



Optimal personality functioning: An existential Franklian psychobiography of Noel Chabani Manganyi (1940–2024)

Lulu Mtimkulu and Paul J. P. Fouché *

Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Humanities, Bloemfontein Campus, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa

*Correspondence: Paul J. P. Fouché, fouchejp@ufs.ac.za

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Abstract: This psychobiography aimed to uncover the characteristics of optimal personality functioning (OPF) across the lifespan of Chabani Manganyi (1940–2024), the first Black South African clinical psychologist. The methodology used in this study encompassed an existential Franklian scholarly psychobiography. Sources of data on Manganyi included only publicly available primary and secondary data. Primary sources included Manganyi's own writings, such as his autobiography, as well as his academic publications, including the biographies he wrote on creative individuals such as Gordimer, Sekoto and Mphahlele. Secondary sources included scholarly publications by academics and colleagues who knew him, as well as tributes, historical accounts, and archival records related to South African psychology scholarship during apartheid and the country's transition to democracy. The study's data sources were captured using online research platforms and search engines that included EBSCOhost, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, the University of the Free State's Kovsie Catalogue and ProQuest. Alexander's (1988, 1990) biographical approach, which lists nine indicators of thematic salience (i.e., uniqueness, negation, emphasis, primacy, frequency, error or distortion, isolation, incompleteness, and omission) were utilized for the identification, extraction and compilation of salient data for analysis, alongside Frankl's proposed nine characteristics of optimal personality functioning. Findings revealed that Manganyi personified characteristics of self-determining action, which were consistently evident in his pursuit of education, his intellectual independence, and his scholarly innovations in the field of South African psychology. Manganyi also personified a sense of self-transcendence, primarily expressed through his scholarship, mentorship, and social advocacy. He consistently positioned his dedication to work in his search for broader societal comprehension and transformation, beyond his personal advancement. Manganyi also exhibited qualities of future-directedness, work as vocation, and the search for meaning in resilient living, serving as a role model in managing challenging life and historical circumstances in transformative ways. The findings align with Frankl's existential characteristics of optimal personality functioning as applied within this scholarly psychobiographical approach, highlighting its cross-cultural transportability in studying historical figures.

Keywords: Psychobiography; Chabani Manganyi; Viktor Frankl; existentialism; optimal personality functioning

Introduction

Noel Chabani Manganyi (1940–2024), an eminent Black South African and distinguished scholar, is highly regarded in many circles (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Hayes, 2016). Firstly, Manganyi's 84-year lifespan encompassed the entire trajectory, spanning from the establishment of the apartheid regime's governance to its resistance and the eventual democratic transformation. Secondly, Manganyi's eminent status as South Africa's first Black clinical psychologist personified his historical and political significance, including professional uniqueness, which justifies scholarly attention (Hayes, 2016). Moreover, Manganyi's professional career and academic work across multiple domains provide extensive primary data sources for analysis (e.g., Manganyi, 1977a, 1977b, 1983a, 1983b, 1991, 1996, 2024, 2013, 2016, 2019). Many would endorse the view that Manganyi had optimal personality functioning, in a manner similar to Viktor Frankl's view of optimal personality functioning (OPF), grounded within his existential theory (Frankl, 1959, 1967, 1969, 1978). This study aimed to uncover and illustrate the extent to which Manganyi's OPF as a scholar and psychologist aligns with the nine characteristics proposed by Frankl. Findings would add to the growing body of cross-cultural psychobiography (Fouché, 2015)

grounded in a sense of contributions to humanity by optimal personality functioning.

Noel Chabani Manganyi: A Brief Historical Sketch of a Distinguished Intellectual

Born on 13 March 1940 in Louis Trichardt, Limpopo, Manganyi rose from a rural Venda-speaking community to become an influential Black African clinical psychologist, biographer, and educational leader (Hayes, 2016). His father, David Manganyi, was a teacher and lay preacher who valued education and instilled in his son the importance of learning and moral integrity. His mother, Elsie Manganyi, was a homemaker who maintained traditional Venda customs while supporting her son's educational aspirations (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2016). Growing up as the family's only child in Mavambe Village near Elim during the height of apartheid legislation, including the Native Land Act of 1913 and the Group Areas Act of 1950, he experienced both cultural rootedness and racial exclusion during his childhood and adolescence (Hayes, 2016). His family's dedication to preserving Venda practices fostered within him a sense of cultural pride and resilience, countering apartheid efforts to dehumanize Black South Africans (Hayes, 2016; Ratele, 2019). Oral storytelling, ancestral rituals, and strong parental guidance cultivated his sense



of selfhood, identity and resilience (Hayes, 2016; Ratele, 2019; Manganyi, 2016). Manganyi's memoir highlights storytelling as a tool for fostering a sense of coherence amidst oppression and refers to early encounters with racial discrimination (Manganyi, 2013, 2016). Exposure to traditional healing practices informed his critique of Western psychology's individualism in his later life (Manganyi, 1977a, 1977b; Hayes, 2016).

At Lemana High School, where he completed his matric, his English teacher encouraged his academic interests (Manganyi, 2013). Despite systemic barriers, Manganyi completed a BA degree in 1962 and an honours degree in psychology in 1964 at the University of the North, today known as Venda University (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2013). At Unisa, he earned his master's degree in 1968 and his PhD in clinical psychology in 1970, becoming South Africa's first black clinical psychologist at the age of 30 (Hayes, 2016; Maluleke, 2024; Manganyi, 2016; Mathebula, 2024). His doctoral work on paraplegia reflected his narrative approach to identity under oppression. He frequently described the isolation he experienced as a Black scholar in a White-dominated field (Manganyi, 2016; Ratele, 2019). Manganyi's professional career combined clinical practice, scholarship, and social critique.

Early career developments. His early psychological research offers direct insight into the development of his theoretical viewpoints and professional concerns regarding identity and oppression under apartheid (Manganyi, 1977a, 2019). Manganyi's biographical works on South African artists (e.g., Gerhard Sekoto) demonstrate his interest in psychological processes underlying creative achievement and cultural expression (Manganyi, 1996; Mathebula, 2024). His autobiography, in turn, provides a crucial first-person perspective on both personal development, psychological functioning and professional career formation (Manganyi, 2016). The availability of secondary sources (e.g., Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Hayes, 2016; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997) further supports the feasibility of a credible psychobiographical study (Ponterotto & Park-Taylor, 2021) of his career, life and personality as a scholar of excellence. Existing academic reviews and interviews also give insight into Manganyi's career progression and professional impact (e.g., Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Hayes, 2016).

As a Black academic and intellectual, Manganyi circumvented apartheid restrictions, and his existential experience of selfhood and identity reveal salient patterns in his personality functioning. These include a self-determination expressed through his resistance towards the apartheid regime, his psychological adaptation to challenges, and his resilience (Manganyi, 2019; Mathebula, 2024). As a mental health professional working within oppressed communities, his career and personality encapsulate the intersection of social service and personal healing (Manganyi, 2024, 2013, 2016). Manganyi's career development unfolded within a contested environment, where his work as a psychologist inevitably engaged with questions of identity, oppression, and mental health within the Black community (Manganyi, 2019, 1977a). His life's transition from rural beginnings to academic leadership parallels South Africa's own transformation, positioning

him as both a witness to and a participant in the processes of political and social transformation (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2016). This socio-historical context provides an essential background and developmental trajectory against which to understand Manganyi's psychological functioning, personality development and professional choices across the challenging socio-political climate of apartheid to a more liberated South African psychology that values social justice and emancipation (Manganyi, 2019; Stevens & Lockhat, 1997). It is within these challenging contexts of systemic oppression on the one hand, and eventual democratic transformation on the other, that this scholarly psychobiography developed.

Contextual influences. As one of the few Black psychologists, Manganyi provided expert testimony on the psychological harms of apartheid, often in political trials, demonstrating his moral courage (Ratele, 2019). He assisted activists and students in clinical practice, developing culturally sensitive, *Ubuntu*-based therapeutic approaches that reflected the significance of indigenous psychology (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 1977b; Nsamenang, 2006; Ratele, 2019). Mpofo (2024) provides a comprehensive explanation of *Ubuntu* beingness in his book, *Counselling for African contexts: Transformative approaches*. Mpofo refers to *Ubuntu* as a 'one-in-all philosophy' for collective well-being, which respects empathic and inclusive social engagement within family and community social networks. During Manganyi's academic career from 1981 to 1990 at the University of the Witwatersrand, apartheid laws restricted him to a 'visiting' academic position, yet he transformed the curriculum by introducing African psychology and a scholarship on racism (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2016). His psychobiographical writings on Es'kia Mphahlele (Manganyi, 1983a; Moloi, 2024) and Gerard Sekoto (Manganyi, 1996) emphasize that personal struggles are often painful reflections of broader sociopolitical challenges and issues (Mathebula, 2024).

Manganyi's work consistently integrated clinical insight with social awareness (Ngwenya & Manganyi, 2003). His interdisciplinary scholarship linked psychology, anthropology, and philosophy to illuminate the experiences of being a black person under apartheid rule. His seminal works include *Being Black in the World* (2019), originally published in 1973, *Alienation and the Body in Racist Society* (1977a), and *Mashangu's Reverie and Other Essays* (1977b). These works blend African cultural insights with existentialist philosophy to critique apartheid's psychological trauma and its effects upon personality and identity development (Manganyi, 1977a, 1977b, 2019). *Being Black in the World* (2019) analyzed identity through existentialism and African communal values (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2019). Manganyi argued that apartheid produced profound alienation, which he reconstructed through narrative identity theory (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2019). His thoughts complemented Steve Biko's Black Consciousness movement by offering a psychological, rather than a mere political framework for understanding liberation (Biko, 1978; Nsamenang, 2006; Ratele, 2019). *Mashangu's Reverie and Other*

Essays (1977b) challenged Western psychological assumptions by emphasizing African worldviews and communal healing (Manganyi, 1977b). Manganyi's international prominence led to a postdoctoral fellowship at Yale University (1973–1975), where he engaged in global debates on race and psychology (Manganyi, 2016; Hayes, 2016). In collaboration with the developmental psychologist Daniel Levinson (see Levinson, 1986), he explored methods of constructing chronological biographical accounts of racial and developmental experiences across the lifespan (Ngwenya & Manganyi, 2003). His international exposure helped him articulate how apartheid's psychological trauma compared to other forms of racial oppression across the globe, while maintaining his focus on the unique cultural resources available for healing within African communities (Manganyi, 2016; Hayes, 2016).

Mpofu (2003) had already, after the turn of the century, highlighted that the experiences of African communities are significantly underrepresented in the then-current psychological literature, compared to those of Western European and North American communities. Prof. Mpofu rightfully argued that professional psychology in sub-Saharan Africa is modelled on Western practices. Mpofu called for greater representation of the African experience in the psychological literature to add to the richness of psychology. It appears from the review of publications by Manganyi that he supported this call, as evidenced in his subsequent publications (e.g., Manganyi, 2016). Manganyi also occupied leadership roles and prestigious positions in South Africa's post-apartheid educational administration.

As Director-General of Education (1994–1999), Manganyi led reforms aimed at correcting the previous inequalities created by the apartheid regime's Bantu Education policies (Hayes, 2016). He especially advocated for indigenous-language education (Ratele, 2019). Later, as Vice-Principal of the University of Pretoria, and thereafter as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Limpopo, he advanced institutional transformation and widened access for Black students (Hayes, 2016). Manganyi was also recognized for his role as a Black clinical psychologist and academic when he received the 2012 Psychological Society of South Africa (PsySSA) Lifetime Achievement Award (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2016). Despite Manganyi's dementia during his final years, and his death on 31 October 2024 due to protracted illness linked to dementia, his professional, intellectual and institutional contributions had a significant impact on current South African psychology. His legacy remains that of a formidable scholar, a brilliant author, biographer-historian (Moloi, 2024) and a gentleman who valued collegiality (Maluleke, 2024).

Theoretical Framework: Viktor Frankl's Existential Psychology and View of Optimal Personality Functioning

Frankl's theoretical contributions are grounded in the philosophical traditions of existentialism and phenomenology, which shaped his understanding of human meaning and agency (Mayer et al., 2021b; Mayer & Fouché, 2025). Existentialism, which emphasizes individual freedom, choice, and the construction of meaning (Nel, 2025; Solomon, 2005), provided the foundation for

Frankl's view of human beings as fundamentally capable of choosing their orientation toward life's circumstances. Frankl diverged from existentialists such as Sartre by rejecting the notion of inherent meaninglessness, instead advancing the concept of "tragic optimism", representing the capacity to discover meaning amid suffering and death (Frankl, 1959, p. 138). Phenomenology, grounded in Husserl's work, emphasizes the understanding of lived experience from a personal and subjective standpoint (Zahavi, 2019). This emphasis on a lived experience further informed Frankl's existential viewpoint. Frankl (1967) prioritized the subjective experience of meaning over reductionist biological or behavioral accounts. This perspective supports Frankl's assertion that individuals retain the freedom to choose their attitude in any situation, a stance he viewed as central to human dignity, responsibility, and purpose (Frankl, 1959, 1967). These attitudes underpin Frankl's conceptualization of OPF as the pursuit of meaning across all life circumstances. Central to Frankl's viewpoint is the "will to meaning", which he posited as the primary motivational force driving human behavior (Frankl, 1969, p. 35). The will to meaning reflects the innate human tendency to seek purpose and is linked with resilience and enhanced well-being (Heintzelman & King, 2014; Martela & Steger, 2016). Frankl also emphasized the interdependence of "freedom and responsibility" as conditions for meaning. While individuals may lack control over external circumstances, they retain the freedom to choose their attitude toward those circumstances (Frankl, 1959, p. 75). This freedom is coupled with the responsibility to shape one's life through value-driven decisions rather than external pressures (Frankl, 1967). Optimal personality functioning, therefore, involves exercising this responsibility in the service of meaningful action (Frankl, 1967, 1969). To further explain how individuals discover meaning, Frankl (1969) identified three pathways: (a) creative values, expressed through work, creation, or contribution; (b) experiential values, realized in encounters with love, beauty, and relationships; and (c) attitudinal values, demonstrated in the attitude one adopts toward unavoidable suffering (Frankl, 1967). These pathways support OPF by helping individuals respond to adversity with meaning and purpose (Wong, 2017). Frankl conceptualized OPF as a dynamic, lifelong engagement with meaning, expressed through nine interrelated characteristics (Frankl, 1959, 1967, 1969). Rather than fixed traits, these characteristics represent sustained existential orientations toward life, a view supported by contemporary research on resilience and well-being (e.g., Mayer et al., 2021a; Wong, 2017). The nine interrelated characteristics of OPF are listed and discussed below.

1. Self-determining action: Reflects the ability to make choices grounded in personal values rather than external pressures, thereby demonstrating authentic and value-based decision-making (Frankl, 1959, 1967).
2. Realistic perception: Involves perceiving one's situation with clarity while retaining hope (Frankl, 1967).
3. The capacity for humor: Serves as an existential coping mechanism, enabling individuals to maintain perspective and dignity in the face of adversity.

Frankl described humor as “a weapon in the fight for self-preservation” (Frankl, 1959, p. 63).

4. Self-transcendence: “The essence of human existence” (Frankl, 1967, p. 97), which entails orienting oneself toward goals, values, or relationships beyond the self, enabling fulfilment through contribution and connection (Frankl, 1969).
5. Future-directedness: Entails a sustaining commitment to future goals despite immediate hardship, consistent with Frankl’s assertion that those who possess a “why” can endure almost any “how” (Frankl, 1959, p. 84).
6. Work as vocation: An expression of meaning through creative values, with work understood as a calling that transforms ordinary tasks into avenues for purpose and contribution (Frankl, 1978).
7. Appreciation of goodness, beauty, and truth: Embodies the experiential pathway to meaning, whereby individuals encounter depth, richness, and transcendence through aesthetic and moral values (Frankl, 1959).
8. Respect for others’ uniqueness: Involves recognizing the inherent dignity of each person as an end in themselves and supporting ethical relationships and community cohesion (Frankl, 1959, 1967).
9. Finding meaning in suffering: Refers to transforming unavoidable hardship into opportunities for growth. Suffering “ceases to be suffering the moment it finds a meaning” (Frankl, 1959, p. 113).

The abovementioned nine characteristics were used to uncover and illustrate the OPF across the scholarly lifespan of Manganyi through this existential Franklian psychobiography. According to More (2023), Frankl’s existentialism significantly influenced Manganyi’s work. Frankl’s view that humans are motivated by a will to meaning is central to Manganyi’s own existential phenomenological psychology. According to Yaniger (2024), Irvin Yalom viewed humans as essentially isolated and self-centered, and living in a meaningless world. For Frankl, humans are interconnected, other-directed and a meaningful part of a meaningful whole. Frankl’s view is thus more aligned with Manganyi’s Africana existential phenomenology, which he constructed in the context of apartheid. It draws parallels with Frankl’s ideas, emphasizing the significance of meaning and purpose in the lives of Black individuals (More, 2023). Manganyi’s work often addressed the psychological influence of apartheid and the need for a Black perspective in psychological discourse. His commitment to using psychological discourse to grapple with the lived experiences of Black people in a racist society reflects the broader influence of Frankl’s existentialism on Manganyi’s psychological views. Manganyi’s frequent engagement with the works of Western pioneers in existentialism and phenomenology (e.g., Frankl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty) is clearly evident in his choice of titles for his own books and the chapters therein. An example of this is the title of his book, *Being Black in the World*, which unambiguously reflects Frankl’s theme of existential existence and Sartre’s phenomenological ontology of existing within this world (More, 2023).

Research Method

Design and methodology

This study employed a psychobiographical, or longitudinal case study (Fouché 2015; Harry, 2023; Swanepoel et al., 2022), grounded within an existential interpretivist paradigm. A focal point of this psychobiography was an analysis of Manganyi’s scholarly development and philosophical views, and of how the latter reflected upon and illustrated his OPF. The psychobiographical approach was well-suited to uncovering and illustrating Manganyi’s OPF, as it enabled a longitudinal analysis across his lifespan, against the background of the socio-historical contexts of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa (Jareño et al., 2024; Ponterotto, 2015).

Psychobiographical sampling or subject selection

Chabani Manganyi was selected as the subject for OPF attributes against the backdrop of data richness and credibility (Creswell, 2013; Du Plessis, 2017). In this regard, Manganyi has (a) historical significance as the first Black South African clinical psychologist; (b) scholarly contributions, such as his extensive publications on identity, race, and psychological liberation; and (c) qualities befitting of existential psychobiographical studies on his life.

Sources of data. A literature search conducted in March 2025 and February 2026, utilizing search engines and databases such as Google Scholar, EBSCOhost, PsycINFO, and JSTOR, confirmed that no prior psychobiographical studies on Manganyi using Frankl’s theory existed. This was cross-corroborated through searches in SCOPUS, Web of Science and SciVal.

Data collection

Data collection entailed gathering publicly available primary and secondary data sources on Manganyi’s life. Primary sources included Manganyi’s own writings, such as his autobiography, *Apartheid and the Making of a Black Psychologist* (Manganyi, 2016), as well as his academic publications (e.g., Manganyi, 1977a, 1991, 2024), including his biographies on the writer Nadine Gordimer and the artist Gerard Sekoto (Manganyi, 1991, 1996). Secondary sources included scholarly publications by those academics and colleagues who knew him. Secondary sources also included tributes (e.g., Maluleke, 2024), historical accounts, and archival records related to South African psychology scholarship during apartheid and beyond (Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Hayes, 2016; Ratele, 2019).

Salient data extraction for evidence and analysis

The process of salient data extraction, to secure significant evidence for analysis, was first guided by Alexander’s (1988, 1990) nine indicators of thematic salience. These indicators of thematic significance, which are well-known amongst the psychobiographical fraternity, include primacy, frequency, uniqueness, negation, emphasis, omission, error or distortion, isolation, and incompleteness. These indicators assisted in scrutinizing, identifying and extracting significant themes within data sources that warrant labelling as salient or significant evidence and are worthy of psychobiographical analysis and interpretation, via the

theoretical approach or psychological perspective used to uncover the subject. In this scholarly psychobiography of Manganyi's life, with the purpose of uncovering and illustrating his characteristics of OPF, the existential approach by Frankl was first used to conceptualize and operationalize these characteristics. Secondly, Yin (2018) and Fouché (2025a, 2025b) propose that a central operational question be formulated and posed to the data and that salient evidence be extracted. This question should encapsulate the aim of the study and the constructs or propositions of the psychological theory used to analyze the case or subject (Yin, 2018). In this study on the OPF of Manganyi, the following central operational question was formulated and posed to the salient data and evidence: *What sections of the salient data and evidence provide for a credible and trustworthy understanding and interpretation of the optimal personality functioning across the scholarly lifespan of Manganyi via the use of Frankl's existential theory, and specifically the nine characteristics indicative of OPF?* The abovementioned two strategies, namely the use of Alexander's (1988) indicators of thematic salience, and Fouché's (2025a, 2025b) and Yin's (2018) suggestion of asking a central operational research question, enhanced the systematic and dependable analyses and interpretation of the significant evidence.

Rigor and trustworthiness: maintaining methodological integrity

Psychobiographies are attracting less criticism regarding their methodological integrity, as they increasingly adopt interdisciplinary theories and innovative psychohistorical methodologies (Ponterotto, 2014, 2015, 2025; Hopkinson & Niklasson, 2025; Martin, 2024). To ensure rigor and trustworthiness, the authors applied four quality criteria: confirmability, credibility, transferability, and dependability (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2018). Confirmability was secured by the central operational research question, which aimed to identify and illustrate, across the lifespan of Manganyi, examples of the nine propositions or characteristics of OPF proposed by Frankl's existential theory (Frankl, 1959, 1967, 1969, 1978). Credibility was secured by using credible primary and secondary data sources, as well as cross-corroboration, also called data triangulation (Yin, 2018), of salient data or evidence. In psychobiography and case study research, findings are not generalized to other cases or to larger samples. Rather, a process of analytical generalization (Yin, 2018) is used to compare or dialogue the findings of the case or subject under study, to the propositions, constructs and characteristics or attributes encapsulated in the psychological theory used to study the case or subject (Kingsley & Knight, 2025; Knight, 2019). Thus, findings related to the characteristics of OPF across the lifespan of Manganyi were compared with the nine characteristics of OPF proposed by Frankl's theory of OPF. Dependability in case studies such as psychobiographies is ensured by following a systematic, stepwise approach to data collection, data analysis, and evidence interpretation. This was done using Alexander's (1988) indicators of thematic salience, as well as by formulating and posing a central operational research question to guide the interpretation of all significant evidence. This *modus*

operandi enhances the auditability of the evidence or findings. Overall methodological integrity was secured by adherence to Levitt et al.'s (2017) recommendations for qualitative research.

Ethical considerations

The study did not involve human participants, or utilize previously unknown personal or private data-sources. Therefore informed consent from participants was not required. Only data in the public domain were utilized. Thus, ethical approval was exempt from institutional ethics review. However, the authors did request ethical clearance for this desktop-literature study from the Faculty of the Humanities', Institutional Review Board, known as GHREC, who granted ethical clearance in the format of a waiver, (clearance number: UFS-HUM-2014-68/1806/21/22/23), to undertake this study on Manganyi. Ethical clearance in the format of a waiver, was requested for purposes of possible ethical clearance required for publication. The authors adhered to psychobiographical ethics (e.g., Anderson, 2024; Ponterotto, 2025; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017) as guidelines in undertaking this psychobiography, such as preferably only utilizing data in the public domain and undertaking a psychobiography on a deceased subject.

Findings and Discussion

The psychobiographical findings regarding Manganyi's personality development as an academic scholar, within the framework of Frankl's existential psychology, particularly the nine characteristics of OPF (Frankl, 1959, 1967, 1978), are presented and discussed in this section. Across Manganyi's lifespan, Frankl's characteristics of OPF manifested in various formats of scholarly career expression and illustration. This expression and illustration of OPF across Manganyi's lifespan were particularly influenced by his academic scholarship within historical, societal and political contexts. His striving towards OPF was shaped by (a) the interaction between his personal life, career and academic scholarship; (b) the country's political circumstances (e.g., apartheid) that challenged his personality development; and (c) relational commitments to family, friends and colleagues (Frankl, 1967). The application of Alexander's (1988, 1990) saliency indicators revealed key developmental themes. These were interpreted using the existential theory of Frankl, particularly Frankl's view of OPF (Frankl, 1959, 1967, 1978). A synoptic, integrated discussion of the findings follows next.

1. Manganyi's *self-determining action* was consistently evident in his pursuit of education, his intellectual independence, and his scholarly innovations within the field of South African psychology (Manganyi, 2016, 2019). From his childhood love for reading to his final act of writing a memoir to document his legacy (Maluleke, 2024; Manganyi, 2013, 2016), his self-determination remained central. Original and supportive evidence related to his pursuit of education is found in his memoir, where he reflected on the teachers who shaped him. Manganyi (2016) wrote:

What I found most admirable about the memorable men and women who taught me at different stages of my life was their ability to engage my curiosity and interest in such a way as to leave an enduring disposition—a love of knowledge—that served me well for the rest of my life. (p. 4)

This indicates that his pursuit of education was not simply a response to his circumstances but rather grew from a genuine, personal love of learning since childhood. Evidence of his early love of reading is found in Chapter 4 of his memoir, where he stated: “I believe it was curiosity that turned me into an avid reader of books on various themes and disciplines that interested me during my life. Without such curiosity and the enriching rewards that accompany the study and writing of life stories, my academic and professional career might easily have taken a different course” (Manganyi, 2016, p. 63). This reflects Manganyi’s self-determined action in pursuing education driven by internal motivation rather than external obligation.

2. His *realistic perception* (Frankl, 1967) evolved from an early awareness of social inequities to a sophisticated understanding of systemic oppression and psychological resistance (Manganyi, 2016, 2019). Manganyi’s capacity to maintain analytical clarity while experiencing racial injustice reflects a mature integration of his realistic perception. Original evidence related to his early awareness of social inequities is found in his memoir, where he described his childhood in Mavambe as beginning happily but gradually giving way to the recognition of what he called “an ever-encroaching tide of racial discrimination” (Manganyi, 2013, p. 279). This indicates that his realistic perception was not something that developed suddenly in adulthood but was rather shaped progressively through his lived experience as a Black child under apartheid. Furthermore, his mature and analytically clear perception of racial oppression is evidenced in how he approached his early published work. In Chapter 4 of his memoir, Manganyi (2016) reflected that in writing *Being Black in the World*, he deliberately worked to keep the problem of White racism “in the mainstream of contemporary consciousness” (p. 68). This is indicative of Manganyi’s realistic perception, grounded not in defeat but in a clear and purposeful commitment to naming and resisting oppression through his intellectual work.

3. Manganyi’s *capacity for humor* (Frankl, 1959, 1978), while subtly expressed, served as a consistent rhetorical strategy for social critique and maintaining psychological equilibrium (Maluleke, 2024; Manganyi, 1996, 2016). From playful peer interactions in rural settings to the strategic use of irony in his published critiques and his light-hearted reflections on aging in his memoir (Manganyi, 1977a, 2013, 2016), humor provided him with a sense of psychological coping and resilience throughout his life. Original evidence related to his use of humor as a coping strategy is found in his memoir, where he recalled the UNIFY academic development program during his time as Vice-Chancellor of the University of the North, writing: “I will always remember the University of the North’s UNIFY program with a twinkle in my eyes and a

smile on my face” (Manganyi, 2016, p. 165). This light-hearted recollection, set within an account of a demanding leadership period, indicates that he maintained a sense of humor even in challenging professional circumstances. Further evidence of Manganyi’s humor and warmth is provided by Hayes (2016, p.77), who described Manganyi as “a man of letters” who combined intellectual seriousness with warmth and generosity of spirit, suggesting that his intellectually advanced sense of humor served as a sustained means of maintaining psychological balance rather than mere social pleasantry (Hayes, 2016).

4. Manganyi’s *self-transcendence* (Frankl, 1967, 1969) was expressed through his scholarship, mentorship, and social advocacy. He consistently positioned his dedication to work in his search for broader societal comprehension and transformation (Maluleke, 2024) beyond his personal advancement. From helping his family with responsibilities in childhood to sharing wisdom through autobiography for future generations, his self-transcendence became increasingly evident (Manganyi, 1996, 2016, 2019; Ngwenya & Manganyi, 2003). Manganyi’s expression of self-transcendence was personified within a collective or community format, which may reflect sociocultural influences on how this characteristic of OPF manifested across his lifespan. Original evidence related to this characteristic is found in Chapter 8 of his memoir, where Manganyi (2016) reflected on his leadership work:

As far as my contribution to developments at the university is concerned, what mattered most to me was that I was driven by idealism and by a search for a higher purpose in the work I was fortunate to carry out in public life. I believe that the pursuit of higher purposes in one’s life and in one’s leadership of others is intimately connected to and nurtured by one’s idealism. (p. 166)

This reflects Frankl’s (1969, 1978) idea of self-transcendence, as Manganyi understood his work as serving something greater than himself. Further evidence of the communal nature of his self-transcendence is found in the preface of his memoir, where he stated that his story was “told on behalf of countless other Black and White South Africans with deserving life stories of their own” (Manganyi, 2016, p. xiv). By framing his autobiography as an act done for others rather than for himself, Manganyi demonstrated that his self-transcendence was collectively focused.

5. His *future-directedness* (Frankl, 1959) extended beyond personal goals across his lifespan, reflecting sustained commitment to his pursuit of intellectual development and mentoring future scholars (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2024, 2016; Ratele, 2019). From aspiring to education for the upliftment of his family, to reflecting on future psychological liberation and legacy beyond death, his future-directedness sustained him through difficult circumstances. Original evidence related to this characteristic is found in his memoir, where he noted that “autobiographical memories enable their bearers to fashion what are sometimes described as identity narrative” (Manganyi,

2016, p. xiv). The act of writing the memoir itself was a future-oriented project, a deliberate attempt to leave behind meaning and legacy. Further evidence of his professional future-directedness is demonstrated within his reflection on his time at the University of Transkei, stating that “my interest in higher education had developed to such an extent that I aspired to be a vice chancellor in years to come” (Manganyi, 2016, p. 159). This indicates that Manganyi’s future-directedness was not limited to personal ambition but was tied to a broader desire to transform institutions and serve others.

6. *Work as vocation* (Frankl, 1967, 1978) emerged as central to Manganyi’s identity formation, notably in his integration of professional psychological practice with ethical social justice, and his societal commitments (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 2016, 2019). From viewing education as a calling to writing as a lifelong mission, his work transcended mere academic and institutional employment to become an existential expression through his written works and overall scholarship (Maluleke, 2024). Original evidence related to his experience of work as a vocation rather than just a job is found in Chapter 8 of his memoir, where Manganyi (2016) stated plainly: “The one ambition I have always cherished is to lead a life of scholarship” (p. 174). Describing scholarship as a lifelong and cherished ambition reflects exactly what Frankl meant when he described work as a vocation that is experienced as a calling and cannot be separated from who a person is. Further evidence of the vocational quality of Manganyi’s psychology career and scholarship is reflected in what moved him during his early writing. In Chapter 4 of his memoir, he recalled that he was especially moved by Frankl’s assertion that “man preserves the right to take any action necessary to free himself from oppression” (Manganyi, 2016, p. 64). This is evidence that Manganyi’s psychological work was never just technical practice but was interwoven with the existential struggles of his people. Hayes (2016) reinforced this when he described Manganyi as someone who “devoted his life to ideas and the life of the mind in a socially engaged way” (p. 77).

7. The *appreciation of goodness, beauty and truth* (Frankl, 1978) was consistently reflected in Manganyi’s engagement with art, literature, and narrative as illustrative ways to search for psychological understanding and societal transformation (Manganyi, 1996, 2016, 2019). From his valuing of family stories and cultural traditions to a memoir that reflected on South African politics and history, his appreciation of goodness, beauty and truth seemed to enrich his intellectual and emotional life. Original evidence of his appreciation for truth as both an intellectual and ethical value is found in Chapter 4 of his memoir, where Manganyi (2016) describes how his early scholarship was shaped by a concern with “the universality of Black suffering in a world dominated by White people” (p. 64). His willingness to engage with these painful and difficult truths through sustained scholarly writing is reflective of a deep commitment to truth that went beyond academic interest and reflected a moral responsibility to bear witness to the realities of those around him. Evidence of Manganyi’s appreciation of beauty and meaning through narrative is seen in his reflections on

psychobiography. Manganyi (2016) drew on C. Wright Mills’s concept of a sociological imagination to describe life-writing as a way of understanding “the social and historical meaning of the individual in the society and in the period in which he has had his quality and his being” (p. 69). This is evidence that Manganyi’s search for meaning and human significance, through an appreciation for storytelling and biography, was at the very heart of what he valued in scholarly life.

8. *Respect for uniqueness* (Frankl, 1959) was particularly evident in Manganyi’s own psychobiographical methodology, which consistently emphasized uniqueness, dignity, and ethical responsibility in the biographical analyses of individuals (Manganyi, 1983b, 1996, 2016; Ngwenya & Manganyi, 2003). From engaging with individuals from diverse communities to his liaison with professional peers, and his honoring colleagues’ unique contributions in his memoir, respect for uniqueness signified both his scholarship and his interpersonal relationships. Supportive evidence related to this characteristic is reflected in Manganyi’s explanation that his biographical subjects, such as Mphahlele and Sekoto, were “very significant South Africans” whose “personal troubles are a resplendent mirror of the public issues of our day” (Ngwenya & Manganyi, 2003, p. 429). His insistence on treating biographical subjects as both individually significant and meaningful demonstrates a genuine respect for the uniqueness of every person’s life story, which he believed deserved to be told with care. Manganyi described his biographical approach as grounded in “the sustained use of empathy and the construction of a meaning-creating historical narrative” (Ngwenya & Manganyi, 2003, p. 431).

9. The search for *meaning in suffering* (Frankl, 1959, 1967) was shaped by Manganyi’s existential theoretical comprehension of life and society, as well as his personal documented experiences of apartheid oppression (Manganyi, 1977a, 2016, 2019). From coping with poverty and segregation through family support, to framing life’s challenges as meaningful in his memoir and accepting mortality with dignity, his search for meaning in suffering underwent continuous psychological evolution. His published works consistently avoided romanticizing trauma while drawing on difficult experiences as sources of reflection, resistance, and renewal (Manganyi, 1991, 2016). Supportive evidence related to this characteristic is found in his memoir, where Manganyi (2016) noted that his fictionalized memoir, *Mashangu’s Reverie*, involved “a gross kind of suffering” that was transformed into “angry anguish” (p. 66). Rather than suppressing this pain, he channeled it into creative and analytical work, which is precisely the attitudinal stance Frankl described as transforming unavoidable suffering into a source of meaning. Further evidence of his mature capacity to find meaning in suffering is seen in his reflection on writing the memoir itself. Manganyi (2016) wrote: “Writing this book has enabled me to come to terms with the personal ways in which encounters with success and adversity became part and parcel of the happy and, at times, painful life story told here” (p. xiv). This shows that he used his experiences of hardship as a source of growth and purpose, which align

with Frankl's conception of attitudinal values and the idea that meaning can be found within painful circumstances.

Conclusive Remarks, Lessons Learned and Implications for Professional Practice

The literature and findings indicate that Manganyi's life was characterized by sustained self-determination, psychological resilience, intellectual depth and towering scholarship across his lifespan (Hayes, 2016; Manganyi, 1977a, 1977b, 1991, 1996, 2013, 2016, 2019, 2024; Ngwenya & Manganyi, 2003; Ratele, 2019). The authors propose that Manganyi's overall personality development was illustrative and representative of a non-linear developmental trajectory. His seemingly OPF could be viewed as shaped by (a) the dynamic and complex interplay of historical, societal and political circumstances; (b) his sustained scholarly and intellectual engagement, including his existential awareness; as well as (c) his commitment to social justice and democratic transformation. Manganyi's developmental trajectory affirms that psychological growth and actualization remain possible even under severely oppressive sociopolitical conditions, and that authentic meaning in life can be forged through purposeful narrative constructions, vocational dedication, and service to others. Findings indicate that Frankl's nine characteristics of OPF, when interpreted with appropriate cultural sensitivity and methodological rigor, also offer valuable insights and lessons on personality functioning and development in diverse and challenging cultural contexts. Manganyi's life journey invites contemporary psychologists within professional practice, as well as academic scholars, to consider how optimal personality functioning may be expressed differently across varied cultural and historical contexts, while maintaining core human capacities for self-determination, psychological growth, meaning-making, and self-transcendence. The analysis and findings revealed both the relevance and applicability of applying Frankl's existential view of OPF, as well as important contextual considerations for its application in oppressive sociopolitical contexts. The findings imply that OPF can be both individual and collective, and both deeply personal and inherently socio-political, thereby challenging purely Western individualistic psychological theories and conceptions of optimal personality functioning. Future researchers interested in studying Manganyi's affinity towards personhood and identity could consider applying Ubuntu theories of personhood, which would add an additional layer of enrichment to the psychobiographical study and analysis of Manganyi's personality functioning. In conclusion, the psychobiographical findings related to the OPF of Manganyi, particularly in his scholarly life, compare to, and undergird, the innovative equivalence of the liberation scholarship of eminent pioneers and researchers in South African psychology (e.g., Cooper & Nicholas, 2012; Hayes, 2016; Mkhize, 2021; Mpofu, 2003; Nsamenang, 2006; Ratele, 2019). The authors are of the opinion that the overall OPF of Manganyi was greatly fostered by his vocational dedication and excellence in South African psychological, socio-political and historical scholarship. The authors conclude with the metaphorically

stated summative view and words, by South African academic, *par excellence*, namely Jonathan Jansen, whom in his review of Manganyi's (2016) memoir and legacy, verbally commented that it appears that it was in the profundity of Manganyi's scholarship, that he was able to "float like a butterfly and sting like a bee" (Maluleke, 2024, p. 3).

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Ethics Approval: The study did not involve human participants, or utilize previously unknown personal or private data-sources. Therefore informed consent from participants was not required. Only data in the public domain were utilized. Thus, ethical approval was exempt from institutional ethics review. However, the authors did request ethical clearance for this desktop-literature study from the Faculty of the Humanities', Institutional Review Board, known as GHREC, who granted ethical clearance in the format of a waiver, (clearance number: UFS-HUM-2014-68/1806/21/22/23), to undertake this study on Manganyi. Ethical clearance in the format of a waiver, was requested for purposes of possible ethical clearance required for publication.

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