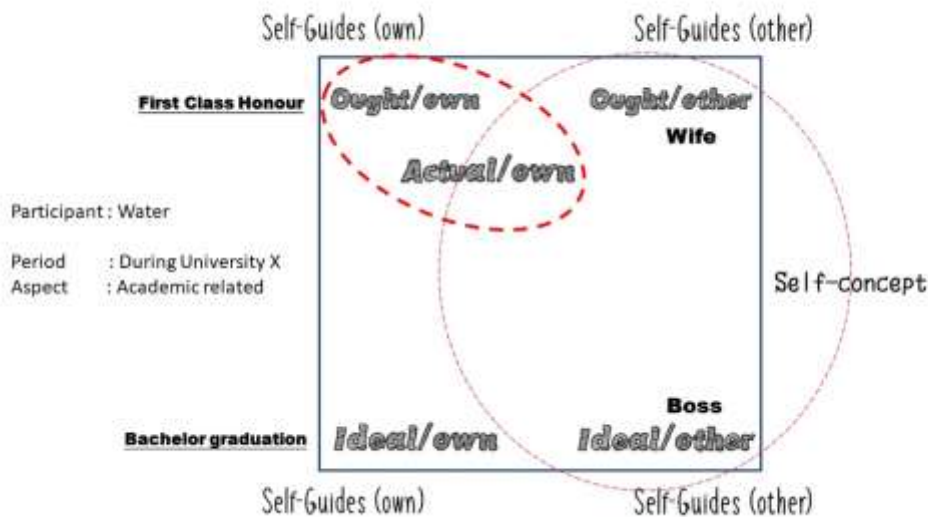


Diagram 50: Self Guide of Water (academic, during University X)

Conclusion: The effect of Water’s **Self-guide (other)** during his high achieving period was “weak”.

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[**Sugar**] The effect of the **self-guide (others)** of Sugar was also diminishing during her study at University X. At the initial stage, since Sugar had aimed clearly and specifically to see University X as her stepping stone for further study for a master’s degree (**Ought/own**), it seemed there was no apparent **self-guide (others)** under the academic aspect. Regarding Sugar’s **self-guide (own)**, details will be illustrated in section 5.3.3.

On the other hand, Sugar started her love relationship at the same pace as studying at University X. Her boyfriend was a PhD student from a famous University in other country. Although he was not able to accompany her physically, he provided indirect emotional support and was her academic role model. In order to squeeze in time to enjoy a holiday with her boyfriend, Sugar made an extra effort (**Actual/own**) to organise and to monitor her “study plan” (**Ought/own**) at University X.

‘.... When I was studying at University X, we could subscribe to (select) subjects in advance...Whenever there were any subjects they were unable to provide according to my study plan, I would gather signatures from classmates and request University X to consider making these subjects available.’

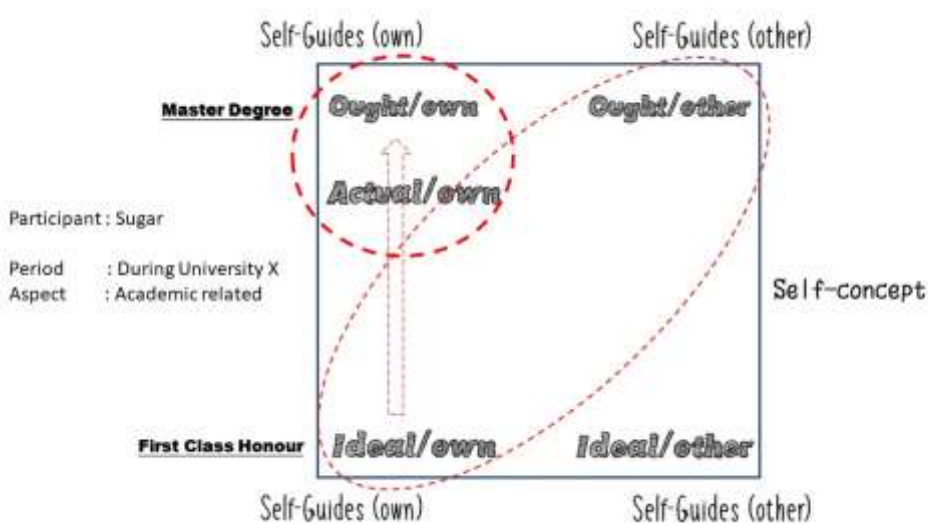


Diagram 5P: Self-Guide of Sugar (academic, during University X)

Conclusion: The effect of Sugar's **Self-guide (other)** during her high achieving period was “weak”.

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[Magic] The effect of the **self-guide (others)** of Magic was also weak (tending to be absent) during her study at University X. Magic restarted her Bachelor's study journey without any family or career reasons, or purposive needs, which is different to the other three participants in the current research. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Magic came across the course and considered it to be still related to her job (human services) and the campus was close to her office. She made her decision and subscribed within one week upon a campus visit. Magic was the only participant who purely aimed to learn, which could be considered as a “**learning goal**” according to Deci et al. (1996; as mentioned in 2.4.1).

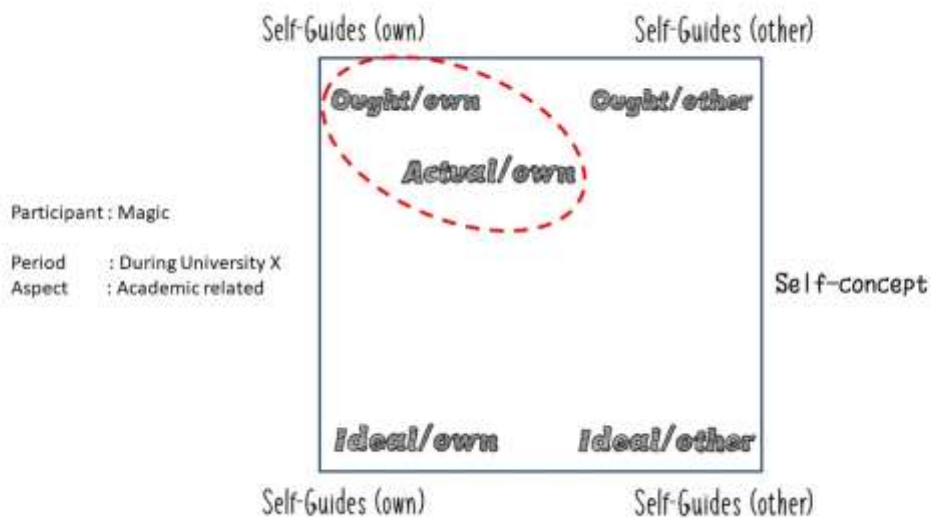


Diagram 5Q: Self Guide of Magic (academic, during University X)

Conclusion: The effect of Magic’s **Self-guide (other)** during her high achieving period was “weak”.

5.3.2 Discussions of Self-efficacy induced by Sparkling Moments

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-15: Signposting Map highlighting 5.3.2 of Discussion III

As corresponding and comparative sections, readers are encouraged to refer to sections 5.1.2, 5.2.2 or 6.2 (Discussion V) whenever necessary.

Discussion III – 5.3.2

Problematic Stories

[Coffee] There was one essential **problematic story** for Coffee during her study journey at University X, which was related to her marriage.

‘... Some problems occurred in my marriage.... Then, I considered them as some challenges that made me understand my life.’

Besides, as with other part-time mature students, struggles between career and study appeared throughout.

‘... When “Exhaustion” appeared during your study at University X, did you share this with your family?’

[From Researcher]

Absolutely not! Because I was afraid to induce any worry for them....’

[From Coffee]

It can be noticed that Coffee was able to identify those issues related to others (e.g. marriage, struggle between career and study) and they were non-academic related. Moreover, she intended to (used to) solve those problems by herself without disturbing others (e.g. being afraid to induce any worry for her family).

~ ~

[Water] There was one essential **problematic story** for Water during her study journey at University X, which was related to early adaptation and his language barrier.

‘.... During the diploma psychology course, the medium was Chinese normally, although I would push myself to finish assignments in English. After being promoted to University X, all materials were in English...I was worn out due to the language burden.... these changes put tremendous pressure on me....’

‘.... During the first and second terms, I had really wanted to quit....’

It can be noticed that Water had experienced typical academic problems, which is common for most learners.

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[Sugar] Throughout the three interviews, Sugar shared seven **problematic stories** in her life, but all of them were prior to her study journey at University X, where the seventh one was the cancellation of a previous top up degree. This is why Sugar had to rush for her replacement place at University within a week. Since then, Sugar felt there had not been any **problematic stories**. Among the seven **problematic stories**, only the sixth and the seventh were academic related.

Sugar’s sixth **problematic story** was related to her aggressive classmate who dominated the group work and occupied a grade A place for most of the subjects. This experience did not appear at University X because of the system. Students at University X are more fluid in different terms, which means students would take different subjects based on their interests, instead of migrating subject by subject. Therefore, Sugar

enjoyed more freedom to cooperate with whomever she felt comfortable with. Upon solving this foundation factor, Sugar was able to perform well term by term.

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[**Magic**] Magic only shared two **problematic stories** in her life, and similar to Sugar, they were prior to her study journey at University X. The second one concerned her hearing impairment, which happened during her late-primary.

Once Magic had started her study at University X, she would “operate” and “complete” most of the tasks and jobs. As mentioned in section 5.3.3, Magic’s **ought/own** always made her study smart and hard. All in all, there was no apparent academic **problematic story** in this period.

Conclusion to Problematic Stories

It seems that three out of the four participants (the exception being Water) did not face academic problems during their period of study at University X. There are two possible reasons for this: i) the tasks were easy; ii) the participants had evolved and possessed greater abilities than before.

It is subjective to identify whether or not the tasks were problematic. During the interviews, I (as a researcher) had to respect and rely on participants. If they did not think achieving a high grade was difficult, I had to follow this and record it.

As mentioned in section 3.3.4, there were only 50 students who were able to achieve the First Class Honours at University X (Hong Kong campus), which occupied around

3% of total graduates. I cannot conclude that the tasks are easy. Therefore, the reasonable explanation to “experiencing no academic **problematic stories**” to Coffee, Sugar and Magic remains: they evolved and had greater abilities than before.

I have to emphasize here, through the “interpretative inquiry” interview method, that there were no clear definitions for participants concerning “what is ‘**problematic story**’?”. Therefore, each of the participants would determine subjectively what and which issues during the period belonged to their “**problematic stories**”. Moreover, under the limited interview time, they had to determine which were worth sharing and were representative. As a result, they tended to sort out what were their own “problematic” stories. Under the academic aspect, I cannot imagine there were no obstacles, otherwise, most graduates at University X would become First Class Honours achievers. As a matter of fact, besides tackling their academic work loads, all of the participants still faced obstacles from different life aspects. Finally, if most of the participants did not see those academic related work loads as their “**problematic stories**”, the logical explanation should be that they were comparatively easier (less problematic).

5.3.3 Discussions through Higgins' Self-concepts

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-16: Signposting Map highlighting 5.3.3 of Discussion III

As corresponding and comparative sections, readers are encouraged to refer to sections 5.1.3, 5.2.3 or 6.2 (Discussion VI) whenever necessary.

Discussion III – 5.3.3

During their study period at University X, a trend of shifting effect from **Self-guide (other)** to **Self-guide (own)** was noticed in this research. Therefore, both the **Self-guide (other)** and **Self-guide (own)** of participants will be discussed in the upcoming two sections. For **Self-guide (own)** section, participants' **goal** will be discussed as well.

Low achieving Period (Before University X)

	Coffee	Water		Sugar	Magic
Self-guide nature	other	other		other	own
Self-guide type	Ought/other	Ought/other	Ideal/other	Ought/other	Ought/own
Who?	Mother	Wife	Boss	Teacher	Magic herself
Why?	HE	Family	Company	HE	Learning
Effect?	strong and specific	Ambiguous and enticed by Ideal/own twice times		strong and specific	not specific stably weak

Table 5D Summary of Academic related **Self-guide (other)** before University X

Self-guide (others) Table 5D summarised that only two participants (Coffee and Sugar) were deeply affected by **Ought/other**. In the case of Magic, the effect of **Self-guide (others)** was not noticed during the interviews.

Self-guide (own) In the case of Coffee and Sugar, the effect of **Self-guide (own)** was not noticed throughout the interviews.

High achieving Period (During University X)

	Coffee		Water		Sugar	Magic
Self-guide nature	other	own	other		other	own
Self-guide type	Ideal/other	Ideal/own to Ought/own	Ought/other	Ideal/other	Ought/other	Ought/own
Who?	Family	Coffee herself	Wife	Boss	Teacher	Magic herself
Effect?	Ambiguous and confusing		Weak	Weak	disappeared	not specific

Table 5E Summary of Academic related **Self-guide (other)** during University X

The **Self-Guides (own)** from all 4 participants started from **Ideal/own** when starting their Bachelor’s course at University X and then evolved to **Ought/own** throughout the study journey.

Coffee Referring to Table 5E, Coffee’s **Ought/other** was diverted into **Self-Guide (Others)** and **Self-Guide (Own)**. Coffee shared that they were confusing and she would find it difficult to identify which one was affecting her.

Water In Water’s case, although two new **Self-Guide (others)** appeared (**Ideal/other** from boss and **Ought/other** from wife), their effects were weak.

Sugar In Sugar's case, the previous effect of previous **Ought/other** was significantly diminished.

Magic Magic expressed that she has seldom been affected by **Self-Guide (others)** thus far.

Self-Concepts

[Coffee] During her study at University X, starting from **Ideal/own**, the **self-guide (own)** of Coffee was shifting to **Ought/own**. Coffee starting on a course of post-graduate study was irrelevant to her career. It was mainly initiated by her daughters' problems. Initially, she tried to gain more psychological knowledge formally so as to subscribe to a one-year course, which was a critical stepping stone for her to start her second bachelor's degree at University X in 2014. Up to this moment, gaining more psychological knowledge for family problems was just an **Ideal/own**, because it could be achieved by attending lessons, submitting homework, passing the examinations and then graduating with fair grades.

'.... This is really a self-improvement. In my philosophy, if I keep studying, I would appreciate what I have known. And I think that knowledge (psychology related) should be useful.'

'.... If you ask me what I will do (psychology related) after graduation, the answer is: No!.... No idea!'

The reasons Coffee activated her **Ought/own** and set a tough goal (First Class Honours) were worthy of investigation. In this research, two turning points for Coffee were discovered: firstly, Coffee was introduced by her workmate/soulmate Milk-tea and

joined a study group of five students. Most of the members had a similar background (e.g. mature students with a stable career) and had an aggressive learning attitude.

'.... Although I had not planned to develop my career in that field, my peers thought that it (achieving good grades) would not burden me much if I studied normally....'

'.... If we wanted to register for the Psychology Association, there were certain requirements concerning subjects taken. Therefore, we considered and followed their guidelines to subscribe to subjects....'

'.... Among our core group of 5, we explored different destinations for different grade scenarios. After becoming aware of the difference between the grades, we thought why don't we achieve a higher grade? ... which was a fundamental drive for us.'

Secondly, Coffee's **Ought/own**, "Don't turn myself down (想令自己失望)"³⁹ was triggered when she faced problematic stores.

'.... My second degree was my own choice, I had to finish it well.'

'....Because I was self-driven for this course, my learning attitude was relatively serious and I would do much research and many preparations concerning the current subjects.'

Conclusion: During her high achieving period, Coffee's **Self-guide** was **Ought/own** and her **self-concept** followed suit.

~ ~

³⁹ Externalised Names according to Table 5B

[Water] The **self-guide (Own)** of Water was **Ideal/own**.

‘.... At that period, my wife and daughter faced quite a lot of problems and affairs. I had sought help from a school social worker. A lot of emotions were explored but improvements were not apparent. Then, in order to tackle the crisis, I started to consider whether they could be solved by self-learning...’

‘.... This study journey started from self-help and went on to emerging interests. I was never aware that psychology was my interest. I started the journey for self-help indeed.’

Similarly to Coffee, Water started the course to gain knowledge for self-help purposes. There were two reasons for him to evolve his **Ideal/own** to **Ought/own**. The first was his own initiation.

‘.... In the beginning, I used not to put too much pressure on myself. I used to work hard and fulfil my responsibilities. Once there were any achievements, I would evolve and push myself.... Sometimes, I would exert tremendous pressure on myself....’

The second one was initiation by his teacher.

*‘.... The “**ideal/own**” appeared first! When I was studying the last 10 subjects at University X, the lecturer told me that I have a talent in psychology. If I wanted to take it as my career, I had to complete a master’s degree. Then, achieving a master’s degree became my “**ought/own**”.’*

Conclusion: During his high achieving period, Water’s **Self-guide** evolved from **Ideal/own** to **Ought/own** and his **self-concept** followed suit.

~ ~

[Sugar] Although Sugar was unable to achieve her desired grade during the higher diploma course, she was admitted via a top-up degree. Unfortunately, the course was cancelled in the middle of the summer holiday because of insufficient enrolment. When Sugar got the news, she was on an overseas trip. Therefore, Sugar missed the critical period to re-apply for other top-up degree courses. After returning to Hong Kong, Sugar discovered the top-up package from University X, and she also became aware that the flexible study structure allowed her to graduate earlier by intensive mode.

‘... For a top-up degree, 2 years is a normal duration. I planned it more precisely and aimed to complete it within 18 months. There were 2 reasons for my plan: Firstly, I wanted to save time for my love-relationship. Secondly, I noticed the graduation period should match the upcoming master’s degree course seamlessly.’

These ideas confirmed two aspects for Sugar: further study to master’s degree two years later (without idling in any academic term) and achieving a high GPA would be essential factors for master’s degree enrolment. Under academic consideration, Sugar’s **self-guide (Own)** clearly shifted from **Ideal/own** to **Ought/own** since then. Undoubtedly, as mentioned in section 5.3.1, Sugar’s boyfriend (newly established love relationship) was also acting as a passive factor.

Conclusion: During her high achieving period, Sugar’s **Self-guide** evolved from **Ideal/own** to **Ought/own** and her **self-concept** followed suit.

~ ~

[Magic] Magic is the only participant who was not aware of her identity as a graduate with First Class Honours. During the interview, she demonstrated her casual attitude (as a kind of personality) that she would complete any jobs (tasks) at hand with curiosity and by all means possible.

Could you foresee you would achieve first honours?

[Researcher]

I had no feeling (or planning) about this label....

[Magic]

Had you monitored your GPA closely in order to ensure the final mark achieved first honours?

[Researcher]

Never! I felt that achieving the first honours at University X was normal. There were 1 out of every 2 students who could achieve that... Therefore, I felt it was normal. I had discussed with many classmates that lots of them got grade As as normal.

[Magic]

As a result, Magic described her **self-guide (Own)** by starting from **Ought/own**. She was affected by the observation that most classmates could obtain a grade A, which was normal. Therefore, she devoted herself to getting grade As as **Ought/own**.

<p>Conclusion: During her <u>high achieving period</u>, Magic's Self-guide was Ought/own and her self-concept followed suit.</p>

5.3.4 Discussions of High Academic Achievement (Outcome)

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-17: Signposting Map highlighting 5.3.4 of Discussion III

Discussion III – 5.3.4

Sparkling Moments (Reinforcement)

[Coffee] During the period of studying at University X, Coffee was also enjoying some **sparkling moments**. According to Coffee, they related to family and these experiences were similar with previous **sparkling moments** (section 5.1.5) in her younger times.

‘.... They will be happy. Or I have to re-phrase in this way, they will be delighted for me. I interpret this from my parents. For example, if my kids perform well, I will be proud of them which is a kind of delight, for her and from her....’

‘.... No matter what happens, we support each other. This is a normal and healthy family. All of us stay together.’

After graduation from University X, Coffee was able to look back at the study journey and discover further **sparkling moments**.

‘.... The degree from University X is a turning point in my career. This is really a concrete benefit to me.’

‘.... The course helps me a lot! That's why my beliefs have changed. That is really beneficial to me.’

~ ~

[Water] Water concluded that he experienced two **sparkling moments** during his time at University X: 1) achieving First Class Honours; 2) being admitted to a Master’s degree course at University Y.

‘.... It's worth it! This (First Class Honours) is a “re-birth” and re-construction of my life. This is not only for myself! I believe the effects would be felt by my family.’

‘....Perhaps this (offer of Master’s degree) will be another “re-birth” opportunity. I aspire for it to be a feeling of re-birth.’

~ ~

[Sugar] Sugar enjoyed the study journey at University X. Actually, Sugar tended to describe the period as the first half and the master’s degree journey as the second half. The date of conducting the interview was the date of Sugar submitting her master’s degree dissertation. This occasion coincidentally acted like the end point of her study

journey. Since she was determined to achieve a high GPA as her stepping stone towards a Master’s Degree, when she got the news of admission to the Master’s Degree, it was an absolutely memorable **sparkling moment** in her life. After that, the acknowledgement of her Master’s Degree graduation was another sparkling moment in her life.

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[**Magic**] Magic introduced her senior colleague, Madam S, as her significant person and Madam S was invited to attend the second interview as an outsider witness in the current research. Magic shared five apparent **sparkling moments** in her life, where only the fifth one happened during her period at University X. It concerned the prompt feedback and interactions from Madam S, which provided her with a very pleasant learning environment. Magic enjoyed their interactions and the freedom to think. I have counter checked all these descriptions with Madam S and she concurred with them all.

The fourth **sparkling moment** of Magic appeared in her previous job. Magic proposed a new system to the department by herself (without other’s request). Initially, no one respected her idea until she left the company. Later, Magic noticed her proposal had been adopted and was running effectively, which generated huge savings for the department. Although Magic was not able to receive any praise or rewards, she still identified it as one of her **sparkling moments**. Most importantly, Magic saw that her idea had been adopted and had proved to be successful.

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Conclusion to Sparkling Moments

It can be noticed that all sparkling moments came along with others. No participants enjoyed their **sparkling moments** alone. To a certain extent, sparkling moments can be concluded as some important moments related to “happy”, “satisfaction” and “recognition”.

All of the participants were able to apply the previously established (learnt) **self-efficacies** to resolve academic obstacles at University X. In other words, **self-efficacies** were similar, but the applications were different. They were able to transform their abilities and maintain their motivations in order to tackle new obstacles. Some remarks for their **Sparkling Moments** are listed in the upcoming paragraphs:

[**Coffee**] Similar to “Don’t turn myself down”, Coffee had mentioned “Don’t turn my family down”. I interpreted this as the “confusing” part where Coffee could not identify clearly whether “**Ideal/other**” or “**Ought/own**” was affecting her. Again, this is the so-called “intertwined” relationship under Chinese family culture. As a result, during the study period at University X, Coffee’s soulmate and workmate, who was named Milk-tea⁴⁰, was performing a role as an important companion by her side. Milk-tea witnessed all issues: no matter whether **problematic**, or **sparkling**. Milk-tea always stood by Coffee. Although Milk-tea was not able to perform as well as Coffee academically, her companionship and emotional support were critical and essential. Coffee had named herself as “Coffee” because whenever they met, coffee and milk tea were their favourite beverages.

⁴⁰ Milk-tea had attended one session of the interview as an outsider witness for the current research.

[Water] After joining University X, Water faced problems of language adaptation and time-management. To a certain extent, these are common problems of mature part-time students. Water solved them by his metaphor of “Water” droplets converging into a “River”, so as to break down “Stones”.

[Sugar] Sugar came across two important factors in her high-achieving period. Firstly, University X provided all essential resources for her higher education journey, e.g. a flexible schedule, responsible and quality lecturers, and so on. Secondly, Sugar was well supported by her boyfriend⁴¹, although they were located distantly from each other. Furthermore, the previous **problematic story** (“aggressive classmate”) had no chance to appear at University X because of the flexibility of the programme. As a result, Sugar was able to study with focus and stability.

[Magic] Similarly, Magic enjoyed the environment at University X. Magic also came across her senior colleague, Madam S⁴², who was willing to discuss and inspire Magic academically. This kind of mental support satisfied Magic’s “curiosity” and resolved her “boring” miraculously. Furthermore, Magic noticed most classmates around her were achieving high grades, which allowed her to see a high-standard mainstream tendency. Although this was kind of misleading, Magic was clever enough to follow and achieved high grades unconsciously.

As a corresponding and comparative section, readers are encouraged to refer to section

⁴¹ Sugar’s boyfriend had attended one session of the interview (through an internet meeting) as an outsider witness for the current research.

⁴² Madam S had attended one session of the interview as an outsider witness for the current research.

6.2 (Discussion V) whenever necessary.

5.3.5 Discussions through Higgins’ Self-guides vs Self-concepts (aligned)

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 5-18: Signposting Map highlighting 5.3.5 of Discussion III

Discussion III – 5.3.5

Relationships between Self-Guide (own) and Self-Concept

In section 5.1, although we cannot notice any successful higher education stories from the four participants (before University X), or even that they might face certain **problematic stories** in their **academic** history, all of them had experienced their **sparkling moments** and grasped their specific **self-efficacies** in non-academic aspects.

In section 5.3, each of the participants came across different reasons and restarted their higher education journey. Besides being the research field, University X did provide several factors to facilitate the four participants’ success. Firstly, it offered an opportunity to study in a recognised higher education institute in Hong Kong. No matter whether it was in part-time or full-time mode, it was an option for Hong Kong

Cantonese learners. Secondly, it targeted accurately and provided psychology-related courses, which fitted the local market need. This indeed attracted some of the participants at their initial subscription stage. Thirdly, the teaching and learning environment provided were constructive and comprehensive (e.g. quality of lecturers, variety of students, learning atmosphere, flexibility of administration, etc.).

With the aforementioned factors, all participants were able to expand/re-activate their dream (**Self-guide, /own**) and execute their existing **self-efficacies** (non-academic related). After tackling some newly faced **problematic stories**, all of them were able to construct their new **self-efficacies** and enjoyed their new **sparkling moments** throughout the higher education journey at University X.

Conclusion to 5.3.5

Low achieving Period (Before University X)

Co-incident makes one happier. The focus of section 5.1.1 is on **Self-Guide (other)**. If we concentrated on the low achieving period, it is easy to imagine participants were supposed to be led or guided by adults (parents or teachers). Therefore, in the cases of Coffee and Sugar, both accepted and followed their **Ought/other**. As a result, as mentioned in section 5.1.3, their **Actual/own** overlapped (co-incident) with **Ought/other** well (the thick red dotted circle). Comparatively, Coffee and Sugar were able to enjoy happier childhoods than Water and Magic.

Non-incident generates obstacles. On the other hand, in the cases of Water and Magic, although both recognised they were dominated by **Ought/own** internally, they still needed to face the mainstream expectation (e.g. academic performance) externally,

which were considered as the unavoidable **Self-guides (other)**. Without fulfilling them properly, both Water and Magic were noticeably less happy than Coffee and Sugar, where the situations lasted for years.

High achieving Period (During University X)

For differing reasons, all prior low achieving learners restarted their higher education study. It is apparent that all of them made their own choice and none of them were instructed or under any obligation to do so. As a result, achieving a bachelor's degree became their **Ideal/own**, which was supposed to be easy, as most University X learners achieved this. Interestingly, three of the participants (the exception being Sugar) raised their standards and set a higher goal, from achieving a bachelor's degree to achieving a First Class Honours. More difficult tasks stimulated their **Ought/own** to join, in order to tackle many more obstacles. Therefore, their **self-guides (own)** were shifting from **Ideal/own** to **Ought/own** throughout the process.

After reviewing the **self-guide** of the four participants, it can be concluded that the overall effects from **self-guide (own)** are strong and the most significant ones are **Ought/own** in this research. All of the participants were able to align their **self-concept** well with their **self-guide**.

No matter how and for what reasons, once their **Ought/own** was set aiming at academic aspects, high-achieving performance would be generated accordingly. This concurred with Zimmerman's (2000, as mentioned in section 2.7.1) "**Future Achievement**" and Valentine et al.'s (2004, as mentioned in section 2.7.1) "**Consistency in Achievement**".

5.4 Conclusive Summary of Chapter 5

As shown in Table 5F, the essential findings are summarised.

Starting from **Self-guides (other)**, most learners have to follow the trajectory of mainstream society, which is a kind of socialisation. Most parents or teachers are playing the role of transmitting their learning trajectory to the next generation. It is not for anyone to determine which is the proper way, and what is the best way to study. It is nice and encouraging to see learners who follow and are able to learn properly, but in reality there are questions such as what can we do if the learners are slow-learners or their talents do not overlap with the mainstream?

Throughout this small-scale qualitative research, we are grateful to be allowed to open up four participants' evolutionary stories. When they were facing their low-achieving periods, different **problematic stories** occurred. Because of the lagging to **Self-guides (other)**, their **Self-concepts** collapsed, which induced moments of stress, sadness, escaping and loss. By using the method of "externalisation", they named their **problematic stories** in a lively and realistic manner.

Fortunately, they came across another non-academic aspects. After exploration and experiencing successful episodes, they were able to freeze their feelings and memories as **sparkling moments** and grasp their first-time **self-efficacy**. Again, they were able to name their **self-efficacy**, which seems to correspond with their **problematic stories**.

	Before University X		HE at University X
	Academic	Non-Academic	Academic
<u>Research Question 1</u> What were the participants' self-guides during the periods? For whom and why were the self-guides set?	Coffee	Ought/own (strong), Mother, HE	Ought/own (strong), herself, HE
	Water	Ambiguous (weak)	Ought/own (strong), himself, Master
	Sugar	Ought/other (strong), Teacher, HE	Ought/own (strong), herself, Master
	Magic	Ought/own, herself, learning	Ideal/own (strong), herself, learning
<u>Research Question 2</u> What were the participants' self-concepts during the periods?	Coffee	Followed Self-guide	
	Water	Poor especially facing "stone"	
	Sugar	Ruined by academic incidents	Coincident with Self-guides & Developed Self-Efficacy
	Magic	Stable and healthy	
<u>Research Question 3</u> What were the relationships between participants' self-guides and self-concepts during the periods?	Coffee	Normal & Escaping	Feeling harsh but devoted
	Water	Stressful & Sad	Feeling harsh but devoted
	Sugar	Stressful & loss	Harmony
	Magic	Normal	Normal

Table 5F Summary of Essential Findings for Chapter 5

It is encouraging that they were courageous enough to re-start their missed higher education. Moreover, they were confident and brave enough to attempt a challenging **goal**. Although difficulties and harsh times appeared, they proved capable of overcoming all those obstacles. Some of them achieved this not for monetary rewards, but for self-exploration or to help others.

All in all, achieving a First Class Honours was just an academic label. In section 6.3, the true meanings of their journeys were recorded. The most valuable issues were: their **Self-guides (own)** overlapped with their **self-concepts**, which provided them with harmony, satisfaction and happiness.

In chapter 5, with the help of Higgins' model, for whom and why the four participants' goals were set was illustrated. However, regarding an academic gap: how were 4 participants be able to achieve a high performance in higher education, when they had never been successful previously?

I could not see how this gap could be filled by Higgins' model only, and therefore the fourth theme (Performance and Self-efficacy) was established, which involved concepts of **Self-efficacy** and **Sparkling Moments**. As shown in Table 5F, we are not able to see **Self-efficacy** and **Sparkling Moments** in the left column (academic, before University X), which can explain why the 4 participants were academically low-achieving. Once they had established these two elements as shown in the middle column (non-academic, before University X), they evolved from "unable" to "able". On the other hand, with the aspiration of "**sparkling moments**", they were dared to set a goal, even it had been unachievable previously. This enriched their **self-guide (own)**, which was the key for their high-achieving because of "high motivation". The right

column (academic, during University X) concluded that the journey was “harsh but devoted” and “happy”, which contrasts with the original “low motivation”, “unenjoyable” and “unhappy”.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Chapter Introduction

Starting from screening four high achieving Cantonese Chinese students, coming from different age groups, their common characteristics are having First Class Honours from an overseas higher education institute in Hong Kong. I am curious about how they could evolve from low achieving to high achieving? What factors affected them? And besides attempting and achieving a bachelor's degree as fundamental, what made them aim for a harsher (higher) goal?

In order to establish a stable academic infrastructure for the research, concepts such as **goals**, **motivation** and **self-efficacy** are applied. Regarding the turning points and evolutionary part, two special concepts are also applied for precise exploration, namely: Self and Affect model (Higgins 1987) and **Sparkling Moments** (Carey & Russell, 2003). Upon completion of the research, the intertwined relationships between “self vs. other”, “**sparkling moments vs. problematic stories**” and “non-academic vs academic” were explored.

Considering the limited number of participants, a qualitative semi-structured interpretative inquiry method was selected. Three rounds of face-to-face interview appointments, totaling 4.5 hours per participant, were conducted during 2017-18. This was then followed by using thematic analysis to organise and analyse the findings.

Although the findings were limited by the small sample size of the qualitative research, some ignored areas in Hong Kong higher education were reached and recorded systematically. Furthermore, the pioneering attempt to apply Higgins’ model for Hong Kong Cantonese Chinese could definitely provide the first batch of field data and generate some inspiration for future researchers in the relevant area.

In the current research, longitudinal discussion of three different stages was illustrated in Chapter 5 (Discussions I, II & III, as mentioned in Map 5-01). In chapter 6, cross-section comparison will be conducted. As shown in Diagram 6-01, Discussions IV, VI & VII are addressing research questions 1 to 3 accordingly. Regarding Discussion V, themes of “**Problematic Stories (PS) / Sparkling Moments (SM)**” and “**Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)**” will be illustrated together. Discussion V not only connects and fills the gaps among the three research questions (Discussions IV, VI & VII), but is also able to explain the evolutions of four participants and how they were able to transform from low achievers into high achievers.

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 6-01: Signposting Map showing Discussion IV to VII

6.2 Addressing the Research Questions by means of Cross-sectional Discussions

Discussion IV

RQ#1 What were the participants’ self-guides during the periods? For whom and why were the self-guides set?

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 6-02: Signposting Map highlighting Discussion IV

Discussion IV – 5.1.1

Academic Related (before University X)

“Others” being participants’ self-guides. Referring to section 5.1.1 and table 5C (section 5.2.3), three participants out of four belonged to this type. They are Coffee (diagram 5B), Water (diagram 5C) and Sugar (diagram 5D). The Ought/other of Coffee was mother and that of Sugar was teacher. They were related to completion of higher education. The effect exerted on them were strong and specific.

In Water's case, the apparent dominant **self-guides** appeared after he married. The **Ought/other** was from his wife and the **Ideal/other** was from his boss. Different to Coffee and Sugar, the effect exerted on Water was ambiguous.

Participants' own-self being his/her self-guides. In Magic's case, the dominant **self-guide** was **Ought/own** (diagram 5E) from herself. The effect exerted on Magic was not specific.

Discussion IV – 5.2.1

Non-academic Related (before University X)

Participants' own-self replacing other-self and being their self-guides. Referring to section 5.2.1 and Table 5C, all four participants belonged to this type. In the cases of Coffee (diagram 5J), Water (diagram 5K) and Sugar (diagram 5L), **Ought/own** was their **self-guide**. Three of them enjoyed **sparkling moments** and were able to name them expressively. Their **motivations** were related to recognitions seeking, challenge solving and champion seeking respectively.

In the case of Magic (diagram 5M), **Ideal/own** was her **self-guide**. She also enjoyed **sparkling moments** and was able to name them expressively. The **motivation** for Magic was related to satisfaction of curiosity.

Discussion IV – 5.3.1





Academic Related (during University X)

Diminishing effect of Others being participants’ self-guides. Referring to section 5.3.1 and Table 5E, three participants out of four belonged to this type. These are Coffee (diagram 5N), Water (diagram 5O) and Sugar (diagram 5P). The effect from **self-guides (other)** dropped drastically, becoming weak and not significant. This provided more room for participants’ **self-guides (own)**.

Participants’ own-self being his/her self-guides. Referring to section 5.3.3 (Table 5D & Table 5E), Magic was the only one who was guided by **ought/own** all the way. Interestingly, Magic could not grasp it clearly and consciously, and thus she described that the effect was not specific.

Discussion VI

RQ#2 *What were the participants’ self-concepts during the periods?*

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 	5.3.2 PS → 
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve 	5.3.4  / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 6-03: Signposting Map highlighting Discussion VI

Discussion VI – 5.1.3

Academic Related (before University X)

Others being participants' self-concepts. Referring to section 5.1.2 and Table 5D, three participants out of four belonged to this type. These are Coffee (diagram 5F), Water (diagram 5G) and Sugar (diagram 5H). Their **Ought/other** and **Ideal/other** initially followed their self-guides stably. Coffee was the only one who was able to maintain alignment for the whole period. Water's and Sugar's **self-guides** were then challenged/affected by different reasons.

Participants' own-self being his/her self-concepts. In Magic's case, the dominant self-guide was **Ought/own** (diagram 5I) from herself. Magic's self-concept followed her self-guides stably and healthily for the whole period.

Discussion VI – 5.2.3

Non-academic Related (before University X)

Participants' own-self being his/her self-concepts. Referring to section 5.2.2, since all **self-guides** were from the participants' own-self, they were able to enjoy recognition and satisfaction throughout the period. Besides generating **self-efficacy** for future use, they experienced **sparkling moments** where the joys were able to compensate for those disappointments generated from **problematic stories**.





Discussion VI – 5.3.3

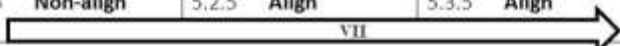
Academic Related (during University X)

Participants’ own-self being his/her self-concepts. Referring to section 5.3.2, since all **self-concepts** were from **own-self**, all participants were able to enjoy freedom to set their own goals and arranged themselves for **goal** achievement. Therefore, most relationships between **self-guides (other)** and **self-concepts** were harmonious.

Discussion VII

RQ#3 *What were the relationships between participants’ self-guides and self-concepts during the periods?*

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 	5.3.2 PS → 
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance/ Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve 	5.3.4  / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align



Map 6-04: Signposting Map highlighting Discussion VII

Discussion VII – 5.1.5

Academic Related (before University X)

Others being participants' self-guides. Without strong **motivation** and academic **ability**, **problematic stories** appeared for Coffee, Water and Sugar. This misalignment led to unhealthy and unsatisfied **self-concepts** in that period.

Participants' own-self being his/her self-guides. In Magic's case, although alignment of **self-concept** and **self-guide** happened, Magic was not able to learn well due to a hearing impairment. Problematic stories (named as "Boring") also appeared. The apparent difference was that Magic was the only participant who was able to get the HE offer by herself after secondary school. Unfortunately, Magic gave up on it because she preferred to start her career as soon as possible.

Self-efficacy. Among the four participants, health and academic related **self-efficacy** was not noticed.

Discussion VII – 5.2.5

Non-academic Related (before University X)

Participants' own-self being his/her self-guides. Referring to section 5.2.3, the joy and satisfactions generated were related to social relationships, no matter whether they were solving problems (Water and Magic) or seeking recognition (Coffee and Sugar). Such positive experiences not only escorted them throughout the period, but the generated **self-efficacy** (non-academic) was a critical and essential element for their later high-achieving **performance** at University X.

Discussion VII – 5.3.5

Academic Related (during University X)

Problematic Stories. Referring to section 5.3.3, only Water faced academic **problematic stories** during study at University X. It is subjective to determine whether the story is “problematic” or not. I have to trust and rely on each participant.

Sparkling Moments (Reinforcement). Referring to section 5.3.3, with the desire to chase for their feeling of **sparkling moments**, all participants set their **academic goal**. Then, all of them were able to transform their non-academic **self-efficacies** into academic ones during the period. Finally, they were able to create a new round of **sparkling moments** and re-enjoyed their joyful experience.

Relationships between **self-guide (own)** and **self-concept**. Referring to section 5.3.3, the relationships between **self-guide (own)** and **self-concept** were harmonious. With the freedom of setting their **self-guide (own)**, participants in fact treated their HE journey as a stepping stone (process) for them to acquire their satisfactions/joy.

Discussion V

RQ	Themes	Before University X		During University X
		Academic Related	Nonacademic Related	Academic (HE) Related
RQ #1	Self-Guides (SG)	5.1.1 SG	5.2.1 SG	5.3.1 SG
	PS/SM	5.1.2 PS	5.2.2 SM	5.3.2 PS → SM
RQ #2	Self-Concept (SC)	5.1.3 SC	5.2.3 SC	5.3.3 SC
	Performance / Self-Efficacy (SE)	5.1.4 -ve / SE	5.2.4 +ve / SE	5.3.4 SE / -ve → +ve
RQ #3	SG vs SC	5.1.5 Non-align	5.2.5 Align	5.3.5 Align

Map 6-05: Signposting Map highlighting Discussion V

6.3 Uncovering the Transformative Myths induced by Sparkling Moments

As mentioned in the caption title, this section connects all themes, which not only respond to the three research questions but also describe the **self-efficacy** migration of participants from non-academic to academic, from low achieving to high achieving (**performance**) and from “other-self” to “own-self” (from unaligned **self-concept** to aligned **self-concept**). Four transformative periods of participants will be discussed in upcoming sections.

Coffee: Transformation from “for Mum” into “as Mum & for Mum”

[Coffee] During the period of study at University X, the ultimate **self-concept** (**Actual/own**) of Coffee was **Ought/own**. In other words, Coffee was motivated and

Water: Transformation from “passive” (reactive) into “active” (proactive)

[Water] As mentioned in section 5.2.1, Water had already grasped a strong **self-guide (own)** and self-efficacy before studying at University X, but the nature was “passive” and “reactive”. In his career aspect, Water manipulated it successfully so that he was recognised by his clients and boss. He had been promoted to be a managerial post.

‘.... The trust from my clients was increasing because they recognised the values of my contributions. They were satisfied and benefited from small projects. Then, they asked for more from me....’

‘.... He (client) appreciated my attitude and that my contributions were higher than the prices... finally, he asked for more high-demand projects from me....’

In the academic aspect, as mentioned in sections 4.2 and 5.1.1, after giving up on the offers from an international institute, Water had no chance to perform in this area. Until joining a psychology-related short course for self-help reasons, Water restarted his passion for study and subscribed to University X. During the interviews, although Water did not have a satisfactory learning experience in his younger days, he was still an active learner.

‘.... Let me rethink what my learning attitude was: I really wanted to learn.... there were not any right or wrong topics... I don't need any concurrence from others. Provided the topic is interesting, perhaps it is relevant.... I want to explore what I like’

Water: Transformation from “Resources Lacking” into “Fruitful Resources full with

Hardware and Software”

The essential and critical turning point for Water’s break-through at University X can be concluded by 2 aspects: hardware and software.

For the “hardware” part, helpful hands were granted by lecturers so that Water was able to solve different technical learning obstacles.

‘.... I had a good relationship with the lecturer. He (lecturer) was so considerate, especially to new students like me.’

‘..... They (lecturers) taught me certain methods. Based on the new methods, I was able to resolve my stress. They were so nice. In the upcoming learning process, I applied the new methods, and I was able to handle a lot of vocabulary...’

‘.... Amazingly, I was able to get a grade A for those difficult subjects. This granted me lots of confidence. Then, I kept using these methods to finish my degree....’

For the “software” part, the interactive learning environment was co-constructed by students and lecturers at University X.

‘....they (teachers before University X) were too stubborn to follow the traditional teaching methods strictly. Therefore, they did not try, or accept, ways that were out of the box, or even any question raising. I would be stopped by “Shut Up”. This really blocked my exploration. I awoke later on and discovered that this is allowed. I am not a monster. Most of my questions are instead meaningful.’

'...I was so delighted for the lecturers' (during University X) appreciation of my behaviour (raising questions). They described mine as a kind of meaningful contribution to lessons.'

'...There were few of them (smart classmates)... after we formed a group, they were under my expectations. But we affected each other and the group evolved positively. For example, the second honours guy, he didn't think that it was pressure, instead, he improved and became aggressive. He thought that this was kind of fun and our atmosphere was relaxed... We evolved together unconsciously.'

Water: Transformed by combining “Active (Proactive) and “Fruitful with Resources”

In the study journey at University X, I can see Water pursuing a tough but clear goal. This promises the “**learning goal**” concept of Deci et al. (1996, as mentioned in 2.4.1). In order to achieve the goal, according to Water’s **self-guides** (philosophy), there was a lot of knowledge and human resources that Water saw as “resources”. Although the journey was tough and pressurised, Water’s **self-efficacy** was executed successfully and he was able to gather all “water”⁴⁴ (resources), and converge them into a “river”⁴⁵. At that moment, Water’s **self-guide** evolved from “passive”/“reactive” to “active”/“proactive”. Therefore, there was no “stone”⁴⁶ able to block Water’s way towards his First Class Honours goal and finally he was on his way to his Master’s degree at University Y.

Conclusion: During his <u>high achieving period</u> , Water’s Self-concept was dominated by his self-guide (own) (evolved from passive/reactive to active/proactive).

⁴⁴ Externalised Names according to Table 5B

⁴⁵ ibid

⁴⁶ ibid

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Sugar: Transformation from “bitter” to “the Sweetest”

[Sugar] Without apparent “**problematic stories**” in University X, Sugar was always waiting for a chance to grasp. As mentioned in section 4.1.3, the meaning of “Sugar” represents “Sweetness coming after bitterness is the sweetest” (translated from a Chinese idiom “先苦後甜”). Sugar’s previous academic related **problematic stories** were due to lack of goals, lack of chances and an overly aggressive classmate. Comparatively, upon grasping studying chance at University X and setting a clear goal towards her Master’s Degree, Sugar performed well by her own efforts and by strategically forming a study group. She handled the competitive relationship with other smart classmates and they evolved together. Moreover, she was always able to formulate her study plan in advance strategically. This practice not only ensured her schedule, but also balanced her work load. Sugar was able to squeeze in some time in order to visit her overseas boyfriend periodically.

‘... Through lots of monitoring and adjustment according to the timetable, I was able to arrange one term as a holiday, without taking any subjects. There was a resting term, which was my intentional plan, not an accidental one.... I did not generate this idea in the beginning. After I learnt about and became familiar with the school system, I dared to plan it.’

Conclusion: During her high achieving period, Sugar’s **Self-concept** was harmony.

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Magic: Transformation from “Strange” to “Magic”

[**Magic**] Similarly to Sugar, without apparent “**problematic stories**” at University X, Magic was also always waiting for a chance to grasp. As mentioned in section 4.1.4, the meaning of “Magic” represents “always viewing, thinking and exploring facts differently to the ways of others, which can be described as ‘Magic’ (or ‘Strange’)”. Magic demonstrated initiative and had been independent since she was a child. The major impact for her was the late awareness of her hearing impairment, which had affected her academic performance. The major deviation to her academic path was that she gave up the bachelor’s degree offer and became determined to start a career-oriented course. Once she had settled down in her career and life, Magic resumed herself and performed well as “normal behaviour”. She was the inborn learner and thinker, who normally performed specially.

Conclusion: During her high achieving period, Magic’s **Self-concept (Ought/own)** was normal. She subscribed to the course, attended the lessons, raised her questions and fulfilled all assignments and examinations. After this organising learning path, a high-achieving result was the outcome.

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It can be noticed that all **self-efficacies** (both before and during University X) were executed and proved to be successful elsewhere. Although they were not directly related to academic issues, with these previous **self-efficacies**, participants were dared to set **goals** on new occasions. According to Zimmerman (2008, as mentioned in section 2.7.1), participants were able to grasp and execute their “perceived **self-efficacy**”. All of them migrated their previous intelligence and persistence, so as to overcome the new obstacles in academic aspects (higher education).

6.4 Meanings of Participants' First Class Honours Award

Among the four participants, Water was the most conscious to the reputation of First Class Honours, while Coffee and Magic were mildly aware of its reputation. Regarding Sugar, since University X amended the system when she achieved the award (old system), she was finally granted a Second Class Honours (new system) instead.

Coffee It is obvious Coffee did not aim for her First Class Honours for career or academic purposes. Therefore, once Coffee became determined to start her second bachelor's degree, she wanted to complete it well. She always thought that as a role model for her daughters, all family members would appreciate and be inspired (encouraged) by her performance.

'... I think all of them are correlated. The meaning of "Super" is that when I accomplished something successfully, people around me would be proud of me. It is really difficult for me to express: when "Super" appears what will be the consequence, but what is the drive for it? I think the core goal is to satisfy them instead.'

Throughout the process, Coffee's **self-efficacy** "Super" was always by her side, and the ultimate **goal** of Coffee was not pleasing herself, but pleasing her family instead.

Water Starting from helping family members by himself, Water shifted his goal to evolve himself before he could help more people in the community.

'... It's quite contradicting for me! I am happier because I became stronger and am able to reach a high academic level....'

'.... It's worthy it! This is a re-birth and re-construction of my life. This is not only for myself! I believe the effect would be felt by my family. Perhaps this will be another rebirth opportunity. I aspire for it to be a feeling of rebirth.'

Before Water was able to fulfilled the professional qualification to help others, it is obvious that he felt satisfactory in proving his ability. Perhaps, this is a kind of compensation for his previous academic period.

Sugar Sugar bore a pre-assumed and clear goal to earn sufficient GPA in her Bachelor's Degree so as to ensure her further study on a Master's Degree. It is obvious that the core element of her goal was sufficient GPA, instead of the First Class Honours. Therefore, although her award was affected by the new system, which degraded it to a Second Class Honours, this disturbed neither her academic promotion nor her mood. Furthermore, Sugar expressed:

'.... I felt relaxed after I confirmed my admission to the Master's Degree at University Y.'

Magic Although Magic achieved her First Class Honours successfully and wore a different graduation crown at the ceremony, she was absolutely unconcerned about her identity.

'.... It (graduation ceremony) was meaningless! I left once I had got the certificate. I had no idea who to invite to take graduation photos with me.... I don't think the occasion is special at all.'

'.... I have no sentiments about the first honours award. I have no feelings towards this label.'

6.5 Final Summing Up

Dewey (1916, as cited in Pring, 2000:12) distinguished between educational and mis-educational activities. Activities classed as educational were those that led to further “growth”. A mis-educational activity or experience was something that blocked growth. The four participants were considered as “low achievers” (mis-educated) previously. After undergoing a certain process, they evolved and became “First Class honours graduates”, developing into “high achievers” (educated with growth). Based on the findings from the current study, the “First Class honours award” is neither a tangible nor a functional standard. None of the participants enjoyed any substantial material benefits due to the accolade. Instead, the award was of great symbolic significance to the participants (section 6.3), bearing different perceptions and meanings for each participant. That is one of the key findings of the current study.

Graduations from University X with a “First Class honours award” were just a milestone. There were different stages in the participants’ stories: before, during the achievement of the “First Class honours award” and after the study journey at University X. The common findings of participants in the current study were:

Before University X

- learning/studying are initiated by others, e.g. **Self-guides (other)** (except Magic); [→ RQ #1]
- they had no chance to participate in a bachelor’s degree previously (except Coffee);
- they faced different **problematic stories** and were not able to perform well in their previous studies; [→ RQ #2]

- mis-alignment of **Self-guides** and **Self-concepts** could not generate any **self-efficacy** for them; [→ RQ #3]
- they came across different non-academic **self-guides (own)** which aligned with their **self-concepts**; [→ RQ #1-3]
- **sparkling moments** were induced which imprinted deeply in their memory;
- their **self-efficacy** was thus established at a certain level before University X;

During University X

- they came across different reasons, **self-guides (own)**, to re-attempt their bachelor's degree at University X; [→ RQ #1]
- University X provided a different learning environment compared to their previous experience;
- they underwent changes during their study journey at University X;
- all processes of evolution involved significant people;
- they converted **self-efficacy** from non-academic to academic successfully;
- **sparkling moments** were induced again during their study journey at University X; [→ RQ #2]
- alignment of **Self-guides** and **Self-concepts** generate further meanings in their lives; [→ RQ #3]
- the knowledge obtained from the courses was functional and useful, which were merely beneficial to “**other**” (not for **own-selves**);
- the formal qualification (with GPA as a universal and recognised standard) obtained from University X served as a stepping stone for those participants who wished to study further (e.g. Water and Sugar).

Most of the participants came from different backgrounds and were at different stages

of life. Under the teaching and learning higher education environment provided by University X, each of them evolved in singular ways. After graduation, their rewards were multi-directional and differentiated. Per Dewey (1916, as cited in Pring, 2000:12), education concerns the cultivation of uniquely human capacities, those of “knowing”, “understanding”, “judging”, and “behaving intelligently”. Miseducation, by contrast, refers to obstacles that are accidental or forcibly imposed and which hinder or stunt the development of these capacities. As an insider researcher who having similar academic trajectory with four participants, through years of research works and analysis, I am grateful to revisit my higher education journey at University X as a researcher. Most importantly, I discover myself deeper and systematically, which I considered this is a kind of reward and satisfaction. This explains the word “grateful” I used above.

6.6 Personal Reflections

During the research journey, I came across a Chinese song on YouTube⁴⁷. The lyrics describe the relationships between certain phenomena in nature, for example kite and wind, rainbow and wind, rain and thunder, and so on. The most attractive point for me is the title of the song, which is “A Long Lens”. The composer described the relationships between couples as changing, the changes themselves being rendered perceptible by the “lens” the audience is adopting. I agree with this concept and considers it as a metaphor for all qualitative case studies. The original lyrics (Chinese) are listed and the English version was composed (with reference to the meaning of the translation) by myself.

⁴⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMouwVdmhY0>

看得見彩虹 我們卻都看不見風

Rainbows fly up high, covers trajectory of wind

於是愛看風箏被操弄

Kites are manipulated up and down

滿足好奇的瞳孔

Can you feel their passiveness?

突然間轟隆 倒也是仁慈的一種

All those harsh stories, fill with sparkle memories

不忍心看風箏被擺弄

Appearing alternative orderly

雨季總那麼有系統

Can you recognise the fate?

看得見彩虹 我們卻都看不見風

Rainbows fly up high, covers trajectory of wind

蠻橫是愛結束的幫兇

Failures fertilize hopes and dreams

我們當時還不懂

Grasp them all with you someday.

突然的重逢 倒也是仁慈的一種

Turning upside down, determination is option

總算能換個緯度想通

It can be understood up to you

我感激緣份這系統

Efficacy will be parked beside

(Efficacy should be there abided)

喔 長鏡頭

Oh, memories

我們的回憶沒拍下太多淚流

Let's help and treat me as new born fiancé

只有涼風藍海和沙丘

With wedding gifts and souvenirs

到哪天碰頭

All are well arranged

你輕巧迴避我荒謬 的舊傷口

Trust me, just follow and step on my old footprints

故事結構 就不必追究

Who knows the truth, there's nothing to lose...

The readers of this study and I are not the participants. The “authentic” relationship between the “First Class honours award” and each participant is difficult for outsiders to understand. Therefore, it is hard (perhaps impossible) for us to grasp the “truth” of the matter. Furthermore, I would like to state, in conclusion, that none of us can judge or claim that we understand them (their stories). Conversely, if we change/adjust our attitude, all of us can appreciate their stories by using a proper “lens”. Further evidence for this is provided by Morrison (2007:20), who asserts that the research is conducted “with” and “for” rather than “on” participants, and this reflects the need both to empathise with participants and to penetrate the meaning frames in which they operate.

Besides the simple matter of appreciating their progress, I believe we (readers like you, being different stakeholders) could definitely learn something from their stories, rich as they are in experience. As Pring (2000:16) stated:

.... Education refers to those activities, on the whole formally planned and taught, which bring about learning....

Besides acting as a kind of solid field data for future researches of higher education Cantonese learners, I hope this study can also encourage all temporary low-achieving learners.

6.8 Limitations of the Study

Even though this body of research has the undeniable merit of offering valuable insights into low-achievers in Hong Kong, it still has certain limitations.

1. The first limitation concerns the small sample size. Since the study involved only 4 case studies, the results cannot be generalised. According to Tracy (2010, p.840), this cannot entirely satisfy the demands for “rich rigour”.
2. The second limitation is rooted in the short duration of the research process.
3. It is readily acknowledged that the current research is exploratory and that there are problems with the statistical model.
4. The use of Cantonese as the interviewing medium creates unique difficulties in the method of translation, as idiomatic Cantonese cannot be rendered perfectly into English. According to Tracy (2010, p.840), this cannot entirely satisfy “rich rigour”.
5. The nuances of the concepts *ideal* and *ought* eluded both the participants and me from time to time.
6. It can be predicted, unsurprisingly, that the findings of the current study will not be very conclusive. According to Tracy (2010, p.840), this cannot entirely satisfy the criteria that would certify the current research as being a “significant contribution” to the field.

Despite this, the upcoming research needs to be planned conscientiously, as the results are sensitive and reliant upon the data that will be collected. In spite of the various limitations of the current research, I believe that the findings from this paper are intriguing enough to secure phase 2 research on a similar topic, which will involve larger sample size and more resources.

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Appendix I

Informed Consent Form, Four Case Studies of Chinese First Honor Graduates

To whom it may concern,

I have read the Research Summary and have had a chance to ask questions about the project, and I am comfortable with the answers that I have been given. I know that I can ask more questions whenever I like.

I have volunteered to participate and won't get paid for participating in the research project.

I agree to participate in the research. I understand that I do not have to participate in it if I don't want to and that I can withdraw at any time during the interview. I know that I don't have to answer any questions I don't like.

If I pull out and with my agreement, Edgar will be allowed to use any information that I have given him before then, and he will be able to write down that I have stopped participating. But he won't be able to make me keep participating if I don't want to.

I agree to be voice taped and be scripted for the research project.

I understand the research will take place over 12 months. During that time Edgar will interview me 2-3 times, each interview will last for no more than 90 minutes.

I understand that the risks of the research are, e.g.: for a project which requires participants to discuss trauma or depression, that talking about those things with Edgar might make me feel worse.

I understand that Edgar wants to write about the research in his EdD dissertation in University of Bristol.

I understand that my name will NOT be mentioned in any texts that come out of this research.

I understand that anyone can read the report that comes out of this research, and that even people on the other side of the world might see it, maybe on the internet. That's OK with me.

Edgar will give me and University X a copy of report that he writes or produces out of the research.

I understand that Edgar will hold copyright in any books, articles, databases or conference papers produced as a result of this research.

I know that, if I am worried about the research project, I can contact Edgar on 852 [REDACTED].

I know that if I have any concerns I can raise these with:

University of Bristol
Dr. Janet Orchard
janet.orchard@bristol.ac.uk

or

Ms Alice Hung
alice@ulu.edu.hk

I have read this Informed Consent Form and I agree with it.

Name of the research participant	Signed by the research participant
Mr. AAA BBB CCC 25/12/2017	25/12/2017

Sample of Informed Consent for Participants before First Interview

Appendix II

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