

Chief Mohlomi's Indigenous Epistemology of a Healing Career: A Psychobiographical Analysis



Maximus Monaheng Sefotho¹  & Lauren Elizabeth Lindstrom^{1&2} 

¹ Department of Educational Psychology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

² School of Education, University of California – Davis, USA.

ABSTRACT

This study was a psychobiographical analysis of Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of a healing career. Mohlomi was an unconventional thinker and the great-grandson of the king of the Bakoena, Monaheng, who lived in pre-colonial Africa. Mohlomi is generally referred to as the Socrates of Africa, a philosopher par excellence. He was also known as a great healer. The study answered the question: *How can Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of healing practices help bridge the Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) psychological healing practices gap and promote Afrocentric indigenous healing practices?* Savickas' Career Construction Theory was used as a lens to interpret Chief Mohlomi's career of healing. Employing a single-case design, biographical data was examined to understand Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of healing practices. The findings underscore Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of healing, healing for well-being, healing for inclusion and healing as nation-building. This study contributes to the field of psychology in general through the use of a psychobiography. In particular, the study contributes to the fields of career development and psychiatry based on the lessons learned from Chief Mohlomi's epistemology of healing.

Correspondence

Maximus Monaheng Sefotho

Email:

msefotho@uj.ac.za

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INTRODUCTION

As a historical figure, Chief Mohlomi is claimed by both Lesotho and South Africa. He was born at Fothane near the present-day town of Fouriesburg in the Free State Province of the Republic of South Africa, towards the north of the modern-day District of Butha-Buthe in Lesotho.¹ Lesotho and South Africa are inextricably linked as Lesotho is right in the middle of the Republic of South Africa as an independent sovereign kingdom. The two countries share people across their borders as many have relatives in either country. Chief Mohlomi, although born in South Africa, played a key role in laying the foundations for the formation of the Basotho nation. He was born of the Bakoena clan during the great migration of groupings of people in search of fertile and safe land for settlement and establishment of

¹ L. B. J. Machobane, "Mohlomi: Doctor, Traveller and Sage," *Mohlomi, Journal of Southern African Historical Studies* 2 (1978): 5–27; D Frédéric Ellenberger, *Histori Ea Basotho* (Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1956).

nations. Chief Mohlomi received an ancestral instruction “to study medicine and to become a healer of bodies and minds.”²

Since traditional healing among the pre-colonial healers was not documented through the written word, gaps could have existed over time in the oral preservation of the medicinal knowledge of Chief Mohlomi. Oral history is believed to change over time, therefore original information is likely to get lost or distorted. However, African historiography proposes that oral history has generally been the historical consciousness of many nations globally as was the “case in ancient Egypt, and in ancient Greece”.³

The study aims to explore and understand Chief Mohlomi’s indigenous epistemology of healing practices. The study seeks to revisit the healing methods and relate them to current practices in support of the United Nations sustainable development goal: SDG 3 – Good Health and well-being. The study further aims to reignite debates on the relevance of indigenous epistemologies to current psychological healing practices and how these could add value to contemporary psychobiography.⁴ The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic pushed many people towards traditional ways of healing in the face of imminent demise when no medication was available.⁵ The research question that underlies the study is: How can Chief Mohlomi’s indigenous epistemology of healing practices help bridge the WEIRD current psychological healing practices gap and promote Afrocentric indigenous healing practices?

The psychobiographical accounts of traditional healers have been rare in academic disciplines and research, especially career psychology. Notably, historical figures such as Chief Mohlomi can now feature in contemporary psychobiography.⁶ Historical books dominate research and the curriculum, but not psychobiographical accounts which address the psychological experiences of historical figures. Psychobiography as a research method has the potential to enrich research that can be conducted in mainstream psychology on historical figures.⁷ Ponterotto et al. encourage training on psychobiography in North America.⁸ This study also encourages the inclusion of indigenous epistemologies in psychobiography training within African contexts. The study aims to promote synergy between indigenous epistemology of healing practices and psychobiography in studying the lived experiences of great personalities in African history who made remarkable contributions to their nations. Du Plessis and Du Plessis describe this synergy as “an easy alliance.”⁹ Along with Mohlomi, Credo Mutwa’s lived experiences could unearth interesting discourses from which great lessons could be drawn. However, the study’s main focus is Chief Mohlomi, who was a traditional healer and nation-builder.

This article is divided into seven sections. The article presents historical antecedents of Mohlomi’s psychobiography. Mark Savickas’ career construction theory is presented as appropriate and provides a theoretical framework for this study. The “Traditional Career Inspiration” section briefly sketches the ‘careerography’ of a sociohistorical context that inspired Chief Mohlomi to construct a healing career. The researchers argue that phenomenology and Afrocentricity are posited as African agency that promotes context-based philosophies such as Chief Mohlomi’s philosophy of Setho. The subsequent sections illuminate Chief Mohlomi’s ‘setho’ philosophy of peaceful de-stigmatization and well-being; illustrate the methodology followed for the psychobiographical account of Chief Mohlomi’s indigenous healing

² Max du Preez, “The Socrates of Africa and His Student: A Case Study of Pre-Colonial African Leadership,” *Leadership* 8, no. 1 (2012): 7–15.

³ Monsuru Babatunde Muraina, “Oral Tradition as a Reliable Source of Historical Writing: Arguments for and Against and Implications for Historical Writing in Education,” *Oral Tradition* 22 (2015), 17.

⁴ Zoltán Kóváry, “Psychobiography as a Method. The Revival of Studying Lives: New Perspectives in Personality and Creativity Research,” *Europe’s Journal of Psychology* 7, no. 4 (2011): 739–77.

⁵ Nazi Nejat et al., “Prevention and Treatment of COVID-19 Using Traditional and Folk Medicine: A Content Analysis Study,” *Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences* 31, no. 6 (2021); Belachew Umeta Chali et al., “Traditional Medicine Practice in the Context of COVID-19 Pandemic: Community Claim in Jimma Zone, Oromia, Ethiopia,” *Infection and Drug Resistance* Volume 14 (September 2021): 3773–83, <https://doi.org/10.2147/IDR.S331434>; Dâmaris Silveira et al., “COVID-19: Is There Evidence for the Use of Herbal Medicines as Adjuvant Symptomatic Therapy?,” *Frontiers in Pharmacology* 11 (2020): 581840; Peter M Mphekgwana, Mpsanyana Makgahlela, and Tebogo M Mothiba, “Use of Traditional Medicines to Fight COVID-19 during the South African Nationwide Lockdown: A Prevalence Study among University Students and Academic Staff,” *The Open Public Health Journal* 14, no. 1 (2021).

⁶ Kóváry, “Psychobiography as a Method. The Revival of Studying Lives: New Perspectives in Personality and Creativity Research.”

⁷ Tim Kasser, “Integrating Psychobiography into Psychology’s Mainstream: Introduction to the Special Section.,” *American Psychologist* 72, no. 5 (2017): 430.

⁸ Joseph G. Ponterotto et al., “Psychobiography Training in Psychology in North America: Mapping the Field and Charting a Course,” *Europe’s Journal of Psychology* 11, no. 3 (August 20, 2015): 459–75, <https://doi.org/10.5964/ejop.v11i3.938>.

⁹ Carol Du Plessis and Graham Du Plessis, “An Easy Alliance: The Relationship Between Phenomenology and Psychobiography: Special Edition on Psychobiography and Phenomenology,” *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* (Taylor & Francis, 2018), 1.

and provide some recommendations emerging from the study. The “Conclusion” section provides some concluding remarks.

Historical Antecedents of Mohlomi’s Psychobiography

Chief Mohlomi enjoys the status of a historical personality among Basotho of the pre-literate societies.¹⁰ Estimated to have been born in 1720, Mohlomi distinguished himself as a person with special gifts.¹¹ After he was born, his elderly grandfather Monaheng, upon being introduced to Mohlomi and holding him in his arms, experienced orthostatic hypertension¹² which numbed his body.¹³ After his experience of mystic self-transcendence, Monaheng declared that Mohlomi would be a great man whose legacy would be told by generations to come.¹⁴ His name, Mohlomi emerged from an experience of building a new village for his father Monyane, as a symbolic gesture of establishing new villages from then on and was called *Mohlomi oa metse*.¹⁵

Mohlomi grew up a much-loved grandchild by his grandfather Monaheng, who instructed that the *Bakoena* rituals be performed on the child to strengthen and protect him.¹⁶ *Bakoena* is a chieftainship clan to which Chief Monaheng and his people belonged. This is a clan whose totem is a crocodile (koena), hence, *Bakoena. Koena*, was a great grandfather of the *Bakoena* clan.¹⁷ Apart from his grandfather, Mohlomi enjoyed tremendous love from his grandmother who raised him. It was traditional among Basotho that children grew up nurtured by grandparents. His grandmother was a great orator who told him fairy tales and taught him riddles and great stories that shaped his philosophy of life.¹⁸ Psychobiography is perceived as “the intensive life-span study of an individual of historic significance in socio-cultural context using psychological and historiographic research methods and interpreted from established theories of psychology.”¹⁹ Mayer, van Niekerk, Fouché and Ponterotto concur that psychobiographies “...clarify and illuminate historically significant experiences” such as that of Chief Mohlomi.²⁰

Traditional Career Inspiration

During Chief Mohlomi’s lifetime, few career choices including ‘careerography’, perceived to have great potential for “intensive study of the individual life in sociohistorical context” existed.²¹ However, contextual issues shaped the kind of careers young people could aspire towards even then. From the stories of his grandmother, one particularly caught Chief Mohlomi’s attention, and that was the ability of traditional doctors to influence and shape people’s lives. She told him that the doctors have the power to heal or to harm, but the good ones only do good to promote well-being.²² Today, this would be interpreted to address the third United Nations sustainable development goal: SDG 3 - Good Health and Wellbeing to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages. The good doctors “are selected by their ancestors.”²³ Theirs is a calling to build and heal nations.²⁴ Much of what Chief Mohlomi heard were stories of how the traditional doctors travel widely, healing and helping those in need.²⁵ It appears that Chief

¹⁰ Robert K Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, vol. 5 (sage, 2009).

¹¹ Ellenberger, *Histori Ea Basotho*.

¹² Jens Jordan et al., “Orthostatic Hypertension: Critical Appraisal of an Overlooked Condition,” *Hypertension* 75, no. 5 (2020): 1151–58.

¹³ Samson Mbizo. Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1960).

¹⁴ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

¹⁵ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

¹⁶ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

¹⁷ Zacharias Aunyané Matšela and Ramoshebi I Maboee Moletsane, *Mantlatilane* (Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1988).

¹⁸ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

¹⁹ Joseph G. Ponterotto, “Psychobiography in Psychology: Past, Present, and Future,” *Journal of Psychology in Africa* 25, no. 5 (September 3, 2015): 379, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14330237.2015.1101267>.

²⁰ Claude-Hélène Mayer et al., “Psychobiography Beyond WEIRD?,” in *Beyond WEIRD: Psychobiography in Times of Transcultural and Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 1, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28827-2_1.

²¹ Joseph G. Ponterotto and Jennie Park-Taylor, “Careerography: Introducing a New Tool for Research, Theory Development, Practice, and Training in Career Psychology,” *Journal of Career Development* 48, no. 1 (February 1, 2021): 3–6, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845319867429>.

²² Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

²³ T Sodi et al., “Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study,” *International Journal of Health Promotion and Education* 49, no. 3 (2011): 101–10.

²⁴ Lindelwa Judith Mpono, “Traditional Healing among the Nguni People” (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2007).

²⁵ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

Mohlomi was able to distinguish between the significant and the insignificant from the traditional doctors' stories he heard.²⁶

Chief Mohlomi was greatly inspired by the traditional career of becoming a doctor from the stories his grandmother told him. He would usually request his grandmother to tell him more stories about doctors. She then became aware that indeed Chief Mohlomi had developed a great interest in becoming a doctor. His grandfather then arranged for Chief Mohlomi to understudy Rasebolai who taught him medicinal herbs for healing.²⁷ This could be related to the internship in the training of psychologists and medical internships for medical doctors. Generally, this type of calling manifests itself through a dream.²⁸ Similarly, Chief Mohlomi was called to healing in a dream he had during his initiation; a tradition central to Basotho to be trained on how to be a man.²⁹ This was to inculcate a sense of being morally apt and responsible family men. Such training is the foundation of an African episteme that allows traditional healers to learn the trade of healing.³⁰ However, traditional healing is enshrined in challenges of secrecy and not shared easily.³¹ Thus, Mohlomi was also warned by Rasebolai not to go about sharing the secrets of healing he learned from him.³² Nonetheless, it is a phenomenological experience that is particular and perhaps Afrocentric.

Phenomenology and Afrocentricity

Phenomenology as a philosophy and a method of inquiry has been extensively applied in the fields of philosophy and research.³³ Two main distinctions of phenomenology are descriptive and interpretive phenomenology.³⁴ The Heideggerian view of interpretive-hermeneutic phenomenology gives precedence and meaning to the lived experiences such as that of Chief Mohlomi as the subject of this paper.³⁵ Phenomenology has been interpreted to also play a pivotal role in the field of psychology.³⁶ Chief Mohlomi's lived experiences portrayed him as a healer of psycho-somatic illnesses.³⁷ In honour of this great man, Basotho named the only mental hospital in Lesotho, Mohlomi Mental Hospital.³⁸ This is anchored on his healing repertoire of mental illnesses among the many other ailments. The phenomenon of his healing methods was driven by deep mysticism and transcendence that allowed him to be shown which herbs to use for what ailments.³⁹ Mysticism and invocation of the ancestors is perceived to be an Afrocentric experience.⁴⁰

Afrocentricity as a philosophy of the African phenomenon drives "the Afrocentric posture", or a sense of "Afrocentric narratology" that crafts psychobiographies such as that of Mohlomi.⁴¹ Afrocentricity rejects the "psychological and historical dislocation [that] lay at the heart of the African cultural and social crisis."⁴² This study argues that this crisis does not acknowledge the phenomenon of Chief Mohlomi's

²⁶ Barbara Tuchman, "Distinguishing the Significant from the Insignificant," *Radcliffe Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (1996): 7.

²⁷ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*.

²⁸ Sodi et al., "Indigenous Healing Practices in Limpopo Province of South Africa: A Qualitative Study."

²⁹ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*.

³⁰ Wade W Nobles, Lesiba Baloyi, and Tholene Sodi, "Pan African Humanness and Sakhu Djaer as Praxis for Indigenous Knowledge Systems," *Alternation Journal*, no. 18 (2016): 36–59.

³¹ Seth Asare-Danso, "The Traditional Approach to the Management of Diseases in Ghana," *Legon Journal of Sociology* 2, no. 2 (2005): 69–80.

³² Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*.

³³ Anne Flood, "Understanding Phenomenology," *Nurse Researcher* 17, no. 2 (2010); Danuta M Wojnar and Kristen M Swanson, "Phenomenology: An Exploration," *Journal of Holistic Nursing* 25, no. 3 (2007): 172–80; Lynne M Connelly, "What Is Phenomenology?," *Medsurg Nursing* 19, no. 2 (2010): 127.

³⁴ Connelly, "What Is Phenomenology?"

³⁵ Sadruddin Bahadur Qutoshi, "Phenomenology: A Philosophy and Method of Inquiry.," *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 5, no. 1 (2018): 215–22.

³⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty and John F Bannan, "What Is Phenomenology?," *CrossCurrents* 6, no. 1 (1956): 59–70; Tholene Sodi, "A Phenomenological Study of Healing in a North Sotho Community" (University of Cape Town, 1998), <http://hdl.handle.net/11427/9601>.

³⁷ Machobane, "Mohlomi: Doctor, Traveller and Sage."

³⁸ Christopher Chitereka, "People with Disabilities and the Role of Social Workers in Lesotho," *Social Work & Society* 8, no. 1 (2010): 82–93; Bernadett 'Malehlohonolo. Damane, "Nurses' Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices towards Mental Illness in the Mafeteng District, Lesotho" (University of the Free State, 2018).

³⁹ Peter F Omonzejele, "African Concepts of Health, Disease, and Treatment: An Ethical Inquiry," *Explore* 4, no. 2 (2008): 120–26.

⁴⁰ Stephen Ababio, "Mystical Medicine and Body Art in Asante Culture," *Journal of Medicinal Plants* 7, no. 6 (2019): 171–74.

⁴¹ Molefi Kete Asante, "The Philosophy of Afrocentricity," in *The Palgrave Handbook of African Philosophy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2017), 237, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59291-0_16.

⁴² Asante, "The Philosophy of Afrocentricity," 231.

indigenous epistemology of healing and apply it to current health-related issues. Thus, acknowledging and applying would be embracing “The mental health capabilities of Indigenous people [that] have sustained them for millennia”.⁴³ The Afrocentric paradigm is less well embraced by African scholars, researchers, and practitioners to employ as a lens through which to resolve African health issues. Afrocentricity propels the “primacy of the African experience for African people”.⁴⁴ The African experience is unique in that, it emerges from the African soul and addresses the African phenomenon which can only be appreciated from an African perspective. Afrocentricity is posited as an African agency that promotes context-based philosophies such as Chief Mohlomi’s philosophy developed through his travels among the African nations as a healer.⁴⁵

Chief Mohlomi’s ‘setho’ philosophy of peaceful de-stigmatization and well-being

Chief Mohlomi is colloquially referred to as the Socrates of Africa, an example of pre-colonial brilliance.⁴⁶ Chief Mohlomi’s Western philosopher contemporaries included Montesquieu, Voltaire, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Kant.⁴⁷ During his time, Chief Mohlomi’s life experiences were surrounded by warfare, cannibalism, killings, plunder and struggle for power.⁴⁸ Despite this, his axiological stance could be equated to the unconditional positive regard of Carl Rogers. However, he chose to embrace the philosophy of peace. According to du Preez,

“Many versions of what Mohlomi heard the ancestors say survived in the oral traditions of the Free State and Lesotho. What all of them have in common was that Mohlomi was told to be a man of peace and love; to be fair and just; to see all people as his brothers and sisters; to have compassion and patience; and to give special consideration to children, women and old people. He was also told to study medicine and to become a healer of bodies and minds.”⁴⁹

Literature generally refers to botho/ubuntu, as a philosophy, which in our interpretation means humanity or humanness.⁵⁰ Botho is the nature of a human being.⁵¹ Therefore botho/ubuntu is a composite of principles and characteristics of being human. However, the essence of the word philosophy implies a process, not a noun. This, researchers propose to call Mohlomi’s philosophy ‘setho’, an inclination towards botho. *Setho* is a propensity towards botho, a positionality towards the phenomenon of botho experienced as “connected by human consciousness.”⁵² *Setho* represents a worldview.⁵³ Futhwa defines *setho* as “the indigenous belief system of the people of Afrika in the supernatural...dealing with relationships between human beings, nature and the universe.”⁵⁴ Mokolatsie agrees with Otlogetswe that *setho* entails, a way people do things and positive manners of working with others.⁵⁵

From the *setho* perspective, Chief Mohlomi treated all people as equal, deserving of respect and human dignity. Through peaceful means, he de-stigmatized individuals, communities and nations. In his

⁴³ Elias Mpfu et al., “Mental Health and Indigenous People,” in *Handbook of Social Sciences and Global Public Health*, ed. P. Liamputtong (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 1–16, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-96778-9_112-1.

⁴⁴ Ama Mazama, “The Afrocentric Paradigm: Contours and Definitions,” *Journal of Black Studies* 31, no. 4 (2001): 388.

⁴⁵ Asante, “The Philosophy of Afrocentricity.”

⁴⁶ du Preez, “The Socrates of Africa and His Student: A Case Study of Pre-Colonial African Leadership.”

⁴⁷ du Preez, “The Socrates of Africa and His Student: A Case Study of Pre-Colonial African Leadership,” 9.

⁴⁸ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

⁴⁹ du Preez, “The Socrates of Africa and His Student: A Case Study of Pre-Colonial African Leadership.”

⁵⁰ Ramathate T H Dolamo, “Botho/Ubuntu: Perspectives of Black Consciousness and Black Theology,” *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 40 (2014): 215–29; Monaheng Mahlatsi, “Botho/Ubuntu Philosophy: Education from Childhood to Adulthood in Africa,” *International Journal of Scientific & Technology Research* 6, no. 8 (2017): 94–98; Puleng LenkaBula, “Beyond Anthropocentricity—Botho/Ubuntu and the Quest for Economic and Ecological Justice in Africa,” *Religion and Theology* 15, no. 3–4 (2008): 375–94; Moeketsi Letseka, “Educating for ≪I≫Ubuntu/Botho&L;I≫: Lessons from Basotho Indigenous Education,” *Open Journal of Philosophy* 03, no. 02 (2013): 337–44, <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2013.32051>.

⁵¹ Mamothibeli Sehlabo, 19 September 2021.

⁵² Rasha Alsaigh and Imelda Coyne, “Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research Underpinned by Gadamer’s Philosophy: A Framework to Facilitate Data Analysis,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 20 (January 4, 2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069211047820>.

⁵³ Mamothibeli Sehlabo, 19 September 2021.

⁵⁴ Fezekile Futhwa, *Setho: Afrikan Thought and Belief System* (Fezekile Futhwa, 2011), 6.

⁵⁵ Christopher. N. Mokolatsie, “Revisiting Virtue Ethics and Spirituality of Botho: A Study of an Indigenous Ethic of Character Formation in the Moral Thought and Practice of Basotho ” (University of South Africa, 2019); Thapelo Joseph. Otlogetswe, “The Difference between Setho and Botho,” 2015, <https://otlogetswe.wordpress.com/2015/11/19/the-difference-between-setho-botho/>.

many travels, he married many wives to establish peace. He paid *bohali* for men who did not have the means to marry. Guma relates a story of how Chief Mohlomi healed a man whose body was full of sores, rejected by healers and isolated from the community.⁵⁶ He made him feel human again and restored his dignity and well-being. For the purposes of this paper, *setho* is adopted as a philosophy of Chief Mohlomi considering his indigenous epistemology of healing. Mofuoa considers *setho* as a philosophy of life and/or belief systems that Mohlomi could have used in healing the nation.⁵⁷ In the field of psychology, *setho* could also be interpreted from positive psychology as promoted by Martin E. P. Seligman.⁵⁸ Central to Seligman's work are the notions of learned optimism and authentic happiness.⁵⁹ Chief Mohlomi's attitude towards life was engulfed in optimism. Healing others, mainly those seriously ill was a sign of optimism in the power of healing to restore authentic happiness. It must be emphasized that the current study does not fall within what Mayer et al. called the WEIRD, that is; western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic, but is anchored on Afrocentricity and Chief Mohlomi's *setho* philosophy.⁶⁰

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although the concept of a career emerged long after Chief Mohlomi's healing work, Savickas' Career Construction Theory is deemed appropriate as a theoretical framework for this study. The Career Construction Theory corresponds to Chief Mohlomi's indigenous healing that was mobile.⁶¹ The central tenet of the career construction theory is based on the epistemology that individuals built their careers.⁶² The theory's vocational characteristics are that it is "differential, developmental, and dynamic."⁶³ Chief Mohlomi was a different man, and he practised healing in a different way based on his ethics of *setho*.⁶⁴ From a developmental psychological perspective, Chief Mohlomi built his career from a traditional healer Rasebolai, but he continually adapted and perfected it to his style.⁶⁵ The dynamism of Chief Mohlomi's healing work exposed him to embrace humanity in ways that transcended the thinking of his time. He became one of the richest, benevolent, and ethical indigenous healers of his time.

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

The method employed for this study is psychobiographical.⁶⁶ The study was conducted within the interpretative qualitative paradigm⁶⁷ and a "historical-interpretive psychology" tradition⁶⁸ premised on a single case psychobiography research design.⁶⁹ The existential philosophical approach of the study was epistemological and exploratory-descriptive of Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of healing to illuminate current psychological healing practices.⁷⁰

⁵⁶ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*.

⁵⁷ Mofuoa, "The Normative Grounding of Social Responsibility in African Emerging Markets: A Setho Ethics Approach," 495.

⁵⁸ Stephanie Ann Hooker, "Seligman, Martin," in *Encyclopedia of Behavioral Medicine*, ed. M.D. Gellman and J.R. Turner (New York, NY: Springer New York, 2013), 1763–64, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-1005-9_1542.

⁵⁹ Martin. E. P. Seligman, *Learned Optimism* (New York: Knopf, 1990).

⁶⁰ Mayer et al., "Psychobiography Beyond WEIRD?" 3.

⁶¹ Mark. L. Savickas, "The Theory and Practice of Career Construction," in *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*, ed. R. W. Lent and S. D. Brown (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2005), 42–70.

⁶² Savickas, "The Theory and Practice of Career Construction."

⁶³ Cort W Rudolph, Hannes Zacher, and Andreas Hirschi, "Empirical Developments in Career Construction Theory," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* (Elsevier, 2019).

⁶⁴ Khali Mofuoa, "The Normative Grounding of Social Responsibility in African Emerging Markets: A Setho Ethics Approach," in *Corporate Social Responsibility: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (IGI Global, 2019), 489–508.

⁶⁵ Mingke Zhuang et al., "Examining a Sequential Mediation Model of Chinese University Students' Well-Being: A Career Construction Perspective," *Frontiers in Psychology* 9 (April 25, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00593>.

⁶⁶ Deirdre A Kramer, "A Psychobiographical Analysis of Faith, Hope, and Despair in Suicide," *Journal of Adult Development* 9 (2002): 117–26.

⁶⁷ Charles Kivunja and Ahmed Bawa Kuyini, "Understanding and Applying Research Paradigms in Educational Contexts.," *International Journal of Higher Education* 6, no. 5 (2017): 26–41.

⁶⁸ Kőváry, "Psychobiography as a Method. The Revival of Studying Lives: New Perspectives in Personality and Creativity Research," 750.

⁶⁹ Paul Fouché, Ruvé du Plessis, and Roelf van Niekerk, "Levinsonian Seasons in the Life of Steve Jobs: A Psychobiographical Case Study," *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 17, no. 1 (2017).

⁷⁰ Fouché, du Plessis, and van Niekerk, "Levinsonian Seasons in the Life of Steve Jobs: A Psychobiographical Case Study."

This study also followed a Gadamerian-based research method.⁷¹ Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) was a German philosopher who argued against the idea that meaning could only be found through objective methods and advocated philosophical hermeneutics.⁷² While originally used to understand Biblical texts, hermeneutics made its way into educational research as the art of understanding and the theory of interpretation.⁷³ Hermeneutics supports an idiographic approach within the qualitative methodology.⁷⁴ Luthans and Davis consider an idiographic approach a "subjective" approach to methodology, which yields meaning that may not be generalised.⁷⁵ Psychobiographical methods have been established as legitimate scientific endeavours within psychology.⁷⁶ From the qualitative research, psychobiographical methods could be considered ideographical and are poised to produce a rigorous analysis of texts. To mine meaning from texts, the first author followed the following steps as suggested by Alsaigh and Coyne:⁷⁷

1. *Deciding upon a research question*
2. *Identification of preunderstandings*
3. *Gaining understanding through dialogue with participants*
4. *Gaining understanding through dialogue with text*
5. *Establishing trustworthiness*

Deciding upon a research question: Chief Mohlomi falls within the category of “non-WEIRD, extraordinary individuals” about whom research is limited.

The identification of preunderstandings was supported by Gadamer’s ontological view that researchers are deeply influenced by the traditions of their culture.⁷⁸ Working in the field of career psychology with a focus on the career transitioning of people with disabilities, the first author developed a desire to understand Chief Mohlomi’s epistemology of healing, especially in relation to mental health. The first author started this pursuit with a presentation titled: *African Mental Health: composition and Understanding of the Human Mind and Well-being*, at the University of California-Davis’ Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopmental Disorders (MIND) Institute in March 2019. The main protagonist of the presentation was Chief Mohlomi aimed at situating the Afrocentric view within general mental health. From there the first author was invited to the Center for Mind and Brain Institute of the University of California -Davis by a renowned scholar Doctor Clifford Saron. The first author spent an afternoon with some of his neuroscientist PhD students in April 2019. Doctor Saron’s work also includes *Botho/Ubuntu: A Dialogue on Spirituality, Science, and Humanity*, which was held in Gaborone, Botswana in August 2017.⁷⁹

Gaining understanding through dialogue with participants was complex as Chief Mohlomi is a historical person. However, the first author filled this gap with conversations with Professor LBBJ Machobane (May 2019), a Mosotho historian and Mrs Mamothibeli Sehlabo (June and October 2019), a custodian of the Sesotho culture.

Gaining understanding through dialogue with text was achieved through critical and analytical reading of books and articles on Chief Mohlomi. Phenomenological hermeneutics guided the dialogue

⁷¹ Valerie Fleming, Uta Gaidys, and Yvonne Robb, “Hermeneutic Research in Nursing: Developing a Gadamerian-based Research Method,” *Nursing Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (2003): 113–20.

⁷² Jeff Clark, “Philosophy, Understanding and the Consultation: A Fusion of Horizons,” *British Journal of General Practice* 58, no. 546 (January 1, 2008): 58–60, <https://doi.org/10.3399/bjgp08X263929>.

⁷³ Loren G. Agrey, “Philosophical Hermeneutics: A Tradition with Promise,” *Universal Journal of Educational Research* 2, no. 2 (February 2014): 188–92, <https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2014.020211>.

⁷⁴ Clark, “Philosophy, Understanding and the Consultation: A Fusion of Horizons.”

⁷⁵ Fred Luthans and Tim R V Davis, “An Idiographic Approach to Organizational Behavior Research: The Use of Single Case Experimental Designs and Direct Measures,” *Academy of Management Review* 7, no. 3 (1982): 381; Linda Finlay, “Exploring Lived Experience: Principles and Practice of Phenomenological Research,” *International Journal of Therapy and Rehabilitation* 16, no. 9 (2009): 474–81.

⁷⁶ Carolina du Plessis, “The Method of Psychobiography: Presenting a Step-Wise Approach,” *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 14, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 217, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2017.1284290>.

⁷⁷ Alsaigh and Coyne, “Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research Underpinned by Gadamer’s Philosophy: A Framework to Facilitate Data Analysis,” 3.

⁷⁸ Alsaigh and Coyne, “Doing a Hermeneutic Phenomenology Research Underpinned by Gadamer’s Philosophy: A Framework to Facilitate Data Analysis,” 2.

⁷⁹ <https://ubuntudialogue.org/about-the-dialogue/>

with the texts the first author read. Data analysis equally provides a deep understanding of the text for the researcher by making “the active life of meaning construction carried out by human subjectivity...”.⁸⁰

Ethical Considerations

Research on human subjects generally presents ethical dilemmas. Research ethics protects human subjects against violation of their rights. In the case of historical persons' psychobiographical studies, since they may be deceased for a long time, “no informed consent is required”.⁸¹ However, the deceased must also be respected, and researchers ought to ‘weigh(s) . . . privacy and reputation against the public interest when disclosing or formulating facts. . .’⁸² Such was the approach in the psychobiographical analysis of Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of a healing career toward phronesis.⁸³ The lessons learned from this study carry little chance of affecting or invading the privacy of the surviving relatives since he died in about 1815.⁸⁴ Instead, the historical consciousness of the lessons learned has the potential to inform healing, especially in mental health. Our hermeneutical mindset allowed us to make hermeneutically legitimate and ethical decisions in undertaking the study.⁸⁵ No ethics application was required.

Sampling Procedures, Data Extraction and Analysis

Chief Mohlomi was purposively selected as a historical figure who played a critical role in the healing of the sick in the pre-colonial era. Chief Mohlomi is especially unique or significant in regard to the indigenous epistemology of healing.⁸⁶ His extraordinary gift of healing and the building of society pre-dates current systems and potentially holds lessons for interdisciplinary approaches to healing.⁸⁷ Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research as it provides for the identification and selection of information-rich cases such as the life story of Chief Mohlomi.⁸⁸ A literature search was conducted from source documentation of a few published history books: Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane, *Historia ea Basotho* and *The Basutos*.⁸⁹ Some articles included: *The Socrates of Africa and his student: A case study of pre-colonial African leadership*. Doctoral Dissertation: *Nurses' knowledge, attitudes and practices towards mental illness in the Mafeteng District, Lesotho*.

Data was extracted from the reading of selected books and articles and conversing with the experts. The analysis of the case of Chief Mohlomi's indigenous healing was guided by the process of extracting, categorising, and organising data that responded to the aim of the study as suggested by Yin.⁹⁰ The first author is a native Sesotho speaker who has some publications based on the analysis of Sesotho documents including traditional music.

In extracting data, ETL (extract, transform, load) was followed.

- **Extract:** Data was pulled from history books, articles, and notes made from expert interviews conducted.
- **Transform:** The extracted raw data needed first to be translated from Sesotho into English, cleaned up to remove redundancies, fill gaps, and categorised.
- **Load:** The transformed data was transferred to a template for analysis.

⁸⁰ Doris Elida Fuster Guillen, “Qualitative Research: Hermeneutical Phenomenological Method.,” *Journal of Educational Psychology-Propositos y Representaciones* 7, no. 1 (2019): 218.

⁸¹ Christine S Davis, Heather Powell Gallardo, and Kenneth A Lachlan, “Straight Talk about Communication Research Methods,” 2017, 111.

⁸² Antoon De Baets, “A Declaration of the Responsibilities of Present Generations toward Past Generations,” *History and Theory* 43, no. 4 (2004): 143.

⁸³ Oscar Vergara, “Ética Biomédica y Prudencia,” *Cuadernos de Bioética* 26, no. 2 (2015): 267–77.

⁸⁴ Max Du Preez, “The Socrates of Africa and His Student: A Model of Pre-Colonial African Leadership,” *Google Privacy Policy*, 2009.

⁸⁵ Vergara, “Ética Biomédica y Prudencia.”

⁸⁶ Fouché, du Plessis, and van Niekerk, “Levinsonian Seasons in the Life of Steve Jobs: A Psychobiographical Case Study.”

⁸⁷ Julius Omona, “Sampling in Qualitative Research: Improving the Quality of Research Outcomes in Higher Education,” *Makerere Journal of Higher Education* 4, no. 2 (2013): 169–85.

⁸⁸ Heather Ames, Claire Glenton, and Simon Lewin, “Purposive Sampling in a Qualitative Evidence Synthesis: A Worked Example from a Synthesis on Parental Perceptions of Vaccination Communication,” *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 19 (2019): 1–9.

⁸⁹ Tinasha Ndroo and Roelf van Niekerk, “A Psychobiographical Analysis of the Personality Traits of Steve Jobs's Entrepreneurial Life,” *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* 19, no. 1 (August 30, 2019): 29–39, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20797222.2019.1620421>.

⁹⁰ Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003).

Although ETL processes have been a companion to database technology, they have been appropriated in this article for the processing of Chief Mohlomi’s psychobiographical data.⁹¹ ETL was used in this study as an analytic framework to process data from psychobiographical accounts. It must be noted that this is in no way near the magnitude of how ETL is used in processing big amounts of data. In this process, extraction involved the pulling of usable information, targeting relevant pieces of information from books, articles and notes to address the aim of the study. *Diagram 1* represents the process followed to process the data and induce themes.




Technique <i>Data extraction, data categorisation and data organisation /analysis</i>			
Extract 	Transform 	Load 	
Themes induced			
Mohlomi’s indigenous epistemology of healing	Healing for wellbeing	Healing for inclusion	Healing as nation-building
Categories			
A sense of ‘connectedness’	Spirituality as wellbeing	Non-discriminative healing (p. 95)	Treating barrenness for childbirth (pp 15 – 17)
A quest for wholeness	Psychological wellbeing	Ethical healing practices (p. 98 -)	Ending a tradition of killing twins (<i>Mafahla a morena</i>)
A belief in a higher being or beings	Communality as a fountain of wellbeing	<i>Khotso ke khaitsele</i> (Peace is my sister) (p. 113)	Healing patients from neighbouring chiefdoms (p 92)

Diagram 1: Metrix of data extraction and analysis – Author developed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are presented as themes that have been induced from the texts analysed. The main text that provided rich data has been the book titled: *Morena Mohlomi, Mora Monyane*.⁹² The thematic presentation of the results is not supported by verbatim accounts but by meanings extrapolated from the reading of texts for psychological salience, which denotes distinctiveness, prominence, and obviousness.⁹³

Theme 1: Mohlomi’s Indigenous Epistemology of Healing

Indigenous healing has been practised in many nations of the world. Indigenous healing remains a central part of community healing systems globally. In oral tradition-based societies, knowledge about such practices as indigenous healing is usually lost as it is not documented. Mohlomi’s indigenous epistemology of healing stemmed from knowledge gathered from his training by Rasebolai.⁹⁴ He was also shown medicinal plants through dreams.⁹⁵ Three themes were induced from the analysis of books and articles, as well as consultations with the two experts on Lesotho history and culture. Invoking ancestors and appealing to the spiritual world, that is addressing the mind of the patient.⁹⁶ For the traditional African, health is not just about the proper functioning of bodily organs. Good health for the African consists of mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional stability [of] oneself, family members, and community; this

⁹¹ Panos Vassiliadis and A. Alkis Simitsis, “Extraction, Transformation, and Loading,” in *Encyclopedia of Database Systems*. (Berlin: Springer, 2009), 1095–1101.

⁹² Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

⁹³ Nick C Ellis, “Salience, Cognition, Language Complexity, and Complex Adaptive Systems,” *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 38, no. 2 (2016): 344.

⁹⁴ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

⁹⁵ Machobane, “Mohlomi: Doctor, Traveller and Sage.”

⁹⁶ Peter White, “The Concept of Diseases and Health Care in African Traditional Religion in Ghana,” *HTS: Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): 1–7.

integrated view of health is based on the African unitary view of reality.⁹⁷ Good health for the African is not a subjective affair.⁹⁸ Traditional healers do not separate the natural from the spiritual, or the physical from the supernatural. The healer deals with the complete person and provides treatment for physical, psychological, spiritual and social symptoms.⁹⁹ Psychocultural appropriateness: Observance of cultural principles of healing guide the healing processes of African indigenous healers.

A sense of 'connectedness'

A sense of 'connectedness' (social connectedness) was imperative for emerging nations in sub-Saharan Africa. Although many nations were dispersed by the *lifaqane* wars, people sought to be connected as they found unity in strength against their enemies. Connectedness, *tlamahano*, became a central value to strive towards. *Kopano ke matla* (Unity is strength), *lets'oele le beta poho* (multitudes overcome challenges), *nonyana tsa siba le le leng li fofa 'moho* (birds of a feather flock together) are some of the idioms that signify a sense of connectedness. Social connectedness is essential to the life of Basotho. Since social connectedness is a fundamental human need, the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness (SCSC) is doing phenomenal work in linking the people of the world to combat social isolation. Although technology has decreased physical distances between people by creating virtual spaces to meet, humanity is living in an age of isolation.¹⁰⁰ In response to the isolation, Arnfred suggests revisiting African tradition.¹⁰¹

A quest for wholeness (Botho/Ubuntu)

A quest for wholeness is enshrined in recognising and embracing fulfilment in one's life, physically, mentally, and spiritually. In Sesotho, *botho kaofela* (wholeness of being human), encapsulates the essence of wholeness. "Motho Ke Motho Ka Batho Babang", also known as "A Person is a Person Because of Other People" is central to the quest for wholeness anchored on co-existence and co-dependence.¹⁰² Morena Mohlomi as a chief and healer of his people desired good health for the community. When the community experiences fewer illnesses, a sense of wholeness abounds which could be assumed as co-dependency through the reconstruction and caregiving.¹⁰³ Although Haaken, also described co-dependency as "inadequacies and develop[ment of] an excessive sensitivity to the needs of others", the researchers view it as a healthy way of communal support.¹⁰⁴ Anchored in Botho/Ubuntu, wholeness has the capacity to promote co-existence and harmony.¹⁰⁵

A belief in a higher being or beings

Molimo (God), and *Balimo* (the Ancestors) have been central to the life of Basotho. Rakotsoane describes the higher being as the celestial being or sky divinity known to Basotho before the arrival of missionaries with their foreign religion.¹⁰⁶ In the Sesotho language, names carry particular significance. For instance, *mo* in *Molimo* signifies one who, and *limo* signifies the skies. Thus, *Molimo* is a supreme being who lives in the skies. Basotho believe that human beings do not die, but transition to the world beyond our own where they continue living. Therefore, *ba* (those who are) *limo* (in the skies), refers to those who are also living in the skies after they transition from the world. Morena Mohlomi as a Mosotho and a custodian of

⁹⁷ Asare-Danso, "The Traditional Approach to the Management of Diseases in Ghana."

⁹⁸ Omonzejele, "African Concepts of Health, Disease, and Treatment: An Ethical Inquiry."

⁹⁹ White, "The Concept of Diseases and Health Care in African Traditional Religion in Ghana."

¹⁰⁰ Kim Samuel, *On Belonging: Finding Connection in an Age of Isolation* (Abrams, 2022).

¹⁰¹ Signe Arnfred, "Re-Visiting 'African Tradition', Re-Thinking Gender and Power: Learning from Fieldwork in Northern Mozambique," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 32, no. 3 (2023): 286–306.

¹⁰² Ingrid Bacon et al., "The Lived Experience of Codependency: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis," *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction* 18, no. 3 (2020): 754–71.

¹⁰³ Janice Haaken, "From Al-Anon to ACOA: Codependence and the Reconstruction of Caregiving," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 18, no. 2 (1993): 321–45.

¹⁰⁴ Haaken, "From Al-Anon to ACOA: Codependence and the Reconstruction of Caregiving," 322.

¹⁰⁵ Nomlaungelo Ngubane and Manyane Makua, "Ubuntu Pedagogy—Transforming Educational Practices in South Africa through an African Philosophy: From Theory to Practice," *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 13, no. 1 (2021): 1–12.

¹⁰⁶ Francis Lobiane.C. Rakotsoane, "The Southern Sotho's Ultimate Object of Worship: Sky-Divinity or Water-Divinity?" (University of Cape Town, 2001).

culture believed in *Molimo* and *Balimo*.¹⁰⁷ During his initiation, Mohlomi had a dream in which he was taken to the land of his ancestors.¹⁰⁸ There was revealed to him in a vision, his future and instructions on how to go about leading the nation.¹⁰⁹ This is akin to Saron's investigation on "how brain signals can predict behavior, and implications for free will."¹¹⁰

Theme 2: Mohlomi's Healing for Wellbeing.

Basotho customarily greet each other in very special ways asking one another about their health status, that is, their wellbeing. The philosophical depth of the manner of greeting is indicative of the centrality of vigilance for each other's wellbeing. Guma demonstrated this desire for each other's wellbeing through a case where Mohlomi tested the veracity of charlatans who displayed as traditional healers.

*From one of his healing missions, he was compensated with a specially made set of two shields so beautiful that they could only be used for ornamentation. He enthusiastically showed them to his community with marked pride. One day he called the community, specifically the diviners and asked them to find a culprit who stole one of the shields. Many diviners did their tricks and accused many different people. Only one diviner said he disagreed with all the accusations made and that only one person knew where the shield was. At this point Mohlomi decided to expose the false diviners and asked: Only one shield was missing, but so many people accused; it was not possible that many of them could steal one shield.*¹¹¹

Chief Mohlomi concluded the exposure by warning and reprimanding the false diviners that instead of healing the people, they accused them falsely and caused unnecessary discord. He chased all of them from his village and said only the good healers must remain for the wellbeing of the community.¹¹² The holistic well-being of people is when their spirituality, mental, and commonality are portrayed in the physical being. This is supported by the etymology of healing which "comes from the old-English term *haelen*, meaning 'wholeness' and often refers to the process of moving toward a desired wholeness or achievement of cohesion."¹¹³

Spirituality as Wellbeing

Ethno-Spirituality denotes the nature of spirituality in African traditions for the well-being of societies. This was different from the contemporary spirituality that emerged from Euro-western societies. According to Mohlomi, a true traditional hear, is one who has been anointed by the ancestors "O khantselitsoe ke Balimo."¹¹⁴ The researchers' interpretation is that the anointing is spiritual, and anointing is for one to preserve the well-being of the community. The theme of spirituality as well-being should be interpreted through some dimensions of African cosmology, described as "...the African's search for the meaning of life...cognitive mappings and theologies."¹¹⁵ Basotho cosmology aligns with the perception that "Man in traditional African cosmology is caught in a matrix of spiritual relationships. There are the unbreakable ties to the Supreme Being, who created the earth and everything therein for man and his progeny. These ties are unbreakable because man's existence is ontologically dependent upon his Creator."¹¹⁶ This dependency on the creator presupposes assurance of well-being, mentally putting one at

¹⁰⁷ Maboe G Mokgobi, "Understanding Traditional African Healing," *African Journal for Physical Health Education, Recreation and Dance* 20, no. sup-2 (2014): 24–34.

¹⁰⁸ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*, 77.

¹⁰⁹ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*, 78.

¹¹⁰ Dirk De Ridder and Sven Vanneste, "The Predictive Brain and the 'Free Will' Illusion," *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (2013); Wendy, Hasenkamp. *Cliff Saron Embracing Complexity*. [Audio podcast]. December 21, 2021. <https://podcast.mindandlife.org/cliff-saron/>.

¹¹¹ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*, 78.

¹¹² Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*, 107.

¹¹³ Kimberly Firth et al., "Healing, a Concept Analysis," *Global Advances in Health and Medicine* 4, no. 6 (November 1, 2015): 46, <https://doi.org/10.7453/gahmj.2015.056>.

¹¹⁴ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*, 107.

¹¹⁵ Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu, "The Dimensions of African Cosmology," *Filosofia Theoretica: Journal of African Philosophy, Culture and Religions* 2, no. 2 (2013): 533–55.

¹¹⁶ Sulayman Nyang, "Essay Reflections on Traditional African Cosmology," *New Directions* 8, no. 1 (1980): 8, <https://dh.howard.edu/newdirections/vol8/iss1/8>.

ease. For Pietilä, “the Basotho cosmology or regime of value, ...[can be] associated with life-generating potency.”¹¹⁷

Psychological Well-being

It is laudable that Lesotho has a mental hospital, Mohlomi Psychiatric Hospital named after this iconic man, Chief Mohlomi.¹¹⁸ The historiographical depictions of Chief Mohlomi, especially by Guma portray him as a traditional healer who was gifted with healing mental illnesses.¹¹⁹ Psychological well-being is a *sine qua non* for a physically and emotionally healthy nation. Chief Mohlomi promoted psychological well-being among his people. That promotion resonates with current approaches to mental health perceived as the “absence of mental illness and the presence of psychological well-being.”¹²⁰ Basotho developed a habit of consciously enhancing their psychological well-being through ‘*Ho imamela*’ (loosely translated meaning, to listen to one’s thought processes or mind. This exercise can be equated to the current exponentially growing field of mindfulness and training of the mind.¹²¹ “Consequently, contemplative practice and meditation training are associated with a range of profound and mystical-type experiences, including internal unity, transcendence, sacredness, noetic quality, and deeply felt positive affect.”¹²²

Ironically, Lesotho occupies the number one position in suicide rates among its youth, topping the world record as the fourth leading cause of death among people aged 15–29 years.¹²³ This sad reality is an antithesis to the epistemology of the traditional healing of Chief Mohlomi. Lesotho needs to seriously investigate factors that propound such high rates of suicide among her youth. This worrisome situation calls for “...proactive suicide-prevention strategies in uncertain times, [especially investigating the relationship between] suicide and economic uncertainty.”¹²⁴ Table 1 below provides the statistics of six countries among which Lesotho features the highest percentages. These represent country rates as presented.

Table 1: Six countries showing higher female than male suicide rates over a 17-year period

Average Total Suicide Rate per 100,000 people	Male-female suicide rate ratios by Year					
	Country	2016	2015	2010	2000	Range
28.2	Lesotho	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7-0.7
10	China	0.95	0.9	0.8	0.8	0.8-0.95
8	Myanmar	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.4	0.4-0.7
6.6	Bangladesh	0.8	0.8	0.6	0.8	0.6-0.8
4.6	Morocco	0.7	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.6-0.7
3.4	Pakistan	0.97	0.97	0.9	0.8	0.8-0.97

Source: Adapted from Pridmore & Pridmore (2020).

Evidently, “75% of deaths by suicide occur in low- and middle-income countries” and Lesotho is one of the poorest countries in the world.¹²⁵ Reasons for suicide in Lesotho may not currently be known,

¹¹⁷ Tuulikki Pietilä, “Basotho Blankets: Ownership and Appropriation,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 29, no. 1 (2023): 128.

¹¹⁸ Pulane Maphats’ oe, “Patient Satisfaction Survey on the Quality of Psychiatric Care at Mohlomi Psychiatric Out-Patient Clinic in Lesotho” (Wits University, 2014).

¹¹⁹ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor’a Monyane*.

¹²⁰ Yi-Yuan Tang, Rongxiang Tang, and James J. Gross, “Promoting Psychological Well-Being Through an Evidence-Based Mindfulness Training Program,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 13 (July 10, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2019.00237>.

¹²¹ Nicholas T. Van Dam et al., “Mind the Hype: A Critical Evaluation and Prescriptive Agenda for Research on Mindfulness and Meditation,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 13, no. 1 (January 10, 2018): 36–61, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691617709589>.

¹²² Anthony P Zanesco et al., “The Occurrence of Psychologically Profound, Meaningful, and Mystical Experiences During a Month-Long Meditation Retreat,” *Mindfulness* 14, no. 3 (2023): 606–21.

¹²³ Kathryn L. Lovero et al., “Suicide in Global Mental Health,” *Current Psychiatry Reports* 25, no. 6 (June 13, 2023): 255. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11920-023-01423-x>.

¹²⁴ S. Tolga Er, Ender Demir, and Emre Sari, “Suicide and Economic Uncertainty: New Findings in a Global Setting,” *SSM - Population Health* 22 (June 2023): 1, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2023.101387>.

¹²⁵ Sarah Atieno Ouma et al., “Developing a Suicide Prevention Action Plan in Kisumu County, Kenya,” *Public Health Challenges* 2, no. 3 (2023): 1.

but perhaps lessons could be learned from Chief Mohlomi's ways of maintaining a healthy psychological well-being for Basotho. Generally, data on the causes of suicide is difficult to obtain due to the complexity of the phenomenon.¹²⁶ However, Lesotho must find ways to drastically decrease the rate of suicide among her people. Chief Mohlomi's philosophy of *setho* seems to be relevant to the sustainable development goal: SDG 3 – Good health and well-being. Although SDG 3 – good health and well-being drives human health in general, Lesotho has not fully embraced and implemented Chief Mohlomi's *setho* philosophy adequately. The World Health Organization's latest report places Lesotho at the apex of all countries of the world with the highest suicide rate of 28.2¹²⁷ out of a total population of 2,007,201 million persons.¹²⁸ However, there is insufficient knowledge on what causes such a high prevalence of suicide in Lesotho.

Theme 3: Chief Mohlomi Healing for Inclusion.

This theme is illustrated by a story of a man whose body was rotting with an unknown disease and was shunned by healers and the community.¹²⁹ Chief Mohlomi healed him so he became part of the community once again. Healing for inclusion equals restoration of human health for equitable treatment and well-being. Healing for inclusion as practised by Chief Mohlomi promoted equitable health outcomes among community members. Chief Mohlomi's inclusive healing was an example of enhancing healthcare equity.¹³⁰ Lessons from the type of healing from Chief Mohlomi's experiences of indigenous healing could be perceived as "educating for indigenous health equity."¹³¹ Thus, the idea is not to replace other types of healing approaches but rather to build bridges between indigenous and non-indigenous ways of healing.

Theme 4: Mohlomi's Healing as Nation-building.

The pride of a Sesotho family is the children born from the parents to bear their name. Where families were unable to bear children, traditional healers were consulted.¹³² Morena Monaheng, the grandfather of Chief Mohlomi suffered for a while before his first child was born. Chief Mohlomi's other competencies in healing included treating barrenness for childbirth.¹³³ Based on the traditions of the time, Morena Monaheng had to allow one of his twins to be killed because at the time, twins were considered as ominous and could bring misfortune to the nation.¹³⁴ Morena Monaheng, allowed the community to decide whether one of the twins should be killed or not, and the decision was to let the child live.¹³⁵ This decision brought about a paradigm change among Basotho, ending a tradition of killing twins (Mafahla a morena).

Chief Mohlomi did not only heal physical ailments. He was aware that if the nation was afflicted even by natural phenomena such as drought, there would be no crops for harvest. A worried nation would not be easy to govern. He therefore learned rainmaking to heal the nation's mind from worry about hunger.¹³⁶ One of the key roles played by Chief Mohlomi was to be an advisor to the Basotho future King Moshoeshoe I and other chiefs to embrace peace and rule the nations peacefully.¹³⁷ As Mofuoa observes, "...Mohlomi's medicine and rain-making travels enabled him also to preach peace and resolve conflicts through peaceful means in societies he visited".¹³⁸ This strongly epitomises healing as nation-building.

¹²⁶ Johanne Renaud et al., "Suicidal Ideation and Behavior in Youth in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: A Brief Review of Risk Factors and Implications for Prevention," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 13 (December 6, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2022.1044354>.

¹²⁷ Saxby Pridmore, Saxby Pridmore, and William Pridmore, "Suicide Is Impacted by Culture: Gender Suicide Rates," *Neurology and Neurobiology*, January 30, 2020, 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.31487/j.NNB.2020.01.02>.

¹²⁸ Bureau of Statistics, *2016 Population and Housing Census (PHC) Report, Maseru, Lesotho*, 2018.

¹²⁹ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*.

¹³⁰ Annette J. Browne et al., "Enhancing Health Care Equity with Indigenous Populations: Evidence-Based Strategies from an Ethnographic Study," *BMC Health Services Research* 16, no. 1 (December 4, 2016): 544, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-016-1707-9>.

¹³¹ Rhys Jones et al., "Educating for Indigenous Health Equity: An International Consensus Statement," *Academic Medicine* 94, no. 4 (2019): 512–19.

¹³² Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*.

¹³³ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*, 15-17..

¹³⁴ Goabilwe Nnanishie Ramaeba, Boikanyego Sebina, and Wazha Lopang, "Speaking Double: A Socio, Phonological and Semantic Analysis of Naming Twins in Botswana," *Botswana Notes and Records* 52 (2020): 45–55.

¹³⁵ Guma, *Morena Mohlomi Mor'a Monyane*.

¹³⁶ Khali Mofuoa, "A Mosotho Model of Ethical Leadership," *The International Journal of Ethical Leadership* 9, no. 1 (2022): 64–81.

¹³⁷ Du Preez, "The Socrates of Africa and His Student: A Model of Pre-Colonial African Leadership."

¹³⁸ Mofuoa, "A Mosotho Model of Ethical Leadership," 66.

The heraldic motto: "Khotso, Pula, Nala", meaning Peace, Rain, and Prosperity is the basis of nation-building in Lesotho.

Healing Patients from Neighbouring Chiefdoms

Chief Mohlomi was an ambulant healer, who travelled extensively throughout Southern Africa. His mission was to heal people even from neighbouring and far-flung communities. In today's language, healing patients from neighbouring communities could be equated to the decentralization of health care.¹³⁹ Ambulant healing could equally be equated to today's telemedicine or telehealth where practitioners reach patients from their own contexts, especially remote areas.¹⁴⁰ Chief Mohlomi's approach to healing pre-empted sharing of resources in health care. He did not perceive only healing his community as sufficient. He wanted to reach out to as many people as possible in the promotion of health care. Equally, he used healing for peace-building as neighbouring nations would, out of reverence to him, not attack Chief Mohlomi's people but collaborate with them.

Discussion Summary

This study set out to answer the question: How can Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of healing practices help bridge the Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) psychological healing practices gap and promote Afrocentric indigenous healing practices? Savickas' career construction theory was a theoretical framework that guided the study. The study used psychobiography to analyse the life of Chief Mohlomi indigenous epistemology of healing. The key findings indicated the importance of healing for well-being, healing for inclusion and healing as nation-building as important lessons from the study. The implications of these findings point towards the importance of revisiting Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of healing to be used to heal the current ills in society such as the high rates of suicide among the youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The study revealed that social isolation could be one of the sources of high suicide rates among Basotho youth. Future research is recommended to find ways that could promote a sense of connectedness to obviate suicidal tendencies.
- Ethno-spirituality was indicated as Africans lacking a sense of meaning. We recommend that ethno-spirituality be investigated to illuminate how it can be used to promote well-being and a sense of putting Basotho mentally at ease as a healing method.
- Mainstreaming use of Chief Mohlomi's philosophy of 'Setho' to include and promote psychological well-being among Basotho.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the psychobiographical analysis of Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of a healing career has demonstrated the construction of a career in healing in pre-colonial times. Savickas' theory of career construction guided the extrapolation of themes as indigenous practices that could inform today's healing practices. The traditional career inspiration Mohlomi drew from his grandmother and the healer Rasebolai resonates with what could be interpreted to be his subjective life experience. Healing for wellbeing was central to Mohlomi's daily activities and it symbolised a life-design framework for constructing a career. Healing for inclusion relates to meaningful choices that mirror the spirit of Botho/Ubuntu of communality. Healing as nation-building is indicative of the central construct of construction that symbolises the aim of Savickas' theory. The study has been able to strongly demonstrate that Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of healing practices can help bridge the Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) psychological healing practices. It can also promote Afrocentric indigenous healing practices. Some implications for practice based on Chief Mohlomi's indigenous epistemology of healing practices could include Botho/Ubuntu-driven healing practices in

¹³⁹ Sabine Saade et al., "What Barriers Could Impede Access to Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents in Africa? A Scoping Review," *BMC Health Services Research* 23, no. 1 (April 6, 2023): 348, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-023-09294-x>.

¹⁴⁰ Abid Haleem et al., "Medical 4.0 Technologies for Healthcare: Features, Capabilities, and Applications," *Internet of Things and Cyber-Physical Systems* 2 (2022): 12–30, <https://podcast.mindandlife.org/cliff-saron/>.

contemporary times. Healing for psychological well-being could be emphasised in today's healing practice to transcend only healing the body.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Prof. Maximus Monaheng Sefotho is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology (with a specialisation/focus on Career Guidance and Disability) at University of Johannesburg, South Africa. His research and teaching work focus on Career Choice/Construction within the sphere of Contemporary Careers: Protean and Boundaryless as well as hephapreneurship (A concept he coined). Prof. Sefotho was the first registered member of the South African Career Development Association (SACDA), which he serves as a board member up to this day. Prof. Sefotho contributed in the development of the competency framework for career development practitioners and currently has developed an interest in the transition of differently abled persons from home through to the world of work. His later work has emphasised an Afrocentric approach that is driven by the philosophy of Ubuntu.

In search of an Ubuntu Model of Career Development, Prof. Sefotho interrogates harmonising Ubuntu with Euro-Western models in addressing equity, social justice and avoiding harmful beneficence.

Dr. Lauren Lindstrom is a Professor and former Dean of the School of Education at the University of California, Davis - USA. Dr. Lindstrom has focused her career on developing innovative career development programs and improving post-school outcomes for young adults with disabilities. Her research examines the interplay of individual factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, disability and family expectations, with system level factors such as school services, educational policies, and barriers in the workplace. Over the last 25 years, she has developed school and community based programs and disseminated findings through publications, products, national and international conference presentations. Dr. Lindstrom is a member of the Graduate Group in Education at UC Davis, a faculty affiliate with the UC Davis MIND Institute, and a Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of Johannesburg, Department of Educational Psychology.