

SYLVIA PLATH: A PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

by

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Promoter: Prof. J. P. Fouché

Per mio padre

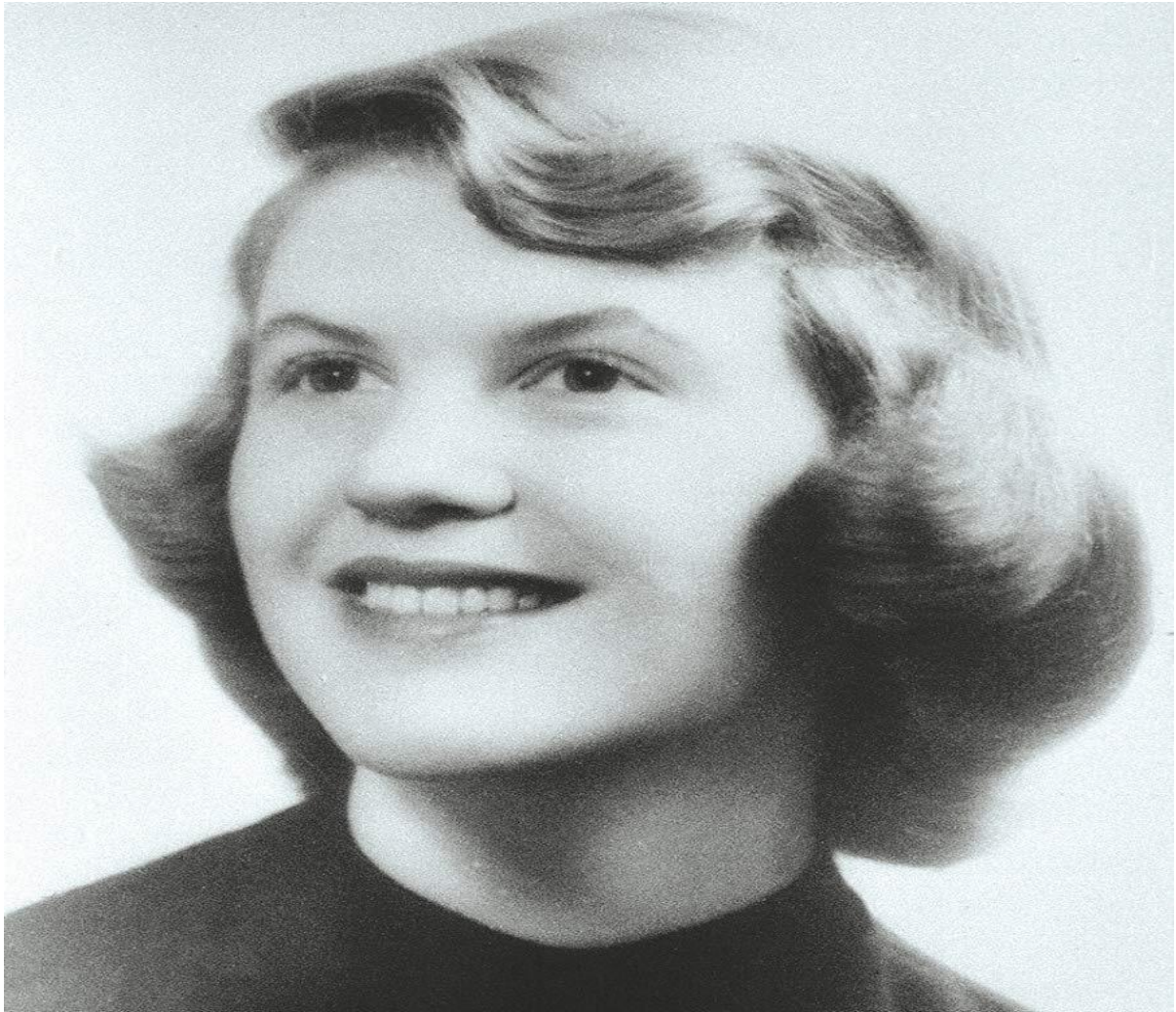
Valerio Panelatti

L'uomo che mi ha insegnato che la grandezza di un uomo non è misurata ne dalle sue lauree, ne da i soldi che ha in banca, ma piuttosto dalla sua fede in Dio; perche è questa fede che lo aiuta a camminare con la testa in alto, sicuro nella convinzione che, nonostante le cattiverie e le sofferenze di questo mondo...la vita è sempre bella.

For my father

Valerio Panelatti

The man who has taught me that the greatness of a man is measured neither by his degrees, nor by the money that he has in the bank, but rather by his faith in God; because it is this faith which helps him to walk tall, steadfast in the conviction that, irrespective of this world's nastiness and suffering...life is always beautiful.



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**“The woman is perfected.
Her dead
Body wears the smile of accomplishment,
The illusion of a Greek necessity
Flows in the scrolls of her toga,
Her bare
Feet seem to be saying:
We have come so far, it is over”.**

The poem *Edge*, written by Sylvia Plath on the 5th of February 1963 (Hughes, 2008, p. 272).

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“For from Him, and through Him and for Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever!”

Romans 11: 36

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ABSTRACT

Increased interest in psychobiographical research has resulted in national and international researchers advocating its value. Although South Africa has seen an increase in the number of psychobiographies based on individuals who have made important contributions, both nationally and internationally, the majority of these psychobiographies have focused on male research subjects. In light of South Africa's efforts to promote female empowerment in a post-apartheid era, South African psychologists may be motivated to embark on the study of significant and exceptional women who shaped history, whether in South Africa or abroad. Sylvia Plath has been hailed as one of the most influential and renowned figures of the 20th century. Although she only published one poetry collection (*The Colossus*) and one novel (*The Bell Jar*) in her lifetime, the many poems, short stories, letters and journal entries which were published after her death, have secured her status as a powerful voice in Anglo-American culture and literature.

None of the works which currently exist on Sylvia Plath provide an in-depth psychological perspective on her life. The researcher thus decided to select her as the subject for this psychobiography through purposive sampling, with the aim of providing a psychological exploration and description of aspects of her life, against the backdrop of her socio-historical context. This aim was accomplished by applying two psychological frameworks to the biographical and historical data collected on Sylvia Plath. The psychological frameworks included: (a) Erikson's stage-based, psychosocial theory of development, and (b) Schwartz's Internal Family Systems (IFS) model. The study's primary aim was thus to explore and describe Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development and the structure of her internal family system throughout her life. Due to the exploratory-descriptive nature of this study, the objective can be said to fall within the inductive research approach.

The use of specific methodological strategies proved to be particularly valuable in the extraction and analysis of data in this study. The researcher made use of Alexander's nine indicators of psychological saliency and Schultz's model of prototypical scenes, to facilitate the organisation and prioritisation of biographical data. In order to manage the proliferation of data available on Sylvia Plath, the researcher posed specific questions to the data, which allowed for the extraction of units of analysis relevant to the research objectives of the study. The researcher made use of two conceptual matrices to facilitate the analysis of data in this psychobiographical study, as proposed by Fouché. This ensured the systematic categorisation and consistent analysis of biographical data collected on Sylvia Plath, according to the stages

of her psychosocial development and the constructs of her internal family system, and in terms of the socio-historical contexts which impacted on her life.

Findings from the study suggest that Plath did not progress through the different stages of psychosocial development successfully and consequently failed to acquire the ego virtues of hope, willpower, purpose, competence, fidelity and love as proposed by Erikson. In terms of Schwartz's model, findings suggest that each stage of her life was characterised by parts-led functioning as a result of transferred burdens, imperfect care-taking, existential anxiety and traumatic emotional experiences. This resulted in polarization of her different parts, which blocked the healing energy of her Self and aggravated feelings of worthlessness, shame and guilt. The integrative, holistic approach of the study's psychological frameworks allowed for an extensive exploration and description of different constructs and dimensions, and ensured that Plath's life was explored against the backdrop of her socio-historical context, since both psychological frameworks highlight the impact of one's political, cultural and historical environment on one's development and intrapsychic processes.

Apart from contributing to the body of knowledge on Sylvia Plath and to the frameworks of psychosocial development and internal family systems, this study also added to educational objectives in the field of psychobiography. This psychobiography affirmed that an examination of the lives of extraordinary women who used their creative genius to address socio-historical issues, could be a significant endeavour for future psychobiographical researchers. Based on the psychological frameworks applied in this study, recommendations are made for future research.

Keywords: Psychobiography, Sylvia Plath, psychosocial development, Erikson, internal family systems, Schwartz, psychological saliency, Alexander, prototypical scenes, Schultz.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter introduces the study by providing the primary aim and general orientation to the context of the research. Aspects which are outlined include the general problem statement, the research subject, the psychobiographical approach, and the selected psychological frameworks. The chapter concludes with the researcher's personal passage and an exposition of the chapters which constitute the study.

1.2 Introduction and Aim of Research

This study serves as an example of psychobiographical case study design and methodology, from a qualitative, morphogenic perspective. The aim of the study was to conduct a longitudinal study, so as to explore and describe aspects of Sylvia Plath's life within the context of her socio-historical milieu. This aim was accomplished by applying two psychological frameworks to the biographical and historical data collected on Sylvia Plath. The psychological frameworks included: (a) Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) stage-based, psychosocial theory of development, and (b) Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems (IFS) model.

The study's primary aim was thus to explore and describe Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development and the structure of her internal family system throughout her life and against the backdrop of her socio-historical context. Due to the exploratory-descriptive nature of this study, the aim can be said to fall within the inductive research approach. In accordance with this approach, the researcher conceptualised Sylvia Plath's life in terms of specific psychological concepts which are presented in the ensuing section.

1.3 Context of the Research

This section presents the general problem statement and provides a brief introduction to the psychobiographical research subject, Sylvia Plath. This is followed by: (a) a brief description of psychobiography as a research approach, and (b) an outline of the two psychological frameworks which were used to guide the collection and analysis of data in this study, namely, Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development, and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model of Internal Family Systems.

1.3.1 General Problem Statement

With the advent of the narrative turn in psychology in the 1990s, life story analysis was accepted and popularised, leading to “a renaissance of psychobiography” (Kóváry, 2011, p. 739). Elms (1994) regarded psychobiography as a way of doing both biography and psychology. This implies an intrinsically interdisciplinary characteristic of psychobiography (Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994; McAdams & Ochberg, 1988). Although the interdisciplinary characteristic has resulted in a disquietude due to the different methodological approaches employed by psychology and biography (Elms, 1994), the established alliance has also resulted in reciprocal benefits, with psychology improving biography as much as biography improves psychology (Fouché, Smit, Watson & Van Niekerk, 2007; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Runyan, 1988a). This justifies Runyan’s (1988a) description of psychobiography as an “amphibious creature” (p. 296).

The plethora of handbooks and journals published in the field of psychobiography in the past few decades attests to the fact that this discipline is attracting growing attention (Barenbaum & Winter, 2013). Increased interest in psychobiographical research has resulted in national and international researchers advocating its value (e.g., Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; McAdams, 1988, 1994; Ponterotto, 2013, 2014, 2017; Runyan, 1984; Schultz, 2001a, 2005a). In 2008, Ponterotto began his own research programme in psychobiography (Ponterotto, 2014). Not only has his contribution to psychobiography included invaluable ethical guidelines for conducting and reporting psychobiography, it has also promoted the value of psychobiography as a doctoral dissertation topic and research approach in psychology (Ponterotto, 2014).

In South Africa, the significance of academically institutionalised psychobiography has been recognised and pursued with much more vigour and enthusiasm by supervisors and postgraduate students in various South African Departments of Psychology (Fouché et al., 2007; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Nel, 2013). In addition to the awakening and growth of psychobiographical research at academic institutions, numerous articles pertaining to psychobiography have been published in the past years, especially in the *Journal of Psychology in Africa* (Fouché, 2015). Although South Africa has seen an increase in the number of psychobiographies based on individuals who have made important contributions, both nationally and internationally, the majority of these psychobiographies have focused on male research subjects. In light of South Africa’s efforts to promote female empowerment in a post-apartheid era (Akala & Divala, 2016; Magubane, 2003), South African psychologists may be motivated to embark on the study of significant and exceptional women who shaped history,

whether in South Africa or abroad. The researcher hopes that this study will add to the growing field of psychobiography in South Africa, and that it will also illuminate aspects of the life of one of the great pioneers of the feminist movement.

1.3.2 The Psychobiographical Subject

Sylvia Plath has been hailed as one of the most influential and renowned figures of the 20th century (Gill, 2008). Although she only published one poetry collection (*The Colossus*) and one novel (*The Bell Jar*) in her lifetime, the many poems, short stories, letters and journal entries which were published after her death, have secured her status as a powerful voice in Anglo-American culture and literature (Gill, 2008; Perloff, 1979). Since the publication of her first poetry collection in 1960, Sylvia's work has constantly remained in print and has even been translated in numerous languages (Gill, 2008). The myriad of material available on Sylvia Plath's life and works attests not only to her exceptional literary ability, but also to the web of controversies surrounding her life. According to Kumlu (2011), no writer or poet has been as misunderstood as Plath. Furthermore, no writer or poet has been labelled as often as Plath, as being schizophrenic or mad, and this by scholars and researchers who have no education in psychology. Rose (2013) described Plath as a "shadowy figure who hovers between the furthest poles of positive and negative appraisal" (p. 1). She laid bare the forms of psychic investment which lie behind the processes through which Western literary culture evaluates and perpetuates itself (Rose, 2013). Kumlu (2011) suggested that the works and studies pertaining to Plath be read carefully in order to prevent her works from being read under false assumptions. The myths that have been created concerning Plath, especially those starting after her death, are not only the false assumptions of literary critics, but also of the Cold War American ideology, which tried to turn Plath into a problematic woman (Gill, 2008; Kumlu, 2011; Perloff, 1979). Despite the claims of Sylvia Plath's critics, that her works were built mainly upon a life-story characterised by despair, trauma and schizophrenia, Kumlu (2011) argued that the real Plath succeeded in crystallising not only the traumas of her generation, but also various literary works as a response to the ideology of her age. This view corresponds with that of Gloria Steinem; one of Plath's classmates (Alexander, 1999), who went on to become a leader and spokeswoman for the American feminist movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Steinem (Alexander, 1999) described Sylvia as being an early prophet who used her suffering to describe societal problems. In terms of this description, Plath's works not only encompass pessimism, but also happiness, achievement and power – a view seldom taken of Plath's life and works.

This study applied Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model to the biographical and historical material available on Sylvia Plath's life, so as to allow for an exploration and description of her life from a psychobiographical perspective.

1.3.3 The Psychobiographical Approach

Psychobiography has been defined as "the systematic use of psychological (especially personality) theory to transform a life into a coherent and illuminating story" (McAdams & Ochberg, 1988, p. 2). Psychobiography involves the qualitative analysis of a single case using an idiographic and longitudinal approach (Simonton, 1999). It entails the systematic collection, analysis and discernment of life stories within a socio-historical context (Fouché et al., 2007; McAdams, 1994; Runyan, 1988c) and provides the opportunity for an in-depth study of the fundamental components that bring an individual's personal story to life (Fouché, 1999; McAdams & Ochberg, 1988). According to McAdams (1988), this life must be understood on three correlative levels, namely: (a) the biological or physical level; (b) the psychological and emotional level; and (c) the social and familial level, which incorporates the cultural and historical context. Since psychobiographical studies seek to enhance the interpretation and understanding of a subject's life story through the application of psychological theory and research to that subject's life, they are said to be anchored in the social constructionist and interpretivist paradigms (Van Niekerk, 2007).

The constructionist-interpretivist approach posits the existence of multiple, socially-constructed realities, which passionately engage the researcher and lead to the discovery of meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Ponterotto, 2010). Psychobiography can be said to involve the indirect assessment of a biographical subject so that certain hypotheses can be confirmed (Nel, 2013). It thus provides the opportunity for psychological theories to be developed, refined and tested (Runyan, 2005). According to Schultz (2005a), psychobiographies can lead to formal propositions that could ultimately be tested against larger groups of people.

In this study, the primary objective was to explore the psychosocial development and internal family structure of Sylvia Plath. The secondary objective was to informally assess the propositions and constructs of the two psychological frameworks applied to Plath's life. The primary objective of this psychobiography reflects the exploratory-descriptive nature of the inductive approach taken to this study, since it involved a detailed exploration and description characterised by attention to triangulated evidence of the subject's life experiences, interpersonal relationships and socio-historical context in what has been termed "thick

description” (Denzin, 1989; Geertz, 1973; Ponterotto, 2006, 2014; Ryle, 1971). The secondary objective of the study reflects the descriptive-dialogic nature of the deductive approach taken to the study, since it involves the informal validation or refutation of existing theoretical conceptualisations and propositions by comparing the psychobiographical research findings to the expected outcomes of theoretical frameworks (Chéze, 2009; Edwards, 1990; Fouché, 1999).

Supporters of psychobiographical research have identified some undeniable advantages of the approach for the discipline of psychology (Elms, 1988; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Kővary, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014). In this study, these advantages included: (a) an appreciation of the uniqueness of Sylvia Plath’s case within the whole; (b) incorporation of the socio-historical context of her life; (c) consideration of her subjective reality; (d) exploration of process and pattern across her lifespan; (e) assessment of the theory and model applied to her life; and (f) integration of findings within the discipline of psychology. It was hoped that this study would add to educational objectives in the field of psychobiography. A detailed discussion of the psychobiographical approach and its methodological considerations is presented in later chapters (see section 1.5).

1.3.4 Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory

Erikson’s (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development broke boundaries in the field of human development by expanding psychoanalytic concepts of psychosexual development to include the impact of both genetic and social factors (Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Schultz, 1990). According to Erikson’s epigenetic principle, human personality grows and develops cumulatively through eight life stages, each with its own developmental crisis, until each part of the individual has fully developed to form a more complex system (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963, 1980; Watts, Cockroft, & Duncan, 2009; Yount, 2008). Although Erikson maintained that unsuccessful resolution at an earlier stage will negatively affect an individual’s ability to resolve later crises, his cumulative account of development allows for individuals to rectify and alter resolutions of previously unresolved or negatively resolved stages at any time (Craig, 1996; Marcia, 2002). Each of Erikson’s eight stages is composed of two opposing tendencies, a syntonic and a dystonic disposition, which must come into balance to produce the stage’s virtue or ego strength (Erikson, Erikson, & Kivnick, 1986). The successful completion of each stage of life thus results in a new strength being added to the individual’s ensemble of life-skills (Erikson, 1969).

Erikson (1963) posited that each step in the life cycle presents the individual with a new set of choices and tests which are prescribed by the structure of the culture and society in which the individual lives. According to Erikson (1968), the individual and the social environment are intertwined, and their ongoing, reciprocal influence is mediated by the synthesising power of the ego (Erikson et al., 1986; Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Watts et al., 2009). Although Erikson (1958, 1963, 1980, 1993, 1997) described psychosocial development as unfolding across the lifespan, he intentionally avoided stipulating definitive, fixed age ranges because he believed that an individual's developmental trajectory is influenced both by biological maturation and by the broader environmental and social context within which the individual lives (Newman & Newman, 2012).

This approach to the unfolding of the life cycle allows for a more flexible framework of human development and accounts for: (a) the qualitative differences in adaptation from one developmental stage to the next, and (b) the unique developmental pathways followed by different individuals as they journey through life (Caprara & Cervone, 2000; Erikson, 1950, 1963; Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2008; Santrock, 2001). Chapter 3 provides a detailed exposition of this theoretical approach and its application to psychobiographical studies.

1.3.5 The Internal Family Systems Model

The Internal Family Systems (IFS) model emerged from a synthesis of three significant paradigms – the multiplicity of the mind (Assagioli, 1976; Carter, 2008; Engler, 2003; Jung, 1969; Mitchell, 1993; Perls, 1969; Rowan, 1990; 1993), systems thinking (Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967) and mindfulness-based therapy (Engler & Fulton, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2012; Macnaughton, 2004; Nyanatiloka, 1972; Schwartz, 2011; Siegel, 2007, 2010, 2011; Sparks, 2011).

The appeal of the IFS model lies in the fact that its approach is collaborative, non-pathologising and enjoyable because it assumes that, much like a large family system, each internal part has well-meaning intentions and profound value (Schwartz & Sparks, 2014). In line with the approaches advocated by family therapy, the IFS model proposes that individual improvement is attained not through the removal of a dysfunctional part, but rather through the acceptance that each part is significant and valuable (Green, 2008).

The internal parts assume characteristics which maintain functionality (managers), harbour pain (exiles), or react to impending threats (firefighters) (Twombly & Schwartz, 2008). In addition to the different parts, the IFS model maintains that individuals possess a Self at their core and that this Self contains everything it requires to be a good leader, including compassion,

clarity of perspective, confidence, courage, curiosity, calmness, connectedness and creativity (Haddock, Weiler, Trump, & Henry, 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 1987). Schwartz (2001, 2003, 2013a) referred to these qualities as the eight Cs of the Self and maintained that an individual exhibits these qualities when the Self is fully differentiated. In this state, the individual feels confident, free, open-hearted and centered and experiences a calm state of well-being and connectedness with the universe, similar to the state experienced during meditation (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a, 2013b).

Through mindfulness practices, IFS therapy helps the conflicting parts of an individual to become aware of the power of the Self so that the individual can better understand his/her internal world, and relate to the Self and to society in psychologically healthier ways (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2011). Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2004, 2013a) emphasised that the aim of IFS is to assist individuals in achieving Self-leadership, so that they can compassionately relate to their own parts and to the parts of others, whilst developing effective ways to release constrained parts that may be evoking unhealthy behaviour or feelings (Haddock, Weiler, Trump, & Henry, 2017; Schwartz, 2013a).

The optimistic philosophy inherent in the IFS model allows for people to be seen as having all the resources that they need for healing to take place (Schwartz, 1995). Rather than seeing people as having pathological deficits, the IFS model sees people as being restricted from using internal strengths as a result of polarised relationships both within themselves and in relation to people around them (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995; Sweezy & Ziskind, 2013). Chapter 4 provides a detailed exposition of this theoretical approach and its application to psychobiographical studies.

1.3.6 Reflexivity

In qualitative research, subjectivity is considered to be an integral part of the research process (Flick, 2006; Morrow, 2005). Morrow (2005) emphasised that subjectivity needs to be managed effectively so as to minimise the negative effects of researcher bias. In order to deal with biases and assumptions that come from their own personal life experiences or from emotionally-laden interactions with research subjects over long periods of time, qualitative researchers are advised to approach their research reflexively and ambivalently (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 1999; Morrow, 2005; Schultz, 2005a; Stroud, 2004). Reflexivity is a process which entails reflecting critically on oneself as researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2008) and is aptly defined by Rennie (2004) as an awareness of self and a sense of agency within that self-awareness. The reflexivity construct emanates from qualitative research methods rooted in the

constructionist-interpretivist epistemology (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). This construct recognises the collaborative role of both the researcher and the research subject in the acquisition and construction of knowledge and the meaning which is derived from such knowledge (Ashworth, 2003; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017; Punch, 1993; Taylor, 1999; Willig, 2008).

Ponterotto (2014) maintained that a psychobiographer's level of bias can vary widely, as can his/her unspoken agendas in writing the life story of an eminent individual. In some cases, the subject is seen as a role model or hero to the researcher; whilst in other cases, the subject may represent a deep mystery to the researcher, who is then driven by a need to unveil that life mystery (Ponterotto, 2014). In order to ensure critical reflection on the self as researcher (which is explored in greater detail in Chapters 6 and 7), the next section highlights the researcher's personal motivations for undertaking this research project on Sylvia Plath.

1.4 The Researcher's Personal Journey

As a senior English teacher and Counselling Psychologist, the researcher is passionate about both literature and psychology. Prior to commencing with this research project, the researcher had taught Plath's poetry and was familiar with her work. The researcher had always been intrigued by the complexity of Plath's poetry and the impact which her works had on the feminist movement, but she had limited knowledge about Plath's personal life. When initially introduced to the field of psychobiographical research, the researcher was enticed by the qualitative, in-depth nature of this investigative approach. The psychobiographical approach appealed to the researcher because it provided the opportunity to understand a life of prominent literary significance from a psychological vantage point. It thus allowed the researcher to marry her two disciplines of interest – literature and psychology.

Sylvia Plath was selected as a psychobiographical subject for the subsequent reasons: (a) the wealth of information available on her life, especially in the form of newly-published material, (b) the relevance and applicability of Plath's life with regard to the psychological frameworks utilised in this study, and (c) the value of studying exceptionally talented, creative women. A discussion of these aspects is presented in greater detail in sections 7.4 and 7.5. The researcher had limited prior knowledge of Sylvia Plath's personal life story and knew her only from the perspective of her poetry. This was, however, regarded by the researcher as an advantage, since it reduced the likelihood of researcher bias – a consideration which is discussed at greater length in section 6.2.1.

The researcher was also intrigued by the wide-spread claim that Plath's works have been built mainly upon a life-story characterised by despair, trauma and schizophrenia (Kumlu, 2011). Although it is true that Plath's life included despair and trauma, and that many of her works encompass pessimism, the researcher felt that it was unjustified to label someone of Plath's calibre as schizophrenic or mad. This label not only undermines the value of her contribution to literature and to the feminist movement, it also disregards the complexity of her nature and the impact of her socio-historical context on her development.

Elms (1994) cautioned psychobiographers against over-pathologising a research subject's life – he called, instead, for a more eugraphic approach which focused on extraordinary and exemplary individuals, since this would guide positive psychologists in determining how psychosocial factors facilitate the development of greatness (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). As postulated by Simonton (1999), positive psychology benefits appreciably from the study of outstanding or illustrious individuals who display positive traits such as creativity, charisma, talent, morality, spirituality or wisdom; and thus overlaps considerably with the goals of psychobiographical research (Van Niekerk, 2007). The data on Sylvia Plath's life made the researcher aware of the fact that her life was also characterised by qualities which are indicative of optimal human functioning, such as tenacity, efficiency, creativity, talent and goal-directed behaviour. The fact that Sylvia Plath's life and works also encompassed elements of happiness, achievement and power, prompted the researcher to choose her as a psychobiographical subject so that the origins and dynamics of her exemplary qualities could be better understood. Chapter 11 provides a final reflection on the researcher's personal reaction to the research subject in this psychobiographical endeavour.

1.5 Overview of the Study

This psychobiography includes 11 chapters, the first of which provides an introduction to the study. Chapters 2 to 5 constitute the literature review chapters. Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive overview of salient features and socio-historical events which shaped Sylvia Plath's life. Chapter 3 presents Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) stage theory of psychosocial development, whilst Chapter 4 presents Schwartz's (1994, 2001) model of Internal Family Systems (IFS). Chapter 5 provides a theoretical overview of psychobiographical research, thereby concluding the literature review chapters.

Chapters 6 and 7 expound the methodological considerations of this study. The preliminary methodological issues and constraints that need to be considered when conducting

psychobiographical research are discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 7 then presents a discussion of the research design and methodology applied to this psychobiographical study.

Chapters 8, 9 and 10 present the findings and the discussion of the study. In Chapter 8, the research findings pertaining to the psychosocial personality development of Sylvia Plath are discussed. The findings pertaining to the structure of Plath's internal family system are discussed in Chapter 9. Chapter 10 presents the integrated research findings.

In Chapter 11, which concludes the study, the value and the limitations of the study are discussed, and recommendations for future research are provided. The chapter ends with the researcher's personal reflections concerning this study on Sylvia Plath.

1.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the study by outlining the aim of the research and the context within which the research was conducted. The researcher expressed her personal journey regarding this study and concluded by providing a broad outline of the chapters to follow. The subsequent chapter presents the salient features and socio-historical events which shaped Sylvia Plath's life.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIFE OF SYLVIA PLATH: A BIOGRAPHICAL PORTRAIT

I sit here without identity: faceless... I'm lost... Is it a nightmare. There is no sun. There is only continual motion. If I rest, if I think inward, I go mad. There is so much, and I am torn in different directions, pulled thin, taut against horizons too distant for me to reach... Will I never rest in sunlight again – slow, languid & golden with peace? (Plath, 2000, pp. 26 – 27)

2.1 Chapter Preview

The purpose of this chapter is to present an overview of Sylvia Plath's life and of the socio-historical contexts in which her writing was produced. Her life, which spanned 30 years from the time of her birth on the 27th of October 1932, till the time of her death on 11 February 1963, is presented chronologically in this chapter. The information has been organised into phases of development including her infancy, early childhood, middle childhood, later childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Her adolescent and adulthood phases have been further subdivided according to significant events. Each phase of development is discussed within the context of circumstances and historical events which influenced Sylvia's life and her writing. The biographical information on Sylvia's life has been drawn from existing biographies outlined in the next section. These biographies are based on archival information, interviews with those who knew her, journal entries, correspondence and scholarly assessments of her work, including Sylvia's autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, originally published under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas. Although the main aim of the chapter is to provide a chronological account of the facts of Sylvia's life, excerpts from her poems, short stories, journal entries, letters and novel have been included, since these are inextricably woven into the narrative that constitutes Sylvia's life. To omit these would be to omit a significant part of Sylvia herself, since she not only associated her life with the power of her words, but also expressed what she stood for through her writing. Her personal, social and political ideals are thus as much a part of her writing as her life history is part of the biographies which have been written about her.

2.2 The Life of Sylvia Plath

Sylvia Plath has been hailed as one of the most influential and renowned figures of the 20th century (Gill, 2008). Although she only published one poetry collection (*The Colossus*) and

one novel (*The Bell Jar*) in her lifetime, the many poems, short stories, letters and journal entries which were published after her death, have secured her status as a powerful voice in Anglo-American culture and literature (Gill, 2008; Perloff, 1979). Since the publication of her first poetry collection in 1960, Sylvia's work has constantly remained in print and has even been translated in numerous languages (Gill, 2008). Not only has Sylvia's work been the target of a plethora of literary critiques and interpretations, she herself has been the subject of eight published biographies, as well as countless biographical interpretations, sketches and memoirs (Gill, 2008). According to Rose (2013), one of Sylvia's biographers, the reason for this multitude of biographies lies in the haunting allure of Sylvia's presence, which lives on in her work and which tantalises biographers and readers to want to lay claim to the truth of her life. In the case of Sylvia, the ethical considerations related to the biographical genre have been even more contentious, not only because her work invites biographical speculation, but also because her early death and the fact that she was still married to Ted Hughes, resulted in the Plath Estate falling into the hands of Ted and his sister, Olwyn. They not only discouraged any form of research and interpretation, but apparently even threatened to take legal action against biographers who were unwilling to subordinate themselves to the demands and prerequisites of the Plath Estate (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 2003; Gill, 2008; Rollyson, 2013).

The different biographies which have managed to reach the shelves of bookstores have told the story of Sylvia's life from different perspectives. In 1976, Edward Butscher wrote the first full-length biography of Sylvia entitled, *Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness*. In it he tried to establish a connection between Sylvia's psychological well-being and her aesthetics, basing this connection on the statements of those who knew her, as well as on evidence inherent in Sylvia's own writing (Gill, 2008). In 1987, Linda Wagner-Martin wrote *Sylvia Plath: A Biography*, from a feminist perspective, paying particular attention to literary and gender contexts (Gill, 2008). Wagner-Martin's access to Sylvia's writing drafts, journals and letters, gave her biography added credibility. Van Dyne (2006) described it as a responsible account of Sylvia's life, despite the fact that Olwyn Hughes criticised the final product, saying that it was based on nothing but gossip (Gill, 2006). In 1989, the poet Anne Stevenson (who was one of Sylvia's contemporaries), wrote *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath*. Although her biography was written with the help and approval of the Plath Estate, it came under suspicion because readers felt that Stevenson's neutrality had been compromised by the biased involvement of the Estate (Van Dyne, 2006). According to Van Dyne (2006), although *Bitter Fame* included new information on Sylvia's life, it failed to sympathise with Sylvia and her poetry and presented her in a negative light. Alexander's biography, entitled *Rough Magic*, was published

first in 1991. Like Sylvia's previous biographers, Alexander made use of information from the Plath archives. Although he conducted thorough and meticulous research, he was accused of exuding too much sympathy for his biographical subject. Although his biography was also criticised for focusing too much on Sylvia's suicide, he did manage to win access to Aurelia Plath and included valuable information from her in his account of Sylvia's life (Gill, 2008). Ronald Hayman's biography, entitled *The Death and Life of Sylvia Plath*, was published in the same year that Alexander's first edition was published. Like Alexander, he focused on the importance of the theme of death in Sylvia's life. His biography was criticised for portraying Sylvia as a victim and for implying that her suicide was a type of masochism on her part (Gill, 2008). The biography of Jacqueline Rose, entitled *The Haunting of Sylvia Plath*, was also published for the first time in 1991. Although Rose insists in the preface that it is not a biography, but rather a thought-provoking examination of the issues related to writing about Sylvia Plath, it does explore contentious aspects of her life and work.

The year 2013 marked the 50th anniversary of Sylvia's death and saw the publication of two new Plath biographies. Andrew Wilson's biography, *Mad Girl's Love Song*, is the first biography to focus on the early years of Sylvia, before she met Ted. Based on previously unavailable archival material and exclusive interviews with lovers and friends who had never spoken about Sylvia before, Wilson's biography presents a comprehensive and detailed picture of a young Sylvia and the origins of her unsettled and often sinister self (Chisholm, 2013). Carl Rollyson's biography of Sylvia, entitled *American Isis: The Life and Art of Sylvia Plath*, was also published in 2013 and constitutes the first biography to include new material from the Ted Hughes archive at the British Library. Drawing on this new archival information, which includes 41 letters between Sylvia and Ted, as well as on interviews with Sylvia's Smith College associates and other people who knew her, Rollyson's biography credibly outlines the smothering effects on Sylvia of marital, familial and social pressures that may have contributed to her undoing (Marshall, 2013).

2.2.1 Infancy (1932 – 1933): Sylvia, the First-Born, during the Great Depression

Otto Emile Plath was born in Grabow, Germany, on the 13th of April 1885 (Wilson, 2013). He was the eldest of six children born to Theodore Platt and Ernestine Kottke, who had emigrated from Germany to start a new life in America in 1901 (Wilson, 2013). On the 8th of September 1900, 15-year-old Otto Plath arrived in New York, thanks to his grandfather, John, who had heard of his grandson's outstanding academic record and had decided to pay for his education at Northwestern College, Wisconsin, on condition that he enter the Lutheran ministry

and devote his life to the family religion (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Otto seized this opportunity, not only because it afforded him the higher education which he would not have been able to afford in Germany, but also because it exempted him from military service which, as a confirmed pacifist, he dreaded (Plath, 1975). After his arrival in America, Otto remained in Manhattan, and lived with an uncle in whose liquor and food store he clerked. It was then that he changed his name from Platt to Plath, in an attempt to integrate himself in American culture (Alexander, 1999). He was so determined to master the English language that he sought permission to attend grade school classes, despite the fact that he would not get any credits for the subject. Within a year, he managed to work his way through all eight grades and could speak English fluently (Wilson, 2013).

Between 1903 and 1910, Otto attended Northwestern Preparatory School and thereafter, Northwestern College – a classic German Gymnasium where he studied classical languages (Gaebler, 2000; Wilson, 2013). After graduating from Northwestern College in 1910 with a sterling academic record, Otto proceeded to the Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Wauwatosa, as promised to his grandfather. However, only weeks into the term, Otto became disenchanted with the right-wing synod's conservatism (Alexander, 1999).

In his spare time, Otto had become fascinated by the writings of Charles Darwin, and was shocked to find that Darwin's writings were forbidden at the Lutheran Seminary (Plath, 1975; Wilson, 2013). Otto tried to conform to the prescriptions of the seminary, but eventually decided to leave the seminary and abandon his plans to enter the ministry – a decision which resulted in Otto's grandfather striking his name from the family Bible and excommunicating him from the family (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia (Plath, 1963, 1966) incorporated this component of her father's family history into her semi auto-biographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, by portraying the protagonist's father as a Lutheran living in Wisconsin before ending up a cynical atheist. After being disowned by his grandfather, Otto moved to Seattle and enrolled at the University of Washington to study German. In June 1912, he received a Master of Arts degree, and on the 7th of August of the same year, he married Lydia Clara Bartz, the 23-year-old sister of his friend Rupert Bartz, from Wisconsin. Unfortunately, the marriage was a disaster resulting in Lydia leaving Otto and returning to her family after only three weeks of marriage. The two of them never saw each other again, and for the rest of her life, Lydia (who worked as a nurse), never remarried and never spoke about either Otto or his famous daughter, Sylvia (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

In October 1918, while living in Berkeley, California, Otto was under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for suspected pro-German leanings. Although the FBI

files show that he was eventually cleared of any pro-German sympathies, the records described him as “a man who makes no friends and with whom no one is really well acquainted” and as someone having a “nervous and morbid disposition” (Wilson, 2013, pp. 19-20). Despite these criticisms, Otto’s work ethic was relentless. In addition to his studies at the University in Berkeley, he was obligated to work at the Lincoln market during the day and to operate an elevator in the evenings, just to make ends meet (Wilson, 2013). After Berkeley, he attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he taught modern languages from 1915 to 1918 (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Between 1921 and 1925 he studied zoology at Harvard University, where he was also employed as an assistant entomologist, and where he was awarded a doctorate in Applied Biology in 1928 (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). In 1929, Otto worked as an assistant professor of Biology at Boston University, where he had also been convinced to teach a course in Middle-High German. It was there that he met his future wife and mother of Sylvia Plath, Aurelia Schober (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Aurelia Schober was born into a hard-working, immigrant family from Austria (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In 1894, her father Franz Schober, who was born and raised in Bad Aussee, near Salzburg, left his birthplace at the age of 14 and travelled to northern Italy to settle in a village near Venice (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Two years later he moved to Paris; and two years after that, to London. By 1902, Franz had sailed from Bremen on the *Kronprinz Wilhelm*, to arrive in America in March 1903 (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Once in America, he took up residence in Boston (Alexander, 1999). By 1904, 24-year-old Franz had Americanised his first name to Francis (nicknamed Frank), in the same period that his friend, Joseph, changed his surname to Greenwood (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Joseph’s sister, Aurelia, arrived in America from Vienna in 1904. It seemed almost predestined that she and Franz were meant for each other, especially in light of the fact that he had seen a photo of her in 1898 and had proclaimed to her brother, Joseph, that he would marry her some day (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). The couple did, in fact, marry. On the 3rd of July 1905 – the day Aurelia turned 18, the minimum age in Massachusetts at which one could marry without parental consent – Aurelia Greenwood and Frank Schober filed for a marriage certificate, despite her father’s objections (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). A week later, on the 10th of July, they were married in a civil ceremony (Alexander, 1999). Not even a year later, on the 26th of April, 1906, Aurelia gave birth to a daughter, whom they decided should carry both their names, and was thus called Aurelia Frances (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Aurelia Frances grew up in the coastal town of Point Shirley, in a household that spoke German (Wilson, 2013). The language barrier resulted in her feeling very isolated at school and when she entered grammar school, her father took the decision that English should be spoken in the home (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975). Despite this, however, Aurelia's parents continued to maintain a very heavy German accent throughout their lives (Plath, 2000). Aurelia's childhood was marked by prejudice, especially during the years of the First World War. The Italian-Irish neighbourhood of Winthrop did not sympathise with anyone of German descent and she was often bullied and called "spy-face" (Wilson, 2013, p. 23).

As a child, Aurelia – like her daughter Sylvia after her – found her escape in reading, working her way through the classics and every romantic historical novel she could find in the local library (Wilson, 2013). She lived in a dream world, and had a book tucked under every mattress of the beds she had to make up daily, so that every spare moment could be devoted to reading (Plath, 1975). It was her love of reading and, in particular, her love of Emily Dickenson's poetry that inspired Aurelia to become a writer (Alexander, 1999; Wilson 2013). Unfortunately her father's strong disapproval of this career choice dampened her impulse to write and resulted in her signing up for a curriculum featuring vocational studies as her major, rather than English and German (which were her first choices) (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Despite the fact that Aurelia did not pursue her first choices, she maintained an excellent academic record in undergraduate school, and graduated as valedictorian for the class of 1928 at Boston University's College of Practical Arts and Letters (Alexander, 1999). Soon after, in the autumn of 1929, she enrolled at Boston University's College of Liberal Arts to do her master's degree, as this would enable her to qualify as a high school teacher of English and German (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). It was then that Aurelia signed up for Otto Plath's Middle High German class and asked him to serve as both her academic adviser and her thesis reader. During that year, their relationship never became personal. Firstly because, at that time in America, it was inappropriate for a young woman to initiate a relationship with her professor, especially one old enough to be her father; and secondly, because the dean of the faculty had implored Otto not to show his feelings for his student until she had completed her degree (Alexander, 1999). Otto obliged, but on the day after the course had ended, when Aurelia Schober stopped by his office to thank him for his help, he took the opportunity and invited her to join him as his guest at the country home of a fellow professor and his wife (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). That weekend, Otto told Aurelia about his brief marriage to Lydia Bartz, and informed her that he would get a divorce if he were to form a serious relationship with a

young woman. He also shared with her his love of bees – a passion that had its roots in his childhood in Grabow where he regularly observed the activities of a neighbouring bee-keeper (Plath, 1934; Wilson, 2013).

During the summer of 1930, Aurelia and Otto became avid pen-pals, and when Aurelia returned to Boston in September to assume the Brookline High School faculty post she had been offered, she and Otto started dating (Alexander, 1999). Finally, shortly after Christmas 1931, they left Boston and, chaperoned by Aurelia's mother, drove cross-country to Nevada, where Otto filed for and received a divorce from his first wife, Lydia Bartz, on the 4th of January, 1932 (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Later that same day, Otto Plath and Aurelia Schober were married in a civil ceremony (Alexander, 1999). Still accompanied by Aurelia's mother, they had their honeymoon and then drove back to Boston to begin their married life. Aurelia moved into Otto's apartment in Jamaica Plain and yielded to Otto's wish that she retire from work to take on the role of housewife and mother (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

Otto had stated that he wished to start a family as soon as possible. He never anticipated, however, that Aurelia would become pregnant only weeks into their marriage, which was taken over instantaneously by Otto's work on his book *Bumblebees and their Ways*, based on his doctoral thesis (Wilson, 2013). Since Otto was not particularly good at writing, Aurelia was entrusted with the job of revising his scientific treatises, doing research, writing notes, producing rough drafts, editing and proofreading (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Although this was a far cry from the romantic novels she had hoped one day to write on her own, Aurelia obediently assisted Otto with his publication, supporting him not only in his career, but also in his role as *der Herr des Hauses* (head of the house) (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975; Wilson, 2013). Aurelia wrote: "I realised that if I wanted a peaceful home – and I did – I would simply have to become more submissive, although it was not my nature to be so" (Plath, 1992, p. 13). Aurelia received nothing approaching co-author credit for her contribution to Otto's work, but instead received a short, standard mention in the acknowledgements that referred to how she had "aided [her husband] greatly in editing the manuscript and in proofreading" (Alexander, 1999, p. 22). Nonetheless, Aurelia continued to support Otto's ambitions and set aside hours each day to help him with the linguistic expression of his scientific ideas (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). She was apparently content to play the traditional role of faculty wife which, although stifling to her creative and intellectual abilities, provided the domestic security which she sought (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Otto was somewhat of a tyrant in the home and ruled his household according to strict requirements, edicts that Aurelia found difficult to live with (Wilson, 2013). When at home,

he worked at the dining room table, using the sideboard as a depository for the multitude of reference books that he regularly needed to consult, and forbidding Aurelia from moving a single paper or book (Wilson, 2013). So if Aurelia dared to invite guests over for supper, she had to do so secretly on the night of the week that Otto taught, and everything would have to be returned to its proper place by the time he returned home (Alexander, 1999). “I drew a plan of the arrangement and managed to have friends in occasionally for dinner the one evening a week that my husband gave a course at Harvard night school, always replacing every item correctly before his return” (Plath, 1992, p. 12).

Aurelia’s friends appreciated her congenial, outgoing disposition and described her as intelligent and charming, with a sincere, if unprofessional, interest in literature and the arts (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Despite the fact that she enjoyed the vicarious satisfaction of being a professor’s wife, she was socially unfulfilled and often lamented the fact that their life consisted of all work and no play (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). A stickler for order and a lover of logic, Otto seemed more interested in the regimented nature of insect societies than in the social nature of human beings (Wilson, 2013). Otto had always been a single-minded man devoid of outside interests and hobbies and totally absorbed by his work (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Apart from the fact that he was content to be alone and set in his a-social ways, he was also as headstrong as his grandfather had been and unwilling to change himself for anybody (Alexander, 1999). Fortunately, Aurelia’s pregnancy gave her the hope of involving herself in a project that could contain and channel her energies, and give her the avenue to express her creative and intellectual abilities (Wilson, 2013).

On Thursday, the 27th of October 1932, Aurelia Plath checked into Memorial Hospital in Boston, and gave birth to a healthy baby girl (Alexander, 1999). Otto and Aurelia chose the name *Sylvia* for no other reason than because they liked the sound of it (Alexander, 1999). It was supposedly derived from the herb *salvia* and the adjective *sylvan*, which would have suited Otto’s classical education and scientific training (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although at birth, Sylvia was described as being healthy, content and alert; she was born three weeks prematurely and suffered from a troublesome sinus condition that would afflict her for the rest of her life (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Trained by Otto in the methodology of scientific classification, Aurelia began to document key moments in her daughter’s life to such a detailed extent, that the verbal expression of her maternal energies produced a written creation of her daughter’s growth and development (Alexander, 1999; Heller, 1976; Wilson, 2013). So detailed were Aurelia’s recordings, that

Sylvia's baby book, entitled: *The record of Sylvia Plath by her mummy*, included even the minutest details of her physical growth (Wilson, 2013).

According to Aurelia, Sylvia's determined personality revealed itself at the early age of six to eight weeks, when she tenaciously attempted to shape sounds into words (Alexander, 1999). By the time she was eight weeks old, she could say "ga" and "goo" and at six months she would say "gully gully" whenever Aurelia offered her a bottle, echoing the words "goody goody", which Aurelia would say to her daughter whenever she gave her a bottle of milk (Wilson, 2013, p. 26). At eight months, Sylvia was able to say the words "mama", "dada" and "bye bye" and, according to Aurelia's notes in the baby book, little Sylvia took delight in the world around her, particularly in nature, cars and other babies (Wilson, 2013, p. 26). One day in September 1933, Aurelia noted that Sylvia shouted out "AGS" in imitation of the word "rags" when the rag man passed down the street (Wilson, 2013, p. 27). On the 19th of December 1933, Sylvia shouted out the word "Daddy" which, according to Aurelia, was uttered when someone shakes the furnace (Wilson, 2013, p. 27). In light of Otto's furnace-like temperament and the fact that one of Sylvia's later poems about her father was entitled *Daddy*, the symbolic significance of this utterance cannot be overlooked.

Aurelia's detailed documentation of Sylvia's early years indicates that she was a child bathed in love. The popular parenting trends at the time advocated that babies be fed according to strict timetables, and that they be coddled sparingly and ignored if they cried. Aurelia, however, followed her own instincts and fed Sylvia on demand, rocking her frequently and picking her up when she cried (Alexander, 1999). Aurelia strengthened her convictions about child-rearing by studying experts who deviated from accepted parenting trends, such as Friedrich Froebel, whose *Educating Man* she read at Otto's suggestion (Alexander, 1999).

Otto, who at 47 was already an elderly father, seemed to gain pleasure from his daughter's development from a scientific perspective (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). When Sylvia was six months old, Otto held her against a rope that was attached to a bamboo shade and, according to Aurelia:

he was delighted by the fact that her feet grasped the rope in the same manner as her hands – to him proof of man's evolutionary process as well as the gradual loss of flexibility when man started to wear shoes and used his feet only for walking. (Plath, 1992, p. 12)

2.2.2 Early Childhood (1933–1936): Sylvia, the Sibling Rival, and the Move to Winthrop

Despite the fact that Otto was delighted with Sylvia, he did let it be known that he also wanted a son and that he would have one in a few years (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Surely enough,

in 1934, Aurelia became pregnant with her second child. To prepare Sylvia for the birth of a sibling, Aurelia told her that soon she would have a brother or a sister, named either Warren or Evelyn, and that she would be called upon to help prepare for this new arrival (Wilson, 2013). Aurelia also tried to make the baby real for Sylvia by taking her shopping for baby clothes and by allowing her to press her ear against Aurelia's stomach to hear the baby kick (Alexander, 1999). The week before the baby's birth, Aurelia took Sylvia to her parents' home in Point Shirley and stayed with her until the day of the delivery, to ensure that Sylvia felt comfortable with her new surroundings (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

On the 27th of April, 1935, Aurelia travelled back into Boston, checked into Jamaica Plains Faulkner Hospital, and gave birth – again three weeks early – to a boy, whom she and Otto named Warren Joseph (Alexander, 1999). Despite all Aurelia's efforts to prepare Sylvia for the baby's arrival, Sylvia cried on the day that Aurelia left for the hospital (Alexander, 1999), and when informed that she now had a baby brother, she expressed her disappointment by exclaiming “I wanted an Evelyn, *not* a Warren” (Plath, 1992, p. 16).

In *Ocean 1212-W*, an autobiographical essay named after her grandparents' telephone number, Sylvia (Plath, 2008) described Warren's arrival as an intrusion and wrote that his appearance resulted in a kind of existential crisis. Before his birth, she had experienced what she called a “beautiful fusion” with the world, but his arrival resulted in her feeling separated and no longer special (Plath, 2008, p. 24). Sylvia visually painted her vehemence and resentment when she wrote:

A baby! I hated babies. I who for two and a half years had been the centre of a tender universe felt the axis wrench and a polar chill immobilize my bones. I would be a bystander, a museum mammoth. (Newman, 1970, p. 268)

Although Sylvia may have been disappointed with the arrival of a baby brother, Aurelia described her as having an original sense of humour and her childhood as being overwhelmingly “laughter-shared” (Wilson, 2013, p. 28). Nonetheless, Aurelia did notice that Sylvia demanded more attention after Warren's birth, and she would try to crawl up onto her mother's lap whenever Aurelia tried to breastfeed Warren (Plath, 1975). It was around this time that Sylvia discovered the alphabet from the capital letters on packaged goods on the pantry shelves, and whenever Aurelia picked Warren up to feed him, Sylvia would grab a newspaper, sit on the floor in front of her mother and proceed to identify the capital letters (Plath, 1975; Wilson, 2013). Aurelia regularly sang to her children, and she had an ambitious programme of reading books aloud to them so that they could be acutely aware of everything around them from the perspective of both a painter and a writer (Alexander, 1999; Heller,

1976). It seems that Sylvia's efforts to counteract the threat of her brother, coupled with Aurelia's constant literary encouragement, resulted in her ever-increasing attachment to words as a substitute for love (Wilson, 2013). In fact Sylvia (or Sivvy, as her family called her) identified with the physicality of words to such an extent that she often wished, as she expressed in *The Bell Jar*, that she could return to the "womblike space of the printed page" (Plath, 1966a, p. 57). Sylvia's attachment to her father also strengthened after Warren's birth, and she went out of her way to please Otto, using her quick, retentive intellect to memorise the Latin names for various insects (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Sylvia's short story *Among the Bumblebees* (which had the original title of *The Two Gods of Alice Denway*), aptly captures the relationship between her and her father (Wilson, 2013). In the story, Sylvia described Otto as a "giant of a man" who "feared nothing" (Plath, 2008, p. 320). She also described the protagonist, Alice (a fictionalised Sylvia), as her father's favourite (Plath, 2008). This description is particularly significant when one considers that, while growing up, Sylvia was often told how much she resembled her father; whilst her brother Warren, who was often ill due to an asthmatic condition, was said to take after their mother's side of the family (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). The short story not only depicts Otto's dominance and angry outbursts, it also conveys Sylvia's admiration for the way in which Otto could handle bees without being stung (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2008; Wilson, 2013). In the story, the father becomes ill and cannot respond to his daughter's calls. Sylvia ended this story with a poignant comment about how there would never be another man to compare to her father, a man who had walked with her, "proud and arrogant among the bumblebees" (Plath, 2008, p. 327).

2.2.3 Middle Childhood (1936 – 1939): Sylvia and the Great New England Hurricane preceding the Plath Tragedy

In 1936, a year after Warren's birth, Otto began to suffer from ill health (Wilson, 2013). He began to lose weight, was afflicted by a terrible cough and sinusitis, and seemed constantly irritable and short-tempered (Wilson, 2013). Despite the fact that Otto was not a very pleasant man, and was often consumed by "explosive outbursts of anger" (Plath, 1992, p. 18), Sylvia was a bright, fun person and enjoyed what she described as "an idyllic childhood" (Wilson, 2013, p. 31). Although she inhabited a household run on severe Germanic principles and dominated by a controlled, austere atmosphere, in her mind she lived in a fantastical "never-never land of magic, of fairy queens and virginal maidens, of little princes and their rose bushes" (Plath, 2000, p. 35).

Otto spent the majority of his time in his large study downstairs and the onset and progression of his illness exacerbated not only his physical strength, but also his already volatile and erratic temperament (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). To protect Sylvia and Warren from Otto's wrath, Aurelia would troop the children upstairs to a large bedroom which she had converted into a playroom for them (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). There Sylvia and Warren would have their supper and entertain themselves, while Aurelia and Otto had dinner downstairs. For half an hour before bedtime, Sylvia and Warren would be allowed downstairs to spend time with and entertain their father (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Although Sylvia and Warren had a close relationship, it was competitive and Sylvia would often "monopolize" their conversations and try to outsmart Warren with her ever-increasing knowledge and vocabulary (Plath, 1992, p. 19). From time to time she would bully and fight with Warren, and once she accidentally cut his neck with a flick of the blade on her ice skate (Wilson, 2013). In her journal, Sylvia wrote about this rivalry with her brother: "Old rivalry with brother. All men are my brothers. And competition is engrained in the world" (Plath, 2000, p. 519). For Sylvia, the sibling rivalry between her and Warren symbolised the larger battle that she had to fight with men for independence and recognition during a period of history filled with constrictions and conventionalities that restricted women's independence and growth (Kendall, 2001; Kirk, 2009; Wagner-Martin, 1987; Wilson, 2013).

Apart from the feelings evoked by the sibling rivalry, Sylvia also experienced a number of fears in childhood. She developed an irrational fear of bobby pins and buttons, to such an extent that even the mention of the word button would send her running and screaming in fear (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Whilst she liked the "clean quick flash of zippers", she was "nauseated at the sight of bobby pins", because she associated them with "warmth and disgusting intimate contact with dirty hair" (Plath, 2000, pp. 52-53). In high school Sylvia wrote an essay entitled *Childhood Fears* in which she described her childhood fear of vacuum cleaners, subways, and burglars who might steal into her room and hide in the cupboards. Her terror of subways emanated from the anxiety that she might stand too close to the edge of the platform and either fall or get pushed into the path of an oncoming train (Wilson, 2013).

During the summer of 1936, in an effort to protect Sylvia and Warren from Otto's explosive temper, Aurelia took her two children and went to live with her parents at their home in Point Shirley (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). That autumn, the Plaths made the decision to move from their small apartment in Prince Street to a more spacious seven-room, two-story house situated at the coast in Winthrop, only three miles away from Aurelia's parents (Alexander,

1999; Wilson, 2013). It was in Winthrop that Sylvia acquired her powerful, almost obsessive love and fear of the ocean, romantically envisioning it as the mother of the universe that transformed the ordinary process of life into poetry (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In her journal she referred to the “potently rich sea of my subconscious”, and she frequently associated its murky origins with the dark ocean floor of her childhood, a place that she believed she needed to return to if she ever wanted to attain success as a writer (Wilson, 2013, p. 33).

In the Autumn of 1937, Aurelia enrolled Sylvia, who was only four at the time, at a private elementary school known as the Sunshine School (Alexander, 1999). Although she was under-age, Sylvia seemed ready for school, thanks to her sharp mind and Aurelia’s reading programme, which resulted in her being able to read from a very young age (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). By the end of the school year, Sylvia was performing so well, that Aurelia decided she was ready for public school (Alexander, 1999). In the Autumn of 1938, she entered the Annie F. Warren Grammar School, Winthrop’s public elementary school, and although the academic programme was far more rigorous than she had been used to at her previous school, she maintained a straight A profile from the very beginning, impressing her teachers with her intelligence and dedication (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Historically, the autumn of 1938 was also the year of the hurricane, which caused massive destruction and the loss of two hundred lives from Long Island to Canada (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). This hurricane left an indelible impression on Sylvia and fuelled her artistic imagination. Years later, she wrote about her vivid recollections of the event, and in *The Disquieting Muses*, she linked the storm, retrospectively with the birth of her artist self and her mother’s inadequacy (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). She was also immensely proud of the fact that her grandparents’ home had survived the storm, despite its vulnerable location on the beach:

My grandmother’s house had lasted valiant – though the waves broke right over the road and into the bay. My grandfather’s sea-wall had saved it, the neighbors said. Sand buried her furnace in golden whorls; salt stained the upholstered sofa; and a dead shark filled what had been the geranium bed, but my grandmother had her broom out, it would soon be right. (Plath, 2008, p. 25)

Sylvia associated the survival of her grandparents’ home with the indomitable nature of their old-fashioned lifestyle – a lifestyle which epitomised the security she envied and yearned for, but whose simplicity remained far removed from the profound complexity of her mind (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

2.2.4 Later Childhood (1939 – 1945): The Aftermath of Otto Plath’s Death during World War II

In mid-August of the year 1940, Otto stubbed his little toe while rushing out of his study on his way to summer school (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The throbbing pain worsened and by the end of the day, “the toes were black and red streaks ran up his ankle” (Plath, 1992, p. 22). Diabetes mellitus was diagnosed, and because Otto had neglected to obtain medical help when the first warning signs of diabetes appeared, his condition became life-threatening and, in his weakened state, he contracted pneumonia (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). After a two-week stay in Winthrop Hospital, he returned to Johnson Avenue where he had to remain under the supervision of a nurse who, because Otto’s condition was so severe, worked every day except for Wednesday (Alexander, 1999). Warren was sent to stay with his grandparents, but Sylvia remained at home and, dressed in the nurse’s outfit that had been fashioned from an old uniform, performed duties such as bringing her father fruit or cool drinks (Wilson, 2013). On the nurse’s first day off, Otto insisted that Aurelia take Sylvia to the beach for some fresh air. When Aurelia returned, however, she found him sprawled on the stairs, seemingly dead (Alexander, 1999). According to Aurelia, “He had left his bed to go downstairs into the garden to look at his flowers” (Plath, 1992, p. 23). Aurelia dragged Otto back to his bed and repeatedly tried calling the doctor who, unfortunately, could not be reached (Wilson, 2013).

The next day, Dr. Loder, one of Boston’s foremost diabetes specialists, examined Otto and determined that the restricted blood flow characteristic of diabetes had made Otto’s left leg gangrenous (Alexander, 1999). On the 12th of October 1940, in an effort to save Otto’s life, Dr. Loder performed an above-the-knee amputation (Alexander, 1999, Wilson, 2013). Although Warren seemed to accept the news of the amputation, Sylvia curiously enquired, “When he buys shoes, will he have to buy a pair, Mummy?” (Plath, 1992, p. 24). Unfortunately, the gangrene was arterio-sclerotic, and Otto weakened rapidly as it spread through his body (Butscher, 1976, 2003). On the night of the 5th of November, 1940, as Aurelia sat beside his bed, Otto whispered in a strained voice: “I don’t mind the thought of death at all, but I would like to see how the children grow up” (Alexander, 1999, p. 32).

That night, Otto suffered an embolism and died at the age of 55 (Wilson, 2013). According to his death certificate, the immediate cause of death was diabetes mellitus and bronchopneumonia due to gangrene (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Since Sylvia and Warren were asleep when Aurelia received the phonecall informing her of Otto’s death, she decided to wait until morning to break the news to them (Alexander, 1999, Wilson, 2013).

Warren was still sleeping, and when she woke him and told him that Daddy's sufferings were at an end, he exclaimed: "Oh, Mummy, I'm so glad *you* are young and healthy!" (Plath, 1992, p. 25). Sylvia, who had just turned eight, was awake and reading when her mother came to give her the news and her reaction was completely different to Warren's (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Pulling her blankets over her head, she exclaimed: "I'll never speak to God again!" (Plath, 1992, p. 25). The next day, Sylvia returned home from school and handed her mother a note that read, "I promise never to marry again" (Wilson, 2013, p. 37). Apparently that day at school the children had been mean to Sylvia, telling her that she was going to have a stepfather. Sylvia was devastated by this and thought that she could prevent her mother from remarrying by forcing her to sign the note. From that night onwards, Sylvia kept that note folded up in the back of her diary (Wilson, 2013).

Given Sylvia's sensitivity and imagination, it was inevitable that Otto's death would have a traumatic effect on her (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia wrote in her journal about this traumatic time, blaming her mother for what she considered to be the "murder" of her father (Plath, 2000, p. 431). Despite the fact that Otto was somewhat of a tyrant, Sylvia outlined in her journal that she missed her father and hated her mother for her lack of tenderness towards him (Plath, 2000). From Aurelia's point of view, she did everything in her power to love and protect her two young children, going so far as to prevent them from attending their father's funeral for fear that it might be traumatic for them (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). On November the 9th, Aurelia, accompanied by her parents, attended her husband's funeral, which was held in Winthrop (Alexander, 1999). Whilst Aurelia justified her decision not to take the children along by claiming that she tried not to let them see her cry, Sylvia interpreted Aurelia's decision as indifference and a sign that she had not really loved her husband (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). After her husband's death, Aurelia became the family's sole bread-winner because Otto, like Aurelia's father before him, had lost a substantial amount of money on the stock market (Plath, 2000, p. 430).

The traumatic effect of Otto's death on Sylvia was intensified by the fact that she experienced his departure as a deliberate act of betrayal (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Added to this was the fact that Sylvia had come to depend upon his praise (Wilson, 2013). Consequently, she fell back upon the only defenses available to her, one of these being to seek compensation in other realms as public approval became a substitute for lost parental love (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her drive for success was also an emulation of her deceased father's own discipline and ambition, and this drive fuelled Sylvia's poetic talent (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rose, 2013). Aurelia's reading aloud of Matthew Arnold's poem, *The Forsaken Merman*, was the spark that

set Sylvia's poetic imagination aflame (Butscher, 1976, 2003). As she listened in silence to the lines "Where the sea snakes coil and twine, / Dry their mail and bask in the brine, / Where great whales come sailing by, / Sail and sail, with unshut eye, / Round the world forever and aye," (Doherty & Maland, 1998), Sylvia was visibly shaken by the poem's music and rhythm, and wrote years later that the poetry had made her fall "into a new way of being happy" (Plath, 2008, p. 22). Although Sylvia was enthralled by the poetry of great poets, she aspired to create art as well (Alexander, 1999). In one of her journal entries she wrote: "It is sad only to be able to mouth other poets; I want someone to mouth me" (Plath, 2000, p. 98). One night, while Aurelia and her children stood on the beach and gazed at the moon, Sylvia - who was only eight at the time - spontaneously composed a poem that echoed Arnold's poem both in tone and in rhythm (Alexander, 1999).

Sylvia had been writing poetry long before that night on the beach. By the age of five she was already writing well-crafted poems. Of her early attempts, the first one that she recopied in final form, dated and saved, was entitled *Thoughts*, an unrhymed couplet celebrating Christmas, written in 1937 (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). From the autumn of 1940, Sylvia was producing poems at a consistent pace. The first poems were innocent distillations of daily life, but as time passed and the tragedy of her father's deteriorating health began to unfold, Sylvia's poetry began to change. Sylvia observed the unfolding tragedy with an uninformed, yet knowing perception, and when the tragedy culminated on the day of her father's death in November 1940, the ordeal came to represent all that was not happy in Sylvia's childhood (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

It is not co-incidental that Sylvia's first published poem appeared in the Boston Sunday Herald only six months after her father's death (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her drive for success and fame thus emerged in her childhood and, although she never specifically mentioned Otto's death, she was quite aware of the link between her childhood artistic efforts and that traumatic event (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rose, 2013). Her father haunts her work like a ghost that cannot find peace, as can be seen by his ghostly appearance in poems such as *Lament*, *On the Decline of Oracles*, *Electra on Azalea Path*, *The Beekeeper's Daughter*, *The Colossus*, *Little Fugue*, *Berck-Plage*, *Daddy* and *Lady Lazarus* (Rose, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Even her intense fascination with the ocean extended to her father whom she described as a Neptune-like character serving as a "father-sea-god muse" (Plath, 2000, p. 399). In the poem *Full Fathom Five*, Plath continued with this sea metaphor, describing this powerful man-turned-sea god as something that emerged from her subconscious to haunt her (Hughes, 1981). According to Rollyson (2013), poetry proved to be a mediating point between Sylvia and the

world, a conjoining like that of land and sea. To Sylvia, words in poetry made her want to cry, but they also made her very happy. “Poetry had that power over her. She would live and die by it” (Rollyson, 2013, p. 15).

After Otto Plath’s death, Aurelia found herself in serious financial difficulties with no income available beyond what she could bring in herself by going out to work (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Throughout their almost ten-year marriage, the Plaths had managed to save very little, apart from Otto’s modest university retirement account (Alexander, 1999). The mere five thousand dollars which constituted Otto’s life-insurance coverage was used to pay doctor, hospital and funeral expenses, after which there was barely enough money left for Aurelia to pay for a tombstone for her deceased husband (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Otto’s modest grave marker consisted of a small stone bearing nothing but his name and birth and death dates, and although this had been his wish, it confirmed Sylvia’s belief that Aurelia had not really loved her husband, and fuelled her already-existing resentment towards her mother (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). To add to the tragedy, Otto’s death did not receive the public attention and consideration expected for a man who had achieved an important measure of success in his field. None of the Boston papers contained an obituary, and the notice which appeared in the *Winthrop Review*, included nothing but the factual details of his funeral service and interment in Winthrop Cemetery (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

In January 1941, Aurelia managed to get a job as a teaching substitute at Braintree High School, where she taught German and Spanish (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Since Aurelia’s position was temporary and involved a daily commute, she decided to accept a permanent position for the coming September at Winthrop Junior High School (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). The position involved teaching ninth grade pupils, and overseeing a substantial part of the school’s accounting services (Alexander, 1999). Unfortunately the combination of full-time teaching, together with the added responsibility of looking after the school’s finances, proved too much for Aurelia, leaving her exhausted and afflicted by the symptoms of a duodenal stomach ulcer (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). This condition, which started during Otto’s illness, would flare up at intensely stressful moments for the rest of Aurelia’s life and would contribute to Sylvia’s resentment of what she saw as her mother’s attitude of noble martyrdom (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). In her journal entry based on her therapy session with her psychiatrist, Dr. Ruth Beuscher, Sylvia described her mother as “a man and a woman in one sweet ulcerous ball”, driven by the compulsion to sacrifice herself so that her children could have “the world of joy she’d never had” (Plath, 2000,

p. 430). Later in life, Sylvia became fascinated by the work of Carl Jung, particularly his views on parental expectations and self-sacrifice, as these views mirrored what she experienced first-hand in her own family (Wilson, 2013).

Not only did Aurelia lose the main breadwinner of her family when Otto passed away, but her father, Frank, was forced into early retirement due to the downsizing of the Dorothy Muriel Company, for which he had worked as a cost accountant (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson 2013). To alleviate the circumstantially-imposed financial burden on both families, the Plaths and the Schobers decided to merge their households and move into a house in Johnson Avenue (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The arrangement was beneficial to both families as it allowed them to share expenses, and ensured that the children were taken care of while Aurelia worked (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Despite the beneficial arrangement, it was, nonetheless, a sad time for the Schobers, who had to abandon the home they had loved and cared for over so many years (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Aurelia's mother, whom Sylvia and Warren called Grammy, was described by those who knew her as the stereotypical Viennese grandmother – maternal, warm and domestically efficient (Butscher, 2003). Not surprisingly, she assumed all the domestic duties such as buying groceries, cooking meals, cleaning the house, minding Sylvia and Warren, and even chauffeuring the family in the Schobers' second-hand Plymouth (since Otto and Aurelia had never owned a car) (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

To supplement the family income, Aurelia's father (called Grampy by the children) assumed the position of waiter at a local country club (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). According to Gordon Lameyer, one of Sylvia Plath's boyfriends, she felt a little embarrassed about the fact that her grandfather had to work serving tables (Wilson, 2013). Nonetheless, she loved him dearly and spent much of her childhood with him (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). He was a sturdy, good-natured man who seldom spoke, but always admired everything Sylvia did (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). His typical immigrant drive for success soon revealed itself in his steady advancement from "waiter" to "head waiter" to "manager" during the course of his residence in Winthrop (Butscher, 2003, p. 16). In her journal, Sylvia's description of her grandfather best encapsulates his benevolence and reveals that in temperament, at least, he was the opposite of her father Otto:

Grampy is white-haired, terribly even-tempered, terribly old, terribly endearing in his mute and blind admiration of everything you do. (You take a bitter and rather self-righteous pride in the fact that he's a steward at a Country Club). (Plath, 2000, p. 365)

Sylvia's writings allude to the fact that she loved to watch her father propel himself through the water like a seagod, effortlessly carrying her on his back and leaving a wake behind him (Rollyson, 2013). In light of Otto's diabetic condition and its debilitating effect on his physical health and strength, the physical feats ascribed to him by Sylvia would have been impossible for him to perform (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). As Aurelia's *Letters Home* confirm, the seagod father was actually Sylvia's grandfather, Grampy, with whom she would often swim in the harbour (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). Although Sylvia was aware of the facts, she was more concerned with recreating the power of her father's presence and dramatising the hold he had on her imagination (Rollyson, 2013). Similarly, she mythologised some of her early schooling, exaggerating the multicultural aspects of her upbringing to suit the atmosphere which reigned at the time (Melikoglu, 2007; Rollyson, 2013).

Since 1938, when Germany had annexed Austria, Americans of German heritage, like both the Plaths and the Schobers, had felt the negative repercussions of anti-German sentiment (Alexander, 1999). On the 7th of December 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbour, resulting in Roosevelt signing a proclamation of war against Germany and Italy, Japan's Axis partners (Alexander, 1999; Clarke, 2001). The decision by congress to expand the draft age so that all men between 18 and 64 could be included for military enlistment, meant that Sylvia's Uncle Frank (Aurelia's brother) would be drafted for military service (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 2003). Sylvia often went sailing with her Uncle Frank, who also lived in the Plath/Schober household until his marriage to Louise Bowman on the 27th of June, 1942, shortly before his departure for war (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Uncle Frank often appeared in Sylvia's dreams dressed as Superman (Rollyson, 2013). Years later, Plath wrote a short story entitled *Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit* (Plath, 1979). The story, inspired by events during that disturbing time of war, portrayed Uncle Frank as the little girl's Superman in the flesh, and although created from Sylvia's imagination, a poignant scene from the story is pure autobiography and captures perfectly the painful reality of war for Germans and their descendants in the states (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 2003; Kirk, 2009):

That same winter, war was declared, and I remember sitting by the radio with Mother and Uncle Frank and feeling a queer foreboding in the air. Their voices were low and serious, and their talk was of planes and German bombs. Uncle Frank said something about Germans in America being put in prison for the duration, and Mother kept saying over and over again about daddy: "I'm only glad Otto didn't live to see this; I'm only glad Otto didn't live to see it come to this." (Plath, 1979, p. 271)

In school, the war provided another platform for Sylvia to demonstrate her superior talent and susceptibility to art, and she won the fifth-grade prize for drawing the best civil-defence sign (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Unfortunately, the psychological impact of the war outweighed the glory that any prize could provide, amplifying the already existing insecurities coiled in Sylvia's young, impressionable mind (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her detailed diary entries of this traumatic time, attest to the fact that she experienced it as a horrific period graphically engraved in her sensitive preteen psyche (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

The war was not the only momentous occurrence to threaten Sylvia's existence (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In the summer of 1942, the dean of Boston University's College of Practical Arts and Letters invited Aurelia to develop and oversee a new course for medical secretaries that would be offered in the autumn of that year (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson 2013). Aurelia regarded the appointment as providential since it offered a higher salary and promised to be less stressful than her position at Winthrop Junior High (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975, 1992; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Aurelia's acceptance of the position at Boston University brought with it her decision to move to a place that was closer to Boston, so she would not have to commute to the city every day (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013). She also believed that the ocean exacerbated her children's chronic sinus and respiratory infections, and aggravated her mother's arthritis condition (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). More importantly, however, Aurelia wanted her children to grow up in a community that offered a higher concentration of educated professionals, as opposed to Winthrop's working-class community (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

On the 26th of October 1942, exactly one day before Sylvia's 10th birthday, Aurelia sold the family home in Winthrop and, with the assistance of her parents, bought a house in the town of Wellesley (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Wellesley was the town which would mould Sylvia's life from the age of nine to the age of 18, and would help reinforce the middle-class values filtered through her mother, who regarded it as a paradise of ultimate respectability (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Apart from the authentic beauty of Wellesley, Aurelia was attracted to this more affluent suburb of Boston because it offered an excellent schooling system, which could enhance Sylvia's educational development (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). For Aurelia, whose ethos of self-improvement ran through her veins, academic achievement was a priority (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson 2013). She was, however, well aware of the fact that she could never afford to give her daughter a quality education on

her meagre teacher's salary (Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1975,1992; Wilson, 2013). Fortunately, as a community member, Sylvia was eligible to attend Wellesley College – a distinguished, women-only, liberal-arts college that offered a limited number of scholarships to outstanding students (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Outstanding was but one word used to describe Sylvia, who generally left a positive impression on adults, particularly teachers, even long after she had disappeared from their lives (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). In fact, in a letter written to Sylvia's biographer almost 10 years after her death, one of her teachers from Winthrop said of her: "It is not strange that after all these years I should remember Sylvia so well, for she was truly outstanding in every way" (Butscher, 2003, p. 19).

Although Aurelia was confident that she had made the right decision in moving the family from Winthrop, for Sylvia, the dual tragedy of losing both her father and Winthrop was a watershed moment since it essentially represented the loss of her entire childhood (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Later in her life, Sylvia eloquently described the painful memory of that loss in her artful writing:

And this is how it stiffens, my vision of that seaside childhood. My father died, we moved inland. Whereon those nine first years of my life sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle – beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white, flying myth. (Plath, 1979, p. 26)

Apart from the sadness generated by the loss of her father and her familiar coastal wonderland, the move to Wellesley represented a source of great anxiety to Sylvia, who had to adapt to a completely new world (Alexander, 1999). Sylvia's greatest problems, however, were not external ones. Even at this early age, she seemed to suffer from some sort of mental disturbance (Wilson, 2013). For eight years of her life she had been enchanted by her coastal wonderland, to such an extent that she imagined the swells of the Atlantic as "running hills" (Rollyson, 2013, p. 9). The family's move inland after her father's death not only sealed her off from the enchantments of childhood, but also trapped her in a world of darkness from which she could never escape (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013, Wilson 2013). For the most part, she managed to keep that darkness masked, and those close to her had no idea that she was experiencing psychological problems of any kind, since she always came across as highly personable, respectable and enthusiastic (Wilson, 2013).

Since the two-bedroom house on Elmwood Road was appreciably smaller than the one that the family had inhabited in Johnson Avenue, Sylvia was forced to share a room with Aurelia (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). For a young girl approaching her teenage years, these

cramped living arrangements were less than desirable (Alexander, 1999). More than ever before, Sylvia's art of writing became her escape, and her journals at that age were filled with fragments of poems and snatches of stories that articulated her desire to escape to a more exotic world (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her belief in magic and the "otherworldly" became the central metaphor through which she could express herself and escape to that world (Wilson, 2013, p. 43).

In order to facilitate the transition to a new environment and allay some of Sylvia's anxieties, Aurelia decided to enroll her in the fifth grade at the Marshall Livingston Perrin Elementary School, rather than the sixth grade which she had started in Winthrop (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Since Sylvia had started the first grade at age four, she was two years younger than most of her classmates, and Aurelia believed that putting her back a grade would help to narrow the physical, emotional and social gap between Sylvia and her peers (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). It also eased Sylvia's academic workload, since she was already familiar with the work. This afforded her the time to pursue extra-curricular activities, such as piano, viola, dancing and painting lessons, Girl Scouts, sailing and summer camps (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). It also afforded her the time to develop new friendships and to engage in her favourite activities, which included sunbathing, reading and writing (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia's writing was done to delight not only herself, but also her mother, whom Sylvia regarded as an extension of herself, rather than as a separate person (Wilson, 2013).

Her writing became a tool through which she could discharge some of her secret anxieties and guarantee her mother's love (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). At that stage in her life, her writing (and in particular, her poetry) was approached more as a socially accepted avenue to public success and recognition from her mother, than as a tool for unearthing the remains of a buried self (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In fact, most of Sylvia's early writing can be seen as one long Valentine's card to her mother, who campaigned tirelessly to ensure that Sylvia had the educational opportunities she had missed in childhood (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The habit of dedicating her writing to her mother began in earnest in February 1943 when Aurelia was admitted to hospital for an acute gastric haemorrhage (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). During Aurelia's month-long convalescence, Sylvia wrote a letter to her every day, not only including poems and pictures she had drawn, but also assuring her mother of her good behaviour and committed piano practice during her mother's absence (Wilson, 2013). In July 1943, Aurelia suffered another haemorrhage, and Sylvia was sent away

from home to spend a month at Girl Scout camp in New Hampshire (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

Despite the anxiety and dread which Sylvia experienced over her mother's health, she continued to maintain an outstanding academic record, impressing her teachers with her intelligence, creativity and penchant for extra work (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Achievement was central to Sylvia's world, as essential to her as her deep and abiding respect for books and whoever wrote them (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). By the time that she entered the sixth grade at Alice L. Phillips Junior High in September 1943, she had read so many books that she received an honorary certificate from the Massachusetts Division of Public Libraries' Department of Education (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

Despite Sylvia's tremendous drive and ambition to attain the highest achievement in everything, she still managed to make time for play, and like any 11-year-old, enjoyed a wide range of activities, including swimming, playing with paper dolls, and listening to radio shows (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her favourite shows were *The Jack Benny Show*, *The Lone Ranger*, and the radio serial version of the Superman Comic Book (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). She loved to create radio melodramas in the schoolyard, and in between learning to master the piano keys at summer camp, she was already writing short stories and plotting novels (Rollyson, 2013). From an early age, Sylvia regarded writing as a form of serious play, and since she no longer had the ocean as her playground, she took to climbing the trees that dominated Wellesley's landscape (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In these trees, which made the heavens seem a little closer to her, Sylvia's imagination would take flight and allow her to produce writing that transported her to a fantasy world (Wilson, 2013). Her writing at that time included a short story called *The Thrilling Journey of a Penny*, and poems that she would later call jingles, such as *In the Corner of My Garden* and *A Wish Upon a Star* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). By the spring of 1944, Sylvia was writing poems at an astounding rate and exceptional level of sophistication – poems which she saved into one of three books: a scrapbook, a diary, and a book which she called *Life Poem Book* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The junior-high school newspaper, *The Phillipian*, regularly published not only her poems, but also her drawings (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia had always been encouraged by her mother to use all her senses to observe the world and write down what she experienced, and it was from her mother that she picked up the obsession for documenting the details of everyday life (Wilson, 2013). Her compulsion for chonicalisation not only resulted in a detailed account of her development as a woman and a

writer, it also painted a detailed picture of the socio-cultural context experienced by a 1940s American teenager (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In May 1944 Sylvia won her Writer's Badge from the Girl Scouts for her journal containing quotidian descriptions, ideas for stories and fragments of verse (Wilson, 2013). The exhilarating experience of garnering awards for her writing and seeing her name printed beside a published poem or story, strengthened Sylvia's sense of existence and became an addictive ambition that she would pursue for the rest of her life (Wilson, 2013).

The habit of chronicling the details of day-to-day existence and recording the intimate lives of those close to her, culminated in Sylvia's semi-autobiographical novel – *The Bell Jar* – a book which Aurelia found to be “a very embarrassing publication” (Wilson, 1999, p. 46). Despite the similarities between Aurelia and Sylvia regarding their copious documentation of daily events, and their belief in the transformative power of ambition and hard work, the two women stood at opposite poles when it came to their writing approach (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Whereas Aurelia preferred to write about the concrete and the factual, Sylvia opted for the inclusion of feelings and the mythologising of select experiences (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). It is precisely this intermingling of fact and fiction which sparked the debate over the authenticity of her work, and the extent to which her narrative world mirrored her real one (Wilson, 2013).

In September 1944, Sylvia entered the seventh grade and continued her pattern of outstanding achievement, impressing her teachers with her meticulous work ethic and her superior creative ability (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). By the age of 12, she had scored in the genius range of 160 on an IQ test conducted by Dorothy H. Humphrey, who described her as brilliant and unusual (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia was indeed unusual, and although she was well-liked by adults, especially teachers, even they recognised that she was somewhat socially isolated amongst her classmates (Butscher, 1976, 2003). As she approached adolescence, she became concerned about her popularity and decided to make a concerted effort to develop her social skills (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Her efforts included serving as vice-president for her guidance class, managing the selling of stamps to support American war efforts, joining the girls' basketball team and attending various social functions, often escorted by boys (Alexander, 1999). Outside school, she continued to draw, study music and be enthralled by the power that literature had over her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In January 1945, when Aurelia took her children to see the production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Sylvia was particularly enthralled by the story of Prospero who, finally realising the error of his ways, decides to release the airy spirit

Ariel from more than a decade of captivity in a tree (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). For years to come, Sylvia would remember specific speeches, characters and lines from this her first play, and it would provide a principal metaphor for her later work (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

For Sylvia, this magical experience represented a turning point in her young life, and she described in her diary how the play had transported her into a world far superior to the one she inhabited (Wilson, 2013). *Ariel's Song* about the death of a father, must have had a particularly chilling impact on 12-year-old Sylvia, who struggled with her own figurative tempest because of her father's abrupt death (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The song of Ariel tells of a father who lies buried deep under the ocean where his bones have turned to coral and his eyes to pearls (Kirk, 2009).

Sylvia's enthrallment with literature was reflected not only in the number of books she read and the proliferation of poems, short stories and journal entries which she wrote, but also in the awards which she garnered at the end of the academic year. At a special school awards ceremony in June 1945, Sylvia won the Wellesley award for the seventh grade, which included a copy of the Lambs' *Tales from Shakespeare* and an honours certificate stating that she had won first prize for excellence in English expression (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). She also received commendation cards for her unusual creativity in English, for the outstanding quality of her oral and written work, and for the excellent service she had rendered in managing war stamp sales (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia's reward for her academic achievement that year was a two-week stay at Camp Helen Storow on Buzzards Bay in Massachusetts, which she attended with her friend Betsy Powley (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). While she attended the camp, she compiled a 90-page book dedicated to Betsy (Wilson, 2013). Although the book provides some information about Betsy, it reveals a great deal more about the 12-year-old Plath, whose writing was so ordered and meticulous that it displayed obsessional tendencies (Wilson, 2013). Even the detailed documentation of her camp schedule, including the list of food she ate and the number of paces it took her to walk certain distances, affirm these obsessional tendencies. Sylvia also counted the number of letters that she had received from her mother during that summer camp, and since each letter represented a token of love to her, she concluded that she was loved more than any other girl (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's obsessive perfectionism and her desire to please her mother and play the part of the dutiful daughter, were reinforced by Aurelia's habit of rewarding good behaviour (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Although a very encouraging and self-sacrificing parent, Aurelia raised her children with the knowledge that there was a correlation between good behaviour and love (Rollyson,

2013; Wilson, 2013). She was the type of parent who enforced a strict moral regime, not through punishment, but through martyrdom to principles and values (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia's postcards and letters from summer camp may have expressed the continual theme of motherly love and adoration, but behind the mask of the perfect and obedient daughter, lurked Sylvia's resentments against Aurelia's oppressive bourgeois values (Butscher, 1976; 2003; Rollyson, 2013). As Sylvia's interior world darkened, she became an expert at pretending and wearing a mask of normality (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Even her journal entries provide insight into what Sylvia herself called her many masks (Gill, 2008). Perhaps the only clues to the true nature of her personality were her competitive drive and compulsive perfectionism, instincts which, even at an early age, bordered on the pathological (Wilson, 2013). Even a childhood acquaintance, Frank Irish (who knew her from the age of 12 to the age of 17) described her as being incredibly intense, competitive and determined to do things right, to the extent that "everything she did had to be not just good, but perfect" (Wilson, 2013, p. 56). Sylvia's compulsive perfectionism emerged from the moral and social framework of her life, and provided not only the main features of her surface masks, but their underpinnings as well (Butscher, 1976; 2003; Wilson, 2013). This resulted in a strong sense of middle-class propriety and a strict adherence to domestic and moral cleanliness throughout her life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). A satirist by nature, Sylvia's acerbic comments about people from a lower class and her enthrallment with her favourite radio heroes (the Lone Ranger and Superman) were constituents of a symbolic clean-up that would make the world morally immaculate (Rollyson, 2013). Her visceral dislike of moral and physical imperfection explains her extreme reactions later in life to her husband's deplorable physical and moral hygiene (Rollyson, 2013).

2.2.5 Early Adolescence (1945 – 1947): Sylvia's Junior High School Years after World War II

To Sylvia, 1945 marked not only the end of World War II, but also the start of adolescence. It was in this period of optimism that she entered the eighth grade at Alice L. Phillips Junior High (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). To the outside world at least, she appeared to be a normal, young teenage girl (Wilson, 2013). Apart from an excellent academic record, she participated in extra-mural activities such as dancing and playing the viola in the school orchestra, all the while maintaining a heavy reading schedule of classical novels (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). According to one of Sylvia's school counsellor's, she was an avid reader who read in such great depth that she seemed to devour Shakespearean literature (Butscher, 1976, 2003;

Rollyson, 2013). Being 13, her appetite was ravenous and her detailed diaries attest to the fact that she devoured food as heartily as she devoured literature (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Socially, she appeared to be a normal teenager as well, and within only a week of entering eighth grade, she was elected as president of her homeroom (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Her two closest friends were Betsy Powley and Ruth Freeman, and together the three girls enjoyed all the pastimes that typify adolescence, including discussing boys and attending summer camps (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). It is ironic that her friend, Ruth Freeman, described her as “not a morbid child – it was all fun and laughter” (Wilson, 2013, p.2, gallery section). Evidently, this dichotomy attests to Sylvia’s expertise at perfecting an outer mask of normality – one which kept hidden her morbidity (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

In February 1946, Sylvia began to keep a dream book in which she recorded her night-time visions of escape (Wilson, 2013). More often than not, Sylvia suffered from monstrous nightmares, which included visions of murder, death and unspeakable horrors (Wilson, 2013). These nightmares prompted her to write Gothic mystery stories which, although disturbing, provided an outlet through which she could express some of the darkness and morbidity which hid behind her outer mask (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Looks mattered to Sylvia, as did good manners, diction and what she wore (Rollyson, 2013). Consequently, she was devastated by the onset of acne, which made her feel so self-conscious and unattractive that she would confine herself to her home for fear of embarrassing herself in public (Wilson, 2013). In her journal she described herself as an “ugly introvert” (Plath, 2000, p. 130), and at the tender age of 14, she attempted to harm herself by cutting her face (Wilson, 2013). The self-cutting was yet again a manifestation of the darkness and morbidity which she had tried to keep hidden, but which became increasingly overwhelming as adolescence progressed (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013, Wilson, 2013). The fact that Sylvia was unable to arrive at a clear explanation for her inner turmoil and harmful behaviour, frustrated and confused her even more (Wilson, 2013). In her efforts to resolve the mystery of her identity, she wrote the poem “Riddle” (Wilson, 2013, p. 62).

In light of Sylvia’s intense identification with the physicality of words as a substitute for love, it is not surprising that she plunged into depression at the end of April 1946, after discovering that her fountain pen had been stolen (Wilson, 2013). The disappearance of her pen upset her not only because it represented her relationship with the written word, but also because Sylvia knew that her mother would not be able to replace it at short notice, given the

family's financial constraints (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). These financial constraints resulted in Sylvia developing into a very abstemious person, attested to by the fact that she kept meticulous record of every penny that she spent (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). To supplement her allowance, Sylvia did babysitting – temporary work which earned her some money, but which also made her arrive at the conclusion that children were nothing but an inconvenience (Wilson, 2013). Fortunately, she was allowed to listen to one of her favourite radio serials (*The Shadow*) while babysitting (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Years later, Sylvia would remember the words of the actor who introduced the programme, and she would be inspired to write a short story featuring these ominous words: “Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men? The Shadow knows!” (Plath, 2008, p. 151).

In the holiday preceding ninth grade, Sylvia spent her time learning how to type, reading and writing poetry (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). That August of 1946, she went through a collection of poems that she had written over the previous nine years and decided to select, arrange in chronological order, and copy by hand those that she considered to be her best (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She illustrated many of her poems with crayon and ink drawings, and called her homemade anthology *Poems by Sylvia Plath* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She continued to excel academically and was encouraged by her teachers to apply for a scholarship to study English, since she displayed extraordinary talent for the subject (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her ninth-grade English teacher, Miss Helen Lawson, described her as being extremely neat, both in her personal appearance and in her work, and even labelled her as a “perfectionist” and “one of the few who stand out personally – quiet, easy, willing, and good morally and scholastically” (Butscher, 2003, p. 22).

Family, close friends and authority figures like teachers, saw only Sylvia's polite, respectable and caring side, evident in her memorial poem written for Miss Catherine Cox, a junior high school teacher who passed away when Sylvia was in ninth grade (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). This poem was published in *The Phillipian* in November 1946, together with two other poems by Sylvia, *The Promise* and *October*, all of which were imbued with imagery from nature and an eternal possibility for hope (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). These poems echo Sylvia's determination to be positive and cheerful, and represent her public mask (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Below the surface, however, the darkness and morbidity seemed to increase as adolescence progressed and her adolescent contemporaries often described her as “a loner” and “a daydreamer”, on account of her frequent retreats from the world into a private, secret universe where the self had “supernatural powers” (Butscher, 2003, p. 14).

Despite the fact that Sylvia had the ability to write tender, moving poetry, she also had the tendency to write cruel comments about those close to her, as is evident in the spiteful caricatures presented in her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). According to Aurelia, these malicious caricatures were symptomatic of a twisted mind affected by depression, or a warped personality brought on by the negative consequences of badly-conducted electro-convulsive therapy (Wilson, 2013). Her adolescent diary entries also attest to the contradictory duality of her personality, with manifestations of intense sexuality surfacing, only to be quickly suppressed in what Sylvia regarded as an attempt “to control the impure side of her personality” (Plath, 2000, p. 67). Coupled with this duality, was Sylvia’s tendency to project onto those around her, fantasies, wishes and motivations which often had no bearing on reality (Wilson, 2013). The discrepancy between reality and her imaginary world, or what Wilson (2013, p. 72) referred to as “the spirit of Ariel”, grew all the more extensive with the passing of time.

At the beginning of 1947, Sylvia bought a scrapbook into which she began to paste photographs of herself accompanied by autobiographical diary entries (Wilson, 2013). In this diary, Sylvia recorded that she aspired to become the world’s greatest author and artist. That February, she also recorded that she wanted to achieve the award of a sixth letter by the end of junior high – an accomplishment which the school’s history had never seen (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her poem *Fireside Reveries* was published in *The Phillipian* in the same month and attests to Sylvia’s zealous drive (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The poem not only captured Sylvia’s awareness of herself as a daydreamer who aspired to be great; it also expressed Sylvia’s belief that the direction of her life would involve a literary career (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In the poem, Sylvia wrote: “My thoughts to shining fame aspire” (Wilson, 2013, p. 67), a line which aptly summed up Sylvia’s ambitious nature and her insatiable appetite for success and public recognition (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Four months later, at the school’s final assembly of the year, Sylvia’s string of accolades and academic awards, publicly confirmed that she was indeed a golden girl destined for a great future. (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). According to one of her friends, Betsy Wallingford, Sylvia was born with a relentless drive for success. Not only was she driven to experiment with everything in life, she also excelled at everything with which she experimented (Wilson, 2013). The list of awards which Sylvia garnered at the end of junior high was nothing less than extraordinary and included a special student award. She also received recommendation cards for obtaining straight A’s during her three years at Phillips, as well as for punctuality and excellence in art (which included an honourable mention in a

national poetry competition and an achievement certificate for winning first place in a national art contest sponsored by the Carnegie Institute). Furthermore, Sylvia attained awards for fifth and sixth letters based on her exceptionally high credit score and the fact that she was the only pupil in the history of the school to attain enough credits for a sixth letter (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia's intelligence proved to be both the curse and the blessing of her entire life, and although it facilitated her attainment of public approval and recognition, it also enslaved her, as she later confirmed when she said: "there is no escaping the mind" (Butscher, 2003, p. 27). Her complete immersion in her work and the power which her mind held over her, revealed itself one day in the final stretch of Junior High, when she returned home from a private art lesson with a pastel still life which had not yet dried completely. As her grandmother tossed her apron onto the table, it accidentally brushed against the pastel and ruined it (Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia reassured her grandmother that she could patch it up, she privately confessed in her diary her feelings of frustration and devastation, and even wrote a poem which Aurelia described as the first to contain tragic undertones (Plath, 1992). The poem entitled, "*I thought that I could not be hurt*" articulated the extremes of emotion that Sylvia experienced before, during and after the incident; and captured perfectly the dichotomous war between the intensity of joy and the blackness of despair that characterised Sylvia's existence (Plath, 1992, p. 34). This seemingly insignificant accident symbolised the fragility of the human heart to Sylvia (Wilson, 2013) and although it occurred when she was only 14 years old, it represented what would become a recurrent theme in her life: "It is as if my life were magically run by two electric currents: joyous positive and despairing negative – whichever is running at the moment dominates my life, floods it" (Plath, 2000, p. 395).

On the last day of Junior High, Sylvia passed around her yearbook and received 75 autographs of good wishes from her peers (Kirk, 2009). Despite the plethora of accolades which she had won for being the highest-achieving pupil in her grade, and the myriad of friends, boyfriends and activities which enlivened her junior high year, the annotations in the yearbook attest to the fact that this promising 14-year-old prodigy was connected to a level of pain that she could not explain to anyone (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). It is with this secretly-held pain that Sylvia commenced high school.

2.2.6 Middle Adolescence (1947 – 1950): Sylvia’s High School Years during the McCarthy Era

In September 1947, Sylvia began classes at Gamaliel Bradford High School, and was immediately enthralled by her new English teacher, Wilbury Crockett (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Admittance to Mr. Crockett’s advanced English classes depended on the results of an entrance exam in grammar and vocabulary, and the 20 or so students who managed to survive the rigorous challenges of the course became part of an elite group of superior intellectuals, aptly named Crocketeers (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Due to the academically gruelling demands of this elite course, almost half of the pupils who were admitted dropped out within a matter of days, transferring instead to a less demanding course (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia, however, flourished in this climate of academic rigour, and she was both intellectually stimulated and inspired by Mr. Crockett’s style of teaching and by his profound concern with the ideas and values that language expressed (Wilson, 2013). Being in Mr. Crockett’s class was both a privilege and an honour, and it guaranteed college-level standards in a college-like atmosphere, with each class conducted as though it were a college seminar (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). To Sylvia, Mr. Crockett was nothing less than “the teacher of a lifetime” (Alexander, 1999, p. 51). Not only did he bring out her competitive nature, he also inspired her to write about subjects such as the Korean War and the atomic bomb, thus affording her the opportunity to follow her father’s pacifist politics (Rollyson, 2013). In Mr. Crockett, Sylvia found a positive father figure, one who had all of Otto Plath’s intellectual virtues, but none of his supposed imperiousness and despotism (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

From the very beginning, Mr. Crockett recognised Sylvia’s superior creative ability and her genuine excitement and passion for the literary giants studied in class (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). True to her nature and her academic reputation, her papers were always highly perceptive, well-argued, and meticulously typed, mirroring an almost compulsive attention to detail that was typical of everything she did and wrote (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In fact, Sylvia’s extraordinary talent for writing lyric so impressed Mr. Crockett, that he described her as “too talented to believe” (Butscher, 2003, p. 31). Even her guidance counsellor described her as being “too dangerously brainy”, whilst one of her good friends, Philip McCurdy, described her as “a super-normal teenager” (Butscher, 2003, p. 32). Notwithstanding the praise which Sylvia received, and the fact that, to the outside world at least, she seemed destined for great success, beneath the surface mask of the golden child, lurked a loner who doubted her talent, questioned her identity, and fretted about her popularity

(Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). At that stage in her life, she questioned the ease with which she could see points of view other than her own, ascribing her confusion to the feeling of inferiority which haunted her (Wilson, 2013). In an effort to overcome the social awkwardness of early adolescence and be accepted by her contemporaries, Sylvia joined the high school sorority, Sub-Deb (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Membership to this sorority entailed submitting oneself to an initiation week characterised by personal and public humiliation (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia had initially felt flattered to be invited to join this elite sorority which would undoubtedly increase her popularity, she later resigned because she disapproved of the condescending manner with which members treated non-members (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Later in life, as a woman of 30, she would write about this experience in her autobiographical essay, entitled *America! America!* (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In this essay, Sylvia articulated the pressure of being trapped between the desire to belong and the drive to maintain one's individuality, concluding that there was something sinister about popularity, something that "leached a girl of her individuality" (Plath, 2008, p. 56).

Sylvia expressed ambiguity towards the power of the group in her short story entitled *Initiation* (Plath, 2008). This ambiguity was but one manifestation of her duality and accounted for her constant state of emotional flux (Wilson, 2013). Mr. Crocket was one of the few people in Wellesley who could see beneath Sylvia's outer mask. According to him, she had the ability both to "seal herself off" from others and to manipulate them "for what they could give her" (Butscher, 2003, p. 35). Her physical attractiveness, combined with her willingness to please, not only consolidated her position as class star, but also kept hidden the encroaching darkness which haunted her and flung her between tides of emotional instability (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Like the sea which she felt so connected to, Sylvia's moods fluctuated between high waves on dark, tempestuous days, to tranquil ripples on calm and sunny days (Rollyson, 2013). This fluctuating tide of emotions surfaced in many of the poems written by Sylvia during high school. The poem *Bereft*, composed in 1947, takes the form of a lament to an unnamed being who leads the poetess down to the sea and says goodbye eternally (Wilson, 2013).

In light of the fact that Sylvia associated her father with an idyllic sea-side childhood brought to an abrupt end by his death (Schultz, 2005e), the poem *Bereft*, although still unpublished, carries particular significance. Whilst it captures perfectly Sylvia's analogy of her dead father to a kind of sea god, it also captures and foreshadows the ambivalence of emotion reflected in her later father-centred poems such as *Electra on Azalea Path*, *Full Fathom Five*, *Little Fugue*,

Daddy and *The Colossus* (Walder, 1976; Wilson, 2013). According to Malcolm (1995), many regard the death of Sylvia's father as "the shadow-event of her life, the wound from which she never recovered" (p. 34). The poems written by Sylvia during her high school years not only reflect the wound, they also express trademark Plathian themes, including the enigmatic nature of identity, the terror of self-knowledge, and the sinister nature of deceptively normal day-to-day existence (Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia continued to place a high premium on school work and academic achievement, but as adolescence progressed, she found herself increasingly distracted by her growing sexual desires, and this resulted in yet another source of conflict for her (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although sexual attractiveness was important to her and was encouraged by her culture, the idea of sex itself was disconcerting to her, for personal and moral reasons (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her diary entries attest to the conflicting demands of her religion and culture and the fact that her relationships with boys were often characterised by complex feelings that vacillated between love and hate (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her literary works also bear witness to this conflict and the social anxieties which she experienced (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Like many girls of her generation, Sylvia found herself torn between the conventions and contradictions of dating, and her own personal experiences of heartbreak and confusion inspired her to write the story *And Summer Will Not Come Again* (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In her journal, she described the source of that inspiration as follows:

I sat listlessly on my porch at home, crying over the way summer would not come again – never the same. The first story in print came from that "never again" refrain beat out by the rain. August rain: the best of the summer gone, and the new fall not yet born. The odd uneven time. (Plath, 2000, p. 124)

The story not only bears witness to the intensity of Sylvia's perceptions and feelings, it also attests to the fact that she was a product of her socio-cultural milieu, with its emphasis on finding and keeping a boyfriend (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In her journal she wrote passionately about her loathing of being trapped in a system which she regarded as hypocritical, since it was governed by artificial rules of religious and social propriety, that stifled personal desire (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson 2013). The ever-widening discrepancy between superficial appearances and inner realities obscured Sylvia's insight into her identity, which she often experienced as fragmented into many different and often conflicting identities (Wilson, 2013). It is not surprising therefore, that Sylvia felt such a strong sense of identification with Virginia Cunningham, the principal character of the 1948 film *The Snake*

Pit (Wilson, 2013). According to Sylvia, who wrote a review of this film whilst still in high school, Virginia symbolised all patients who were affected by mental disturbance – a condition which she believed was defined and measured by its socio-cultural context (Wilson 2013).

Sylvia's story *In This Field We Wonder Through*, written in 1948, articulates perfectly the multiplicity of her personality (Wilson, 2013). The story describes the preoccupations and anxieties of Joyce (a representation of Sylvia), who prefers the predictability of school life to the chaotic uncertainty of friends and boys (Wilson, 2013). Like Sylvia, Joyce presents herself to the world wearing a mask of amiable politeness, but beneath the mask of perfect bourgeois values, hides the shadow of dark depression (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). According to Butscher (1976, 2003), religion and culture constituted inseparable, but also opposing halves of Sylvia as a whole, and the conflict between these halves limited her unrelentlessly. Furthermore, these opposing poles strengthened her infantile insistence on black and white extremes, evident in the physical manifestation of her intense depressive episodes whenever she was plagued by sinusitis or menstrual cramps (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia was intensely aware of her psychological vulnerability and even compared her unstable state to an “emotional thermometer” (Wilson, 2013, p. 86). One of the antidotes for the Manichean intensities of her experience proved to be discipline, expressed in its purest form through achievement (Butscher 1976, 2003). Sylvia also found release from the psychological pressure that was building up within her through written confessions to her mother. This act of purging her delicate frame of mind to Aurelia became increasingly compulsive and, although cathartic, eventually became a curse to Sylvia (Wilson, 2013).

Her journal entries and letters to her mother reflect not only her identity confusion, but also her desire to possess a divine insanity which could transform everyday experiences into something extraordinary, thus turning her into a type of deity (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2017; Wilson, 2013). She admitted to having “a terrible egotism”, and in her desire to be free and omniscient, she even referred to herself as “the girl who wanted to be God” (Plath, 1992, p. 40). The conflict between Sylvia's inner world of chaos and confusion and her outer façade of perfect manners and grooming was nowhere more evident than at that stage in her life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson 2013). Whilst she regarded herself as a being set apart from others, she also longed to liberate herself of her identity so that she could take on the perspectives of those she wanted to write about (Wilson, 2013). In a letter written to her friend Eddie Cohen in 1950, Sylvia captured perfectly the raging battle between her inner and outer worlds when she mentioned that most people did not realise “the chaos that seethes behind my exterior” (Wilson, 2013, p. 106).

It would be careless to ignore the profound influence which Nietzsche's ideas had on Sylvia. Aurelia gave Sylvia a copy of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* as a gift, and his controversial ideas about decency, morality and conventional behaviour so enthralled Sylvia, that she not only used the text's chapter headings in the titles of some of her poems, but also incorporated his ideas in the personal mythology which she created regarding her life (Wilson, 2013). The most chilling parallels between Nietzsche's ideas and Sylvia's life are captured in the poems *Lady Lazarus* (based on Sylvia's 1953 suicide attempt) and *Kindness*, written two weeks before her suicide in 1963. In light of the fact that Sylvia sacrificed everything in her life so as to immortalise her writing, Nietzsche's advice to ambitious writers to "write with blood" (Nietzsche, 1932, p. 72) and to "Die at the right time" so as to ensure eternal fame (Nietzsche, 1932, p. 125) can be seen as an omen in Sylvia's life, ironically brought to life when she wrote in the poem *Kindness*: "The blood jetty is poetry/There is no stopping it" (Hughes, 1981, p. 27).

Aurelia was not the only one to whom Sylvia wrote in her efforts to ease her inner tension and boost her self-confidence during the difficult period of adolescence (Wilson, 2013). In the same year that she started high school she began a pen-pal correspondence with a German teenager called Hans Joachim Neupert (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In Hans she found not only a correspondent through whom she could sharpen her writing skills, but also a confidante with whom she could share her ideas about war (Rollyson, 2013). Despite the unsettling effect of the Cold War, the Korean War, and McCarthyism on the country's politics, America was characterised, at the time, by a complacent attitude of conformity and consumerism, and Sylvia was not only intensely aware of the safe, suburban upbringing of the typical American teenager, but also intensely disgusted in the country's seeming indifference to war (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her correspondence with Hans was thus greatly motivated both by her strong feelings about the war and her keen interest in discovering what the war felt like to a young teenage boy living in a war-torn environment (Rollyson, 2013).

Sylvia detested the idea of war and saw no purpose to it except as a manifestation of extreme anti-communism (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In 1950, when the United States revealed that it would continue to support the development of the hydrogen bomb, Sylvia and her friend Perry Norton wrote a letter to the *Christian Science Monitor* expressing their outrage (Wilson, 2013). The letter, entitled *Youth's Plea for World Peace*, was published a month later and criticised both the arms race and the absurd notion that a weapon of mass destruction could be created to bring about world peace (Wilson, 2013). What upset Sylvia was the way war destroyed everything, including acts of generosity and kindness, and she believed strongly that

peace could be attained through the spread of world federalism (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). She defined pacifism not only as the rejection of war, but also as the establishment of a sense of solidarity with other people from other places (Rollyson, 2013). Her early pacifist ideas would never be forsaken and would find expression, as with all the things she was passionate about, through her writing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia's letters to Hans spanned a five-year period and reveal a great deal about her temperament and her life aspirations. Her story *And Summer Will Not Come Again* was rejected 45 times before eventually being published (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Even at this young age, Sylvia showed the tenacity of a professional writer who refused to be discouraged by repeated rejections (Wilson, 2013). If anything, the repeated rejections only made Sylvia more determined and not surprisingly, she earned the position of school editor in her senior year (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The front-page article in the school newspaper emphasised that Sylvia would be an excellent editor not only because of her exceptional writing ability, but also because of her sharp critical vision and her notable reputation of sticking to a task until its completion (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

In September 1949, Sylvia entered her senior year of high school and continued her tradition of outstanding academic achievement (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). For fear of appearing "too dangerously brainy" (Plath, 2008, p. 55), and in light of the fact that colleges sought good, all-round students, and not just academic top achievers, Sylvia ensured that she participated in a variety of activities, including participation in basketball, the school drama production, the school newspaper and the Natural Honor Society (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Despite a full academic schedule, she continued to read, write and submit poetry and short stories to publishing companies (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). She also published numerous poems in *The Bradford* during her senior year, all of them anonymous, with *Family Reunion* epitomising perfectly Sylvia's advanced skill with regard to metaphor and the integration of artistic creativity and autobiographical characterisation (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Although Aurelia Plath would be shocked in later years to discover the personal, autobiographical nature of Sylvia's caricatured relatives in the poems, the anonymity allowed Sylvia to give expression to the sardonic, mocking side of her personality (Butscher, 1976, 2003). This side of her personality hid beneath the mask of surface politeness and was, ironically, the persona that was encouraged by Aurelia (Butscher, 1976, 2013; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Although Sylvia could easily obtain a scholarship to Wellesley, based on her academic achievements, she was determined to gain a place at Smith College, one of the elite women's colleges in the country (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). She was interested in Smith College not only because it was reputed for its quality of higher education, especially in English and Art, but also because of its location (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Situated in Northampton, Massachusetts, and being about 90 miles from Wellesley, Smith College would give her the space she felt she needed from her mother and her family (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Despite the financial strain that it would place on the family, Aurelia did not object to Sylvia's desire to attend Smith College, and even welcomed it as a sign of her daughter's growing independence (Rollyson, 2013).

In her application to Smith College, Sylvia included her scholastic achievements, her membership to school, church and political organisations, her extensive reading list, the results of her Scholastic Achievement and Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests (which placed her in the category of genius) and recommendation letters from a number of people who knew her well (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). All these references described Sylvia as a well-balanced, highly intelligent and exceptionally talented young woman who could mingle easily with a wide variety of people and who, apart from always being incredibly resourceful, was also always gracious, well-poised, calm and gentle (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although Mr. Samuel Graves, the headmaster of Bradford High School described her as a "superior candidate", in his recommendation letter to Smith, he also anticipated future college problems related to Sylvia's extreme ambitiousness when he wrote: "May college mean some 'fun' for her as well as intellectual accomplishments" (Alexander, 1999, p. 59).

Unfortunately, the testimonies of Sylvia related only to her "squeaky clean" outer mask of normality (Plath, 2008, p.55). According to Wilson (2013), it was perhaps her inner conflict and feeling of emptiness that pushed her to compete in such an extreme way. To Sylvia, academic certificates, awards and prizes were tangible manifestations of her accomplishments that could help to foster her self-esteem (Wilson, 2013). True to this persona of academic excellence, in June 1950, Sylvia graduated from Bradford High School as valedictorian of her class, collecting a plethora of awards and prizes for her outstanding achievements in History, English, Writing and Art (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Not surprisingly, she was accepted by both Wellesley and Smith College (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The scholarship which she obtained from Smith College, together with the additional scholarship which she obtained from the Wellesley Smith Club (an alumni group in

the town), made her dream of going to Smith College a reality (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although she obtained these scholarships, Sylvia was well aware of the fact that attending Smith College would involve a continued financial struggle, since the scholarships did not fully cover indispensable articles such as clothes and books (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia was always reminded of the fact that she was not in the same financial bracket as many of her peers, and whilst her fellow high school *Crocketteers* prepared for their pre-college summer vacation through Europe, Sylvia prepared herself for her summer job at *Lookout Farm* where she would spend her days picking strawberries and packaging spinach (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Despite the gruelling physical nature of the work, Sylvia actually revelled in the harsh demands of her new outdoor job, which not only afforded her the opportunity to mix with a strange array of characters, but also distracted her from the internal pressure which threatened to ignite her depression (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

She used her personal experiences on the farm as the basis for future creative works, a habit that she would practice throughout her life (Alexander, 1999). The poem *Bitter Strawberries* was a direct outcome of her work experience on *Lookout Farm*. Set in the strawberry fields in which Sylvia laboured that summer; the poem compares farming in America to the war that was taking place in Korea at the time. Consequently, this anti-war poem not only depicts the socio-cultural realities of the time, it also aptly captures Sylvia's sentiments about war, whilst manifesting the poetic genius that her discipline could generate (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Perhaps the strawberries which turn "thick and sour" whilst the horseflies "buzzed, paused and stung" like bombers (Butscher, 2003, p. 38) foreshadowed the bitter pain that awaited her in college and that would eventually consume her.

In the months preceding the start of college, Sylvia started a new journal to document important experiences and conversations in her life (Wilson, 2013). This journal, which would be published as her famous journal decades later, would be used by Sylvia not only as a resource from which to pool material for her creative writing, but also as a tool to better understand what she regarded as the enigmas of her self (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's compulsive need to lift people and experiences from her personal life and immerse them into her creative writing became such a habit that it transformed into a trademark feature of her literature throughout her profession (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In fact, it was precisely this autobiographical feature of her writing that gave genuine coherence to her work and made it convincing (Butscher, 1976, 2003). The concluding lines of her short story *Den of Lions*, published in *Seventeen* magazine in 1951, were copied almost precisely

from one of Sylvia's journal entries and attest to the autobiographical nature of her writing (Wilson, 2013).

Her first journal entry describing her immense satisfaction after a day's hard physical labour on *Lookout Farm* starts with the words: "I may never be happy, but tonight I am content" (Plath, 2000, p. 8). *Lookout Farm* not only provided her with a range of fascinating characters whom she thought were ripe enough to be transported from real life to the pages of her journal, it also presented her with a number of interesting experiences from which she shaped some of her short stories (Wilson, 2013). Two of these short stories, *The Estonian* and *The Latvian*, were based on the character of Ilo Pill, an Estonian immigrant whom Sylvia claimed had tried to seduce her in his barn loft room on *Lookout Farm* (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia managed to free herself from his grasp, she recorded in her journal that the experience had left her feeling so full of desire that she was "flooded with longing, electric, shivering" (Plath, 2000, p. 11).

As Sylvia prepared for her new life at Smith College, the reality that she would be leaving home for the first time gave her a new-found freedom to record experiences that she may have felt forced to censor under Aurelia's watchful eye (Wilson, 2013). Her new journal entries included descriptions of malevolent thoughts, body functions and provocative sexual fantasies. In fact, sexual fantasies made numerous appearances in her journal entries and attest to the ambiguous nature of her conflicting identities. Her journal entry describing how wonderful it was "to be a virgin, clean and sound and young" is, for example, immediately juxtaposed by her desire to be raped (Plath, 2000, p. 8). She also wrote of her desire to be driven off to a mountain cabin "and be raped in a huge lust like a cave woman, fighting, screaming, biting in a ferocious ecstasy of orgasm..." (Plath, 2000, p. 174).

Sylvia's fragmented thinking and the conflict of being trapped in a society that forced women into traditional roles of subservience at the expense of personal fulfillment is captured perfectly in the journal entry where she wrote:

I spiral back to me, sitting here, swimming, drowning, sick with longing. I have too much conscience injected in me to break customs without disastrous effects; I can only lean enviously against the boundary and hate, hate, hate the boys who can dispel sexual hunger freely, without misgiving, and be whole, while I drag out from date to date in soggy desire, always unfulfilled. The whole thing sickens me. (Plath, 2000, p. 20)

Given that Sylvia had an immense amount of sexual energy and that she felt trapped in a society which frowned upon the liberal expression of female emotions, it is not surprising that her journal became her outlet for the myriad of emotions that both helped and haunted her

(Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). With this journal, Sylvia left the safe familiarity of her home in Wellesley to start her new adventure as a Smith girl (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009).

2.2.7 Later Adolescence (1950 – 1952): Sylvia’s Junior College Years at the Time of the Cold War

Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, was founded in 1875 and had a reputation for attracting highly intelligent, wealthy and socially distinguished young women who would be shaped into the perfect wives for their male equivalents at Princeton or Yale (Butscher 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). It also attracted some neurotic students who, because of the pressure generated by unrelentless academic and social competition, occasionally succumbed to nervous breakdown and even suicide (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Although Smith College had humble origins, by the time Sylvia entered its gates in September 1950, it was reputed as the largest women’s college in the world, boasting literary names like Mary Ellen Chase, the well-known novelist and feminist who lectured in the English Faculty and would play a significant role in Sylvia’s literary career (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although Sylvia had obtained a scholarship to attend Smith College, she did not come from a wealthy, socially-elite family, and her scholarship thus depended on her obtaining top academic grades. In the event of her marks slipping, her grant money would be retracted and she would be dismissed from Smith College (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her fear of losing her place at Smith impelled her to work even harder than she had in high school. Although this ensured her habitual string of extraordinary academic achievements and laudatory acclamations from lecturers, the heavy workload and the continued pressure she placed on herself soon plunged her into depression and loneliness within the first months of college life (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009).

The pressure was aggravated by the fact that Sylvia felt socially inferior to her peers who regarded her as an “ambitious loner” (Kirk, 2009, p. 61). Marcia Brown, one of her best friends at Smith, described her as having “tremendously well-organised study habits”, adding that Sylvia’s need to excel far outweighed her need for sociability (Butscher, 2003, p. 45). According to Ann Hayes (another close friend at Haven House), although she was very aware of the importance of building friendships and belonging to a group, she did not want to pay the price of making friends with too many people and consequently she isolated herself socially and remained an outsider (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The effect of this was that the other college girls looked at her suspiciously, often making nasty remarks both behind her back

and in her face. Sylvia, who was so overwhelmed by her fears of inadequacy, was incapable of responding to the humiliating insults and merely hid behind the mask of polite social decorum (Wilson, 2013). Despite the indignities and subtle psychological attacks which Sylvia endured from some of the other girls, Haven House suited her perfectly since it was home to many ambitious individualists and brilliant academic loners with whom Sylvia could compete in an inspiring, yet safe academic environment (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

By that time, Sylvia was corresponding with Eddie Cohen – a 21-year-old Chicago college student majoring in English (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). He had written Sylvia her first fan letter early in August 1950, after her short story *And Summer Will Not Come Again* had been published in *Seventeen* magazine (Alexander 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). For four years, Eddie became not only Sylvia's informed literary critic, but also her confidante (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Serving as a type of alternative journal, Eddie offered the added advantage of being able to respond to Sylvia's innermost desires, fears and questions about life's complexities (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia identified with Eddie's "ice cream and pickles" description of himself since it summed up perfectly the paradox of her own character (Wilson, 2013, p. 119). Whilst she presented herself to the world wearing the mask of sweet politeness, she carried within her an acidic, sour side that struck accord with Eddie's cynical idealism and made it easy for her to reveal herself to him without the danger of physical or romantic involvement (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). She admitted to Eddie that the vulnerability which she carried around with her and which was partly a symptom of her early adolescent self-consciousness could often be mistaken for insensitivity. In her efforts to protect herself from being hurt, she hid this vulnerability behind a veneer of cynical sarcasm and an attitude of indifference (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Whilst Eddie became infatuated with Sylvia, whom he regarded as a psychological twin, she regarded him as a reflection of her alter ego, her writing and her desire to be the many lives that would make of her a god-like figure (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Although she came to depend heavily on Eddie's analyses of her psyche and even admitted to him that he was her dream man, she dreaded the thought of actually meeting him in person, because she felt that their relationship existed only in a "paper world" which to her, was "unreal" (Rollyson, 2013, p. 32).

Despite Sylvia's rejection of Eddie as a romantic prospect, he continued to write and respond to her letters, displaying such an accurate understanding of her personality, that Sylvia even wrote about his uncanny perceptiveness in a letter to her mother (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Even from the early stages of their correspondence, he saw the darker side of Sylvia

and interpreted her as something incomplete, ceaselessly striving for wholeness in a bewildering world that sometimes eluded her understanding (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Eddie understood perfectly the intellectual anxiety which Sylvia faced at Smith College, and he was capable of detecting tensions within her that not even her mother could identify (Rollyson, 2013). Years later when Sylvia attempted suicide for the first time, it was Eddie who understood the severity of her breakdown and the illusory nature of her recovery. His correspondence to her in this regard not only affirmed his perceptive understanding of her personality, but also proved to be an ominous foreshadowing of the course that her life would take, as can be seen from his words in the following extract:

Attempting to cherish that old life when things were so relatively uncomplicated will do you little good, and when reality intrudes, as it eventually must, you will merely bounce back to where you so recently returned hence. (Rollyson, 2013, p. 79)

Eddie also played the role of sex counsellor to Sylvia, responding openly to her questions about relationships and sex (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Although there was no doubt about the intensity of her sexual desires, she felt torn, not only by the puritan expectations imposed by 1950s society on her gender, but also by the black and white extremities which governed her personality. Consequently sex could never be a simple pleasure for Sylvia (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although she was intrigued and transported by its mysteries, she questioned the point of sexual seduction and pleasure since it inevitably left morally proper girls feeling dissatisfied (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). The socially conservative tradition and double standards which prevailed at the time fuelled Sylvia's sexual ambiguity (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003) and compounded her intimate relationships, which were often characterised by fluctuating emotions that left her "tremulous with love and longing, creeping in the dark" (Plath, 2000, p. 19). This added even more social pressure to Sylvia's college existence (Butscher 1976, 2003).

Whilst she detested the segregation of women in all aspects of life, from sexuality to the literary canon (Rollyson, 2013), she also understood the need to be both competent and well-rounded in her traditional role of a woman (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In the 1950s, this traditional role was defined as someone who would ultimately marry and assume her husband's existence, all the while being expected to raise a family and engage in intelligent conversation over a gourmet meal which she would have prepared herself (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

According to Sylvia's contemporaries, the women in this period of history belonged to a generation that did not question social standards, and attending college was merely something

that they did to fill the time before they got married – with marriage being the only real life-changing mechanism to be hoped for by a woman (Alexander, 1999). Sylvia confirmed this expectation towards the end of her undergraduate career when she admitted in a *Mademoiselle* interview that a Smith girl was compelled to have the right date every weekend, preferably one with perfect social and academic connections as this ensured instant status and respect from fellow college students (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Although she dated numerous young men in adolescence and young adulthood, her choice of men for her more serious college relationships attests to the pressure placed on young college girls to find the right marital partner, preferably from one of the prestigious Ivy League colleges (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her most significant relationships were, for example, with Dick Norton, a Yale medical student (represented by Buddy Willard in *The Bell Jar*), and Gordon Lameyer, an English student from Amburst College (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's journal entries and letters written throughout the dating years of her life bear witness to the contradictory and irreconcilable pressures placed on young women in America during the 1950s (Gill, 2008). They were expected to date distinguished young college men with promising futures, but they had to ensure that they remained chaste; they had to study hard to ensure self-improvement, but they had to keep in mind that the ultimate goals in life were marriage, children and a home (Gill, 2008; Plath, 1992; Plath, 2003).

Sylvia was constantly aware of the fact that women were expected to be both intelligent and beautiful, assertive and submissive (Gill, 2008). She wrote to her mother about the prejudice against girls who were too clever, and in her journals and her semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*, she exposed the devastating effects that the ideologies of that historical period placed on women (Gill, 2008; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). According to Gill (2008), this period in history preceded what came to be known as second wave feminism, and had a profound influence on Sylvia's life.

For Sylvia, who had such high ambitions to achieve greatness, the contradictory roles expected of women and the strain of keeping up appearances left her feeling lost and stripped of identity (Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013). Although her intense industriousness and relentless determination to succeed ensured that she maintained the academic excellence which she had achieved in high school, the strain of juggling academic, extra-curricular and social demands, together with the pressure of her financial obligations, aggravated her anxiety and her desperate feelings of loneliness and melancholy (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013). In her journal, she compared the loneliness to “a disease of the blood, dispersed throughout the body so that one cannot locate the matrix, the spot of contagion” (Plath, 2000, p. 29). She felt

torn between wanting to escape the intense sadness that enveloped her, and wanting to embrace it even more intensely in her painful and anxious quest towards self-understanding (Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013). She questioned the meaning of existence and reasoned that “if you have no past or future which, after all, is all that the present is made of, why then you may as well dispose of the empty shell of present and commit suicide” (Plath, 2000, p. 30).

Sylvia was aware of her intellectual potential and her capacity to realise her existence, but she was also intensely aware of the restrictions imposed on her by her socio-cultural environment – an environment which she believed “stunted, narrowed, warped” her (Plath, 2000, p. 31). She hated herself for being “torn between I know not what within me” (Plath, 2000, p. 30), and although she recognised that “there is joy, fulfillment and companionship... the loneliness of the soul in its appalling self-consciousness, is horrible and overpowering” (Plath, 2000, p. 31).

In October 1950, not even a month into the academic year, Sylvia was already exhausted and caught in the grip of depression (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). She worked constantly in order to keep up with her heavy workload and, like Esther in *The Bell Jar*, seemed incapable of knowing when to stop (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1963). In her efforts to relieve her anxiety and exhaustion, she came to depend on the regular use of sleeping pills (Wilson, 2013). That month, she was informed by Mary Elizabeth Mensel, the director of scholarships and student aid at Smith College that her scholarship benefactress was Olive Higgins Prouty, a well-known and popular novelist, whom Sylvia later represented as Philomena Guinea in *The Bell Jar* (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Gill, 2008; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia, who received the scholarship based on her proven success in writing and publishing, immediately felt a magical connection with Prouty and wrote her a letter of thanks filled with descriptions of her wonderful new life at Smith (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her mood lifted when she received a letter back from Prouty, complimenting her on her writing talent and inviting her to tea over the Christmas holiday (Alexander 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Although Sylvia was appalled by the slushy sentimentality which characterised Prouty’s writing, she recognised the important role which Prouty could play in advancing her career as a writer, since this promised both intellectual success and popularity (Butscher, 1976, 2003). A notification from *Seventeen* magazine in November 1950, informing her of the publication of her poem *Ode to a Bitter Plum*, added to her excitement and ambitious zeal of becoming famous (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). Two months later, she was notified that she had attained third prize for her story *Den of Lions* which would be published

in May 1951 (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). News of her writing success soon spread around Smith College, and Sylvia wrote to her mother about her delight of being “almost famous” (Plath, 1992, p. 60), affirming her belief that having one’s work published was “the real test of being a writer” (Plath, 1992, p. 67).

Unfortunately, the improvement in Sylvia’s mood was short-lived and within days of being back at home for the Christmas holiday of 1950, Sylvia was again caught in the grip of a deep depression (Wilson, 2013). She ascribed one of the reasons for that depression to the fact that she had to fake being happy in front of Aurelia. In a letter to a friend, she acknowledged that her mother had worked hard and sacrificed her health for her two children. Sylvia felt that the least she could do to convince her mother that her efforts had not been in vain, was to pretend to be happy with life (Plath, 2017). The strain of wearing a mask, coupled with the realisation that she could not turn to her mother in times of emotional crisis, added to her anxieties about the everyday responsibilities of adult life and she started to question not only her confidence to be an independent adult who could earn her own living, but also the deeper-rooted problem of the mystery of her own identity (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In her journal she expressed her wish to be everyone so that she could come back and write about her thoughts and emotions as the many people she had been (Plath, 2000). This wish points to many aspects of her personality, including: the multiplicity of her identity, her obsession with the concept of individual consciousness, and her eternal dissatisfaction with herself, despite her high achievements (Wilson, 2013). She strove constantly to achieve more, to be more intelligent, to be more attractive than she felt she was, and she declared in her journal that she was envious of all those who could think, write, draw, ski, look, live and love better than she could (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Irrespective of how remarkable her accomplishments were, Sylvia felt dissatisfied and inexplicably sad (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). In her journal, she attributed her dissatisfaction and unhappiness to her realisation that she was incapable of inhabiting a multitude of different personalities. She also resented having to choose between alternatives and concluded that this was perhaps why she wanted to be everyone – “so no one can blame me for being I. So I won’t have to take the responsibility for my own character development and philosophy” (Plath, 2000, p. 44).

That Christmas holiday, Sylvia became ill with sinusitis, an illness that she had been afflicted with since childhood (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her friend, Eddie Cohen, believed the illness to be psychosomatic, perceptively observing that every illness was preceded by a failed relationship or some other unfortunate experience with a male (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In fact, Sylvia became chronically ill with sinusitis in the week after her

father's death, the illness thus possibly being a physical manifestation of separation anxiety (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's chronic struggle with sinus infections not only contributed to a lifetime of severe headaches, but also left her feeling extremely depressed (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In a letter to Aurelia, she even confessed that the illness made her feel like a "depressive maniac" (Plath, 1992, p. 82).

When Sylvia returned to Smith College in January 1951, her depression worsened at the news that one of her closest college friends, Ann Davidow, had decided to leave college (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Ann had become so anxious about her ability to succeed at Smith, that she even contemplated suicide and had secretly stored sleeping pills and razor blades for this purpose (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia, who felt that Ann's departure would rob her of an important psychological support system, wrote to her mother about the distressing news (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Interestingly, Aurelia would later suggest that her daughter had exaggerated and that Ann's depression and anxiety were merely projections of Sylvia's emotions (Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013).

Sylvia's journal entries at the time reflect her distress not only because of the loss of a friend whom she felt balanced her, but also because she feared the end of the world due to nuclear war (Plath, 2000). She described the Cold War period following World War II as a "dark age" and compared the demise of America to that of the Roman Empire (Plath, 2000, p. 32). According to Gill (2008), this postwar period in America was characterised by profound contradictions which greatly influenced Sylvia's cultural and literary milieu. Although it was a time of peace and relative abundance (due to the financial benefits which America had acquired by providing supplies to allied forces during World War II), it was also a time of extreme anxiety and uncertainty. Factors such as the conflict between American right and left wing politics, the threat of communist infiltration and the Soviet Union's superiority in developing technology for the creation of the atomic bomb, all contributed to America's growing sense of vulnerability, and added momentum to the anti-communist drive known as McCarthyism (Gill, 2008).

The uncertainty and pervasive culture of suspicion gave rise to organisations such as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which sought to systematically purge America of all traces of Communism (Gill, 2008). No one was exempt from suspicious scrutiny, and even Sylvia's beloved high-school teacher, Mr. Crockett (who was a pacifist), was questioned by the Wellesley Town Board for his alleged involvement in communism (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). To Sylvia, this constituted a betrayal of American ideals such as

democracy and freedom of speech (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). True to the historical time-period, playwright Arthur Miller portrayed the hypocrisy of these ideals in his play, *The Crucible*. Similarly, Sylvia's writing attests to the fact that she was influenced by the atmosphere of hostility and suspicion which reigned at the time (Gill, 2008). Her *Ariel* poems reflect the tension created by the historical circumstances of the time and provide a backdrop for her exploration of the destructiveness of people around her (Peel, 2002). Not surprisingly, that period in history heralded the confessional style of poetry writing, which was influenced by the politics of the time, and which questioned the boundary between private experience and public discourse (Gill, 2008). Sylvia's poem, *Lady Lazarus*, tells of a woman who is forced to perform a striptease, for which she is condemned (Plath, 1966b). Consequently the poem, written in confessional style, captures not only Sylvia's personal feelings of inner turmoil and disdain, but also the double standards so typical of American life in the late 1950s (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Gill, 2008; Nelson, 2002).

The double standards embedded in the ideological changes of the time, caused a cultural shift in all aspects of life, not least of which was the role of women in the changing dynamics of American family life (Gill, 2008). Whilst women were encouraged to develop themselves academically, they were simultaneously urged to focus their ambitions on domesticity (Friedan, 1963). Sylvia's relationship with Dick Norton exemplified perfectly the consequences of the double bind which women found themselves in, and came to represent everything that Sylvia hated about American 1950s hypocrisy (Wilson, 2013). The Plaths and Nortons had been family friends even before Sylvia and Dick were born and Sylvia had been a close friend of Dick's younger brother, Perry. In February 1951, when Dick invited Sylvia for a weekend to Yale, where he was studying medicine, she confided in her friend Ann that she had never felt such admiration for any of her previous dates, and that she even felt a little inferior in his presence, given that he was so intelligent and talented in the sciences (Wilson, 2013). Intent on impressing Dick, Sylvia wrote to her mother that she would devote her spring holiday to the study of physics, chemistry and mathematics (Plath, 1992). Although she preferred art and poetry, she was determined to learn more about the sciences and believed that it would give her a firmer rooting in reality (Plath, 1992).

Her friend, Eddie Cohen, warned her that this was indicative of her tendency to forge a false identity just to be accepted by others, adding that it would result in her having a "shapeless, amorphous personality" (Wilson, 2013, p. 15). Eddie also questioned Sylvia's feelings for the men she dated, and suggested that she was intrigued by the idea of the love story, rather than

the love itself (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia understood Eddy's analysis perfectly, acknowledging this revelation and the dilemma of being a woman in the 1950s in one of her journal entries:

The most saddening thing is to admit that I am not in love. I can only love (if that means self denial – or does it mean self fulfillment? Or both?) by giving up my love of self and ambitions – why, why, why, can't I combine ambition for myself and another? I think I could, if only I chose a mate with a career demanding less of a wife in the way of town and social responsibility. But God, who is to say? You, God, whom I invoke without belief, only I can choose, and only I am responsible. (Plath, 2000, p. 102)

Sylvia's journal entries during her years at Smith College became a vehicle through which she could vent her frustrations. She was frustrated by the fact that she had to live in a society which gave men the freedom to be sexually active without tarnishing their reputations, whilst women were forced to suppress their sexual feelings and remain chaste for their prospective husbands (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia resented the fact that society expected her to sacrifice her ambitions and subordinate herself and her creativity to the will of her future husband (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). She realised, however, that the only way to have both a sexually gratifying relationship and the respectful support of society, would be to obtain a partner through the customary ritual of marriage (Plath, 2000). She came to the conclusion that a woman was limited in fulfilling her talents either with or without a husband and children, because a woman's intellectual, emotional and physical ambitions would always be at odds with societal expectations (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000). Not only did Sylvia's journal entries capture the essence of her emotional turmoil, they also raised her to the status of martyred champion for feminists who would read them for decades to come (Gill, 2008; Kirk, 2009).

Sylvia's feelings of inferiority, coupled with her persistent unsureness regarding her own identity, made her all the more desperate to fit in, to the point that she allowed her culture to impinge on her (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Torn by society's alternatives of spinsterhood and marriage, and by the extreme pressure imposed on her by her own divided personality, Sylvia felt herself slipping deeper and deeper into a vacuum of despair (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although she admired Dick and even admitted to her mother that he was the most stimulating boy she had ever known, she was afraid of revealing her real self with all its contradictions (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). That summer, Sylvia read Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* – a novel that would leave a lasting impression on her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). There are many similarities between Sylvia's semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*, and Salinger's coming-of-age story about a troubled adolescent (Kirk, 2009) who proclaims: "I

thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again" (Salinger, 2010, p. 213).

When Sylvia returned to Smith College for her sophomore year in September 1951, she was invited, together with all the girls of Haven House, to the coming out party of Maureen Lee Buckley, daughter of the extremely wealthy Texan lawyer and oil magnate, William Frank Buckley Senior (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia delighted in the extravagance of the evening and even wrote to her mother describing the lavishness of what would be a night to remember (Plath, 1992), her euphoria masked her true anxieties and inferiorities about having been born into a family that lacked the wealth and social standing of the Buckley family (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Back at Smith College, the realisation that her mundane, day-to-day existence was far removed from the idyllic, glittering world of the rich and famous, hurled her even further into depression (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). As per usual, Sylvia's mental anguish manifested in physical symptoms of sinusitis, and she was forced to book into Smith's infirmary, where the combination of sleeping pills, pyrobenzamine and privine left her feeling more depressed than ever before (Wilson, 2013). In her journal entry, she expressed her anxiety about a number of things, including: lacking the style and financial resources to dress well for an upcoming interview with *Mademoiselle Magazine*; feeling unprepared for an upcoming test; having to catch up two weeks of missed work; making her mother, Dick and herself unhappy; and being caught in the trap of feeling "too well to be really ill and pampered, too groggy to make being up worthwhile" (Plath, 2000, p. 533).

Sylvia's lack of money and the pressure it placed on her to find additional sources of income in the form of babysitting jobs, hotel waitressing and writing for publication, became an obsession to her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). She knew that in order to safeguard her scholarship, she would have to maintain her excellent academic record through extensive study; but she also knew that it was essential to earn money to supplement her academic grant, and she feared that the burden of additional work would negatively affect her grades (Wilson, 2013). In her letters to Aurelia, she confessed that she could not keep up with all the pressure and that she saw the future as consisting of nothing but work (Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). In an unpublished letter to her mother, she even drew a picture of her own gravestone, including a caption that life had been fun while it lasted (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her emotionally tumultuous relationships with men also fuelled her depressive state (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although she dated numerous men at this time, she maintained her relationship with Dick Norton, often visiting him at

Harvard over weekends when she did not have pressing academic commitments (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Unfortunately the discrepancy between their personal ideologies started to put a strain on their relationship, and in November 1951, after a visit to Dick, Sylvia wrote *Sonnet: To Eva*, describing the difference between Dick's scientific mind (which reduced everything to empirical facts), and her poetic and whimsical imagination (which extended far beyond the realm of reason) (Hughes, 1981; Wilson, 2013).

Less than six months later, Sylvia would write a short story entitled *Sunday at the Miltons*, expressing not only the ideological contrasts between herself and Dick, but also venting her vehement feelings towards him after he had disparaged her creative ambitions (Wilson, 2013). This story, which Sylvia described as a type of psychological wish fulfillment for her liberation from Dick's domination (Plath, 1992), would earn her first place in a *Mademoiselle* fiction contest and would also be used by Sylvia in her application to Harvard for admittance to a fiction-writing class (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Despite the fact that Sylvia had disguised the protagonists' characters by making them brother and sister, she felt anxious that Dick might recognise his character in the story. In a letter to her mother she admitted, however, that all her best works contained a "germ of reality" (Plath, 1992, p. 87). This tendency of using her own real-life stories as inspiration for her writing, was not only encouraged by admired writers such as Olive Higgins Prouty and Val Gendron, it actually became one of Sylvia's trademark recourses, and fuelled her search for her identity (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). According to Wilson (2013), Sylvia's creative quest to find her identity through her visionary imagination was so powerful, that it dominated her short life and had the potential to both attract and annihilate those who strayed in its path.

After completing her final sophomore exams in mid 1952, Sylvia accepted a summer waitressing job at the Belmont Hotel in West Harwick, with the hope of earning enough money to cover her expenses for her junior year at Smith (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). When she arrived at the Belmont, however, she discovered that, because of her lack of waitressing experience, she had been assigned to the side hall, rather than the main dining hall where the tips were more lucrative (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Within days of commencing her new waitressing job, Sylvia felt exhausted, disgruntled and depressed, and she wrote to her mother about her anxiety and feelings of inferiority (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Her mood lifted somewhat with the arrival of a telegram from her mother, announcing that her short story, *Summer at the Miltons*, had won first prize in *Mademoiselle's* fiction contest, earning her 500 dollars (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013;

Wilson, 2013). Her happiness was short-lived, however, and when Aurelia arrived to visit her, Sylvia was close to a mental breakdown (Wilson, 2013). She questioned her inability to cope, and felt threatened by the attractive young women at the Belmont whom she regarded as rivals and who seemed not to like her (Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her vulnerable mental state soon manifested itself physically when she became ill with sinusitis, and had to return home to Wellesley to recuperate (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

At first, Sylvia was relieved to be free of her work obligation at the Belmont, but her relief soon turned to desolation when she realised that she would be stuck at home in Wellesley under the watchful eye of Aurelia, with nothing to do (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). When she reflected on her three weeks at the Belmont, she realised that although she had detested feeling caged, the rigid structure and repetitive routine work of her old job had given her a sense of purpose which she lacked at home (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Home had lost its potential as a place of refuge for her, and although the busy work schedule of the Belmont had exhausted her, the void engendered by idle recreation at home, suffocated her, and she desperately craved routine to anchor her and give direction to her life (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The antithesis between the over-stimulating, rigidly-structured environment of the Belmont, and the boring, unregulated ambience of home reminded her of a bell jar being lifted off a secure community that had functioned like clock-work with the lid on, but that now revealed a community of frightened, impotent individuals existing aimlessly (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In her journal, Sylvia aptly captured the stifling dilemma of this antithesis when she said:

That's what it feels like: getting shed of a routine. Even though one has rebelled terribly against it, even then, one feels uncomfortable when jounced out of the repetitive rut. And so with me. What to do? Where to turn? What ties, what roots? As I hang suspended in the strange thin air of back-home? (Plath, 2000, p. 118)

Desperate for a summer job, Sylvia considered an array of advertised posts, from typist to lampshades painter, until she came across a job advertised in the *Christian Science Monitor*, for the position of housekeeper/mother's helper to Mrs. Cantor in Massachusetts (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia had vowed never to do a babysitting job again, the sound of Mrs. Cantor's voice appealed to her, as did the fact that the Cantors lived near the sea – a location which had always enthralled Sylvia (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Not only did the Cantors treat Sylvia like a family member, her work for them also gave her the opportunity to enjoy sun-filled days at the beach,

and soon she regained her vitality and felt happy again (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). She even commented in her journal: “Oh, I bite, I bite on life like a sharp apple. Playing it like a fish, I am happy” (Plath, 2000, p. 141). Despite her improvement in mood, Sylvia still felt it necessary to take the sleeping pills endorsed by her mother (Wilson, 2013). Ironically, one of her reasons for taking the job with the Cantors had been to get away from her mother, yet within weeks of her new job she discovered that Mrs. Cantor had the same possessive, overbearing nature of her mother, manifested in her frequent enquiries about all the boys Sylvia dated (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson 2013). Mrs. Cantor believed in Christian Science – a doctrine which advocated a more platonic view of Christianity, and proclaimed that sickness and sin were but illusions that could be overcome through prayer and the power of the mind (Rollyson, 2013). The fact that Sylvia pretended to be a keen disciple and even bragged in a letter to Aurelia that she had attended Christian Science Sunday school and knew all the right answers, attests to the fact that she wore masks and that she was, in fact, a fragmented personality (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

According to Butscher (1976, 2003), Sylvia was three persons who were constantly struggling with one another for dominance. There was the modest, intelligent, doubtful, obsessively-efficient Sylvia who came from a middle-class background and adhered to staunch Calvinistic values; then there was Sylvia the poetess and golden girl at Smith College, destined for a glittering future; and lastly there was Sylvia, the dark shadow, intent on destroying anyone who possessed the qualities she did not have (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although Sylvia wore other masks as well, including the traumatised child still wounded by her father’s death and yearning for the safety of her mother’s womb; and the traditional 1950s teenager aspiring to have a happy home complete with husband and children, Butscher (1976, 2003) maintained that these masks were only splintered fragments of the three main masks that she wore to conceal her insecurities and her narcissistic tendencies. She was so effective at wearing these masks, that she managed to deceive even the best of her lecturers, including Professor Gibian who commented (ironically) that Sylvia was completely healthy, wholesome and creative, and that she was the only one of his gifted writers who was not neurotic (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia detested to be seen as a failure and she constructed such a perfect mask for herself as a winner, that her entire identity hinged on the thoroughness with which she moulded and maintained that mask (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

The pressure to maintain this mask resulted in her constant vacillation between calm confidence and nervous agitation, to the point that she would eventually suffer a complete

mental breakdown (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). She was aware of the fact that her personality was splintered, but she strove to hide her vulnerabilities and present herself to the world as an unfragmented, confident, complete individual (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In her letters she wrote about her desire to gather all her different “selves” together (Wilson, 2013, p. 208), and she confirmed in her journal her “strange” ability to “be so many women to so many people” (Plath, 2000, p. 137).

Even her confidante, Eddie Cohen, maintained that she lacked spontaneity and he described her as being “all mask” (Alexander, 1999, p. 90). Not only did her different masks struggle with one another for dominance, it was as though each mask existed in a dialectic of counter positions, with Sylvia constantly striving to live through the contradictions (Rollyson, 2013). In her role as dutiful daughter, for example, Sylvia felt torn between feelings of adoration and resentment towards Aurelia. Although she loved her mother dearly and even referred to her as “my favourite person” (Rollyson, 2013, pp. 28-29), she resented Aurelia’s extreme altruism and the way in which she empathised so intensely with her daughter’s every depression, that Sylvia felt the negative reverberations actually prolonged her down periods (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Whilst Sylvia recognised and appreciated the fact that Aurelia worked tirelessly to give her children everything of the best, she detested the obligation that it placed on her to perform for her mother, and she confessed that she felt the need to escape from home, especially during periods of intense depression (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013).

Even in her role as golden girl at Smith College, Sylvia hid the reality of her inner turmoil (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Towards the end of 1952, the signs of that turmoil were, however, quite evident in her communications with Dick, Eddie, Marcia and her mother (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). She complained vehemently about the demands of her physical science class and even admitted to her mother that the subject was driving her to suicide (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In her journal, she expressed her despair and her desire to kill herself and to escape from responsibility by crawling back “into the womb” (Plath, 2000, p. 149). The news that one of her brother’s classmates had committed suicide, flung her into even greater emotional turmoil and made her doubt her old belief that one could change one’s life simply by altering one’s thoughts about it (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her journal entries attest to her self-examination and the fact that she felt as though she was drowning in a sea of negative emotions, including fear, envy, doubt, self-hate and madness (Plath, 2000). In her journal she listed all her achievements and acknowledged that she had the life millions of people envied, and still she felt paralysed by her insecurities, constantly afraid that the hell within her would break

through her surface mask and expose her as an imposter (Plath, 2000). She expanded on this idea in a college paper entitled *Dialogue*, describing her identity as being nothing more than an empty shell. Internally, she felt as though she was being devoured by a terrible disease that made her hollow and empty, and although she pretended to be normal, she feared that people would see through her false exterior to the rotten core inside (Wilson, 2013).

It was in this state of emotional turmoil, marked by insomnia and frequent episodes of uncontrollable crying, that Sylvia considered going to see a psychiatrist (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Deep down, however, she believed herself to be beyond help, and she saw suicide as her only solution (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). She resolved to continue wearing the mask of normality until she found the strength to commit suicide (Wilson, 2013). In her journal, she wrote: “Masks are the order of the day – and the least I can do is cultivate the illusion that I am gay, serene, not hollow and afraid” (Plath, 2000, p. 151).

Sylvia’s self-examination also led her to wonder whether her depression was related to her desire to be a writer. She questioned the suicides of brilliant female writers like Virginia Woolf and Sara Teasdale and wondered whether their writing was sublimation of their deepest desires, or something fuelled by their neuroticism (Plath, 2000). Anne Stevenson raised this point in a controversial essay on Sylvia, when she posited that the incompatibility between being a woman and being a writer in the post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s, led to the self-destructiveness evident in the lives of many great female writers of that time (Jacobus, 2012). Sylvia did, in fact, feel torn between the roles of woman and writer. Whilst she aspired to be a great writer, she felt stifled by the conventional roles expected of her by society, and the antithesis between her ambitious aspirations and society’s socio-cultural expectations only served to intensify her depression (Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013). The actual cause of that self-destructive depression was, however, her intense fear of failure (Jacobus, 2012; Wilson, 2013). The concept of choice terrified her and she visualized it as a tree with a multitude of branches and offshoots that had to be rejected in the climb to the top (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia used this image in *The Bell Jar*, and captured perfectly her insecurities and the predicament of being an aspiring female writer in 1950s America, when she wrote:

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the top of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor ... I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn’t make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable

to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (Plath, 1963, p. 73)

Just after the Christmas of 1952, Sylvia visited Dick at Saranac and attempted to ski down a challenging slope at Mount Pisgah. Since she had no prior skiing experience, the endeavour resulted in an accident and Sylvia broke her leg (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In a telegram to her mother to inform her of the accident, Sylvia signed off with “your fractious, fugacious, frangible Sivvy” (Rollyson, 2013, p. 54). This was Sylvia’s way of saying that she had reached breaking point (Rollyson, 2013). Her friend, Eddy, suspected that, much like her past sinusitis afflictions, her skiing accident was yet another cathartic expression of her emotional pain based on romantic disappointment (Wilson, 2013). In fact, in times of extreme stress caused by emotional trauma, Sylvia had a habit of attempting potentially harmful acts, as she did when she drove herself off the road after her husband left her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia would write about her skiing accident in *The Bell Jar*. Symbolically, this accident represented an intuitive death wish which formed in her mind “coolly as a tree or a flower” (Plath, 1963, p. 92). As she hurled herself down the mountain, she envisioned past scenes from her life, associating the fall with a letting go of all her masks, so that her true self could be reborn (Wilson, 2013). The idea of resurrection also appeared in a journal entry written at the end of 1952. In this journal entry, Sylvia referred to herself as the girl who died and was resurrected (Plath, 2000). In a sense, Sylvia was resurrected at the beginning of 1953 when she decided to make a concerted effort to piece together the fragmented splinters of her disordered life (Wilson, 2013). She decided to change all the aspects of her life which made her unhappy, one of which was her dreaded chemistry course (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Using her excellent writing skills, Sylvia wrote a petition requesting that she be allowed to audit chemistry, which meant attending the lectures, but not having to depend on the course for credits (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The news that her proposal had been accepted fuelled her new found vigour and enthusiasm for life, and she confessed in letters and in her journal that her broken leg had become like a passport, affording her a new way of approaching potential emotional problems in the future (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

Another aspect of her life which made her unhappy was her relationship with Dick, and she came to the liberating realisation that she could never marry him (Wilson, 2013). Apart from the fact that his tuberculosis negatively affected her desire for him, she also resented his supercilious, domineering attitude, which reduced their relationship to a competition rather

than a co-operative fusion of passion and intellect (Plath, 2000). Physically, Sylvia wanted a colossus of a man, and intellectually she wanted a man who wouldn't feel threatened by her creative talents (Wilson, 2013). Both literally and figuratively, Dick fell short of Sylvia's expectations, and in a letter to her mother she confessed that she was not prepared to sacrifice her ambitions for a marriage to Dick (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). Her romantic interests turned to Myron Lotz, an intelligent, handsome, future Yale medical student whom she had met at the Nortons over thanksgiving of 1952 (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia was intrigued by Myron's brilliant mind and his athletic good looks, and her obsession with him prompted her to write the villanelles *To Eva Descending the Star* and *Mad Girl's Love Song* (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Unfortunately, their dates always seemed to get cancelled, to the point that Sylvia wondered if he hadn't just been a figment of her imagination (Wilson, 2013).

In the months preceding her final junior exams, Sylvia's days were filled with a plethora of social and academic obligations. Despite a hectic schedule of activities, Sylvia managed to write publishable work for national periodicals, all the while maintaining high academic grades at Smith (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). By the end of her junior year she had garnered a string of accolades, including the position of editor for the *Smith Review* (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). This position, together with her academic awards and the fact that she had won national recognition from renowned publications, turned Sylvia's third year at Smith into a triumphant culmination of her artistic talents (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). The crowning glory of this triumph occurred when Sylvia received the news that she had won a guest editorship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York, scheduled to take place in the month of June 1953 (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

By the end of the academic year, Sylvia had won two of Smith's most prestigious literary awards and was publicly applauded in the school and local newspaper as being one of Smith's most prominent writers (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Yet despite all these accolades, Sylvia continued to be plagued by feelings of inferiority (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her journal entries bear witness to the fact that she felt undesirable to men, despite her many social conquests, and in her letters to her mother, she confessed that she felt incapable of keeping up with all the academic work and that journalism appealed to her because it made her feel less self-conscious (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). Even the letters she received from editors who expressed interest in her future literary works and encouraged her to write books, did nothing to dispel the feeling that she was not good enough (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson,

2013). According to Wilson (2013), she attempted, throughout her life, to cast herself in the role of female Icarus, desperately striving towards an abstract concept of perfection that she knew she could never attain.

In a letter written to her brother just before her departure for New York in mid 1953, Sylvia expressed her fear that the world would be destroyed by war before either of them could start enjoying the rewards of all their hard work (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2017). What Sylvia did not realise at the time, is that the threat of world war was nothing compared to the inner war that raged within her.

2.2.8 Adulthood (1953 – 1955): Sylvia’s Senior College Years and the Execution of the Rosenbergs

Sylvia arrived in New York for her guest-editorship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* within days of completing her final exams at Smith College (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The rush which characterised the end of a semester and her quick departure for New York proved to be both frenetic and daunting for Sylvia, who later admitted to her mother that she struggled to deal with high-pressure situations (Rollyson, 2013). Added to this was the fact that New York itself seemed too big and impersonal to Sylvia, especially when compared to her hometown of Wellesley (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

By 1953, New York had established itself as an influential city of global importance. An important historical event at the time was the impending Rosenberg execution, due to take place within the month of Sylvia’s *Mademoiselle* internship (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The Rosenberg’s had been found guilty of communist activity in 1951 of the McCarthy era, and had been sentenced to death by electrocution at New York’s Sing Sing Prison (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The Rosenberg case troubled Sylvia deeply and she followed their high-profile case with keen interest (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

On the first day of the *Mademoiselle* internship, Sylvia and 19 other guest editors reported for duty at the magazine’s offices in Madison Avenue (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Each of them was assigned an editing task for the forthcoming August 1953 college edition of the magazine, under the directorship of the magazine’s professional editor, Betsy Talbot Blackwell (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Blackwell had worked for *Mademoiselle* since 1935 and she had a reputation for taking plain young girls to New York, giving them a make-over and then putting them in her magazine to publicise the idea that the magazine nourished young women both inside and out (Wilson, 2013). The pressure placed on these young female guest editors was enormous. Not only did they have a

heavy workload and immense pressure to meet deadlines, they were also expected to attend social functions and appear in public to promote advertising and boost magazine sales. They thus had to fulfill the dual roles of active working journalists and runway models on show for the magazine's advertising campaigns (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). *Mademoiselle's* photographer accompanied the young guest editors on all their group outings, and took photographs of them at every opportunity (Butscher, 1976, 2003). To the self-conscious Sylvia, the incessant public exposure made her feel all the more vulnerable and only served to aggravate her ever-increasing sense of distress (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). In a photograph taken to illustrate a feature which introduced the guest editors, Sylvia was asked to pose on a sofa while holding a paper rose (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

The occasion proved too much for Sylvia, not only because the paper rose typified the magazine's shallow approach to art, but also because she had reached a level of unhappiness that could no longer be contained behind her mask of normality (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In *The Bell Jar* – Sylvia's autobiographical narrative based on her experience in New York and the aftermath of this experience – she describes Esther going as far as hiding in the powder room to avoid being photographed, because she was certain that it would result in uncontrollable crying. When the photographer asks her to smile, she finds her mouth obeying falsely, like that of a ventriloquist's dummy, and she bursts into tears (Plath, 1962). It is not only this photograph which reveals the artificial, contrived expression of a mask (Wilson, 2013). Cyrilly Abels, the managing editor to whom Sylvia was assigned, commented years later that Sylvia wore a stiff mask of unrelenting pleasantness, which made her seem unspontaneous and fake (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Emotionally, although she felt deeply, she did not give much of herself, except to very close friends (Wilson, 2013). According to Cyrilly Abels, "She was simply all façade, too polite, too well brought-up and well-disciplined" (Butscher, 2003, p. 104).

Interestingly, the photograph of Sylvia in *Mademoiselle Magazine* was accompanied by a graphologist's analysis of her hand-writing, which indicated that she would succeed in artistic fields, and that she had a sense of beauty and form (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The unedited analysis originally sent in by the graphologist also indicated, however, that Sylvia's weakness lay in her superficial, stilted behaviour and her rigid outlook (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Ironically, the opening line of the feature introducing the guest editors posed the question: "What sort of girl wins a MADEMOISELLE Guest Editorship and comes to New York to work for a month on the August College issue?" (Wilson, 2013, p. 248). Sylvia could not answer

this question, since she was going through the initial stages of yet another identity crisis (Wilson, 2013). She wrote to her mother from New York, admitting that life was so difficult and fast, that she sometimes wondered who she was (Plath, 1992). Nonetheless, Sylvia continued to wear the mask of perfect self-control, and her well-developed social poise helped carry her through the tasks expected of her as guest managing editor (Butscher, 1976, 2003). These included writing assignments, reading and providing critique on manuscripts, typing rejection letters, running errands and answering phone calls (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia had initially expected to be appointed as guest fiction editor, based on the fact that she had won the magazine's fiction contest, her disappointment was alleviated by the fact that her position as guest managing editor gave her the opportunity to meet well-known writers (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Although Sylvia recognised that working for a national magazine was invaluable to her career as a writer, the pressure from heavy work responsibilities, coupled with the exhausting burden of social obligations, soon began to affect the perfectionistic Sylvia both physically and emotionally (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In a letter to her brother, she compared New York to a world split open and one that "spilt out its guts like a cracked watermelon" (Plath, 1992, p. 117).

This image was rooted in Sylvia's physical illness after she and some of the other guest editors suffered ptomaine poisoning from a lunch of crab salad served at one of New York's advertising agencies (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The existential manifestation of the food poisoning incident occurred a few days later when the Rosenberg's were executed (Wilson, 2013). Being a pacifist like her father, Sylvia noted in her journal that the news which was constantly splashed over newspapers and relayed over radio, made her feel sick to her stomach (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). She was particularly disturbed by the apathetic response of Americans to this horrifying execution, and she recalled in her journal how one of the guest editors – a beautiful, stylish girl who had taken a nap on one of the conference couches – awoke and said with bored rustiness that she was glad the Rosenberg's were going to die, after which she carelessly went back to sleep (Plath, 2000). The emotional intensity of Sylvia's involvement in the Rosenberg case manifested itself in the fact that she began the day in protest, and challenged her peers to do the same (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia claimed that she felt a natural empathy with the Rosenbergs (Wilson, 2013). This empathic connection was affirmed by the testimony of a fellow guest editor who recalled seeing welts forming all along Sylvia's arms at the exact time that the Rosenberg executions were to take place (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Later, Sylvia would write about the Rosenberg deaths in the opening lines

of *The Bell Jar*. She captured her own sense of confusion and despair when she said: “It was a queer, sultry summer, the summer they electrocuted the Rosenberg’s, and I didn’t know what I was doing in New York” (Plath, 1963, p. 1).

Shortly after her experiences in New York, Sylvia had to undergo brutal electroshock therapy in a psychiatrist’s effort to treat her ever-worsening depression (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). She linked the electric treatments, which were incompetently administered without muscle relaxants or sedatives, to the Rosenberg executions (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013) and she described the horror of the experience in her poem *The Hanging Man*: “By the roots of my hair some god got hold of me. I sizzled in his blue volts like a desert prophet” (Mitchell, 2011, p. 43).

Despite the inner turmoil and ever-increasing depression which Sylvia suffered during her month in New York, she continued to play the part of a busy, efficient, well-balanced young girl (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). She participated in the arranged social activities with minimal emotional involvement, since none of these activities made much of an impression on her cheerful reserve (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Culturally, however, she was enthralled by what the city had to offer, and her most memorable moments in New York were of the ballets, symphonies and theatre productions which she attended, or the times when she explored the city’s endless cultural riches alone (Butscher, 1976, 2003). From a work point of view, her depression did not deter her from fulfilling her responsibilities. Not only did she manage to complete all the assignments expected of her by the magazine, she also contributed to the August issue more than any of the other guest editors (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In her journal, she described her month in New York as a deadly combination of “pain, parties, work” (Plath, 2000, p. 187). Although the outside world may have perceived it as the pinnacle of her literary achievement, and the epitome of the American Dream, to Sylvia the month in New York represented a traumatic time of progressive deterioration and ever-increasing despair (Butscher, 1976, 2003, Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia (writing as her fictional double, Esther) admits that although she knew she should have been excited about her month in New York, she found herself incapable of reacting, feeling “very still and empty, the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo” (Plath, 1963, pp. 2-3). In a letter to her brother, she confessed that when she thought of everything she had seen and experienced in New York, it felt as though her mind wanted to split open (Plath, 1992). In the same letter, she compared the train that she would

take from New York back to Wellesley, to a coffin – an image which affirms that Sylvia was feeling seriously disturbed by the time she left New York (Wilson, 2013).

When Sylvia arrived back in Wellesley at the end of June 1953, she found the Plath household caught in the grip of tension owing to her grandmother being seriously ill and her mother suffering from severe pain due to an old ulcer (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Despite the fact that her energy sources were depleted, making it difficult for her to perform even the simplest tasks, Sylvia had no choice but to carry the burden of running the Plath home while her mother attempted to recover (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Aurelia noted her daughter's somber, listless mood when she returned from New York and she dreaded telling Sylvia that her application to Frank O'Connor's short story writing course at Harvard Summer School had been rejected (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia had already submitted some poems for the course and she was looking forward to attending it, assuming that she would automatically be accepted (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although Aurelia anticipated that her daughter would be disappointed in the rejection, she never expected the shock and despair that Sylvia expressed upon receiving the devastating news (Plath, 1992). According to Butscher (1976, 2003) the rejection wounded Sylvia's already vulnerable self-esteem and increased her existing insecurities about her self-worth. Ironically, Frank O'Connor would later confirm that he had rejected Sylvia's application because he thought her too advanced for his class (Rollyson, 2013).

Although Aurelia attributed Sylvia's "great change" to the news of her rejection from the Harvard writing course (Plath, 1992, p. 123), Sylvia's journals suggest that her depression had been brewing for a long time, and that the joyful exuberance which her mother claimed characterised her, had been but a mask which was starting to collapse (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her depression was aggravated by the fact that summer loomed before her like a wasteland, devoid of the structured routine which Sylvia believed gave her purpose (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The circumstances were much like the previous summer when ill health had forced her to leave the Belmont and she had used the metaphor of the bell jar for the first time to describe to her friend Marcia, her depression and sense of purposeless detachment from life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Marcia, who was spending the summer of 1953 in Cambridge, came to have dinner with the Plath's one evening after Sylvia's return from New York (Butscher, 1976, 2003). She noticed Sylvia's state of depression and physical exhaustion, but feared speaking to Aurelia about it, since Aurelia had always been hypersensitive about her daughter's mental state (Butscher, 1976, 2003). According to Marcia, Aurelia often overreacted, and when it came to her treatment of Sylvia, Aurelia gave the impression that she was

“breathing on her every minute” (Butscher, 2003, p. 111). After receiving the news that her application had been rejected, Sylvia considered enrolling for another course at Harvard, such as elementary psychology or 20th century novel (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). This would allow her to meet new people and give her access to the library and other campus activities, thereby providing the structure she so craved (Rollyson, 2013). Unfortunately, the cost involved would only worsen the family’s already precarious financial position, and Sylvia gave up on the idea, expressing in her journal, her resentment about not being born a wealthy girl, and not having the financial resources to meet the following year’s college expenses (Plath, 2000). Sylvia had, in fact, thought of generating income from some of the stories that she would have to write for Frank O’Connor’s writing course (Plath, 2000). With this option closed to her, she decided that the solution would be to create her own disciplined structure of routine activities, which included: reading Joyce (whom she considered as a subject for her honours thesis); writing her first novel based on her recent experiences in New York; writing pieces for magazines like *Seventeen*, *Ladies Home*, *Accent on Living* and the *New Yorker*; learning shorthand from her mother; and pursuing a full set of physical recreations, such as hiking, cycling, walking, playing tennis and visiting the beach (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1992; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia hoped that by keeping busy with all these activities, she could forget her egocentric self and ward off the feelings of self-doubt which made her want to “crawl back into the womb” (Plath, 2000, p. 545). Nothing seemed to work, however, and even those activities like writing, for which she had talent and which should have boosted her confidence, became sources of aggravation that only served to increase her feeling of failure and inferiority (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2000).

As Sylvia’s symptoms worsened, she began to lose interest in all of the activities she had ever loved – from the simple pleasure of sunbathing to the more challenging activities of reading and writing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). She hardly ever left the house, she struggled to sleep at night and she became obsessed with thoughts that she was disappointing significant people in her life – people who expected great things from her, like her beloved high-school English teacher, Wilbury Crockett (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In a disturbing letter to Mr. Crockett written during this period, Sylvia apologised for being a disappointment, adding that she surmised he would never want to see her again (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Apart from the physical manifestations of her depression, Sylvia’s journal entries, as well as Aurelia’s description of her daughter’s state of mind, suggest that Sylvia had all the symptoms of clinical depression (Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). Although she wrote only a few journal entries in that month, what she did write was fraught with negative

images of fear, confusion, frustration and despair (Plath, 2000). In one of these journal entries, Sylvia admitted to being her own worst enemy and admonished herself for thinking selfishly of razors, self-inflicted wounds and suicide (Plath, 2000). Shortly afterwards, when her mother noticed cuts on her legs and confronted her about them, Sylvia admitted to having used razor blades on herself in an effort to gauge her level of courageousness (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Taking her mother's hand, she exclaimed: "Oh, mother, the world is so rotten! I want to die! Let's die together!" (Plath, 1992, p. 124).

It seems that Sylvia recognised that she was in the grip of a dangerous mental crisis, and she agreed to see the family doctor who immediately recommended psychiatric treatment (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sleeping pills were recommended and it was suggested that Sylvia take up a part-time job as a nurse's aid at Newton-Wellesley Hospital, in the hope that helping others would take her mind off her own inner pain (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia obediently did what was suggested, but her employment at the hospital was short lived, since she soon had to receive treatment there as an outpatient (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). After several weeks of private therapy sessions, Sylvia showed no improvement, and the attending psychiatrist decided that electro-convulsive therapy (ECT) was needed to shake her out of her depression (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Electro-convulsive therapy was used extensively in the 1950s to treat depression (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). At the time, it was usually administered without the use of anaesthetic or muscle relaxants and resulted in such severe convulsions, that patients sometimes suffered from fractures or dislocations (Wilson, 2013). In theory, the electric currents were believed to lower a patient's anxiety level by interfering with the normal functioning of the brain so that it could not remember anxiety-provoking thoughts (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In Sylvia's case, however, the treatment actually increased her level of anxiety because she was fully conscious during treatments and thus remembered each and every brutal volt that passed through her body (Alexander, 1999). She was constantly anxious about the threat of having to receive more electric shock treatments should her condition not improve (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Not only did Sylvia feel as though she was being tortured by electrocution every time she went for treatment, she also suffered feelings of abandonment, because she was left alone in the recovery room, without the support or counselling that should have been provided by a doctor or a nurse (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The poorly administered electroshock treatments fractured and deleted Sylvia's already splintered sense of identity and impaired her memory to such an extent that even joyful past experiences were replaced by cynicism and doubt (Wilson, 2013). Added to

this was the fact that the electroshock treatments aggravated Sylvia's inability to sleep to the point that she developed chronic insomnia (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Consequently her mental functions also began to deteriorate, and she felt incapable of the very activity which had always defined her, namely writing (Wilson, 2013). In a letter she confessed her fear at the prospect of not being able to write again, believing that no-one would find her interesting if she lost this ability (Plath, 1992).

In this state of despair, repressed sources of turmoil began to surface and Sylvia began associating her depression with her deceased father, Otto. She began taking trips to places in Winthrop which she associated with her childhood, and she even managed to locate her father's modest tombstone in the graveyard where he had been buried. This discovery only intensified her depression and resurrected old feelings of guilt and loss. Sylvia's anger over Aurelia's neglect of Otto was confounded by her fear that she may have hated her father as much as she had loved him, and she became terrified that a subconscious, secret death wish for her father may have mysteriously contributed to the diabetes which killed him (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Overwhelmed by these disturbing thoughts and emotions, suicide became not just a possibility, but a desired goal in Sylvia's mind (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although she continued to hide behind the mask of normality, subscribing as always to her mother's notion that a brave face had to be shown to the world, beneath the surface, Sylvia began to plan the method she would use to commit suicide (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

In one of her less serious attempts, she slit her wrists with a razor blade, and in another she tried drowning herself in the ocean, but neither of these methods worked (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Eventually she decided that she would use the traditional method of sleeping pills. Because she suffered from insomnia, her psychiatrist had prescribed sleeping pills which her mother kept locked in the bedroom safe. Unbeknown to Aurelia, however, Sylvia knew where the key to the safe was hidden. On the morning of 24 August 1953, she took the bottle of pills, left a note on the dining room table to say that she was going for a long hike and would only be back the next day, and then went to lie in the crawl space under the porch. There she swallowed 40 sleeping pills before falling into an unconscious state (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). That evening, when Aurelia found the note on the dining room table, she knew that something terrible had happened and she contacted the local police to report Sylvia missing (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Almost 100 volunteers joined in the search for Sylvia, and the story of her disappearance made front-page headlines in the Boston newspapers (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). When interviewed by

reporters, Aurelia commented that her daughter was on the verge of a mental breakdown owing to the unattainable standards which she had set for herself (Wilson, 2013). Aurelia never made any mention of the psychiatrist who had treated Sylvia, or of the electroconvulsive shock treatments which her daughter had received, and although her comment to the newspaper was true, it failed to convey the magnitude of Sylvia's mental anguish (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Two days after her disappearance, Sylvia was found when her family heard her moans coming from the basement (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). She was covered in her own vomit, and she had a cut on her right cheek which, although not severe, was infected and would form a lifetime scar on her face (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The quantity of pills she had swallowed had induced the vomiting, thereby saving her life. She was immediately transported to Newton-Wellesley Hospital where her condition was stabilized. Soon after, Sylvia was transferred first to the psychiatric section of Massachusetts's General Hospital and then to McLean Hospital in Belmont. Olive Higgins Prouty not only covered the entire cost of Sylvia's psychiatric treatment, but also offered emotional support and actual hands-on help to Aurelia when it came to Sylvia's care. From that time onwards, Aurelia consulted Olive on all aspects relating to Sylvia's recovery and well-being (Wilson, 2013).

At McLean Hospital, Sylvia underwent an array of treatments, including insulin injections and psychotherapy. There she also met the psychiatrist, Dr Ruth Tiffany Beuscher (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In Dr. Beuscher, Sylvia found a professional, independent role model whom she could confide in about things that had been bothering her since childhood. Sylvia opened up to Dr. Beuscher about her deep-rooted resentment towards her mother, and her ever-increasing frustrations regarding the double standards of sexuality for men and women (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Contrary to traditional approaches in the 1950s, Dr. Beuscher not only encouraged Sylvia to experiment with sex, but also had her fitted for a diaphragm birth control device (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Further into treatment, Dr Beuscher consulted with Aurelia and proposed yet another course of electro-convulsive shock treatments. Dr. Beuscher administered these treatments herself and carefully monitored Sylvia, who seemed to recover almost immediately after they had been administered (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

It is interesting to note that at the time of Sylvia's release from McLean, Aurelia received news from one of Otto's sisters that there were multiple cases of depression in the Plath family. In fact, Otto's mother had suffered from such severe depression that she had required hospitalisation (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Unfortunately Aurelia never shared this

important information with anyone, not even Sylvia (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). By the end of January 1954, Sylvia was discharged from McLean Hospital and she was ready to return to Smith College (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

Due to her illness, her workload was lightened and she registered for only three courses – American Fiction, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy and 19th Century Intellectual History. She was allocated a private room at Lawrence House where her duties were limited to delivering the breakfast tray to her housemother every morning (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Despite all the rumours and attention which her suicide had provoked, Sylvia put in a concerted effort to remain positive and enthusiastic and to integrate herself in all aspects of college life. She went on dates, attended readings and even returned to New York for a social visit. She began writing poetry again and read extensively (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). She also changed her appearance. The previous year, Marilyn Monroe had made her debut on the cover of *Playboy* magazine. That spring, Sylvia (who was an adoring fan of Marilyn Monroe) decided to dye her hair to resemble the blonde sex symbol. She informed her mother that the gesture signalled her newly-adopted, adventurous personality (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Although Sylvia could not graduate with her class that year, she was awarded a substantial scholarship to attend Smith College the following year. She also obtained a scholarship to attend Harvard Summer School (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). True to her academic zealotry, she continued to garner outstanding grades and chose the challenging topic of Dostoevsky for her senior thesis. Her rekindled academic focus and her desire to be the best at everything also manifested itself in her election as president of the Alpha Phi Kappa society (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Since her scholarship freed her from the burden of financial concerns for the upcoming academic year, Sylvia could afford to relax in the few weeks before Harvard Summer School began. At that stage, she believed herself to be in love with a naval officer named Gordon Lameyer. This did not stop her, however, from dating other men, and she recorded all her encounters meticulously, within her journals (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

One of these encounters was with a Science professor named Edwin Akutowicz (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia and her friend, Nancy Hunter, met the professor at Cambridge where they were attending summer school. Although he initially took Nancy out on a date, she refused to have anything to do with him after he tried to seduce her in his flat. Shortly afterwards, Sylvia was dating Edwin, and he even began taking her to her appointments with her psychiatrist. In her memoir written years later, Nancy recounted a terrifying incident

when Sylvia spent the night at Edwin's flat (Wilson, 2013). According to Sylvia, Edwin raped her, resulting in internal tearing which caused her to haemorrhage (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The next day when Sylvia returned to the apartment that she was sharing with Nancy and two other girls from Lawrence House, she was bleeding badly. Although Nancy phoned a doctor and tried to stop the bleeding through the methods proposed by the doctor, Sylvia continued to bleed profusely. Although Sylvia was terrified of doctors and hospitals, Nancy felt compelled to take her to hospital, fearing that Sylvia might bleed to death (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

A simple medical procedure stopped the bleeding, but to Nancy's shock and dismay, Sylvia continued to date Edwin (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Although their relationship was short-lived, it marked the beginning of Sylvia's tendency to tolerate men who mistreated her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). According to Gordon Lameyer, Sylvia's inner conflicts and her choices in men were the result of unfulfilled childhood love needs and the fact that she experienced her father's death as an abandonment (Wilson, 2013). Not only did she write about her loss and the associated emotions in her journal, she also used her poetry as a vehicle to reify the lost father figure (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rose, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Otto remained a constant force in Sylvia's imagination and although she acknowledged, in her poem *The Colossus*, that she would never be able to get her father "put together entirely/pierced, glued, and properly jointed" (Plath, 2008, p. 12), she continued to recreate him in her works, using words as a substitute for his absence and the love she craved from him (Wilson, 2013). In her diary, she admitted to being in search of "the gigantic paternal embrace of a mental colossus" (Plath, 2000, p. 163), believing that there was a strong link between the loss of her father and her compulsive desire to find a replacement for him in the men she dated (Plath, 2000). That summer, Sylvia also dated a Harvard tutor named Ira O. Scott Jr., describing him as her new godfather (Wilson, 2013). She used her relationships with the men she dated that summer as inspiration for two short stories, entitled *Platinum Summer* and *Coincidentally Yours* (Wilson, 2013). Interestingly, Gordon Lameyer – the man whom Sylvia identified as the one she was most likely to marry – did not feature in any of her stories (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia did not only write these short stories for possible financial remuneration, she also used them to gain insight into the type of man she would one day marry (Wilson, 2013). Although she harboured the dream of marrying a "demigod of a man", she acknowledged the impossibility of that desire when she wrote: "I want a romantic nonexistent hero" (Plath, 2000, p. 182). This realisation prompted her to retreat even further into her poetry and literature,

where she often unconsciously manufactured her own personal absolute of male perfection (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

When Sylvia returned to Smith College in September 1954, she set about applying for a Fulbright scholarship, in the hope of fulfilling her dream to study at Oxford or Cambridge (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's efforts to secure a Fulbright scholarship included interviews with each of the professors in Smith's English department, all of whom gave her glowing academic references (Wilson, 2013). She also changed her hair colour from platinum blonde to walnut brown, believing that the more staid appearance would allow her to be taken more seriously (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Despite the rapturous reports from her college professors, Sylvia was concerned that her mental breakdown and subsequent hospitalisation at McLean would be held against her (Wilson, 2013). Consequently, she decided to ask Ruth Beuscher for a recommendation letter, knowing full well that her therapist would dispel any concerns regarding her mental instability (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Ruth Beuscher not only gave Sylvia a sterling character reference, she even went so far as to say that the most obvious characteristics of her illness, when correctly channelled, contributed to Sylvia's superiority and heightened sense of integrity (Wilson, 2013). Despite this sterling recommendation, Sylvia, who had applied to both Cambridge and Oxford, doubted that Oxford would accept her, since the university had a reputation of rejecting students "with any physical or mental ills in the past" (Plath, 1992, p. 148).

In October 1954, the *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* asked Sylvia to interview and write an article on Alfred Kazin – Smith's newly-appointed William Allan Neilson professor (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Not only was Kazin the author of *A Walker in the City* and *On Native Ground*, he had also taught as a Fulbright lecturer at Cambridge. Consequently, Sylvia added his course to her workload in the hope that he would serve as an influential and powerful mentor (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). True to her reputation of outstanding student, Sylvia impressed Kazin with her insightful responses and mature discussions and she inevitably succeeded in garnering A grades from him, as well a recommendation letter for the Fulbright selection board describing her as the most gifted "top-notch" student who deserved "to be watched, to be encouraged – and to be remembered" (Wilson, 2013, p. 330).

In the same period of time, Sylvia began her thesis entitled *The Magic Mirror*. The thesis aimed to explore the use of the double in Dostoevsky's novella *The Double* and his final novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In light of Sylvia's own internal battles, it is not surprising that she was fascinated and enthralled by Dostoevsky's

psychological and philosophical examination of split personalities (Wilson, 2013). Like Dostoevsky's character, Golyadkin, who questions his own identity and in the end believes that he is witnessing a "multitude of duplicates" wherever he goes (Dostoevsky, 1917, p. 87), so too Sylvia's journal entries bear witness to the multiplicity of her fragmented identities (Plath, 2000). Like Golyadkin, Sylvia was plagued by the vicissitudes of her identity and she feared the consequences of her "unworthy twin" overtaking her (Dostoevsky, 1917, p. 121). In *The Brothers Karamazov*, the protagonist's unconscious death-wish for his father also resonated with Sylvia's personal turmoil regarding her father's death (Wilson, 2013). According to Steiner (1974), although Sylvia adored her father, she had also wished him dead many times, and when he did die, Sylvia imagined that she had killed him. The accompanying guilt which haunted Sylvia for her entire life can be compared to the guilt experienced by Dostoevsky's character Ivan. Although Ivan was theoretically innocent, the burden of his guilt ultimately drove him to insanity (Slonim, 1950).

Not only was the multiplicity of her identity evident in her inner psychic turmoil, even in her relationships Sylvia was guilty of donning multiple masks (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). On her 22nd birthday she wrote to Gordon Lameyer, expressing her undying devotion to him, yet at the same time she was dating both Edwin Akutowicz (the man responsible for her vaginal haemorrhaging), and Richard Sassoon (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2017; Wilson, 2013). Richard's letters to Sylvia make reference to him wanting to spank her and attest to her involvement in yet another unhealthy relationship marked by sado-masochism (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Despite Sylvia's multiple relationship interests, she maintained her standard of academic excellence, all the while continuing to write poetry, short stories and pieces for highly-reputed literary magazines (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Not only did she receive recognition as a professional writer for her work, she also received substantial financial remuneration (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

The highlight of Sylvia's academic career occurred when she graduated from Smith College in 1955 as one of only four summa cum laude graduates (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Apart from winning a plethora of prizes, including the Clara French Prize for the most outstanding English student of the class, she also received the news that she had been granted a Fulbright scholarship to study literature at Cambridge University in England (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Between the Fulbright scholarship and the commission money which Sylvia had earned from her work, she finally felt freed from her depression and from the financial pressures which had burdened her throughout her college career, and which had fuelled much of the suppressed

animosity which she felt towards her well-meaning benefactors (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Everything seemed to be going right for her, and she aptly captured her sense of satisfaction and pride when she said to her mother on graduation day: “My cup runneth over” (Plath, 1992, p. 176). Her enthusiasm for the future and her sense of ambition were so strong, that she even told her brother that a lifetime would not be long enough for all the projects she planned to complete (Wilson, 2013).

Her enthusiasm was not limited to her career prospects. That summer, Sylvia developed an enthusiastic interest in Peter Davison, a well-educated, handsome young man of Scottish descent, who had graduated from Harvard and spent a year in Cambridge on a Fulbright scholarship (Wilson, 2013). Despite the fact that she was in a relationship with Richard Sassoon, Sylvia began entertaining the idea of marrying a man like Davison, and she even confessed to her mother that she was enthralled by his “Britishy” voice (Plath, 1992, pp. 176-177). Her interest in Davison resulted in a somewhat detached attitude towards Sassoon, who incorrectly assumed that she was unhappy because she didn’t want to leave him behind when she sailed for Europe (Wilson, 2013).

In a letter to Sylvia, Sassoon reassured her that her time in England would be delightful, and that he would probably go and study at the Sorbonne in Paris, which meant that they could continue to see one another (Wilson, 2013). In her reply to Sassoon, Sylvia ascribed her low spirits to the worsening relationship with her mother at home. She also blamed herself for lacking the drive to achieve and in a letter to Gordon Lameyer, she compared her summer preceding her departure for Cambridge to “a long stretch of undisciplined hedonism” (Wilson, 2013, p. 355). Although she was excited about the prospect of beginning a new life in England, she was also fraught with insecurities and anxieties since it would be the first time that she was leaving the routine and comfort of home (Wilson, 2013). Davison noted that, although Sylvia had an insatiable thirst for knowledge, she tended to doubt her own abilities, often donning a mask to hide the terror she felt inside (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Davison, 1991). The discrepancy between her façade of confidence and her inner turmoil often resulted in her feeling alienated from herself (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Davison, 1991; Wilson, 2013). Consequently, she often came across to him like a well-trained horse in a circus, one that performs all the right acts, but lacks any real emotion (Davison, 1991). The only time that he felt she was being genuine, was when she related the circumstances of her breakdown and subsequent suicide attempt. He described it as “a simpler, less poised, and more touching story” than the one she would describe in *The Bell Jar* years later (Davison, 1991, p. 171).

Sylvia's interest in Davison did not last beyond the summer and she ended the relationship by telling him that she was in search of a man who could anchor her instability (Davison, 1991). She spent the rest of her summer holiday preparing for her new life in England (Wilson, 2013). A few days before her departure, she, Aurelia and Warren met with Olive Higgins Prouty. Ironically, Prouty had written a romance novel about a young girl who suffers a mental breakdown but is healed when she falls in love on board a European ship. Although the superficial parallels between this young girl and Sylvia must have been obvious to Prouty, Sylvia's life was far removed from Prouty's romantic illusion. Unfortunately it was part of Sylvia's tragedy that she deluded herself in aspiring to such illusion (Wilson, 2013).

2.2.9 Adulthood (1955 – 1956): Sylvia in Cambridge, England, at the Time of the Suez Crisis

On the 14th of September, 1955, Sylvia set sail for Europe on board the liner, Queen Elizabeth II, (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). As the ship left the harbour, she bid Manhattan farewell, and commenced a journey that both excited and frightened her (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Whilst the journey offered an escape from the narrow-minded mentality of her middle-class world, it also hurled her into a world of insecurities, devoid of all the things which were familiar to her (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Within days of being on board, she began a romance with Carl Shakin, a Physics graduate who was on his way to study at the University of Manchester, also on a Fulbright scholarship (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The fact that he had married only eight weeks before did not deter Sylvia and she wrote enthusiastically to her mother about the enchantment of her time with Carl and the magnificence of the places they visited together (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013).

On the 1st of October she travelled to Cambridge by train and was immediately enchanted by the beauty of the city (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Unfortunately, she was not as enchanted by the weather of Cambridge, and within days of starting the new term, she fell ill with a terrible sinus infection (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia checked into the Newnham campus hospital but found that the treatment of sinusitis was very different to the treatment she had received in America. At Smith College, the treatment included penicillin, cocaine sprays and sleeping pills; but at Cambridge, she was given nothing more than an aspirin (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Furthermore, she was appalled by the tasteless food and rude nurses, and she soon checked herself out of the hospital,

opting instead to get a prescription from the physician at the National Health Services (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia quickly applied herself to embracing every aspect of her new life, and she decided to join the Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC), where she enacted both the role of Rosalind in Shakespeare's play *As you Like It*, and the role of Camille in Tennessee William's play *Camino Real* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). She succeeded, almost immediately, in obtaining the role of the mad poetess in an 18th century comedy entitled *Three Hours after Marriage* (Plath, 1992). Although Sylvia adored performing for an audience, she knew that time devoted to her writing would be better spent than time devoted to acting, and she wrote to her mother saying: "I would rather be a mediocre writer than a bad actress" (Plath, 1992, p. 194). Sylvia's social life in Cambridge proved to be as enchanting as her picturesque environment. With men outnumbering women ten to one, Sylvia was never at a loss for potential suitors. These included Mallory Wober, a Jewish boy who was studying Natural Sciences at King's College; David Buck, who was studying English at Christ's College; John Lythgoe, who was studying Natural Sciences at Trinity College; and Nat LaMar, a young black man who was studying at Pembroke College on a Henry Fellowship (Wilson, 2013). The latter had known Sylvia's brother, Warren, at Exeter, and Sylvia considered him to be like a psychic brother since their personalities were so similar and they had so much in common (Plath, 1992). In her first term, Sylvia also dated Dick Wertz, a Theology student at Westminster College and former roommate of Richard Sassoon at Yale. Their conversations about Sassoon, who had secured a place at the Sorbonne in France, seemed to trigger old feelings in Sylvia and in November she began writing to Sassoon about her new life as she experienced it through her imaginative poet's mind (Wilson, 2013). When Sassoon dropped in to visit Sylvia and Wertz in Cambridge that December, she was not that enthusiastic to see him and, in a letter to Eleanor Friedman, she even compared him to Kafka's metamorphosised insect¹ (Kafka, 1972; Wilson, 2013). Typical of her contradictory nature, Sylvia seemed to be swept away by the idea of love, and she was then disillusioned when she was confronted by its imperfect reality (Butscher, 2003; Wilson 2013).

So extreme was Sylvia's contradictory nature that within a week she changed her mind and wrote another letter, this time to Sassoon, begging for his help with a psychological dilemma. In the letter she expressed her profound sadness as well as her lack of confidence in her ability

¹ Kafka, F. 1972. *The Metamorphosis and other stories*. Barnes & Noble Classics. London.

to write (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). In light of the tragic circumstances of her death at a time recorded as one of the coldest winters in England, it is of prodigious significance that she should write to Sassoon saying: “I must stop identifying with the seasons, because this English winter will be the death of me” (Plath, 2000, p. 193). Two days later, Sylvia wrote to Olive Higgins Prouty about her striving for perfection and the distress which she experienced when she realised that this was an impossible ideal (Wilson, 2013). She also ascribed her inability to face difficult situations to a lack of courage, and she admitted that she would try to escape the pain that accompanied tragedy or loss by hiding in a delusional fantasy world (Plath, 1992).

That December, Sylvia had a horse-riding incident when a horse ran off with her. So intense and thrilling was the runaway incident, that it left an indelible mark in her memory and inspired her 1958 poem called *Whiteness I remember* (Hughes, 1981, p. 102). In her journal she admitted that she found it difficult to write about horses, since she knew so little of them, yet she felt enlightened by the dare-devil change in the horse she was riding and her tenacity to hold onto him for life (Plath, 2000, p.403). The harrowing, adrenalin-filled incident also inspired her 1962 poem entitled *Ariel* in which she wrote forebodingly: “And I /am the arrow, / The dew that flies / Suicidal, at one with the drive / Into the red / Eye, the cauldron of morning” (Plath, 2004, p. 34).

On the 20th of December 1955, Sylvia set off to meet Sassoon in Paris on what was meant to be the romantic holiday of a lifetime. Together, they visited France, Italy and Monte Carlo (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia had dated other men prior to the trip, but she had decided that Sassoon was the only man whom she really wanted (Alexander, 1999). Consequently, it came as a devastating shock to Sylvia when Sassoon suggested, at the end of their idyllic trip, that they end the relationship and start seeing other potential partners. He confessed that he had met a Swiss girl and that they had even discussed marriage (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia returned to Cambridge distraught and wrote to her mother saying that Sassoon was the only boy that she had ever loved (Plath, 1992). She also wrote a heartfelt letter to Sassoon, promising him that she would be faithful while she waited for him. Apart from her Jewish friend Wober, Sylvia broke all contact with the boys she had become acquainted with at Cambridge (Wilson, 2013). She often wore black, and in her journal she wrote impassionately about her cold and comfortless existence (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). Her anguish and heartache were intensified by the fact that *The New Yorker* had rejected her short story based on her holiday in France with Sassoon. Furthermore, her grandmother had been diagnosed with stomach cancer and she felt that she had no elders in England to whom

she could turn for comfort, advice and guidance (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

At the time, Cambridge was experiencing one of its worst winters, and Sylvia was constantly plagued by illness (Wilson, 2013). The bitter cold weather, her heavy work schedule, her poor health and the fact that she had received poor reviews for her poems published in *Chequer* (a local college paper), hurled Sylvia into a depression that rekindled memories of her suicide attempt in 1953 (Alexander, 1999; Kirk 2009; Wilson, 2013). In her journal entry, she compared her survival after that suicide attempt to a “coming out of the grave” (Plath, 2000, p. 199). Her reference to her “grave winter paller” in the very same entry, takes on ominous significance when one considers that the circumstances around Sylvia’s eventual suicide in 1963, mirrored what Sylvia was experiencing in Cambridge in the early months of 1956 (Plath, 2000, p. 199).

Sylvia believed that her suicidal depression was provoked by the relentless stresses that knawed at her, causing conflict between her ambitiousness and her fear of not attaining perfection (Alexander, 1999). Her constant battle against colds and flu prompted her to go for a complete medical examination at the college infirmary, where the medical personnel suggested that she see a psychiatrist (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). In her first session with the psychiatrist, Dr. Davy, Sylvia opened up about her recent break-up with Sassoon and her longing for an older role model at Cambridge (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Although she did not speak to Dr. Davy about her father, in her journal entry she acknowledged her need to be comforted by a father figure and she wrote: “I cry so to be held by a man; some man, who is a father” (Plath, 2000, p. 199).

Despite her dark mood, Sylvia decided to attend the inaugural party of a new literary publication called the *St Botolphs Review* (Alexander 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). It featured the work of a number of writers, including Ted Hughes, David Ross and Daniel Huws, the reviewer who had criticised Sylvia’s poems in *Chequer* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Apart from the fact that Sylvia admired the work of the writer’s featured in the new magazine, she was determined to meet Hughes in person so that she could confront him about his attack on her work (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She prepared for this encounter by memorising a number of poems in the magazine and dressing seductively in response to his derogatory review, which described her work as: “Quaint and eclectic artfulness. My better half tells me ‘Fraud, fraud’, but I will not say so; who am I to know how beautiful she may be?” (Middlebrook, 2003, p. 2).

Sylvia was not quite as prepared for her encounter with Ted Hughes, whose physical presence overwhelmed her (Wilson, 2013). Officially named Edward James Hughes, Ted was born in West Yorkshire, England, on the 16th of August, 1930 (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). He began writing poetry during his adolescence and he attributed the violent, ominous atmosphere in his poetry to his hunting experiences on the moors and to the stories his father had told him about World War I (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Later, Ted would say that destiny had brought him and Sylvia together (Kirk, 2009). The violent, ominous atmosphere which characterised his poetry certainly characterised their first meeting, for Ted wasted no time in grabbing Sylvia at the party, ripping off her headband and earrings, and kissing her hard on the mouth. She reciprocated by biting him so hard on the cheek that it bled and left a scar for days afterwards (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). There was immediate chemistry between Sylvia and Ted. He had a reputation in Cambridge for being popular with women, and Sylvia was immediately attracted to his tall, dark attractiveness and his physical strength (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). She saw him as the one man who was as large as his poetry, and she was convinced that he was the only man who could replace Sassoon (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Nonetheless, she doubted that she would ever meet him again, and two days after the party, she wrote the poem *Pursuit*, expressing the dark nature of her lustful encounter with Ted (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). She dedicated this poem to him and began it with a quote from Racine's poem *Phedre*: "Dans le fond des forets votre image me suit"² (Hughes, 2008, p. 22). In a letter to her mother, Sylvia explained that the quotation captured the paradoxical appeal of death in that the more passionately one lives, the more one consumes and burns oneself (Plath, 1992). The poem thus not only captured the essence of Sylvia's brief but intense life, it also foreshadowed the destructive outcome of her marriage to Ted (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

After the St. Botolph's inauguration party, Sylvia felt apathetic, tired and guilty about neglecting her language studies. In her journal, she wrote about the burden of having a "puritanical conscience", and how it made her castigate herself every time she felt she had done wrong or had not demanded enough of herself (Plath, 2000, p. 215).

Despite the fact that Sylvia was attracted to Ted, she was still madly in love with Sassoon and she decided that she needed to see him, if only to free herself from him (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). She wrote him a long letter, begging him to see her in

² Translation: In the depth of the forest, your image follows me.

Paris over the Easter holiday (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In her journal, she confessed her painful longing for him, saying that it resulted in her feeling schizophrenic and devoid of a soul (Plath, 2000). Notwithstanding her passionate declaration to Sassoon, Sylvia continued flirting with Ted and even spent the night with him in London before her departure to Paris on the 24th of March (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson 2013). The sleepless night of wild sex with Ted left her exhausted and physically bruised, but did not curb her obsessive impulse to get to Sassoon's apartment (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). The rejection which she felt when the concierge told her that Sassoon had left for Spain and would only be returning after Easter, catapulted Sylvia back into the arms of Ted (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In her journal, she described her despair, saying that it shook her to her roots, and that no man had ever gone off and left her crying for him (Plath, 2000). So intense were Sylvia's feelings for Sassoon that she admitted in her journal that had he returned to Paris, she would have stayed with him (Plath, 2000).

Even though Sylvia recognised the danger of returning impulsively to the arms of Ted, she acknowledged that he was the only man who could measure up to Sassoon (Plath, 2000). Ted had written to her while she was travelling in Europe. The letters, which included a love poem, reached her during her trip, and convinced her that he was waiting for her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia, who was particularly vulnerable, not only because of the loss of Sassoon, but also because she felt cut off from her family, succumbed to Ted's warm energy and went straight to him upon her return to England (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

According to Middlebrook (2003), it was Sylvia who proposed to Ted, but because she was afraid of losing her Fulbright scholarship, she thought it best that they wait until after she had completed her studies. However, when Aurelia arrived to visit Sylvia in England that June, the couple announced that they had decided to marry immediately and to keep it a secret until Sylvia graduated the following year. Thereafter they planned to have a public wedding in Wellesley, where Aurelia's brother Frank would give Sylvia away and Warren would be best man (Alexander, 1999). On the 16th of June, 1956, Sylvia and Ted were married at the Church of St. George the Martyr in London, with Aurelia being the only one present (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). After the wedding, Aurelia (like her mother before her) accompanied the newlyweds on their honeymoon to Paris (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

Ted did not inform his family and friends immediately about his marriage to Sylvia. His friends disliked her forwardness and flashy style, and they criticised her florid writing style which differed greatly from Ted's (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Unlike his friends, Ted was attracted to Sylvia's vibrancy and saw her as the epitome of America and its literature

(Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia, on the other hand, associated Ted with everything in nature (Plath, 1992). In their differences, in fact, they seemed to complement each other. He taught her about the wonders of nature, including how to cook freshly caught food over a fire, while she attended to the business of typing and submitting their writing for publication, much like her mother had done for Otto (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Both Sylvia and Ted believed that they could learn a lot from each other. He valued her perceptive and supportive reading of his work and she admired the grounded, bold, forceful style of his poetry (Rollyson, 2013). They both enjoyed sketching, and one of their favourite pastimes was a game involving the completion of quotations. One of them would begin a quotation from literature, and the other would complete it. In such ways, Ted and Sylvia created a symbiotic partnership that enhanced their poetry (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia wrote to her mother telling her that she had finally found peace and that she predicted great things for both herself and Ted. She believed that her hospitalisation at McLean had prepared her for her new life with Ted, whom she regarded as her reward and her life's work (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2017; Rollyson, 2013).

Although Sylvia's letters to her mother portrayed Ted as the type of overpowering man that her father had been, her positive descriptions of him were so convincing that Aurelia could not but support her daughter's decision to marry him (Rollyson, 2013). Olive Higgins Prouty, Sylvia's patron, on the other hand, was very skeptical of Ted and compared him to Dylan Thomas, whom Sylvia greatly admired. Prouty predicted that Ted, like Dylan Thomas, would be an unfaithful husband and cautioned Sylvia against a man whom Sylvia herself had described as cruel and unkind, with a tendency of "bashing people around" (Rollyson, 2013, p. 117). Sylvia, however, believed that she could manage Ted's sadistic and womanising tendencies, and she continued to portray him as the only man with whom she could find fulfillment (Rollyson, 2013). In letters to her family, Sylvia elevated her life to the status of a movie, and she described Ted as her male counterpart (Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). He had been the only man to identify with Sylvia's ambitions and dreams, and he supported her in all aspects of her life. When her grandmother passed away, it was Ted who was there to comfort and support Sylvia in her time of need. He seemed always to be at her disposal, and he allowed her to take charge of things, never resisting her enthusiastic arrangements (Rollyson, 2013).

After spending two weeks of their honeymoon in Paris, the newlyweds said goodbye to Aurelia and departed for Spain on what was to be a working holiday for both of them (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Although the challenge of adapting to married life in an unfamiliar country on limited funds would put a strain on any relationship, Sylvia and Ted thrived on the shared challenge, and they both felt liberated in the idyllic Spanish town of

Benidorm on the Mediterranean coastline (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia's sinuses cleared for the very first time in her life, and Ted felt that his writing was better than it had ever been before. He wrote to his brother Gerald in Australia, extolling Sylvia's virtues as a poetess. He valued that she analysed his work so meticulously and he took great pride in the fact that his work had been published in two noteworthy publications, thanks to Sylvia's rigorous submissions programme (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia's journal entries at the time, attest to the idyllic circumstances of their summer in Spain, which Sylvia believed was the source of their inspiration and creativity. Never in her life had she experienced such perfect physical and mental well-being, and she revelled in her newfound happiness alongside a husband whom she described as magnificent and brilliant (Plath, 2000). Although Sylvia projected an idealised image of Ted and their marriage, their relationship was not without its faults (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia was not very easy to live with because she was sentimental and possessive, and often experienced episodes of jealousy, anger and depression. Everything she did was always meticulously planned and diarised, and when things did not go as planned, she needed to be reassured that it did not constitute a crisis (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She had the tendency of exaggerating personal disappointment and of turning even the smallest upset into a disenchantment of cosmic proportions (Rollyson, 2013). In an enigmatic extract from her journal, written on the 23rd of July 1956, she alluded to a growing "wrongness ... creeping, choking the house, twining the tables and chairs and poisoning the knives and forks... and the world has grown crooked and sour as a lemon overnight" (Plath, 2000, p. 123).

Ted was also not that easy to live with because he was short-tempered and paid little attention to personal hygiene and grooming (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia, who had a deep-rooted obsession with cleanliness, found this aspect of Ted particularly difficult to handle. Even as a child, her desire for a morally perfect world had expressed itself in her fascination with fictitious heroes like *Superman*, *The Shadow* and the *Lone Ranger*, all of whom were, in Sylvia's mind, part of a campaign to sanitise the world (Rollyson, 2013). Even more concerning was the fact that Ted had a tendency to be cruel and even violent when he lost his temper (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Years later, when her marriage to Ted was under immense stress, she told the story of an incident in Spain when Ted had been overtaken by an uncontrollable fit of rage. Before she could even make sense of what was happening, Ted was choking her. Only when she started to lose consciousness, did he loosen his grip. Although Sylvia did nothing about the incident, she admitted later in life that the occurrence had made her doubt her decision to marry Ted (Alexander, 1999). The reference to choking in the mysterious journal entry of 23 July could possibly relate to this incident (Plath, 2000).

At the end of August, Ted and Sylvia's honeymoon in Spain ended and they met up briefly with Warren in Paris, before visiting Ted's parents in Yorkshire (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). In a letter to her mother, Sylvia described her fascination with the Yorkshire countryside, which she compared to that of *Wuthering Heights* (Plath, 1992). Ted's father, William, came from Spanish and Irish descendants, and was a quiet and subdued man. His wife, Edith, descended from a West Yorkshire family and had a keen interest in magic and witchcraft (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). This was not uncommon amongst Yorkshire inhabitants who, because they lived in a remote area and frowned upon modern progress, clung rigidly to religious and superstitious beliefs (Alexander, 1999). It was rumoured that Edith studied witchcraft and imparted her knowledge of the subject onto her children (Alexander 1999; Rollyson, 2013). Ted, in fact, showed a keen interest in astrology, necromancy and hypnosis (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). On the very first day of their honeymoon in Benidorm he had hypnotised Sylvia to help her sleep more peacefully after she had fallen ill with dysentery (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Ted believed that hypnosis helped to unlock his imagination and he often resorted to this form of mind control (Alexander 1999). He also gave Sylvia a pack of Tarot cards for her birthday. The two of them would often consult these cards and an Ouija board in their quest to make contact with spirits who might predict the magazines that would publish their work (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In a letter to her mother, Sylvia expressed the desire to be a Tarot card expert, whilst Ted could practice astrology in the same way that the poet Yeats and his wife had done. She also hoped to buy a crystal ball with which to predict their future (Plath, 1992). Black magic became a recurrent theme in their marriage and something on which both Sylvia and Ted came to depend (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

Due to financial constraints and the fact that their marriage was still a secret, Sylvia returned alone to Cambridge for her final year, whilst Ted went back to Yorkshire to stay with his parents (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). The separation proved too much for Sylvia who fell into a depression, despite the success that she was garnering as a writer with the publication of two short stories and all the poems she had submitted (Alexander, 1999; Kirk 2009). Sylvia wrote to her mother about the panic which she had experienced when she thought she had missed an appointment with Ted. In her mind, she and Ted needed nothing but each other to be happy (Plath, 1992). Ted, who was aware of Sylvia's emotional dependency on him, wrote frequent letters to her to comfort and encourage her. Even from London, where he was employed by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to record his poetry reading of Yeats, Ted continued to reinforce their relationship with intimate letters in which he nick-

named her “Puss-Kish-Ponky” and told her that he missed her “ponky warmth” and felt lost without her (Rollyson, 2013, p. 125). So successful was Ted’s poetry recording, that he was invited back by the BBC for another session (Alexander, 1999). Ted, who believed that poetry had to be read aloud to be fully appreciated, was very successful as a voice in modern poetry. He often read to Sylvia and he encouraged her to recite poetry, which resulted in her own voice growing in authority and confidence (Rollyson, 2013). By the end of October, Sylvia was more distraught than ever about the fact that she and Ted had to continue living separate lives because their marriage was still a secret (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013).

Dorothea Krook, one of the Cambridge professors whom Sylvia admired profoundly, encouraged Sylvia to tell the Newman and Fulbright officials that she was married (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia did so and much to her surprise, they neither criticised her nor threatened to retract her scholarship, but instead, simply congratulated her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Krook, who did not yet know Sylvia that well, was nonetheless concerned about Sylvia’s over-dependency on her husband (Rollyson, 2013). Earlier that month, in a letter to her mother, Sylvia had confessed that she lived for Ted, enclosing a poem that, although expressive of her deep love for Ted, also foreshadowed an ominous end (Plath, 1992).

By the end of that year, Ted and Sylvia were living together in a rented apartment. Ted managed to find a teaching job at a high school for boys near Cambridge, whilst Sylvia brought in small amounts of money through her writing (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Money was scarce, and the couple even resorted to their Ouija board in the hope of winning bets on the weekly British soccer pool (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

In November, Sylvia met Ted’s sister, Olwyn. Olwyn Hughes had occupied a number of secretarial positions in Paris and, unlike Ted and Sylvia, she did not seem to have any financial problems (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). It angered Sylvia that the confident, self-contained Olwyn carelessly spent money on expensive clothing and cigarettes, even though she had a debt of fifty pounds with Ted (Alexander, 1999). The fact that Olwyn represented the type of independent career woman that Sylvia detested, only fuelled the antagonism between the two women (Rollyson, 2013). As Sylvia approached her final semester at Cambridge, she began contemplating the idea of returning to America with Ted (Kirk, 2009). True to her pacifist ideology, she was totally opposed to Britain’s invasion of Egypt after the Suez Canal was nationalised by Nasser, and she openly voiced her objections (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). To Sylvia, England was at fault for violating the sovereignty of another country for materialistic gains (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In the same way that she had written to

Hans about World peace when she was an adolescent, so she wrote to her mother about her disgust with militarism and her hope that Warren would become a conscientious objector (Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). She was sickened by Britain's political policy on Cyprus and other African states. She felt that Britain had no future and that America was now the only place for her and Ted (Rollyson, 2013).

As part of her submissions programme, she entered Ted's *The Hawk in the Rain* in a competition sponsored by the Poetry Center in New York. The winner's book would be published by Harper and Brothers in America, and by Faber and Faber in England (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

2.2.10 Adulthood (1957 – 1959): Sylvia, the Newlywed Poetess in America in the Years of the Space Race

Sylvia commenced 1957 by following a strict writing routine of two hours per day, starting at six in the morning before Ted left for work (Rollyson, 2013). Urged by Ted, who said it would improve her writing, she also made time to memorise the poems of well-known poets, while she worked on love stories that she planned to submit to New York magazines (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). In the same way that Aurelia had worked in the background to help her husband Otto gain recognition as an expert in his field, so too Sylvia typed Ted's work and submitted it for possible publication, in the hope that he would be recognised for his talent and genius (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Malcolm, 2012; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). Surely enough, on the 23rd of February, 1957, exactly two days prior to the anniversary of what Sylvia called "that fatal party where I met Ted", a telegram arrived announcing that Ted had won the New York Poetry Center First Publication Award for his first book, *The Hawk in the Rain* (Alexander, 1999, p. 203). This would change their lives by opening countless doors for them in America (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). That April, Sylvia succeeded in breaking through the British market with the publication of her poems *Black Rook in Raining Weather* and *Spinster* in the *London Magazine* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Despite these literary breakthroughs, Sylvia struggled to produce anything noteworthy for her novel, tentatively entitled *Falcon Yard* (Rollyson, 2013). In her journal, she described the frustration at not being able to write, and her lack of confidence in her ability to write induced both anxiety and depression (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). She felt stuck, as though a paralysis had frozen her head (Plath, 2000). Although she took great pride in Ted's accomplishments, she felt that his criticism of her work was ill-timed and only reinforced the static rut in which

she found herself (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). The burden of having to study for her final exams only aggravated the problem, and although she tried to relieve the tension by going for frequent bike rides and escaping into “domesticity”, her writer’s block persisted (Plath, 2000, p. 269). She resolved to wait until the summer to resume her writing attempts. As a wedding gift, her mother had rented a cottage at the Cape for her and Ted, and the newlyweds looked forward to a summer vacation which they planned to devote to their writing (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). To comfort herself, she read the diary of Virginia Woolf, who also suffered from depression and who committed suicide by drowning herself (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia identified with Woolf and felt that her life was linked to Woolf’s in some way. Apart from the fact that she loved Woolf’s work, she took great pride in the fact that they had so much in common. Both experienced the pain and humiliation of having their work rejected by prestigious publishing houses, and both resorted to domestic activities like cooking and baking in their efforts to ward off depression (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). In letters to family, Ted wrote that Sylvia invested a lot of energy in cooking (Hughes, 2009). Even the film, *Sylvia* (Owen & Jeffs, 2003), starring Gwyneth Paltrow, suggests that Sylvia resorted to the diversions of cooking and baking when she suffered from writer’s block (Rollyson, 2013). By the end of May 1957, Sylvia was so exhausted from having to study and write her final exams at Cambridge, that she could barely rejoice in the good news that her manuscript *Two Lovers* had reached the final of a Yale writing competition (Alexander, 1999). After her exams, which earned her a master’s degree and the equivalent of an American high B, she and Ted visited his parents and sister in Yorkshire before departing for a new life in America (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Letters written by Ted to his sister, Olwyn, while he and Sylvia voyaged to America, suggest that Olwyn had been intolerant of Sylvia’s fluctuating moods. Ted, who was very protective of Sylvia, tried to justify her moods by blaming the exhaustive exams which Sylvia had had to endure the previous month (Hughes, 2009). In the same way that Sylvia glamorised Ted and put him on a pedestal, so too Ted ascribed his success and fulfillment as a writer to his marriage to Sylvia (Rollyson, 2013). He wrote about their mutually-inspiring working relationship, describing Sylvia as talented, alert, indefatigable and keenly responsive to everything (Hughes, 1998, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Not only did they support one another, their letters suggest that they inspired greatness in each other (A.S. Plath, 1992; Hughes, 1998, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

Aurelia welcomed the newlyweds to America by hosting a reception for them (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Although Ted’s letters suggest his disdain for the materialistic, pretentious and conformist America of the 1950s, he did appreciate the fact that

American literary critics were not as cruel and venomous as their British counterparts (Hughes, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Aurelia's letters suggest that Sylvia was exuberantly happy to be back at home and proud to be able to show off her charming poet husband (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992). After a two-week visit with Aurelia, Warren drove the couple to Eastham where they would take advantage of Aurelia's gift of a holiday alone on the Cape (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Whilst on their summer vacation, Ted's work began appearing in numerous, esteemed periodicals, both in America and in England (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Even poems that had previously been rejected were being bought by acclaimed publishing houses like the *New Yorker* (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

In the matter of months, thanks not only to his first book award, but also to Sylvia's tenacious submissions programme and her enthusiastic marketing of his work, Ted had more publishing accomplishments than Sylvia had been able to accumulate in years (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). To add insult to injury, Sylvia was devastated by the news that *Two Lovers* had not won the Yale competition, since in her mind she had already convinced herself that she would win (Alexander, 1999). That summer, Sylvia wrote *Dialogue over a Ouija board*, and although she never submitted it for publication, this long poetry play about two people engaged in an argument as they call on the spirits of the Ouija board, provides profound insight into Ted and Sylvia's relationship (Rollyson, 2013; Rose, 2013). Ted's preoccupation with the occult was often based on materialistic pursuits, and in their relationship, the Ouija Board was frequently used as a vehicle for conversations with regard to how money could be generated (Rollyson, 2013). According to Rose (2013), *Dialogue* also suggests the volatile and often violent nature of both Ted and Sylvia's personalities.

In September 1957, Sylvia and Ted left the Cape and moved to Northampton, close to Smith Campus, where Sylvia had been offered a teaching position (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Although she had initially felt elated about getting the position, she soon discovered that the heavy workload exhausted her and depleted her of all creativity, thus negatively affecting her already strained writing efforts (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). From the very beginning, she felt incompetent in her new teaching role (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). This was aggravated by the fact that she felt intimidated by her students who were less than seven years younger than she was (Rollyson, 2013). In her journal entry entitled *Letter to a demon*, Sylvia admonished herself for not being able to stand up against the "murderous" part of herself that demanded perfection and stripped her of her confidence when she was anything less than perfect (Plath, 2000, p. 618). She called "this murderous self" her "demon", believing it would destroy her unless she fought it by excelling at everything (Plath, 2000, p.

618). Apart from the pressure of striving for perfection, she admitted, in the same journal entry, that she had to fight shyness and that she struggled to face people easily (Plath, 2000). *Letter to a demon* not only summed up Sylvia's emotional state at the time, it also revealed her need to control every aspect of her life, which meant being the perfect writer, teacher and wife (Alexander, 1999).

Sylvia's lack of confidence and her constant striving for perfection not only depleted her physically, but also suffocated her drive to write (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). She realised from the start that teaching would obstruct her efforts at becoming a celebrated poet, and after six months, she announced that she would be leaving Smith once her contract had ended (Butscher, 1976; 2003). Sylvia's colleagues and students did not share her poor opinion of herself. On the contrary, they described her as being a brilliant teacher (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; 2003). Not surprisingly, it was unanimously agreed that her contract be renewed (Alexander, 1999). Sylvia, however, declined the offer, despite pressure from her sponsors to remain (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In a letter to her mother, she lamented her lack of energy and expressed her distress regarding the deterioration of her writing talent (Plath, 1992). There was another reason for Sylvia wanting to leave Smith College. Ted had a reputation for enjoying the attention of women and Sylvia confessed to her mother that she did not want to expose her husband to Smith girls, for they too had a reputation for luring male professors of all ages (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992). Even A. Alvarez commented that Ted was "constitutionally incapable of fidelity" (Rollyson, 2013, p. 155). On the 21st of May, 1958, Sylvia taught her final class at Smith. Prompted by growing suspicions based on rumours that Ted entertained women at Smith's notorious Paradise Pond whilst he waited for his wife to finish her lectures, Sylvia walked across Smith campus to the infamous pond frequented by Smith students and their boyfriends. Surely enough, Sylvia caught Ted in the company of a young, blonde female student. Although the student ran off, the incident provoked a violent argument between Sylvia and Ted, who physically assaulted one another (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In her journal entry written a day after the incident, Sylvia commented that within two years, Ted had managed to transform her "from a crazy perfectionist and promiscuous human-being-lover, to a misanthrope" (Plath, 2000, p. 386). Sylvia chided herself for having put Ted on an "infinitely superior" plane and she remarked that she now felt nothing but revulsion in herself, but even more so in Ted whose vanity thrived at her expense (Plath, 2000, p. 386). Despite the explosive argument and Sylvia's revulsion, the couple made peace and resolved to stick to their decision of relocating to Boston where they would devote themselves to their writing. That June they celebrated their second wedding

anniversary in the company of Aurelia, who expressed her concern about both of them giving up their teaching positions – a decision which would entail a loss of income of over six thousand dollars (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Sylvia interpreted her mother's concern as yet another manifestation of Aurelia's tendency to want to control her daughter's life (Alexander, 1999). Initially, her publishing successes seemed to prove that she and Ted had made the right decision to give up their teaching jobs. Prestigious publishing houses like *The New Yorker* and the *London Magazine* were publishing her poems and short stories for lucrative amounts of money, and it seemed that she was finally garnering the recognition which she had been waiting for (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). She wrote a proud letter to her mother informing her that she had earned enough money to cover their rent in Boston for three months (Plath, 1992). Despite the improvement in their finances, Sylvia felt that she was falling into a depression again, mostly on account of the fact that she was unable to write (Alexander, 1999). Her journal entry describing how Ted had gassed an injured bird out of its misery, foreshadowed her own fate (Plath, 2000). Although Sylvia acknowledged that she and Ted were perfectly attuned to each other's moods and that this confirmed her belief that he was her counterpart, she resented her ever-growing dependency on him and compared their relationship to that of vampires who feed on one another (Plath, 2000). Sylvia used the same vampire imagery when she compared her mother to a walking vampire. In her therapy sessions with Dr. Beuscher, she admitted that she hated her mother for having killed the only man who could have loved her steadily throughout life (Plath, 2000). She seemed haunted by her father's spirit and felt simultaneously guided and suffocated by his presence when he appeared as Prince Otto – the family god – when she and Ted called on the spirits of the Ouija board (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

Ongoing financial concerns and her ever-increasing frustration at not being able to write at the level she aspired to, prompted her to submit her name to an employment agency (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Ironically, her first assignment was for the position of part-time secretary at the very same psychiatric ward of the hospital where she had received treatment after her suicide attempt five years previously (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Her job description for this two-month, part-time employment included the typing up of psychiatric patient records, answering the phone and performing different types of office work (Rollyson, 2013). Although this job was far-moved from the work of a writer, it proved to be the tonic that Sylvia needed to overcome her writer's block (Rollyson, 2013). Her feelings of uncertainty about herself in relation to Ted, whom she considered to be her superior, coupled with the stress of not being able to fall pregnant, motivated her to resume her therapy sessions with Dr. Beuscher (Plath,

2000; Rollyson, 2013). These therapy sessions, together with her readings of Freud and the wealth of information which she obtained from the case studies which she had to type as secretary, were sources of inspiration which led Sylvia to write her highly-acclaimed short fiction entitled, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In the story, a narrator/secretary becomes obsessed as she types up the dreams of psychiatric patients (Rollyson, 2013). Although Sylvia believed in the benefits of her therapeutic sessions with Dr. Beuscher, she objected to electric shock therapy, believing that it robbed patients not only of their memory, but also of the creative power of their fear. Sylvia did not endorse fear, but she did resent the arrogance of psychiatric institutions that believed they could artificially manufacture mental health and well-being (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

Also in that period of time, Sylvia's poem *Second Winter* was published by *Ladies' Home Journal*. The poem, spoken by a woman, who realises that her love has vanished, captures the loveless marriage she had with Ted at the time (Alexander, 1999). Ted had recently degraded Sylvia in front of her friend Marcia Stern, accusing her of tearing up his old socks and refusing to sew buttons onto his shirts (Alexander, 1999). In a letter to Marcia, Sylvia described herself as a "triple threat woman: wife, writer, and teacher" (Peel, 2002, p. 113). In her pursuit of perfection in these three roles, she often found herself torn between blind devotion to Ted and anger because, like her father, he had failed to be there for her (Alexander, 1999). Her therapy sessions with Dr Beuscher revealed that her intense feelings of possessiveness and jealousy in her marriage stemmed from her unresolved feelings of abandonment about her father. Like Ted, Otto had loved her, but he had not been there for her (Plath, 2000). According to Bawer (2007), Sylvia found a father-substitute in Ted. She failed, however, to see the danger of relying on Ted to be everything her mother and father had not been (Rollyson, 2013). When Ted left, he unlocked in Sylvia the suppressed fear and anger that she had internalised since her father's death when she was only eight years old (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). It was at this time that Sylvia started including the theme of the dead father in her work (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

The first half of 1959 was characterised by frustration and unhappiness for Sylvia who stressed about the fact that her poetry volume was constantly being rejected. On a more personal level, the fact that she was struggling to fall pregnant only added to her distress (Butscher, 1976, 2003). She found relief from this distress by attending Robert Lowell's creative writing workshop at Boston University (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003, Kirk, 2009). The workshop proved to be a very positive, creative experience for Sylvia because it exposed her to the techniques of a writing style known as confessionalism, allowing her to shift

the theme of her writing to more sensitive, internal subject matter (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Rosenthal (1967) defined confessional poetry as therapeutic, autobiographical and uncompromisingly honest. Sylvia herself commented that this personal style of writing was a breakthrough since it allowed a deeper and more psychological take on emotional experiences previously considered taboo (Gill, 2008). Confessional poetry has since been evaluated as being inescapably political (Brunner, 2001). For someone like Sylvia, who as early as high school had shown evidence of an ever-increasing political awareness, confessional writing proved to be the ideal vehicle to articulate personal concerns as well as concerns about bigger political issues such as Hiroshima and the advent of the Cold War (Alexander, 1999; Gill, 2008).

At the time, there was a pervasive anxiety about the threat of communism (Peel, 2002). In 1950, communist North Korea was engaged in war with South Korea. Largely under direction of America, the United Nations stepped in to try to prevent the spread of communism to western countries. This fear of communist invasion underpinned all aspects of American life. America's involvement in the Korean War so soon after the end of World War II, confirmed the multitude of threats aimed at American norms. Russia's superiority in the space race and in developing technology to build the atomic bomb, added to America's feelings of vulnerability and fuelled the anticommunist drive known as McCarthyism. The banning of all communist activities in America, hurled the country into an era of hostility and suspicion, evident in Sylvia's *Johnny Panic* stories. As the Cold War proceeded, the perceived inner threat was matched by an outer threat in the form of a possible nuclear attack from communist enemies. With Fidel Castro's rise to power in Cuba in 1959, the threat became all the more intimidating. By 1962, Cuba had joined forces with Russia, and the Cuban missile crisis in October of that year alerted the world to the imminent threat of World War III (Peel, 2002).

Although a peaceful compromise was eventually negotiated, Sylvia's *Ariel* poems (most of which were written in this period) capture the tense atmosphere which prevailed (Peel, 2002). Although her poems do not report the historical events directly, Peel (2002) noted that the historical circumstances offered an extremely charged backdrop for the articulation of Sylvia's own emotions "about the madness and destructive tendencies of the men and women around her" (Peel, 2002, p. 183). It was not only politics that influenced Sylvia's poetic voice. Her therapy sessions with Dr Beuscher revealed that one of the obstacles in her life was her fear of failure. This revelation proved to be a major step in her evolution as writer and contributed to the psychological depth and emotional richness of her *Ariel* poems (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). That March, prompted by Dr Beuscher's suggestion, Sylvia made an emotional

breakthrough by visiting her father's grave (Rollyson, 2013). When Sylvia found the grave situated on Azalea Path in Winthrop Cemetery, she was overwhelmed by both anger and sorrow (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In her journal, she wrote about her desire to dig up the grave as proof that her father had existed and really was dead (Plath, 2000). Her poem *Electra on Azalea Path*, about a daughter who visits her father's grave to ask his forgiveness, was written ten days after her visit to Winthrop Cemetery, and concludes with the almost prophetic confession, "It was my love that did us both to death" (Plath, 2008, p. 117).

In April, Sylvia and Ted received some good news. Ted had been granted a Guggenheim fellowship, which would cover their living expenses for the rest of the year and provide some financial relief (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). More good news came in the form of an invitation for Ted and Sylvia to join the artists' colony, Yaddo, in Saratoga Springs (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). That summer proved to be a productive one for Sylvia. She wrote numerous stories and poems, and even completed a children's book entitled *The Bed Book* (Alexander, 1999; Gill, 2008). Despite these achievements, Sylvia continued to be plagued by her inability to fall pregnant. This preoccupation underpinned a large part of her writing at the time (Plath, 2000). Later that summer, Sylvia and Ted decided to take a road trip across America to visit her father's family in California. Sylvia was struck by the striking similarity between her Aunt Frieda and her father (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She wrote to her mother, describing how moved she had been to see that her aunt had the same bright, intelligent, piercing blue eyes of her father (Plath, 1992). Although she did not know it at the time, she had finally managed to fall pregnant after consulting a gynaecologist about fertility problems. She would later name her daughter Frieda, like her paternal aunt (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

On their trip across America, Sylvia and Ted also stopped at Yellowstone National Park, where a bear incident inspired Sylvia to write the short story *The Fifty-Ninth Bear* (Plath, 1992; Plath, 1977, 1979). The discrepancy between the real-life incident and the imagined one is that in the story, the husband is mauled and killed by the bear (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). Brain (2006) points out that this discrepancy attests to the limitations of biography. Although one may never uncover what Sylvia intended through this narrative, one cannot deny that it provided a vehicle through which she could vent her frustrations by exacting a type of fantasy revenge (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

In September 1959, Sylvia and Ted joined the Yaddo artists' colony. Since the staff at Yaddo attended to all the cooking and cleaning duties, visiting writers had time to devote themselves entirely to their writing. During the day, Ted wrote in a cabin on the grounds,

whilst Sylvia wrote in a studio on the third floor of one of the houses. Although they wrote apart from one another, Sylvia continued to be led by Ted's tutelage (Alexander, 1999). Ted controlled more areas of Sylvia's life than just her writing. Sonia Raiziss, one of the other residents at Yaddo at the time, recalled that Sylvia allowed Ted to take the lead in most things, even something as simple as entering the room (Alexander, 1999). Although both of them had an imposing, almost god-like physical aspect, Sylvia's behaviour suggested that Ted was the more important one in their relationship (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

In the two months that Sylvia and Ted stayed at Yaddo, they often resorted to hypnosis, meditation, invocation and stream-of-consciousness exercises, in an effort to tap into their imaginations (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). These exercises had startling effects on Sylvia who managed to produce some of the most mature and intellectually satisfying poems she had ever written, including *Mushrooms* and *The Colossus* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). *The Colossus* depicts a daughter's futile efforts at reassembling the crumbling statue which represents her father (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia later entitled her first poetry manuscript *The Colossus and other Poems*. This volume was eventually published by the editor James Michie at William Heinemann Publishers in Britain (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

As was often the case in Sylvia's life, she continued to suffer from insomnia and disturbing dreams whilst at Yaddo (Alexander, 1999). In one of these dreams, Marilyn Monroe appeared to her as a kind of fairy godmother "promising a new flowering life" (Plath, 2000, p. 514). By this time, Sylvia knew that she was finally pregnant. In anticipation of this new life promised to her in a dream, Sylvia resolved that she would teach herself how to read Tarot cards and the stars when she returned back home (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000). Grace Schulman, a writer who attended Yaddo in the 1970s, regarded Sylvia's time at Yaddo as a time of healing and rebirth. These themes of healing and rebirth are reflected in poems like *The Stories*, where she writes as "one who has lived in fragments and is now reborn" (Schulman, 1985, p. 174). In *The Burnt-Out Spa*, this notion of rebirth is, however, contradicted. The poem is extremely sad when read against the backdrop of Sylvia's life. It ends with the suggestion that no amount of creativity could dispel Sylvia's inner turmoil and that she was doomed to live a life devoid of nourishment and healing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1981).

After Yaddo, Sylvia and Ted spent Thanksgiving with Aurelia in Wellesley before preparing to depart for England on the 12th of December, 1959 – the very date on which Sylvia's poem *A Winter's Tale* was published in *The New Yorker* (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1981). In the weeks leading up to the departure, Ted continued to write whilst Sylvia packed their belongings. It

was also in this time that Sylvia went for a medical examination to confirm what she had discovered at Yaddo – she was five months pregnant (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In *Letter Home*, Aurelia wrote that Sylvia looked just like a high school pupil on the day that the couple left (Plath, 1992). Although Ted called out from the train that they would be back in two years, Sylvia would never return to America again (Alexander, 1999).

The strained relationship between Sylvia and Olwyn, who was very protective of Ted and seemed jealous of Sylvia, also aggravated the uneasy atmosphere that Christmas (Alexander, 1999, Kirk, 2009). Although the two women were cordial to one another, their relationship only deteriorated over the next year and culminated in an explosive argument the following Christmas, during which Olwyn accused Sylvia of being immature, selfish, inhospitable and intolerant. She even addressed Sylvia by her maiden name, confirming to Sylvia that she had never accepted her as a sister-in-law (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992). The animosity between the two women would have unexpected, significant repercussions on the running of Sylvia's literary estate after her death (Alexander 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013).

2.2.11 Adulthood (1960 – 1963): Sylvia's Cold Years in England at the time of Kennedy's Presidency

2.2.11.1 A Literary Life in London (1960-1961)

At the beginning of 1960, Sylvia and Ted moved into a small flat overlooking Chalcot Square in London (Alexander, 1999). That February, Sylvia received a letter from the editor James Michie, informing her that the publishing house Heinemann wanted to publish *The Colossus* – a collection of poems which she had dedicated to Ted (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia, who had received nothing but rejections from American publishing houses, was ecstatic about the news. This breakthrough set in motion a number of literary successes, including the publication of *Full Fathom Five* and *The Sleepers* in the *London* magazine (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Despite these successes, however, Sylvia continued to struggle with the fact that her work was not being accepted in America, especially since her British husband had already succeeded in publishing *Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal* in the United States (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In her journal, she resigned herself to remaining an exile in England (Plath, 2000). The foreshadowing of this journal entry is ominous when one considers that Sylvia never did return to America.

The publication of Ted's second book, *Lupercal* – named after the Roman festival of fertility and dedicated to Sylvia – not only earned him the Somerset Maugham Award and a substantial financial remuneration, it also elicited a string of social engagements with well-known people like T.S. Eliot. Ted's success also resulted in a plethora of letters, requests and invitations to give poetry readings (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). It was Sylvia who took on the responsibility of responding to the mountain of correspondence, knowing all too well that Ted would not take the trouble to attend to administrative obligations (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992).

Amidst the excitement of these successes, Sylvia finally gave birth to their first child on the first of April, 1960 (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Because hospital beds in England had to be booked eight months before the time and since it was common practice for British women to give birth at home with the help of midwives, Sylvia gave birth in her flat at Chalcot Square (Alexander, 1999). Ted stayed at Sylvia's side throughout the labour and birth, soothing her by using the same concentration techniques that they had used to facilitate their writing (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). A few days before, he had used hypnosis to suggest a quick, pain-free delivery. Although it was anything but painless, it was quick, and after only four and a half hours of labour without anaesthetic, Frieda Rebecca Hughes was born (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992). In a letter to her mother, Sylvia wrote, "I have never been so happy in my life" (Plath, 1975, p. 374).

Although England's National Health Service provided free midwife services to help mothers with prenatal care, delivery and two weeks of postnatal care, Sylvia found it difficult to write after the birth, since the baby cried for most of the night, leaving Sylvia exhausted during the day. With time, however, her writing would reflect the positive creative effect of motherhood (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In a letter to a friend, Sylvia confessed that the entire experience of giving birth and having a baby was far deeper and "closer to the bone, than love and marriage" (Plath, 1992, p. 50). On the 17th of April, Sylvia and Ted took Frieda on her very first baby outing – a ban-the-bomb political protest march (Alexander, 1999). Sylvia, who had always been a pacifist like her father, wrote to her mother imploring her to vote for Kennedy rather than Nixon in the forthcoming presidential elections (Alexander, 1999).

Sylvia experienced a number of literary successes in the summer of 1960, which culminated in the publication of her very first poetry collection, *The Colossus*, by Heinemann Publishers in England. She had asked for the book to be released on her birthday, but since Heinemann only released books on a Monday, the official date of publication ended up being the 31st of October. Sylvia anxiously awaited reviews of her book. Unfortunately the book did not get as

much attention as she had hoped for, and Sylvia became so discouraged that she decided to write fiction for women's magazines rather than write poetry (Alexander, 1999). Finally, in December 1960, A. Alvarez wrote the first significant review of *Colossus* in *The Observer*. He praised Sylvia for writing good poetry and for steering clear of "feminine charm, deliciousness, gentility, super-sensitivity and the act of being a poetess" (Alexander, 1999, p. 251).

In January 1961, Sylvia discovered that she was again pregnant. She dedicated herself to improving her health, which had deteriorated that winter. She also decided that she would go for an appendectomy in February since she had been experiencing recurring problems with her appendix (Alexander, 1999). First, however, she had to work at *The Bookseller*, a publishing house in London which advertised new books. Sylvia had been commissioned to edit and attend to the lay-out of the whole children's section of the next issue (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Whilst working there, she considered the names she would give to her new baby. In a letter to her mother she mentioned that she liked the names Megan Emily and Nicholas Farrar. Her preference for Emily stemmed not only from her fascination with the writers Dickens and Brontë, but also from her idolisation of her father, whose second name was Emil (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992). Later that month, Sylvia and Ted were interviewed by the BBC for a radio programme featuring couples working in the same profession. In Sylvia's interview, she mentioned that her childhood had been happy up until the age of nine. She did not mention what caused that happiness to end. Ted, on the other hand, described his telepathic connection to Sylvia, commenting that their souls were intertwined. After that broadcast, entitled *Poets in Partnership*, Sylvia and Ted were inundated by fan mail and their status as acclaimed writers increased even more (Alexander, 1999).

Much to Sylvia's dismay, she miscarried early in February. She tried to deal with her loss by spending time with Frieda and by writing. The poems written during this period of time include *Parliament Hill Fields*, *Morning Song*, *Heavy Women* and *Barren Women* – all of which revolve around the theme of motherhood (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). At the end of February, Sylvia underwent surgery to remove her appendix. Whilst in hospital, she received the news that *The New Yorker* wished to have exclusivity to all her poems and that they would pay her 100 dollars for this right. Sylvia signed the contract immediately and knew she had nothing to lose since she had always sent her work first to *The New Yorker* anyway (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992).

In the spring, Sylvia received more good news. The publisher Alfred A. Knopf was interested in publishing *The Colossus* in America, on condition that Sylvia exclude *Poem for a Birthday* from the collection. After negotiations regarding the poems that should be included,

Sylvia was confident that her first book would finally be published in America (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992). Inspired by this boost of confidence, she wrote to Alfred Kazin asking him to recommend her for a grant to write a novel (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In reality, Sylvia had already started writing the novel secretly. By the time she received the grant of 2000 dollars from the Saxton Foundation that November, she had already completed the novel. In fact, Heinemann Publishers had already accepted it for publication in England in October. Since the novel, entitled *The Bell Jar*, was so similar to the events which took place in her life over the summer and autumn of 1953, Sylvia decided to publish it under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). That October, Sylvia also tried to sell the original copy of *The Colossus*. A dealer had sold two of Ted's original manuscripts to a university, and Sylvia thought that she could also generate some much-needed money in this way. Little did she and Ted know how much their papers and manuscripts would be in demand 40 years later (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

2.2.11.2 *Life at Court Green Country Home (1961-1962)*

Two significant events marked the summer of 1961: Sylvia discovered that she was pregnant again, and the couple moved to Court Green, a countryside estate in North Tawton, far removed from the glamour and cultural attractions which they were accustomed to in London (Alexander, 1999). Sylvia found the environment to be quite depressing and isolated, but Ted had wished to move to the country, and she was determined to create a happy home for them there (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Their new home, which consisted of a double-story, twelve-bedroom house, was far more spacious than their cramped apartment in London, and although it needed major reparations, it allowed Sylvia and Ted to become land and home owners for the first time (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Contrary to what Sylvia and Ted's financial complaints suggested, their living standards were far better than those of their neighbours and they were considered by the villagers as being part of the gentry (Butscher, 1976, 2003). As for their London apartment, they sublet it to a Canadian poet named David Wevill and his wife, Assia Gutmann (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992). Sylvia and Ted would become good friends with the Wevills. This friendship would later prove to be a fateful, tragic one (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

The birth of Sylvia's second child occurred early in 1962. Nicholas Farrar Hughes was born on the 17th of January in what Sylvia described as an epic event (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992). In the first part of that year, the life of the Hughes family seemed almost too idyllic to be true. Ted would take care of Frieda during the day, so that Sylvia could attend to the baby's feedings.

Despite the demands of household responsibilities, they both continued to write. In the spring they collected the daffodils that abounded on Court Green's property and sold them at a local market (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). That year proved to be Sylvia's most productive in terms of her writing achievements. The poems written in April of that year include: *Little Fugue* (a poem which deals with the death of her father), *An Appearance*, *Crossing the Water*, *Along the Narcissi* and *Elm* (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). The poem *Elm*, written in April of that year, is particularly significant when one considers the events that unfolded in Sylvia's life in the months that followed. The poem is narrated by a female spirit trapped inside the elm tree and is a projection of Sylvia herself (Butscher, 1976, 2003). It is a powerful poem spoken by a woman who has been abandoned by the one she loves. At the time, there seemed to be no signs of marital problems between Sylvia and Ted. It is unclear whether Sylvia sensed that Ted was drifting away from her emotionally (Alexander, 1999). Her journal entries at the time paint a detailed picture of domesticity, stability and sociability (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

The image that Sylvia projected in North Tawton was that of a happy, extroverted and intelligent American woman who was kind to everyone (Butscher, 1976). From the beginning, she tried to ingratiate herself in the lives of the villagers, and although she missed the company of more academically-orientated mothers with whom she could converse about literature and politics, she forged friendships with neighbours and contented herself with conversations about motherhood and babies (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Rollyson, 2013). All who knew Sylvia attested to the fact that she was an excellent mother – so excellent, that they even referred to her as a perfectionist. The Cromptons, who became close family friends, remarked on her calm efficiency in protecting her children and sustaining an idyllic family unit (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

In May, Sylvia and Ted invited David and Assia Weville to Court Green (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). They frequently welcomed visitors now that they had the space to entertain. Sylvia was particularly excited about the arrival of the Wevilles since they were both intelligent and passionate about literature (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In a letter to Aurelia, she described David as being an amiable, young poet from Canada and Assia as being exceptionally attractive and intelligent (Plath, 1992). Over the course of the weekend, the interaction between Assia and Ted became all the more inappropriate. Assia was known for having affairs, particularly with poets. In fact, her marriage to David had been the result of an affair she had started with him whilst married to another man (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

Given Ted's reputation of flirtations with women, it is not surprising that a sexual attraction developed between him and Assia that weekend. One account describes how Assia lifted her nightgown over Ted whilst he was sitting alone at the kitchen table one morning having coffee. Although Sylvia never witnessed the event, she was aware of the chemistry between them (Rollyson, 2013). On the Monday after they left, she locked herself in her study and wrote two poems – *Event* and *Rabbit Catcher*, both of which deal with the theme of dying relationships (Alexander; 1999; Butscher, 1976; Kirk, 2009).

Despite Sylvia's perceptions of what had transpired between Ted and Assia, she continued her regimen of domestic activities as though nothing had happened and even hosted Ted's family for the first week in June (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). After their departure, she decided to enjoy life's simple pleasures, including gardening, reading, strolling through the countryside and spending time with her children (Alexander, 1999). She wrote to her mother declaring that this was the happiest time in her life (Plath, 1992). Ted had made his mark as a prominent poet with the publication of his poetry collections, one of which was to be published in England for the first time. His BBC broadcasts, his children's book and his association with esteemed writers and poets of the time had also enhanced his reputation, giving him much power within literary circles (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

As for Sylvia, she too was carving a niche for herself as an esteemed poetess. Her poem, *Three Women*, was broadcast on BBC radio and captured perfectly the haunting reality of Sylvia's life – a life trapped in anguished suspense between doubt and hope (Rollyson, 2013). According to A. Alvarez, who visited the couple at Court Green, Sylvia was nothing like the subordinate wife she had been when they first met (Rollyson, 2013). On the contrary, it seemed that she held the power in her marriage. Not only did she appear in complete command of her family and household, she also exuded an inner confidence in her abilities. Motherhood had given her the boost she had previously lacked and her children had bolstered her creativity (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). Unfortunately, Alvarez had mistaken Sylvia's façade of security and confidence for genuine strength (Alexander, 1999). Behind her artful façade, however, ran the same fear that had chased her all her life (Butscher, 1976, 2003). That ominous sense of foreboding that threaded its way through her poetry was not merely imagined - it was real and part of Sylvia's daily existence (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Alvarez had been fooled by Sylvia's apparent joy, and the mask of fulfillment and confidence that he had witnessed in her was what she had wanted him to see, not what she was actually experiencing at the time (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

That June, Sylvia donned another type of mask. She had decided to start farming with bees and attended a beekeepers meeting with Ted where they wore masks for protection while they watched an experienced beekeeper making numerous hives out of one hive (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia was so inspired by the meeting that she decided to order Italian hybrid bees, which were delivered to Court Green shortly afterwards. Although the box of bees was installed in the orchard far from the house, Ted was stung repeatedly by the bees and seemed almost to be under attack of Sylvia's new pets (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Although the danger of being stung by the bees and their association with her father was harrowing, Sylvia persisted and soon mastered the art of tending the bees, applying herself with the same determination that characterised all her endeavours (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia enjoyed entertaining Aurelia at Court Green and she spoke enthusiastically about her blissful life in the country. Despite the perfect life which Sylvia portrayed, Aurelia sensed an uncomfortable tension between Sylvia and Ted, and an underlying depression in Sylvia (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Kirk, 2009). She told her mother that she was writing a sequel to *The Bell Jar*. It was to be a happy love story based on her romance with Ted and featuring him as the hero. Sylvia planned to give Ted the rough draft of the novel in August for his birthday (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Tragedy struck at the end of June when a neighbour, Percy Key, died from lung cancer (Alexander, 1999). Sylvia was deeply affected by his death, not only because she and Ted had become closely acquainted with the Keys, but also because it revived memories of her own father's death (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Soon after the funeral she wrote *Widow* and *Berck-Plage*, both of which are infused with images of death (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Hughes, 2008). Within days of writing *Berck-Plage*, Sylvia wrote a poem entitled *The Other*. Although the poem remains vague throughout, it is clear that it deals with adultery and that the rival or catalyst for the failed love affair is a woman (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

The poem seems almost preemptive when one considers that exactly one week later, Ted's affair with Assia Weville was exposed. Sylvia and Aurelia had gone shopping in Exeter and returned to Court Green earlier than planned (Alexander, 1999). When Sylvia entered the house and heard the phone ringing, she raced to answer it. Ted, who was upstairs, also raced to answer the call, falling down the stairs in his urgency to intercept the call (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Even though the caller tried to disguise her voice to sound like that of a man, Sylvia recognised who it was immediately (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). It was Assia Weville and she wished to speak to Ted. Sylvia calmly handed

the phone to Ted, but after he had hung up, she ripped the telephone line from the wall, exposing her knowledge of Ted's affair and revealing the reality of her anguish (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). The poem she wrote after this incident, *Words Heard, by Accident, Over the Phone*, suggests that Sylvia had been aware of the affair. Although the poem is cryptic, it abounds with images of betrayal and adultery, and highlights not only the psychological impact which the phone call had on Sylvia, but also her skill with words to create intensely powerful poetry. She refers to the room being "ahiss", using imagery that is suggestive of a snake, and simultaneously playing on Assia's name to suggest that she is the sly adulteress (Hughes, 2008, p. 203).

Leaving Frieda in Aurelia's care, Sylvia grabbed the baby and drove off to the Cromptons. By the time she arrived at their home, she was almost hysterical. Elizabeth Crompton recalled that Sylvia cried desperately and pleaded for help. She declared that her perfect marriage had been ruined and that she felt destroyed because "When you give your heart to somebody, you can't take it back. If they don't want it, it's gone" (Alexander, 1999, p. 284). Although David Crompton's memory of that night confirmed his wife's account, what struck him that night was Sylvia's belief in mystical powers and black magic, since they had never seen this side of Sylvia before. She even told them that one night, while she sat in front of her fireplace, a piece of unburned paper drifted from the fireplace and landed at her feet. The piece of paper had a name written on it and Sylvia saw this as a warning sign from the mystical powers that ruled her destiny (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

The next morning, the Cromptons found Sylvia downstairs, enthralled by a litter of newborn kittens. She exclaimed how beautiful and new they looked, and seemed a completely different person to the hysterical woman they had witnessed the night before (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Aurelia was well aware of her daughter's fluctuating temperaments. Her moods would rise and fall from one day to the next, even from one moment to the next (Rollyson, 2013). Although Sylvia had asked Ted to leave Court Green, they continued to fulfill their work obligations in London, always portraying an amicable relationship in public (Butscher, 1967, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). The mask of pleasant normality which Sylvia displayed in public was far removed from the reality of her torment depicted in her poetry (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Words were Sylvia's most powerful tool, and charged words, in particular, were her tonic (Rollyson, 2013). In the same way that she had wielded words to win parental affection in childhood, identifying with the physicality of words to such an extent that they were her only comfort (Wilson, 2013), so too she persuaded herself and created her life through her words (Rollyson,

2013). In her poem *Kindness*, written days before her suicide, she declared her dependency on words when she said “The blood jet is poetry, / There is no stopping it” (Plath, 2008, p. 270).

The magical power which words held for Sylvia manifested itself when she made a bonfire in the backyard and threw the original manuscript of her sequel to *The Bell Jar* into the raging flames (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). The book which she had intended to give to Ted as a birthday gift and which portrayed him as a hero now seemed a lie to her and something she could never finish (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson 2014). In another episode of rage that summer, Sylvia burned all the letters her mother had sent to her over the years (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). This was a particularly painful occurrence for Aurelia who had hoped to publish a collection of their correspondence. Years later, she did publish *Letters Home*, containing Sylvia’s letters, but her own writing – which as far back as her marriage had never been acknowledged – was reduced to ashes in Sylvia’s furnace (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). According to Rollyson (2013), a humiliated Sylvia could not bear the thought of her mother being witness to a less-than-perfect marriage.

Sylvia’s third bonfire exorcism that summer was to destroy Ted’s belongings, which included letters, papers, poetry drafts and other writings. After throwing his belongings into the fire, she proceeded to dance around it, as though to exorcise Ted from her world (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The fact that Ted was unphased by her behaviour suggests that he understood the power words had for her. Her burning rituals were not merely acts of revenge or manifestations of a psychologically-disturbed woman. In a sense, they were purging rituals. Because Ted’s writings represented lies to her, the only way she could continue living was to destroy the words which carried the lies (Rollyson, 2013). Her poem *Burning Letters*, written that August, captures both Sylvia’s rage and her pathos as her life is consumed by a “merciless” fire that cannot be extinguished, “but goes on/dyeing the air” (Hughes, 2008, p. 205).

Aurelia left Court Green at the beginning of August. At the end of that month, Sylvia wrote to her informing her that she was going to apply for a legal separation. Although she was against getting a divorce (and would never file for one), she could no longer bear to lead the “degraded and agonized life” that she was being forced to live by Ted, who was still having an affair with Assia (Plath, 1992, p. 460). Sylvia believed that a legal separation would impel Ted to pay for child support and prevent him from spending all their savings on another woman (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992).

Ted’s absence proved to be too much for Sylvia to bear. She felt trapped in the country amongst cows, children and neighbours who had no idea of the torment that plagued her complex personality (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Ted had been her only intellectual stimulation

and his absence made her feel desperate and lonely, darkening her already weakened mental state (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia's physical well-being had always been negatively affected by stressful circumstances, and that August was no exception. She became so ill with influenza, that her fever measured 103 degrees (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Months later, Sylvia would write a poem entitled *Fever 103°*. The poem not only addressed the theme of adultery, but also captured Sylvia's concerns with the socio-historical reality of the time, as expressed in imagery of the atomic bomb and its devastating effect on Hiroshima (Butscher 1976, 2003; Hughes, 2008). On one occasion, Sylvia drove off a road into an airfield. It is unclear whether it was an accident or another attempt by Sylvia to end her life (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Either way, friends and family were concerned about Sylvia's mental stability (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

In September, Sylvia and Ted went to Ireland, leaving the children in the care of a nanny (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia had convinced Ted to go in the hope that they might save their marriage. In Ireland they stayed at the home of a fellow poet named Richard Murphy. He took them out to Inishbofin where Sylvia climbed the tower of W.B. Yeats. She had always admired the poetry of Yeats and the experience proved to be spiritually meaningful to her at this particularly difficult time in her life (Alexander, 1999; Kirk 2009). One night, after supper with Murphy and an Irish poet named Thomas Kinsella, talk turned to the Ouija board and Sylvia and Ted offered to demonstrate its magical powers (Alexander, 1999). Murphy declined participation, but Ted spent hours in communication with the spirits summoned from the Ouija board. That night he experienced the paranormal transformation of a face in a portrait hanging in the hallway of Murphy's home. He interpreted this as a sign from the spirits that he should depart immediately. Without saying a word to Sylvia, he packed his belongings and left (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Sylvia experienced Ted's unexpected departure as nothing less than abandonment. Despite the resulting humiliation and depression which she felt, she determined to maintain a stable home for her children and to protect them from the trauma of their father's abandonment (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Back at Court Green, her poem, *For a Fatherless Son*, captures this theme of abandonment. Although she suffered from severe depression, she continued her habitual practice of domestic efficiency. She looked after the children, took them on outings, cooked decadent meals, helped to harvest the season's apples, collected honey from the beehives, went for horse-riding lessons and interacted as cheerfully as always with the locals, maintaining the appearance that nothing had happened (Butscher,

1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Her decision to start smoking was perhaps the most tangible manifestation of her inner turmoil, especially since she had always protested against the use of tobacco (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013).

On the advice of her psychiatrist, Dr. Butscher, Sylvia went to London to see a lawyer about a possible divorce from Ted (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although she detested the idea of getting divorced and still clung to the hope of a reconciliation, she acknowledged, in a letter to her mother, the realisation that he was never coming back (Plath, 1992). Ted did return to Court Green, but only to collect his belongings. Sylvia wrote to her mother that his stay at Court Green had turned into a nightmare and that she was trying to exercise some control over the little that was left in her life (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). Although she did not mention the reality of her growing depression in her letters, her despair manifested itself clearly in her poetry (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013).

Depression fuelled her art and provided the emotional charge which characterised her new stream of creativity (Butscher 1976, 2003). The nights were the worst for Sylvia and she resorted to taking sleeping pills and to waking up again at four in the morning to write (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). In those final months of 1962 she wrote a plethora of poems, dating each one in a collection that would become her greatest contribution to American literature (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

Inspired by her beekeeping, which was her way of feeling close to her father and honouring his memory, she wrote a series of bee poems at the beginning of October. These poems convey the sentiments of a still enraged, yet liberated woman. Writing poetry gave her more pleasure than anything else and made her feel empowered (Rollyson, 2013). A letter written to her mother on the 9th of October, however, expressed a type of relapse as Sylvia lamented that everything was breaking, including her dinner service and cottage. Even her much-loved bees had stung her. Writing about the fragile state of her existence, she expressed the hope that some family member would visit her (Plath, 1992). Although Aurelia offered to support her financially if she came back to America, Sylvia refused the invitation, expressing her need to establish herself as a successful writer in her new life (Plath, 1992). Creating a new life, however, entailed making peace with the past, and Sylvia's poem *Daddy*, addresses not only her life-long frustration with male-dominating characters like Otto and Ted, but also her desire to insert herself in 20th century history and imprint her legacy on events that shaped the world (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Echoes of world-changing events, like the Second World War, reverberate in *Daddy* as Sylvia attempts to identify with her German "panzer-man" father/persecutor and let go of all the things she has yearned for (Hughes, 2008, p. 223). Amidst

the chilling autobiographical references, Sylvia reveals her desire to be reunited with her father, who was so omnipotent that he seemed like “a bag full of God” (Hughes, 2008, p. 222). In the same breath, however, she expresses her need “to kill” him, the man she has “always been scared of”, so that she can finally be a woman in her own right (Hughes, 2008, pp. 222-223).

Sylvia composed her poetry on the back of Smith’s pink memorandum pages and her handwriting, once meticulous and controlled, now captured the same determination and frenzy that Virginia Woolf had described before she committed suicide (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Her letters, journal entries and poems fluctuated between hopeless despair and absolute confidence. In a letter written to her mother at the time, she wrote: “I am a writer... I am a genius of a writer; I have it in me. I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name” (Plath, 1992, p. 468). On the 27th of October 1962, Sylvia’s 30th birthday, she wrote the poems *Poppies in October* and *Ariel* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). At the time, Sylvia was taking horse-riding lessons on a horse named Ariel. The poem she wrote not only celebrates female power and strength, but also recaptures Shakespeare’s Ariel in *The Tempest* – a play she had seen in Boston with Aurelia and Warren after her father’s death (Wilson, 2013). In the song from the play, the father’s body is transformed by the ocean’s water into something eternal and beautiful (Wilson, 2013). In the same way that the ocean and her father’s memory held special significance for Sylvia, so too did the poem *Ariel*. The poem was so closely linked to meaningful symbols in Sylvia’s life, that she decided to use its title for her entire collection (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

At the end of October, Sylvia wrote the poem *Lazarus*. In this poem, which has become associated with Sylvia’s life, a woman attempts suicide as a way to mark every decade of her life (Hughes, 2008). Soon after writing these poems, Sylvia was asked to record her *Ariel* poems for the BBC. Although her disembodied voice can be unnerving for some listeners, it captures perfectly her outrage at a society that restricted women, expecting them to be perfect wives and mothers, but simultaneously preventing them from reaching the level of perfection that she sought (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

2.2.11.3 Return to London for the Final Months (1962 – 1963)

On the 5th of November 1962, Sylvia returned to London to search for an apartment close to publishing houses, in the hope that she could generate more money for herself (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). When she came across an apartment on Fitzroy Road that had been inhabited by William Butler Yeats, she put in an offer immediately taking it as a sign that her work would be blessed if she lived in Yeats’ old house (Plath, 1992). She had recently climbed

Yeats' tower in Ireland and had been so enthralled by the experience that she felt as though she could communicate with him through the medium of his spirit (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). By Thanksgiving she had still not received a reply to her application for the apartment. So desperate was she to live there, that she offered to pay in advance for the first year and to sign a lease of five years, using her mother in America as a reference (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). This secured the apartment for Sylvia, who would move into the upper section with her children in December. Trevor Thomas, an artist who had also submitted an application to rent the apartment, would move into the downstairs section (Alexander, 1999, Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Although several of Sylvia's new poems were rejected by both *The Atlantic Monthly* and *The New Yorker*, she continued her fervent writing schedule. She was determined that her collection of poems would be published under the title *Ariel and Other Poems* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In a letter to her mother, she affirmed that the British publication of the book would be dedicated to her children and the American one, to Olive Higgins-Prouty, her benefactress (Plath, 1992). Sylvia's determination and her fiercely feminine poetry about the life-affirming nature of motherhood, suggested that she was in complete control of her world and on the threshold of an exciting new life (Rollyson, 2013). Her correspondence with her family, however, suggested that she was not as stable as the professional, high-powered look that she aimed to project through her outfits, jewellery and hairstyle (Rollyson, 2013). Even Trevor Thomas, her downstairs neighbour whom she frequently called on for assistance, commented on her moods, which fluctuated from confident and charming to whining, desperate and even rude (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Between the time that she moved into her new London apartment and the end of January, Sylvia wrote few poems and concentrated instead on the writing of a novel entitled *Doubletake*. The novel, which she later renamed *Double Exposure*, is about a woman who discovers that her perfect hero of a husband is actually an adulterer who deserts her for another woman (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia hoped that this autobiographical re-examination of her life would help her come to terms with the breakdown of her marriage (Alexander, 1999). Although Sylvia fluctuated between loathing Ted for having abandoned her and hoping for a reconciliation with him, in her final letter to her mother, written a week before her suicide, she confessed that she was finally seeing the finality of everything and that she felt lonely and burdened by grim problems from which she could not escape (Plath, 1992).

Sylvia's emotional problems were exacerbated by the practical frustrations of her new home. The telephone and the new gas stove which she had purchased still had to be installed, and her furniture had to be unloaded by candlelight because she had no electricity (Alexander,

1999; Kirk, 2009). To make matters worse, England seemed to be caught in the grip of an ice age, with extreme subzero temperatures that caused pipes to freeze and electricity to be cut intermittently (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia, who had lost 20 pounds, was extremely run down and wrote to her friend, Marcia Brown, that the separation from Ted had flattened her entirely (Rollyson, 2013). The children, together with Sylvia, had colds and high fevers, and they struggled to cope emotionally every time Ted left after a visit (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In a letter to her mother, Sylvia admitted that her flu, the challenges of the last six months and the responsibilities of caring for two sick babies had made her lose her identity (Plath, 1992). This is reflected in the poems she wrote between the 28th of January and the 4th of February. Although poems like *Balloons*, *Kindness* and *Child* show that motherhood still gave her much joy, the other poems convey a sense of futility, hopelessness and ultimate despair (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rose, 2013; Rollyson, 2013).

Sylvia's last two poems, *Balloons* and *Edge*, written on the fifth of February 1963, convey perfectly the turmoil of a woman caught between the despair of an imperfect life and the hope of escape promised by death (Rollyson, 2013). In a sense, these poems could be seen as Sylvia's suicide note (Butscher, 1976, 2003). According to Rollyson (2013), it is common for suicidal patients to vacillate between euphoric hope and painful despair. The energy that Sylvia put into her writing from four in the morning when she awakened from the blurring effects of sleeping pills was so intense, that she had little energy left to sustain her for the rest of the day (Rollyson, 2013). Even her husband, Ted, commented that for Sylvia, the final product of a successful writing stint was the temporary exhaustion of her ingenuity, rather than the success of the poem itself (Hughes, 2008).

In the last week of Sylvia's life, her moods continued to fluctuate. The fluctuations were intensified by intermittent high temperatures which weakened her already vulnerable mental and physical state, making her feel all the more afraid and insecure (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). The cold only added to her despair. Forced to stay indoors with the children and hampered by the absence of a telephone which had yet to be installed, Sylvia felt lonelier and more isolated than she had ever felt before (Butscher, 1976, 2003). She complained about not having friends, despite evidence to the contrary, and in her relationship with Ted she continued to fluctuate between wanting a reconciliation and demanding that he leave England (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia's medication may have contributed to her fluctuations and negative thought patterns. Even today, anti-depressants have varying effects on different patients, and it can sometimes take months to find the right medication and dose for a specific patient (Rollyson, 2013).

By the weekend of the eighth of February, Dr John Horder, Sylvia's trusted and empathetic psychiatrist, realised that her medication was ineffective and that her depression had reached a level so dangerous that she required hospitalisation (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Despite his efforts, Dr. Horder was unable to find a room for Sylvia. He was thus relieved when Sylvia told him that she and the children had plans to stay with the Beckers that weekend (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Gary and Jillian Becker were new friends of Sylvia and lived in another part of London (Butscher, 1976, 2003, Kirk, 2009). They knew Sylvia well enough to understand that she needed company. In Jillian Becker's memoir describing Sylvia's final days, she wrote that although Sylvia donned her habitual cheerful exterior, internally she was tormented by self-hatred related to woes that included the death of her father, her husband's infidelity and also the underlying pressure to succeed for her mother (Becker, 2003). Sylvia's incessant need to make an impression on Aurelia proved to be a lifelong burden and made her feel guilty every time she failed to live up to certain expectations. She even believed that her failed marriage was a reflection of her failure as a woman, and she loathed the shame which such failure would impel her to experience (Becker, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). So intense was Sylvia's experience of self-loathing, that she even found it difficult to fulfill her duties as a mother (Alexander, 1999; Becker, 2003; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009).

On the Sunday, Sylvia announced unexpectedly that she would return to her apartment that evening because she had many things to do. Although her friend Jillian wondered what had brought on this impulsive decision, she was reassured by a determined Sylvia who seemed in complete control of herself (Becker, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Jillian's husband, Gerry, accompanied Sylvia and her children back to their apartment. On their arrival, Sylvia started crying, and although Gerry insisted that she return with him to the Becker home, Sylvia insisted that she had many things to attend to before the week started, and that she was expecting a nurse to arrive early on the Monday morning (Alexander, 1999; Becker, 2003; Kirk, 2009). It is unclear whether Sylvia expected the nurse to save her or not (Rollyson, 2013). Alvarez (1972) suggested that Sylvia's suicide was her way of aborting her life's energy and ambition and admitting to failure. Even her friend Jillian, who had shared her deepest confidences, could not understand whether Sylvia's determined resolution to leave so abruptly was fuelled by an excitement to start a new life or an urgency to die (Becker, 2013). In a journal entry written more than 10 years before her suicide, Sylvia compared death to a fainting spell with no awakening (Plath, 2000). Similarly, in a journal entry written in 1950 after the dentist anaesthetised her to extract her wisdom teeth, she recalled the ease and simplicity with which

unconsciousness could be achieved through gas and she compared the experience to a type of death which took her out of her body (Plath, 2000).

On Monday, the 11th of February 1963, Sylvia placed the bread and milk she had prepared for her children next to their beds (Alexander, 1999; Alvarez, 1972; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). She opened their bedroom window and sealed off their door with masking tape and a towel (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). On a piece of paper, she wrote the telephone number of the children's doctor and taped this to a stroller in the adjacent bedroom (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). On another piece of paper she wrote a note and the telephone number of Dr Horder and attached this to the baby carriage in the main entrance of the apartment (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She then returned to the kitchen where she sealed off the windows and door with kitchen cloths and tea towels to prevent the gas from poisoning her sleeping children (Alexander, 1999; Alvarez, 1972; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). After turning on all the gas taps, she knelt on the floor and placed her head on a folded towel deep in the gas oven (Alexander, 1999; Alvarez, 1972; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). When Nurse Morris arrived that morning, she was unsure which apartment belonged to Sylvia, but soon noticed her children crying at the open window (Alexander, 1999; Alvarez, 1972; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). With the help of a workman, Charles Langridge, she managed to break into the apartment, turn off the gas taps and carry Sylvia to another room. There she tried to revive Sylvia through cardiopulmonary resuscitation, but to no avail (Alexander, 1999; Alvarez, 1972; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

When the ambulance arrived at the University Hospital of St. Pancras with Sylvia's body, she was pronounced dead on arrival, the cause being recorded as suicide by carbon monoxide poisoning due to depression (Alexander, 1999; Alvarez, 1972; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). On the 15th of February, an inquest was conducted regarding Sylvia's sudden death. At this inquest, Dr. Sutton gave testimony about Sylvia's post-mortem and concluded that she had killed herself (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). After the inquest, Ted arranged for Sylvia to be buried on the Yorkshire moors in the Hughes family cemetery (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The funeral, which took place on the 16th of February, was attended by Ted, his parents, Sylvia's brother Warren and his wife Margaret, and the Beckers (Alexander, 1999). Aurelia was so devastated by the news of Sylvia's death that she could not make the trip to England. Sylvia's children did not attend their mother's funeral either, and were left in the care of Aunt Hilda in London (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia's tombstone included her names (Sylvia Plath Hughes), her dates of birth and death (1932-1963) and an inscription chosen by

Ted from the Bhagavad Gita, which read: “Even amidst fierce flames the golden lotus can be planted” (Alexander, 1999, p. 332). Years later, her tombstone – defaced thrice by vandals who tried to chip away the surname Hughes – was removed (Alexander, 1999).

2.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter highlighted significant socio-historical events in the life of Sylvia Plath. These events will be explored in terms of the selected psychological frameworks in later chapters. The theoretical discussions pertaining to the theory and model selected for this psychobiography are followed by discussions on the design and methodology of the psychobiographical endeavour itself. The findings pertaining to Sylvia Plath’s psychosocial development and the structure of her internal family system are presented in Chapters 8, 9 and 10. The first psychological framework used in this study, namely Erikson’s (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) stage theory of psychosocial development, is presented in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 3

ERIKSON'S THEORY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter expounds Erik H. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and constitutes one of the psychological theories used in this psychobiography to investigate and delineate the personality development of Sylvia Plath. The first section of the chapter examines Erikson's life and the comparison between his theory and Freud's psychoanalytical theory. Thereafter the principles which constitute the foundation of Erikson's theory are presented and his stages of psychosocial development are discussed. This is followed by selected research studies based on Erikson's work and proposed expansions of his work. The final section of the chapter includes a critique of Erikson's theory and a discussion of the relevance of his work to the field of psychobiography. The content of this chapter reinforces the relevance of Erikson's theory as a cumulative, all-encompassing framework of lifelong development from which to operationalise Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development.

3.2 A Brief Biography of Erik H. Erikson

Erik H. Erikson was born in Frankfurt, Germany on the 15th of June, 1902 (Boeree, 2006). He was the child of an extra-marital relationship between a Danish woman from a prominent Jewish family and an unnamed Danish man who abandoned Erikson's mother before he was born (Boeree, 2006; Crowne, 2009). His mother, Kasla Abrahamsen, moved to Germany shortly before Erikson was born, giving birth to him in Frankfurt and raising him in nearby Buehl where she had contacts with members of an artistic community (Alexander, 2005; Crowne, 2009). According to Alexander (2005), it is highly likely that the members of this community were accepting and even adoring of the young child of an artistic single mother, especially a child who showed such strong signs of progressive intellectual ability. According to Erikson (1975), the male members of the artistic community were his first male role models.

When he was three, Erikson's mother settled in the German industrial port of Karlsruhe, where she met the paediatrician, Dr. Theodor Homburger, when Erik fell ill and needed treatment (Alexander, 2005; Phares, 1984). His mother married Dr. Homburger, who was willing to adopt Erikson on condition that his actual origins remained a secret (Bloland, 1999; Crowne, 2009). Throughout her life, Erikson's mother refused to tell him who his father was, stating that she had promised her husband that she would never divulge this information. The

fact that she withheld this information even after her husband died, made Erikson feel betrayed. To cope with the emotional pain, Erikson clung to the fantasy that his father might have been a member of the Danish royal family (Bloland, 1999).

Erikson experienced great tension over his origins because of the fact that he never discovered who his birth father was, and this gave him both a creative edge and a life-long sense of fragility (Friedman, 1999). It was only in adolescence that Erikson discovered that Dr. Homburger was not his biological father. This revelation resulted in him entering a prolonged period of crisis, and although he never broke ties with his family or encountered any legal problems, he was personally adrift for many years as he wandered through Europe on foot trying to earn a living as an artist (Friedman, 1999). Erikson was an alienated and isolated young man (Alexander, 2005; Coles, 1970). In his autobiographical writings, he alluded to the roots of his identity crisis, saying that experiences such as those he had lived through in his youth were sure to bring on an identity crisis (Erikson, 1975; Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 2008). Apart from the identity crisis which caused excessive anxiety for Erikson, a major problem for him was his inability to work with discipline and regularity (Erikson, 1975; McAdams, 1994).

From what is known about Erikson during his adolescent years, it appears that he lacked childhood friends. Jewish children considered him an outsider, probably because of his Scandinavian appearance, which differed from his mother and made him appear strange. Despite the fact that he was born in Germany, his Jewish and Danish background alienated him from German children who spurned him (Alexander, 2005). Having to define himself in terms of differences and similarities to those in his environment, forced Erikson to cultivate an image of himself as an “outsider” (McAdams, 1994, p. 656).

In his isolated world, Erikson took pleasure in his art, mostly alone, until he met two friends in his final year at school – Blos and Stonorov (Alexander, 2005). It was Blos who, in 1927 when Erikson was 25 years old, invited him to Vienna to sketch and work at a school with young children who were under analytical treatment or whose parents were connected with psychoanalysis, either because they were patients or students of the Freuds (Alexander, 2005; Friedman, 1999).

This school was a progressive school where teachers and pupils were given complete freedom to learn, explore and create their own curriculum (Crowne, 2009; Hall & Lindzey, 1978). Involvement in this school sparked Erikson’s interest in the education of children and resulted in him enrolling and graduating from a school that trained teachers in the Montessori method (Boeree, 2006; Hall & Lindsey, 1978).

Erikson's exceptional gift of dealing with children was noticed by Freud's daughter and colleague, Anna Freud, who invited him to undertake a training analysis with her and enter child psychoanalytic training under her guidance (Alexander 2005; Crowne, 2009; Gross, 1987). For Erikson, this invitation afforded him the opportunity to mix with accepting adults who recognised his intellectual ability and provided him with a context similar to the one he had experienced among artists. It also afforded him the opportunity to be accepted by Anna Freud, who connected him, in a way, with the royalty he had assigned to his biological father (Alexander, 2005).

In 1930, Erikson married Joan Serson, a Canadian dance teacher and fellow analyst at the school where he worked (Alexander, 2005; Boeree, 2006). She proved to be the person who had the greatest influence on the course of his life. Apart from providing him entry into the United States, helping him to develop his English fluency and supporting his steps to fame (Friedman, 1999), she provided Erikson with the opportunity to assume responsibilities related to family life and the care of home and children, thus encouraging, in a way, his entry into adulthood (Alexander, 2005). In Erikson's eyes, his wife was the ultimate source of strength and wisdom in the family and the healer who could solve all problems from the practical to the personal (Bloland, 1999).

Erikson's view of himself stood in sharp contrast to the world's experience of him as someone who had deep insight into the emotional lives of others and as a pioneer in developmental psychology (Bloland, 1999; Kivnick & Wells, 2014). It is ironic that a man who is regarded as a major thinker of the 20th century (Hoare, 2002), was described as insecure and vulnerable by his daughter, Sue Erikson Bloland (1999) who wrote: "He evoked in those closest to him a wish to comfort and reassure him, to make him feel that he was worthy and lovable; to help him wrestle with his lifelong feelings of personal inadequacy, his punishing self-doubt" (p. 52).

According to Bloland (1999), it was Erikson's feelings of inadequacy that drove him to become so successful. Apart from the fact that he was a brilliant thinker and writer, he was driven by his need for recognition and positive affect, especially from the significant females in his life, namely his mother and his wife (and possibly even his analyst, Anna Freud), who were sustaining sources of support in his life (Alexander, 2005; Bloland, 1999; Friedman, 1999).

After concluding his analytic training in 1933, Erikson was made a full member of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society (Crowne, 2009). However, due to the anti-Semitic activities of the National Socialists, he and his family left Vienna, first for Copenhagen and then to Boston,

where he was welcomed as the city's first child analyst (Boeree, 2006; Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Meyer et al., 2008). In 1939 he became a naturalised American citizen and officially changed his surname from Homburger to Erikson, maintaining Homburger as his second name. This was a symbolic event as it marked the maturation of his own identity (Boeree, 2006; McAdams, 1994).

Erikson worked with a number of prominent people like Margaret Mead, Gregory Bateson, Reinhold Niebühr, David Reisman and Henry Murray; and over the course of his career, held academic positions at Harvard, Yale and the University of California, Berkeley (Friedman, 1999; Kivnick & Wells, 2013). In 1950, at the age of 48, he published his first independent book, *Childhood and Society* – a book that had a profound impact in the field of psychoanalysis and that highlighted the role of ego psychology in personality theory (Crowne, 2009; Meyer et al., 2008).

In that same year, when professors were coerced into signing loyalty oaths during Senator McCarthy's reign of terror, Erikson resigned his professorship from Berkley and returned to clinical practice in Massachusetts (Boeree, 2006; Crowne, 2009). From 1951 to 1960, Erikson played a major intellectual role at the Austen Riggs Center in Massachusetts, serving as senior consultant in the treatment of disturbed adolescents (Phares, 1984). He was also part-time faculty member of the University of Pittsburgh's Western Psychiatric Institute, and was affiliated with several other institutions, including the San Francisco Psychoanalytic Institute and the psychiatry department at San Francisco's Mount Zion Hospital (Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Phares, 1984). Erikson returned to Harvard University in 1960 and remained there until his retirement in 1970, after which he wrote and did research with his wife (Boeree, 2006; Crowne, 2009). He died in Harwich, Massachusetts in 1994 (Crowne, 2009).

Erikson published numerous articles, contributed chapters to various books and wrote 14 of his own books, one of which, *Gandhi's Truth*, won the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award (Coles, 1970; Friedman, 1999; Meyer et al., 2008). His leading work on the adolescent's search for identity (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1974), while reflecting his own personal identity problems, gave new legitimacy and dignity to adolescent struggles to find oneself as one's own person (Friedman, 1999; Meyer et al., 2008). This, coupled with his extensive writings on people who struggled with their own identities, namely: Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958), Adolf Hitler (Erikson, 1969), George Barnard Shaw (Erikson, 1968), Mahatma Gandhi (Erikson, 1969) and Thomas Jefferson (Erikson, 1974); established Erikson not only as a leading psychobiographer (Alexander, 2005), but also as one of the foremost psychologists of our time (Roazen, 1976).

3.3 Comparison between the Theories of Erikson and Freud

Despite the fact that some critics maintain that Erikson's theory deviates so markedly from psychoanalysis that it falls outside of the Freudian tradition, Erikson's early writings and notes attest to the fact that he thought and practiced as a Freudian (Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Hoare, 2005). Apart from identifying with Freud's artistic inclinations and interests, and with his poetic style of writing (Hoare, 2005), Erikson found in Freud the father he had never know, referring to him as a "mythical father" who radically altered his way of viewing the world (Erikson, 1975, p. 29).

Like Freud, Erikson immersed himself in the intrapsychic mysteries of people's lives, using dream interpretation, free association and hypnosis to uncover latent meanings of observable behaviour and thought (Gross, 1987; McAdams, 1994). Another similarity lies in the fact that the first five stages of Erikson's theory are linked to the libido and thus constitute a reformulation and expansion of Freud's psychosexual stages (Atalay, 2007; Maier, 1988; McAdams, 1994). Erikson himself perceived his own ideas as expanding rather than radically altering Freudian theory (Atalay, 2007), maintaining that his work on the life cycle would never have emerged without Freud's psychosexual stage theory, which remained "his most basic theoretical point of reference" (Friedman, 1999, p. 221).

That said, there are, nonetheless, significant differences between the theories of Erikson and Freud, which Erikson (1975) described with reference to the terms "upward", "outward" and "forward" (p. 39). Erikson altered Freudian thought so as to accommodate a focus on healthy, lifelong development which incorporated the importance of consciousness and interaction with the social world (Hoare, 2005).

Although Erikson acknowledged the importance of the unconscious, he deviated from Freud's view that all human behaviour is determined by instinctual sexual and aggressive drives over which the individual has little control (McAdams, 1994; Meyer et al., 2008). Freud thus emphasised the role of the unconscious, specifically the id, and regarded the ego as the executive officer, mediating and constantly at the mercy of the id and the superego (Meyer et al., 2008; Watts, Cockroft & Duncan, 2009). Erikson, on the other hand, regarded the ego as far more than a simple mediator of the opposing demands between id and superego (Shaffer & Kipp, 2007). He conceptualised the ego as an independent part of the personality with its own energy sources (Meyer et al., 2008), and maintained that the mature ego makes investments and choices that extend beyond the instinctually-driven childhood development phase postulated by Freud (Erikson, 1975). Erikson (1968) described the ego as:

The domain of an inner ‘agency’ safeguarding our coherent existence by screening and synthesizing, in a series of moments, all the impressions, emotions, memories, and impulses which try to enter our thought and demand our action, and which would tear us apart if unsorted and unmanaged by a slowly grown and reliably watchful screening system. (p. 218)

To this he added that “the functioning ego, while guarding individuality, is far from isolated, for a kind of communality links egos in mutual activation. Something in the ego process then, and something in the social process is – well, identical” (Erikson, 1968, p. 224). Erikson (1975) thus revised Freud’s emphasis on the unconscious instinctual origins of development. By accentuating the ego’s adaptive role in the ongoing socialisation process, he shifted psychoanalytic thought “upward” (p. 30) in consciousness, emphasising the person as an agent of his or her own psychosocial maturation (Hoare, 2005).

Secondly, Freud viewed the developing child as being locked within the rigid boundaries of the child-mother-father Oedipal/Electra triangle, thereby emphasising the influence of sexual urges on development (Shaffer & Kipp, 2007; Watts et al., 2009). Erikson, on the other hand, although accepting Freud’s view that maturation results in conflicts revolving around oral, anal, phallic, latent and genital stages of psychosexual development, viewed the developing child within the context of his or her particular family and its historical-cultural heritage, and believed that psychosocial development continues even after the resolution of the sexual conflicts (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968; Freiberg, 1987). Thus Erikson was less concerned with the sexually-orientated Oedipal/Electra conflict stemming from the unconscious, and more concerned with the socio-cultural reality of the family as it shapes the ego and the developing individual (Atalay, 2007; Erikson, 1959; Meyer et al., 2008, Watts et al., 2009). According to Erikson (1968), “We cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor can we separate ... identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crisis in historic development, because the two help to define each other and are truly relative to each other” (p. 23). From this perspective, the family, as a product of society and culture, moulds the developing ego, providing the promise of security, identity and integrity, and creating the only conditions under which human growth and development are possible (Erikson, 1950, 1963). Although acknowledging the importance of biology in human development, Erikson broadened Freud’s concept of psychosexual development into the bio-psychosocial, emphasising the psychosocial in his description of the vital importance of family systems, society and culture in individual development (Hoare, 2005; Kivnick & Wells, 2014). As early as 1939 and 1943, Erikson showed in his writings of the Sioux and Yurok Native Americans, that the social-physical world exists inside the human mental world (Hoare, 2005). According

to Erikson (1950, 1963), the inner mental world of the individual is such that it creates the potential for significant interaction with those in the social and physical environment. The social-physical world in turn, guides and narrows the individual's choices, thereby "confirming the right life plan" (Erikson, 1968, p. 87). Erikson's postulation that the context of one's social, cultural environment and times lives within and scripts symbols, messages and meanings into the psyche, thus countered Freud's backward and downward view and represented his "outward" notion (Erikson, 1975, p. 39).

Erikson's work on the "forward" trajectory of development (Hoare, 2005, p.5) highlights a third important difference between his theory and that of Freud's. Whereas Freud viewed development as culminating with the completion of adolescence, leaving adulthood to be conceptualised as a dormant period, Erikson viewed development in terms of stages that continue both into adulthood and throughout the individual's entire lifespan (Erikson, 1980; Gross, 1987; Hoare, 2005; Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Spano, Koenig, Hudson, & Leiste, 2010). Erikson thus undertook to place Freud's libido theory in the perspective of "the totality of human life" (Roazen, 1976, p. 16), thereby rejecting Freud's reductionistic view and moving upward and forward through the lifespan with positive, healthy psychological development in mind (Erikson, 1975; Hoare, 2005). Unlike Freud who emphasised adulthood stasis and developmental negative, Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980, 1987) maintained that adulthood holds substantial content of its own and that every developmental and social crisis which the individual must resolve provides the opportunity for growth. Erikson (1963, 1980) also wrote that every adult carries remnants of childhood conflicts in the depths of his or her personality, and that these conflicts can be re-resolved. The fact that Erikson believed that it was never too late in life to change the negative resolution of an old conflict into a more positive one, and the fact that he advocated the study of normal, healthy individuals as active and adaptive agents of their lifelong development within a complementary, ever-evolving society, made his theoretical outlook more positive and optimistic than Freud's (Freiberg, 1987; Hoare, 2005; McAdams, 1994; Watts et al., 2009). Rejecting Freud's deterministic notion that psychological life in adulthood is predetermined by the conditions established in childhood, Erikson (1975) wrote that "man is not organised like an archaeological mound, in layers; as he grows he makes the past part of all future, and every environment, as he once experienced it, part of the present environment" (pp. 117-118).

Watts et al. (2009) have described Erikson's theory as "a map of how things go right", as opposed to Freud's theory being described as "a map of how things go wrong" (p. 284). Erikson's emphasis on the individual's biopsychosocial development across the entire lifespan

with the focus on psychosocial health, has established him as a founder of multidisciplinary thinking and a pioneer in the fields of adult psychology (Douvan, 1997), lifespan development (Golland, 1997), positive psychology (Hill & Burrow, 2012; Ryff, 1989), and psychohistory (Pietikainen & Ihanus, 2003).

The following section provides a description of the basic principles of Erikson's original theory, as well as expansions of the theory based on Erikson's career-long observations of individuals and social/historical movements.

3.4 Erikson's Principles of Development

3.4.1 The Epigenetic Principle

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development was first published in 1950 and broke boundaries in the field of human development by expanding psychoanalytic concepts of psychosexual development to include the impact of both genetic and social factors (Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Schultz, 1990). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968) explained the influence of genetic factors on development by means of the epigenetic principle (Meyer et al., 2008). This principle stems from embryology and refers to the process by which an embryonic organism emerges from unorganised and undifferentiated protoplasm, with organs developing according to a regular, sequenced programme of growth (Crowne, 2009). In fetal development, all the major subsystems of the fetus are present in the first weeks of pregnancy, with each subsystem having a critical period or crucial time of ascendancy in which development proceeds at its best or risks distortion (Roazen, 1976; Yount, 2008). In human development, Erikson interpreted the epigenetic principle to mean that anything that grows has a ground plan out of which parts arise and ascend according to their own time of maturation, with all parts ultimately forming a functioning whole (Erikson, 1968; Roazen, 1976). Thus, although epigenesis or the epigenetic principle is rooted in concepts related to evolution and genetics, in Erikson's theory, it extends to an emerging sequence of motor, sensory, cognitive and social abilities, suggesting that human personality grows and develops, not randomly and automatically, but cumulatively through eight life stages, each with its own developmental crisis, until each part of the individual has fully developed to form a more complex system (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963, 1980; Watts et al., 2009; Yount, 2008).

Like Freud, Erikson linked psychological development to biological maturation, but broadened Freud's concept of psychosexual development into the bio-psychosocial by

describing the significant impact of family, culture and society on individual development (Hoare, 2005; Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Watts et al., 2009).

The impact of such social interaction on human development begins even before birth and is defined by the terms “involvement” which Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986) explained as follows:

Involvement is related to the prenatal containment in our mother’s vulva, where, modern research suggests, we were not just passively wrapped up but already had to prove our truly ‘inborn’ capacity for involvement, which means our being alive, by stimulating the ‘environment’ as it stimulates us. (pp. 32 – 33)

Literally, epigenesis means “upon emergence”, but Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1989) expanded the definition, explaining that “... epi can mean ‘above’ in space as well as ‘before’ in time, and in connection with genesis can well represent the space-time nature of all development ...” (p. 38). In keeping with the epigenetic principle, Erikson (1968) maintained that interaction with significant persons and social institutions must remain within “the proper rate and the proper sequence” which governs all epigenesis (p. 93). Personality thus develops in stages according to predetermined steps which are based on the individual’s readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of and to interact with an ever-increasing context of significant persons and social institutions (Erikson, 1968).

Progress through each of the developmental stages hinges on the success, or lack of success, in resolving various crises. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968) defined these moments as critical turning points of maturation during which time the individual is presented with two opposing developmental opportunities, prescribed by the culture and society in which the individual lives (Boeree, 2006; Corey, 2005; Gross, 1987). If the basic crisis of a particular stage is successfully resolved, the individual can be considered ready to proceed to the next stage. Alternatively, if the crisis is not successfully resolved, it can cause deep-rooted personal problems within the individual (psyche) and in his/her relationship with others (social) (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968; Hamachek, 1990; Yount, 2008). Although Erikson maintained that unsuccessful resolution at an earlier stage will negatively affect an individual’s ability to resolve later crises, his cumulative account of development allows for individuals to rectify and alter resolutions of previously unresolved or negatively resolved stages at any time (Craig, 1996; Marcia, 2002).

3.4.2 Modes and Modalities

The concept of modes plays a significant role in Erikson's theory and although it is used primarily to describe development during the first six years of life, it features in Erikson's explanation of all the stages. Erikson tried to explain adult behaviour patterns by linking physical behaviour patterns in children (organ modes) to a wide range of psychosocial and cognitive behaviour patterns in adults (psychosocial modalities) (Erikson, 1963, 1980, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008).

Whilst Freud localised the infantile appearance of instincts in three erogenous zones, Erikson expanded the classical psychosocial perspective by describing the modes of expression of each bodily zone (Crowne, 2009). During the first year of life, the mouth is the dominant body zone and consequently the mode of incorporation predominates at this stage. Although this stage corresponds with Freud's oral stage, Erikson extended the psychosexual aspect by positing that the basic organ modes associated with taking in food (e.g., sucking, biting, holding onto) serve as prototypes for psychosocial modalities such as endearment, amiability, captivating behaviour and the absorption of knowledge. The attitudes and emotions that children learn to associate with incorporative behaviour, together with the way in which they resolve the crisis of trust versus mistrust influences their lifelong functioning. It also determines the nature of their relationships with people, their interaction with the physical environment, their perceptions of the world and their attitudes towards knowledge and cognitive functioning (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1974; Meyer et al., 2008).

During the second year of life, the anal body zone dominates, resulting in the mode of expulsion being of primary importance. One can trace similarities between this stage and Freud's anal stage, but Erikson posited that the acquisition of muscle control enables children to exercise more control over their lives (Erikson, 1963, 1968). The organ modes of excretion and retention and the acquisition of socially acceptable toilet habits serve as prototypes for psychosocial modalities connected with behaviours that play a decisive role in the development of individual personality (Erikson, 1963, 1968) and in attitudes concerning protection, domination, passivity and destruction (Erikson, 1974, 1980, 1982).

From the age of three to six, the sexual organs constitute the dominant body zone and the modes of inclusion and intrusion contribute to children's increasing ability to move around independently and to take initiative in 'making' and 'doing' things which sometimes contradict social standards and provoke feelings of guilt (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1982; Meyer et al., 2008). These guilt feelings serve an important function in that they motivate behaviour either actively or passively. Intrusion allows for vigorous physical and mental activity manifested in

physical aggression, competitiveness and ardent curiosity (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1982). Inclusion, on the other hand, allows for imaginative potential and the willingness to establish caring and protective relations with peers and younger children (Erikson, 1982; Welchman, 2000).

3.4.3 Rituals, Ritualizations and Ritualisms

Cultural and social rituals play an important role in society because they allow people to express their emotions and urges in socially acceptable ways and simultaneously provide some degree of security in an ever-changing world (Crowne, 2009, Meyer et al., 2008). According to Erikson (1977, 1996), these rituals are instinctive and reveal a cultural identity that influences each stage of development. Not only do they provide distinctiveness and individuality, they also allow for the reconciliation of opposites so that “ambivalence as well as ambiguity” can be overcome in life (Erikson, 1977, p. 578).

There are three aspects to rituals. Rituals can be defined as playful patterns of human behaviour which are repeated in more or less the same way in particular circumstances (Meyer et al., 2008). They constitute the adult form of social practices exemplified by informal gestures such as how to greet others, and more formal occasions such as weddings, christenings and funerals (Crowne, 2009). Ritualizations can be defined as the ritual aspects of interactions that take place at each stage of development; whereas ritualisms refer to the exaggerated or pathological excesses of ritualization that serve only the needs of the individual (Crowne, 2009).

The infant stage is characterised by the interaction that takes place between mother and infant. This ritualization is numinous (awe-inspiring) and consists primarily of eye contact, hugging, caressing, kissing, endearing sounds and gestures, and the repetition of the baby’s name – to which the infant usually responds positively with fascinated staring, smiling and cooing (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1966, 1977, 1986; Hall, Macintyre, & Porter, 1985). An infant who is deprived of such interaction may develop the ritualism of idolism, which is characterised by mistrust, anxiety and helpless devotion, which ultimately leads to the idolisation of self or significant others in adulthood (Crowne, 2009).

In the second year of life, as the child grapples with the issue of autonomy and discovers that there are rules and limitations, he or she learns the ritualization of punishment and reward (Crowne, 2009; Meyer et al. 2008). If treated respectfully, the child will learn judicious ritualization, which is the prototype of judging people and events to be fair and unfair. Prejudiced judgement, or *pseudospeciation* as Erikson named it, lays the foundation for the

inclusion or exclusion of others; whilst the excessive ritualism of legalism is characterised by the stubborn insistence on rules (or legalities) with limited understanding of morality and social conscience (Crowne, 2009). According to Erikson (1977), the ritualization of punishment and reward plays an important role in the development of the superego, as evidenced in the child's experience of parental approval or disapproval during toilet training.

The play age ranges from approximately age three to five and is characterised by the child's use of dramatic ritualization. Through imaginative play, the child learns to explore situations and events from different points of view (Erikson, 1977). Through the ritualization of authenticity, the child is enabled to discover characters and roles that suite him or her. Conversely, the ritualism of impersonation places the child in danger of getting lost in a role because of the belief that he or she is the enacted fantasy person (Crowne, 2009).

During the school years, the child must master the discipline of learning. Formal ritualization involves the repetition of formal behaviour patterns, which play an important role in the educational process since they teach the child to work methodically and to acquire an over-all sense of quality for craftsmanship and perfection (Erikson, 1966, 1977; Welchman, 2000). Through this ritualization, children learn how to solve mathematical problems, how to talk to teachers and authority figures, and how to behave in the proper way in society (Capps, 2004; Meyer et al., 2008). The distorted ritualism in adulthood is called formalism and is characterised by excessive perfectionism and the repetition of meaningless rituals (Crowne 2009).

The ritualization that occurs during adolescence is called ideology and relates to the integration and synthesis of contributions from previous life stages into a coherent set of ideas and ideals that enhance ego identity. The adolescent's belief system is affirmed, at this stage, by rituals which celebrate the mastery of sexuality, technology and an individual ideology within a broader social context (Crowne, 2009; Welchman, 2000). The estrangement that occurs from lack of an integrated ideology is identity confusion, whilst the distorted form of the ideology ritualization is the ritualism known as totalism. This refers to a fanatical preoccupation or blind submission to a belief system or famous figure and the lifestyle he or she represents (Crowne, 2009).

The virtue of love comes into being during Erikson's intimacy stage of development, which ushers in the affiliative ritualization. The most significant ritual of this stage is marriage, because it brings together previous ritualizations such as the numinous (mutual adoration) and the judicious (exchanging marriage vows), and it affirms the sharing of work, friendship and love. Erikson (1964) wrote: "Love, then, is mutuality of devotion forever subduing the

antagonisms inherent in divided function” (p. 125). The corresponding ritualism is elitism and is expressed by those who are not close to others and associate with exclusive groups that give a false sense of comradeship (Crowne, 2009).

The ritualization of the mature adult is called generational and involves the transmission of beliefs, values and skills to the young (Capps, 2004; Welchman, 2000). It includes family, parenting and teacher rituals which involve the care and instruction of children and young people. Adults who feel they have nothing to teach may become demanding and authoritarian and manifest the uncaring ritualism of authoritarianism (Crowne, 2009). The ritualization of old age is called integral and is reflected in the wisdom of the ages. As the corresponding ritualism, Erikson suggested *sapientism* which refers to the pretense of being wise (Crowne, 2009). Erikson (1977) maintained that rituals play an important role in development in that they affirm the cultural and social meaning of the life cycle. He wrote:

We can see now what rituals must accomplish: by combining and renewing the ritualizations of childhood and affirming generative sanction, they help to consolidate adult life once its commitments and investments have led to the creation of new persons and to the production of new things and ideas. And, of course, by tying life cycle and institutions into a meaningful whole, they create a sense of immortality not only for the leaders and the elite but also for every participant. (pp. 112-113)

3.4.4 Expansions of Erikson’s Original Principles of Development

Erikson, together with two colleagues, Joan Erikson and Helen Kivnick, published his last authored book, *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, in 1986. The book presented the research findings from the five-year long Vital Involvement study based on Erikson’s career-long observations of individuals and social/historical movements (e.g., Erikson, 1958, 1959, 1964, 1968, 1969, 1975). It not only rearticulated, but also elaborated three fundamental principles rooted in Erikson’s original theory of healthy life cycle development, namely: (a) Dynamic Balance of Opposites; (b) Vital Involvement; and (c) Life in Time. Kivnick and Wells (2014) used Erikson’s final study to expand gerontological research, explaining Erikson’s principles in new detail. They linked these principles to relevant research and suggested ways for Erikson’s ideas to further enrich gerontological practice and research. The next section explains each of these principles in greater detail.

3.4.4.1 *Dynamic Balance of Opposites*

According to Erikson et al. (1986), each of the eight stages is composed of two opposing tendencies, a syntonic and a dystonic disposition, which must come into balance to produce the

stage's virtue or ego strength. Erikson et al. (1986) wrote: "... the first two, in infancy, are a sense of trust and a sense of mistrust: their balance, we claim helps create the basis for the most essential overall outlook on life, namely, hope ..." (p. 33). In other words, "... a favourable ratio of basic trust over basic mistrust is the first step in psychosocial adaptation" (Erikson, 1950, p. 271).

Erikson's solution to a developmental crisis is thus neither achieved by excluding one of the opposites, nor by some form of compromise between the two. Rather, it is attained through a synthesis that includes both syntonic and dystonic dispositions, although the syntonic pole always seems to carry more weight than the negative dystonic. This synthesis allows for the emergence of each ego strength and enables the individual to advance to a higher level of development (Erikson et al., 1986, Meyer et al., 2008). In the words of Erikson (1969), the completion of each stage of life means that a "new strength is added to a widening ensemble of life-skills" (p. 52).

3.4.4.2 Vital Involvement

Erikson (1968) recognised that multiple stresses are part of everyday life in increasingly complex societies. He believed that the ego plays a key role as an agent which chooses amongst different developmental possibilities and tries to find creative solutions for developmental crises, so that psychosocial development can progress successfully and lead to the acquisition of psychosocial strengths (Kivnick & Wells, 2014; Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al., 2009).

Erikson (1968) conceptualised the ego as the mediating aspect of personality responsible for co-ordinated functioning and described it as:

the domain of an inner 'agency' safeguarding our coherent existence by screening and synthesizing, in a series of moments, all the impressions, emotions, memories, and impulses which try to enter our thought and demand action, and which would tear us apart if unsorted and unmanaged by a slowly growing and reliably watchful screening system. (p. 218)

In 1986, Erikson and his colleagues referred to the mediating aspect of the ego as vital involvement, which they described as the ego's meaningful engagement with the outside world. Kivnick and Wells (2014), maintained that vital involvement requires a self, an external environment and a reciprocally powerful and mutually influential interaction. Although vital involvement has much in common with the more recently coined term *vital engagement* (Nakamura, 2001; Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2003). Kivnick and Wells (2014) suggested that the construct vital involvement goes beyond vital engagement in that it forms part of a theoretical scaffolding that supports successful psychosocial development. Whilst vital

engagement is described as “a form of positive behaviour” (Nakamura, 2001, p. 5), and a component of resilience, vital involvement contextualises vital engagement in broader terms and emphasises the importance of meaningful interaction with the environment as a prerequisite to healthy psychosocial development (Kivnick & Wells, 2014).

Erikson (1963) posited that each step in the life cycle presents the individual with a new set of choices and tests which are prescribed by the structure of the culture and society in which the individual lives. The successful resolution of such life challenges leads to the acquisition of virtues which are indicative of growing ego strength. Erikson (1982) described ego strengths as those characteristics that qualify and prepare individuals for their roles in the development of society from generation to generation. The consideration of social and environmental influences is a significant aspect of Erikson’s theory. Erikson (1968) did not draw a sharp distinction between the individual and the social environment, but rather described them as being intertwined:

One can only conclude that the functioning ego, while guarding individuality, is far from being isolated, for a kind of communality links egos in a mutual activation. Something in the ego processes, then, and something in social processes is – well, practically identical. (p. 224)

This has implications for the balanced synthesis of syntonic and dystonic dispositions and implies that each psychosocial theme will change as environments and age-based expectations change (Erikson et al., 1986; Kivnick & Wells, 2014). Vital involvement thus constitutes a fundamental aspect of Eriksonian theory which requires a simultaneous consideration of the person, the social environment and the ongoing, reciprocal influence they have on one another (Kivnick & Wells, 2014).

3.4.4.3 *Life in Time*

According to Erikson (1963, 1980), development is a life-long process that proceeds cumulatively, with each developmental stage being reliant on the successful negotiation of earlier stages. Although at each stage of development a certain aspect of personality emerges as the focal point of development (Meyer et al., 2008), all psychosocial themes are operational throughout the life cycle and they permeate the individual’s psychosocial life at a time determined by the individual’s physiological capacities, social relationships and community/culture-based expectations (Kivnick & Wells, 2014). Erikson et al. (1986) labelled this principle *Life in Time* and described it as follows:

the individual is never struggling only with the tension that is focal at the time. Rather, at every successive developmental stage, the individual is also

increasingly engaged in the anticipation of tensions that have yet to become focal and in re-experiencing those tensions that were [focal earlier] ... (pp. 39-40)

Although Erikson claimed that the lack of resolution of an earlier stage would adversely affect the resolution of later stages, he did make provision for spontaneous recovery from developmental mistakes or inadequacies (Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al. 2009). The principle of *Life in Time* thus not only imbues Erikson's theory with an optimistic view of development, it also helps to clarify numerous mechanisms that underlie the positive relationship between generativity and well-being throughout the life cycle (An & Cooney, 2006; McAdams, De St. Aubin & Logan, 1993). In the field of gerontology, this principle adds value to research and practice since it emphasises the importance of an individual finding balance between involvement in the personal present and gerotranscendence's involvement in an infinite continuum of past and future (Tornstam, 1997). Furthermore, the principle of *Life in Time* helps to shape researchers' conceptual and operational understanding of constructs such as well-being, quality of life and life satisfaction (De Medeiros & Basting, 2013; Geron, 2012; Geron & Kivnick, 2012; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008), all of which are important constructs in practices such as person-centred care (e.g., Crandall, White, Schuldheis, & Talerico, 2007) and civic engagement, where community life is enriched for citizens of all ages (e.g., Kaskie, Imhof, Cavanaugh, & Culp, 2008).

3.4.4.4 Self-Actualization and Optimal Development

According to Erikson (1959, 1994), the highest stage of development, known as ego integrity, demands that one integrates the various components and forces in one's life. Erikson (1994) maintained that this can only be accomplished when one accepts that all parts of one's life are, or in fact constitute, one's "one and only life":

It is the acceptance of one's one and only life cycle and of the people who have become significant to it as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions. It thus means a new different love of one's parents, free of the wish that they should have been different and an acceptance of the fact that one's life is one's own responsibility... For he knows that an individual life is the accidental coincidence of but one life cycle with but one segment of history; and that for him all human integrity stands and falls with the one style of integrity of which he partakes. (p. 104)

In his psychosocial theory of human development Erikson (1964, 1985, 1997) proposed the concept of ego virtues or ego strengths. Erikson used the terms *virtue* and *strength* interchangeably to refer to instinctual, inherent strengths acquired by optimally-functioning individuals. Erikson (1964, 1985, 1997) maintained that the eight ego strengths, represented

on his epigenetic chart of psychosocial stages, exist throughout the life cycle with each strength demonstrating an ascendance in association with positive resolution of its corresponding psychosocial crisis. The epigenetic principle is fundamental to an understanding of Erikson's psychosocial theory and explains the growth of personality (which includes the psychosocial stages and the ego strengths). Each strength is rooted in all those ego strengths that are prior to its ascendance and, when mature, provides new meaning to all previous ego strengths and all those still to reach ascendance (Erikson, 1985).

A number of factors play a role in each ego strength's time of ascendance. Erikson (1965) maintained that ascendance of ego strengths depends on a unique interplay between the individual's physiological, cognitive and emotional preparedness to successfully resolve the appropriate psychosocial crises, and the conditions of the surrounding social environment. Erikson (1964) referred to this process as a "socio-genetic evolution" and contended that "all basic virtues can arise only in the interplay of a life stage with the individuals and the social forces of a true community" (p. 3).

Erikson (1985) explained that each ego strength has an antipathic counterpart, which he described as a dystonic tendency that is counterproductive to both the positive resolution of a psychosocial crisis and the establishment of the relevant ego strength. The greater the presence of the ego strength's antipathy, the more poorly resolved the crisis of that particular psychosocial stage, and the weaker (or more poorly developed) the relevant ego strength. That said, however, Erikson (1985) emphasised that the presence of some degree of each antipathy is not only inevitable, but is also necessary and desirable. For example, whilst trust in others and the world is obviously more beneficial to well-being than mistrust, a certain measure of mistrust is necessary to prevent gullibility and to ensure that one approaches potentially dangerous situations/people with caution. Balance is thus the key word to exemplify Erikson's notion of optimal development with regard to ego strengths.

3.5 The Stages of Psychosocial Development

As already indicated, Erikson proposed that psychosocial development unfolds over eight stages across the lifespan (Graves & Larkin, 2006). He intentionally avoided stipulating definitive, fixed age ranges because he believed that an individual's developmental trajectory is influenced both by biological maturation and by the broader environmental and social context within which the individual lives (Newman & Newman, 2012). This "gentle and implicit" (Roberts & Newton, 1987, p. 154), approach to the unfolding of the life cycle allows for a more flexible framework of human development and accounts for the qualitative

differences in adaptation from one developmental stage to the next, and for the unique developmental pathways followed by different individuals as they journey through life (Caprara & Cervone, 2000; Erikson, 1950, 1963; Meyer et al., 2008; Santrock, 2001).

In the subsequent sections, Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development, as well as the ninth stage written by his wife, Joan Erikson, are discussed. Although there are slight variations in the age ranges proposed by different authors, this study has utilised the age ranges proposed by Hamachek (1990). The chronological delineation serves merely as a guideline to establish a framework from which to contextualise and study the development of Plath over the course of her life. Each stage is described with reference to the psychological crisis and virtue which characterises it. The epigenesis, cultural contribution and influence of the broader social context relevant to each stage are also discussed and highlight the idiographic nature and timing of Erikson's sequentially arranged stages of development.

Although Sylvia Plath died at the age of 30, all the stages of Erikson's theory are outlined in keeping with his cumulative, all-encompassing view of development.

3.5.1 Stage I: Basic Trust versus Basic Mistrust – Hope (Birth – 18 months)

In the first year of life, the infant confronts the psychosocial developmental crisis of basic trust versus basic mistrust (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1980). The first psychosocial trait of basic trust is the fundament of all other traits (Erikson, 1959) and constitutes the earliest positive psychosocial attitude towards oneself and the world (Erikson, 1964). It is, in essence, the cornerstone of a vital personality (Erikson, 1968). Basic trust in mutuality rests on the assumption that someone exists without whom we cannot live. This implies a sense of "optimism" without which children die mentally and, in extreme cases, even physically (Erikson, 1959, p. 114). Development, during this first stage, focuses on the organ mode of the mouth and forms the foundation of the psychosocial modality of incorporation. Since psychic energy becomes closely intertwined with the body zones around which the most significant life experiences revolve (Maier, 1978, 1988) this stage is referred to as the oral stage (Erikson, 1968). Although food intake is the overriding need at this stage, the infant soon becomes receptive in many other respects and learns to take in sights, sounds and bodily tactile stimulations from the social environment (Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978, 1988). Initially the infant's mode of incorporating food is passive, but as teeth start to grow, the incorporative mode becomes more aggressive and includes gripping and biting (Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978, 1988; Meyer et al., 2008).

The extent to which infants learn to trust their environment depends primarily on the quality of the maternal relationship, rather than on quantities of food or demonstrations of love (Erikson, 1950, 1963). The maternal relationship is of paramount importance in the development of trust in the infant, since a mother combines the sensitive care of an infant's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within a trusted cultural framework (Erikson, 1963). Being the member of a family and of society, the mother has the potential to communicate to the infant, through the language of somatic interchange, that the infant may trust her, the world and him/herself. From this sense of basic trust the infant learns that all the diffuse somatic experiences and bewildering social cues of early life can be accommodated in a continuity which unites the inner and the outer world, allowing for the experience of integration (Erikson, 1968). Basic mistrust, therefore, relates to the sum of diffuse experiences and social cues which are not successfully balanced by the experience of integration, resulting in the infant's earliest experiences of the social world being threatening (Erikson, 1968; Morris & Maisto, 2002; Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

In later life, this sense of basic mistrust can extend into a feeling of insecurity in interpersonal relationships (Corey, 2005). An excessive expression of mistrust results in a malignant tendency of withdrawal characterised by depression and paranoia (Boeree, 2006), and in extreme cases, results in individuals who may regress into schizoid, depressive or psychotic states in which they close up, refusing food and comfort and becoming oblivious to companionship (Erikson, 1950, 1968). In such cases, the re-establishment of trust has proven to be the basic requirement for therapy (Erikson, 1950). Conversely, the development of too much trust, caused by overprotective parenting, inhibits the child's ability to protest against food that is inappropriate or care that is inadequate. This results in disorientation and the maladaptive tendency of sensory maladjustment where an individual is overly trusting and even gullible (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1986, 1989). A certain measure of mistrust is therefore necessary in life so that an individual can identify possible areas of danger or discomfort and can discriminate between honest and dishonest people (Stevens, 2008).

Successful integration of the opposing conflicts during this first stage of development and the acquisition of a sense of basic trust in one's environment as well as in one's own coping abilities, result in the emergence of the ego quality of hope (Erikson, 1963, 1997), which Erikson (1964) defined as "both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive" (p. 115), and "the enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes, in spite of the dark urges and rages which mark the beginning of existence" (p. 118).

Hope forms the basis for subsequent stages and is crucial for the development of the ego virtues that emanate from those stages, namely will, purpose, and competence in childhood; fidelity in adolescence; and love, care and wisdom in adulthood (Erikson, 1963, 1964, 1997). According to Erikson (1997), the life cycle reaches completion when the hope of infancy develops into the faith of old age. In his view, the hope of an infant can inspire faith in adults – a sense of superior certainty not essentially dependent on evidence or reason – which finds expression in organised religion, ensuring the faith that will support future generations (Erikson, 1964; Roazen, 1976). This faith becomes an invaluable virtue throughout life because it helps the individual to deal with disappointments and to face new challenges (Erikson, 1963, 1968). In essence, the identity gain which emanates from this first stage of human development can be summed up as: “I am what hope I have and give” (Erikson, 1968, p.107).

3.5.2 Stage II: Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt - Willpower (18 months – 3 years)

In the second and third years of life the psychosocial developmental crisis is that of autonomy versus shame and doubt (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1980). Physically, the young child’s movements and mobility increase in maturation to the extent that reaching, walking, climbing, holding, and releasing become more than just activities in themselves, but rather the means for new experiences (Maier, 1978, 1988). The newly improved co-ordination of the muscle system extends to the urethral and sphincter muscles, permitting the development of voluntary release and retention through which the child can regulate his/her eliminative functions (Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978, 1988). Muscular maturation, expanded environmental exploration, improved verbalisation and memory, and enhanced neurological and social discrimination and integration thus set the stage for experimentation with the psychosocial modalities of holding on and letting go (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Freiberg, 1987; Maier, 1978, 1988). This allows the still highly dependent child to experience his/her autonomous will and attain a degree of independence in the world through the mastery of his/her physical, social and psychological functions (Barnes, 1997; Craig & Baucum, 2002; Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978; Morris & Maisto, 2002).

Erikson (1950, 1968, 1997) maintained that the second stage requires the establishment of a delicate balance between restrictive and permissive parenting. Mutual regulation between adult and child thus faces its severest test (Erikson, 1968) as parents strive to encourage independence in their children while simultaneously protecting them from unnecessary failure and feelings of inadequacy and doubt about their abilities (Erikson, 1963, 1997). Successful

resolution of the crisis in Erikson's second stage of social development thus depends on striking the balance between "loving goodwill and hateful self-insistence, between co-operation and wilfulness, and between self-expression and compulsive self-restraint or meek compliance" (Erikson, 1968, p. 109). A sense of autonomy, goodwill and pride emerges from self-control without loss of self-esteem, and this allows the child to be appropriately assertive and to develop the ego virtue of will (Erikson, 1968; Freiberg, 1987). Will is defined by Erikson (1964), as "the unbroken determination to exercise free choice as well as self-restraint, in spite of the unavoidable experience of shame and doubt in infancy" (p. 119). Shame can be seen as the opposite of autonomy and refers to the experience of feeling completely exposed and conscious of being looked at. It is thus synonymous with self-consciousness (Erikson, 1963). Also at the opposite pole of autonomy is doubt, which refers to fear of the unknown and includes aspects of the self that are out of sight (Erikson, 1963; Gross, 1987).

If parental control is too strict and promotes dependency, the child will become incapable of developing internal control and may resort to regression or fake progression in an effort to attain satisfaction (Erikson, 1968). Doubt refers to the aggressive and libidinal focus on the anal organs which cannot be seen by the child but are dominated by the will of others and often lead to the experience of shame (Erikson, 1963, 1968).

A certain measure of shame and doubt is, however, not only inevitable, but also beneficial to preventing the maladaptive tendency of impulsiveness (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Erikson et al., 1986). This type of shameless wilfulness results in a secret determination to try to get away with things when unseen, or to jump into things without proper consideration of one's abilities (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968). Too much shame and doubt leads to the malignant tendency of compulsiveness whereby the individual follows all rules meticulously in his/her quest for perfection (Boeree, 2006). Such an individual also appears stingy and retentive in matters relating to affection, time and money, and runs the risk of developing severe compulsive self-doubt which, in adulthood, finds expression in paranoid fears concerning hidden persecutors or secret persecutions (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1980).

In the same way that the social order ensures hope through organised religion, so law and order and a sense of justice secure the enduring gains of autonomy and will in the second stage of Erikson's life cycle (Erikson, 1968; Roazen, 1976; Stevens, 2008). According to Erikson (1964), the ego virtue of will lays the foundation for acceptance of law and order and emerges from judicious parenting guided by a sense of justice. This principle establishes the boundaries between what the child learns he/she may or may not do (Stevens, 2008), and also directly

influences the child's attitude towards social organisations and ideals in later life (Maier, 1978, 1988).

A reciprocal relationship thus exists between the pattern of child training and political ideology. A sense of rightfully delimited autonomy in the parent fosters confidence in the child that his/her autonomy will not be frustrated later in life and determines the political authority the child will find most satisfactory as an adult (Erikson, 1968, 1980; Maier, 1978, 1988). Similarly, the political ideology of the time influences the nature of acceptable child-rearing practices, appropriating to each individual his/her privileges, limitations, rights and obligations (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Maier, 1978, 1988). Erikson regarded the principle of law and order as particularly important because the sense of doubt evident in many children is often a consequence of the parents' frustration in marriage, work and citizenship (Erikson, 1968, 1980). A sense of lawful independence and rightful dignity of the parent can thus help to prevent the disappointments that make individuals unwilling to grant each other autonomy, be that in relationships, in work or in political life (Erikson, 1963, 1968).

The identity gain which emanates from Erikson's second stage of human development plays an important part in identity formation because it contributes to the individual's courage in choosing and guiding his/her own future independently. It can be summed up as: "I am what I can will freely" (Erikson, 1968, p. 114).

3.5.3 Stage III: Initiative versus Guilt – Purpose (3 – 6 years)

The third psychosocial stage, also referred to as the genital-locomotor or play age, covers approximately the third to the sixth year of life and is characterised by the developmental crisis of initiative versus guilt (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1980, 1997; Hamachek, 1990). The child's increased freedom of movement, improved sense of language and expanded imagination allow for the exploration of new challenges and lay the foundation for a realistic sense of ambition and purpose (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson (1963, 1980) regarded this as an optimistic stage of growth since children of this age have a surplus of energy that enables them to approach goals with enthusiasm and forget failures quickly. Their ever-increasing sense of independence and curiosity about the world and how they can influence it, broadens their fields of activity and imagination, but simultaneously frightens them (Erikson, 1963; Maier, 1978, 1988). Their ability to imagine the future together with the responsibility that they are expected to assume for themselves and for the things in their world, ushers in a sense of guilt, which helps them to differentiate

reasonable from unreasonable areas of investigation (Boeree, 2006; Maier, 1978, 1988; Watts et al., 2009).

The fundamental task at this stage is thus to find the balance between actively exploring the social environment and curtailing initiative whenever conflict arises. Maier (1978, 1988) maintained that, “permissiveness towards such trying out, daring, and investigating is an essential feature of development – as is the establishment of certain boundaries to circumscribe just what *is* permissible” (pp. 100 – 101). Having been trained in the Freudian tradition, Erikson included the Oedipal/Electra experiences in this psychosocial stage of development, claiming that the resolution of the Oedipal/Electra conflict promotes the development of the superego and identification with the same-sex parent (Erikson, 1963).

Increasing independence of movement and the eroticisation of the genitals form the prototypical organ modes of this stage and result in the psychosocial modalities of intrusion and inclusion (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1980). The emergent conflict between their ability to intrude in others’ lives through movement, speech, noise and fantasy – and the realisation of moral rules, which are encouraged through their identification with the parent of the same sex, afford children the opportunity to learn to take on the parental role over themselves whilst simultaneously satisfying their thirst for initiative (Erikson, 1963, 1980; Meyer et al., 2008; Welchman, 2000). It is thus during this stage that children face the universal crisis of turning from an attachment to their parents to the slow process of becoming their own parent and supervising themselves (Erikson, 1963). The guilt that children experience may lead to repression of fantasies and promotes the development of the conscience or superego, which Erikson (1968) maintained is the “ontogenetic cornerstone of morality” (p. 119). Erikson (1963) suggested that moral development in children occurs primarily at this stage and contended that personality divides into two aspects involving the following:

instinct fragments which before had enhanced the growth of his infantile body and mind now become divided into an infantile set which perpetuates the exuberance of growth potentials, and a parental set which supports and increases self-observation, self-guidance, and self-punishment. (p. 256)

Parents play an important role in the successful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis. Should parents become overbearing, condemning or ridiculing, and fail to model appropriate conscience and responsibility, the guilt that the child experiences may be crippling and may be deflected through aggressiveness and resentment of the parents (Crowne, 2009; Gross, 1987). The psychological distress caused by this emanates from what Erikson (1963, 1968) claimed is one of the deepest conflicts in life, namely, the hate for a hypocritical parent. Should a parent

be caught trying to get away with the transgressions which the child has learnt not to tolerate in him/herself, the result could be a morally intolerant individual who is vindictive and suppresses his or her own ego, as well as the egos of others (Erikson, 1963, 1968).

The maladaptive tendency which emerges from an over-development of initiative without sufficient capacity for empathy and conscience is ruthlessness, which manifests in the individual who plans success at the expense of others (Erikson et al., 1989). In its extreme form, this tendency may lead to sociopathy (Boeree, 2006). Conversely, the development of too much guilt manifests in the malignant tendency of inhibition, which characterises individuals who avoid taking any initiative and sexually, may even experience impotence or frigidity (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1986). Erikson (1968) cautioned that the pathological consequences of unresolved conflicts over initiative may manifest in hysterical denial or self-restriction whereby an individual fails to live up to his/her inner capacities for imaginative and emotive expression. On the other hand, over-compensation for such inhibitions manifests in recklessness and gratuitous risk-taking behaviour. Because such an individual is constantly on the go and tirelessly taking initiative, the body takes an increasing strain, heightening the chance for the development of psychosomatic diseases (Erikson, 1968).

Erikson aptly labelled this third stage the play age, for in play, children are provided with the opportunity to explore reality and experiment with the new roles through their imitation of adults (Crowne, 2009). Adults, through their own example and through the gentle encouragement of curiosity and imagination, can guide and discipline children towards an ethos of action that promotes self-confidence and a realistic ambition of the future (Corey, 2005; Craig & Baucum, 2002; Erikson, 1963, 1968). This stage thus relies on the existence of some form of basic family and enables children to become more aware of various family structures and social groups (Erikson, 1968; Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al., 2009). As social awareness becomes more defined, children learn which opportunities and responsibilities they will need to assume as adults (Erikson, 1980). Erikson (1963) maintained that social institutions provide children with ideal prototypes for them to emulate, thereby instilling in them an economic ethos as they become active participants in the economic life of a society. The individual's potential capacity to work and attain economic success within society's economic framework thus depends on the child's mastery of this psychosocial stage of development (Maier, 1978, 1988).

The psychosocial virtue which emanates from finding the balance between enthusiastic action and the tendency to be too strict in self-judgement is purpose (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1968, 1977). This is defined by Erikson (1964), as "the courage to envisage and pursue valued goals uninhibited by the defeat of infantile fantasies, by guilt and by the failing fear of

punishment” (p. 122). Boeree (2006) equated the ego strength of purpose to courage and maintained that individuals can create their own purpose through imagination, initiative and the courage to act, despite limitations and previous failures.

Successful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis thus fosters positive goals for the future as it sets the direction in which the dreams of childhood can connect to the goals of technology and culture in adult life (Erikson, 1968; Watts et al., 2009). This stage thus contributes significantly to later identity development in that it frees the child’s initiative and sense of purpose for adult tasks which promise the potential fulfillment of the individual’s range of capacities. This is expressed in the child’s growing conviction, untainted by guilt, that “I am what I can imagine I will be” (Erikson, 1968, p. 122).

3.5.4 Stage IV: Industry versus Inferiority – Competence (6 – 12 years)

The fourth developmental stage delineates the last period of childhood and comes during latency when the child is between six and 12 (Erikson, 1963, 1997; Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 1989; Meyer et al., 2008; Roazen, 1976). The child, having reached school age, learns to get recognition by producing things and is ready to face the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority (Erikson, 1963, 1997; Meyer et al., 1989, 2008).

Having mastered many of the concerns of early childhood, such as walking, running, talking, toilet training, taking initiative and identifying with sex-roles, the child can now extend him/herself beyond the womb of the family and enter a social reality which includes teachers, peers and members of the community at large (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1963, 1997; Freiberg, 1987).

Physical and psychological maturation seem to slow down, as if to consolidate what has already been acquired and children appear determined to work as equals with their peers on tasks and social problems that they can successfully master (Maier, 1978, 1988). Trained in Freudian psychoanalysis, Erikson (1963) viewed this stage as characterised by a latent interest in sex, referring to it as the “lull before the storm of puberty” (p. 260). During this time, oral and genital concerns are sublimated and the child’s imaginative play interests are superseded by interests in productive situations which involve the implementation of work tools (Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Freiberg, 1987). The psychosexual stage of latency thus allows the child to develop the tool possibilities of body and mind, and to postpone further sexual progress until he/she becomes part of a larger framework of social responsibility (Erikson, 1964).

The school becomes the primary arena for the acquisition of skills and formal ritualisation, whereby the child learns to perform methodically and has the opportunity to master social

experiences by experimenting, planning and sharing, irrespective of whether that school is the field, the jungle or the classroom (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Hall & Lindsey, 1978). In modern technological society, learning takes place in a formal school setting directed at the acquisition of reading, writing, arithmetic, science and social studies (Freiberg, 1987; Meyer et al., 1989, 2008). In more traditional societies, children learn the skills and habits of their culture more directly through observation, participation and the industrious use of utensils, tools and weapons used by the adults of their tribe (Erikson, 1968; Meyer et al., 1989, 2008; Watts et al., 2009).

Despite the fact that this is a very decisive social stage, children may develop an estrangement from themselves and from their tasks if preceding conflicts have not been successfully resolved, leading to a sense of inferiority (Erikson, 1968). This occurs when children are not given the opportunity to experience social success or when they fail to acquire the tools that promote industry, resulting in a pervasive feeling of inadequacy and loss of faith in the power to be self-sufficient (Erikson, 1963; Morris & Maisto, 2002). Racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination also contribute to feelings of inferiority, especially if children discover that their sense of worth depends on factors which override their wish and will to learn and which are beyond their control (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Freiberg, 1987). Failure, therefore, should be prevented throughout school and is most easily prevented during this psychosocial stage since it can be corrected by teaching and educational procedures that lead to the fulfillment of the child's basic needs (Glasser, 1969).

Parents, teachers and peers play an important role in combating feelings of inferiority, since children see them as representatives of the society in which they operate and become attached to them in their efforts to observe, initiate and learn (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978, 1988; Watts et al., 2009). According to Coopersmith (1967), children with high self-esteem are more likely to have parents who provide direct experiences of success, the means to achieve success, and the skills to handle adversity in a realistic yet non-destructive manner. Good teachers can also combat feelings of inferiority in that they know how to alternate play and study and can recognise and encourage special talents in children who may experience school as something to endure rather than enjoy (Erikson, 1968). Peers play an equally important role in combating inferiority and fostering self-esteem because they provide the criteria for the measurement of a child's own success or failure and serve as another source of extra-familial identification (Maier, 1978, 1988).

The maladaptive tendency which results from excessive industry is called narrow virtuosity, which is seen in children who are pressurised to excel in one area of competence, at the expense

of broader interests (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989). At the opposite extreme, and more common than narrow virtuosity, is the malignant inclination toward inertia, which corresponds with Adler's (1929) inferiority complex and is described by Erikson as being the obstinate shadow of the school age (Boeree, 2006). It can be seen in individual's who become inert, avoiding tasks which they may have failed in childhood or for which they feel they have not developed the required skills (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989).

Successful resolution of this stage depends on finding the balance between industry and just so much inferiority as to allow for a healthy sense of humility (Boeree, 2006). This will result in the ego strength of competence which is defined by Erikson (1968) as "the free exercise of dexterity and intelligence in the completion of serious tasks unimpaired by an infantile sense of inferiority" (p. 126). This ego strength lays the foundation for successful participation in the cultural process of productivity, thereby preparing the child for his/her role in sustaining a family (Erikson, 1963). Since industriousness involves doing things with others, social institutions allow for the development of an ethos of production which instills in children a sense of the division of labour and of differential opportunities, affording the development of significant gains in human evolution (Capps, 2004; Erikson, 1964; Roazen, 1976). The contribution of this particular stage to a sense of identity is expressed by Erikson (1968) as: "I am what I can learn to make work" (p. 127).

3.5.5 Stage V: Identity versus Role Confusion - Fidelity (12 – 20 years)

Erikson's fifth psychosocial stage marks the end of childhood and presents adolescents standing on the threshold of adulthood, with the challenge of successfully resolving the conflict between ego identity and role confusion (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963; Gross, 1987; Hamachek, 1990). Rapid bodily growth and the significant physiological and anatomical changes that characterise this phase of development shake adolescents' trust in the mastery of their bodily functions and force them to re-evaluate themselves as they prepare for the tasks of adulthood (Maier, 1978, 1988; Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al., 2009).

Being trained as a Freudian, Erikson recognised the influence of sexual libido on the adolescent's development, but negated the idea that finding a heterosexual love partner would automatically result in the development of a mature self-concept (Freiberg, 1987). Significant physical changes, sexual maturity, cognitive development and social expectations force adolescents to re-examine their lives in their quest for a sense of identity (McAdams, 1994; Meyer et al., 2008). Erikson (1958), described this quest as the young person's search for the following:

central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of the effective remnants of his childhood and the hopes of his anticipated adulthood; he must detect some meaningful resemblance between what he has come to see in himself and what his sharpened awareness tells him others judge and expect him to be. (p. 12)

The attainment of identity thus involves making important decisions about who one is and what one will become. It is related to three categories: body, cognition and society; and results in commitment to three important facets that pave the way to adulthood, namely: commitment to an occupational identity; commitment to intimacy with a potential life partner; and commitment to a belief system or ideology (Crowne, 2009; McAdams, 1994), all of which allow for the establishment of what Erikson (1968) regarded as “a firm commitment to the freedom of self-realization” (p. 133).

The epigenetic principle of Erikson’s theory is particularly significant during this fifth stage of psychosocial development in that the attainment of a sense of identity rests on the resolution of the sub-conflicts characteristic of the first four stages of childhood (Erikson, 1958, 1963, 1968, 1980). Just as the sense of trust allows the child to explore new childhood experiences, so the establishment of identity allows the adolescent to have faith in society and its ideas. Concomitantly, however, the adolescent fears an all too trusting commitment and, paradoxically, also expresses his/her need for faith in cynical mistrust (Erikson, 1968). For Erikson (1963, 1980) therefore, identity is attained through the integration of previous identifications. It is the accrued experience of the ego’s ability to integrate all identifications with fluctuations of the sexual instincts, with the aptitudes that emerge from endowment, and with the opportunities offered in social roles (Erikson, 1963). The integration of previous roles, wishes, skills, competencies, expectations and the opportunities provided by society allows the adolescent to find a principle of order whereby past, present and future form a coherent biography conducive to the unified experience of self (Blasi, 1988). The resultant self-image provides a quality of sameness and inner continuity that enhances the identity’s sense of confidence and allows it to fit into the social world (Erikson, 1958, 1963; Roazen, 1976).

Just as the resolution of past crises is instrumental in shaping adolescent identity, so too are adults from the past, and these may include parents, teachers, neighbours or other familiar people whom adolescents turn to in their search for close adult relationships (Maier, 1978, 1988). Although the commitments that signify the achievement of ego identity begin with parents and the models they provide, they extend in adolescence, to peers who form important intermediaries between the developing adolescent and society at large (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963; Maier, 1978, 1988; Watts et al., 2009). Erikson (1963) maintained that, “adolescents...

help one another temporarily through much discomfort by forming cliques and by stereotyping themselves, their ideals, and their enemies” (p. 262).

Society also plays an important role in shaping adolescent identity. It provides clear rites of passage and active support in the form of social institutions such as colleges, universities, tribal schools, military service and extended vocational training, all of which allow for the clarification of roles that distinguish the adult from the child (Boeree, 2006; Meyer et al., 2008). Furthermore, society accommodates the adolescent’s search for identity by providing a psychosocial moratorium, which Erikson (1997) defined as a period of time in which the adolescent is permitted to postpone definitive commitment to a set identity. During this time, the adolescent has the freedom to actively experiment with numerous adult roles and explore a wide range of political, religious and economic ideologies before arriving at a complete decision about a tailor-made identity (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2005; Maier, 1978, 1988; Marcia, 2002; Meyer et al., 2008).

The difficult transition from childhood to adulthood, coupled with the adolescent’s heightened sensitivity to social and historical change can result in the experience of identity confusion (Hall & Lindsey, 1978), which Erikson (1980) maintained is also the result of unsuccessful ego resolutions during the four preceding stages of psychosocial development. Identity confusion thus relates to more than just not knowing who one is (identity). It also relates to not knowing what one can do (initiative, industry), not knowing whether one has the ability to do what needs to be done (autonomy), and not knowing whether others can be counted on to help (trust) (Hamachek, 1995). According to Erikson (1968), the symptoms of identity confusion include “a split of self-images... a loss of center and a dispersion” (p. 212). An adolescent experiencing such confusion suffers from an identity crisis which may manifest in feelings of isolation, emptiness, anxiety, indecisiveness, lack of self-confidence, apathy, hopelessness about the future and depression, which can even lead to suicide (Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Shaffer & Kipp, 2007). It can also manifest in behaviours such as social withdrawal and isolation, delinquency, dropping out of school, substance abuse, indiscriminate sexual behaviour, confrontational and rebellious relationships with parents and teachers, leaving jobs, or withdrawing into bizarre and inaccessible moods (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1968; Watts et al., 2009).

The maladaptive tendency which emerges from excessive ego identity development is fanaticism. This refers to those adolescents who become so involved in a particular societal role or subculture, that they can no longer show tolerance for other views or belief systems and rigidly cling to their membership of cults and ideologies (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1986,

1989; Stevens, 2008). At the opposite extreme is the malignant tendency of repudiation which emerges from the lack of identity and manifests in adolescents who reject both their membership to the adult world and their own need for an identity (Boeree, 2006, Erikson & Erikson, 1997). According to Erikson (1997), repudiation can manifest either as diffidence, characterised by weakness in relation to identity potential; or as systematic defiance, which refers to the preference for a negative identity. Erikson (1968) described a negative identity as “an identity perversely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development, had been presented to them as most undesirable or dangerous and yet also as most real” (p. 174). The most common way for the adolescent to deal with a negative identity is to project the negative characteristics onto others. This results in social pathology which includes prejudice, crime and discrimination against various groups of people (Hall & Lindsey, 1978). According to Erikson (1968), adolescents adopt a negative identity because it is better to become everything that one is not supposed to be than to have no identity at all. In this state adolescents can, according to Erikson (1968),

become remarkably clannish, intolerant, and cruel in their exclusion of others who are ‘different’, in skin colour or cultural background....Such intolerance may be, for a while, a necessary defence against a sense of identity loss. Adolescents not only help one another temporarily through such discomfort by forming cliques and stereotyping themselves, their ideals, and their enemies; they also insistently test each other’s capacity for sustaining loyalties in the midst of inevitable conflicts of values. (pp. 132 – 183)

Successful resolution of the fifth stage of psychosocial development results in the ego strength of fidelity, which Erikson (1964, 1997) defined as “the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems” (p. 125). Fidelity relates to certainty about one’s identity, an accepting awareness of other identity choices that one could have made, and a capacity for loyalty to commitments, ideals, values and one’s social roles (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Markstrom, Berman, Sabino, & Turner, 1998; Meyer, et al., 2008; Stevens, 2008).

According to Erikson (1997), fidelity relates to both infantile trust and to mature faith. It is the cornerstone of identity (Erikson et al., 1986), and is guarded by the social institution which we call ideology (Erikson, 1968). Through their ideology, social systems afford adolescents the opportunity to regenerate that which continues to feel true, and to correct that which has lost its regenerative significance (Erikson, 1968).

The integration of identity is characterised by a dual process whereby the adolescent can differentiate from the social mass, yet simultaneously become more fully a member of society

(Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1980; Maier, 1988). The identity gain of fidelity which emanates from successful identity integration enables the adolescent to move from the reality of being, to the reality of becoming (Erikson, 1975).

3.5.6 Stage VI: Intimacy versus Isolation – Love (20 – 40 years)

The sixth psychosocial stage occurs approximately between the ages of 18 and 35 and is the first adult stage characterised by the young adult's investment of developmental energies in the pursuit of career, work and love (Hamachek, 1990; Maier, 1978, 1988; Shaffer, 2002). This is the stage that depends most crucially on successful resolution of prior crises, since they are most likely to re-occur during this period of development if they have not previously been resolved (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974; Watts et al., 2009). For two individuals to engage in an intimate relationship, they must trust one another, be autonomous, exhibit initiative and industry, be sure of themselves and exhibit maturity both sexually and as productive members of society (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974; Morris & Maisto, 2002).

Successful development is particularly dependent on successful identity formation during adolescence since it provides the young adult with a secure sense of self-definition, allowing for a fusion of identities without the fear of losing oneself (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Marcia, 2002; Watts et al., 2009). Just as adolescence requires the development of a sense of identity, so the first stage of adulthood requires a sense of shared identity, which Western culture accommodates through the ritual of marriage, allowing for the celebration, fostering and protection of intimacy between people who love each other (Hamachek, 1995; Meyer et al., 2008; Stevens, 2008).

Strongly influenced by the psychoanalytic school of thought, Erikson used the term “genitality” to describe the physical force of the sixth stage of development. It is one of the developmental conditions for full maturity and marks the beginning of genuine, mutually interactive and heterosexual genital sexuality³; distinct from the phallic or vaginal strivings of earlier development where sexuality centres around the formation of identity (Erikson, 1963, 1968). According to Erikson (1963), the utopia of genitality should include: (a) mutuality of orgasm, (b) with a loved partner, (c) of the opposite sex⁴, (d) with whom one shares a mutual

³ Although these assertions are indicative of sexual orientation bias – which is one of the criticisms against Erikson's theory (see Section 3.7) – they have been maintained here to reflect Erikson's original ideas. No discrimination against any particular sexual orientation is intended.

⁴ Although these assertions are indicative of sexual orientation bias – which is one of the criticisms against Erikson's theory (see Section 3.7) – they have been maintained here to reflect Erikson's original ideas. No discrimination against any particular sexual orientation is intended.

trust, (e) with whom one can enjoy work, procreation and relaxation, and, (f) in so doing, secure for offspring all the stages of successful development.

Erikson (1968) wrote that Freud's answer to the question as to what a normal individual should be able to do well, was: "Lieben und arbeiten", which translates as: "to love and work" (p. 136). The acts of *loving* and *working* constitute the goals of Erikson's stage of intimacy versus isolation. *Loving* refers to the ability to establish a mature love through the generosity of intimacy and genital sexuality; whilst love and work refer to the ability to express work productiveness, which would not compromise the individual's right or capacity to be a sexual and loving being (Erikson, 1968; Watts et al. 2009).

Erikson (1963, 1968) emphasised that identity formation must be well-established before young adults can commit themselves to sharing their identities in a mutually satisfying and ethical relationship that requires sacrifice and compromise. The more certain young adults are of their identities, the more successfully they can establish psychologically intimate relationships with others (Erikson, 1980). A strong ego is necessary to prevent the fear of ego loss in situations which may require self-abandon, for example, in sexual encounters and orgasms, close affiliations and friendships, and experiences of inspiration by teachers (Erikson, 1963). The avoidance of such experiences of interpersonal intimacy because of fear of a perceived loss of self, may result in highly stereotyped and formal interpersonal relationships which lack fusion, spontaneity and warmth (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1980). Failure to accomplish such intimate relationships with others and with one's inner resources ultimately leads to a profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation, which explains why suicide might be a highly prevalent risk at this stage of development (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Watts et al., 2009).

Young adults who are not sure of their identities may develop the maladaptive tendency of promiscuity, which characterises youths who throw themselves too freely and easily into superficial acts of intimacy with lovers, friends, neighbours and even the entire community (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Erikson et al., 1989). At the opposite end of the continuum, the malignant tendency of exclusivity may develop, which manifests in isolation from loved ones, friends or the community, and a resultant hatefulness in reaction to extreme loneliness (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989). Successful integration of the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation leads to the ego virtue of love. Although this dominant universal virtue is apparent in many forms throughout earlier developmental stages, commencing with the love between mother and infant, it reaches full fruition only after adolescence, when young adults can commit themselves to a mutually shared relationship with an intimate partner (Hall & Lindsey, 1978). Love, in the context of Erikson's theory, has evolutionary and generational value in

that it transforms the love received throughout the childhood stages of development into the care given to others during adult life (Erikson, 1964). It enables young adults to merge selflessly and create shared patterns of living, actively chosen and cultivated as a joint concern for themselves and their offspring (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1980, 1997).

Mutuality of devotion not only imbues young adults with an ethical sense which helps them to be selectively intimate, it also enables them to share mutual trust, work, procreation and recreation, all of which promote the development of their partnership, their children and society as a whole (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1963; Maier, 1978, 1988). Erikson (1968) summed up the existential experience of young adults who have transcended identity in the words: “We are what we love” (p. 138).

3.5.7 Stage VII: Generativity versus Stagnation - Care (40 – 65 years)

The seventh psychosocial stage lasts from approximately 35 until the age of retirement and thus constitutes the longest of Erikson’s developmental life stages (Gross, 1987; Hamachek, 1990). Characterised by the developmental crisis of generativity versus stagnation, the value of this stage lies in the fact that it extends over a number of generations (Erikson, 1963; Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al., 2009). Erikson (1963) maintained that although society emphasises the dependence of children on adults, there is mutual dependency in that the older generation is also dependent on the younger one. Erikson (1968) described this stage as follows:

Evolution has made man a teaching as well as a learning animal, for dependency and maturity are reciprocal: mature man needs to be needed, and maturity is guided by the nature of that which must be cared for. Generativity, then, is primarily the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation. (p. 138)

Inherent in this description is the idea that since adults have largely resolved life crises from the previous stages, they can now give more attention to helping others, especially their own offspring (Craig, 1996; Erikson, 1965; McAdams, 2006; Stevens, 2008). This does not mean, however, that adults cease to develop in adulthood. The challenge of middle adulthood is to gain insight and awareness of oneself and others while simultaneously guiding offspring through their conflicts of developing trust, autonomy, initiative, industry and identity (Erikson, 1968; Freiberg, 1987; Hoare, 2002). Through the transmission of social values to the next generation, the mature adult thus satisfies the need for both the psychosexual and psychosocial aspects of personality enrichment (Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Welchman, 2000). In this sense, generativity can be seen as something that exists both within the individual and in the individual’s social world, occurring in a psychosocial context when variables within the

individual merge with those of the individual's world to provide for the next generation (McAdams, 1994).

The need to participate meaningfully in the development of humanity is realised mainly through the rearing of one's own offspring. Nonetheless, it can also be fulfilled through nurturing, teaching, supervising, mentoring, demonstrating, writing, inventing, or any creative and productive endeavour which contributes to the welfare of future generations so that they too can find hope, virtue and wisdom (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1997; Freiberg, 1987; Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Maier, 1978, 1988; Meyer et al., 2008).

Failure to participate meaningfully in the enrichment of self and future generations can lead to stagnation, boredom, interpersonal impoverishment, and lack of purpose, and characterises those individuals who seem to gain their only pleasure through self-indulgence, who are constantly preoccupied with themselves and who shut out any thoughts of how they might make a meaningful contribution to society (Craig & Baucum, 2002; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Freiberg, 1987; Welchman, 2000). The self-centredness of stagnation often leads to a mid-life crisis in which individuals question the meaning of their existence, mistakenly asking "What am I contributing for?" rather than the generatively significant "Whom am I contributing for?" (Boeree, 2006; Craig & Baucum, 2002). Since Erikson's theory posits that the total span of an individual's life is characterised by the hierarchy of all stages, failure to develop a sense of generativity can often be traced to unresolved crises in previous stages, especially the lack of trust in society and in the future of humanity (Erikson, 1958, 1963; Meyer et al., 2008).

An excessive expression of generativity leads to the maladaptive tendency called over-extension. It characterises those individuals whose generative concern extends beyond what they are capable of, leaving them feeling so depleted that they can no longer contribute productively to the people and interests that they care about (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989). Conversely, too little generative concern and too much stagnation leads to the malignant tendency of rejectivity and characterises individuals who are so self-absorbed that they do not care for anybody (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989). In extreme cases, rejectivity can even result in individuals becoming cruel and moralistically prejudiced against their children, family members or parts of their community. Collectively, it can manifest in wars against people who are perceived as being threateningly different to one's own group (Erikson & Erikson, 1997).

Successful resolution of Erikson's seventh developmental crisis results in the psychosocial virtue of care which, in essence, is an extension of love from the previous stage, manifesting in the teaching, guidance and encouragement of the next generation (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1964, 1997; Graves & Larkin, 2006; Stevens, 2008). According to Erikson and Erikson (1997),

successful acquisition of the previous virtues of hope, will, purpose, fidelity and love, is a prerequisite for the tasks of teaching, guidance and encouragement, since this stage centres around the promotion of these same virtues in future generations (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). In this sense, the virtue of care extends not only to taking care of what one cares to be and whom one cares to be with, but also to guarding, preserving and transcending that which one cares for (Erikson, 1964; Maier, 1978, 1988).

A unique aspect of generativity is its paradoxical nature. On the one hand, the mature adult needs to be needed and expresses this in the desire to nurture and teach those who are in need (Erikson, 1966). At the same time, however, the mature adult seeks to symbolically defy death by constructing legacies that live on (Becker, 1973; Kotre, 1984). To be truly generative, therefore, translates as wanting to live forever, whilst simultaneously and paradoxically wanting to give oneself up completely for the good of others (McAdams, 1994).

The dual benefit of this stage reiterates through this paradox in that socialisation, caring and teaching by older generations, allow for the sharing of customs, rituals, legends, knowledge and values, which ensure survival of cultures and humanity as a whole (Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Welchman, 2000). Younger generations, in turn, reciprocate by validating and honouring the contributions and legacies passed on to them, thereby encouraging older generations to enter the final stage of human development with dignity and grace (Capps, 2004; Erikson, 1964; Erikson et al., 1986). According to Erikson (1958):

the crisis of generativity occurs when a man looks at what he has generated, or helped to generate, and finds it good or wanting, when his life work as part of the productivity of his time gives him some sense of being on the side of a few angels or makes him feel stagnant. All this in turn, offers him either promise of an old age that can be faced with a sense of integrity, and in which he can say, 'All in all, I would do this over again,' or confronts him with a sense of waste, of despair. (p. 237)

Thus apart from fulfilling the personal need to feel needed and promoting a personal sense of dignity and integrity, one's generative efforts outlive the self and have evolutionary value in that valuable experiences and knowledge can be preserved by transcending or passing them on to the next generation (Erikson, 1964; Hall & Lindsey, 1978; McAdams, 1994). As Erikson (1968) succinctly stated, the identity crisis of middle adulthood and beyond is captured in the words: "I am what survives me" (p. 141).

3.5.8 Stage VIII: Integrity versus Despair – Wisdom (65 – 85 years)

Erikson's final psychosocial stage begins around 65 years of age, depending on the individual's health and the cultural environment, and is characterised by the developmental crisis of integrity versus despair (Hamachek, 1990; Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al., 2009). As the adults in this stage witness the development of a new generation, they are afforded the opportunity to gain a more comprehensive perspective of their own life cycle and can thus reach the ultimate sense of trust which Erikson (1963) viewed as the "assured reliance on another's integrity" (p. 267).

The final stage of development thus emanates from the seven stages preceding it, and involves a sense of wisdom, a philosophy of life and an inner peace, all of which are rooted in the virtues of faith, will power, purposefulness, competence, fidelity, love and care (Erikson, 1968; Erikson et al., 1989; Hamachek, 1990, 1995). This is a time when ageing individuals look back on their lives and judge them either as meaningful, productive and happy (in which case a sense of integrity is attained); or as disappointing and filled with lost chances and unrealised goals (in which case a sense of despair prevails) (Craig, 1996; Shaffer & Kipp, 2007; Stevens, 2008).

Individuals who have attained a sense of integrity see their lives as having some order and meaning within a larger context and they accept that one's life is one's own responsibility. Although aware of the relativity of various life styles which give meaning to human endeavours, they preserve their own style of life with dignity and defend it from all physical and economic threats (Erikson, 1968). Their style of life and the integrity of their culture thus become the "patrimony of the soul" (Erikson, 1950, p. 260), allowing them to accept what they have done and who they are, including their failures and limitations (Slavin, 1994).

The alternative to a sense of integrity is despair. It conveys the feeling that time is too short to repair the mistakes of the past and characterises individuals who would do anything to re-live their lives, but because they cannot, end up experiencing low self-esteem, feelings of incompetence, lack of acceptance of one's age, status and lifestyle, and fear of death (Craig & Baucum, 2002; Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Freiberg, 1987).

Individuals who pretentiously assume ego integrity without actually facing the difficulties of old age develop the maladaptive tendency which Erikson calls presumption (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989). At the other extreme is the malignant tendency called disdain, characterising individuals who are contemptuous of their own or others' lives (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989). Erikson (1997) maintained that disdain can also result from the feeling of confusion and helplessness which is characteristic of old age.

Extreme despair is often masked by manifestations of disgust and contemptuous displeasure with certain people, objects and institutions that exist in the diminishing world of the ageing individual (Capps, 2004; Erikson, 1968). This disgust and displeasure, where not supported by the vision of a superior life, only serves to reflect the individual's self-contempt (Erikson, 1980).

The virtue which emanates from successful resolution of the final crisis is wisdom, which Erikson (1964) defined as the following:

A detached concern with life itself, in the face of death itself. It maintains and conveys the integrity of experience, in spite of the decline of bodily and mental functions. It responds to the need of the on-coming generation for an integrated heritage and yet remains aware of the relativity of all knowledge. (p.133)

The ego-strength of wisdom allows the ageing adult to represent to younger generations a life characterised by wholeness and completeness, providing the practical force to be vitally involved as a caregiver, role model and guide for others across the generations (Agronin, 2014). According to Erikson (1963), the attainment of wisdom depends on the individual knowing, understanding and participating in the various social institutions of society, since "Ego integrity implies an emotional integration which permits participation by fellowship as well as acceptance of the responsibility of leadership" (p. 269).

Despite the loss of emotional flexibility, the loss of loved ones and the proximity of death, Erikson's final stage provides the individual with the opportunity to attain full selfhood (Erikson et al., 1986; Morris & Maisto, 2002; Roazen, 1976), which, according to McAdams (1993), involves stepping out of one's life story and stepping away from identity so that one can look back at the story, not as something to be changed, but as something to accept and even enjoy. The movement away from seeing one's own life as a narrative in time requires a transcendence of time and a meaningful interpretation of time through narrative (McAdams, 1994). This view would correspond with Eastern philosophy's perception of the "eternal moment" which is granted exclusively to those who have attained true wisdom and enlightenment (McAdams, 1994, p. 688). Enlightened and wise individuals are not preoccupied with time, they simply exist in the moment and embrace all time (McAdams, 1994).

According to Erikson, a civilization can be measured by the meaning given to the full cycle of life, for such meaning gives coherence to the individual's life and simultaneously forms a link with the next generation, affording it the clarity and strength needed to face life's ultimate concerns (Erikson, 1964, 1968; Roazen, 1976). The cycle is complete when mature adults who

exude ego integrity serve as exemplary models to the young that life can be trusted (Phares, 1984). Erikson (1963) succinctly stated that “healthy children will not fear life, if their parents have integrity enough not to fear death” (p. 233).

3.5.9 Stage 9: Gerotranscendence (85 years and onwards)

According to Erikson (1964; Erikson et al., 1986), wisdom “maintains and learns to convey the integrity of experience, in spite of the decline of bodily and mental functions (Erikson et al., 1986, pp. 37 – 38). This definition reflects Erikson’s own views of ageing as a struggle between positive growth and the increasing awareness of one’s declining physical and mental capabilities (Agronin, 2014). In 1982 and 1986, Erikson wrote *The Life Cycle Completed* and *Vital Involvement in Old Age*, respectively. Within the same decade he developed dementia (Alzheimer’s disease) which necessitated that his wife, Joan, take on a more active role, not only in the editing of his work, but also in the theorising thereof (Agronin, 2014; Yount, 2008). After his death in 1994, his wife revised his work and published an extended version of *The Life Cycle Completed* (1997), which included a new final chapter devoted to the theme of gerotranscendence. She based this ninth stage on the ideas of Lars Tornstam (1989), and maintained that since “Old age in one’s eighties and nineties brings with it new demands, re-evaluations, and daily difficulties” a new ninth stage was required to adequately understand and clarify the challenges of this final period of life (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 105). Agronin (2010) wrote that “much of their description of the ninth stage is quite gloomy as it depicts the unravelling of the life cycle due to bodily decline and the loss of autonomy, self-esteem, confidence, and ultimately of hope itself” (p. 256). To Joan Erikson, however, the ninth stage, despite the fact that it brings “much sorrow to cope with plus a clear announcement that death’s door is open and not so far away” (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 113), also promises the hope borne from basic trust. This hope for further grace and enlightenment gives elders a reason to live and allows for the successful attainment of gerotranscendence (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Tornstam (1989) defined gerotranscendence as:

a shift in meta-perspective, from a material and rational vision to a more cosmic and transcendent one, normally followed by an increase in life satisfaction... As in Jung’s theory of the individuation process, gerotranscendence is regarded as the final stage in a natural process towards maturation and wisdom. According to the theory, the gerotranscendent individual experiences a new feeling of cosmic communion with the spirit of the universe, a redefinition of time, space, life and death, and a redefinition of the self. (p. 60)

This definition correlates positively with Erikson's principles of old age, delineated in his case study of Dr. Borg (Erikson, 1976). According to Erikson et al. (1986), old age represents the culmination of all the stages of the life cycle in that it integrates all the strengths and weaknesses that come before it. Old age thus epitomises the epigenetic principle, in which the developmental trends of life interact in a multitude of directions, which are founded on but transcend the underlying genetic scaffolding (Agronin, 2014; Erikson et al., 1986).

Erikson's theory describes development as a dynamic process that extends beyond childhood as ego-syntonic forces build on and reinforce key strengths in each stage, whereas ego-dystonic forces palliate these achievements and associated fixations or regressions (Erikson, 1988; Erikson & Erikson, 1997; Erikson et al., 1986). The syntonic forces support growth and expansion, offer goals, celebrate self-respect and commitment, and sustain individuals as they battle against the dystonic elements which life presents. Circumstances, such as old age, may place the dystonic elements in a more dominant position; so although Erikson's eight stages are usually presented with the syntonic quotient mentioned first, Joan Erikson, in writing the ninth stage, placed the dystonic element first so as to underscore its prominence and power and emphasise the fact that conflict and tensions are sources of growth, strength and commitment (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). The ninth stage, because of the individual's deteriorating physical and mental capabilities, thus presents greater challenges than in earlier stages for the development of balance between regressive as opposed to integrative personality traits, challenges which are aggravated by society's general disregard for the aged (Spano, Koenig, Hudson, & Leiste, 2010).

Erikson (1950) first described the engulfing despair characteristic of old age as "the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternative roads to integrity" (p. 260). As the aged individual's sense of purpose and enthusiasm is dulled, the despair of the eighth stage threatens to become the predominant force in the ninth stage, bringing with it a feeling of disdain or disgust as "a reaction to feeling (and seeing others) in an increasing state of being finished, confused, helpless" (Erikson & Erikson, 1997, p. 61). Joan Erikson maintained, however, that if individuals embrace the inevitable changes brought about by ageing and look beyond their physical failures and restrictions, they reap the benefits of gerotranscendence (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Seen in this light, gerotranscendence enhances Erikson's eighth stage of integrity versus despair, and promises a greater delineation of Erikson's ego quality of wisdom, whereby aged individuals are afforded the opportunity of breaking through old boundaries and transcending any developmental crisis (Spano et al., 2010).

Erikson's work not only altered and enriched the historical course of psychology, it also laid a foundation in developmental psychology from which researchers can continue to build in future. The next section expounds a number of research studies based on Erikson's work and attests to the richness of his theory and the value that it has added to the field of psychology.

3.6 Research Based on Erikson's Work

3.6.1 Gerontology

Erikson's first in-depth treatment of late life was a case history, not of a major historical figure, but of the character Dr. Isak Borg from Ingmar Bergman's film "Wild Strawberries" (Erikson, 1978). The film portrays the life of a Swedish physician, Dr. Borg, as he journeys by car from his home to the University of Lund to receive an honorary doctorate in recognition of 50 years of practice. Erikson often screened this film during his lectures at Harvard University because he "found in this screenplay an incomparable representation of the wholeness of the human life cycle – stage by stage and generation by generation" (Erikson, 1978, p. 5). Without fully explicating old age itself, Erikson (1978) used the film to explain more profoundly the place that old age occupies amidst the other stages of life:

All the emergent strengths are necessary to complete the individual cycle ... no such cycle can escape variable emphasis on the inhibiting and isolating qualities of human development which foster fear and anxiety ... Neither Borg nor any other character is thus nearly 'located' in one stage; rather, all persons can be seen to oscillate between at least two stages and move more definitely into a higher one only when an even higher one begins to determine the interplay: thus, if Borg, in the last stage that can be formulated as developmental, is in a renewed struggle with the two earlier ones, he is so in the face of death or, at any rate, senility. (pp. 28-29)

From his case study of Dr. Borg, Erikson expounded a number of principles of old age, discussed in greater detail in section 3.4.4. The elaboration of these principles not only enriched Erikson's theory, it also paved the way for several other developmental theorists and researchers who built upon his writings about the life cycle in adulthood. Levinson, for example, in his seminal work *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, detailed early and middle adult tasks and transitions based upon longitudinal interviews with men (Levinson, 1978). *The Seasons of a Woman's Life* was published posthumously and was based on interviews with women (Levinson & Levinson, 1996). Like Levinson, Vaillant based his stage theory both on Erikson's work and on longitudinal studies of ageing adults (Vaillant, 2002, 2012). Vaillant (2002) wrote:

Like Erikson, I have concluded that one way to conceptualise the sequential nature of adult social development may lie in appreciating that it reflects each adult's widening radius over time. Imagine a stone dropped into a pond; it produces ever-expanding ripples, each older one encompassing, but not obliterating, the circle emanating from the next ripple. Adult development is rather like that. (p. 44)

Despite the fact that Erikson's terminology is seldom used explicitly in behavioural and social science research, developmental studies, particularly in the field of gerontology, rest on his seminal principle that development persists throughout adulthood (Kivnick & Wells, 2014). A number of researchers (Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Carstensen, 2006; Carstensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles 1999; Schultz & Heckhausen, 1996, 1999) have used Erikson's principles as a framework to expand their research-based understanding of the experience of old age. Although Erikson's paradoxical, humanities-based approach does not answer all the questions that gerontology may pose, it can help guide gerontology's individual and collective journey by bridging the gap between theoretical developmental constructs and professional practices that the field of gerontology is concerned with providing (Kivnick & Wells, 2014).

Erikson's psychosocial model of personality development has also been used as the underlying framework to explore the relationship between spiritual well-being, depression and personality development in old age. In a study conducted by Hughes and Peake (2002), spirituality and religiosity were found to be significant dimensions in the majority of older adults' lives. Significant relationships were also found between spiritual well-being, depression and psychosocial development. More specifically, a significant inverse relationship was found between depression and spiritual well-being; whereas significant positive relationships were found between spiritual well-being and the degree of resolution of the crises inherent in Erikson's seventh and eight stages respectively, namely: generativity versus stagnation and integrity versus despair. With regard to the spiritual dimension of well-being, both existential and religious well-being correlated positively with the degree of resolution attained in Erikson's psychosocial conflict of integrity versus despair. The results of this study showed that older adults' level of existential well-being and the degree of resolution of integrity versus despair were important predictors of depression. Given that seniors' abilities to find meaning in their lives may lessen the proclivity towards developing depression, the value of this study in the field of gerontology is of paramount importance and can guide the search for ways to facilitate spiritual well-being in old age.

Erikson et al. (1986) maintained that the tendency to review and restructure one's past becomes most prominent in old age. They suggested that, in old age, people are more focused

on reviewing their past than they were earlier in life, and their developmental task centres around coming to terms with the lives they have lived and the people they have become. Those who become obsessed with past difficulties and regrets tend to become depressed, pessimistic and even bitter, feeling they have led meaningless lives. On the contrary, those who accept their pasts as unchangeable and deepen their sense of connection with others as they go through the process of reviewing their life, tend to develop a deep level of self-acceptance. Erikson (1963, 1980) and Erikson et al. (1986) specified that the two poles he referred to as despair and ego integrity are not mutually exclusive, but rather that during any developmental stage, people achieve a balance between the two associated poles. In old age, for instance, as people confront and try to balance the tensions of despair and integrity, they do not experience only feelings of despair or only feelings of integrity. Rather, an individual high in ego integrity is capable of integrating negative feelings, such as hopelessness or cynicism, into a dynamic and complex understanding of the world. Erikson (Erikson, 1963, 1980; Erikson et al., 1986) emphasised that successful management of this last developmental stage and the achievement of balance leaning toward ego integration, is influenced by past developmental experiences but is by no means predetermined. Instead, it is the willingness to remember and review one's past that determines success (or failure) in achieving ego integrity (Erikson, 1963, 1980; Erikson et al., 1986). Erikson (1963) described "the ego's assurance of its accrued proclivity for meaning" and the "past-narcissistic love of the human ego... as an experience which conveys some world order and spiritual sense, no matter how dearly paid for" (p. 268).

The fact that Erikson et al. (1986) considered the tendency to review and process past events as being most prominent in old age, holds significant implications for research in the field of gerontology. This is confirmed by the volume of clinical and empirical evidence which suggests that many people in late adulthood engage in life reviews and the developmental process of ego integrity versus despair (Erikson et al., 1986; Hannah, Domino, Figueredo, & Hendrickson, 1996; James & Zarrett, 2005; Wong & Watt, 1991). The way in which people confront and interpret their life reviews also appears to have implications for well-being. McAdams, Reynolds, Lewis, Patten and Bowman (2001), found that psychological well-being correlates positively with narratives that describe negative, difficult life situations as "redeemed, salvaged, mitigated or made better" (p. 474). A study by Conway and Holmes (2004) confirms the importance of autobiographical memories. The findings of this study not only demonstrate that the goals of the self play a major role in both the encoding and accessibility of autobiographical memories, they also provide support for Erikson's psychosocial theory of development (1950, 1997).

In addition to theorising that individuals strive for ego integrity in late adulthood, Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968; Erikson et al., 1986) suggested that midlife is characterised by generative behaviour such as parenting and teaching that contribute to the well-being and development of future generations. Erikson et al. (1986) maintained that, whilst not essential, successfully balancing the tensions of a particular developmental stage facilitates the management of subsequent stages. The attainment of generativity in midlife should thus facilitate successful management of ego integrity versus despair in late adulthood. Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the correlation between Erikson's seventh and eighth stages. These studies generally used cross-sectional data and found that generativity corresponds positively with ego integrity (Hannah et al., 1996; James & Zarrett, 2005; Ryff & Heincke, 1983). More recent studies by Torges, Stewart and Duncan (2008), used longitudinal data to ascertain the link between generativity and ego integrity. The results of their study indicated that resolving regrets, whether in earlier or late midlife corresponds with concurrently higher levels of ego-integrity.

The link between successful resolution of Erikson's developmental tasks and well-being has been confirmed by numerous studies conducted within an Eriksonian framework. Hofer, Busch and Kärtner (2011), for example, demonstrated that the positive association between self-regulation, well-being and self-esteem is partly mediated by the development of an achieved identity. Busch and Hofer (2011) expanded on this research and conducted two separate studies to examine the interplay between self-regulation, successful development over the lifespan, and well-being. The results of their studies demonstrated that self-regulation is an important resource for the successful resolution of developmental crises across the lifespan, and that this in turn, fosters various forms of well-being. The study of Busch and Hofer (2011) also consolidates the idea that development and developmental outcomes need to be seen in context, as exemplified by a positive belief in the species, which Erikson postulated to be fundamental in the development of generativity.

In a study by Hearn, Saulnier, Strayer, Glenham, Koopman and Marcia (2012), a new measure of Erikson's final psychosocial stage, integrity versus despair, was presented and validated across two studies. Despite the fact that each psychosocial stage in Erikson's model is presented as polar, his writings suggested that, in the eighth stage, for example, people cannot be classified simply as either integrated or despairing. Like previous researchers studying identity versus identity diffusion (Marcia, 1980), intimacy versus isolation (Orlofsky, Marcia, & Lesser, 1973), and generativity versus stagnation (Bradley, 1997; Bradley & Marcia, 1998), Hearn et al. (2012) surmised that individuals might be positioned between the two poles. After

preliminary interviews confirmed their assumptions, they identified four integrity statuses. In addition to Erikson's alternatives of integrity and despair, the intermediate statuses of pseudo-integrated and non-exploring were proposed and developed from both Erikson's writings and pilot interviews. According to the information consolidated from their studies, the researchers provided detailed descriptions of the four statuses in the eighth stage and also recognised that the integrity status entailed acknowledging, absorbing and accommodating despair. These studies are significant in that they empirically validate Erikson's final stage of human development. Such research is of paramount importance in the field of gerontology since it can guide interventions aimed at helping older people to find meaning in their lives.

3.6.2 Adolescence

One of Erikson's primary concerns was the development of identity during adolescence. The research generated on adolescent studies has not only helped to expand Erikson's theory, it has also taken into account changing economic and cultural conditions which may impact on psychosocial development. When Erikson (1950) recorded his observations more than sixty years ago, family systems, schools, social relationships and technology were very different from those we find today. In the 1950s, most children lived with their biological parents (Cherlin, 2010), and the most common family system during that time was the traditional nuclear family. Today, whilst family systems include the traditional nuclear system, several variations exist that were rare sixty years ago, for example, single, step, cohabiting and gay or lesbian couples (Cherlin, 2010). Studies also show that children from most contemporary family systems, including traditional families, spend less time with their parents and siblings than previous generations (Fox, Han, Rhum, & Waldfogel, 2011). Despite the fact that the quantity and quality of family time has changed over the past 60 years, with friendship playing a greater role in psychosocial development today than ever before, research on socialisation and identity formation continues to focus on parent-child relationships (Jones, Vaterlaus, Jackson, & Morrill, 2014). In an effort to address the need for research on extra-familial socialisation experiences, Jones et al. (2014) conducted a study to examine the relationship between friendship characteristics, psychosocial development and identity formation in young adults. Their findings challenge some of Erikson's (1950) propositions and indicate that extra-familial socialisation experiences, including the relationship with parents, siblings, friends, extended family members and unrelated adults play a role in identity formation which warrants further investigation. Their findings also indicate that friendship dynamics contribute both positively and negatively to early psychosocial development and to identity formation.

According to Eriksonian theory, an adolescent's sense of fidelity is a prerequisite to healthy psychological development. Erikson (1964) defined fidelity as "the ability to sustain loyalties freely pledged in spite of the inevitable contradictions of value systems" (p. 125). Ego strengths, also described as virtues of character, correspond with the successful resolution of each developmental stage (Erikson, 1963). Fidelity, for example, emerges at the end of the identity crisis in adolescence and indicates that a stable identity has been achieved. Despite the fact that the development of fidelity is linked to citizenship in adulthood and overall psychosocial well-being (Côté, 2009; Markstrom, Berman, Sabino & Turner, 1998), the study of this significant ego strength has received little attention. The studies that do exist, have examined fidelity as an indicator, or single component of identity attainment (Kroger, 1989; Markstrom-Adams, Hofstra & Dougher, 1994; Markstrom, Sabino, Turner, & Berman, 1997; Stringer, 1994). Brittian and Lerner (2012) conducted a study which not only developed an index of youth fidelity, but also examined the developmental course of this construct, explored the influence of contextual factors on different fidelity trajectories, and tested if those trajectories were associated with later indicators of adolescents' positive development. The results of their study suggested that three types of developmental trajectories existed among adolescents, namely: (a) high and increasing, (b) moderate and increasing, and (c) low and decreasing. The findings also indicated that social relationships and psychosocial and behavioural characteristics, such as contribution, substance use and delinquency, affected fidelity group membership; and girls were more likely than boys to be in the highest fidelity trajectories. The research of Brittian and Lerner (2012) enhances researchers' understanding of the development of fidelity within adolescence and points to the usefulness of studying this ego strength as part of an individual-context developmental process.

In another study based on Erikson's (1968) identity development theory, Chapman and Werner-Wilson (2008) explored the relationships among individual factors, parental factors, involvement in activities, and adolescent attitudes regarding sexuality. Their research findings indicated that, although self-esteem and sexual experience were significant predictors of attitudes regarding sex, parental influence constituted the most influential predictor.

3.6.3 Psychosocial Development in Adulthood

Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968) maintained that an individual develops through a sequence of eight stages which define the life cycle. Each stage is marked by a psychosocial crisis and the particular timing and methods by which the crises are addressed is influenced by the individual's society and culture. Despite its popularity, Erikson's theory was only legitimately

operationalised in the eighties when Hawley constructed the Measure of Psychosocial Development (MPD, Hawley, 1988), based on Erikson's delineation of psychosocial development in his book, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968). The MPD measures the degree and direction of conflict resolution at each of Erikson's eight developmental stages.

In a study conducted by Jenkins, Buboltz, Schwartz and Johnson (2005), the MPD was used together with the Differentiation of Self Inventory (DSI, Skowron & Friedlander, 1998) to investigate the relationship between Bowen's (1978) concept of differentiation of self and Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968) stages of psychosocial development. The results of the study indicated that differentiation levels correlate positively with psychosocial development in young adults, supporting Bowen's (1978) contention that differentiation is predictive of psychological adjustment in adulthood.

Erikson's theory has not only provided the foundation for research examining the influence of intellectual styles and differentiation on psychosocial development (Jenkins, Buboltz, Schwartz & Johnson, 2005; Zang & He, 2011), it has also sparked interest in research aimed at empirically validating the sequence of Erikson's psychosocial stages. According to Erikson (1968), the achievement of a confident sense of identity in adolescence provides the base from which a young adult can develop a mature type of relational intimacy, thereby facilitating commitment to a partner without "fear of ego-loss" (p. 264). Whilst the achievement of a mature identity and the subsequent establishment of a committed, intimate relationship are still regarded as fundamental developmental tasks of young adulthood, changes in expectations for partnerships (Kümmerling & Hassebrauk, 2001) as well as the postponement of identity commitments (Hurrelmann & Albert, 2006), have changed the developmental context during the last decade, making the attainment of this developmental transition more challenging for young adults (Arnett, 2004; Côté, 2000). In light of this, Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke (2010) conducted a study to examine whether the developmental sequence proposed by Erikson is still valid today, given the changing developmental context of the 21st century. The results of their longitudinal study revealed direct links between early ego development during adolescence and intimacy in romantic relationships during early adulthood, confirming Erikson's basic tenets on the developmental ordering of identity and intimacy for young people in the 21st century. The study of Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke holds value not only because it validates Erikson's (1968) theory, but also because it can inform theory on identity and intimacy development and add to researchers' understanding of diversity in the transition to adulthood. Not only do their findings confirm that ego development measurements can assist in the identification of adolescents at risk of failing to establish or maintain intimate relationships, they also have

important implications for the theory of emerging adulthood and suggest that the establishment of identity and ensuing commitment to partnership do occur after a period of exploration, although the time frame for such development is longer today than it was a decade ago (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010).

Despite the fact that Erikson's theory has been difficult to validate empirically, with its basis in clinical observation and emphasis on diverse processes spanning many decades, it continues to hold appeal within areas of personality psychology that focus on specific developmental periods. With regard to adolescence, for example, Erikson's theory has been applied to the study of identity development and has stimulated research on the individual's sense of self from adolescence to the early twenties (Schwartz, 2006), and even throughout adulthood (Helson & Srivastava, 2001; Marcia, 2002; Zucker, Ostrove, & Stewart, 2002). Erikson's theory has also been used in research focusing on the development of ethnic and racial identity (Sneed, Schwartz, & Cross, 2006) as well as research exploring developmental processes and the development of generativity and ego integrity in midlife (Bradley & Marcia, 1998; De St Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004; James & Zarrett, 2005).

Although Erikson's theory is often presented as a fixed set of stages through which the ego develops, a more accurate representation proposes a set of issues that reflect the struggles among the biological, psychological and social forces acting on the individual. Erikson's theoretical proposition suggesting that personality change in adulthood varies from person to person depending on the biopsychosocial issues confronting the individual, was supported in preliminary work by Sneed, Whitbourne and Culang (2006). Expanding on the findings of this study, Whitbourne, Sneed and Sayer (2009) used a data analytical approach which accommodated the possibility of individual differences in the level and rate of change over time. Their findings confirmed Erikson's proposition that psychosocial development should be represented as a matrix, rather than a ladder, and that the crises delineated in the matrix are continuously revisited throughout life (Erikson et al., 1986). The multi-dimensional view of psychosocial development has led to the assumption that complete resolution of any particular crisis is impossible at the expected age, and that a continual reworking of each psychosocial crisis in the context of later issues is a necessary component of development (Erikson, 1991). This supports the view that people change throughout life according to what Erikson (1963) termed "vigorous unfolding" (p. 255), and contrasts with the long-standing belief that: "In most of us, by the age of thirty, the character has set like plaster and will never soften again" (James, 1890, p. 126). In an effort to map the appropriate statistical methodology to Erikson's lifespan development theory, Sneed et al. (2006) utilised multilevel modelling techniques for Erikson's

core stages (trust, identity and ego integrity) over a 34-year period and found that simply polarizing the issues surrounding adult personality development into the extremes of either stability or change is neither useful nor valid. Their research study confirmed the developmental sequence and the idiosyncrasies of individual personality evolution over the lifespan predicted by Erikson's theory, and prompted their suggestion that future research be focused on *who* changes and on *what* predicts such change in adulthood rather than on the existence of change itself.

3.7 The Critique of Erikson's Theory

Erikson's (1963, 1968, 1982; Erikson et al., 1986) theory profoundly influenced developmental psychology and was the first to offer a complete lifespan perspective from birth to death. His psychosocial theory is extensively used for counselling work not only because it links developmental stages to society and provides a useful construct for examining the tension between the individual and society, but also because it emphasises healthy ego development across the lifespan and posits an optimistic view of development that allows for spontaneous recovery from developmental deficits or inadequacies (Meyer et al., 2008; Wastell, 1996). Nugent (1994) noted that Erikson's theory "undergirded counsellors efforts to establish a unique profession aimed at working with psychologically normal people" (p. 50). This is due to the fact that the theory's assumptions are consistent with the dominant Western cultural outlook within which counselling has occurred (Wastell, 1996).

Despite the fact that Erikson's concepts have generally been accepted without much dispute, a number of writers have critiqued his work. According to Wastell (1996), the critique against Erikson's theory can be grouped into two broad categories. The first group includes those criticisms that focus on the intrinsic weakness of the theory. These include the fact that Erikson's theory fails to clearly explain the mechanisms for resolving crises and the conditions for transition from one stage to another (Wastell, 1996), and the fact that the theory does not clearly specify the way in which society influences development (Miller, 1989).

Erikson's theory is also criticised for failing to explain how the resolutions of different stages impact on different personalities, a limitation which negatively affects the theory's applicability to idiosyncratic, specific, individual or atypical contexts (Shaffer 2002; Watts et al., 2009). Added to this is the criticism that Erikson's theory flows primarily from unverified speculation and thus lacks scientific and empirical evidence (Meyer et al., 2008; Wastell, 1996). Notwithstanding its lack of scientific and experimental grounding, Erikson's theory has often been mistaken for an ineluctable piece of science against which deviance has been

identified and stigmatised. In this vein, Burman (1994) criticised Erikson's development theory for failing to take the variables of class, race and gender into account, and for incorrectly imposing standards of white, male, heterosexual, upper class and American development on all children, despite demographically significant differences. Erikson (1964) was aware of this criticism against his theory and himself expressed concern that his work might be "eagerly accepted by some as a potential inventory for tests of adjustment or as a new production schedule in the manufacture of desirable children, citizens or workers" (p. 59). Erikson (1980) responded to this criticism by asserting that he had never intended for his theory to be used as a set of norms that would facilitate the grading of mental health.

The second group of criticisms focuses on the nature of Erikson's model of development. In particular, Erikson's views on femininity have been criticised by supporters of the women's liberation movement who maintain that Erikson's theory is dominated by a male Eurocentric perspective that emphasises the achievement of individuality and autonomy (Roazen, 1976; Wastell, 1996). According to this perspective, the male is treated as the standard of normal development, with the female consequently appearing only as a variation, or worse, a deviation of normal psychosocial development (Wastell, 1996; Watts et al., 2009). This criticism is fuelled by the fact that Erikson's clinical and historical research subjects were all male, inducing the suggestion that the development of "humankind" actually refers to the development of "malekind" (Watts et al., 2009, p. 309). Feminist critics point to the fact that Erikson's emphasis on separation and autonomy excludes a woman's need to connect and relate to others, and thereby denies certain prerequisites in female development (Horst, 1995). The work of Gilligan (1982, 1991) is seminal in this regard. According to Gilligan (1982), Erikson's portrayal of a woman is that:

She holds her identity in abeyance as she prepares to attract the man by whose name she will be known, by whose status she will be defined, the man who will rescue her from emptiness and loneliness by filling "the inner-space". (p. 12)

Gilligan (1982, 1991) thus criticised Erikson's theory for portraying women as inferior, weak and dependent on men, arguing that Erikson failed to emphasise the distinctiveness of a woman's experience. In Gilligan's (1982, 1991) view, a woman's development relies on connections and attachments to others. Since Erikson's stage theory posits that separation and autonomy are prerequisites for healthy development, a woman's attachment to others can be misconstrued as a developmental impediment, according to the feminist critique.

A number of writers (e.g., Hodgson & Fischer, 1979; Hyde, 1991; Jordan, Kaplan, Miller, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Marcia, 2002; Miller, 1976, 1986; Morgan & Farber, 1982; Orlofsky,

1993) share some of Gilligan's views, asserting that the concept of connectedness, while virtually ignored in male-dominated theories, is central to women's development and accounts for the fact that women approach the developmental tasks of identity and intimacy differently from the way men do. These writers interpreted Erikson's theory to mean that women depend on marriage (the intimacy task) to develop an identity, whereas men develop self-definition and identity before addressing the issues of intimacy. The consensus among these writers is that the identity and intimacy tasks, as Erikson described them for men, are reversed or fused in women. They criticised Erikson for portraying women as dependent and passive and also for not modifying his epigenetic chart to reflect gender differences.

In an analysis of the feminist critique against Erikson's theory, Levine (2001) proposed that a partial reconstruction of Erikson's theory with an emphasis on the distinction between the identity constructs of independence and interdependence, rather than on the variable of gender per se, would allow for a more adequate explanation of both female and male identity development. Levine (2001) maintained, however, that a reconceptualisation of Erikson's theory would only be applicable from Stage 5 (the identity stage), since a sense of independence or interdependence can only emerge when a person (male or female) achieves a sense of self as an "I" simultaneously differentiated from and rooted within social interactions (p. 274). Levine (2001) justified Erikson's failure to emphasise the distinction between independence and interdependence in the first four psychosocial stages of his theory by pointing out that Erikson's basic concern was with the development of the ego's identity and that tension between independence and interdependence only becomes a developmental dynamic in the last four stages.

A more forceful criticism against Erikson is that he portrayed gender differences as anatomically determined. Morgan and Farber (1982) argued that by describing female development as anatomically determined and male development as psychosocially determined, Erikson eliminated aspects of choice and struggle from women's identity development. In this respect, he can be compared to Freud. Although Erikson acknowledged that Freud's appraisal of the identity of women was probably the weakest part of his theory, he was reluctant to challenge Freud's theory of femininity and even supported Freud's controversial dictum that "anatomy is destiny" (Erikson, 1968, p. 285). Erikson (1968) even went so far as to say that anatomy "determines not only the range and configuration of physiological functioning and its limitation but also, to an extent, personality configurations" (p. 285). Sorell and Montgomery (2001), in assessing the applicability of Erikson's theory to contemporary human development research, defended Erikson's use of Freud's dictum by pointing out that, rather than to view it

as biologically deterministic, it would be more compatible with Erikson's theory to view biology as something that contributes and impacts on development to varying degrees across the lifespan, whilst it influences, and is influenced by psychosocial and cultural factors.

Erikson's (1950, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1974) work has been criticised for being sexist because he wrote little about the unique experiences of women and also because his treatment of women's identity development reflects a social system in which marriage and family constitute a legitimate career goal for women but not for men. However, the criticisms against Erikson's theory do not take into account the multiple levels of meaning inherent in his use of the terms identity and intimacy; nor do they account for the dialectic and epigenetic nature of his developmental chart (Horst, 1995). It appears, therefore, that Erikson's work has developed a negative reputation primarily amongst those who do not know it well (Côté, 2009), and that the sexist criticism against his theory comes from a misreading of his work (Horst, 1995). According to Horst (1995), portraying women and men as either completely alike or completely different, undermines the importance of the development of identity and intimacy in both genders and does a grave disservice to them both. He proposed that understanding Erikson's theory in its context and dealing with it in depth would add more value to feminism and psychology than trying to point out gender stereotypes. This will not only maintain the integrity of Erikson's work, it will also provide an important foundation for a constructive feminist stance from which research can be expanded so that the experiences of women can be better understood (Horst, 1995).

3.8 Erikson's Contribution to Psychobiography

Erikson wrote extensively on child development and on the influence of society on individual development. His primary interest, however, was in the psychology of youth and the adolescent's search for a coherent sense of self (Agronin, 2014; Roazen, 1976). Erikson (1950, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1974) coined the term "identity crisis" to account for the tumultuous period during which time the adolescent strives to integrate previous experiences and self-notions with current impulses and social expectations (Agronin, 2014):

I have called the major crisis of adolescence the identity crisis; it occurs in that period of the life cycle when each youth must forge for himself some central perspective and direction, some working unity, out of the effective remnants of his childhood and the hopes of his anticipated adulthood; he must detect some meaningful resemblance between what he has come to see in himself and what his sharpened awareness tells him others judge and expect him to be. (Erikson, 1959, p. 12)

Erikson expanded his theme of identity in his works on prominent historical people who struggled with their own identities. These included: Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958); Adolf Hitler (Erikson, 1969), Maxim Gorki (Erikson, 1950, 1963), George Bernard Shaw (Erikson, 1968), Mahatma Gandhi (Erikson, 1969) and Thomas Jefferson (Erikson, 1974). He called these psychological studies of historical figures psychohistories and used them as a vehicle to comment on human problems. In these psychohistories, adult development was mainly refracted through the lens of one's struggle for identity during late adolescence and young adulthood, which was itself refracted through earlier childhood stages (Agronin, 2014). These psychohistories not only attracted the attention of a wide audience of readers, they also had personal meaning for Erikson, who is known to have had identity problems of his own (Alexander, 2005; Meyer et al., 2008).

In his psychobiographical works, Erikson not only examined the problem of identity as it impacted on the development of ideological innovators, he also examined how these innovators succeeded in making the environment adapt to their special demands (Roazen, 1976). In studying these great individuals, Erikson attempted to fathom the nature of "historical greatness" and hypothesised that such individuals are endowed with powerful childhood consciences and appear old even in their early years (Roazen, 1976, p. 75).

The value of psychobiography, from Erikson's perspective, lies in the distinction that he drew between clinical case history and life history. Erikson (1969) maintained that in a clinical setting, patients are undermined by their neurotic conflicts, whereas in history these same human problems add an essential ingredient to all extraordinary effort. The focus on historical greatness thus emphasises strengths and allows for an examination of "how a person managed to keep together and to maintain a significant function in the lives of others" (Roazen, 1976, p. 76).

Despite the fact that Erikson did not want to be associated with everything that gets done in the name of psychohistory (Roazen, 1976), his keen interest in using psychology to enrich the art of biography made of him one of the most sophisticated narrative psychologists in personality psychology (McAdams, 1994; Roazen, 1976). Erikson firmly believed that an individual could best be understood through stories and in terms of stories. It is thus not surprising that he made use of narrative methods, including cultural folk tales, myths, legends, and even cinema to expose cultural and personal truths and to illuminate and expand his psychosocial theory of personality (McAdams, 1994). His exposition of the eight stages of life, which constitute the essence of his theory, are viewed by McAdams (1994) as eight psychosocial chapters of the expectable life story which must be understood as an evolving

interpersonal pattern situated in time. McAdams (1994) provided a definition for biography which accurately reflects Erikson's approach to psychobiography, since it takes into account the context of human life, over time, in a diverse world. He wrote:

Biography is at the heart of things because biography provides a storied account of a life over time. Lives in time make sense only as stories – as more-or-less coherent narratives complete with setting, scene, characters, plot, and theme, and structured to link beginning to middle to ending. (p. 659)

Erikson (1963) termed the key to good psychobiography *triple bookkeeping*. This term encapsulates the three complementary levels on which a person's life must be understood. The first level is that of the body and all of the constitutional givens with which the individual is endowed, including sexual and libidinal dynamics. The second level is that of the ego and refers to the individual's characteristic ways of synthesizing experiences so as to make sense of the world and be able to cope with anxiety and conflict. The third level is that of family and society and refers both to the individual's developmental history within the family and the particular societal, cultural and historical ethos which shapes, and in the case of extraordinary individuals, is shaped by the individual (McAdams 1994; McAdams & Ochberg, 1988). With regard to the three levels involved in triple bookkeeping, Erikson (1963) wrote:

being unable to arrive at any simple sequence and causal chain with a clear location and a circumscribed beginning, only triple bookkeeping (or, if you wish, a systematic going around in circles) can gradually clarify the relevances and the relativities of all the known data. The fact that this may not lead to a clear beginning and may not end with either a clear pathogenic reconstruction nor a well-founded prognostic formulation is unfortunate for the appearance of our files, but it may be just as well for our therapeutic endeavour; for we must be prepared not only to understand but also to influence all three processes at the same time. (p. 46)

Erikson, in trying to bridge the divide between the perspectives of the historian and the psychologist, believed it would be beneficial to envision a two-way street in which the practitioners of both disciplines have something special to gain. So while Erikson welcomed the contribution of psychoanalysis in the clarification of psychological obstacles arising from the past, he also welcomed the contribution of history to psychoanalysis, believing that history could provide a much-needed perspective on concepts that are often misconstrued as universal rather than time-bound (Erikson, 1975; Runyan, 1976). Erikson's (1975) view that one influences what one observes, and therefore becomes part of what one is studying, complements Runyan's (1982) suggestion that the competent psychologist-as-psychobiographer needs to become a "historian" of the period in which his or her research subject lived (pp. 214-216).

The value of Erikson's psychobiographies cannot be underestimated, especially if one takes into account the time period in which he wrote them. In the mid-20th century, the emphasis in American psychology fell on the positivist research paradigm and the controlling forces in tertiary psychology education demanded that psychological studies be based on empirical data that would satisfy scientific criteria. Psychobiographical studies were thus not well supported at the time and occupied a lower rung in the ladder of research approaches (Alexander, 1990; Ponterotto, 2013).

Despite the fact that Erikson appears to have had no leading interest in developing psychobiography as a recognised field of study, he successfully managed to use this approach as a vehicle to elucidate the development of an identity crisis in his psychobiographical subjects. Furthermore, it is thanks to his work in psychobiography that independent scholars previously handicapped by the dominance of orthodox psychoanalytic views in psychobiographical attempts, could find a simpler stage theory to use as an explanatory device (Alexander, 1990). Today, psychobiography as a research topic and approach has grown in popularity and has promoted a greater understanding among psychologists of the diversity inherent in personality development, thus establishing it as an anchor in the discipline of psychology (Ponterotto, 2013).

3.9 Conclusion

Erikson's psychosocial theory of personality development has been presented in this chapter and will be used in Chapter 8 to facilitate a deeper understanding of Plath's personality development through the different stages of her life. Erikson's own psychobiographical studies attest to the fact that his psychosocial approach can facilitate an understanding of an individual's psychological development within a cultural and sociohistorical context. In the following chapter, the Internal Family Systems model of Richard C. Schwartz (1995) is discussed. In this psychobiographical study, it is used to complement Erikson's theory in the theoretical foundation from which to conceptualise Plath's life and personality development.

CHAPTER 4

SCHWARTZ'S MODEL OF INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS

4.1 Chapter Preview

In this chapter, the Internal Family Systems model (IFS) as developed by Richard C. Schwartz (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2001) is discussed. It constitutes the second psychological framework used in this psychobiography to investigate and delineate the personality development of Sylvia Plath. The first section of the chapter presents a brief biographical examination of Schwartz's life, followed by a look at the origins of the IFS model and the influences and approaches which contributed to its establishment. Thereafter, Schwartz's principles and concepts and the systems inherent in his conceptualisation of the IFS model are discussed. This is followed by research studies that enhanced the value of the IFS model as a therapeutic approach that is client focused and capable of eliciting self-efficacy and self-acceptance in clients. In the final section, Schwartz's theory is critically appraised and his contribution to psychotherapy and psychobiography is discussed.

4.2 A Brief Biography of Richard C. Schwartz

Richard C. Schwartz began his career as a family therapist, historian and educator (Schwartz, 2001; Uys, 2010). He earned his PhD in Marriage and Family Therapy from the University of Purdue and thereafter began a long association with the Institute for Juvenile Research at Illinois University in Chicago (Schwartz, 2001). He then moved to the Family Institute at Northwestern University, and earned himself the status of Associate Professor at both Illinois and Northwestern University (Schwartz, 2001; Uys, 2010).

Schwartz developed his model of Internal Family Systems in the early 1980s. Influenced by the tenets of structural family therapy (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981) and strategic family therapy (Haley, 1976; Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974), Schwartz (1995, 2001) developed his internal family systems (IFS) model based on three significant approaches – multiplicity, systems thinking and mindfulness-based therapy. With regard to multiplicity, Schwartz noted from his clients' descriptions that individuals have many parts within themselves and that these parts can often present in extreme form. In addition to this, Schwartz noted that when the concerns of these parts are addressed, they are less disruptive and can submit to the wise leadership of what Schwartz (1995, 2001) came to call the *Self*. As in systemic family theory, Schwartz (1995, 2001) noted that parts take on characteristic roles

that help define the inner world of the client. The *Self* acts as co-ordinator and pivotal point around which the various parts constellate, and embodies the qualities of openness, compassion and confidence (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). The value of IFS lies in the fact that it locates the source of healing within the client, freeing the therapist to guide and support the client in accessing his/her true self (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). This non-pathologising approach makes IFS a more hopeful and positive framework within which to conduct psychotherapy (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2001).

Schwartz founded The Center for Self Leadership in Illinois in 2000. The centre offers national and international training workshops to professionals and the general public, and provides access to publications and video resources through its website (Schwartz, 2001). Not only is Schwartz a featured speaker for many organisations, he is also a fellow of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and serves on the editorial board of four professional journals (Schwartz, 2001). He has published four books, namely: *Internal Family Systems Therapy*, *Introduction to the Internal Family Systems Model*, *The Mosaic Mind* (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995), and *Metaframeworks* (Schwartz, Breunlin, & Mac Kune-Karrer, 1997). His most recent book, *You Are The One You've Been Waiting For* (Schwartz, 2008) deals with the use of IFS with couples. Currently, Schwartz lives and practices in Brookline, in the United States of America.

4.3 The Evolution of the Internal Family Systems Model

4.3.1 Pioneers of the Intrapsychic Realm

The Italian psychiatrist Roberto Assagioli (1965, 1973, 1975) is regarded by some as the first Western thinker to delve into the multiplicity of the mind. Although originally a strong supporter of Freud's psychoanalysis, his keen interest in subpersonalities was clearly evident in his writings as far back as the early 1900s. Eventually his ideas developed into an extensive school of psychotherapy called psychosynthesis.

Like Assagioli, Carl Jung was also interested in the different parts of the self and is today regarded as the most renowned advocate of multiplicity. Unlike Assagioli, who referred to a variety of subpersonalities, Jung termed these entities complexes (which are generally negative) and archetypes (which are generally positive). He extended these descriptions by making use of terms such as the persona, the shadow, the animus and the anima. Jung (1962, 1968, 1969) conceptualised multiplicity by presupposing the nature of these inner entities,

based on their derivation from a collective unconscious; and even went so far as to develop a technique of direct interaction with these entities, called active imagination (Hannah, 1981).

A common feature of the work of Jung and Assagioli is the idea that each person contains a self that is different from the subpersonalities and refers to a non-judgemental state of mind and clear perspective to be achieved. The difference is that Jung saw this self as a passive, observing state, while Assagioli believed that a person can evolve to a point at which the self shifts from passive observer to active manager of the personality (Schwartz, 1995).

Interest in the multiplicity of the mind sparked new research in processes to access the different parts, and thereby allowed for more extensive exploration of the intrapsychic realm. Jungian authors Hillman (1975) and Johnson (1986) refined Jung's original active imagination process, whilst Stone and Winkelman (1985) developed an approach called *voice dialogue* for interacting with the different intrapsychic parts (which they called inner voices) and for getting to know the self. Watanabe (1986) called these intrapsychic parts internal characters and developed a technique similar to voice dialogue for working with these parts. Similarly, Beahrs (1982), J. Watkins (1978) and M. Watkins (1986) developed various methods for accessing and interacting with multiplicity, as did Gestalt therapy with the open-chair technique (Perls, 1969) and Bandler and Grinder (1982) with a technique called *reframing*.

Although all these theorists added to the wealth of knowledge concerning multiplicity, they wrote little about the inter-relationship between parts and the way in which people's intrapsychic systems compare to their family systems. These theorists treated subpersonalities individually and encouraged people to get to know their parts separately. Consequently, ways of treating a group of parts as a system or inner family were not addressed. It was partly in reaction to this limitation that Internal Family System Therapy was born (Schwartz, 1995).

4.3.2 Influences from Family Therapy on the Internal Family Systems Model

The traditional systems-based models of family therapy evaded issues related to intrapsychic processes, viewing such processes as being rooted in psychoanalysis, which they rejected. The basic assumption of these traditional models was that the family level is the key system level to change, and that changes at this level will inadvertently cause change to each family member's inner life. The founder of structural family therapy, Salvador Minuchin, believed that people are basically competent but that their competence is restricted by their family structure. To release this competence, he believed that it was necessary to change the family structure. He did this first by charting the relationships between family members and

between subsets of family, and then by attempting to disrupt dysfunctional relationships within the family so that a healthier pattern of interaction could be attained (Minuchin, 1974).

The structural school of family therapy (Minuchin, 1974; Minuchin & Elizur, 1989; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981) greatly influenced Schwartz's Internal Family Systems (IFS) model, particularly because of its optimistic philosophy. Like structural family therapy, the IFS model recognises the importance of changing the family structure, but further suggests that it is not just the external family structure that restricts and needs to change. Consequently IFS includes some structural methods, like the boundary-making technique, in the internal family process. The model of Minuchin (1974; Minuchin & Elizur, 1989; Minuchin & Fishman, 1981), resonates with Bowlby's (1973) theory of attachment. According to this theory, individuals operate on a spectrum of emotional connections ranging from secure to insecure, each of which generates different strategies to ensure emotional survival (Mones & Schwartz, 2007).

The IFS model was also influenced by the strategic school of family therapy (Breunlin, 1999; Haley, 1976; Watzlawick et al., 1974) which highlighted the importance of tracking sequences of interaction. The focus on sequences was expanded by Haley (1980) to include longer circular sequences that can even play out over decades in families. Haley (1980, 1987) focused on developing treatment strategies to help families to move from maladaptive to more adaptive choices when attempting to solve problems. The work of Madanes (1981) also played an important role in the development of the IFS model since it helped to explain the protective roles that internal personalities are often forced to assume. Similarly, Milton Erickson (1962) influenced the strategic school of family therapy by proposing that the unconscious is a source of strength and wisdom for family members, rather than a storehouse of destructive and negative drives.

Bowen's (1978) concept of differentiation of self also influenced IFS, especially with regards to the manner in which families evolve and transfer their problems from one generation to the next. In the 1980s, the Milan family therapy group (Pallazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, & Prata, 1978) advocated a shift in the therapist's role, calling for a less directive and more collaborative position which expressed genuine curiosity on the part of the therapist towards families (Cecchin, 1987). This approach gave rise to a style of interviewing called circular questioning (Tomm, 1985, 1987, 1988), and influenced the IFS therapist to adopt a more collaborative approach to family therapy (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995; 2001).

The work of White (1989, 1991, 1992; White & Epston, 1990) influenced family therapy in that he abandoned traditional systems thinking for the highly subjective narrative approach in

which people's lives are seen as being controlled by the stories that they have absorbed about themselves. His approach of helping people to find their own stories and deconstruct those that have been forced onto them by their families, closely resembles the liberating effect that people in IFS therapy experience when they can differentiate their Selves from the burdening stories that their parts have accumulated (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2001).

Satir (1972, 1978a, 1978b) went even further in breaking established trends in family therapy by combining the study of intrapsychic subpersonalities with systems theory. This notion of people having parts strongly influenced the IFS model and allowed for a deeper understanding and respect for the network of relationships among members of human systems at any level (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2001).

4.3.3 Approaches on which the Internal Family Systems Model is Based

The Internal Family Systems (IFS) model emerged from a synthesis of three significant approaches – the multiplicity of the mind (Assagioli, 1976; Carter, 2008; Engler, 2003; Jung, 1969; Mitchell, 1993; Perls, 1969; Rowan, 1990, 1993), systems thinking (Von Bertalanffy, 1968; Watzlawick et al., 1967) and mindfulness-based therapy (Engler & Fulton, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1994, 2012; Macnaughton, 2004; Nyanatiloka, 1972; Schwartz, 2011; Siegel, 2007, 2010, 2011; Sparks, 2011).

The multiplicity of the mind approach is based on the premise that the mind is a dynamic system consisting of many subminds (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). In the IFS model, these subminds are called parts and they are believed to interact with one another (Mones & Schwartz, 2002). The multiplicity of the individual's internal parts is considered to be coherent and normal, but since each part contains idiosyncratic characteristics, desires and goals often conflict as parts collide (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001).

By adding the systemic approach to this view, IFS therapists are afforded the opportunity to relate to every level of the human system - including the intrapsychic, familial, community, cultural and societal - with the same concepts and methods (Schwartz, 1995). The systemic approach views individuals as being interconnected in a relational network in which changes to the individual affect the whole system, just as changes to the system as a whole impact on the individual (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). The way in which the individual acts and reacts causes reactions by other parts within the system. Through the interrelatedness and connectedness of individuals within the system, the different parts combine to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its individual parts (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003).

The type of psychotherapy which emerges from the IFS model holds the added advantage that it is collaborative, non-pathologising and enjoyable because it assumes that, much like a large family system, each internal part has well-meaning intentions and profound value (Schwartz & Sparks, 2014). In line with the approaches advocated by family therapy, the IFS model proposes that individual improvement is attained not through the removal of a dysfunctional part, but rather through the acceptance that each part is significant and valuable (Green, 2008).

The internal parts assume characteristic roles which maintain functionality (managers), harbour pain (exiles), or react to impending threats (firefighters) (Twombly & Schwartz, 2008). In addition to the different parts, the IFS model maintains that individuals possess a Self at their core and that this Self contains leadership qualities such as compassion, confidence, calmness and the potential to heal constrained or burdened parts (Haddock, Weiler, Trump, & Henry, 2017). Through mindfulness practices, IFS therapy helps the conflicting parts of an individual to become aware of the power of the Self so that the individual can better understand his/her internal world, and relate to the Self and to society in psychologically healthier ways (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2001).

The aim of IFS is to assist individuals in achieving Self-leadership, so that they can compassionately relate to their own parts and to the parts of others, whilst developing effective ways to release constrained parts that may be evoking unhealthy behaviour or feelings (Haddock et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2013a, 2013b). Mindfulness practices thus help parts to become more familiar with and to trust Self-leadership so that an individual is in a better position to calmly and mindfully approach situations (Schwartz, 2004, 2013a, 2013b).

The optimistic philosophy inherent in the IFS model allows for people to be seen as having all the resources that they need for healing to take place (Schwartz, 1995). Rather than seeing people as having pathological deficits, the IFS model views people as being restricted from using internal strengths as a result of polarized relationships both within themselves and in relation to people around them (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995; Sweezy & Ziskind, 2013).

Through a combination of therapy and meditation, the IFS model endeavours to help people release these restrictions, so that their resources can be catalysed (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). Since therapy starts with the premise that people already have all the resources that they need, IFS therapists can collaborate with their clients rather than trying to teach them, confront them or fill voids in their psyches or families (Schwartz, 1995). In contrast to numerous models that propose a Self, the core Self proposed by IFS is not viewed as an introject (Cohen & Johanson, 2003). Rather, it is seen as that positive, healing energy brought about by a successful

therapeutic process (Mones & Schwartz, 2007). Since the attributes of Self are synonymous with self-acceptance and self-efficacy, the IFS approach relieves therapists of sole responsibility for directing and controlling the course of therapy and for making important interpretations and directives (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995). The IFS model incorporates post-modern ideas by stressing the importance of collaboration between therapist and client (Lucero, Jones, & Hunsaker, 2017). Within this approach, the client is empowered to identify problematic symptoms and to access inner resources and strengths through the process of Self-leadership (Haddock et al., 2017; Lucero et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2013a, 2015). Whilst many therapeutic approaches regard the manifestation of mental multiplicities as pathological (Forgash & Knipe, 2008), the value of the IFS model lies in the fact that it acknowledges the role of all parts in the attainment of healthy functioning (Schwartz & Sparks, 2014).

4.3.3.1 *Multiplicity of the Mind*

As far back as the early 1700s, Freud challenged the notion that individuals have only one mind and that all thoughts and feelings stem from a unitary personality. Freud (1961) paved the way for deeper exploration of multiplicity with his descriptions of the id, ego and superego. This tripartite model was expanded even further by various post-Freudian theorists, like object-relations theorist Melanie Klein who, in the 1940s, claimed that our internal experiences are shaped by introjected representations of important people in our lives (Gunthrip, 1971; Klein, 1948). Jung (1935, 1968, 1969) took the idea of multiplicity a step further in his discussion of archetypes and complexes, because he considered these intrapsychic parts as being more than just introjects. Jung (1935, 1968) described a complex as follows:

It has a sort of body, a certain amount of its own physiology. It can upset the stomach, it upsets the breathing, it disturbs the heart – in short, it behaves like a partial personality. ... I hold that our personal unconscious, as well as the collective unconscious, consists of an indefinite,...unknown, number of complexes or fragmentary personalities. (pp. 80-81)

In the same vein, Roberto Assagioli, Jung's younger contemporary, claimed that we are a collection of subpersonalities (Assagioli, 1965, 1973, 1975; Ferrucci, 1982). Since Assagioli, many theorists have acknowledged the multiplicity of the mind, and they have arrived at conclusions that are incredibly alike to one another. Rowan (1990) has traced the history of the acknowledgement of multiplicity in his book *Subpersonalities*, and more recently, Carter (2008) has explored this field in his book *Multiplicity*. Despite the fact that our culture reinforces a monolithic view of personality, many influential psychotherapists have emerged

that describe the mind as having some measure of multiplicity. For example, object relations speaks of internal objects (Fairbairn, 1952; Gunthrip, 1971; Kernberg, 1976; Klein, 1948;; Winnicott, 1958, 1971); self psychology compares grandiose selves to the act of idealising (Kohut, 1971, 1977); Jungians refer to archetypes and complexes (Jung, 1968, 1969); transactional analysis presumes many different ego states (Berne, 1961, 1972); Gestalt therapy makes mention of top dog and underdog (Fagan & Sheppard, 1970; Perls, 1969); and cognitive-behavioural therapists allude to a variety of schemata and possible selves (Dryden & Golden, 1986; Markus & Nurius, 1987; Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003). Although these different theories vary with regard to the theorised source of inner entities (the natural state of the mind, the collective unconscious, learning, introjection, trauma), some assert that the internal entities, rather than being states of mind, are actually distinct personalities, each one having different ages, temperaments, talents and genders (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). These inner entities have a large degree of autonomy in that they think, say and feel things independently of the person within whom they exist. This is the view held by dissociative identity disorder (DID) theorists. They recognise their patients' multiplicity, but believe that early abuse and trauma forced the individual's personality to split into many different personalities (Bliss, 1986; Kluft, 1985; Nijenhuis, Van der Hart, & Steele, 2002; Putnam, 1989). The descriptions of archetypes and complexes of Jungian theorists resemble autonomous multiplicity in many ways, as does a Jungian derivative called voice dialogue (Stone & Winkelman, 1985). Similarly, ego state therapy (Watkins, 1978; Watkins & Johnson, 1982; Watkins & Watkins, 1979), psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1975) and Internal Family Systems Therapy (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a) endorse the view of inner entities as autonomous personalities, thus subscribing to full-personality multiplicity.

The notion of multiplicity has attracted attention beyond the realm of therapeutic psychology. The postmodernist movement, for example, rejected the idea of a unitary self and not only celebrated the virtues of a self that contains a multitude of different personalities, but also advocated a pluralistic view of society (Schwartz, 1995). Even in the fields of artificial intelligence, computer science and psychoneurology, there have been shifts towards a pluralistic view of the mind. The studies on right and left hemisphere functioning of the renowned brain researcher, Michael Gazzaniga (1985) revolutionised previously-held ideas about the thinking process. He took the notion of multiplicity even further in his book *The Social Brain* (Gazzaniga, 1985), by positing that the human mind consists of an unspecified number of independently functioning units called modules, each of which has a specific role. According to Gazzaniga (1985), it is the relationship amongst these modules that shapes the

emotional and cognitive lives of people. This view correlates strongly with the conception of parts proposed by the Internal Family Systems model. In computer science, the Von Neumann (1966) model represented the original conception of the mind used by computer scientists. According to this model, information was thought to be stored in one area and processed in another in a serial manner. The move to a multiplicity-based comparison for the mind allowed researchers to develop parallel processing computers in which a multitude of processors can work side by side, functioning in a way that approximates human intelligence more closely than the initial serial computers (Wright, 1986). Marvin Minsky (1986), one of the pioneers of artificial intelligence, wrote the following:

For finding good ideas about psychology, the single-agent image has become a grave impediment. To comprehend the human mind is surely one of the hardest tasks any mind can face. The legend of the single Self can only divert us from the target of that inquiry. (p. 51) ... All this suggests that it can make sense to think there exists, inside our brain, a society of different minds. Like members of a family, the different minds can work together to help each other, each still having its own mental experiences that the others never knew about. (p. 290)

The notion of multiplicity has far-reaching implications within psychology and psychotherapy because it allows for a transformation in the way human beings are understood (Schwartz, 1987, 1995, 2001). If people are naturally multiple, then the possibility exists that their extreme thoughts and feelings are the results of extremes within small parts of their minds, rather than evidence of pathology at their core (Schwartz, 1987, 1995, 2013a). This view thus allows for a different, more positive interpretation of medical or psychiatric symptoms. A multiplicity-oriented therapist will thus see clusters of psychiatric symptoms as manifestations of the way in which a person's system of inner personalities has been organised to ensure survival (Schwartz, 1995, 2011). Helping the person to explore his or her system of inner parts can thus facilitate an understanding of the parts that are distressed and the reason behind that distress (Schwartz, 1995, 2011, 2013a).

The Internal Family Systems model developed from the conception of the human mind that can be understood and changed using systems thinking (Hsieh, 2015; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009a, 2009b). From this perspective, the mind becomes a human system at one level, rooted within human systems at many other levels (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). The application of systems thinking to internal systems not only facilitated an understanding of how various external system levels affect and are affected by the mind, it also enhanced the development of techniques to help people change intrapsychically (Schwarz, 1995, 2001, 2017).

4.3.3.2 *Systems Thinking*

Systems theory is based on the premise that individuals are connected to one another in such a way that changes to one individual affect the entire network of relations within the system and vice versa (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). Schwartz (1995) developed the IFS model in an attempt to integrate systems thinking with an individual's intrapsychic processes and the larger political and cultural issues that impact on these processes (Breunlin, Schwartz & Mac Kune-Karrer, 2001; Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). According to the IFS model, the human mind is made up of a multitude of different parts which relate to one another according to the same systemic principles that groups of individuals do (Breunlin et al., 2001). Schwartz (1995, p. 17) maintained that the human "system" is an entity whose parts relate to one another in a pattern and which includes one's personality and belief systems. It is composed of subsystems (smaller systems) but is also part of larger systems and, when analysed, becomes the system-of-focus, a subsystem of the system-of-focus, or the larger system containing the system-of-focus, depending on the analyst's point of view (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). A collection of parts does not constitute a system. Only when the parts are assembled in a certain way so that they can relate to one another, do they assume a structure that creates a certain system. Bateson (1972, 1979) suggested that the interactions within an individual's system be viewed in terms of patterns which connect to one another. The system becomes cybernetic when it can regulate itself by being sensitive to, and changing, according to feedback from the environment. The feedback can be positive or negative and allows the system to maintain homeostasis or change (Schwartz, 1995). A system also has boundaries to facilitate identification of its parts. Every system can be "embedded" in a larger system, which it influences and is influenced by, and which determines the degree of constraint on the interrelated systems (Schwartz, 1995, p. 1). The terms and principles that are used in systems thinking were borrowed from the study of mechanical or biological systems to try to understand families in family therapy (Schwartz, 1987, 1988a, 1988b). For example, in systems thinking terms, people can be said to be organised to maintain different degrees of homeostasis in a variety of areas, from proximity to some people to levels of conflict with others. Furthermore, people contain a multitude of cybernetic subsystems, from those regulating blood pressure to those regulating the expression of emotion (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). An individual's actions and reactions cause specific actions and reactions by other individuals within the system (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). However, IFS maintains that, since people are not merely reactors to environmental feedback, the cybernetic principles are not sufficient to fully explain

human functioning (Schwartz, 1988, 1995, 2001, 2009). Through the interrelatedness and connectedness of individuals within the same system, the different parts of that system combine to create a whole that is far greater than the sum of its individual parts (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). At the core of the IFS model is the premise that people have an innate drive toward and wisdom about their own personal health. They thus not only try to maintain homeostasis and react to feedback, but also strive towards creativity and intimacy, and come fully equipped to lead harmonious internal and external lives (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009, 2011, 2013a). The assumption that follows from this basic premise is that chronic problems in individuals are the result of inadequately accessed inner resources and wisdom due to constraints imposed by elements in the system (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). The system of a healthy person, according to Schwartz (1995), contains parts which show understanding and acceptance of one another, and which allow one another to perform their specialised and unique roles when required. The goal of IFS therapy is to help people discover and release their constrained parts by encouraging communication, understanding and acceptance within the system so that parts will not feel the need to behave in extreme ways (Davis & Piercy, 2007; Schwartz, 1988, 1995, 2001, 2009). Constraints may exist in a person's system of inner personalities; in the person's relationship with certain family members; in the way the family is organised; in the way the family is affected by outside institutions (e.g., school, work or a mental health system); and in the way the family's values and beliefs are affected by the person's ethnic community and society beyond that community (Schwartz, 1988, 1995). According to systems thinking, all the levels of human systems are interlocked, and they affect and are affected by one another. Understanding and assessing these levels is facilitated by the fact that the levels operate according to the premise that an individual's internal and external systems strive for balance, harmony, leadership and development (Breunlin et al., 2001; Schwartz, 1988, 1995).

4.3.3.3 *Mindfulness-Based Therapy*

The first principle in Buddhist philosophy is that suffering (*dukkha* in Sanskrit) is an inevitable part of life (Gunaratana, 1993; Hahn, 1998; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Whilst some forms of suffering, like change, loss, illness and death, are inherent to our human condition, other forms are self-inflicted as a result of our attachment to things, people and ideas (Gehart, 2012; Gehart & McCollum, 2007). Buddhist philosophy advocates that compassionate engagement with suffering, rather than avoidance of it, allows for a more meaningful and enlightening experience of suffering (Gehart & McCollum, 2007).

The second principle in Buddhist philosophy is that our attachment to objects, ideas, people and constructs, especially self-constructs, is the most common cause of human suffering (Gunaratana, 1993; Hahn, 1998; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). It must be pointed out that the Buddhist concept of attachment refers to the problematic overinvestment of one's psychic energy in a particular relationship, experience or phenomenon (Gehart & McCollum, 2007). Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1973), on the other hand, uses this term to explain interpersonal dynamics.

The third principle in Buddhist philosophy stems from the second principle. It postulates that suffering can be reduced and even stopped through the reduction of one's stubborn attachment to how life *should* be (Gunaratana, 1993; Hahn, 1998; Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Although suffering is an inevitable part of life and can thus never be completely eliminated, the fourth Buddhist principle advocates that it can be overcome by cultivating morality, wisdom and concentration (Gunaratana, 1993; Hahn, 1998; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Mindfulness (*Smirti* in Sanskrit) is the most well-known Buddhist technique for cultivating the qualities believed to relieve suffering (Gehart, 2012). Mindfulness is the non-attached, non-judgemental, yet fully engaged awareness of external or internal phenomena in the present moment (Gehart, 2012; Gehart & McCollum, 2007; Hahn, 1998; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It involves paying attention to experiences without interpreting or evaluating them emotionally or cognitively, and as such requires non-attachment to experiences (Gehart, 2012; Gehart & McCollum, 2007). Buddhist philosophy differentiates between non-attachment and detachment. Whilst detachment suggests disconnection or distance, non-attachment refers to the patient, non-emotional, yet fully-engaged witnessing of experience without judgement (Gehart, 2012; Gehart & McCollum, 2007). Bateman and Fonagy (2004) referred to the individual's ability to step away from emotions in order to gain perspective as *mentalising*, whilst Fonagy (1996) referred to it as *meta-cognition*. Irrespective of the term that is used, mindfulness has been recognised as a highly beneficial practice and is taught in many modalities of western psychotherapy (Schwartz, 2013b).

In essence, mindfulness is a vehicle which enhances the acquisition of compassion since it shifts an individual's relationship to the experience of suffering and ameliorates one's acceptance of life as it is (Gehart & McCollum, 2007). The benefits of mindfulness extend far beyond mere acceptance and include a reduction in avoidance and the clarification of values (Kocovski, Fleming, & Rector, 2009), an enhanced sense of freedom and security in relationships, as well as increased acceptance both of oneself and one's partner (Pruitt & McCollum, 2010), and reduced emotional reactivity in interpersonal relationships, thereby ensuring positive communication (Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Although mindfulness has a very

long and extensive history in numerous wisdom traditions and Eastern philosophy spiritual practices (Goldstein & Kornfield, 1987; Kabat-Zinn, 1994), it is being used increasingly in western methods of learning, living and working (Langer, 1989, 1997), and as a therapeutic tool for treating general and mental health problems in different population groups (Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Singh, 2001). The work conducted by early family therapists (e.g., Watzlawick et al., 1974), is comparable to mindfulness in that the shifting of a family's conceptual or epistemological frame, automatically changes the interpretation of problem situations (Gehart & McCollum, 2007).

One of the concepts underlying the IFS model of Schwartz (1995, 2001) is the concept of a mindful, compassionate Self that is capable of observation and acceptance without evaluation or judgement. The Self described by Schwartz (1995, 2001) has the ability to create a mental space between mindful awareness and the often confusing noise of emotions, needs and voices generated by the parts of an individual's inner family. Beyond the traditional models discussed in the literature of mindfulness (e.g., Gunaratana, 1993; Hahn, 1998; Kabat-Zinn, 1990; Segal, Williams, & Teasdale, 2002), the Self described by Schwartz (1995, 2001) not only practices observation and acceptance of the inner family, it also listens to and patiently guides the different parts towards a balanced, resilient, harmonious and ever-evolving system (Schwartz, 2013a). This allows the individual to experience a broader, less judgmental perspective of internalised problems and intrapsychic conflicts (Green, 2008; Schwartz, 2013a). In IFS therapy, client and therapist work collaboratively to separate parts so that the story of each part can be better understood (Green, 2008). Through the practice of mindfulness, clients are led to experience the different family parts with feelings of understanding, openness, compassion and acceptance (Green, 2008; Lucero et al., 2017).

According to the IFS model, the Self exhibits qualities of leadership which include mindfulness, compassion and loving kindness (Schwartz, 2013a). Consequently, the Self is also commonly referred to as Self-leadership and is characterised by what Schwartz (2013, p. 4) referred to as the "8 Cs": curiosity, compassion, confidence, courage, creativity, clarity, connectedness and calm. In IFS therapy, the role of the therapist is to help clients to achieve Self-leadership (Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). The IFS therapist does this by differentiating the different parts of the client through his/her own Self-leadership (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). This requires the establishment of what Schwartz (2013, p. 4) called the "5 Ps" of the Self-led therapist, namely: presence, patience, perspective, playfulness and persistence. Through Self-leadership, the therapist can calmly and confidently assist clients to identify extreme parts and to organise them so that they can co-exist harmoniously. The goal of IFS therapy is thus to

enable clients to gain harmony and balance amongst their different parts (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995). The importance of harmony and balance as acquired through the process of mindfulness, is discussed in the subsequent section.

4.4 Schwartz's Principles and Concepts for Understanding Internal Family Systems

4.4.1. Balance

According to Schwartz (1995), there are four dimensions in which balance is crucial to a system's health. These include the degree of influence that a person or group has on the system's decision-making; the degree of access that a person or group has to a system's resources; the level of responsibility that a person or group has within the system; and the degree to which the system's boundaries are balanced (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). In a balanced system, the boundaries are neither too rigid nor too diffuse, and they allow for influence and access to resources and responsibilities based on the needs and roles of those participating in the different subsystems (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Miller, Cardona and Hardin (2007) found that when clients distantiate themselves and their parts from their symptoms, they become less concerned about removing the symptoms and focus instead on finding optimal balance between parts.

4.4.2. Harmony

In IFS, the term *harmony* applies to the relationships amongst members in the system (Schwartz, 1995). In harmonious systems, the participating members work co-operatively towards a common vision, they assign roles based on what members desire and are best suited for, they care about one another's well-being, and they are sensitive and responsive to information communicated amongst members within the system (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). A system which is not harmonious is polarized and results in constrained systems (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995). In polarized relationships, members shift from flexible, harmonious positions to rigid, extreme or competitive positions (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2009). Mindfulness, in IFS therapy, plays an important role in establishing harmony within a system, since it allows for the acknowledgement of needs of the different parts of the system and promotes harmony between them (Schwartz, 2004).

4.4.3. Leadership

Human systems can only be balanced and harmonious if there is effective leadership within the system (Breunlin et al., 2001; Schwartz, 1995). For this to happen, one or more members of the system must mediate polarizations; facilitate the communication of information amongst members; ensure that all members are protected and cared for, and that they feel valued and supported in the pursuit of their individual ideals within the boundary of the system's needs; designate resources and responsibilities; furnish the whole system with a broad vision; represent the system as it interacts with other systems; and interpret feedback from other systems truthfully (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2009). Developing the ability to embody the qualities of Self-leadership is the most significant concept in the IFS model (Lucero et al., 2017; Schwartz, Schwartz. & Galperin., 2009).

4.4.4. Development

Human systems need time to develop the skills and relationships necessary to implement balanced and harmonious functioning (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). The goal of IFS is to help clients obtain balance and harmony between all parts of their internal family system (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995). True to systems thinking, this development will be affected by the system's environment (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). If the system-of-focus exists within a harmonious, balanced larger system, then it will have the environmental conditions needed to become harmonious and balanced (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Alternatively, if it is embedded within a polarized, unbalanced larger system, its ability to use the resources required for healthy development will be constrained (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1994). The accumulation of burdens will also result in constraints for a developing system. For example, trauma, before a system has fully developed, throws it out of balance, often freezing or fixating members of the system at the point in time that the trauma took place. The extreme emotions of these members constrain the system even further, forcing other members into hyperprotective roles (Schwartz et al., 2009). The IFS model is a constraint-releasing approach that seeks to identify and release aspects that may be constraining the system's resources, whether those constraints be imbalances, polarizations, leadership problems or burdened development (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009).

4.4.5 Parts

The multiplicity view maintains that each individual has many minds (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). This view contrasts drastically from our monolithic perception of people, but has the

advantage of moving away from diagnostic categories which reduce personalities to single-word descriptions (Schwartz, 1999a, 2013). When we describe people simply as *needy* or *aggressive*, we are essentially devaluing them and being oblivious to the fascinating complexity of the multiple aspects that constitute personality (Schwartz, 2013a). The question arises as to what these multiple *minds* or *aspects* should be called. Schwartz (1995) argued that one's choice of terminology depends on the model which one decides to use. They have been termed subpersonalities, subselves, internal characters, archetypes, complexes, internal objects, ego states, or voices, depending on the theoretical orientation adopted by the therapist (see section 4.3.1). Schwartz used the term *parts* in his IFS model, but cautioned that the key to choosing the right term resides in the client. Irrespective of the label adopted in formulating theories, the term used clinically should ideally be the one with which a client is most comfortable (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009).

Parts exist from birth and assume a distinctive character as an individual passes through significant points in life (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995). Schwartz (1995, p. 34) described a part as a “discrete and autonomous mental system that has an idiosyncratic range of emotion, style of expressions, set of abilities, desires, and view of the world”. Based on this description, an individual's personality can be said to contain a family of different members, each of whom has different interests, talents, temperaments and even ages (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Although Schwartz (1995, 2001) made use of single-word labels to refer to individual parts, he preferred to conceive of a part as if it were a person who has been forced into a particular role. This allows one to view the part as having many feelings and abilities not necessarily captured by a simplistic label. The analogy to a family allows one to view the parts as people who need to be helped to discover their preferred, more beneficial roles. Only when they are released from the roles that their family dynamics have forced them into, can they discover what they are really like (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013).

According to the IFS approach, each part of the internal family system has immense value and good intentions (Schwartz & Sparks, 2014). When the different parts or inner-family members relate harmoniously to one another, the person will feel as though his or her mind is unitary because all the individual members are in sync and working together to create a harmonious, balanced unity (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a, 2017). Conversely, when the inner-family is imbalanced or suffers trauma, the system tends to polarize (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995). In a polarized system, members of the system are forced to leave their preferred, familiar roles and take on roles that either compete with or are fighting those of other members (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2017). In such a case, each member of the polarization defends

his or her role to protect the vulnerable system from damage. This results in a fragmented system of antagonistic parts (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2001).

Although many models of psychotherapy that subscribe to the multiplicity approach contain similarities to one another and to the IFS model, there are important differences. According to Schwartz (1995, 2013a), the first difference is that in the IFS model, the focus is not just on one's individual parts, but also on the network of relationships amongst those parts. Secondly, the IFS model emphasises the connection between *external* systems (e.g., family, culture and society) and internal systems, using the same concepts and techniques at both levels (Goff & Smith, 2005; Schwartz, 1995). Lastly, the IFS model differs in its assumptions about the qualities and role of what is called the Self (Schwartz, 1995). The next section attempts to give a more detailed description of this core component known as the Self.

4.4.6 The Self

Schwartz (1995) and Beahrs (1982) used the metaphor of an orchestra to explain the relationship between parts and the Self. In this orchestra, the musicians are the parts, and the conductor is the Self. Schwartz (1987) described this metaphor as follows:

A good conductor has a sense of the value of each instrument and the ability of every musician, and is so familiar with music theory that he or she can sense precisely the best point in a symphony to draw out one section and mute another. Indeed it is often as important for a musician to be able to silence his or her instrument at the right time as it is to play the melody skillfully. Each musician, while wanting to spotlight his or her own talent or have the piece played in a way that emphasizes his or her section, has enough respect for the conductor's judgement that he or she remains in the role of following the conductor yet playing as well as possible. This kind of a system is (literally) harmonious.

If, however, the conductor favors the strings and always emphasizes them over the brass, or if the conductor cannot keep the meta-perspective of how the symphony as a whole should sound, or if he or she abdicates and stops conducting altogether, the symphony will become cacophonous. Further, if one of the musicians, lacking the abilities or perspective of a real conductor, tries to take over the conducting, the result would be more incoherence and confusion. (p. 31)

This metaphor allows one to conceptualise the different properties of the Self. Apart from the fact that the Self operates from the core of an individual, which is the seat of consciousness, it also contains everything it requires to be a good leader, including compassion, clarity of perspective, confidence, courage, curiosity, calmness, connectedness and creativity (Schwartz, 1987, 1995). Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013a, 2013b) referred to these qualities as the eight Cs of the Self and maintained that an individual exhibits these qualities when the Self is fully differentiated. In this state, the individual feels confident, free, open-hearted and centred and

experiences a calm state of well-being and connectedness with the universe, similar to the state experienced during meditation (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a, 2013b). Schwartz (2001) summed up this transcendental state by describing the Self as follows: “The idea that at your essence you are pure joy and peace, and from that place you manifest clusters of wonderful leadership and healing qualities and sense a spiritual connectedness” (p. 25). This description correlates in many ways with that of Jung (1953) who described the self archetype in the following way: “The self is not only the centre, but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of consciousness” (p. 41). Jung (1953), however, regarded the Self as being in a passive, observing state. Although the IFS model also describes the Self as “the center of the person, the place from which one observes” (Holmes, 1994, p. 27), Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013) asserted that the Self is anything but passive: The Self is thus not only a passive witness to one’s life; it is also an active leader, both internally and externally.

Given the important role that the Self plays, it is understandable that a person will go to great lengths to protect it. In fact, Schwartz (1995, 2013a, 2013b) maintained that a person is organised to protect the Self, no matter what it costs the system. Consequently, in the face of intensely negative emotions and trauma, the parts dissociate and separate the Self from their negative body sensations (Anderson & Sweezy, 2017). In extreme cases of pain or fear, people report feeling as though their Self is actually removed completely out of their body to protect it from harm (Anderson, 2013). This would explain the out-of-body experiences that some people report after traumatic incidents. In some trauma survivors, the Self is not only taken out of the body, but is actually moved to a safe place where it cannot observe and thus remains oblivious to the trauma experienced (Anderson, 2013; Anderson & Sweezy, 2017). Unfortunately, when such negative experiences force a person’s parts into a position of having to protect the Self, they lose faith in the Self’s ability to lead and increasingly believe that they have to take over leadership (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). The Self’s resources then become obscured by the various extremes of the parts trying to protect it (Schwartz, 1995, 2009). A major tenet of the IFS model is that the Self has all the necessary qualities for effective leadership (Schwartz, 1995, 2009a, 2009b, 2013). The Self is thus never seen as being defective, immature or inadequate. When the Self is not functioning effectively, the assumption is that it is constrained by parts that are afraid to differentiate fully from it (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). A principal goal of IFS therapy is thus to help clients differentiate the Self to the point that the parts can trust it again so that it can regain its leadership status (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). IFS refers to this process as unblending (Anderson,

2013; Engler, 2013; Herbine-Blank, 2013; Krause, 2013; Krause, Rosenberg, & Sweezy, 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013a; Sowell, 2013; Twombly, 2013). This not only allows the Self to harmonise the inner system, it also decreases the feeling of difference or isolation and enables the person to reconnect the different parts and to connect with other people (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2011). The Self is an active, non-coercive, collaborative leader who observes, experiences and interacts with the different subpersonalities and with other people, and has the vision to lead both internal and external life harmoniously and sensitively so that the person can feel more unified, with a sense of continuity and integration which allows for Self-leadership (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Schwartz (1995) wrote:

The Self comes fully equipped to lead and does not have to develop through stages or be borrowed from or strengthened by the therapist. It is also not merely in a passive observer or witness state; instead, once differentiated from the parts, it becomes an active, compassionate and collaborative leader. When the Self is differentiated from the parts (i.e., has separated from their feelings and thoughts), regains their trust, and returns to the body, then Self-leadership is restored. (p. 58)

4.4.7 Polarization

According to Schwartz (1995), polarization occurs when a system is imbalanced. This results in members of the system being forced to leave their preferred roles and taking on roles that compete with or are opposed to those of other members. When polarization occurs, parts become antagonistic as each member of the polarization clings rigidly to his or her position, fearing that the system will be damaged if that rigidly held position is relinquished (Watzlawick et al., 1974).

Schwartz (1995) conceptualized polarization by extending the following nautical metaphor proposed by Watzlawick et al. (1974):

two sailors hanging out of either side of a sailboat in order to steady it: the more one leans overboard, the more the other has to compensate for the instability created by the other's attempts at stabilizing the boat, while the boat itself would be quite steady if not for their acrobatic efforts at steadying it. (p. 36)

Based on the principles of systemic thinking, the boat constitutes an imbalanced system which has forced the sailors to leave their preferred roles and assume rigidly limiting positions that are destructive to the well-being of the boat and place it in jeopardy of capsizing. Ironically, each sailor dislikes his or her new position, but believes it is in the best interests of the system to hold on to this extremity, fearing the consequences of unilaterally leaving that extreme position. Although both sailors would like the system to return to a harmonious and balanced state, the reality is that each is forced to remain extreme in proportion to the extremes

of the other, because failure to move in relation to the movements of the other *would* cause the boat to tip over. The only solution would be for both sailors to move in at the same time. This, however, cannot happen as long as there is mistrust between them. According to Schwartz (1995), this problem could effectively be solved by the inclusion of a third party that both sailors trust. This third party, metaphorically and appropriately depicted as a trusted Captain, could encourage both sailors to move in simultaneously, thereby releasing them from the strain and constraint of polarization. The original, valuable roles of both sailors would thus be restored, allowing them to move freely about the boat, safe in the knowledge that the trusted Captain is steering a safe and mutually beneficial course.

The metaphor of the sailboat effectively demonstrates the relevance and importance of a systemic perspective in IFS therapy. Parts cannot and will not change unilaterally. Only when parts are viewed within the context of the system in which they are embedded, can change be effected, thus allowing the system to return to a state of balance and harmony. According to Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013), balance and harmony are intricately linked goals of IFS therapy, making it impossible for one to be achieved without the other. Systems thinking also helps to explain the ubiquitous positive feedback loop or vicious cycle (Schwartz, 1995) that is so typical of polarizations. The greater the imbalance in a system, the more rigidly each part defends its extreme position, resulting in a vicious cycle that keeps parts deadlocked. Furthermore, polarizations tend to be self-confirming, so that even small differences escalate and quickly throw the system into imbalance (Schwartz, 1995, 2011). Each side of the polarization will be convinced that the other side's beliefs, emotions or impulses are dangerous; and both sides will be afraid of the consequences to the larger system or to themselves if the other side takes over (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). Polarized parts will thus constantly fight for influence, and as one part becomes more extreme in one direction, the other part will counter in the opposite direction (Schwartz, 2013a). A systemic perspective facilitates depolarization as the interrelationship between parts is taken into account, giving each part the vision to see that its assumptions about other parts may be false. These parts will, however, not remain depolarized and harmonious for long unless the imbalances that have caused polarization are also changed (Schwartz, 1995).

The sailboat metaphor is also effective in that it highlights the fact that balance and harmony in the "crew" (parts on board) cannot be attained unless there is effective leadership in the form of the third party, namely the trusted Captain, who can help the different sides see that they have mutual interests and distorted images of each other (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). In IFS, the client's Self plays the role of the trusting Captain by interviewing each side from a place of

pure curiosity, without hidden agendas, whilst the other side watches. As is the case in external human systems, when this happens both sides begin to relax, allowing for the realisation that they are both attempting to protect the system, but in opposite ways (Schwartz, 2013a). This realisation not only depolarizes the parts so that they can meet each other half way, so to speak, and relinquish their battle for the person's soul (Schwartz, 1995); it also makes the parts more accepting of each other which, in turn, can lead to the transformation of those parts and of other people (Schwartz, 2013a). This notion of acceptance, particularly self-acceptance, has been a long-held key to psychological health and well-being in the field of psychology. As far back as 1961, Carl Rogers posited the following aphorism: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change" (p. 66).

In contrast to many models that make reference to a Self, in IFS, the core Self is not seen as an introject (Cohen & Johanson, 2003). Rather, the Self is seen as our basic, pure human nature that we possess from birth (Mones & Schwartz, 2007). This belief, that beneath the surface of their parts, all clients have an undamaged, healing Self, is a hallmark of IFS (Schwartz, 2013b). This is undoubtedly one of the most appealing features of IFS – the fact that everyone already has a capable, trusted boat Captain in the Self (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). The Self is fully equipped to lead once it has differentiated from its parts, and it is capable of standing *meta* to the parts and leading with compassion, confidence and vision (Davis & Piercy, 2007). By achieving Self-leadership, a person is capable of depolarizing internal relationships so that parts are free to find and adopt their preferred, valuable roles (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a, 2013b).

To summarize, a person's internal relations are shaped by the values and interaction patterns within his or her family of origin. The person will at times give more resources, influence and responsibility to some parts than to others. This causes an imbalance which triggers polarizations that can severely stress or paralyze a person's internal system (Krause et al., 2017; Rosenberg, 2013). Schwartz (1995) warned that when an individual's internal family system loses balance, the protector parts try to find safety in the opposite direction in an attempt to balance the burdened system. Although all systems have polarizations, they differ with regard to the intensity of their polarizations (Rosenberg, 2013). There are a number of reasons for parts being locked in roles of extreme intensity. They may be polarized with other parts, they may be trying to protect other parts, or they may be frozen in time (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). There is, however, another very important reason for parts being forced into extreme roles. This will be discussed in the next section.

4.4.8 Burdens

The parts within a person's internal family system often take on extreme beliefs, emotions and behaviours derived from extreme events or interactions with others in a person's life, and carry these like transferred burdens (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). These burdens contain all the terrible traumas and betrayals that the person suffered as a child (Schwartz, 2013a). A premise of the IFS model is that parts acquire burdens as a result of attachment disruptions which range from mild traumas to neglect, sexual and physical abuse, and more extreme forms of interpersonal trauma (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 2013a). Barbieri (2008) defined trauma as the inability to fight or escape from overwhelming circumstances, leading to a dissociation of the mind. Research has shown that extreme cases of trauma, such as childhood neglect, parents suffering from attachment disorders and abandonment, can result in Dissociative Disorders (DDs) and even borderline personality disorder (Lyons-Ruth, 2003). In terms of the IFS model, individuals who show symptoms of dissociation have exiles who carry burdens of extreme beliefs and emotions, as well as managers and firefighters who are either easily overwhelmed or rigidly controlling (Twombly, 2013). These burdens can severely disrupt the leadership, balance and harmony of the internal family system, forcing parts into extreme roles, with each part fearing that submission could result in damage to the system (Krause, 2013; Watzlawick et al., 1974). The principal task of IFS therapy is thus to work with these burdened parts in such a way that the person's undamaged core Self can emerge and deep emotional healing can take place (Schwartz, 2013a). The basic premise is that if each part, even the most damaged and negative, is given the chance to reveal the origin of its burdens, then it can reveal itself in its original, valuable state, before it became so destructive in the person's life (Schwartz, 2013a). In therapeutic context, this entails the client's Self experiencing the emotional pain that caused the burden, whilst the client and therapist bear witness to the experience (Mones & Schwartz, 2007). Although there is inevitably an imbalance of power in the relationship between the client and therapist, the client's Self and the therapist's Self work collaboratively and, under Self leadership, the client's Self is guided to bring healing to parts that need to be healed and transformed (Breunlin, Schwartz & Mac Kune-Karrer, 1992; Davis, 2008; Schwartz, 1995). According to Davis (2008), this process of power sharing is an example of "power with" rather than "power over", and allows for recognition and respect to be given to all parts, even the most destructive ones (p. 676). Parts are requested to step back and to give permission for the client's Self to work with other parts, whilst burdened parts are given a chance to express their emotional pain (Davis, 2008). According to Mones and Schwartz (2007), clients often choose to create a ritual through which to release and unburden deeply

held emotional pain. This is consistent with Garfield (1992) who viewed therapeutic rituals connected to reattribution as a meta-level process common to all therapy models.

Young children are particularly susceptible to absorbing transferred burdens and are highly dependent on their parents for approval and appraisals which shape their self-esteem (Schwartz, 1995). According to Schwartz (1995), parents whose internal family systems are severely polarized tend to be led by their parts. Parts-led parenting invariably creates burdens, which not only polarize the system, but also obstruct the emergence of the child's Self, thereby preventing the clarity of insight required for the establishment of a clear identity (Neustadt, 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). Some of the child's parts may take on qualities of the person who stole his or her self-esteem and sense of safety, and can become so desperate to win the approval of that person, that they end up imitating him or her in an effort to feel more acceptable (Schwartz, 1995). Rogers (1951) defined this type of parenting as being based on conditional love and acceptance. Berne (1961) referred to a similar occurrence in transactional analysis when he described the controlling or critical parent. In IFS, these inner critics or moralizers carry the burden of perfectionism, believing that if they can make the child perfect, he or she will finally be redeemed (Schwartz, 1995). Similarly, parts can also take on other burdens. According to Schwartz (1995, 2001), commonly transferred burdens include having to protect other family members; having to attain a high level of success; and believing that one will never succeed or that the world is a very dangerous place. Not only is it common for any extreme part of a parent or authority figure to be imitated by the approval-craving parts of a child; it is also quite common to see the same burden being passed down from generation to generation in families – an aspect of the IFS model that has been likened to “introjection” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 53). It is important to note that, whereas the core Self is not viewed as an introject in IFS (Cohen & Johanson, 2003), a burden is seen as an introject. This implies that it can be lifted from the part which it burdens, thereby freeing the part to pursue its preferred, constructive role (Schwartz, 1995). Burdens which are passed down from generation to generation in families are referred to as legacy burdens (Sinko, 2017). Legacy burdens develop either directly through the interactions between parent and child, or indirectly through the emotional process of a family (Sinko, 2017). Either way, they exert a powerful influence both within and between family members and they govern everything, from how individuals eat to how they react to death (McGoldrick, 1982; Sinko, 2017). From an IFS perspective, when a family is polarized and lacks the curative, balancing effect that emanates from compassionate leadership, children simply internalise burdens so that they can survive (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a; Sinko, 2017). When physical or psychic pressures outweigh resources, the adaptation

techniques of the system's protectors become more extreme, resulting in families (and family members) becoming more polarized with each generation (Hellinger, 2011; Sinko, 2017).

According to Schwartz (2013a), one of life's great injustices is that so many people who were traumatised as children continue to be reinjured throughout their lives because the original hurt has left them raw and reactive. This is aggravated by the fact that for all people, to some degree, the healing energy of the Self is blocked as a result of traumatic emotional experiences, imperfect care-taking and existential anxiety (Becker, 1973). As a result, people carry sadness, fear, shame and emotional pain that is not fully metabolised because they were too young and too poorly equipped to process it, and because parents were not fully available and not fully capable to help them through these traumas due to their own constraints on Self energy (Mones & Schwartz, 2007).

The appeal of the IFS model lies not only in that it places great emphasis on the process of unburdening the remnants of trauma held by exiled parts (Mones & Schwartz, 2007), but also in that it celebrates the self-healing attributes of the Self which, through self-efficacy and self-acceptance, can transform a person's terror, pain and feelings of worthlessness and lead to a deep sense of personal empowerment (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 2011, 2013a).

4.5 The Three-Group System of the Internal Family Systems Model

According to the IFS model (Schwartz, 1995), the different parts of human systems are organised into three distinct groups that are common to all individuals and that respond to the threats which cause polarizations in distinct ways. One group tends to be highly protective, strategic and interested in controlling the day-to-day functions of the individual so as to ensure safety. The members of this group are called the *managers*. Another group contains the most sensitive parts of the system, known as *exiles*. As the name suggests, the exiles are isolated from the system in an effort to protect and insulate the individual from the memory of extremely negative and painful emotions of past traumatic experiences (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Managers try to imprison the exiles from consciousness and avoid situations that might trigger their escape. When the exiles do manage to escape to consciousness, a third group, known as the *firefighters*, comes to the fore. Firefighters react powerfully and automatically when an exiled part is activated. As their name suggests, they will resort to any technique that they deem necessary to extinguish the emotional flames that might cause pain to the individual (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). According to Schwartz (1995), in many internal systems polarizations exist not only amongst the three groups, but also within them. The next section elaborates on each of these three groups.

4.5.1 Exiles

The tendency of Western culture to regard the expression of emotional pain as a sign of weakness, has led to the belief that painful events must be forgotten as soon as possible and painful parts must be blocked from awareness (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Since the expression of emotional pain is often met with impatience, denial, criticism, revulsion or distraction, even more injury is added to the already injured inner-child parts (Schwartz, 1995). The hurt child then not only becomes an imprisoned exile, but also has to deal with the burden of added rejection and abandonment for feeling hurt, and the ensuing feelings of unlovability, shame or guilt (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014). According to the IFS model, the more intense the emotional anguish of exiles, the harsher the efforts of protectors (managers and firefighters) to ensure that exiled pain is kept at bay (Mones, 2003; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). According to Sweezy (2013), the pain of feeling excluded, unacceptable and alone is typical of shame and can be so poisonous to an individual's current functioning, that the parts who experience it are frequently ostracised and left in the past, with the management of these parts becoming a systemic endeavour that can last for life. The action tendency urges of shame manifest in withdrawal, hiding and avoidance behaviours such as addiction, anxiety, depression, dissociation, psychic numbing and insensitivity to physical and emotional pain (Dearing & Tangney, 2011; Herbine-Blank, 2013; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007). Self-attack behaviours include cutting, risk-taking and even suicide, as well as chronic self-loathing and self-criticism (Sweezy, 2013). Behaviours associated with attacking others include having a threatening attitude and tone of voice, being contemptuous, entitled, dismissive, enraged or disgusted, and even resorting to physical abuse (Gilligan, 1997). Shame and guilt emerge when an internal audience gives a mental thumbs down to an individual's Self (Sweezy, 2013). In the case of guilt, the judgment is directed at behaviour (e.g., I did something wrong), whilst in the case of shame, the judgment is global (e.g. I am a bad person) (Lewis, 1971; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tracy et al., 2007). When an individual believes that he/she is being judged and that his/her personal defects risk being exposed, the emotional, physical and cognitive manifestations of the shame experience reveal themselves in feelings of queasiness, heaviness, shrunkenness foolishness, stupidity, unwantedness, unlovability, aloneness and worthlessness (Mills, 2005; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tracy et al., 2007).

Other theorists have also made reference to this dissociative state which the IFS model explains through use of the term exiles. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Janet (1911) described dissociation of ego states as a defensive psychological function that takes

place unconsciously so as to reduce anxiety and psychic conflict. Barbieri (2008) defined trauma as the inability to fight or escape from overwhelming circumstances, leading to a dissociation of the mind.

Exiles are desperate to be valued, cared for and loved, and will go to extreme measures to escape from their prisons so that their story may be heard. To this end, they may give a person flashbacks, nightmares or sudden, extreme tastes of pain or fear (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Furthermore, exiles often absorb the painful feelings that other parts do not want to carry, leaving them with unbearable amounts of fragility, vulnerability, rejection, worthlessness, sadness, shame, emptiness, hopelessness and helplessness, which they try to transfer to other parts or to the Self at any opportunity (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). In this desperate, distressed and needy state, exiles can be dangerous. As long as they are locked away in their prison cells and frozen in the past, they are protected from being hurt by events in the present. Releasing them, however, not only overwhelms the person with unpleasant memories and negative feelings, but also makes the person more vulnerable to injury (Schwartz, 1995). In their desperation to be saved, exiles will idealise anyone who offers to help and will regard such a helper as a redeemer (Norman & Schwartz, 2003). This often leads the person into even greater danger. Schwartz (1995) wrote of exiles: “They seek a redeemer who resembles the person who rejected them initially (or even the actual abuser), in order to find the love and protection they believe will heal the pain of rejection and finally make them feel safe” (p. 47). Exiles are prepared to pay any price for love, acceptance, protection or the hope of redemption, even if it means having to endure more degradation and abuse. This would explain the inability of some clients to leave abusive relationships (Green, 2008; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). In light of the fact that exiles threaten the survival of a system, especially when their extreme experience of hopelessness catalyses suicide, it is not surprising that they are intensely feared by managers and firefighters (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). These protective groups exert immense energy to keep the traumatized parts exiled, even if it means avoiding events or people that might trigger them (Schwartz, 1995, 2009).

According to the IFS model, although the different parts of one’s inner family system share common goals such as survival, belonging and safety, they often end up in conflict whilst striving for those goals (Scott, 2017). This conflict results in the establishment of polarities which can severely stress or paralyse a person’s internal system (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Whilst loss is an unavoidable part of life to which individuals adapt by grieving, Scott (2017) differentiated between simple grief and grief made complicated by the traumatic and overwhelming nature of the loss. Chronic grief is estimated to affect 15 percent of individuals

dealing with loss (Kersting, 2004). A number of circumstances have been identified as being responsible for chronic grief. These include: (a) unresolved, significant loss experienced early in life and/or characterised by a dependency on the lost relationship (Lobb et al., 2010); (b) an ambivalent relationship between the mourner and the deceased (Freud, 1917); and (c) relational factors such as lack of support or an attachment style characterised by anxious ambivalence (Wayment & Vierthaler, 2002). According to Wolfelt (1992), complicated grief manifests in a number of ways, including: (a) displaced feelings of sadness or anger towards other individuals and events; (b) somatisation, whereby grief feelings are converted into physiological symptoms; (c) postponement, whereby the entire loss experience is shelved; (d) replacement of the deceased in order to avoid the grieving process; and (e) minimisation in order to downplay the significance of the loss. According to Scott (2017), when an individual is faced with the trauma of loss, it takes time for the internal family system to conceptualise what has occurred, resulting in different parts reacting at different times, depending on when those parts obtain the information. The grieving process usually starts with first responder parts responding to the loss with disbelief, shock, numbness and even denial. First responder parts are usually closely associated with storytelling parts (Scott; 2017). According to the IFS model, the more intense the emotional anguish of exiles, the harsher the efforts of protectors (managers and firefighters) to ensure that exiled pain is kept at bay (Mones, 2003; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). The grief reactions of first responder parts, as described by Scott (2017), are usually followed by the reactions of the grief cluster. This cluster includes the internal family system's sad parts, and their reactions include missing, protesting, longing, regretting, searching and feeling guilty (Scott, 2017). Initially, these highly-emotive parts are kept in obedience until the protectors are sure that their emotional distress does not overwhelm the system. Since these parts are eventually given the opportunity to be heard during the grieving process, Scott (2017) referred to them as neo-exiles. Exiles, on the other hand, are blocked from awareness, and although they persist in trying to escape from their prisons so that their story may be heard, managers and firefighters keep them locked away and frozen in the past to protect them from being hurt in the present (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). According to the IFS model, the grieving process is typically characterised by oscillation between being fully blended with one's grief cluster as one tries to process the loss experience, and the restorative cluster, known for its future-focused, goal-directed action. Stroebe and Schut (2010) indicated that this interplay between planning and grieving ensures episodes of relief at a time which can be excruciatingly painful. Complicated grief usually

involves parts which carry stories of painful, unsupported loss, especially during childhood (Krause, 2013; Scott, 2017).

4.5.2 Managers

According to Schwartz (1995), managers exist in all individuals and their task is to protect the individual from harm by ensuring that the exile's feelings, sensations and memories do not escape into consciousness. Managers are strategic, rational and moralising, and although people may feel restricted and annoyed by them, they also depend on them for guidance and moral judgement (Schwartz, 2001). Behaviours which are often associated with managers include controlling and judging (oneself and others), striving or overachieving, taking care of others, worrying, pleasing or withdrawing from others, denial and passive-pessimism (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Managers strive for internal and interpersonal control so that exiles and their pain are kept at bay (Mones, 2003). They try to control relationships, situations and even a person's environment, in an effort to protect the person from being humiliated, abandoned, rejected, attacked or traumatised in any way (Johnson & Schwartz, 2000). In this way they ensure that the system remains safe and the person is able to function effectively in life (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009).

The constant pressure to maintain internal and external control often over-burdens managers with responsibility, and because they represent the inner self-hating voices that people despise, managers are often resented and left feeling unappreciated (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). They do not enjoy what they do, but are forced into roles which they believe are necessary to protect the individual and the system as a whole (Schwartz, 2001).

Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2009) maintained that different managers apply different strategies to protect the system. Some of these managers are common to all individuals, while others may be unique to a specific individual. The trait/factor approach will be applied to describe the characteristics of the common managerial roles. These will later be used to describe Sylvia Plath's inner-family members by exploring cross-sectional images of Plath's internal family system at certain stages of her life.

4.5.2.1 *The Striver*

According to Schwartz (1995), this type of manager tries to motivate a person by being excessively task-orientated and never being satisfied with a person's performance. Although very intellectual and highly effective at solving problems, this manager is extremely controlling

and critical and may try to motivate a person to strive for career success, power or wealth so that he or she is distracted from exiled feelings that might cause pain (Schwartz, 1995).

The Revised NEO Personality Inventory, developed by Paul Costa, Jr. and Robert McCrae (2010), measures the Big Five personality traits, namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Additionally, the test measures six subordinate facets for each of the five main personality domains. The Conscientiousness domain measures degree of organisation, persistence, control and motivation in goal-directed behaviour. One of its subordinate facets is achievement striving (the tendency to invest all one's energy in pursuit of personal achievement), and this facet bears a striking similarity to the critical, controlling striver described by Schwartz (1995).

4.5.2.2 *The Evaluator*

The evaluating manager is perfectionistic about a person's appearance and behaviour and operates according to the belief that a perfect person who pleases everyone will never be abandoned or hurt (Schwartz, 1995). Like the controlling Striver, this type of manager is extremely critical, but for different reasons. Primarily it has the responsibility of obtaining social approval and is consequently always engaged in monitoring and evaluating a person's popularity, appearance and behaviour, even in relation to others (Schwartz, 2001).

The subordinate facets of the Conscientiousness domain include competence (belief in one's self-efficacy); deliberation (the tendency to be cautious and to think things through thoroughly before acting); dutifulness (the sense of obligation to one's conscience); order (organisation and neatness) and self-discipline (the capacity to motivate oneself to reach goals). These facets bear a striking similarity to the evaluating, approval-seeking manager described by Schwartz (1995). Schwartz (1995) reported that Strivers and Evaluators are often in conflict because they have different motives for protecting a person. At the one extreme, the Striver is constantly pushing a person to work, with no regard for feelings. At the other extreme, the Evaluator is pushing the person to be friendly and to socialise with people so that their approval can be attained (Schwartz, 1995). This dichotomy exemplifies the polarization of parts which occurs when parts of the system are "forced to leave their preferred, valuable roles and take on roles that are either competing with or opposed to those of other members" (Schwartz, 1995, p. 42). According to Schwartz (2001), Strivers and Evaluators are often polarized in conflicting roles with a third type of manager known as the Passive Pessimist.

4.5.2.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

The manager which Schwartz (1995) called the Passive Pessimist, tries to avoid all forms of interpersonal risk that might activate feelings of hostility, sexuality or fear. Consequently this type of manager will try to induce total apathy and withdrawal to ensure that the person does not even try to take risks or get close to anyone. Should the person persist in trying to take risks, this manager will try to break down the person's confidence and may even sabotage performance. This manager will remind the person of personal flaws and incidents of rejection, and reduce him or her to an apathetic coward who avoids the pursuit of goals or objects of desire for fear of failure (Schwartz, 1995, 2001).

Neuroticism is one of the five main personality domains in the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 2010), and includes the following subordinate facets: anxiety (the tendency to be fearful and prone to worrying, nervousness and tension); angry hostility (the tendency to experience anger, frustration and bitterness); depression (the tendency to experience guilt, sadness, despondency and loneliness); impulsivity (the inability to control cravings and urges); self-consciousness (the tendency to be shy, sensitive to ridicule and prone to feelings of inferiority); and vulnerability (the inability to cope with stress, resulting in dependency and feelings of hopelessness). These facets bear a striking similarity to the apathetic avoidance-behaviour of Schwartz's (1995) Passive Pessimist. Schwartz (1995) emphasized that the principal purpose of all managers is to keep the feared feelings and thoughts of the exiles securely locked away, both for the protection of the exiles and for the protection of the system as a whole. In the case of people who have been severely abused, the Passive Pessimist, in an effort to keep the person and the system safe, assumes the role of the abuser and forces the exiled part into making the person even more withdrawn (Schwartz, 1995). Similarly, the Passive Pessimist, in an effort to spare a depressed person from further pain, may choose to paralyse that person by forcing the exiled part into making him or her feel totally apathetic, withdrawn, helpless and worthless (Schwartz, 2001).

4.5.2.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

Schwartz (1995) maintained that gender also contributes to the type of role that the manager assumes. In Western society, women are socialised to rely on a manager who makes them sacrifice their own needs and selflessly take care of others. Schwartz (1995) called this selfless carer the Caretaker, and postulated that such a manager would criticise a woman for being selfish if she ever asserted herself. These caring managers put the welfare of others first and disregard their own needs. Although this selfless giving of care makes others dependent on

them, it also leads to them being exploited and devalued (Schwartz, 2001). Conversely, men are socialised to rely on a manager who makes them dominant and who encourages them to believe that they are entitled to anything they want, even at the expense of others (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Schwartz (1995) called this egotistical manager the Entitled One. The Revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 2010) identifies Agreeableness as one of the primary personality domains. The six subordinate facets include: altruism (the tendency to be actively concerned for the welfare of others); tender-mindedness (the tendency to yield to the demands or expectations of others); modesty (the tendency to minimise and devalue one's own achievements); straightforwardness (the tendency to express oneself honestly); and trust (inherent belief in the sincerity and good intentions of others). When one considers the descriptions of these facets, one can associate them with Schwartz's (1995) Caretaker. On the other hand, low scores on the facets measuring Agreeableness would be indicative of an antagonistic personality, thus bearing a striking similarity to Schwartz's (1995) egotistical Entitled Ones.

4.5.2.5 The Worrier or Sentry

According to Schwartz (1995, 2001), the manager he refers to as a Worrier or Sentry is extremely anxious and constantly alert for danger, and will flash worst-case scenarios in front of a person in an effort to frighten him or her from taking any risks. The subordinate facets of the Neuroticism domain in the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 2010) include anxiety, angry hostility, depression, impulsivity and self-consciousness. These facets bear a striking similarity to the profile of the hyper-aroused Worrier who feels in constant jeopardy and thus constantly tries to alarm the person so that all types of risk are avoided (Schwartz, 1995).

It is important to note that some managers give people the outward appearance of success and provide the drive that is needed for them to excel, be it academically, in their careers or in making money. Such high levels of success and achievement not only provide a certain measure of control over relationships and choices, they also distract people from or compensate for their inner shame, sadness, fear or despair (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). Conversely, people who are dominated by their over-controlling managers tend to lead lives characterised by continual half-hearted attempts and failures, since these strategies protect them from disappointment and responsibility. Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2009) listed a range of managerial manifestations, which include: compulsions, obsessions, passivity, reclusiveness, emotional

detachment and sense of unreality, depressive episodes, panic attacks, phobias, somatic complaints, nightmares and hyper-alertness.

Schwartz (1995, 2009) further pointed out that the rigidity or severity of the different managerial strategies corresponds with the degree to which managers think that the person might be reinjured by potential danger. This rigidity is aggravated even further by the fact that managers carry more responsibility than they are equipped to deal with (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). Furthermore, not only do managers have to deal with what they perceive as external dangers in the outside world; they also have to deal with the internal conflict provoked by the dangerous exiles (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). In their desperate efforts to protect the Self from both external and internal threats, they are often left feeling neglected, lonely and scared, but hide these vulnerabilities because they feel responsible for keeping the person's life under control (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz et al., 2009). A vicious cycle is perpetuated, because the more competent the managers become, the more the system depends on them, and the more they are overwhelmed by their power and by the belief that they alone are responsible for the person's success and safety (Schwartz, 1995, 2001).

4.5.3 Firefighters

Two sets of protective parts are responsible for keeping the emotional pain of exiles at bay (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). At one end of the spectrum, managers exercise internal and interpersonal control to keep a person's emotional *prison* locked so that he/she does not get too close to the experience of painful exiles (Mones & Schwartz, 2007). At the other end of the spectrum, firefighters, in their efforts to protect the person from being overwhelmed by emotional pain, do whatever they consider necessary to soothe or distract the person from dreaded, exiled feelings, with little regard for the consequences of their actions (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995).

Although managers and firefighters share the same goal of keeping the exiles imprisoned, the roles and strategies which they adopt are very different and often conflictual. Managers are extremely rational and can anticipate and pre-empt activating situations in a well-planned and structured way. Their goal is to prevent the activation of exiles by keeping strict control at all times and trying to please others, especially those on whom the person depends (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Consequently, managers will try to intervene *before* the exile is aroused. Firefighters, on the other hand, will try to intervene *after* the exile is aroused, and often implement more extreme techniques, such as self-mutilation, binge eating, drug or alcohol abuse, excessive masturbation, promiscuity and other sexually compulsive activities, excessive

demonstrations of rage, kleptomania, and even suicidal attempts (Engler, 2013; Krause, 2013; Riskin, 2013; Schwartz, 1995). Unlike managers, firefighters are impulsive, unthinking, reactive and prone to making a person lose control (Schwartz, 1995), providing a “quick fix” analgesic to the painful casualties of trauma (Mones & Schwartz, 2007, p. 323).

Managers and firefighters are thus strange, complementary allies and their conflictual relationship often results in the person being caught in a vicious cycle (Schwartz, 1995). Managers depend on firefighters to block intrapsychic pain, but then scornfully attack them afterwards for reducing the person to someone weak-willed and indulgent (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995). The critical attack from inner managers as well as from the managers in the disapproving people around the client, reactivates the exiles. This triggers the firefighters to extinguish the scorching flames of painful emotions, which fosters increased self-abusive behaviour and perpetuates the vicious cycle of conflict activated by intrapsychic and interpersonal triggers that are embedded in body memory (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Pert, 1997; Riskin, 2013; Rothschild, 2000).

The more extreme the polarization, the greater the power struggle between the individual’s managers and firefighters, as they try to restore balance to the internal family system (Schwartz, 1995). When managers and firefighters react to the extreme emotional pain of exiles by going into survival mode, their strategies to protect the system intensify (Schwartz, 1995; Sykes, 2017). In such cases, the self-criticism of managers escalates, resulting in an excessive sense of responsibility and an extreme demand for perfection (Schwartz, 1995, 2001; Sykes, 2017). Meanwhile the strategies of firefighters to quench the fire of worthlessness and shame also intensify, but in the opposite direction, resulting in a shift in gears away from responsible behaviour towards rest and escapism (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995, 2001; Sykes, 2017).

With regard to the search for one’s identity during adolescence, Ames, Ilg and Baker (1988) posited that adolescence is primarily about searching for one’s self, and that this includes finding, identifying, counting on and depending on oneself. For this to happen, one must free oneself of one’s childhood veneration of and dependency on one’s parents – an endeavour which demands experimentation with a multitude of diverse personalities. In the adolescent’s quest to differentiate from parents and establish independence, his or her parts often experiment with new and diverse behaviours which meet with parental disapproval (Krause, 2013). In their quest to control extreme behaviour and thereby protect adolescents, authority figures, like parents and teachers, tend to lead from their managerial parts, and resort to the use of anger, criticism, bribery, logic, nagging, punishment and worry to curb what they consider to be

unacceptable behaviour (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). In terms of the IFS model, adults who lead from their parts rather than from the Self become blended and automatically polarize with an adolescent's firefighters (Krause, 2013; Neustadt, 2017; Schwartz, 2013a). According to Krause, Rosenberg and Sweezy (2017), when protectors are activated and forced into a polarized relationship over an extended period of time, they do their job of protecting the system so automatically, repetitively and compulsively, that their behaviour becomes the dominant personality style. Not only does such polarization obscure the adolescent's insight into his or her own identity, it also obstructs access to the healing powers of Self-leadership and perpetuates a vicious cycle of intrapsychic and interpersonal conflict (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a, 2017; Sweezy, 2013).

4.6 Research Based on Schwartz's Work

In an effort to discover whether there are common factors responsible for change across different marriage and family therapy (MFT) models, Davis and Piercy (2007) conducted semi-structured, open-ended qualitative interviews with three different MFT model developers, namely: Dr Susan M. Johnson (Emotionally Focused Therapy), Dr Frank M. Dattilio (Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy) and Dr Richard C. Schwartz (Internal Family Systems Therapy). Although proponents of the common factors hypothesis claim that all models work the same and are thus largely irrelevant (Duncan & Miller, 2000), the study of Davis and Piercy (2007) is consistent with the research of Sprenkle and Blow (2004a, 2004b), who proposed that models are indispensable since they are the vehicle through which common factors operate. The study suggests that, as long as the model (a) orients the therapist to credible aspects of dysfunction; (b) provides a clear definition of healthy relationships; and (c) provides clear guidelines on how to help clients from dysfunction to health, it does not matter *which* model is used, as long as similar ends are reached. This correlates with the systemic concept of *equifinality* (Von Bertalanffy, 1968), which proposes that the same end can be reached through different means. The study of Davis and Piercy (2007) holds value in that it highlights the importance of comparative efficacy research, and supports the claim of Sprenkle and Blow (2004a, 2004b) that such research should be expanded to include client and therapist factors, in-session process (Butler & Wampler, 1999) and other variables as they relate to outcome.

In the same vein, Mones and Schwartz (2007) explored research on metatheoretical approaches to the psychotherapy process, and proposed *The Functional Hypothesis* (described below) as a central organising concept and process in comparative efficacy research. Based on the ground-breaking work of Rosenzweig (1936); Frank (1973); Bandura (1977); Luborsky,

Singer and Luborsky (1975); Wachtel (1977), and Garfield and Bergin (1978, 1986), Hubble, Duncan and Miller (1999), and their contributing authors, posited the Common Factors model as the key to successful psychotherapy. Further contributions to a metatheory and an integrative model of psychotherapy (Asay & Lambert, 1999; Breunlin et al., 1992; Mahoney, 2003; Pinosof, 1995; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1984; Stricker, 1994; Stricker & Gold, 2006) attest to the value of the Common Factors model, which holds that successful outcomes in the psychotherapy process result from four sets of processes, namely: client factors; therapeutic relationship factors; placebo, hope and expectancy factors; and model or technique factors. The findings of Asay and Lambert (1999) suggest that client factors account for 40% of improvement in successful psychotherapeutic outcomes; the therapeutic relationship accounts for 30% of psychotherapeutic improvement; placebo, hope and expectancy factors account for 15% of the improvement; and specific models or techniques of treatment account for the remaining 15% of improvement. Given that clinicians and researchers have been prone to attribute therapeutic success to specific models and applications by the therapist, the findings of Asay and Lambert (1999) are revolutionary. They challenge previously held beliefs and assert that it is the self-healing aspects of the client that become catalysed within a supportive, empathic therapeutic relationship, which lie at the heart of successful psychotherapeutic outcomes (Mones & Schwartz, 2007).

According to this view, which is supported by a number of researchers within the psychotherapy integration movement (Bohart, 2006; Gold, 1994, 2006; Hubble et al., 1999; Tallman & Bohart, 1999), clients possess their own healing capacity which emerges through a therapeutic process that fosters hope and expectancy, and elicits self-efficacy and self-acceptance in clients. To conceptualise this view, Mones and Schwartz (2007) used the following analogy: “When asked by an admirer how he, Michelangelo, could have sculpted the magnificent David from a solid block of marble, Michelangelo replied, ‘David was inside the marble all along; I just knew how to bring him out’” (p. 315).

This analogy helps to understand The Functional Hypothesis, which Mones and Schwartz (2007) maintain is at the heart of the process to elicit the curative aspects of the client. According to this metatheoretical concept, psychological symptoms are not pathological aspects. When understood within internal, interpersonal and cultural contexts, these psychological symptoms are actually attempts at adaptation and strategies for survival. Mones and Schwartz (2007) maintained that when therapists guide clients to understand their adaptational strategies of survival, and in so doing, liberate themselves from past trauma, the result is self-efficacy and self-acceptance, both of which are

markers of successful therapy that is associated with the Common Factors. Mones and Schwartz (2007) proposed that The Functional Hypothesis “be recognized as part of the metatheory that informs the successful elements in the Common Factors and strengthens the view of psychotherapy integration that is client focused” (p. 326).

4.7 The Critique of Schwartz’s IFS Model

Although the IFS model was originally developed by Schwartz (1995) as a therapeutic model in the treatment of eating disorders, it has proven to be successful in the treatment of anxiety, depression and other mood disorders (Green, 2008; Haddock et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2013a, 2013c; Uys, 2010). In fact, the National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) has acknowledged the IFS model as an evidence-based treatment for successfully treating panic, phobia and generalised anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms and physical health conditions (Matheson, 2015). IFS therapy has also frequently been used to treat trauma and has been endorsed by numerous trauma experts, including Schwartz, as a beneficial treatment approach (Lucero et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2004; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014; Schwartz et al., 2009; Twombly & Schwartz, 2008).

Although the effectiveness of IFS therapy has been explored in a variety of clinical populations (Breunlin et al., 1992; Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Haddock et al., 2017; Johnson & Schwartz, 2000; Lucero et al., 2017), there is still a lack of statistical data from empirical research to demonstrate its effectiveness. To date, only a few studies have researched the role of Self-leadership in promoting physical and mental well-being (Dolbier, Soderstrom & Steinhardt, 2001). In an empirical study conducted to examine the relationship between Self-leadership and workaholic behaviour, Robinson, Flowers and Burris (2006) found that Self-leadership, as expounded by the IFS model, was proven to be effective in reducing excessive workaholic behaviour. Le Doze (2005), a French neurologist who obtained training in IFS, also provided anecdotal support via case studies of the effective use of IFS in migraine treatments. Despite the fact that IFS therapy has been used extensively to treat trauma, effectiveness studies of IFS therapy in the treatment of trauma have yet to be conducted and there is no existing research on how IFS can be applied to the unique needs and challenges of combat veterans suffering from trauma (Lucero et al., 2017).

The fact that no clearly-defined, empirical studies have been conducted in the past to test the efficacy of the IFS model, appears to be the most common criticism against the model (Ditkoff, 2012; Lucero et al., 2017; Pignotti, 2011; Schwartz, Schwartz & Galperin, 2009). According to Schwartz et al. (2009), the best evidence that exists of the effectiveness of the

IFS model comes from empirical observations in the therapist's office (Schwartz et al., 2009). This assertion, in itself, evokes criticism, since it ignores the fact that the clinical experience of therapists is influenced by subjectivity and is subject to confirmation bias, which refers to the tendency to focus on successful aspects of therapy and to overlook or rationalise unsuccessful aspects (Pignotti, 2011). It is this very criticism which added fuel to the allegations against IFS in the Castlewood Treatment Center law suit (Pignotti, 2011). In this lawsuit, both Castlewood Treatment Center and its former director, Mark Schwartz, were accused of using the IFS approach to implant false memories of satanic abuse, torture and multiple personalities in their patients. The lawsuit has subsequently been dismissed (Bernhard, 2013).

Although the IFS model has been criticised for its lack of clearly-defined, empirical studies, the fact that the National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) has acknowledged it as an evidence-based treatment for successfully treating psychological and physical health issues, suggests that this criticism is losing ground, and affirms the potential of IFS therapy for advancing and promoting emotional healing and mental well-being (Matheson, 2015). Furthermore, the Center for Self-Leadership (<http://www.selfleadership.org>) now offers an IFS Personality Scale based on the Internal Family Systems model. The scale is the product of an extensive research project conducted by Lia DeLand in collaboration with Richard Schwartz, and has proven to be an effective tool in the practice of IFS. The scale is available via an online website (<http://www.ifs-scale.com>).

The validity and reliability criticisms against IFS, based on the lack of empirical data in the past, are also being addressed in more recent studies. The study of Haddock et al. (2017) was one of the first studies to examine the IFS model as a treatment modality for a mental health condition. Not only did the study utilise a rigorous research design in which the IFS model was compared against well-established treatments, it also made use of established, reliable measures and included fidelity assessments to test treatment compliance (Haddock et al., 2017). The study by Haddock et al. (2017) contributed significantly to providing empirical support for the effectiveness of IFS in treating depression in female college students. Further research needs to be conducted, however, to ascertain whether IFS therapy treatments result in permanent changes to the internal family system. Such research will not only enhance the status and value of IFS as a treatment method, it will also decrease the financial implications related to unsuccessful treatment options (Haddock et al., 2017).

Schwartz's IFS model has also been criticised for including concepts which are non-specific and vague, and which ultimately detract from the scientific objectives of empirical research

(Uys, 2010). Hsieh (2015) added to the criticism of the IFS model by pointing to the time-consuming process involved in working through the polarized parts in order to discover the core Self. Hsieh (2015) also pointed to the complexity and difficulty involved in disrupting an internal family system characterised by conflict and maladaptive cognitions and behaviours. Although maladaptive cycles can be broken to rectify a dysfunctional system, intervention would require sustained effort and commitment from both the therapist and the client and, apart from being time-consuming, could prove to be daunting and overwhelming (Hsieh, 2015).

Uys (2010) highlighted the fact that the metaphorical language used by Schwartz (1995) to describe his model (e.g., managers, firefighters and exiles), exposes the model to a variety of misinterpretations. Notwithstanding these criticisms, Uys (2010) applauded Schwartz's (1995) IFS model for integrating systems theory with more complex intrapsychic personality theories, and for courageously celebrating the value of multiplicity. In keeping with the more positive appraisals of the IFS model, Schwartz's contribution to psychotherapy and psychobiography is discussed in the next section.

4.8 Schwartz's Contribution to Psychotherapy and Psychobiography

A hallmark of the IFS model is the belief that beneath the surface of a client's different parts lies a healing, undamaged Self that can guide the client to recovery and well-being (Schwartz, 2013b). The positive, non-pathologising feature of IFS is what has made it stand out amongst therapeutic treatment approaches (Earley, 2012; Green, 2008; Lucero et al., 2017; Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 2013b). A basic premise of the IFS model is that psychological symptoms should not be regarded as pathological features of human experience. Rather, they should be viewed as strategies to ensure survival and to facilitate adaptation within internal, cultural and interpersonal contexts (Mones & Schwartz, 2007).

According to Lucero et al. (2017), the IFS model provides an integrative treatment approach based on modern as well as post-modern theories. IFS draws from post-modernism by encouraging collaboration between therapist and client and by viewing the client as resourceful and capable of self-healing (Lucero et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2013a, 2013b). Unlike therapeutic treatments which regard the existence of mental multiplicities as an indication of pathology (Forgash & Knipe, 2008), IFS regards all parts of the internal family system as indispensable in the attainment of healthy functioning (Schwartz & Sparks, 2014).

The appeal of IFS therapy also lies in the fact that it allows for a seamless transition between family and individual treatment (Green, 2008). Not only is the language employed within IFS intuitive and simple to understand, thereby reducing the need for skills training or extensive

psycho-education, it is also applicable to both the internal system of the individual and to the parts of other individual members within the family system (Goff & Smith, 2005). By using IFS, family therapy can be incorporated when required during the process of therapy. In such cases, family members are encouraged to identify their different parts and to respect and honour each family member's voice in the therapeutic process (Lucero et al., 2017).

IFS has proven to be particularly effective in the treatment of trauma (Lucero et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2004; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014). By drawing on the benefits of mindfulness, IFS encourages the observation and acknowledgement of difficult emotions, which in turn leads to the recognition of other potentially curative responses to external stimuli (Lang et al., 2012; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014). The work of Miller et al. (2007) provides a useful reference for the integration of IFS and narrative therapeutic practices in the treatment of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). According to Lavergne (2004), the combination of Art Therapy and IFS provides a synergistic and powerful model for treating trauma amongst adolescents. Not only do both modalities address key adolescent developmental needs, they also provide for the effective processing of traumatic and/or painful life experiences (Lavergne, 2004).

IFS has also proven to be a powerful tool in creating, maintaining and enriching a fulfilling and healthy marital relationship (Green, 2008). According to Jayson and Schwartz (2000), when couples are encouraged to share vulnerable emotions and feel understood by each other, they automatically heal themselves and strengthen their connection, commitment and intimacy. Mojta, Falconier and Huebner (2014) found that IFS helped novice therapists in the identification, understanding and management of their internal processes, and that this, in turn, contributed to a more beneficial therapeutic relationship.

The popularity of the IFS model led to Schwartz founding an organisation called the Center for Self Leadership (CLS) in 2000 (Haddock et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2013b). The center has established a non-profit foundation which aims to obtain funding for IFS research (Green, 2008; Schwartz, 2013a). Not only has Schwartz's Centre for Self Leadership trained many therapists on how to use the IFS model, it has also enhanced the status of the model to the point that IFS therapy is now practiced both in the United States and in Europe (Green, 2008).

Although Schwartz (1995) has validated the IFS model anecdotally, there are limited empirical studies measuring its effectiveness in the literature of psychotherapeutic interventions (Green, 2008). The study of Haddock et al. (2017) was one of the first studies which sought to empirically validate IFS as a treatment modality for a mental health condition. Although the study by Lucero et al. (2017) fully supported IFS as an effective therapeutic intervention for combat veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), it

used a fictional case to illustrate the effectiveness of the IFS approach in treating PTSD in combat veterans at individual, couples and family levels, and as such, could not report statistical evidence of the effectiveness of IFS. Lucero et al. (2017) suggested that researchers broaden evidence-based treatments of trauma by empirically testing the effectiveness of the IFS model with this population group. They also encouraged therapists who treat combat veterans to include the IFS approach in their practices, and to collaborate with combat veterans, their families and other mental and medical health professionals to ensure that the best possible care is given to this unique group.

With regard to psychobiography, a search conducted through EbscoHost indicates that, apart from the psychobiographical study of Uys (2010), IFS has not been included in the field of psychobiographical research. The researcher encourages researchers interested in psychobiography to incorporate the IFS model in their studies, as it promises a more easily conceptualised representation of internal processes (Smith, 2017) which other psychotherapeutic models have left in the abstract.

The IFS model offers an alternative perspective from the psychopathological and psychoanalytical stances usually taken in psychobiographical studies. This would answer the request by Elms (1994) for researchers to assist in moving psychobiography away from theoretical narrowness, whilst shifting its focus from pathography to the study of psychological health.

4.9 Conclusion

The Internal Family System (IFS) model of Schwartz (1994) was discussed in this chapter. The framework provided by the IFS model will be employed as a complementary framework to supplement Erikson's psychosocial theory of development as applied to the life of Sylvia Plath. This will allow for an investigation into Sylvia Plath's internal family system over her lifespan, whilst simultaneously allowing for the informal testing of the model's applicability to her life. The findings from the application of the IFS model to the life of Sylvia Plath are expounded in Chapter 9. In the following chapter, the theoretical foundation and practice of psychobiographical research is presented.

CHAPTER 5

A THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH

5.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter provides an overview of the development and current practice of psychobiography as case study research within the qualitative methodological framework. The difference between quantitative and qualitative research is described, with particular focus on the relevance of qualitative research to psychobiography. The term psychobiography is explored and defined, and terms related to it are clarified. This is followed by an overview of the history of psychobiography, both internationally and within the South African context. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the critique as well as the appeal and value of utilising psychobiographical research in the study of extraordinary lives.

5.2 Research in the Social Sciences

5.2.1 Introduction

Despite the fact that psychologists have frequently made informal references to historical events and personalities so as to illustrate certain principles, it was only with the advent of psychobiography and psychohistory that the first genuine, methodologically-governed qualitative analyses emerged (Simonton, 2003). Elms (1988) maintained, in fact, that Freud's (1910, 1964) psychoanalytic interpretation of the life and works of Leonardo da Vinci, proved to be the benchmark work of qualitative research.

Today, the appeal of qualitative research is confirmed not only by the proliferation of published books and journals containing methodological papers on and results of qualitative research, but also by the growing number of intellectual disciplines that employ this type of approach (Flick, 2006; Runyan, 1988a). These disciplines include sociology, psychology, anthropology, nursing, engineering, political science, history, business, medicine, social work, journalism, education, communication and cultural studies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Flick, 2006; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013). Qualitative research is thus often described as interdisciplinary (Struwig & Stead, 2004) and multi-focused (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005; Rudestam & Newton, 2001). According to Ponterotto (2005), the depth and variety of qualitative traditions that researchers can draw upon in informing research programmes, provides a sense of flexibility and excitement about the research endeavour.

Although qualitative research has been criticised for lacking scientific precision, objectivity and rigour (Yin, 2009), its interdisciplinary and multi-focused nature provides flexibility and allows the researcher to adapt the methodology of his/her study to suit the uniqueness of the research aim (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The next section will briefly outline the difference between quantitative and qualitative research and highlight the value of qualitative research in psychobiographical studies.

5.2.2 Quantitative versus Qualitative Research

Traditionally, psychology and the social sciences have taken the natural sciences and their exactness as a model, and have focused on the development of quantitative and standardised research methods (Flick, 2006). The purpose of such scientific research methods has been to isolate causes and effects, to correctly operationalise theoretical relations, to measure and quantify phenomena, to create research designs that allow for the generalisation of findings and to formulate general laws (Flick, 2006). According to this approach, all hypotheses must be subjugated to empirical testing that transcends opinion and personal bias (Carey, 1989; Cozby, 2007) and guarantees a “value-free objectivist science” (Carey, 1989, p. 104). The controlled experiment is the embodiment of the scientific approach (McAdams, 2006; Perry, 1995; Schultz, 2005a) and, as the name suggests, entails that conditions under which the phenomena and relations under study occur, are controlled as rigidly as possible so as to ensure the reliability, validity and generalisability of results (Cozby, 2007; Flick, 2006; Gravetter & Wallnau, 1995). Changing social conditions and the resulting diversification of life worlds have, however, created new social contexts and perspectives, and have forced social researchers to replace traditional deductive methodologies typical of experimental or quantitative research with the more inductive strategies of qualitative research (Cozby, 2007; Flick, 2006; Silverman, 2000; Willig, 2001; Yin, 2009).

Quantitative research is nomothetic and etic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). These terms describe standardised methods of obtaining knowledge from large samples of individuals through techniques that allow social scientists to test existing theories and make predictions (Morrow & Smith, 2000; Paine, 2002). Qualitative research, on the other hand, is idiographic and emic, and focuses on how social experiences are created and given meaning in one or a few individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Griffen, 1985; Morrow & Smith, 2000).

In quantitative research, the researcher tries to prove and confirm hypotheses through a deductive method interfused with a number of theories (Neuman, 1994, Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010). Conversely, the qualitative research method is chosen when there is little information

about a topic, when the researcher's variables are unclear or unknown, and when a relevant theory base is lacking (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005). The purpose of qualitative research is thus not to test hypotheses, but rather to “describe, analyze, and interpret the constructive aspects of the social world” (McLeod, 2001, p. 133). Qualitative research thus plays an important role in the construction of useful theory within research (Creswell, 2007; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

Quantitative research is anchored in the positivistic paradigm, which accentuates empirical, quantifiable observations in the form of numbers and statistics, through which distinct relationships can be explained (“erklären”) (Husén, 1988, p. 17). Qualitative research, on the other hand, is anchored in the postpositivist, constructivist-interpretivist and critical-ideological paradigms (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2010). According to the postpositivist perspective, true reality exists but can never be fully understood, only approximated (Guba, 1990). Postpositivists use holistic and interpretative methods and strive to understand the motives of behaviour through empathy (“verstehen”) (Husén, 1988, p.17). The constructivist-interpretivist approach posits the existence of multiple, socially-constructed realities which passionately engage the researcher and lead to the discovery of meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Ponterotto, 2010). According to the critical-ideological approach, reality is moulded by political, economic, cultural, ethnic, gender and social considerations which place the researcher in a proactive role with research goals that include emancipation, advocacy and transformation (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Ponterotto, 2010).

To conceptualize the intricate synergy between the paradigms in which qualitative research is anchored, Denzin and Lincoln (2003) offered the following definition:

Qualitative research is an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and sometimes counterdisciplinary field. It crosscuts the humanities and the social and physical sciences. Qualitative research is many things at the same time. It is multi paradigmatic in focus. Its practitioners are sensitive to the value of the multi method approach. They are committed to the naturalistic perspective and to the interpretive understanding of human experience. At the same time, the field is inherently political and shaped by multiple ethical and political positions. (p.11)

Qualitative research is thus recommended as the research method of choice when an issue under study needs to be understood in its complexity, and when the researcher endeavours to understand the participants' actual contexts or settings that are directly related to social phenomena (Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010). McLeod (2001) posited that the main goal of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of how the world is constructed. Qualitative research thus not only allows researchers to examine the ways in which subjects assign symbolic meaning to their worlds, it also allows for an exploration of lived human experience

as it is affected by cultural and contextual factors (Runyan, 2005; Schultz, 2005a; Silverman, 2000; Travers, 2001).

According to Martin (1996), the subject matter of psychology is humans and their experiences and actions. He maintained that since this subject matter differs significantly from the subject matter of physical science by being more contextualised, uncertain and morally saturated, psychological theory should concern itself with context and moral significance, and with the formulation of principles rather than causal laws. This view corresponds with Polkinghorne's (1983) assertion that the human psyche is qualitatively different from the physically measurable attributes of natural science phenomena. With regard to the objectivity promised by quantitative research, Bonß and Hartmann (1985) posited that:

On the condition of the disenchantment of ideals of objectivism, we can no longer unreflectively start from the notion of objectively true sentences. What remains is the possibility of statements which are related to subjects and situations, and which a sociologically articulated concept of knowledge would have to establish. (p. 21)

Although there are numerous definitions on the entity of qualitative research, the definition in Denzin and Lincoln's (2005) *Handbook of Qualitative Research* provides a comprehensive clarification of this important term:

Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in forms of the meaning people bring to them. (p. 3)

The definition of Denzin and Lincoln (2005) reiterates one of the key advantages of qualitative research as posited by Ponterotto (2010), namely that qualitative research involves the study of the emotive and cognitive dimensions of a subject's lived experiences and allows for interpretations to be articulated within the context of a subject's socially constructed world view. The fact that qualitative researchers explore the socially constructed nature of reality implies that an intimate relationship exists between the researcher and what is studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This brings into question the role of subjectivity in qualitative research. According to Morrow (2005), qualitative researchers acknowledge that the very nature of the data they gather and the analytic processes in which they engage are grounded in subjectivity. Scriven (1972) warned that it is incorrect to equate qualitative research with subjectivity and quantitative research with objectivity. Qualitative researchers claim that the underlying

paradigm from which they work determines whether they work to limit, control or manage subjectivity or whether they embrace it and use it as data (Flick, 2006; Morrow, 2005).

In order to manage subjectivity and deal with biases and assumptions that come from their own life experiences or from emotion-laden associations with the subject under study, qualitative researchers try to approach their endeavors by reflecting critically on themselves (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Morrow, 2005). This process is known as reflexivity and is defined by Rennie (2004) as “self-awareness and agency within that self-awareness” (p. 183). Although the strategies for managing subjectivity can assist the qualitative researcher in representing the subject’s reality equitably and avoiding biased interpretations, Heshusius (1994) rejected the subjectivity-objectivity dichotomy and maintained that it represented an “alienated mode of consciousness” (p.15) that estranged the researcher from the researched subject. Rather, Heshusius (1994) suggested a *participatory consciousness*, which she defined as “the awareness of a deeper level of kinship between the knower and the known” (p.16). In this type of consciousness, emotion forms an integral part of the relationship between the researcher and the researched subject and allows for an empathic form of relating that replaces mere observation (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Heshusius, 1994). As Heshusius (1994) aptly posited, it allows for “a holistic apprehension of reality as mutually evolving” (p. 20).

Qualitative research covers a wide range of methodological approaches in its exploration of human behaviour (Manning, 1982, Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010), including psychobiography as a single-case study research design (Cavaye, 1996; Fouche, 1999; Kőváry 2011; McLeod, 2008). The following section outlines the role of case study research is psychobiography.

5.2.3 Case Study Research in Psychobiography

Case study research is widely referred to and applied as a means of inquiry in the social sciences (Thomas, 2011; Tight, 2010; Yin, 2009). Despite its extensive application, however, it continues to be criticised and is often stereotyped as a “weak sibling among social science research methods” (Yin, 2009, p. xiii). This is partly due to the fact that there is no clear consensus as to whether case study should be defined as a method, a methodology, a strategy, an approach or a research design (Bassegy, 1999; Merriam, 1988; Orum, Feagin & Sjoberg, 1991; Tight, 2010; Yin, 1994). According to Thomas (2011), attempts at defining case study have further been compounded by the diversity of epistemological starting points from which practitioners of the case study arrive. The fact that case study is often used as a “catch-all

category” for various research methods, methodologies and designs has made it lose some of its meaning and has left potential researchers feeling uncertain and misguided about structure (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007, p.2). The following section presents the various definitions of case study so that key features can be delineated in an effort to promote clarity on the much-debated issue of case study’s status and practice in social science research.

According to Thomas (2011), “Case studies are analyses of persons, events, decisions, periods, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems that are studied holistically by one or more methods” (p. 513). He added that the case study should include both a practical and historical unity (known as the subject of the case study), and an analytical or theoretical frame (known as the object of the case study). Thomas (2011, p. 515) maintained that the development of theory, whether it be “theory-testing” or “theory-seeking”, is fundamental to the dynamic of the relationship between subject and object in case study research. In an attempt to provide a clearer framing structure for case study research, Thomas (2011) proposed a typology which disentangles the various layers of classificatory principles and offers possibilities for the improved construction and analysis of case studies. His typology highlights the importance of: (a) distinguishing between subject and object; (b) clarifying the purpose of the study; (c) being aware of the likely analytical approach to be pursued; and (d) identifying the likely process to be followed in conducting the research.

Yin (2003) maintained that case study is but one strategy to doing social science research, alongside experiments, surveys, histories and archival analyses. He believed that the advantages and disadvantages of each strategy depend on: (a) the type of research question posed, (b) the control which a researcher has over actual behavioural events, and (c) the focus on current as opposed to historical phenomena. Yin (1981, 2003, 2009) posited that case studies are the preferred strategy when *how* or *why* questions are posed in research; when the researcher has little control over events; and when there is an in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. To this definition, Yin (2009) added that case study research: (a) copes with technically distinctive situations in which there are many more variables of interest than data points; (b) relies on multiple sources of evidence, necessitating the convergence of data in a triangulation fashion; and (c) benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to steer data collection and analysis.

Simons (2009) defined case study as “an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program or system in a ‘real life’ context” (p. 21). According to him, case study should not be seen as a method in and of itself, but should rather be viewed as a design frame that incorporates various methods.

Simons' view proposes analytical eclecticism and corresponds with the definition offered by Stake (2005):

Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied ...by which methods we choose to study the case. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods – but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case. (p. 512)

Similarly, Punch (2005) defined the case as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” and maintained that, despite the fact that there may be a variety of specific purposes and research questions when a case is studied, “the general objective is to develop as full an understanding of that case as possible” (p.144). Creswell (2002) also made reference to the “bounded” context of case study research and defined case study as enquiry that allows “in-depth understanding of a ‘case’ or bounded system, which involves understanding an event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p. 61).

Stake (2005) warned, however, that not everything can be considered a case, and that some researchers have a tendency to use the term *case study* as a label for anything they please. To resolve this generalisation, Stake (2005, p. 445) identified three types of case study and elucidated the reasons for undertaking each type of study:

- 1) Intrinsic case study is conducted when one wants a better understanding of the particular case.
- 2) Instrumental case study is conducted when one wants to obtain insight into an issue or when one wants to redraw a generalisation.
- 3) Multiple or collective case study is conducted when one wants to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition.

Based on the typologies of Eckstein (1975), George and Bennett (2005, pp.75-76) proposed six types of case study. These include:

1. Theoretical or configurative idiographic case studies, which are illustrative in nature and do not contribute to theory.
2. Disciplined configurative case studies, which use established theories to explain a case.
3. Heuristic case studies, which make use of exceptional cases and serve to identify new causal paths.
4. Theory testing case studies, which assess the validity and scope conditions of single or competing theories.

5. Plausibility/preliminary case studies, which determine whether further study is warranted.
6. “Building Block” case studies which examine particular types or subtypes of a phenomenon and “serve a particular kind of heuristic purpose”.

The typologies of Stake (2005) and George and Bennett (2005) are but two of the many types of case studies enumerated by different analysts (e.g., Basse, 1999; De Vaus, 2001; Merriam, 1988; Mitchell, 2006; Yin, 2009). Although an exposition of the work by each of these analysts is beyond the scope of this study, it does point to the mixture of criteria for classification of case study types and the conflation of underlying issues – all of which fuel the confusion and scepticism surrounding case study research.

In an effort to disentangle these issues and diminish the controversy about the value of case study research, Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2007) proposed a more precise and encompassing definition that reconciles the manifold definitions of case study research. Their definition states that “case study is a transparadigmatic and trans-disciplinary heuristic that involves the careful delineation of the phenomena for which evidence is being collected (event, concept, program and process)” (Khan, 2007, p. 2).

By using the terms transdisciplinary and transparadigmatic, Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2007) implied that case study has no particular disciplinary orientation and that it is relevant regardless of whether research is conducted within the postpositivist, critical theory or constructivist paradigm. According to the postpositivist paradigm, “Case studies can be seen as studies of empirical units that exist and can be found out, discovered, or delineated in the course of research” (Runyan, 1997, p. 300). Gerring (2004, p. 342) posited a critical theorist’s orientation to the case study by defining it as “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units”. The ultimate goal of this orientation is transformation and the move toward a better, more rational world that seeks to eradicate injustices, exclusions and inequalities by scrutinising the roles of culture, race, ethnicity and gender (Antonio, 1990; Miller, 1994; Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007). According to the interpretivist paradigm, case study can be defined as: “The detailed examination of an aspect of a historical episode to develop or test historical explanations that may be generalizable to other events” (George & Bennett, 2005, p. 5). The interpretivist orientation assumes that reality is a social construct that emerges from the way in which individuals and groups interact and create meaning through their experience in everyday life and the real world (Travis, 1999; Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007).

To support their proposed definition, Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2007, p. 4) delineated the properties or features that characterise a prototypical case study. They maintained that case studies:

1. Require an intensive, in-depth focus on the unit of analysis and usually involve a far smaller sample size than survey research.
2. Provide extensive contextual detail of specific moments in action.
3. Involve the systematic study of situations as they occur in their natural settings.
4. Provide detailed descriptions of time and place, thereby establishing boundedness and affording context to the structures and relationships that are of interest to the researcher.
5. Provide researchers with the opportunity to generate working hypotheses and learn novel lessons based on what is uncovered or constructed during data collection and analysis.
6. Make use of multiple sources of data so that triangulation is facilitated and accuracy of results can be assured.
7. Serve to enrich and potentially transform the understanding of phenomena by uncovering or constructing indivisible factors that are elements of the phenomena.

5.3 Defining the Term Psychobiography

Psychobiography has been defined as “the systematic use of psychological (especially personality) theory to transform a life into a coherent and illuminating story” (McAdams & Ochberg, 1988, p. 2). In psychobiography, the life to be transformed is usually that of a renowned individual, with the aim of discerning, discovering or formulating the central story of that individual’s entire life through the structured use of psychological theory (McAdams, 1994; McAdams & Ochberg, 1988). According to McAdams (2005):

Psychobiographers’ third-person accounts of their subjects’ lives should aim to uncover, interpret, incorporate, and critique subjects’ first-person narrative identities; the story the psychobiographer tells should creatively engage the story the psychobiographer thinks the subject told. (p. 75)

When one considers the etymology of the term *psychobiography*, it is not surprising that the biographical component is stressed in various definitions of the term. Bromley (1986, p. 9) defined psychobiographies as “Biographical studies in which psychological concepts, methods, and findings play a major role”, whilst Carlson (1988) equated the term with longitudinal biographical research into the personality development of exemplary and completed lives. In

the same vein, Howe (1997) maintained that psychobiographical research entails the comprehensive application of biographical data so as to trace the development of innovative thinking, creativity and productivity in extraordinary individuals. According to Simonton (1999), psychobiography is the qualitative analysis of a single case using an idiographic and longitudinal approach. It involves the indirect assessment of the micro-analytical unit (the individual) so that certain hypotheses can be confirmed (Nel, 2013).

Similarly, Anderson (1981a, 1981b) described psychobiography as involving both longitudinal and cross-cultural research to explore the psychological components of a historical figure's life. In turn, Schultz (2001a, 2001b) defined psychobiography as the intentional and explicit use of psychological theory and research to interpret the life of an individual. Schultz (2005, p. 4) added that "Psychobiographies produce inspirations, strong hunches, or insights, leading in time to formal propositions that can be tested against larger groups of people (if such an end is desired)".

Based on an overview of psychobiographical descriptions, Van Niekerk (2007) identified five universal characteristics common to psychobiographical research, namely:

1. Psychobiographies make use of qualitative data.
2. Psychobiographers favour an all-embracing approach, rather than a compartmentalised approach when studying the lifespan of individuals.
3. Psychobiographical subjects are identified by name, unlike quantitative research participants who remain anonymous.
4. Psychobiographers make use of biographical data that have mostly been gathered by other researchers like historians and biographers.
5. The aim of data collection in psychobiography is not to solve pre-established research problems, but rather to examine the historical and psychological significance of famous, exemplary or enigmatic individuals whose life histories are inherently interesting and valuable.

Whilst quantitative research methods disregard personal, human experiences (Runyan, 2002), psychobiographies involve the study of "whole persons in context and time through the narrative of their experience" and thus allow for a comprehensive understanding of human beings (Josselson, Lieblich, & McAdams, 2003, p. 6). This description of psychobiography correlates with that of McLeod (1994) who equated psychobiography to qualitative narrative case study, which seeks to clarify and understand the stories which individuals narrate about their life experiences. From this point of view, the subjective narrations that individuals

provide of their past, present and future, are particularly significant and valuable (Roberts, 2002).

Psychobiography involves the systematic collection, analysis and discernment of life stories within a socio-historical context (Fouché et al., 2007; McAdams, 1994; Runyan, 1988c) and provides the opportunity for an in-depth study of the fundamental components that bring an individual's personal story to life (Fouché, 1999; McAdams & Ochberg, 1988). According to McAdams (1988), this life must be understood on three correlative levels, namely: (a) the biological or physical level; (b) the psychological and emotional level; and (c) the social and familial level, which incorporates the cultural and historical context.

Elms (1994, p. 4) defined psychobiography as “biography that makes substantial use of psychological theory and knowledge”. Since psychobiography makes extensive use of lifelong biographical data to explain an individual's personality (Alexander, 1988) and unearth how that individual came to be so exceptional, an intrinsic interdisciplinary relationship exists between psychology and biography (Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994; McAdams & Ochberg, 1988). Despite the fact that Elms (1994) described this interdisciplinary relationship as being *uneasy*, based on the fact that biography and psychobiography make use of different methodological approaches (Fouché et al., 2007), psychobiography inhabits the realm of both biography and psychology (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Runyan, 1988a), justifying Runyan's description of it as an “amphibious creature” (1988a, p. 296). A more recent and empirically grounded definition of psychobiography comes from Schultz (2012), who wrote:

Psychobiography is the analysis of historically significant lives through the use of psychological theory and research. Its aim is to understand persons, and to uncover the private motives behind public acts, whether these acts involve the making of art or the creation of scientific theories, or the adoption of political decisions. (p. 2)

In light of the fact that psychobiography extends over a number of disciplinary boundaries (Schultz, 2002), there are a number of terms that are related to it and that need to be clarified in order for an accurate conceptualisation of psychobiography to be attained. The following section attempts such clarification.

5.4 Psychobiography and Related Terms

5.4.1 Biography

A biography is the structured exposition of an individual's life, written by someone other than the subject under study, without necessarily involving the co-operation of that subject

(Cole & Knowles, 2001; Fouché, 1999; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Lee, 2009). A biography may be based on a variety of sources and types of information (Bertaux, 1981; Bromley, 1986) and is considered to be well-written when it examines and records the development of a subject's life through the lens of history, art and literature (Howe, 1997). Despite the intuitively appealing claim that individuals are best understood in their biographical contexts, biographical approaches to the study of individuals have traditionally occupied a controversial and ambiguous status in scientific studies such as personality psychology (Anderson, 1981; Runyan, 1982, 1990). Since biographies make use of diverse approaches to record and explain unique facets of a subject's personality and his/her life experiences within the social and cultural context, they adopt an interpretive methodology and are often criticised for being too unwieldy and subjective for rigorous scientific study (Howe, 1997; McAdams, 1994; Roberts, 2002; Runyan, 1984, Schultz, 2005a).

Biographers tend to write from a literary perspective and traditionally do not remark on a subject's psychological functioning (Schultz, 2003). This would explain why most personality psychologists have not historically viewed themselves as biographers (Elms, 1988). Despite the *uneasy alliance* between biography and psychology, as suggested by Elms (1994), there has been an upsurge of interest in and a growing acceptance of biographical and autobiographical approaches and frameworks among personality psychologists and other social scientists (Bertaux, 1981; McAdams & Ochberg, 1988; Moraitis & Pollock, 1987; Runyan, 1988a; Wrightsman, 1981). According to Fouché and Van Niekerk (2005), biography and psychology are mutually valuable in the study of lives. This mutually-beneficial relationship is founded on the commonalities between psychology and biography (Schultz, 2001a, 2001b) and affirms Erikson and Adler's suggestion that a psychologically informed biography is probably the best means for capturing a human life situated in time (McAdams, 1994).

5.4.2 Autobiography

An autobiography is the story of an individual's life (or aspects of that life), told or written in the first person singular, and defining a genre where the individual is the author and interpreter of his or her own life story (Becker, 2009; Bertaux 1981; Bromley, 1986; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). Although the author may refer to factual information and make use of objective sources of information (Bromley, 1986; Roberts, 2002), autobiographies are essentially subjective in nature and often criticised for being biased and lacking in scientific credibility (Bromley, 1986). This view is supported by Becker (2009) who maintained that even though an autobiographer strives to establish a credible correlation between his/her own

narrative and that which an objective, unbiased investigation might yield, he/she invariably succumbs to selection bias. This may result in the autobiographer overlooking information that “would be trivial or distasteful to him, though of great interest to us” (Becker, 2009, p. 4). Elms (2005) noted that psychological theorists sometimes write their own autobiographies within the framework of their own personality theories. Erik Erikson’s personal account of his youthful identity crisis (1970) is an example of the subjective foundation of his autobiography which, with the support of his clinical and psychobiographical cases, consolidated his theoretical perspectives (Elms, 2005).

5.4.3 Life Histories

Whilst psychobiographers focus on one particular life, social scientists who collect life histories apply biographical methods to examine relationships across many lives (McAdams, 2006) and base these life histories on subjective and objective data gathered from a variety of sources (Yin, 2003). Since life history researchers study autobiographies of people with similarities, such as ethnic lineage, occupation, social problem or lifestyle choice, they have become increasingly popular in fields which seek to identify common societal and cultural patterns, e.g. sociology and anthropology (Bertaux, 1981; Bromley, 1986; Craik, 1986; McAdams, 1988, 1994; Watson, 1976). This focus on similarities in different individuals rather than the uniqueness of a single life (Rosenwald, 1988), enables life history to provide insightful information regarding social experience (Runyan, 1982). Marshall and Rossman (1989) maintained that, because a life history describes the entire life course of a subject, it allows the reader to share the subject’s experiences vicariously. Furthermore, the hypotheses generated by data from life histories can be tested by further studies and can lead to comparative studies in which behavioural processes and personality types are explored (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Based on the fact that such data can be useful in testing personality theory, it can be applied to methodologies used in psychobiography (Carlson, 1988). Bromley (1986) defined life history as a “scientific reconstruction and interpretation, based on the best evidence available, of the major formative, critical and culminative episodes in a person’s life” (p. 8). This definition, together with the assertion by Marshall and Rossman (1989) that “life history methodology emphasizes the value of a person’s own story and provides pieces for a ‘mosaic’ or total picture of a concept” (p. 97), points to the multidisciplinary value of life history research as a vehicle to study the lives of exceptional people (psychobiography), and as a therapeutic tool of reminiscence used during the process of live-review writing (Bertaux & Kohli, 2009).

5.4.4 Historical Psychology

Historical psychology differs from psychohistory in that it describes the history of psychological phenomena and/or the history of thought about psychological development and the important formative and cumulative factors that influence the course of life (Runyan, 1988c, 2003). Historical psychology can thus be viewed as the study of the history of psychology and establishes psychology as an historical science (Berg, 1995; Fouché, 1999; Loewenberg, 1983; Runyan, 2003). According to Runyan (2005), historical science, as developed by Stephen Jay Gould (1986), is the study of complex sequences of historically contingent events and processes, and plays an important role in clarifying the objectives and methods of the study of lives and their place in scientific psychology.

5.4.5 Historical Research and Historiography

Historical research can be defined as the systematic and objective identification, analysis and interpretation of historical data aimed at establishing factual information and drawing inferences about past occurrences (Berg, 1995; Cohen & Manion, 1994; Denzin, 1978). Its goals include (a) the clarification of present and future trends, (b) the attainment of insight into social processes, (c) the comparison between data and theoretical hypotheses and (d) the resolution of current problems through enlightened insight into past occurrences (Cohen & Marion, 1994). Although historiography is very similar to historical research in that it involves the systematic collection and objective evaluation of evidence related to past events (Berg, 1995), it differs from historical research in that it aims to reconstruct the pieces of information collected from the past into a meaningful set of historical explanations (Cohen & Marion, 1994; Denzin, 1978; Wallbank, 1985), without applying such knowledge to solve contemporary problems.

5.4.6 Psychohistory

Psychohistory emerged at a time when the horrors spawned by Hitler, the genocidal Nazi death camps, and World War II were too painful for society to integrate into traditional moral and emotional means of defining everyday life, and proved too intricate for rational explanations by social science (Albin, 1980). The criticism that it might lack some of the rigour of the traditional fields, prompted psychohistorians to lean on psychoanalytic theory since it could uncover the unconscious sources of social chaos and serve as a psychohistorical explanation of what was happening in the world.

In light of this, psychohistory came to be defined as the direct application of formal or legitimate psychological theory, such as psychoanalytic theory, to better understand and interpret historical events and famous or historical figures (Botond, 1991; Runyan, 1984, 1988b; Schultz, 2005a; Shiner, 2005). Erikson legitimised psychohistory through his judicious use of Freudian theory and his emphasis on social, cultural and historical factors (Albin, 1980). This established psychohistory as an historical exercise which not only acknowledged the role of social, cultural and political factors in history, but also endeavoured to understand that which motivates populations and social groups (Berg, 1995; Loewenberg, 1983; Runyan, 1988c). According to Mollinger (1975), since historical events are related to different stages of life, psychohistory plays an important role in providing a link between the individual and the cultural group to which he/she belongs. This correlates with the view of Pozzuto (1982) who posited that psychohistory emerged to create a link between our understanding of individual development and our knowledge of sociohistorical occurrences. Erikson's psychohistories of remarkable figures like Luther and Gandhi not only affirmed this important link, but also elucidated the methodological principles of "psychohistorical explorations" (Kóváry, 2011, p. 753), and promoted psychohistory beyond psychobiography by linking leaders with followers through intricate patterns of shared and reciprocal needs (Albin, 1980).

Despite the fact that the term *psychohistory* suggests a co-operative alliance between the disciplines of psychology and history, the relationship between the two disciplines has been marked by misunderstanding, suspicion and hostility, thus obscuring the scope and definition of psychohistory (Runyan, 1982, 1988b; Schultz, 2005a). Whilst history is concerned with examining past events, particularly in relation to human affairs, psychology is concerned with the empirical study of behavioural patterns and experiences in people (Louw & Edwards, 1994; Runyan, 1988c, 2005; Simonton, 1994). Edwards (2004) argued that because psychohistory is concerned with explaining historical events through the application of psychological theory, it is primarily orientated towards history rather than psychology.

Erikson (1980) maintained, however, that psychohistory necessitates a combination of psychological and historical analyses, with each one tempering the other. This tempered balance between psychology and history would, according to Erikson (1980), allow psychohistorians:

to affirm that rather than being in a separate field, we are really part of a great trend that strives for a wholeness of perspective in all fields concerned with human fate and therefore cultivates a complementarity of developing methods.
(p. ix)

5.5 The History of Psychobiography

The origins of psychobiography can be traced back to the very first literary biographers, despite the fact that they rarely used psychological concepts to interpret the lives of their subjects (McAdams, 1994). These biographers tended to neglect their subjects' human weaknesses and emotive experiences and sought, rather, to glorify them. Plutarch (45–125 A.D.), for example, focused on political and historical figures with a view to illustrating exemplary character traits like honesty and courage (Kőváry, 2011; McAdams, 1994). Similarly, hagiographies written by Christian scholars during the Middle Ages, venerated the saints and served as moral and spiritual lessons to teach people about faith, rather than being profound explorations in personality (McAdams, 1994).

In the 16th century, interest in the life and the personality of artists began to appear (Wittkower & Wittkower, 2006). Giorgio Vasari's book *Lives of the Artists* was published in 1550 (Vasari, 1998), and proved to be a significant step forward in biographical writing. Gittings (1978) argued, however, that it was only in the 17th century that biography began to assume a more sophisticated form when biographers such as Izaak Walton and John Aubrey began to write narratives about the lives of people. The most famous biography in Western literature – *The Life of Samuel Johnson* – was published by James Boswell in 1791, and explored the many dimensions of Johnson's character so as to illustrate the grandeur of one particular life (McAdams, 1994).

The 19th century ushered in the Romantic period in Europe, characterised by a revolution in human thought whereby many of the intellectuals of the day rejected classical teachings emphasising reason and order, and focused rather on celebrating the exuberant and passionate life of the individual (Cantor, 1971; Russell, 1945). This period's focus on the individual brought biographical writing to its peak and not only influenced Freud's conception of creativity (Kőváry, 2011), but also established modern hermeneutics (Dilthey, 1996). Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*, published in 1910, established the first authentic alliance between literary biography and psychology, and marked the beginning of psychobiographical research (McAdams, 2006; Runyan, 1988b).

Another source of psychobiography that emerged during the 19th century was the medical approach called pathography. Rooted in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, this psychoanalytic approach to biography posited that there is an inherent connection between madness and genius (Kőváry, 2011), and tried to unmask neurotic drives concealed in the lives and masterpieces of eminent people (Scalapino, 1999). The pathographic component of Freud's psychoanalytic biographies is recognisable in the narratives that he developed to

account for hysterical symptoms and their resolution in his patients. These narratives, however, were not just stories of an individual's developing history of purposes and motives in response to changing circumstances, rather they were stories of the dynamics between the ego and the unconscious, and the effects of circumstances on both conscious and unconscious levels of motivation and activity (Barresi & Juckes, 1997).

Freud's psychodynamic explanation of Leonardo da Vinci's creativity and scientific endeavours proved problematic, however, since it was impossible to prove that Da Vinci's genius emanated exclusively from an infantile sexual desire (McAdams, 1988; Scalapino, 1999). Despite its crucial psychobiographical errors, Freud's *Leonardo* continues to offer valuable lessons to practising psychobiographers, thus reconceptualising the quest of biography and psychology as applied psychoanalysis (Elms, 1994; McAdams, 1988; Runyan, 1988b). In his suggestions for effective and accurate psychobiographical writing, Freud warned psychobiographers to avoid the following: (a) Arguments built upon a single clue; (b) pathographising and/or idealising the psychobiographical subject; and (c) drawing strong conclusions from inaccurate data (Elms, 1994). Elms (1994) maintained that these guidelines (and Freud's failure to adhere to them) serve as a cautionary tale of what can happen if psychobiographers ignore Freud's guidelines as he did. This is summed up in a final proscriptive guideline for all psychobiographers: "Avoid assuming that you are less susceptible to psychobiographical errors than Freud was" (Elms, 1994, p. 50).

Following Freud's pioneering contributions to psychobiography, psychoanalysts started using this form of research to investigate and study the personality of artists (Kőváry, 2011). The period between 1912 and 1937 produced a periodical known as *Imago*, which was dedicated to the application of psychoanalysis to human sciences such as anthropology, literature, philosophy, theology and linguistics. This publication not only examined the relationship of the artist and the neurotic, it also explained the connection between biography and the idiosyncrasies of a particular artist, and thereby legitimised pathography and psychobiography as a research method (Schönau, 1998). Proponents of early psychoanalysis conducted psychobiographical studies which included analyses of Conrad Ferdinand Meyer (Sadger, 1908), Shakespeare as explored through *Hamlet* (Jones, 1910), Richard Wagner (Graf, 1911), Amenhotep the 4th (Abraham, 1912, 1935), Martin Luther (Smith, 1913) and Socrates (Karpas, 1915).

The rise of psychoanalytic biography elicited the disapproval of art lovers who felt that the authors of these psychobiographies handled existing art literature like "some museum that is easy to access, using its exhibited objects to justify new hypotheses" (Schönau, 1998, p. 32).

Since these hypotheses were reductionistic and primarily of a psychopathological nature typical of the personality concepts of classic psychoanalysis, the psychobiographies produced during the 1910s and 1920s elicited a number of criticisms against this method of analysis (Fouché, 1999; Kőváry, 2011; Runyan, 1988b). Nonetheless, the production of psychobiographies continued through the 1930s, and by the end of that decade psychobiographical studies had been written on Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Molière, Goethe, Coleridge, Nietzsche, Poe, Rousseau, Caesar, Lincoln, Napoleon, Darwin, and Alexander the Great (Anderson, 1978). The 1940s, however, proved to be a quiet period for psychological biography, except for studies of George III (Guttmacher, 1941) and Adolf Hitler (Langer, 1943). Fortunately, the 1950s not only saw a renewed production of psychobiographical studies, but also produced more meticulous and methodologically-orientated psychobiographies such as George and George's (1956) *Woodrow Wilson and Colonel House: A Personality Study* and Erikson's (1958) *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (Runyan, 1988b). The 1950s also produced some important attempts to clarify the scientific status of psychobiography. Both Ernst Kris (1952) (in his *Psychoanalytic Explorations in Art*), and David Beres (1959) (in his article, *The contribution of psychoanalysis to the biography of the artist – commentary of methodology*) attempted to draw attention to the importance of methodological clarification and the necessity of diverging from the psychopathology-centred approach (Kőváry, 2011). Despite their efforts, however, psychobiography lost its popularity and a large part of its credibility in the middle of the 20th century and was replaced by the study of decontextualised dispositional constructs using laboratory experiments and correlational studies (McAdams, 1997). Whilst Erikson's psychobiographies of Luther (1958) and Gandhi (1969) contributed greatly to reinstating the credibility of the psychobiographical approach (McAdams, 1988; Pietikainen & Ihanus, 2003), dynamic life-history research became a marginalised scientific method following the popularity of the nomothetic approach in personality and creativity research after World War II (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003; Runyan, 2005a).

According to Runyan (1988a), the psychobiographical analyses of writers, musicians, artists, politicians, scientists and religious figures increased significantly from the 1960s onwards, with the most accelerated increase occurring in the 1970s. The increase not only expanded the array of individuals studied, but also widened the range of disciplines contributing to psychobiography, for example: psychiatry, history, political science, sociology, anthropology, theology, education, music, art history and academic personality psychology (Cara, 2007; Runyan, 1988a). The discipline of neuropsychology also contributed to psychobiography by providing a more medically-orientated paradigm from which to study

eminent lives (Gronn, 1993). Although the authors from the different disciplines have shared the practice of psychobiography as a research method, it must be noted that they differ in terms of their selected research subjects, with social scientists generally selecting political or historical figures as their subjects, humanistic researchers selecting creative artists and psychologists selecting their own disciplinary predecessors as the subjects of their psychobiographies (Carlson, 1988; Runyan, 1988a).

The 1980s were characterised by a focus on the role of narrative in psychology (Bruner, 1986; Hargitai, 2007; László, 2008). The popularity of the narrative approach not only ignited psychobiography (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003; Runyan, 2005), but also resulted in a proliferation of pioneering works which greatly contributed to the study of lives. Amongst these were the works of James Anderson, Irving Alexander, William Runyan, Alan C. Elms and Dan McAdams. Interest in the narrative approach had already emerged in the 1970s when Silvan Tomkins developed an influential affect-theory that was applied by self psychologists when they replaced the psychoanalytic instinct-based theory with a theory based on human motivation (Monsen, 1999). Tomkins's (1979) script theory presented the individual as a playwright who, from birth onwards, constructs scenes and scripts in life so as to intensify emotion and create meaning over time (McAdams, 1994, 2006). It is the power of emotion to magnify the importance and urgency of some aspect of a particular situation that gives meaning and direction to a situation or scene (Barresi & Jukes, 1997). According to Tomkins (1979), the individual in script theory is not a passive experiencer of scenes or scripts, but, "like Charlie Chaplin, he will try to write, direct, produce, criticize, and promote the scenes in which he casts himself as hero" (p. 215).

In a similar vein, McAdams (1985a) formulated an empirically tested *life-story model of identity* that can be applied in psychobiographical analyses (Kőváry, 2011; Schultz, 2005a). This model proposes that individuals living in contemporary societies begin to build and internalise integrative life narratives in late adolescence and early adulthood and continue to work on these identity stories into the later years of life (Schultz, 2005a). The components of this model are determined by thematic lines and narrative complexity and include: (a) nuclear episodes of life stories (b) imagoes (which are the characters of the story); (c) ideological background; and (d) a script of generativity (Kőváry, 2011; McAdams, 1994). McAdams (1984, 1985a, 1985b, 1993) maintained that an imago represents an idealised personification of the self that functions as the main character in one's life story. Imagoes integrate a variety of different characteristics, roles and experiences in an individual's life, and also reflect culture's values and possibilities (McAdams, 1993, 1994).

As such, imagoes and their connection to the different components of McAdams' (1985a) model, contribute greatly to the organisation and interpretation of biographical data (Kőváry, 2011). According to McAdams (2005, p. 74), "The narrative study of lives seeks to write, interpret, and disseminate people's life stories with an eye toward understanding what those stories say about the people themselves and about culture".

In the 1980s and 1990s, the field of psychology witnessed a resurgence of interest in psychobiography and other methods related to personology and narrative research (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013). In 1988, *The Journal of Personality* published a special issue on psychobiography, which was later published as a book called *Psychobiography and Life Narratives* and included the journal articles by McAdams, Elms, Anderson, Runyan, Alexander, Carlson, Winter and Ochberg (Kőváry, 2011). In that same year, McAdams advocated a revitalisation of the personological tradition in his book *Power and Intimacy: Identity and the Life Story* (1988), and also edited *Psychobiography and Life Narratives* together with Richard Ochberg (Kőváry, 2011).

The 1990s ushered in what Kőváry (2011, p. 739) aptly referred to as "a renaissance of psychobiography". During this time, influential works were published which not only guided research in the psychobiographical endeavour, but also established psychobiography as an acceptable research method and a reputable genre (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). The influential works produced during this decade included *Personology: Method and content in personality assessment and psychobiography* (1990) by Irving Alexander, *Uncovering lives: The uneasy alliance of biography and psychology* (1994) by Alan Elms, and an article by William Runyan entitled, *Studying lives: psychobiography and the structure of personality psychology*, which was later included in the American Academic Press' *Handbook of Personality Psychology* (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Kőváry, 2011; Runyan, 1997).

New approaches to psychobiography during the 1980s and 1990s included a move towards psychoanalytical phenomenology, which established a strong trend in psychoanalytical self psychology (Karterud & Island, 1999). This move was driven by Robert Stolorow and George Atwood who insisted that modern psychobiography focus on human subjectivity and the meaning of human experience and behaviour (Elms, 2007; Runyan, 1997; Stolorow & Atwood, 1984). Apart from psychoanalysis, Runyan (2005a) maintained that personology constitutes the most important theoretical and methodological foundation of modern psychobiography.

The new millennium has seen a revival in the study of individual lives (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003), attested to by the plethora of handbooks and journals published in the field of psychobiography. *Psychodynamics* published a special psychobiographical issue in 2003,

William Todd Schultz published the *Handbook of Psychobiography* in 2005, and in 2007, *The Guilford Press* published *Handbook of research methods in personality psychology* (Kőváry, 2011).

Today, modern psychobiography is based not only on the psychoanalytical tradition, but also on the theoretical and methodological foundation of personology, and the dynamic narratives derived from individual life stories (Kőváry, 2011; McAdams, 1988; Runyan, 2005). McAdams proposed that modern psychobiography should strive for an integration of personality theories in a hierarchical model (McAdams & Pals, 2007), and that it should apply more concepts of contemporary personality psychology (McAdams, 2005).

Although modern psychobiography reflects a greater biographical diversity of research subjects and employs more accurate research techniques, Ponterotto (2013) maintained that there are limited guidelines with regard to the best methodological practices in contemporary psychobiographical research. In 2008, Ponterotto began his own research programme in psychobiography (Ponterotto, 2014). Not only has his contribution to psychobiography included invaluable ethical guidelines for conducting and reporting psychobiography, it has also promoted the value of psychobiography as a doctoral dissertation topic and research approach in psychology (Ponterotto, 2014).

In South Africa, the 1990s have been metaphorically associated with the birth and childhood of academic psychobiography (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010), although Van Niekerk (2007) traced the first psychological analysis of an eminent South African as far back as 1939, when Burgers explored the life of author Cornelis Jacobus Langenhoven. In 1960, Burgess produced a similar study of the poet Louis Leipoldt, and in 1978 Van der Merwe produced a study of the life of the poetess, Ingrid Jonker (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

Van Niekerk (2007) noted that 20 years passed between Van der Merwe's (1978) study and the subsequent psychobiographic study of the life of General Jan Christiaan Smuts by Paul Fouche in 1999. Since then, the significance of academically institutionalised psychobiography has been recognised and pursued with much more vigour and enthusiasm by supervisors and postgraduate students in a number of South African Departments of Psychology, including the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in Port Elizabeth, Rhodes University (RU) in Grahamstown, the University of Johannesburg (UJ) and the University of the Free State (UFS) in Bloemfontein (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2009, 2010).

In addition to the awakening and growth of psychobiographical research at academic institutions, numerous articles pertaining to psychobiography have been published in the past 15 years in the *South African Journal of Psychology* (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Not only

does psychobiographical research hold value for the development and testing of theories related to human development in South Africa (Fouché, 1999), it also holds value for longitudinal research and theory in the fields of developmental psychology, positive psychology, health psychology, career psychology and personology (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). These authors call for continued contributions to the field of psychobiography to further enhance its status in South Africa and abroad.

5.6 Critique of Psychobiography

According to Ponterotto (2014), the most common criticisms hurled at psychobiography include reductionism, the limitations of single theory application, and the interpretation of a historical figure's personality through a contemporary lens. As far back as the 80s and 90s, Runyan (1997) warned against the dangers of reductionism in psychobiography. Reductionism refers to the tendency of reconstructing early childhood events or overemphasising the impact of childhood experiences on personality development and behaviour across the subject's lifespan (Runyan, 1982, 1997). Critics of psychobiography maintain that a focus on the individual reduces the discipline to something simplistic, reductionistic and elitist (Runyan, 1988a). In this regard, Anderson (1981b) wrote:

As even the fiercest proponents of psychobiography admit, psychobiographical studies tend to be reductionistic, narrow, and disparaging. A marked disparity exists between the potential and the execution of psychobiography. (p. 455)

Elms (1994) added that contemporary psychology is often aimed at “reducing human complexities of thought and emotion to simplicities of cognition and neurology” (p. 11). In response to this criticism, Ponterotto (2014, p. 81) suggested that psychobiographical researchers strive for “expansionism” in an effort to obtain a more holistic, comprehensive, full-life review of historical subjects.

Psychobiography has also been criticised for depending too heavily on psychoanalytic formulations (Elms, 1994). This can be traced back to the historical roots of psychobiography. In the early 20th century, psychobiography was so enmeshed with the psychoanalytic approach, that it was often referred to as “applied psychoanalysis” (Ponterotto, 2014, p. 81). Although this has allowed for the interpretation of a broad array of emotional concerns at the heart of a life story (Kóváry, 2011), it has also led to the inappropriate application of single theories to historic and public figures through methodological flaws and researcher bias (Ponterotto, 2014). When a researcher's subjective feelings influence the analysis of qualitative results, the

meaning of data can be eschewed (McLeod, 2008). The application of a single theory also underestimates the impact of social and historical influences (Gay, 1988). Furthermore, the clinical-diagnostic approach of psychoanalysis has led to psychobiography being criticised for its focus on psychopathology and the subsequent disregard of a research subject's positive characteristics (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1988b; Schultz, 2005a). In response to this criticism, it appears that a more flexible, eclectic, personally significant and positive approach is needed – one that relies more courageously on different theories and methods of personality psychology and moulds theories around the subject's life story rather than that story being forced into a pre-determined theoretical model (Elms, 1994; Kőváry, 2011; McAdams, 2005; Ponterotto, 2014).

Another criticism is that psychobiographers sometimes fail to take into account that different historical periods and cultures may have adopted values and operating principles which differ from those that the contemporary psychobiographer is familiar with (Anderson, 1981a; Ponterotto, 2014). By interpreting the life of the research subject through his/her own world view and subjective life experiences, the psychobiographer can fall prey to biases and inaccuracies typical of retrospective reports (Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 1982). Runyan (1984) warned that the quality of a psychobiography is negatively affected when the researcher assumes that psychological theories may be applied unquestioningly to certain cultural groups or historical contexts. To this end, Runyan (1984) suggested a three-layered approach which takes into account the researcher's selected psychological theory, the contextual factors that apply to the subject, and the idiographic characteristics of the subject.

Lastly, psychobiography has been criticised for its “methodological looseness” (Elms, 1994, p. 10). This correlates with a criticism noted by Schultz (2002) regarding the inaccurate and imprecise methodology employed by psychobiographers. It has been suggested that quantitative methods are an essential feature of the scientific endeavour (Runyan, 1982) and that case studies are a less desirable form of inquiry than either experiments or surveys because they provide little basis for scientific generalisation (Yin, 2009). In this regard, Yin (2009) wrote:

Perhaps the greatest concern has been over the lack of rigor of case study research. Too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, has not followed systematic procedures, or has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions. (p. 14)

Notwithstanding the criticisms hurled against it, psychobiography has attracted increasing attention during the last three decades. This is attested to by the plethora of writings by pioneers

in the field of modern psychobiography, many of whom have developed techniques and processes to ensure the efficiency of psychobiographical research and promote its credibility in the scientific field (Elms, 1994; McAdams, 1988; Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 1988a; Schultz, 2005a). Runyan (1982) summed up the inherent value of psychobiography perfectly when he said: “Detailed studies of individual cases can make an important contribution to the design and evaluation of efforts to alter the course of experience in individual lives” (p. 443).

5.7 The Appeal and Value of Psychobiographical Research

Despite the numerous criticisms hurled at psychobiographical research, supporters of the approach maintain that it holds undeniable advantages for the discipline of psychology (Elms, 1988; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014). These include: (a) appreciating the uniqueness of the individual case within the whole, (b) incorporating the socio-historical context of the individual, (c) entering the subjective reality of the individual, (d) tracing process and pattern across the lifespan, (e) the testing and development of theories, (f) integration within the discipline of psychology, (g) adding to educational objectives in diverse fields, and (h) the study of psychological outliers. These advantages are discussed in greater depth below.

5.7.1 Appreciating the Uniqueness of the Individual Case within the Whole

Personality psychology was born within psychology departments in American universities at a time when the focus of psychology was on the search for universal laws applicable to all organisms (McAdams, 1994). This nomothetic approach contrasted sharply with personality psychology’s holistic approach to the study of individuals and resulted in personality psychology being a dissident field on the large scene of American psychology (Hall & Lindsey, 1957). In 1937, Gordon Allport published the first major textbook in personality and in it espoused personality psychology as the study of the individual person. Allport (1937) defined personality as “the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustment to his environment” (p. 48). For more than 25 years, Allport advocated an idiographic approach to studying personality development (Fouché, 1999). This established idiographic research as a science at odds with the nomothetic approach that positivists and statisticians used to generalise psychological principles and laws of behaviour (Elms, 1994; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Hermans, 1988; Hevern, 1999).

Although Allport’s dichotomous classification of the idiographic and the nomothetic was criticised for failing to provide a satisfactory explanation concerning the individuality of the

whole person in context (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 1999; Wallace, 1989), it encouraged many personologists of the time to pay attention to the uniqueness of the individual and the complexities of the single case (McAdams, 1994; Rosenwald, 1988). In response to the criticism, Allport (1942) eventually replaced the absolutistic term idiographic with the more subtle term morphogenic, which refers to the study of individualised patterning processes in personality as a whole, as opposed to the study of particular and isolated elements of personality (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1982, 1983).

The morphogenic nature of psychobiography allows researchers to provide a holistic description of a subject's life, whilst maintaining the individuality and uniqueness of that subject (Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994; Gronn, 1993; Runyan, 1984, Stroud, 2004). Added to this is the fact that personality psychology and psychobiography share the goal of improved understanding of individuals, with the result that progress made in the field of psychobiography invariably contributes to the development of personality psychology and vice versa (Runyan, 1988a). Schultz (2001b) reinforced this notion by positing that the study of the individual as a primary unit of analysis restores the individual to the place where he/she should be in personality psychology.

5.7.2 Incorporating the Socio-Historical Context of the Individual

Psychobiography not only provides the opportunity to appreciate the uniqueness of the individual in his/her totality, it also provides the opportunity to understand the biographical subject within the gestalt of socio-historical culture, socialisation processes, interpersonal relationships and family history (Fouché, 1999; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Runyan, 1984; Watson, 1976). By acknowledging the influence of society and history on the individual and his/her experience of the world (Goodson & Sikes, 2001), the psychobiographer can gain a more holistic understanding of the psychological development of that individual (Carlson, 1988; Roberts, 2002; Runyan, 1984). This notion of understanding the individual's life holistically within the context of interrelations among various parts and times of his/her world, is aptly captured by Levinson (1981) who wrote:

[The past is] part of the present, and the biographer must so represent it. Likewise, the person's defined plans and more shadowy imaginings of the future shape and are shaped by the present. The future, too, forms a part of the present that the biographer must explore. (pp. 61-62)

The principal concept in Levinson's model is the individual *life structure*, which he defines as "the patterning or design of the individual life at a given time" (Levinson, 1978, p. 99).

Since the individual life structure includes the individual's sociocultural world (class, religion, family, political systems, historical era), his/her participation in this world (relationships and roles with respect to significant people and institutions in his/her life), and various facets of the self (which may remain stable or may be transformed over time), it is no wonder that life history research, such as psychobiography has played a pivotal role in the field of social science, where it has been used to expose the larger cultural and sub-cultural influences on human development (Fouché, 1999; McAdams, 1994; Mouton, 1988; Runyan, 1982a, 1988b). Apart from Daniel Levinson (1920-1994), theorists such as Alfred Adler (1870–1937), Erik Erikson (1902–1980), and Henry Murray (1893–1988) emphasised the influence of social, cultural and historical factors on human development. Their contribution to the study of lives in the field of personality psychology established psychologically informed biography as the best vehicle for capturing a human life within the sociohistorical context (McAdams, 1994).

5.7.3 Entering the Subjective Reality of the Individual

According to Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990), human beings make sense of the world either according to the paradigmatic mode of thought or according to the narrative mode of thought. Whilst the paradigmatic mode of thought concerns itself with scientifically-reasoned analyses, logical proof and empirical observations; the narrative mode of thought concerns itself with stories which capture the fluctuations of human intention organised in time (Bruner, 1986). This narrative truth in life, although removed from logic, science and empirical demonstration (Spence, 1982), perceptively captures human desire, goal and social conduct (Cordes, 1986). McAdams (1994) reiterated this by stating that: “Stories are less about facts and more about meanings. In the subjective and embellished telling of the past, the past is constructed – history is made” (p. 721). This perspective was proposed as far back as 1930 when Adler posited that the interpretation of reality and the meanings associated with experience far outweigh the significance of objective reality (Corey, 2005). Adler wrote:

Experiences, traumata, sexual development mechanisms cannot yield an explanation, but the perspective in which these are regarded, the individual way of seeing them, which subordinates all life to the final goal, can do so. (p. 400)

The subjective nature of life history research allows the psychobiographer to enter the world of the biographical subject, and better understand his/her inner experiences, thoughts and feelings (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Howe, 1997; Mouton, 1988; Watson, 1976). According to Watson (1976), the subjective understanding of a subject's life story provides a hermeneutical and phenomenological perspective. This not only illuminates the subject's life story and the

personal myths that construct it (Adler, 1929; McAdams, 1996), but also promotes the development of sympathy and empathy with the subject (Runyan, 1984; Schultz, 2003). Runyan (1984) maintained that such empathic understanding ensures an evocative and emotionally-compelling narration of the subject's life story. The artistry involved in this narration is aptly captured by Schultz (2005b) who said:

In psychobiography one tells a story about a life. Chances are, the life itself already entices, but the story adds to or subtracts from any initial intensity of interest ... To write psychobiography one acts not like a scientist but an artist ... Narration is required ... If understanding people really is analogous to the interpretation of a poem, then we can't deny the essential artfulness of the psychobiographical enterprise. Like any artisan, we do best when we hone this artfulness, not ignore or avoid it. (p. 13)

5.7.4 Tracing Process and Pattern across the Lifespan

Life history research not only allows for a more comprehensive description and deeper understanding of behavioural processes and developmental patterns across the lifespan of the biographical subject (Mouton, 1988; Runyan, 1984), it also provides the opportunity to examine and understand the dynamicism of the biographical subject's personality functioning (Fiske, 1988; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Since life history research involves the longitudinal study of finished lives (Alexander, 1990), researchers in this field can obtain an all-encompassing view of human development as it unfolds through the different stages of life, from birth until death (Carlson, 1988; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Gronn, 1993; Sokolovsky, 1996). This adds value to personality psychology, because it allows for a holistic study of the different processes and dimensions in personality functioning at any given time and in any situation (Fouché, 1999). White (1972) captured this notion perfectly when he wrote that “[t]he study of personality includes the time dimension and is most perfectly represented in the study of whole lives in all their individuality” (p. 2).

5.7.5 The Testing and Development of Theories

The extent of psychobiography's value in the field of theory testing and development is best described by Runyan (2005), who wrote that “Personal life histories are ... involved in the creation and development of every tradition in psychology, including psychoanalysis, learning theory, behaviourism, humanist psychology, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, and the study of lives” (p. 19). According to Carlson (1988), the material obtained from cases studied in psychobiography provides the perfect laboratory for the testing and development of theories in the field of human development. Howe (1997) posited that empirical psychology (of which

psychobiography forms part) not only adds to our understanding of the developmental process in individuals, but also provides various kinds of necessary knowledge that would not normally be available to biographers. Such knowledge plays an important role in theory development. Adler and Adler (1987) highlighted the value of case study research by asserting that, through an examination of the trans-situational relevance of description, “we can generate, modify, and expand the conceptualizations that shape our scientific understanding” (p. 6).

Not only is case study research important in the development of theory, it also ensures that the pertinence of existing psychological theories can be tested. In asserting that theory development facilitates both the collection of data and the generalisation of case study results, Yin (2009) differentiated between statistical generalisation and analytic generalisation. In statistical generalisation, inferences are made about a population based on data collected from a sample of that population.

According to Yin (2009), a fatal flaw in doing case study research (such as psychobiography) is to conceive of statistical generalisation as the method of generalising the results of the case study. This is because case studies are not “sampling units” and should not be chosen for this reason (Yin, 2009, p. 38). Rather, individual case studies should be selected in the same way that a laboratory investigator selects the topic of a new experiment. In such circumstances, the mode of generalisation is analytical, and refers to the process whereby previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study (Yin, 2009). The aim of analytic generalisation is thus to compare case study data with previously developed theory so that it can be tested, extended and developed even further (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Yin, 2009). The information gained from psychobiographical case study research thus plays a pivotal role in expounding the conceptual intricacies in the understanding of individual lives that prompt research and theory development (Schultz, 2005b). Consequently, psychobiography has proven to be extremely valuable in the testing and development of theories in the fields of gerontology, career development, human health and potential development, leadership development and personality development (Fouché, 1999; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; McAdams, 1994).

5.7.6 Integration within the Discipline of Psychology

Runyan (1988, 2005) maintained that personality psychology is concerned with the basic tasks of developing general theories of personality, analysing individual and group differences, understanding individual persons, and studying selected processes and classes of behaviour. Since one of the ultimate objectives of personality psychology is to arrive at a better

understanding of individual persons, progress in the study of individual lives (as is conducted in psychobiography), is closely related to progress in personality psychology as a whole (Runyan, 1988a, 2005).

As explored in greater detail in section 5.7.8, the value of the mutually-beneficial relationship between psychobiography and personality psychology is even more obvious when the researched subject is considered extraordinary, “and even more so when their very uniqueness is a primary reason for taking an interest in them” (Howe, 1997, p. 241). Studying the abilities, talents and remarkable traits of luminaries increases our knowledge of psychological well-being and sheds light on the psychology of creativity and the psychological make-up of creative geniuses (McAdams, 2005; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). Simonton (1999) provided an incentive for psychologists to study significant samples when he wrote:

one of the best ways of demonstrating the broader relevance of psychology is to show that it helps to explain the big events and important people of the real world, including leaders, creators, champions, saints, sages, and celebrities. (p. 442)

Psychobiography not only contributes to the field of personality psychology, it also allows for an integration of diverse psychological theories (Perry, 2012). Schultz (2005b) maintained that by taking one life at a time and assimilating what is useful from disparate bodies of knowledge, psychobiography allows for an integration of psychology’s “split selves” (p. 5).

5.7.7 Adding to Educational Objectives in Diverse Fields

The case study, which characterises psychobiography, has been defined as an intensive investigation of a single unit (Handel, 1991; Runyan, 1982; Yin, 1989) and, as such, has proven to be extremely useful to study problems in depth, to understand the stages in processes, and to understand situations in context (Greene & David, 1984; Yin, 1989). Psychobiographical research thus lends itself to research and teaching in many diverse fields, including medicine, law and business (Gilgun, 1994). Not only has case study research provided the basis for the development of psychotherapy (Kazdin, 1981), for the science of cognitive development as instituted by Piaget (1951, 1952, 1954), and for the science of human behaviour (Garmezy, 1982); it also established the platform on which foundation work for family therapy and family sociology was based (Gilgun, Daly, & Handel, 1992; Handel, 1991).

According to Gilgun (1994), case study research (of which psychobiography forms part) is compatible with many forms of social work practice and policy research. Apart from the fact that social work deals with the most intractable and painful social problems, the practice thereof is informed by the ideals of social justice and deeply rooted ethical principles. In light of this,

Gilgun (1994) suggested that case study research could add immense value to the discipline of social work by building social work knowledge for assessment, intervention and outcome.

Using his psychobiography of Frederick Douglass as an example, Torres (1977) described how the material obtained from case study research may be used to teach psychoanalytic developmental theory to parents who are enrolled in social welfare programmes. Since psychobiography involves the application of modern psychoanalytic and social theory principles to facts surrounding the development and activities of extraordinary people, Torres (1977) used the parents' interest in the psychobiographical subject to facilitate understanding of both the subject and the underlying psychosocial theory, and in the process, affirmed the value of psychobiographical analysis as a teaching tool.

Cara (2007) suggested that psychobiography is a method that can effectively be assimilated by occupational therapy and occupational science. This is due to the fact that psychobiography is an interdisciplinary method and is well-suited to any researcher who has disciplined empathy and an interest in collecting solid data (Elms, 1994). Psychobiography has been equated to a specific form of narrative that focuses primarily on the psychological background and behaviour of an individual to make predictions about that individual's motivations (Elms 1994; Runyan, 1984; Schultz, 2005a). Since occupational therapy has defined itself as a field that uses narrative to develop theory and practice (Burke & Kern, 1996; Clark, 1993; Clark, Carlson, & Polkinghorne, 1997; Clouston, 2003; Eklund, Rottpeter, & Vikstrom, 2003; Finlay, 2004; Gahnstrom-Strandqvist, Josephsson, & Tham, 2004; Helfrich, Kielhofner, & Mattingly, 1994; Larson & Fanchiang, 1996; Mattingly & Lawlor, 2000; Price-Lackey & Cashman, 1996; Wicks & Whiteford, 2003), psychobiography can be used to broaden existing knowledge on occupational behaviour in the field of occupational therapy. The fit between psychobiography and occupational therapy is further affirmed by the fact that both these fields work with the whole personality and recognise the complexity of the individual, with a focus on health rather than pathology (Cara, 2007; Schultz, 2005a). The fact that psychobiographical research can broaden the methodological scope of the occupational therapy field and expand on research to understand individuals, is supported by Carlson (1988) who wrote that the psychobiographical method could bring valuable data from biographical studies in other disciplines to bear on occupational therapy theoretical efforts.

Kővary (2011) posited that research practice using psychobiography could play an invaluable role in the training of psychologists. According to him, apart from requiring comprehensive, profound and personal knowledge of psychological functioning, psychology students require tuition that focuses on the development of their self-awareness and their

empathic skills. Kőváry (2011) argued that such knowledge can be created by in-depth, integrative personal work that is not based on statistical evaluation of correlated personality traits, but rather on the understanding of individual lives by case studies and the exploration of life stories. In this regard, Kőváry (2011) reiterated Dilthey's premise that "Understanding is the rediscovery of the I in the Thou" (1996, p. 192) when he wrote:

Teaching and applying modern psychobiographic approaches could become part of the theoretical and practical education of psychology students, and could play a significant role in socializing for the profession of psychology. A century-long experience reveals that studying lives can be extremely useful and contribute to the development of the recognition of the self and the other, and its practical applications such as psychobiography are able to prepare future professionals to better understand the meaning of individual lives supported by indispensable self-reflection. (Kőváry, 2011, pp. 767-768)

5.7.8 The Study of Psychological Outliers

Psychologists have always been interested in the study of individuals who have "made a name for themselves" or, in extreme cases, have "made history" for some distinctive achievement like the creation of a masterpiece or an act of leadership that changed the course of history (Simonton, 1999, p. 425). These individuals have been perceived as *outliers* on the normal distribution of human personality development (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013). According to Runyan (1982), psychobiography provides a descriptively rich approach to the study of outliers since it involves "the explicit use of formal or systematic psychology in biography" (p. 201).

The study of these outliers not only helps to demonstrate the broader relevance of psychology by explaining significant events and important people of the real world (such as leaders, creators, champions, saints, sages and celebrities), it also promotes the development of "positive psychology" by highlighting "optimal human functioning" (Simonton, 1999, p. 442). In a similar vein, Elms (1994) cautioned psychobiographers against over-pathologising a research subject's life. He called for a more eugraphic approach which focused on extraordinary and exemplary individuals, since this would guide positive psychologists in determining how psychosocial factors facilitate the development of greatness (Fouche & Van Niekerk, 2010). As postulated by Simonton (1999), positive psychology benefits appreciably from the study of outstanding or illustrious individuals who display positive traits, such as creativity, charisma, talent, morality, spirituality, or wisdom; and thus overlaps considerably with the goals of psychobiographical research (Van Niekerk, 2007). This would explain why contemporary psychobiography is constantly widening its focus and has become a popular

strategy for the analysis of artists, scientists, political and historical figures (Kőváry, 2011). Izenberg (2003) highlighted the important role that psychobiography plays in understanding the masterpieces of intellectual and artistic geniuses, since these masterpieces are the ones “most clearly marked by the individuality as well as the genius of their creators” (Izenberg, 2003, p. 32). It is not surprising, therefore, that psychobiography has proven to be a very useful research method in exploring the psychology of creativity (Kőváry, 2009a, 2009b). Fouché and Van Niekerk (2010) posited that, “Exceptional individuals remind researchers in psychology that great achievements are within reach and this could inspire citizens to strive towards similar achievements” (p. 502).

Whilst the one end of the spectrum of personality development represents those outliers who are “geniuses”, the other end of the spectrum represents those outliers who have left their mark through their “madness” (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013, p. 384), or because their attainments were “infamous rather than famous, notorious rather than notable” (Simonton, 1999, p. 426). According to Ponterotto and Reynolds (2013, p. 384) sometimes the study of “genius” and “madness”, or “creativity” and “mental illness” converge in the same person. Sylvia Plath, the highly acclaimed literary genius who suffered from major depression and committed suicide at the age of 30, provides an example of such convergence (Cooper, 2003; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b).

Ponterotto (2012) explored both the genius and psychological decline of Bobby Fischer, world-famous chess champion, and posited that such a psychobiographical study could help mental health practitioners and educators to meet the needs of child prodigies and youths at risk. Ponterotto and Reynolds (2013) further suggested that such a study could be extended to examine the relationship between Bobby Fischer’s mental condition and the levels of stress throughout his lifetime. Such a suggestion holds promise for psychobiographical research on Sylvia Plath since it serves as an incentive to examine the interplay and role of genetic predispositions (nature) and environmental circumstances (nurture) in heightening Plath’s creative literary genius, and simultaneously contributing to her psychological symptoms of depression.

Kramer (2002) maintained that psychobiography is a particularly appropriate method for the study of suicide because it is sensitive to the individuality of each case. By studying the lives of individuals who have committed suicide, psychobiography can help to provide a coherent account of an otherwise unfinished, unresolved life narrative (Nel, 2013). Since suicide is an intricate human problem that defies any singular explanation (Gilbert, 1992, Heckler, 1994; Schneideman, 1976a, 1976b), an in-depth analysis of unique cases of suicide

can reveal common psychological processes that drive the individual toward the final, fatal decision (Kramer, 2002).

Schultz (2005a, 2005b) emphasized the role of psychobiography and related case-study approaches in understanding how people are unique and how they function and come to be irrespective of any reference group. According to Schultz (2005b, 2005d), psychobiographers assume that renowned or noteworthy individuals are worth knowing in a deep way, because they are often exactly those individuals whom knowing more about, and as intimately as possible, may be seen as most rewarding and worthwhile. Schultz (2005b) articulated this notion perfectly when he said:

the world's Gandhis and Hitlers, Picassos and Van Goghs. These are the figures who define the limits and the architecture of the human mind, in all its horror and magnificence. We must know them, because to know them is to know ourselves. (p.4)

5.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to provide a theoretical overview of the development and practice of contemporary psychobiography. The term psychobiography was defined and differentiated from closely related terms such as biography, autobiography, life history, historical psychology, historical research, historiography and psychohistory. The history and critique of psychobiography were presented, followed by a discussion of its appeal and value as a single-case, qualitative research methodology in the study of extraordinary lives. The following chapter delineates the preliminary methodological precautions and strategies that psychobiographers need to take into account to ensure an ethically-sound psychobiographical study.

CHAPTER 6

PRELIMINARY METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter explores the methodological issues and constraints that need to be considered when conducting a psychobiographical case study. These issues and constraints include subjectivity and researcher bias, reductionism, socio-cultural and historical considerations, inadequacy of evidence, elitism and easy genre, infinite profusion of biographical data and exaggerated expectations. Criticisms relating to the validity and reliability of psychobiographical design and methodology are also discussed, with particular reference to the idiographic and emic nature of qualitative research and the standards of rigour that stem from the postpositivist paradigm. This is followed by ethical considerations in psychobiographical case study research. Each of the discussed methodological issues is followed by a discussion of the methods applied by the researcher to palliate the negative effects of the methodological constraints on the study of Sylvia Plath.

6.2 Methodological Considerations in Psychobiographical Case Study

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), qualitative research is a field of inquiry that not only crosscuts disciplines, fields and subject matter, but also advocates a diversified range of methods and approaches – from case studies, politics and ethics, to participant observation, visual methods and interpretive analysis. In light of this diversity, qualitative research (of which psychobiography forms part), has often been criticised for failing to comply with the rigorous methodological demands of scientific inquiry (Anderson, 1981a; Runyan, 1982, 1984, 1988b; Yin, 2009), and has consequently been relegated to a subordinate status in the scientific arena (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2008). In response, qualitative researchers have extolled the humanistic virtues of their subjective, interpretive approach to the study of human life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), claiming that such an approach gives proper recognition “to the full complexity and dignity of what it is to be human” (Edwards, 1998, p. 2). Patton (2002) aptly compared qualitative research to alchemy when he said: “Medieval alchemy aimed to transmute base metals into gold. Modern alchemy aims to transform raw data into knowledge, the coin of the information age. Rarity increases value. Fine qualitative analysis remains rare and difficult – and therefore valuable” (p. 432).

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials, one of which is the psychobiographical case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The case study method has played a fundamental role in the evolution of humanistic and transpersonal clinical inquiry (Edwards, 1998; Runyan, 1982), and constitutes but one of several ways of doing social science research (Yin, 2009). Although psychobiographical case study research has classically been considered a “soft” form of research (Yin, 2009, p. 2), which lacks rigorous scientific research methods and scientifically supported theories (Anderson, 1981a, 1981b; Howe, 1997; Runyan, 1982; Schultz, 2014); it is, in fact, one of the most difficult forms of research, because it requires the use of multiple sources of evidence that converge and aim for triangulation and methodological pluralism (Ponterotto, 2015; Yin, 2009).

According to Ponterotto (2015), psychobiographical case study research has relied, to a large extent, on qualitative research methods anchored in the constructivist-interpretivist research paradigm. A paradigm, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2008), encompasses four forms, namely: (a) ethics (axiology), (b) epistemology, (c) ontology and (d) methodology. *Ethics* asks the question: “How will I be as a moral person in the world?” *Epistemology* asks the question: “How do I know the world?” *Ontology* raises questions about the nature of reality and the nature of human beings in the world. *Methodology* concentrates on the best means for acquiring knowledge about the world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). In psychobiographical case study research, the means for acquiring knowledge have included archival record and document review (1st and 3rd-person sources), personal interviews, and integration of extant biographical data (Ponterotto, 2015). Although these research means have contributed significantly to a better understanding of the complexity and diversity of the research subject’s central life story in holistic, historic and cultural context (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; McAdams, 1994; Ponterotto, 2014). Ponterotto (2015) suggested a more scientifically-orientated approach to psychobiography, manifested in the following ways:

- (1) the application of more empirically validated and testable theories of psychology;
- (2) the use of more rigorous historiographic research approaches with the integration of some quantitative research methods;
- and (3) careful attention to ethical considerations in the planning, execution, and reporting of psychobiographical studies. (p.384)

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) compared the qualitative researcher to “a *bricoleur*”, “a maker of quilts”, or, “a person who assembles images into montages” (p. 5). Edel (1979) remarked, however, that the researcher’s “real battle” is to discover “the figure under the carpet, the evidence in the reverse of the tapestry” (Anderson, 1981a, p. 475). Anderson (1981a, p. 451) cautioned that “no psychological explanation is ever unquestionably true”. In the same vein,

Lincoln and Guba (2000) posited that there is no single conventional paradigm to which all social scientists ascribe. Anderson's word of caution echoes Denzin and Lincoln's (2008) assertion that there is no single "truth" (p. 252), and correlates with Henry James' cautionary note: "Never say you know the last word about any human heart" (cited in Anderson, 1981a, p. 475). Ponterotto (2014) remarked, however, that the astute, thoughtful, psychologically self-aware psychobiographer provides a stethoscope with which to hear the rhythms of that heartbeat.

Although research literature abounds with criticisms expounding the discrepancy between the potential and the execution of psychobiography (Anderson, 1981a, 1981b; Fouché, 1999; Howe, 1997; Runyan, 1983, 1984; Schultz, 2014), the last decade has seen committed efforts amongst notable psychobiographers to raise the psychobiographical endeavour to the status of a legitimate science based on more empirically tested theories and more positively-orientated psychology models (Fouché, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Ponterotto, 2015; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013b; Schultz, 2014).

Fouché (1999) synthesised the major preliminary constraints and obstacles inherent to the methodology of psychobiographical case study research. The psychobiographer has a responsibility to pay particular attention to these methodological pitfalls and to be "open to melding and shifting theoretical anchors as the available data are integrated and interpreted" (Ponterotto, 2014, p. 84).

6.2.1 Subjectivity and Research Bias

6.2.1.1 Explanation

According to Edwards (1998), a careful, unbiased description is essential when conducting psychobiography. The task requires detailed observation as well as the identification of basic concepts and distinctions which will enable the psychobiographer to accurately describe what has been observed (Edwards, 1998). In the same vein, Anderson (1981a, 1981b) emphasised that it is imperative that psychobiographers be acutely aware of their own personal and methodological biases when conducting research. During the data collection phase, it is particularly important that steps be taken to ensure that the raw data are genuine and free from bias and selection effects (Edwards, 1998). According to Morrow (2005), there are many factors that can interfere with a fair collection and interpretation of data, including the researcher's emotional involvement with the topic of interest, presuppositions formed from reading the literature, and various aspects of interaction with research subjects. Ponterotto

(2014) maintained that a psychobiographer's level of bias can vary widely, as can his/her unspoken agendas in writing the life story of an eminent individual. In some cases the subject is seen as a role model or hero to the researcher; whilst in other cases, the subject may have done great harm to society and the researcher may want to uncover the dynamics behind the evil (Ponterotto, 2014). Alternatively, the subject may represent a deep mystery to the researcher, who is then driven by a need to unveil that life mystery (Ponterotto, 2014).

Ponterotto (2014) referred to different types of biased psychobiographies, namely: *hagiographies*; *idealographies*; *degradographies* and *pathographies*. Dating back to the ancient Greeks, hagiographies (from the Greek "holy" or "saint" and "to write") were essentially idolising summaries of the life stories of saints, gurus and other holy individuals believed to possess sacred powers. *Idealographies* are not as revering as idolising hagiographies, but still idealise the character, achievement and impact of historical subjects, and thus fall in the category of biased positive psychobiographies. Conversely, *degradographies* are defined by Manis (1994) as biographies that rely on derogatory gossip or innuendos of disreputable behaviour to debase the life of public figures. In the same category of biased negative psychobiographies, *pathographies* are defined by Schultz (2005b) as diagnostic psychobiographies that reduce the complex whole of personality to static psychopathological categories and/or symptoms, thereby obscuring the psychological strengths and resources of research subjects.

The extensiveness of pathology-orientated theories employed in psychobiographies attests to the fact that psychobiographers have a tendency to indulge in disparaging their research subjects (Anderson, 1981a). Although the psychobiographer may unconsciously believe that he/she is objectively describing the subject's personality, an emphasis on the pathological components of the subject's personality may be an unconscious expression of the psychobiographer's dislike of the subject. In this regard, Anderson (1981a) suggested that psychobiographers carefully examine their feelings about their research subjects and constantly be aware of counter-transference. Erikson (1964, 1974) maintained that counter-transference is inevitable in a psychobiography, but if recognised, can be turned into an advantage, rather than an obstacle, because it can provide an indication of how people who interacted with the subject during his/her lifetime may have felt about him/her. According to Anderson (1981a), what is crucial is that the psychobiographer differentiate between these commonly-elicited feelings and those that are idiosyncratic and personally unique to the researcher. Anderson (1981a) suggested that, apart from the recognition of counter-transference, the development of empathy could safeguard psychobiographers against the tendency to be disparaging, even at an

unconscious level. Erikson (1958, 1969, 1974) proposed that psychobiographers approach their research subjects with disciplined subjectivity as this would allow for the recognition of subjective interpretation as well as for self-reflection on the impact of feelings, perceptions and personal aspects that invariably affect qualitative psychobiographical research.

Unlike quantitative research traditions which strive for objectivity, qualitative researchers regard their subjectivity as well as that of their research subjects as an integral part of the research process (Flick, 2006; Morrow, 2005). Irrespective of this difference, Morrow (2005) maintained that both qualitative and quantitative research approaches are subject to researcher bias and that the different operating paradigms have their own ways of approaching subjectivity and managing the resultant bias (Erikson, 1969, 1974).

Qualitative researchers can manage subjectivity and minimise researcher bias in a number of ways, including: representation, making their implicit assumptions and biases overt to themselves and others, and reflexivity (Morrow, 2005). The concept of representation that emanates from subjectivity relates to asking questions about whose reality is represented in psychobiographical research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). These questions highlight the complexities of fairly representing the experiences of a research subject; and point to the importance of seeing the subject, rather than the researcher, as the authority on the subject's life (Morrow, 2005).

Making one's implicit assumptions and biases overt to self and others has become standard practice in qualitative research and is referred to as "*bracketing*", "*monitoring of self*" (Peshkin, 1988, p. 20), or being "*rigorously subjective*" (Jackson, 1990, p. 154). This describes the process of becoming aware of one's implicit assumptions and predispositions and setting them aside to avoid having them influence the research adversely (Schwandt, 2001).

In order to deal with biases and assumptions that come from their own personal life experiences or from emotionally-laden interactions with research subjects over long periods of time, qualitative researchers are advised to approach their research reflexively and ambivalently (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 1999; Morrow, 2005; Schultz, 2005a; Stroud, 2004). Reflexivity is a process which entails reflecting critically on oneself as researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2008) and is aptly defined by Rennie (2004) as "self-awareness and agency within that self-awareness" (p. 183).

There are two ways in which researchers can monitor reflexivity. One is through the use of a self-reflective journal which contains an ongoing record of the researcher's experiences, reactions and awareness of biases that arise during the research process (Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). The other is through consultation with a research team of

knowledgeable colleagues who can critically evaluate and discuss the researcher's reflections (Hill, Thompson & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

According to Elms (1994), the best psychobiographical studies come from researchers who feel ambivalent not only toward the subject of their study, but also toward the method of psychobiography itself, as ambivalence ensures honesty in the examination of data. Elms and Song (2005) added that fairness in psychobiography can be attained by conscientiously gathering all the personality-related information one can locate on a research subject before reaching firm conclusions. Such data should be gathered without prescreening it to support certain favoured hypotheses. The exploration of personal feelings and the ability to remain ambivalent have been identified as key elements in the successful execution of psychobiographical research (Elovitz, 2003). These guidelines complement those of Ponterotto (2014) who said: "Perhaps the ideal psychobiography is one that is comprehensive, exhaustively researched, holistic in coverage, and balanced in assessing and interpreting the subject's strengths and failings" (p. 83).

6.2.1.2 Application to the study of Plath

Prior to commencing with this research project, the researcher was familiar with Plath's works, but had limited knowledge about her personal life. The researcher was intrigued by the complexity of Plath's poetry and the impact which her works had on the feminist movement. As the researcher expanded her knowledge base of the subject's personal life history, she became aware of two particular elements of researcher bias pertaining to Plath as a research subject. The first related to the socio-historical context in which Plath was raised.

Although the United States of America experienced an explosion in the female labour market in the 1950s, women were mostly confined to secretarial and clerical positions, assembly lines, nursing, teaching and domestic service (Wilson, 2013). The majority of women who started college never graduated, with the result that, although many American women had jobs, they did not occupy high level positions and only a meagre six percent succeeded in reaching management positions (Gill, 2008).

In those days, women went to college in preparation for their roles as wives and mothers, and although college inspired many women, like Plath, to believe in a world of limitless possibilities, it simultaneously blinded them to the ruthless reality of gender discrimination in a society that made it impossible for women to amalgamate domesticity with a successful career (Davison, 1980; Gill, 2008).

The researcher sympathised with Plath's struggle to achieve her career aspirations within the confines of a restrictive and limiting social milieu. Steiner (1974) commented that Sylvia's poetry reflected this struggle. Although she always exhibited a calm exterior, which was in keeping with the expectations of her oppressive bourgeois upbringing, deep within she experienced a raging turbulence which manifested itself in the antithetical nature of her works (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Steiner, 1974). In order to keep the struggle in check, "she wore the mantle of a bourgeois lady, as inhibiting and restraining as a straight jacket" (Steiner, 1974, pp. 19-20).

The second element of research bias pertaining to Plath as a research subject related to her marriage and the emotional pain which she suffered as a result of her husband's infidelity. This element is inextricably linked to the first element in that the pressure of balancing an ambitious career with the traditional role expected of a woman in the 1950s, invariably reverberated and influenced the dynamics of Plath's relationship with Hughes.

To overcome researcher bias pertaining to these elements, the researcher discussed their contents with her research promoter. This helped to enhance the disciplined subjectivity (Erikson, 1958, 1969, 1974) of the researcher's empathic appreciation of the subject's life and the socio-cultural and historical forces which shaped it. This process of reflexivity is referred to in more detail in Chapter 11.

The extensive research into Plath's literary and socio-historical contexts ensured holistic coverage and afforded the researcher the opportunity to further examine her attitudes and feelings towards the research subject, all the while providing a comprehensive framework in which to arrive at a balanced assessment and interpretation of Plath's strengths and failings.

6.2.2 Reductionism

6.2.2.1 Explanation

The field of psychology has often been criticised for using strategies and methods which reduce human actions and experiences to behavioural contingencies, statistical regularities, neurophysiological states and processes, and computational functions and models (Martin & Dawda, 2002). Whilst such strategies and methods may be well-suited to disciplines such as physics and chemistry, they result in a reduction of psychological phenomena and undermine the fact that human actions and experiences are meaningful, intentional, rational, normative and perspective-orientated (Kimble, 1984; Martin & Dawda, 2002; Robinson, 1995). According to Martin and Dawda (2002), the physical, scientific reductionism applied so

extensively in psychology is inappropriate and needs to be replaced by ontological, epistemological and methodological alternatives that better explain psychological phenomena pertaining to human beings.

Similarly, Elms (1994) noted that a vast segment of contemporary psychology is concerned with reducing human complexities of thought and emotion to simplicities of cognition and neurology. He warned that, since psychology deals with “whole human beings – with people who talk and behave as people, not as bundles of nerve fibres or as simplified sensory systems”, reductionism as an overriding research strategy is ineffective and needs to be replaced by a more complicated set of explanations that adequately addresses the complexity of human development, personality and social psychology (Elms, 1994, p. 11). Schultz (2005b) accurately summed up the fact that reductionism minimises the complexity of human thought and behaviour when he wrote:

Reductionism reduces to explaining a lot by way of a very little (a single reason); in fact, psychobiography works best when it does exactly the opposite, namely, tracing mysterious gestalts of thought and action back to a variety of biographical vectors. (p. 12)

There are three ways in which reductionism distorts a clear understanding of what it is purported to explain. The first involves the application of fixed psychological formulas and theories which disregard the impact of complex social, cultural and historical influences on the life of the psychobiographical subject (Anderson, 1981a; Capps, 2004; Runyan, 1984, 1988). Comprehensive psychobiography takes cognisance of the intricacies of the psychobiographical subject’s personality and strives to interpret those intricacies within the context of the subject’s sociocultural and sociohistorical background (Anderson, 1981a; Howe, 1997; Schultz, 2005a). According to Ponterotto (2014, p. 81), “psychology has veered toward reductionism at the expense of more holistic descriptions of human behaviour” and should rather aim for “expansionism” since this would allow for a more holistic, comprehensive, full-time review of the historical subject.

A second form of psychobiographic reductionism stems from a tendency to overemphasise pathology at the expense of creativity, normality and psychological well-being (Anderson, 1981; Elms, 1994; Fouche, 1999; Runyan, 1982; 1988b). This tendency can be traced back to earlier psychobiographies anchored in the psychoanalytic tradition (Runyan, 1988b). These psychobiographies reduced the human life experience to a series of diagnostic labels which sought to capture and explain a historic or public figure’s mental capacity (Ponterotto, 2014). Aptly referred to as overpathologising (McAdams, 1994) or pathography (Schultz, 2005b) the

diagnostic slant of such a tendency not only undermines the complexity and variety of the psychobiographical subject's experience (Meissner, 2003; Schultz, 2005b) but also reduces the subject's life to a neurotic tendency characterised by psychopathological symptoms (Runyan, 1988b; Scalapino, 1999; Schultz, 2005b). Schultz (2005b) succinctly warned against this form of reductionism when he said: "... beware psychobiography by diagnosis. In oversimplifying a life – something all labels do – psychiatric diagnosis succeeds by subtraction, by leaving things out. Good psychobiography leaves in as much as possible" (p. 11).

A third form of reductionism occurs when psychobiographers overemphasise early childhood experiences on personality development and neglect later formative processes and influences that could affect behaviour across the psychobiographical subject's lifespan (Anderson, 1981a; Elms, 1994; Howe, 1997; Kőváry, 2011; Runyan, 1982). Erikson (1969) referred to this type of reductionism as "originology" and defined it as "the habitual effort to find the 'causes' of a man's whole development in his childhood conflicts"⁵ (p.98).

Erikson (1993) added that this form of reductionism reduces every human situation to a comparison with an earlier one, and presupposes that the source of all human situations can be traced back to infantile origins. Two variants of this form of reductionism include "the critical period fallacy" and "eventism" (Ponterotto, 2014, p. 80). Runyan (1982) warned that the critical period fallacy rests on the faulty assumption that the study of a subject's entire life can be conducted on the basis of a particular critical period in that subject's childhood. Similarly he warned against the danger of eventism, which involves viewing a particular critical event in childhood as pivotal in understanding all subsequent behaviour. Schultz (2005b), who tabulated reductionism as one of the markers of bad psychobiography, explained that whilst childhood plays an influential role in the development of personality, it is never the only factor that needs to be considered in good psychobiography.

A number of strategies have been proposed to guard against the pitfalls of reductionism in psychobiography. The first involves thorough research (Anderson, 1981a). A comprehensive literature study based on multiple sources of information (Fouche & Van Niekerk, 2005; Yin, 2009) ensures a holistic investigation that incorporates theoretical flexibility and eclecticism (Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 1982; Schultz, 2005b). This not only promotes a complex understanding of the psychobiographical subject, but also assists the psychobiographer in

⁵ Direct translation of Erikson's original quote. No gender discrimination is intended. 'Man' is used in a holistic sense to refer to men and women alike.

maintaining appreciation for the complexity of the subject's unique personality (Anderson, 1981a; Elms, 1994).

Another strategy to minimise reductionism includes the use of the eugraphic approach, since this approach emphasises health and normality and de-emphasises originology and pathography (Elms, 1994; Fouche, 1999). The incidence of reductionism is further reduced when psychobiographers avoid the excessive use of esoteric psychological terminology or jargon, since such psychological jargon misguides psychobiographers into believing that its use is synonymous with sufficient psychological explanation (Anderson, 1981a; Elovitz, 2003).

6.2.2.2 Application to the study of Plath

A number of strategies were employed by the researcher in order to guard against the pitfalls of reductionism. Firstly, an extensive literature study was conducted of all publicly available documentation on Plath's life as well as her publications. This comprehensive literature study, based on multiple sources of information, ensured a holistic investigation of Plath's life that incorporated the socio-cultural and historical contexts which impacted on her life.

The extensive documentation on Plath's life and works attests to the web of controversies surrounding her life. Some authors (e.g., Hayman, 1991; Stevenson, 1989) have fixated on her psychological problems or on her childhood experiences and the effect that this had on her later relationships. To avoid an overemphasis of Plath's early childhood experiences and to minimise the negative effects of originology, the researcher incorporated theories which consider lifelong growth and development. Similarly, the researcher ensured that the pathological aspects of Plath's life were not overemphasised by including theories which are eugraphic in nature and which also allow for an analysis of strengths and non-pathological developmental events in the subject's life.

Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development is a life course theory spanning an individual's entire life from birth until death. Not only did this theory allow for a psychosocial and longitudinal examination of Plath's life, it also allowed for an examination of the ego strengths which emanated from the synthesis of her syntonic and dystonic dispositions. The Internal Family Systems model of Schwartz (1995) evolved out of the recognition of the multiplicity of the mind. The application of this theory to Plath's life allowed the researcher to view Plath as a holistic system composed of various sub-personalities or parts. At the core of all these parts is the Self, which Schwartz (1995) defined as an active, compassionate inner leader.

There has been a tendency, in the documentation of Plath's life, to refer to the death of her father as a critical turning point in her life. The researcher avoided this reductionistic error referred to by Runyan (1988) as *eventism* or *critical period fallacy*, by tracing, as suggested by Schultz (2005, p. 12), "gestalts" of events back to a variety of biographical indicators in Plath's life, rather than interpreting any single event in her life as being of pivotal importance.

6.2.3 Socio-Cultural and Historical Considerations

6.2.3.1 *Explanation*

Sociologists, anthropologists, economists and political scientists have all grappled with the problem of trying to understand the relationship between individual psychology and continuity and change in society (Runyan, 1988c). Social theorists and historians maintain that because individuals live in concrete conditions and not in a vacuum as free independent agents, their actions, passions, intentions and thinking are shaped and formed by the social, economic and historical contexts in which they exist (Marková, 2014; Runyan, 1988c). Strong determinists even maintain that individuals are "nothing but" the intersection of social forces (Runyan, 1988c, p. 265). There is, however, a reciprocal relationship between social structures and individuals. Giddens (1976) argued that "the production of society is a skilled performance, sustained and 'made to happen' by human beings" (p. 15).

The importance of directing attention to issues of continuity and change in relationships between psychological processes and social structures over the course of time cannot be underestimated, especially in the field of psychobiography. As psychobiographers focus on one life at a time, they sometimes forget that human lives are lived out in a thoroughly social context. In fact, some of the controversial issues in psychobiography include the inattention to the psychobiographical subject's social and historical context, the transhistorical generality of contemporary psychological research, and the disregard of other lives that intersect with the psychobiographical subjects life in important ways or at crucial moments (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1982, 1988b).

Since selected psychobiographical subjects have often inhabited a socio-historical context that differs from contemporary culture, psychobiography is a type of cross-cultural, trans-historical research that exposes itself to the criticisms of ethnocentrism and tempocentrism (Anderson, 1981a, 1981b; Perry, 2012; Ponterotto, 2014). The essence of these criticisms relates to the application of contemporary psychological concepts and theories to subjects who lived in earlier historical periods and cultures (Fouché, 1999; Perry, 2012). As far back as

1938, the historian Lucien Febvre wrote: “How can we historians make use of psychology which is the product of observation carried out on twentieth-century man, in order to interpret the actions of the man of the past?” (Gilmore, 1979, p.31).

According to Ponterotto (2014), the challenge to accurately understand the life experience, personality and character of a historical or public figure who lived in the past, becomes even more pronounced as the temporal distance between the psychobiographer’s life and that of his/her subject increases. This is because different historical periods and cultures have sets of values and operating principles which differ from those of the modern psychobiographer (Anderson, 1981a) and, if ignored, invariably distort psychological interpretations and lead to misinterpretations of behaviours and circumstances across time and cultures (Elms, 1994; Ponterotto, 2014). Marková (2014) argued that although some elements of context may remain similar across time and cultures, thus allowing for some form of prediction, any strong prediction would imply a conception of context as independent of human agency, which would in itself be meaningless. Runyan (1988) maintained that there are important conceptual distinctions between (a) the extent to which psychological phenomena are or are not included in historical analyses; (b) the degree to which such psychological phenomena are interpreted in terms of formal or informal psychology, and (c) the extent to which the formal psychology which is available for use has been tested for its transhistorical generality or specificity. Underlying these distinctions is the premise that phenomena do not appear arbitrarily, but rather that they are part of superordinated phenomena that characterise a particular epoch in terms of history, social representation and culture (Marková, 2014).

Kluckhohn and Murray (1953, p. 53) posited that every individual is in certain respects (a) like all other individuals, (b) like some other individuals, and (c) like no other individuals. Historically, therefore, some psychological generalisations can apply to all historical periods; others, to limited historical periods; and still others, to only specific historical circumstances. In light of this complex, three-layered description of psycho-historical interpretation, Runyan (1983, 1988) advised that psychobiographers consider psychological theories that apply universally, other theories that apply only within limited socio-historical contexts, and finally, idiographic relationships that apply only within specific cases.

Careful consideration of the psychobiographical subject’s socio-cultural and historical context on all three of the above-mentioned levels not only ensures more accurate psychological interpretations, it also promotes an empathic understanding of the subject (Anderson, 1981a; Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1984). To this end, Ponterotto (2014) proposed that, when writing about historic figures many years removed from their own life-space,

psychobiographers should become competent historians, cultural anthropologists, sociologists and political scientists of the era in question. Similarly, Anderson (1981a) suggested that psychobiographers use the emic approach adopted by anthropologists. This approach requires that the researcher go as far as possible to obtain knowledge about the culture, from the perspective of those living in it, and especially from the research subject's perspective (Anderson, 1981a; Flores & Obasi, 2003). Ponterotto (2014) said that "the key to strong theoretical anchoring in psychobiography is in-depth and comprehensive theoretical coverage of the historic subject" (p. 84). This requires thorough knowledge of the psychobiographical subject's social and historical context and facilitates what Runyan (1982) described as "an adequate frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of specific actions, statements, artistic practices, and so on" (p. 216).

Ponterotto (2013, 2014) suggested the use of Hiller's (2011) Multi-Layered Chronological Chart (MLCC) methodology to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the research subject within a socio-cultural-historical context. The value of Hiller's (2011) MLCC is that it graphically represents the life space of the psychobiographical subject across a chronological horizontal axis and a domain specific vertical axis, which includes critical personal and family events, social and political conditions and important historical events.

Despite the fact that psychobiography has often been criticised for trying to interpret a past life within the lens of 21st century values (Anderson, 1981a; Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 1984), it has provided a platform to examine problems cutting across each of the human sciences, whilst simultaneously revealing the deep interconnections between psychological processes, social structures, and historical continuity and change (Runyan, 1988c).

6.2.3.2 Application to the study of Plath

Plath lived from 1932 to 1963 – a period in history which differed greatly from the South African/Italian upbringing of the researcher. Nonetheless, the researcher shared a family history of emigration with the subject. In the same way that Plath's grandparents and parents had emigrated from Europe to establish a better life in America; so too the researcher's grandparent's and parents emigrated from Italy in the hope of finding a better life in South Africa. Both the researcher's grandparents were prisoners of war during the Second World War and they shared many of their war-time stories with the researcher whilst she was growing up. Consequently, the researcher has always been fascinated by the stories of people who lived in this period of history.

As a female artist working within the confines of a post World War II era (Gill, 2008; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013), Plath's life provides a wealth of cultural information about female writers of the time. Since she wrote between the first two waves of modern feminism, her writing captured many of the ideas and issues that women would pursue for decades after her death. Unfortunately her social, cultural and political milieu prevented her from reaping the benefit of her powerful feminist voice. The researcher has a keen interest in the plight of women who have been restricted by society's injustices. Not only is the researcher fascinated by the life stories of feminist pioneers, she has also taught feminist literature for the past 20 years, and has always been intrigued by the poetry of Plath because of its complexity and also because of its impact on the feminist movement. According to Nussbaum (1997), literature has the potential to lead to personal change and, on an even larger scale, to social change. When the complexity of Plath's poetry is unravelled, it often reveals timeless and universal themes which are applicable to women who may be similar to Plath in some way. In this sense, Plath's poems could be considered agents of personal and social change.

In order to develop a culturally-sensitive frame of reference within which to study the life of Plath, the researcher conducted a thorough and extensive literature study which included social, cultural and historical information pertaining to the period in which she lived. The psychological theories which were applied to Plath's life reiterate the importance of social, cultural and historical influences on the life of an individual. Although Erikson's psychosocial theory of development has been criticised for being biased with regard to culture and gender, it was developed in Europe where Plath spent a large part of her adult life, and was deemed appropriate since it considers the influence of socio-cultural and historical context on an individual's life. As for Schwartz's (1995) model on Internal Family Systems, although the model is not a feminist theory per se, its focus on sub-personalities, allows for the illustration of Plath's feminist voice, because the model addresses the very concepts exemplified in Plath's outlining of the "female divided self's dilemma" (Kriel, 2011, p.81).

6.2.4 Inadequacy of Evidence on Absent Subjects

6.2.4.1 Explanation

One of the most frequent criticisms hurled against psychobiography is that interpretations are based on sparse, inadequate or unreliable evidence (Anderson, 1978; Gatzke, 1973; Runyan, 1982, 1988). The justification for this criticism becomes even more pronounced when psychobiography is compared to psychotherapy. Critics argue that the information which a

psychotherapist obtains from direct access to a patient, far outweighs that which the psychobiographer could ever hope to gather from historical sources (Fouché, 1999). In this regard, Barzun (1974) noted that the psychobiographer is at a disadvantage compared to the psychotherapist based on the following:

the patient is absent, and the clues he may have left to his once living psyche are the product of chance. Diaries, letters, literary work form a random record, in which expressions of mood are more frequent than evidence of actions. 'Dream-material' is extremely rare. Compared to the data elicited under therapy and consciously directed at relevance and completeness by the analyst, this trickle from written remains seems almost negligible. (p. 46)

According to Runyan (1982, 1988), although the problem of evidence results in certain questions remaining unanswered, it should not impair the possibility of developing psychobiological interpretations of the many features of behaviour and experience of historical individuals for which there is sufficient evidence. On a comparative basis, there are also a number of advantages which the psychobiographer has over the psychotherapist. Whilst the psychobiographer may not have access to material such as free associations, dreams and transference reactions typically accessed by the psychoanalyst, the psychobiographer has the advantage of having information about a person who has lived his or her entire life, meaning that the ultimate unfolding and final resolution of the subject's life are available for inspection (Cody, 1971).

The psychobiographer also has the advantage of being able to obtain information from sources other than the subject, such as family, friends, colleagues and even other biographers who have documented the subject's life (Fouché, 1999; Runyan, 1982, 1988). Furthermore, the psychobiographer has access to the wealth of creative material produced by the subject, such as diaries, speeches, poems, written books, drawings and even caricatures (Anderson, 1981a; Davis, 1975). The content of the subject's creative works could express inner psychological states and conflicts, which could be drawn upon to interpret the subject's personality, albeit with caution (Runyan, 1982, 1988). Another significant advantage is that the evidence used in psychobiography is available to all and can be critically examined (Runyan, 1982, 1988). This allows for a refinement of hypotheses and data, so that the psychobiographer can build a more balanced and comprehensive portrait of the psychobiographical subject (Anderson, 1981a).

6.2.4.2 Application to the study of Plath

In order to minimise the negative effect of an absent subject, the researcher conducted an extensive and comprehensive literature study. This included primary and secondary data sources. Primary data sources refer to material produced by the subject under study (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delport, 2005) and in this study, included Plath's literary works as well as her unabridged journal entries (Plath, 2000), her letters (Plath, 1992, 2017, 2018) and her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (Plath, 1963). Secondary sources included all the full-length biographies written on Plath, as well as literary essays and articles written on her life and works.

6.2.5 Elitism and Easy Genre

6.2.5.1 Explanation

Supporters of the anti-biographical position argue that the study of individuals is often elitist and concentrated only on eminent or extraordinary individuals to which ordinary men and women cannot relate (Simonton, 1994; Runyan, 1982, 1988). According to Runyan (1988), although there is much to learn from those individuals who have been neglected in history and by society, the social class issue should not be confounded with the aggregation level issue, since this is an entirely independent concept.

Detailed biographical studies of individuals can be conducted across all classes, from the elite to the most oppressed, as is indicated by the growing number of psychobiographies on criminals, drug addicts and psychotic killers (Runyan, 1988a). Runyan (1988) added that it is not solely the choice of subject that determines whether or not a study is elitist, but also the interpretations given and how the individual is related to his or her social, political and historical context. Furthermore, although it may be virtuous to move away from an exclusive focus on the elite (Runyan, 1988a), it should also be remembered that prominent or eminent individuals are often selected precisely because they are, at least to some extent, "sui generis" (Simonton, 1999, p. 425). Runyan (1988a) cautioned that an interest in the experiences of ordinary individuals is not sufficient reason for choosing quantitative studies above biographical studies, since both types of research can and need to be conducted for all social groups. In this regard, McAdams (2005, 2006) pointed out that the study of eminent individuals and the evidence they have left behind (such as diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and creative works) offer the opportunity to study unusual and remarkable phenomena.

Another anti-biographical argument raised by some historians is the view that biography is too easy a form of research, based on a predictable format that traces the birth, development and death of the biographical subject (Runyan, 1988a). Although this criticism may hold true for poorly written psychobiographies that are simplistic, superficial and artlessly presented, it certainly does not hold true for comprehensive, well-written psychobiographies (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1988a; Schultz, 2005b). Good psychobiographies are exhaustively researched and holistic in coverage (Ponterotto, 2014), and they are based on a multitude of sources that provide insight into the subject's social, cultural and historical world and the arena of his or her professional life (McAdams, 1994; Runyan, 1988a). With regard to sources, Anderson (1981a) added that, although psychobiographers typically rely on personal materials such as diaries, letters and private notebooks when conducting research, resourceful psychobiographers look for different kinds of data in unusual sources, which could include medical records, caricatures and even odd jottings made by the psychobiographical subject. Schultz (2005b) negated the criticism that psychobiography is an easy genre by highlighting that one of the markers of good psychobiography is comprehensiveness, which entails an exploration of numerous interpretations so that multiple features of the act in question are illuminated. According to Runyan (1988), good psychobiography requires an integration of scientific-psychological and historical modes of inquiry, the complexity of which is affirmed by the extensive literature on the art and science of the biographical endeavour.

6.2.5.2 Application to the study of Plath

Critics of psychobiographical research could argue that conducting a study on an individual who was privileged enough to attend a prestigious Ivy League college is elitist. However, although Smith College did have a reputation of attracting the cleverest, wealthiest and most socially elite young women in the United States of America (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013), Plath's family background and financial standing was anything but elite. In fact, after her father's death, her mother became the family's sole provider because her father had lost a substantial amount of money on the stock market (Plath, 2000). It was as a result of Plath's exceptional academic achievements that she managed to secure a scholarship to attend Smith College. Her letters and journal entries attest to her feelings of inferiority and self-consciousness about her lowly status compared to that of her fellow students (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 2000, 2017, 2018).

In order to help her mother to pay for the shortfall between her college fees and her scholarship, Plath volunteered for extra jobs at college and in her spare time, wrote poems and

short stories for extra money (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Being a white woman of European descent living in the United States of America, Plath's origin may be far-removed from the South African context. However, the researcher would like to argue that her struggle to let her voice be heard in an oppressive society is precisely what makes the study relevant and valuable to a South African audience. Although Plath became somewhat of a cult figure for many as a result of the many controversies which plagued her life story, she was a real woman who struggled with everyday challenges and concerns common to many women, and not just with the dramatic issues of psychological breakdown or tempestuous romances for which she is most known. Plath's struggle towards selfhood thus represents the struggle that many women face, even in today's emancipated world. The researcher is of the opinion that an examination of Plath's life can contribute to a deeper understanding of the broader psychosocial challenges and subpersonality functioning faced by a woman who had a significant influence on the course of the feminist movement. It was the researchers hope that this psychobiographical study would not only add to the growing field of psychobiography in South Africa, but that it would also help to psychologically consolidate Plath's legacy for women in the future.

With regard to the criticism that psychobiography is an easy genre, the researcher would like to argue that the process of collecting and analysing such an extensive quantity of biographical data related to Plath and her socio-cultural and historical context, proved to be extremely complex. This complexity was heightened by the fact that multiple psychological theories were applied, necessitating the integration of multiple sets of results.

6.2.6 Infinite Profusion of Biographical Data

6.2.6.1 Explanation

As far back as 1910, Freud (1910, 1961) suggested that researchers collect as much data as possible, from as many sources as possible. Elms (1994) supported this suggestion, positing that extensiveness of data increases accuracy and decreases the possibility of findings being based on misperceptions, biases and other errors. Schultz (2005b) added that in addition to collecting a multitude of data, it is imperative to test whether themes run across data. In this regard, Schultz (2005b) advised psychobiographers to link interpretations to sets of evidence and to a web of supporting facts taken from the subject's life. In this way, "if one piece of evidence fails – or is exposed as incomplete or excessively partial – other pieces remain, securing the interpretation's effectiveness" (Schultz, 2005b, p. 11).

Elms (1994) claimed that to the avid psychobiographer, the phrase “Too much data” is an oxymoron (p. 22). Whilst the importance of collecting as much data as possible cannot be negated, the management of such data has often exposed psychobiography to the criticism that it lacks scientific rigour (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005b; Yin, 2009). To improve the scientific methodology of psychobiography, experienced case study investigators have suggested that biographical material be handled in a competent, scholarly fashion so that important information can be revealed in the data and the most relevant information can be extracted (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994; Simonton, 1999).

According to Yin (2009) data may come from a variety of sources, including documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artifacts. Elms (1994) added that the collection of good psychobiographical data includes research into additional published data such as letters, diaries, autobiographies, memoirs and the subject’s other writings. Whilst a diverse array of evidence represents an important strength of case study research, it can prove to be problematic for the novice case study investigator who, being overwhelmed by the extensive profusion of data, may not know what to do with the evidence (Elms, 1994; Yin, 2009). Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that such large volumes of data be organised in the following ways:

1. Placing information in different arrays.
2. Creating a matrix of categories and placing the evidence within such categories.
3. Making data displays in the form of flow charts and other graphics, so that data can be more easily examined.
4. Tabulating the frequency of diverse events.
5. Placing information in chronological order.

Yin (2009) cautioned that the use of different sources requires different data collection procedures, which include the use of: (a) multiple sources of evidence which converge on the same facts or findings, (b) a case study database of evidence, and (c) a chain of evidence, linking the questions asked, the data collected, and the conclusions drawn.

Anderson (1981b) recommended that the split-half approach be applied to facilitate the management of large volumes of biographical data. According to this approach, information is split into two parts. One part focuses on examining theoretical propositions and constructs that have been identified in published material, whilst the second part focuses on examining unpublished material so that information can be compared and tested against the theoretical propositions discerned in the published material (Anderson, 1981b; Fouché, 1999). Such an

approach would allow the psychobiographer to continually go back and forth between hypotheses and data, in an effort to build a comprehensive portrait of the psychobiographical subject (Anderson, 1981a).

Alexander (1988, 1990) proposed that large volumes of biographical data be managed according to two distinct yet complementary methods. The first method requires that data be questioned and organised based on the answers to specific questions (Alexander, 1988, 1990). This ensures that the research remains focused on material that is pertinent and relevant to the study at hand (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Fouché, 1999). According to Yin (2009), much preparation is required to determine the questions that are most pertinent and relevant to a topic, and to formulate those questions with precision. Cooper (1984) advised that a thorough review of the literature on the topic could help in this regard, but Yin (2009) cautioned that such a literature review should serve as a means to an end, and not an end in itself. As Yin (2009) succinctly stated:

Novices may think that the purpose of a literature review is to determine the *answers* about what is known on a topic; in contrast, experienced investigators review previous research to develop sharper and more insightful *questions* about the topic. (p. 14)

The second method proposed by Alexander (1988) to reduce large volumes of data to manageable quantities, involves the evaluation of data according to an inventory of the “principal identifiers of salience” (p. 13). These identifiers thus serve as helpful guidelines according to which psychobiographers can identify data that is worthy of further consideration. The nine guidelines for extracting psychobiographical data are: (a) primacy, (b) frequency, (c) uniqueness, (d) negation, (e) emphasis, (f) omission, (g) error or distortion, (h) isolation, and (i) incompleteness (Alexander, 1988, pp. 269-278). A more detailed discussion of these identifiers of salience appears in Chapter 7, section 7.6.1.1.

In addition to Alexander’s (1988) main identifiers of salience, McAdams (1994, 1996) proposed that data be sorted according to the subject’s life story. According to McAdams (1996), “The story is a natural package for organizing many different kinds of information” (p.720). McAdams’ (1984, 1985b, 1985c, 1987, 1988b, 1990, 1993, 1994) theoretical work on the meaning of human lives adopts a narrative approach in that the person is viewed as a storyteller who narrates life while living it. Based on this approach, identity is seen as an internalised and evolving life story that connects the reconstructed past, the perceived present and the anticipated future into a narrative configuration that imbues the person’s life with a sense of continuity (McAdams, 1994). With regard to Alexander’s (1988) nine guidelines for

extracting psychobiographical data, McAdams (1994) posited that each guideline may be viewed as a rule for story making employed by the psychobiographer who attempts to discern or create the central story of a life. The guidelines thus serve as clues in the data, highlighting important aspects of the narrative, and suggesting how the story of a subject's life is to be discovered, created and told (Edel, 1984; McAdams, 1988c).

6.2.6.2 Application to the study of Plath

Plath is one of the most anthologised American poets of the 20th century. Although she only published one poetry collection (*The Colossus*), and one novel (*The Bell Jar*) in her lifetime, the posthumous publications of her *Ariel* poems, her *Letters Home* and her *Journals*, have affirmed her status as one of the most influential writers in 20th century culture and literature. Since its first appearance in 1960, Plath's work has constantly remained in print in England, the United States of America and other countries where it has been translated. The Plath catalogue of literature continues to expand, with each new restored edition offering additional material to be considered by scholars who have produced a plethora of critical interpretations and responses to her work.

Plath has also been the subject of seven full-length biographies and countless memoirs, stretches and biographical interpretations. Rollyson (2013) maintained that Plath has been elevated to the status of a revered cult goddess. He even described her as the "Marilyn Monroe of modern literature" (Rollyson, 2013, p. 1). Her allure has been heightened by the controversies that have plagued accounts of her life and death, inviting biographers to be even more enticed by her story. Added to this is the fact that Plath left a wealth of material in her papers, calendars, manuscripts and journals. She was also a fairly public figure at a time when records like awards and school attendance registers were kept, so there is a wealth of resources in the form of newspaper articles and other types of public documentation for biographers to contemplate. Since Plath committed suicide less than a century ago (Alexander, 1999; Gill, 2008; Kirk, 2009) family members, friends and contemporaries who were acquainted with her may still be alive to offer written memoirs and reminiscences of her life. The profusion of biographical data thus promises to continue expanding.

Given that the biographical data on Plath is so vast, the researcher made use of publicly available documents. This ensured that information could be cross-referenced and checked throughout the course of the study. Plath's archival material is housed at the Lilly Library in Bloomington, Indiana, and at Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts. These archives include Plath's baby book, her journals and diaries, school yearbooks and scrapbooks,

unpublished photographs, calendars, original works of art, letters and other memorabilia, handwritten and typed manuscripts for poems, her novel *The Bell Jar*, and even a final letter written to friends just days before her suicide.

Even though the archival material was not directly retrievable, much of it was incorporated in the published biographies which the researcher consulted over the course of the study. The biographies are also based on interviews with Plath family members and close acquaintances. One of the most recent biographies was written by Wilson (2013), who had access to previously unpublished material, photographs and letters.

The researcher made use of the strategies proposed by Alexander (1988, 1990) to manage the infinite profusion of biographical data available on Plath. Firstly, the data was organised based on the answers to specific research questions pertaining to the psychological theories applied in the study. Secondly, all data which was believed to be worthy of further consideration was identified according to Alexander's nine indicators of salience. These are discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

6.2.7 Exaggerated Expectations

6.2.7.1 Explanation

Although critics may argue that psychobiographers mistakenly conceive of their work as a panacea which presumes an all-encompassing solution to a multitude of problems, including the historical, Anderson (1981) noted from a close review of the literature, that exaggerated expectations for psychohistory are not prevalent and thus do not pose a widespread problem. Nonetheless, he did caution psychobiographers to focus not only on psychological factors when conducting a psychobiographical study, but also to pay careful attention to the effects of historical, economic and political forces.

According to Anderson (1981a), the psychobiographer should constantly be aware of two important limitations in psychobiography. Firstly, psychological explanations should be seen as supplements to existing explanations. Rather than trying to replace other types of explanations, Anderson suggested that investigators "join hands in a cooperative effort to find the most satisfying explanation of the man and his times" (pp. 460-461). Secondly, since no psychological explanation is ever unquestionably true, psychobiographical explanations should not be seen as final conclusions. Rather, they should be recognised as speculations with a high degree of plausibility, as long as they are consistent with the evidence at hand and they account

for behaviour which is difficult to explain in any other way (Anderson, 1981a; Elovitz, 2003; Meissner, 2003).

6.2.7.2 Application to the study of Plath

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the personality development of Plath according to the psychosocial theory of personality development by Erikson (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) and the systems theory of sub-personalities by Schwartz (1995). The researcher acknowledges the limitations of the study from a purely psychological perspective. Nonetheless, the researcher considers the expectations of the study to be realistic since they fall within the framework of the selected theories, and take into account the different social, cultural, political and historical forces which impacted on Plath's development over the course of her life. The researcher acknowledges that the psychobiographical explanations presented in this study are not final conclusions and proposes that they be recognised as highly plausible psychological speculations which can be used to supplement existing views pertaining to Plath's life.

6.2.8 Criticisms Relating to Validity and Reliability

The validity and reliability of psychobiographical design and methodology have been the subject of considerable controversy owing to the idiographic nature of qualitative research (Morrow & Smith, 2000; Runyan, 1982, 1983; Yin, 1994). The controversy about the scientific value and trustworthiness of psychobiographical studies stems, in part, from the conflation of a variety of underlying issues, including: (a) the subjectivity and potential for inaccuracies and biases in retrospective and introspective research methods; (b) the value of qualitative research methods as opposed to more scientific quantitative methods in testing generated hypotheses; (c) the low internal validity of qualitative methods based on the existence of competing causal explanations regarding the subject; and (d) the low external validity of qualitative methods based on the fact that findings from individual cases cannot easily be generalised to the population at large (Runyan, 1988a; Schultz, 2005a).

Yin (2009) posited that, since a research design is supposed to represent a logical set of statements, its quality can be measured according to certain logical tests. The four tests proposed by Yin (2009) are commonly used to establish the quality of any empirical social research, including case study research, and are as follows: (a) construct validity, (b) internal validity, (c) external validity, and (d) reliability. It must be noted that, since qualitative research ensues from a variety of disciplines, paradigms and epistemologies, it embraces multiple

standards of quality, the “goodness” (Morrow & Smith, 2000) of which is assessed on the basis of the paradigmatic underpinnings of the research and the standards of the discipline (Morrow, 2005).

Ponterotto (2005) identified four paradigms that underpin research, namely: positivism, post-positivism, interpretivism/constructivism and postmodernism/critical/ideological. The above-mentioned tests proposed by Yin (2009) (i.e., construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability) are conventional standards of enquiry most typically adopted in postpositivist qualitative studies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Patton (2002) referred to these standards of inquiry as “traditional scientific research criteria” (p. 544) and maintained that in order to increase the credibility and legitimacy of qualitative inquiry among those who place priority on traditional scientific research criteria, it is important to emphasise those criteria that have priority within that tradition. According to Patton (2002), these criteria include:

objectivity of the inquirer (attempts to minimize bias), validity of the data, systematic rigor of fieldwork procedures, triangulation (consistency of findings across methods and data sources), reliability of coding and pattern analyses, correspondence of findings to reality, generalizability (external validity), strength of evidence supporting causal hypotheses, [and] contributions to theory. (p. 544)

Lincoln and Guba (2000) proposed standards of inquiry that correspond to the criteria stemming from postpositivist quantitative benchmarks of rigour. These criteria are intended to achieve the same purposes as construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability in quantitative research, but because they emerge from outside the qualitative genre, are referred to by Lincoln (1995) as *extrinsic* criteria. In qualitative research, these criteria are referred to as: confirmability; credibility; transferability and dependability/auditability (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln, 1995; Shenton, 2004). The above-mentioned tests and their applicability and importance to psychobiography are discussed in the subsequent section.

6.2.8.1 Construct Validity/Objectivity and Confirmability

6.2.8.1.1 Explanation

Construct validity refers to the identification and explanation of definitions and correct operational measures for the concepts being studied, as well as the establishment of objective findings based on literary and theoretical frameworks (De Vos, 2005; Gilgun, 1994; Yin, 2003, 2009). Related to the question of objectivity is the old question of the degree to which the account reflects or depicts that which the researcher and his/her research subjects have mutually

constructed (Olesen, 2008). This question is precisely what makes construct validity challenging in psychobiographical research (Kvale, 1996; Yin, 2003, 2009). Those who have been critical of case studies, often point to the fact that case study investigators pay inadequate attention to the issue of validity (Rosal, 1994), and that they use “subjective” judgements to collect data, resulting in an insufficiently-developed operational set of measures (Yin, 2003, 2009).

Psychobiographical research based on the post-positivist paradigm with its quantitative emphasis, refers to construct validity as confirmability (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). According to Gasson (2004), it addresses the central issue that “findings should represent, as far as is (humanly) possible, the situation being researched rather than the beliefs, pet theories, or biases of the researcher” (p. 93). A number of strategies can be applied to increase construct validity and confirmability when conducting psychobiographical research. The first strategy is relevant during the data collection phase of research and involves the use of multiple sources of evidence, in a manner that encourages convergent lines of inquiry (Duffy, 1987; Fouché, 1999; Yin, 2003, 2009). This is supported by Ponterotto (2014) who maintained that a hallmark of qualitative research in the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is the simultaneous collection and analysis of data. This discovery-orientated approach allows the psychobiographer to be guided by emerging data as subsequent stages of the research are planned (Ponterotto, 2014). The collection of information from multiple sources in a way that corroborates the same fact or phenomenon, is known as data triangulation, and is considered to be an indispensable part of the iterative research process, since it addresses the potential problems of construct validity and adds additional layers of perspective, depth and empathy to the study (Krefting, 1991; Ponterotto, 2012, 2014; Yin, 2003, 2009). This can be accomplished through the development of an audit trail, which entails the careful tracking and auditing of the emerging research design, allowing the astute psychobiographer to comprehensively consider all of the following: a detailed chronology of research activities and processes; influences on the data collection and analysis; emerging themes, categories or models; and analytic memos (Morrow, 2005). The audit trail can be facilitated by the use of a data analysis matrix, which clearly presents the conceptual definitions and operational measures under study and enhances the establishment of connections between the data and the theoretical frameworks that are applied (Fouché, 1999; Perry, 2012; Yin, 2009). The third strategy occurs in the composition phase of research and involves having the draft case study report reviewed by key participants and informants in the case (Yin, 2009). Similarly, the researcher could have the case study reviewed by a knowledgeable research team

or peer debriefers who could propose alternative interpretations to those of the researcher and promote critical discussion on the researcher's responses to the research process (Morrow, 2005; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). From a methodological point of view, the construction of knowledge by colleagues who offer alternative interpretations and the corrections made through such a process, enhance the accuracy of the case study, and increase its construct validity and confirmability (Krefting, 1991; Morrow, 2005; Yin, 2009).

6.2.8.1.2 *Application to the study of Plath*

The researcher ensured construct validity by conceptualising clearly defined concepts and procedures used in the study of Plath. This conceptualisation was informed by the theoretical frameworks applied in the study, namely, Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development (Chapter 3) and Schwartz's (1995) Internal Family Systems model (Chapter 4). The data analysis matrices for the two psychological frameworks used in this study, are presented in more detail in Chapter 7. The construct validity of the study was further enhanced through the use of data triangulation, based on multiple sources of data available on Plath. In order to ensure the accurate conceptualisation of each construct, the researcher outlined clear guidelines which were then paralleled with the historical periods in Plath's personality development over the course of her life.

Due to the inherent complexity of the iterative process involved in qualitative research, the researcher consulted with her supervisor consistently to ensure confirmability of the research. The consultations involved ongoing discourse about the study's methods and procedures, as well as reflection regarding possible affective states which could lead to bias. An audit trail (Krefting, 1991) allowed the researcher to keep a meticulous record of the study's raw data and the process of data reduction, analysis, reconstruction and synthesis.

6.2.8.2 *Internal Validity and Credibility*

6.2.8.2.1 *Explanation*

Internal validity seeks to establish causal relationships between conditions (Neuman, 1994, and is thus better suited to explanatory or causal studies than to descriptive or exploratory studies (Yin, 2009). In case study research, the question about internal validity extends to the general problem of making inferences, since case studies lend themselves to inferences every time events cannot be directly observed (Yin, 2009). One of the most effective techniques to ensure internal validity in case study research is to use the analytic tactic of pattern matching,

which involves the comparison between an empirically-based pattern and a predicted one to see if the patterns coincide (Trochim, 1989). Similarly, the internal validity of a case study can be increased by constructing a rational and persuasive chain of reasoning which extends from the data to the conclusions, and integrates all themes into a coherent whole (Edwards, 1998; Krefting, 1991).

The strength of in-depth case studies is thus inextricably linked to a wealth of data systematically collected from multiple sources, since a detailed examination of the data allows the researcher to identify and validate recurring patterns (Krefting, 1991) and simultaneously provides a basis for critically evaluating different interpretations and conclusions within a single case (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliot, 1994). The value of an extensive data base correlates with Elms' (1988) assertion that arguments should not be built upon single clues. Where there is insufficient information to establish a particular conclusion, further data from the same case could be explored in an attempt to uncover multiple clues to the researcher's question (Edwards, 1998). Other analytic tactics to enhance internal validity include: building explanations, addressing rival explanations, using logic models and testing hypotheses against a broad range of cases so that competing theories can be evaluated (Bromley, 1986; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2009).

The post-positivist paradigm equates internal validity in quantitative approaches to credibility in qualitative research (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005). According to Gasson (2004), credibility relates to internal consistency, where the central issue is "how we ensure rigor in the research process and how we communicate to others that we have done so" (p. 95). Patton (2002) posited that the credibility of qualitative inquiry depends on three distinct yet related inquiry elements, namely: (a) rigorous fieldwork methods that generate high-quality data, which are systematically analysed with particular attention to issues of credibility; (b) the credibility of the researcher, which is determined by training, experience, track record, status and presentation of self; and (c) philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, which translates into a fundamental appreciation of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling and holistic thinking.

A number of factors can threaten the credibility of qualitative research, and those include subjectivity and bias stemming from the researcher's attitude towards the research subject or his/her enthusiasm for a particular theoretical interpretation (Edwards, 1998; Elms, 1988; Fouche, 1999; Krefting, 1991). To overcome the factors that threaten the credibility of qualitative research, a number of strategies have been proposed. Rudestam and Newton (2001)

suggested the strategy of structural corroboration, which entails immersing oneself in the subject material and doing in-depth research so as to investigate possible distortions and recurrent themes. As with confirmability, credibility can also be enhanced by using multiple sources of data, which not only ensures that the goal of adequate variety is achieved, but also enhances the interpretive status of evidence (Barbour, 2001; Creswell, 2013; Morrow, 2005). The utilisation of multiple data sources is often referred to as triangulation, but Morrow (2005) cautioned that the term can be confusing, since it invariably brings to mind the number three, which is irrelevant to the consideration of variety of data. Furthermore, Morrow (2005) cautioned researchers to keep in mind that, although the purposes of triangulation are similar across quantitative and qualitative paradigms, the procedures are somewhat different. In case study research, the most important advantage of applying triangulation is that converging lines of inquiry can be gleaned from the multiple data sources obtained, thereby making case study findings more accurate and convincing (Yin, 2003, 2009). The process of triangulation not only ensures that all data is adequately investigated and cross-checked, it also reduces the distortion that comes from biased interpretations and single-source investigations, and is thus ideally suited to assuring credibility in psychobiographical case study research (Denzin, 1989; Flick 2006; Patton, 2002; Willig, 2001). Morrow (2005) added that credibility in qualitative research can be achieved by prolonged engagement with participants; persistent observation in the field; the use of peer researchers or peer debriefers; negative case analysis; researcher reflexivity; participant checks, validation or co-analysis; thorough description of source data so as to find a fit between the data and the emerging analysis; and “thick descriptions” (p. 252).

Based on the work of Ryle (1971), Geertz (1973), Denzin (1989), Holloway (1997), and Schwandt (2001), Ponterotto (2006) clarified the meaning of “thick description” (pp. 542-543) by delineating a number of essential components:

1. “Thick description” involves the accurate description and interpretation of observed social action within its particular context.
2. “Thick description” assigns purpose and intentionality to observed social action by way of the researcher’s accurate and clear description of the context under which that action took place.
3. “Thick description” captures the thoughts, feelings and complex web of relationships amongst observed participants in their operating context.
4. “Thick description” of social actions leads to “thick interpretation” of those actions, which in turn leads to “thick meaning” of the research findings that resonate with researchers, participants and readers.

5. “Thick meaning” of findings provides a sense of “verisimilitude” which transports the reader back in history as if he/she were a living witness to the research subject’s life experiences (Ponterotto, 2014, p. 87).

According to Ponterotto (2014, p. 87) “thick description” is demonstrated by the psychobiographer’s attention to context, detail and triangulated evidence, and is achieved by the researcher’s presentation of vivid quotes and scenes describing the subject. In essence, “thick description” relates to the multiple layers of culture and context in which experiences are embedded (Morrow, 2005, p. 252). It is a hallmark of strong qualitative research within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm and contributes greatly to the internal validity and credibility of psychobiographical research (Ponterotto, 2014).

6.2.8.2.2 *Application to the study of Plath*

Since the proposed study was exploratory in nature and aimed to describe the development of Plath rather than establish causal relationships, internal validity was not of great concern. Nonetheless, it was important to maintain a high level of credibility when making inferences in the study (Yin, 2009). To this end, the researcher maintained prolonged and extensive engagement with the data gathered on Plath, making in-depth analyses of each biographical document. The researcher also applied data triangulation, and cross-referenced the multitude of sources consulted to ensure that interpretations of the literature on Plath were not distorted. Theory triangulation was ensured through the use of two theoretical perspectives which consider an individual’s optimal development in his/her environment. Consultation with the study promoter, who gave ongoing feedback regarding the methods used to collect and analyse data, ensured researcher triangulation. Reflexivity was applied and by acknowledging the subjectivity of the researcher (Flick, 2006) and exploring the relationship between the researcher and the research subject (Fouché, 1999), researcher bias was kept to a minimum.

6.2.8.3 *External Validity and Transferability*

6.2.8.3.1 *Explanation*

External validity deals with the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings can be generalised to other contexts beyond the immediate case study (De Vos, 2005; Runyan, 1984; Yin, 2003, 2009). Opponents of the idiographic approach have criticised single case studies for constituting a poor foundation for generalisation to the larger population (Donmoyer, 2000; McAdams, 2006; Runyan, 2005; Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) maintained however, that such

criticisms are unfounded since they imply an implicit contrast between the situation and survey research, in which a sample is intended to generalise to a larger universe. This analogy to samples and universes is incorrect when dealing with case studies, since case studies rely on analytic, not statistical generalisation; the latter relating results to other case studies or the larger population (Kvale, 1996; Yin, 2009). Although case studies are highly localised, analytic generalisation offers the researcher the opportunity to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory (Gasson, 2004; Shadish, 1995, Yin, 2009). In analytic generalisation, a previously developed theory is thus used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the case study. The empirical results are considered potent if two or more cases support the same theory, and even more so if they negate an equally plausible rival theory (Yin, 2003, 2009). Cronbach (1975), one of the most prominent figures in psychometrics and research methodology, gave considerable attention to the issue of generalisations and concluded that social phenomena are too variable and context-bound to permit significant empirical generalisations. In light of this, Cronbach (1975) suggested that generalisations be treated, not as definitive conclusions, but as working hypotheses for future applicability and testing. Similarly, Stake (1978, 1995, 2000) posited that a researcher's first priority is to do justice to the specific case study, before looking for patterns across other case studies.

According to Stake's (1978, p. 6) definition of "particularization", thorough knowledge for the particular and the ability to recognise it in new and foreign contexts, constitutes a form of generalisation that is both intuitive and empirical. Stake (2000) extended this kind of generalisation to include the kind of learning that readers take from their encounters with specific case studies, and said: "Knowledge is socially constructed, so we constructivists believe, and, in their experiential and contextual accounts, case study researchers assist readers in the construction of knowledge" (p. 442).

Guba and Lincoln (1981) posited that human behaviour is invariably mediated by the context in which it occurs. In keeping with postpositivist quantitative methods of rigour, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that the terms "transferability" and "fittingness" be used as replacements for generalisation when dealing with qualitative findings, and they explained these terms as follows:

The degree of *transferability* is a direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts, what we shall call "*fittingness*". Fittingness is defined as degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts. If context A and context B are "sufficiently" congruent, then working hypotheses from the sending originating context may be applicable in the receiving context. (p. 124)

The extent to which findings are transferable to other settings and contexts is an important criterion for theory development in qualitative research (Hammersley, 1992) and is achieved when the researcher provides sufficient information about the self (the researcher as instrument) and the research context, process, participants and researcher participant relationships to enable the reader to decide how the findings may transfer (Morrow, 2005).

Cronbach, Ambron, Dornbusch, Hess, Hornik, Phillips, Walker and Weiner (1980) offered an alternative in the methodological paradigms debate over generalisability, and suggested that designs allow for reasonable “extrapolation” (pp. 231-235). Unlike the conventional meaning of the term generalisation, extrapolation implies that the researcher has gone beyond the narrow confines of the data to think about other applications of the findings. Consequently, extrapolations can be particularly useful when based on case studies that produce pertinent data aimed at specific concerns about both the present and the future (Patton, 2002).

6.2.8.3.2 Application to the study of Plath

Since the aim of this study was not to generalise the findings of Plath to other cases or to the larger group, but rather to generalise them to the psychosocial theory of Erikson (1950, 1960, 1968, 1974, 1980) and the Internal Family Systems model of Schwartz (1995), external validity (i.e. transferability) was not a significant concern in this study. The researcher documented Plath’s psychosocial and personality development extensively and compared these findings to the above-mentioned personality theories through the process of analytical generalisation (Yin, 2003, 2009).

6.2.8.4 Reliability and Dependability

6.2.8.4.1 Explanation

The narrative approach adopted in psychobiographical case study research is one of the most important and widely used ideographic methods (Runyan, 1982). Although this qualitative approach may not comply with the more traditional social scientific methods of measurement, correlation and experimentation, it provides opportunities to achieve empathy and gives the researcher an empirical basis for describing the social and historical contexts of actions and events (Patton, 2002; Runyan, 1982).

Whilst it is true that many alternative accounts of individual lives can be constructed using the case study method, Filstead (1970) posited that the qualitative perspective does not imply that the researcher lacks the ability to be scientific while collecting data. Rather, it serves as a

reminder of the importance of conceptualising the empirical social world “as it actually exists to those under investigation, rather than as the researcher imagines it to be” (Filstead, 1970, p. 4). The aim of qualitative enquiry is thus to describe and explain phenomena as accurately and comprehensively as possible so that the descriptions and explanations correspond as closely as possible to the way the world is and actually operates (Patton, 2002). This aim correlates with the question of reliability in psychobiographical research.

According to Yin (2009), the goal of reliability is to minimise the errors and biases in a study so that, should a later investigation follow the same procedure as described by an earlier investigator who conducted a specific case study, the later investigator would arrive at the same findings and conclusions. This correlates with the suggestion by Guba (1978) that the classification system and set of categories produced by a researcher should be reproducible by another competent judge who can verify that (a) the categories make sense in view of the available data, and (b) appropriate arrangement of data in the category system has taken place. Similarly, Alexander (1990, 1994) pointed out that the most important aspects of the methodological search are those of identifying the critical bits of data and putting them in comparable form. Alexander (1990, 1994) translated the question of reliability into the following pertinent research questions:

1. What is the likelihood that other investigators, applying the stated principles of salience, would extract similar material from the original set of data?
2. What is the likelihood that any given sample of extracted material would be transformed similarly by different data analysts?
3. What is the likelihood that similar consistent subject response patterns would be detected in any set of reduced or transformed material by different data analysts?

According to the post-positivist perspective, reliability is analogous to dependability or auditability in qualitative research (Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2005; Shenton, 2004), and relates to the central issue that “the way in which a study is conducted should be consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques” (Gasson, 2004, p. 94).

The terms dependability and auditability are particularly relevant in light of the fact that they are based on the procedure of audits in the domain of financing, which asserts that calculations are only considered reliable if they are capable of being audited (Flick, 2006; Yin, 2009). The United States General Accounting Office [GAO] (1987), stated that “inaccuracy and bias are unacceptable in any case study”, and that establishing an “audit trail” is the best way to verify the rigour of any research study (p. 51). This is in line with Yin’s (2009)

suggestion that case study research be conducted in a way that would allow an auditor to repeat the procedure and arrive at the same results.

Many of the procedures used to accomplish the goal of confirmability (objectivity) are applicable when it comes to dependability (reliability) in qualitative research. Morrow (2005) agreed that these include the management of subjectivity and accountability through an audit trail. Flick (2006, pp. 376-377) outlined an audit trail in order to check procedural dependability in the following areas:

1. The raw data, as well as the collection and recording of such data.
2. Data reduction and results of synthesis through the use of summative techniques such as theoretical notes, memos and short case descriptions.
3. Reconstruction of data and results of syntheses according to the structure of developed and used categories, findings and produced reports, which integrate concepts and links to existing literature.
4. Methodological notes and decisions concerning the enhancement of trustworthiness and the credibility of findings.
5. Materials concerning intentions and dispositions such as the concepts of research, personal notes and expectations of participants.
6. Information about the development of research instruments, including the pilot version and preliminary plans.

Yin (2009) maintained that there are two specific tactics which can be applied to enhance the reliability (dependability) of case study research. These include the use of a case study protocol and the development of a case study database. The case study protocol can significantly increase the reliability of case study research and is intended to guide the research investigator in carrying out the data collection from a single case (Yin, 2009). It should include: an overview of the case study project, field procedures, case study questions and a guide for the case study report (Yin, 2009). With regard to the case study project, Yin (2009) indicated that it should strive to develop a formal, presentable database so that other research investigators can review the evidence directly and not be limited to the written case study reports. The case study database thus markedly increases the reliability of the entire case study.

Patton (2002) posited that observation methods based on disciplined training and rigorous preparation also contribute to a study's measure of reliability. According to Patton (2002), training to become a skilled observer includes: learning to pay attention; practice in descriptive writing; acquiring discipline to record field notes; knowing how to separate detail from trivial information; using rigorous scientific methods to validate and triangulate observations; and,

reporting the strengths and limitations of one's own perspective. Data collection methods based on disciplined training and rigorous preparation allow for accurate observation, consistent encoding, well-structured categorisation and comprehensive documentation – all of which play a significant role in improving the accuracy, authenticity and reliability of case study research (Nel, 2013; Patton, 2002; Rudestam & Newton, 2001; Stake, 2005).

6.2.8.4.2 Application to the study of Plath

In this study, reliability of data gathering and analysis was ensured through the use of Alexander's (1988, 1990) primary indicators of psychological saliency, namely: frequency; primacy; emphasis; isolation; uniqueness; incompleteness; error, distortion or omission; and negation. Each of these indicators of saliency is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 7. To further enhance the reliability of the study, the researcher made use of two conceptual matrices, enabling the categorisation of data on Plath according to the constructs or stages of the psychological frameworks used by the researcher.

The afore-mentioned sections discussed the methodological considerations which must be addressed when a psychobiographical study is undertaken. Apart from these methodological considerations, the researcher must address certain ethical considerations since these are vital to legitimacy of the psychobiographical endeavour (Fouché, 1999; Nel, 2013; Stroud, 2004). In the section which follows, the researcher will discuss these ethical considerations and their application to the psychobiographical study of Plath.

6.3 Ethics in Psychobiographical Case Study Research

6.3.1 Explanation

Over the years, the growing sensitivity to ethical issues in research has led to the formulation of a large number of codes of ethics and the establishment of ethics committees and associations in many areas (Flick, 2006). Most professional psychology associations around the world anchor their principles for ethical research in the bio-medical model stimulated by the Nuremberg trials in the mid – 1940s (Ponterotto, 2015). Pritchard (2002) argued, however, that the bio-medical model's concept of research does not adequately deal with procedural changes in research projects and with unforeseen contingencies that lead to changes in purpose and intent.

Anonymity, for example, cannot always be maintained, nor is it always desirable. This ethical dilemma applies particularly to psychobiographical research, since one of the aims of

such research is to acquire an in-depth understanding of the psychology of significant subjects whose identities are anything but anonymous (Elms, 1994). The question of anonymity is indirectly linked to that of confidentiality, since it would be impossible for the researcher to protect the confidentiality of family members and associates of the deceased research subject, given that the psychobiographical research process is *de facto*, and not anonymous (Ponterotto, 2013, 2015).

The American Psychological Association has given much attention to ethical issues in psychological research, from animal care to human boredom (Elms, 1994). According to Christians (2008), in value-free social science, codes of ethics for professional and academic associations are the conventional format for moral principles. Although different scholarly associations have adopted their own sets of ethical codes, Christians (2008) identified four major guidelines common to inductive scientific approaches aimed at achieving majoritarian ends:

1. **Informed consent.** Research subjects have the right to be informed about the nature and consequences of experiments in which they are involved, and their agreement to participate must be voluntary and based on full and transparent information (Christians, 2008; Van Niekerk, Vos, & Fouché, 2015). With regard to psychobiographies, the American Psychiatric Association issued guidelines in 1976, stipulating that psychobiographical subjects should be long-departed, with no surviving family members close enough to be embarrassed by distasteful revelations (Elms, 1994).
2. **Deception.** In emphasising informed consent, social science codes of ethics adamantly oppose deception, condoning it only if “the knowledge to be gained from deceptive experiments is clearly valuable to society” (Soble, 1978, p. 40). In psychobiographical research, the dishonest use of biographical data should be avoided at all times (Elms, 1994) and only published data available in the public domain should be considered (Van Niekerk et. al., 2015).
3. **Privacy and confidentiality.** Codes of ethics insist on safeguarding against invasion of privacy and the potential embarrassment or harm to research subjects or to their relatives and associates due to insensitive research practices (Christians, 2008; Flick, 2006; Fouché, 2015; Runyan, 1984).
4. **Accuracy.** Apart from the fact that all data should be approached with respect, empathy and prudence (Van Niekerk et. al., 2015), researchers have a cardinal

responsibility to ensure that all data are accurate and free of fabrications, fraudulent materials, omissions and contrivances (Christians, 2008).

Given that psychological research ethics have focused mostly on living human participants, and the majority of psychobiographies focus on deceased historical subjects, it is not surprising that psychobiographers have received little guidance and training on how to conduct ethical research on deceased subjects (Ponterotto, 2015; Ponterotto, Reynolds, Morel, & Cheung, 2015). Most ethical principle reports provided by various psychological organisations do not even address the psychobiographer as a psychological researcher (Ponterotto, 2013), and those that do make pronouncements about the ethics of psychobiography have often obfuscated certain issues rather than clarified them (Elms, 1994).

Traditionally, psychobiographers have not adequately addressed ethical considerations in the psychobiographical research endeavour (Ponterotto, 2013, 2017; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). Ponterotto (2014) reiterated that psychobiographers have a responsibility to ensure that psychobiographical research is anchored in scientifically supported theoretical frameworks; depends on stringent, thorough and triangulated research methodology; and addresses ethical and legal matters in a judicious, sensible manner. The benefits of psychobiographical research are extensive and include, (a) enhanced development of the psychology profession; (b) amplified range of practising skills; (c) expanded repertoire of research approaches; and (d) improved collaboration with other intellectual disciplines (Ponterotto, 2014). According to Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017), these extensive benefits have prompted psychologists in many different speciality areas to conduct psychobiographical research (see Fouché, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Howe, 1997; Kóváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005a, 2014). The surge of interest in psychobiographical research over the past two decades (Schultz, 2005a), resulting in what Kóváry (2011) referred to as a “renaissance in psychobiography” (p. 739), has reinforced the need to clarify ethical consideration in psychobiography and establish guidelines that would assist the psychobiographer in producing competently executed and reported psychobiographies (Ponterotto, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2017). In this regard Haverkamp (2005) argued that one cannot establish a trustworthy research relationship, which is positively balanced in term of benefits and risks, unless one performs one’s research role in a competent manner.

Despite the fact that the American Psychiatric Association (1976) has provided guidelines regarding ethics and psychobiography (Fouché, 2015) more recent developments focus on the deconstruction of the ethics code of the American Psychological Association (2002) to discern if and how any of the existing ethical principles apply to the work of the psychobiographer

(Mayer, 2010; Ponterotto, 2015). Ponterotto (2013, 2014, 2015, 2017) has made groundbreaking strides in addressing ethical issues related to the conduct and reporting of psychobiographical research. Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017) recently outlined a six-step ethical decision-making model to guide psychobiographers through difficult ethical decisions.

Ponterotto (2015, 2017) commented on a number of evolving trends in psychobiography that could enhance the interdisciplinary status and ethical vigilance of the field. These include an increased production of psychobiographical research, reflected in journal articles, book chapters and full-length books; enhanced psychobiographical training in psychology curriculums and core psychology courses; professional and organisational initiatives aimed at promoting and monitoring the production and quality of psychobiographical studies; and the establishment of an International Association for Psychobiography (IAP) that could promote psychobiographical research and link psychobiographers worldwide in a support and idea-sharing network. Ponterotto (2017) added that, since ethical issues in psychobiography have generally been neglected across psychological societies and associations worldwide, it would be helpful to form an international “Task Force on Ethical Principles in Psychobiography” (p. 256) to ensure optimal ethical practice in the field. Elms (1994) declared that “Ethical psychobiography doesn’t just avoid the unethical; it adds to our understanding of ourselves and other human beings” (p. 255). Most recently, Ponterotto (2017) expanded the six-step ethical decision-making model (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017), to a ten-step guide that includes reflective questions for psychobiographical researchers. This will undoubtedly enhance both the development and reputation of counsellors amongst related disciplines and in the eyes of the general public (Ponterotto, 2017).

6.3.2 Application to the study of Plath

This study was conducted for academic reasons and, as such, posed fewer ethical problems. Since the researcher selected to study Sylvia Plath, a deceased subject, no informed consent was needed. Furthermore, in order to protect any living relatives and associates from possible harmful or embarrassing consequences which unpublished controversial information could cause, only publicly available data on Plath were used. The researcher submitted a proposal to the Committee for Title Registration. The Committee for Title Registration of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State, acted as an Institutional Review Board and granted permission for this psychobiographical study of the life of Sylvia Plath to be conducted. Throughout this study, the researcher endeavoured to uphold the relevant ethical responsibilities expected of any psychologist engaged in the process of psychobiographical

research, as proposed by Ponterotto (2017) in his ten-step guide to conducting psychobiographical research.

6.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to highlight the most significant methodological challenges in psychobiographical case study research. The chapter included a discussion of ethical considerations, as well as the strategies employed by the researcher to overcome or diminish the negative impact of these challenges. The following chapter expounds the research design and the methodology of this psychobiographical case study.

CHAPTER 7

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

7.1 Chapter Preview

The chapter commences by providing an outline of the specific research objectives of this psychobiographical study. This is followed by a description of the design and methodology employed to meet the specific objectives, and includes a description of the procedures implemented to collect, condense, analyse and present the data pertaining to the psychobiographical subject. The chapter concludes with an overview of the ethical considerations which were addressed in this study, including the criteria for trustworthiness and reflexivity.

7.2 The Psychobiographical Research Objectives

Ponterotto (2015, p. 379) comprehensively defined psychobiographical research as “the intense lifespan study of an individual of historic significance in socio-cultural context using psychological and historiographic research methods and interpreted from established theories of psychology”. The primary aim of this psychobiography was to conduct an intensive, lifespan study of the American feminist poet and writer, Sylvia Plath, in terms of Erikson’s (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development and Schwartz’s (1995) Internal Family Systems model. The primary aim of this psychobiography reflects the exploratory-descriptive nature of the inductive approach taken to this study, since it involved a detailed exploration and description characterised by attention to triangulated evidence of the subject’s life experiences, interpersonal relationships and socio-historical context in what has been termed “thick description” (Denzin, 1989; Geertz, 1973; Ponterotto, 2006, 2014; Ryle, 1971).

The secondary aim of this psychobiography was to conduct an assessment of the content of the two psychological frameworks applied to the study of Plath. The secondary objective of the study thus reflects the descriptive-dialogic nature of the deductive approach taken to the study, since it involved the validation or refutation of existing theoretical conceptualisations and propositions by comparing the psychobiographical research findings to the expected outcomes of theoretical frameworks (Chéze, 2009; Edwards, 1990; Fouché, 1999).

The application of the descriptive-dialogic approach thus allowed for a dialogue to be established between the exploratory-descriptive findings and the theoretical conceptualisations

and propositions of the applied frameworks (Burnell, 2013; Chéze, 2009; Edwards, 1990; Fouché, 1999). Through the process of analytical generalisation, assessment of the selected theoretical models was operationalised (Cavaye, 1996; Chéze, 2009, McLeod, 1994; Yin, 2009).

In addition to the above-mentioned aims, this study aimed to contribute to the growing field of psychobiographical research. In South Africa, this field has grown considerably in recent years and is now recognised as a legitimate field in psychology (Fouché, 2015). Runyan (1988) highlighted the importance of expanding the field of psychobiography by stating that psychobiographical research enhances the field of personality psychology since one of its objectives is the development of a better understanding of individual persons.

Although Plath was not South African, her struggle towards selfhood in a culture and time period characterised by gender-related inequalities and inequities, reflects the struggle of many South African women, even in a post-apartheid society. According to Akala and Divala (2016), although the gender-equity paradigm in post-apartheid South Africa has made great strides to empower formally marginalised women, areas of serious marginalisation continue to exist in the country. By examining Plath's life, the researcher hoped to contribute not only to the growing field of psychobiography in South Africa, but also to a deeper understanding of the broader psychosocial challenges and sub-personality functioning faced by this remarkable pioneer of the feminist movement. In light of the researcher's strong feelings about gender-related inequalities and their impact on female empowerment, the reader might question the researcher's decision not to use a feminist theory to explore the life of Plath. This decision was prompted by two important considerations. Firstly, owing to the researcher's strong feelings about gender-related inequalities, a feminist theory was avoided to guard against researcher bias. Secondly, it must be noted that Plath was intensely aware of the implications of being a woman in America in that specific cultural period, and this caused immense conflict for her, both personally and emotionally (Kriel, 2011). She was acutely aware of society's expectations for her as a woman (to be a subservient, well-educated wife, but also content to be "pregnant and in the kitchen" (Plath, 2000, p. 444), and even though she strongly rejected these societal expectations, she often used them as boundaries within which to shape the image she chose to present to society (Gill, 2008; Kriel, 2011). As such, Kriel (2011) described Plath as a somewhat reluctant feminist, for although she fought against what society and all her "white-haired old mothers" (Plath, 2000, p. 433) wanted of her; she simultaneously longed to be a wife and mother. This conflicting dualism could pose challenges for researchers attempting to arrive at an equitable interpretation of Plath's life from a feminist perspective.

7.3 The Psychobiographical Research Design and Methodology

This psychobiographical study on the life and personality functioning of Plath can be described as longitudinal life-history research (Cara, 2007; Chéze, 2009; Plummer, 1983; Runyan, 1984, 1988) with a qualitative, single-case, idiographic research design (Burnell, 2013; Chéze, 2009; Flick, 2006; Runyan, 1988c, 1994; Yin, 1994, 2003). Longitudinal life-history research documents the life experiences that shaped an individual's unique personality (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Burnell, 2013; Runyan, 1982, 1983, 1984). The application of a single-case design allows for the assessment and clarification of theory propositions, especially against unique, individual cases (Yin, 1994, 2003).

A single-case, psychobiographical research design makes extensive use of psychological theory to systematically reconstruct the life story of a biographical subject into a coherent, psychologically illuminating narrative (Edwards, 1998; Fouché, 1999; McAdams, 1988, 1994; Nel, 2013; Runyan, 1983, 1984; Schultz, 2005b). This narrative traces the development of important psychological constructs in the subject's life over time (McAdams, 2006; Schultz, 2005b). According to Minnameier (2010), the main justification and rationale for conducting psychobiographical research is to develop an enlightened understanding of an individual subject by employing psychological theories to interpret biographical data. This process is called abduction and can be defined as the interpretation or explanation of events, data or facts through the application of theory, and the exposition of facts as a manifestation of some aspect of the applied theory (Robinson & McAdams, 2015). In terms of this definition, psychobiographical research can be described as qualitative-morphogenic in nature since it allows for both nomothetic (general) and idiographic (specific) considerations in the understanding of individuality (Elms, 1994; Robinson, 2011; Runyan, 1983).

In this study, the qualitative-morphogenic approach facilitated the longitudinal study of Plath within her sociohistorical context. Despite the appeal of this approach, it presents the researcher with a number of challenges which must be addressed in the research process. These challenges were presented as preliminary methodological considerations in the previous chapter, and included the measures taken by the researcher to overcome or mitigate their negative effects in this study of Plath's life. In the subsequent section, the researcher's choice of psychobiographical subject is discussed.

7.4 Selection of the Psychobiographical Subject and the Psychological Frameworks

The first step which needs to be taken in any psychobiographical endeavour, involves the selection of the psychobiographical subject (Du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 1994; Kóváry, 2011). In traditional research, this process is called sampling (Du Plessis, 2017; Simonton, 1999). In psychobiographical research, the objective is to select a subject for his or her contemporary, historical or theoretical significance, thus the purposive strategy which is employed is referred to as significant or purposive sampling (Flick, 2006; Mayer & Maree, 2017; Simonton, 1999). When Elms (1994, p. 19) urged, “Let your subject choose you”, he was suggesting that psychobiographers be guided by the intensity of their enthusiasm for a subject when making their choice.

This notion is not a new one and was pointed out by Erikson (1968), who highlighted the importance of clarifying one’s personal motivations in choosing a subject. Currently, this is referred to as personal reflexivity in qualitative research (Kóváry, 2011; Willig, 2008). According to Willig (2008), personal reflexivity entails reflecting on how one’s experiences, values, interests, political orientation beliefs, social identities and life goals have influenced the research. It also entails reflecting on the ways in which one is affected and even changed by the research. Even though the goals of personal reflexivity are partly unconscious, they exist irrespective of whether the researcher considers them or not and they play a significant role in determining the researcher’s approach (Elms, 1994; Kóváry, 2011; Willig, 2008).

Elms (1994) warned that in order to prevent subjectivity when choosing a research subject, the researcher should strive for ambivalence. He added that the researcher should strive to choose a subject who is intriguing and who lends him/herself to a fascinating examination of contradictions, puzzles, juxtapositions and previously unexplained twists in his/her psychological development. In psychobiographical research, these subjects are usually influential personalities considered to be public figures because they are the focus of intense public scrutiny and interest (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). In the history of psychobiography, these public figures have included military and political leaders, writers and artists, scientists, philosophers and psychologists (Elms, 1994; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017; Ponterotto et al., 2015; Runyan, 1982; Schultz, 2005a).

Purposive, significant sampling in psychobiography minimises the risk of selection bias associated with pre-existing groups and allows the researcher to consider the range of individuals on the personality development spectrum and to select eminent individuals traditionally discounted in quantitative research approaches (Barbour, 2001; Howe, 1997; Kóváry, 2011; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017; Simonton, 1999). Psychobiographical studies of

genius and mental illness thus play a crucial role in informing all those who work with youth prodigies as well as youths at risk (Howe, 2007; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

Many influential authors in the field of psychobiography have suggested guidelines pertaining to the selection of a psychobiographical subject. These include the researcher's personal feelings and motives for selecting the subject; the significance of the subject and the degree to which people other than the psychobiographer would be interested in the subject; the amount of information available on the subject; the formulation of specific questions relating to the subject; the educational value of the study, not only for other psychobiographers, but also for educators, policy makers, administrators and mental health professionals working with people who are similar to the subject; and lastly, the ethical considerations related to conducting the psychobiography (Du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 1994; Howe, 2007; Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2014; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b).

The American feminist poet and writer, Sylvia Plath (1932-1963), who committed suicide at the young age of 30, was selected as the subject for this psychobiographical study. The decision to choose Plath as the subject was based in part on the researcher's personal interest in English feminist literature. The biographical and socio-historical data pertaining to Plath's life was presented in Chapter 2. Apart from the researcher's personal interest in Plath, the following factors informed the decision to choose Plath as a subject:

1. An initial review of literature was conducted using the database search EBSCOhost of the library of the University of the Free State. The review revealed an extensive number of resources on Plath, allowing for a comprehensive and detailed investigation of the various facets of her life. The myriad of biographic and literary essays on her life and works (e.g. Alexander, 2003; Butscher, 1976; Hayman, 1991; Malcolm, 1994; Rose, 2013; Stevenson, 1989; Wagner-Martin, 1988; Wilson, 2013) not only confirmed her exceptional literary ability, but also revealed the web of controversies surrounding her life. According to Kumlu (2011), no writer or poet has been as misunderstood as Plath. Furthermore, no writer or poet has been labelled as often as Plath as being schizophrenic or mad, and this by scholars and researchers who have no education in psychology. Since Plath's life has not been examined from a formal, psychological perspective and since no full-length, academic psychobiography have been conducted on her life, the researcher felt that the choice of Plath as subject of the study could be valuable in the field of psychobiography.
2. The literature review also indicated that Plath's life and personality development appeared to have theoretical value and applicability to the psychological frameworks

which the researcher chose to use in this study. The first psychological framework is Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development. This theory is a life-course theory spanning an individual's entire life, from birth until death, allowing for a more psychosocial and longitudinal examination of Plath's life. Although Plath died at the young age of 30, the researcher felt that the first six stages of Erikson's theory could adequately account for Plath's development, particularly with regard to the conflicts characterising each stage and the problems and virtues which successful and unsuccessful conflict resolution can bring about. Erikson's theory was also deemed applicable because it allowed the researcher to consider the impact of socio-historical occurrences (e.g., World War II, the feminist movement and the Cold War), on the personality development of Plath. The second psychological framework is Schwartz's (1995) Internal Family Systems model. This model evolved out of the recognition of the multiplicity of the mind and an attempt to understand it using systems thinking (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). The Internal Family Systems model emphasises the importance of viewing the individual as a system composed of various subpersonalities or parts. At the core of all these parts is the Self, which Schwartz (1995, 2001) defined as an active, compassionate inner leader. Although Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model is not a feminist theory per se, its focus on subpersonalities allowed the researcher to illustrate Plath's feminist voice, since the model proposed by Schwartz (1995, 2001) addresses the very concepts exemplified in Plath's outlining of the "female divided self's dilemma" (Kriel, 2011, p. 81).

7.5 Collection of Data Sources

Integral to the sampling process of qualitative data analysis in psychobiographical research, is the identification of sufficient data pertaining to the subject of the study (Du Plessis, 2017). Data needs to be assessed not only in terms of quantity available, but also in terms of quality, since the data itself constitutes the sample utilised in qualitative research (Alexander, 1990; Du Plessis, 2017; Schultz, 2005b). This important methodological guideline dates back to Freud (1910, 1961), who suggested that researchers gather as much data as possible, from as many sources as possible (Schultz, 2005b). Elms (1994) supported this suggestion, adding that the extensiveness of the data increases the accuracy of the study and decreases the possibility of findings being based on biases, misperceptions or other errors. Schultz (2005b) advised that, apart from gathering as many sources as possible, the psychobiographer should strive to identify themes that run across the data, since this enhances the consistency of the study. The

most commonly used data sources in case study research include: documentation, archival records, direct observation, participant observation, interviews and physical artifacts (Yin, 2003). Simonton (2003) differentiated between documentation produced by the subject (primary sources) and documentation produced by others on the subject (secondary sources).

Ideally, case study research should draw information from as many sources as possible, including primary and secondary sources, and it should be of such a nature that it provides insight into the different psychological components of a subject's functioning (Du Plessis, 2017; Yin, 2003). Primary sources should include the subject's written or recorded verbal productions, since these comprise a major constituent of source material (Alexander, 1990; Du Plessis, 2017; Saccaggi, 2015). Yin (2003) posited that the benefits from the suggested data sources can be maximised by applying the following principles:

Principle 1: The Utilisation of Multiple Data Sources. The utilisation of multiple data sources has been identified as one of the strengths of case study research because it affords the researcher the opportunity to investigate a broader scope of attitudinal, behavioural and historical issues (Yin, 2003). Additionally, multiple data sources allow the researcher to discover converging lines of inquiry, thereby enhancing the triangulation process of research (Fouché, 1999; Patton, 1987, 2002; Willig, 2008; Yin, 2003, 2009). This not only improves the construct validity and quality of the research, but also guides the researcher in selecting information which corroborates the same facts or phenomena (Yin, 2003).

Principle 2: The Creation of a Comprehensive Database. This principle relates to the organisation and documentation of collected data (Yin, 2003). According to Du Plessis (2017), the researcher should enter each potential data source into a database, so that a comprehensive bibliography of all available information on the subject is created. Since the database makes room for a variety of components, including case study notes, documents, tables and narratives (Yin, 2003), it is imperative that the researcher develop a formal and presentable database. This database should identify all sources clearly (including seminal facts pertaining to the subject), and should be organised in such a way that it can be of value to future researchers who might want to access it (Du Plessis, 2017; Fouché, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003).

Principle 3: Maintaining a Chain of Evidence. This principle increases the reliability of case study information because it allows external observers to trace important lines of investigation and to follow the evidentiary process of research (Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) advises

the case study researcher to work backwards and to identify the specific data sources that could support the hypothetical conclusion delineated by the research.

In order to fulfill the primary objective of this study, the researcher searched for all publically-available biographical, autobiographical and literary material on Sylvia Plath, as well as material related to the historical period in which she lived. The search was conducted by means of the World Wide Web, the EBSCOhost search engine and the information-system service provided by the library of the Free State University. This library service, which includes inter-library loans, allowed for the retrieval of both published documents and unpublished psychobiographical studies from other university libraries in South Africa. The researcher also made use of the online shopping service of national and international publishers, to purchase the latest releases of material on Plath. Not only did this published material prove useful in the verification and corroboration of information required to enhance the factual accuracy and reliability of the study, it also served as a source of data which the researcher could review and study at length according to her own convenience (Burnell, 2013; Du Plessis, 2017; Fouché, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003, 2009). The published material included primary sources of information (Plath's semi-autobiographical novel, her journal entries and letters written to her mother, relatives and acquaintances), as well as secondary sources of information (biographies, essays and articles written about Plath, as well as a collection of poems written by Plath's husband, Ted Hughes, in response to her suicide and their highly publicised and volatile marriage). These materials were all considered relevant to the study's primary aim and were included in the database since they served as the basic units of analysis in this psychobiography. The primary and secondary sources were tabulated for easy reference (See Table 7.1) and they were also included in the reference list.

Since Plath's life was shrouded in controversy, the danger exists that published material concerning her life may be biased, thus compromising the credibility of such material (Yin, 1999). In an effort to overcome author bias and ensure internal validity of the psychobiography, the researcher made use of multiple data sources which were triangulated in a process known as data triangulation (Fouché, 1999; Patton, 1987, 2002; Willig, 2008; Yin, 2003, 2009). To further enhance the interpretation of data from multiple sources, the researcher applied investigator triangulation (Yin, 2003, 2009). This involved an ongoing process of consultation and feedback from the research supervisor on the procedures followed to collect and interpret data in this psychobiography. Reflexivity was also applied to ensure that data interpretation was not distorted. According to Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017), an added advantage of

researcher reflexivity is that it leads to an increased awareness of ethically- significant moments which need to be explored in psychobiographical research.

Table 7.1

Primary and secondary sources utilised in the study of Sylvia Plath

Title	Author	Publication Date	Publisher	Genre	Source
<i>The Bell Jar</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1963	Faber & Faber	Semi-autobiographical novel	Primary
<i>Letters Home</i>	Plath, Sylvia (Edited by Plath, A.S.)	1975, 1992	Harper Perennial	Collection of Plath's letters	Primary
<i>Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1977, 1979, 2008	Faber & Faber	Short stories, prose and diary excerpts	Primary
<i>The Journals of Sylvia Plath</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1982	Faber & Faber	Collection of diary entries	Primary
<i>The Magic Mirror</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1989	Smith College	Plath's Smith College senior thesis	Primary
<i>The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath</i>	Plath, Sylvia (Edited by Kukil, K.)	2000	Anchor Books	Collection of diary entries	Primary
<i>The Letters of Sylvia Plath Vol. 1</i>	Plath, Sylvia (Edited by Steinberg, P.K & Kukil, K.V)	2017	Faber & Faber	Collection of Plath's letters	Primary
<i>The Letters of Sylvia Plath Vol. 2</i>	Plath, Sylvia (Edited by Steinberg, P.K & Kukil, K.V)	2018	Faber & Faber	Collection of Plath's letters	Primary
<i>The Colossus and Other Works</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1960, 2008	Faber & Faber	Poetry	Primary
<i>Ariel</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1965	Faber & Faber	Poetry	Primary
<i>Three Women: A Monologue for Three Voices</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1968	Turret Books	Poetry	Primary
<i>Crossing the Water</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1971	Faber & Faber	Poetry	Primary
<i>Winter Trees</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1971	Faber & Faber	Poetry	Primary
<i>The Collected Poems: Sylvia Plath</i>	Plath, Sylvia (Edited by Ted Hughes)	1985	Faber & Faber	Poetry	Primary

<i>Selected Poems</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1985	Faber & Faber	Poetry	Primary
<i>Ariel: The Restored Edition</i>	Plath, Sylvia	2004	Harper Perennial	Poetry	Primary
<i>The Bed Book</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1976	Faber & Faber	Children's book	Primary
<i>The It-Doesn't-Matter Suit</i>	Plath, Sylvia	1996	Faber & Faber	Children's book	Primary
<i>Mrs Cherry's Kitchen</i>	Plath, Sylvia	2001	Faber & Faber	Children's book	Primary
<i>Collected Children's Stories</i>	Plath, Sylvia	2001	Faber & Faber	Children's book	Primary
<i>Rough Magic: A Biography of Sylvia Plath</i>	Alexander, Paul.	1991, 1999, 2003	Da Capo Press	Biography	Secondary
<i>Giving Up: The Last Days of Sylvia Plath</i>	Becker, Jillian	2003	St Martin's Press	Biography	Secondary
<i>Sylvia Plath: Method and Madness</i>	Butscher, Edward	1976, 2003	Schaffner Press	Biography	Secondary
<i>The Haunted Reader and Sylvia Plath</i>	Crowther, Gail	2017	Fonthill	Biography	Secondary
<i>These Ghostly Archives: The Unearthing of Sylvia Plath</i>	Crowther, Gail & Steinberg, Peter K.	2017	Fonthill	Biography	Secondary
<i>The Death and Life of Sylvia Plath</i>	Hayman, Ronald	1991	Carol Publishing	Biography	Secondary
<i>Sylvia Plath: A Biography</i>	Kirk, Connie Ann	2009	Prometheus Books	Biography	Secondary
<i>The Silent Woman: Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes</i>	Malcolm, Janet	1993, 1994	Granta	Biography	Secondary
<i>Her Husband: Hughes and Plath - A Marriage</i>	Middlebrook, Diane	2003	Viking	Biography	Secondary
<i>American Isis: The Life and Art of Sylvia Plath</i>	Rollyson, Carl	2013	St Martin's Press	Biography	Secondary
<i>The Haunting of Sylvia Plath</i>	Rose, Jacqueline	2013	Virago	Biography	Secondary
<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	Steinberg, Peter K.	2004	Chelsea House	Biography	Secondary

<i>Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath</i>	Stevenson, Anne	1990	Penguin	Biography	Secondary
<i>Sylvia Plath: An Analytical Bibliography</i>	Tabor, Stephen	1988	Mansell	Biography	Secondary
<i>Sylvia Plath</i>	Wagner-Martin, Linda	1988	Routledge	Biography	Secondary
<i>Mad Girl's Love Song</i>	Wilson, Andrew	2013	Simon & Schuster	Biography	Secondary
<i>Birthday Letters</i>	Hughes, Ted	1998	Farrar Straus Giroux	Biographic poetry collection	Secondary

One of the hallmarks of qualitative research within the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is the simultaneous collection and analysis of data (Fassinger, 2005; Polkinghorne, 2005; Ponterotto, 2014). The procedures utilised by the researcher for the analysis of data extracted from the collected material are discussed in the following section.

7.6 Extraction and Analysis of Data

Since psychobiographers aim to provide psychological accounts of individual human lives within their particular social, cultural and historical contexts across their entire lifespans (Elms, 1994; McAdams, 1988; Runyan, 1990; Schultz, 2005b), it goes without saying that psychobiography generates an exorbitant amount of information. One of the most challenging tasks facing psychobiographers is the careful examination, extraction, organisation and categorisation of that information so that pertinent units of data can be identified for further scrutiny (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Fouché, 1999; Itzkowitz & Volkan, 2003; McAdams, 1994, 2006; Schultz, 2005b). Successful psychobiography depends on the researcher's ability to discern between content which is inconsequential and that which is psychologically significant in securing the relevance of the psychobiographical interpretation (Schultz, 2005b). Psychobiographical sophistication thus depends on the researcher's ability to extract salient information from the subject's life and to apply the most appropriate psychological theory so that the themes and constructs which are extracted from the narrative best illuminate the complexity of the subject's life (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Carlson, 1988; Creswell, 1994; Du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 1994; McAdams, 1988, 1994, Schultz, 2005b). To attain this goal, Yin (2003, 2009) suggested that case study data be analysed systematically using the following general analytic strategies: (a) reliance on analysis guided by the research objectives and theoretical propositions of the case study, and (b) the development of a case description. These

strategies involve the identification of psychologically salient data from the array of collected source materials (Saccaggi, 2015). The strategies suggested by Yin (2003, 2009) correlate with the analytical approaches proposed by Alexander (1988, 1990). These are discussed in greater detail in the subsequent section.

7.6.1 The Model of Alexander

7.6.1.1 *Indicators of Saliency*

The first analytical model proposed by Alexander (1988, 1990) involves sifting through a network of rules designed to highlight importance, so that salient data reveals itself. Alexander (1988, 1990) posited that this sifting process has a dual function in that it reduces data to manageable proportions and simultaneously focuses on discovering the dynamic nature of the subject's personality.

Alexander (1990, p. 12) referred to the latter function as breaking through the data's "conscious communicational intent" so that alternative interpretations can emerge. This model involves the analysis of personal material produced by the subject to uncover both the conscious and unconscious motives behind the subject's social communicative repertoire (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Given the wealth of biographical data generated from the study of a subject's life, Alexander (1988, 1990) postulated nine indicators of psychological saliency, aimed at facilitating the organisation and prioritisation of biographical data. He based these indicators on strategies used in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis to extract core identifying units which, when examined more rigorously, lead to a better understanding of the nuclear constituents of a subject's personality (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Schultz, 2005c).

Alexander (1988, 1990) explained these indicators in terms of means-end sequences or schemas which, when analysed, help to reveal a subject's personal experience of the world. The researcher used Alexander's (1988, 1990) indicators of saliency as a guide in the identification of psychologically significant incidents, experiences or themes pertaining to the life of Plath. In the next section, the indicators are described and an example of their application in Plath's writing is provided

Primacy. According to the principle marker of primacy, information which is presented first in a text is considered psychologically salient and worthy of inspection because it reveals something uniquely important (Schultz, 2002, 2005c). The importance given to early experiences in the development of personality is considered a key feature of psychoanalysis and constitutes the foundation upon which subsequent meaning is elaborated (Alexander,

1990). Even in psychotherapy, therapists often treat the very first information which a patient provides as salient and fundamental in unravelling what will follow (Alexander, 1990). Similarly, McAdams (1993) adopted the principle of primacy in his interview protocol and life-story model. Early memories, first experiences and autobiographical introductory remarks are thus of particular significance to the psychobiographer, even though they may present in disguised form (Elms, 1994).

Frequency. The principle of frequency refers to the repetition of communications, happenings, themes, obsessions, patterns, conflicts, sequences and even symbols (Schultz, 2005c). Although frequency and repetition are, for the most part, considered signs of certainty that something is important, there is the paradoxical dilemma that increasing repetition can become monotonous and decrease one's awareness of its importance (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005c). Elms (1994) warned, however, that its significance should never be underestimated and that it should always be investigated. Schultz (2005c) supported the attentive examination of repetitive patterns or scripts that occur in a subject's life since these constitute nuclear components of personality. Although the repetitive patterns or scripts may assume many forms and need not be literal or exclusively textual in nature, their meaning needs to be explored, especially when they come across as obsessions (Schultz, 2005c). Key repetitions not only tell fundamentally revealing stories, they may also be expressions of powerful value schemes (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Schultz, 2005c). Alexander (1988, p. 271) suggested that the isolation of sequential "units" of information or material in terms of means-end structures, can assist in the assessment of their value for the discovery of dynamic sequences.

Uniqueness. Unlike frequency, the principle of uniqueness occurs when material is pointed out by a subject as being unprecedented or particularly singular (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005c). Uniqueness manifests itself more subtly when the subject's language or emotional expression departs radically from the nomothetic baseline of normality established by cultural expectations (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Apart from verbal deviations, Alexander (1988, 1990) posited that deviations in the content of what is expressed by the subject also constitute powerful signs of salience which require further examination.

Negation. The principle of negation is characterised by arduous repudiation of any given biographical or psychological fact, particularly when there is no positive assertion to the contrary (Schultz, 2005c). From a Freudian perspective, negation by patients is particularly worthy of attention because it can be indicative of unconscious, repressed material that is disguised by the semblance of impossibility or unlikelihood (Alexander, 1988, 1990). While

it goes without saying that attention should be given to that which a subject claims to be, Elms (1994) maintained that it is equally, if not more important, to pay attention to that which a subject claims not to be. Alexander (1988, 1990) warned, however, that entertaining the likelihood of a subject's statements by eliminating the negative component, is but one of the available possibilities. He, therefore, suggested that negatively-framed imagery merely be earmarked for more extensive study without automatically assuming the precise nature of its importance (Alexander, 1988, 1990).

Emphasis. When a biographical subject goes to great lengths to highlight an experience, the psychobiographer should consider the experience as being psychologically salient (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005c). Alexander (1988, 1990) warned, however, that a subject's emphasised experiences do not necessarily contain material that is worthy of investigation, and that the psychobiographer should refrain from making automatic assumptions based on a subject's accentuated revelations.

He proposed that the psychobiographer pay closer attention to the more subtle forms of emphasis which are not explicitly intended by the subject, but which are nonetheless signalled in a clear, unmistakable way (Alexander, 1988, 1990). These are categorised into the components over-, under- and misplaced emphasis (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005c). Over-emphasis occurs when something ordinary, or commonplace is given excessive attention. The opposite happens with under-emphasis, which refers to something important receiving too little attention. In the case of misplaced emphasis, there is no credible link between the implied means and the announced outcome; resulting in irrelevancies of a crucial event being emphasised with undue force (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005c).

Omission. The principle of omission refers to the absence of content that one would expect either because the subject implies certain standards of comparison or because logical and cultural expectations lead one to question the absence of such content (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005c). Elms (1994, p. 246) referred to the notion of paying attention to omissions that could shed light on unravelling the mystery of a subject's whole life as the "Sherlock Holmes rule". Alexander (1988) suggested that a subject's role in a sequence which evolved a negative outcome, be investigated for its potential repetitive properties. He added that the most significant type of omission in such cases is related to affect rather than to cognition. The omission of affective imagery would necessitate a search for the specific circumstances which govern applicable affective experiences and their consequences (Alexander, 1988, 1990).

Error and Distortion. The principle of error and/or distortion is characterised by the occurrence of factual errors such as time and place, or misquotations and person distortions (Alexander, 1988; Schultz, 2005c). Psychoanalysis deals extensively with the role of error and distortion as salient indicators of a subject's hidden motives (Alexander, 1988). Although Freudian slips may not always be indicative of deep-rooted motives that demand further investigation, they should never be overlooked as meaningful psychological pointers (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005c).

Isolation. The principle of isolation manifests itself when one comes across perplexing content which does not seem to fit in with the rest of the material presented (Alexander, 1988; Schultz, 2005c). Elms (1994, p. 247) referred to this marker of salience as the "Come again?" criterion, whilst Schultz (2005c, p. 46) referred to it as the "sore thumb" cue, because of the fact that the isolated material stands out so jarringly against the rest of the content. In psychoanalysis, isolation is a defense mechanism which involves isolating behaviours or thoughts so that their links with other thoughts or with the rest of the subject's life are severed (Schultz, 2005c). The goal of this defense mechanism is to isolate an idea and to sever its association with repressed, unconscious material so that it does not remind one of something that would preferably be forgotten (Schultz, 2005c). Although the occurrence of a seemingly irrelevant association in a well-ordered description of an experience can be indicative of something important in the mind of the subject, Alexander (1988) warned that more subtle expressions of this phenomenon may go undetected because the observer sometimes unknowingly provides the connections required to make sense of a subject's incongruent communication sequences. For isolation to serve as an effective marker in uncovering and revealing deeper meaning, the psychobiographer needs to restore the connection between isolated ideas and the web of unconscious material which they represent (Schultz, 2005c).

Incompletion. The principle of incompletion is characterised by a subject beginning a sequence and following a course, but failing to see it through to its closure (Alexander, 1988; Schultz, 2005c). The subject may manifest incompletion in a number of ways, such as: starting a story, but stopping in the middle; starting a story and then changing the subject; or starting and finishing a story, but omitting something significant from the middle of the story (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005c). In some cases a subject may be aware of what is occurring and simply stop verbal discourse abruptly because it may be too painful to continue (Alexander, 1988, 1990). In such cases, incompletion serves as a form of avoidance which the subject implements to evade anxiety or guilt (Schultz, 2005c). Other examples of incompletion may include subtle changes such as distraction where the narrative flow is interrupted and the subject fails to return

to the original line of narration (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Incompletion may also reveal itself in completed sequences which lack means-end relationships (Alexander, 1988, 1990), or in narrative expressions beyond the textual domain (Schultz, 2005c). Failing to complete an artistic work and even episodes of writer's block could, depending on context, represent a type of incompletion which warrants investigation (Schultz, 2005c).

Alexander's (1988, 1990) indicators of salience were applied in this study to allow for the identification and detailed examination of salient data sets produced by Plath. The data sets which promoted the objective of this research study, namely: to explore and describe Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development and the structure of her internal family system throughout her lifespan – were included and discussed in detail in Chapters 8 and 9 of this study. The following is an example of a salient data set taken from Plath's journal:

OCTOBER 13: Tuesday

Very depressed today (Primacy). Unable to write a thing (Frequency). Menacing gods. I feel outcast on a cold star, unable to feel anything but an awful helpless numbness (Uniqueness). I look down into the warm, earthy world. Into a nest of lovers' beds, baby cribs, meal tables, all the solid commerce of life in this earth, and feel apart, enclosed in a wall of glass (Uniqueness). Caught between the hope and promise of my work ... the one or two stories that seem to catch something, the one or two poems that build a little colored island of words ... and the hopeless gap between that promise, and the real world of other peoples poems and stories and novels (Frequency). My shaping spirit of imagination is far from me (Error and distortion). At least I have begun my German. Painful, as if "part were cut out of my brain" (Frequency). I am of course at fault (Frequency). Anesthetizing myself again, and pretending nothing is there. There is the curse of this vanity. My inability to lose myself in a character, a situation. Always myself, myself. What good does it do to be published, if I am producing nothing? (Incompletion). If only a group of people were more important to me than the Idea of a Novel, I might begin a novel. Little artificial stories that get nothing of the feeling, the drama even of life. When they should be realer, more intense than life. And I am prepared for nothing else (Negation). Am dead already. Pretend an interest in astrology, botany, which I never follow up. When I go home I must teach myself the Tarot pack, the stars, German conversation. Add French to my studying. This comes so natural to some people. Ted is my salvation. He is so rare, so special, (Uniqueness) how could anyone else stand me! Of course, otherwise I might get a PhD, teach in New York, or work at a career (Isolation). It is hard, with our unplanned drifting, to do much in this way.

Another thing that horrifies me (Emphasis) is the way I forget: I once knew Plato well, James Joyce, and so on and so on. If one doesn't apply knowledge, doesn't review, keep it up, it sinks into a Sargasso and encrusts with barnacles. A job that would plunge me in other lives would be a help. A reporter, a sociologist, anything. Maybe in England I will have some luck. They are, in a sense, less "professional" than we are here. More open to the amateur. At least I think so. (Plath, 2000, p. 517)

7.6.1.2 *Data Questioning*

The second analytical approach proposed by Alexander (1988, 1990) involves posing questions to the data. The purpose of this strategy is to manage prolific data by identifying specific questions which relate to the research objectives of the study (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Du Plessis, 2017; Nel, 2013). Alexander's (1988, 1990) data questioning strategy correlates with the formulation of tentative hypotheses proposed by Elms (2007). Du Plessis (2017) highlighted that the questions posed by the researcher should always relate to specific aspects of the subject's life. Furthermore, the researcher should keep in mind that the data questioning process is influenced by the researcher's choice of psychological theory, since the posed questions may relate to specific aspects of the chosen theoretical paradigm (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 1994 2005). Alexander, (1988, 1990) warned, however, that theory be used as a springboard rather than as a restrictive blinder, since a more flexible framework allows for a better understanding of a subject's dynamics.

For this study, the researcher addressed the proliferation of data on Plath's life by posing the following general questions:

- Which components of the collected data allow for a more comprehensive exploration and understanding of the development of Plath's psychosocial and internal family system across her lifespan?

To answer the above question, the researcher conceptualised Plath's life history firstly, in terms of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development (discussed in Chapter 8), and secondly, in terms of the Internal Family Systems model developed by Schwartz (1995, 2001) (discussed in Chapter 9). The research findings discussed in Chapter 8 were based on the literature study of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development (discussed in Chapter 3), whilst the findings discussed in Chapter 9 were based on the literature study of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model (discussed in Chapter 4). The researcher thus extracted data pertaining to the theoretical propositions and conceptualisations of the selected psychological frameworks, thereby affirming the exploratory-descriptive nature of the research.

- What methods will the researcher use to establish a dialogue between the exploratory-descriptive data on Plath and the content of the psychological frameworks utilised in this study?

To answer this question, the researcher implemented analytical generalisation by critically comparing the extracted data on Plath with aspects of the theoretical propositions and

conceptualisations of the two frameworks utilised in this study. By implementing this descriptive-dialogic approach, the researcher was able to assess content features of both the psychosocial development theory of Erikson (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) and the Internal Family Systems model of Schwartz (1995).

The above questions allowed for an interaction between the data of the study and the selected psychological frameworks, and thus provided insight into the aims of the research and the constructs of the theoretical approaches which were used in the study (Fouché, 1999; Nel, 2013; Saccaggi, 2015; Yin, 2003, 2009). In order to develop the descriptive framework proposed by Yin (2003, 2009), the researcher constructed two conceptual matrices to facilitate the organisation and integration of information pertaining to the study of Plath. This framework is discussed in section 7.6.3.

7.6.2 The Model of Schultz

Although Schultz (2005c) agreed that Alexander's (1988, 1990) indicators of psychological saliency serve as useful markers for homing in on uniquely meaningful and interpretable moments or events, he suggested even greater refinement of salience prioritisation. According to Schultz (2005c), it is possible to reduce the plethora of saliencies to one "supersaliency", which he defined as "a single scene encapsulating all the core parameters of a life story" (p. 48). Schultz (2003, 2005c) referred to these constellating memories as prototypical scenes and compared them to a type of personality x-ray in that they provide the model of, and outline for, a life.

Schultz (2003, 2005c) posited that prototypical scenes are rich with meaning and provide the opportunity for psychobiographical hypotheses to be generated or for pre-existing interpretations to be confirmed. According to Schultz (2005c), Plath's prototypical scene centres on her father, or more specifically, on a visit to her father's grave. Schultz (2003, 2005c) outlined five key features of prototypical scenes. These are presented below, together with examples of their application to the life of Plath.

1. Specificity and emotional intensity – Prototypical scenes are usually recalled vividly and with intense emotion. The detail and emotive diction of Plath's journal entry, dated Monday, March 9, 1959, attest to Schultz's (2003, 2005c) criteria of specificity and emotional intensity:

A clear blue day in Winthrop. Went to my father's grave, a very depressing sight. Three grave yards separated by streets, all made within the last fifty years or so, ugly crude block stones, headstones together, as if the dead were sleeping head to head in a poorhouse. In the third yard, on a flat grassy area looking

across a sallow barren stretch to rows of wooden tenements I found the flat stone, “Otto E. Plath: 1885-1940”, right beside the path, where it would be walked over. Felt cheated. My temptation to dig him up. To prove he existed and really was dead. How far gone would he be? No trees, no peace, his headstone jammed up against the body on the other side. Left shortly. It is good to have the place in mind. (Plath, 2000, p. 473)

2. Interpenetration and permeation – Prototypical scenes are interpenetrate and permeate a range of artistic and psychological contexts, either allusively or overtly. Plath recorded the visit to her father’s grave in her journal, she mentioned it in her novel *The Bell Jar* (Plath, 1963) and it provided the stimulus for her poem *Electra on Azalea Path* (Plath, 1981):

The day you died I went into the dirt,
 Into the lightless hibernaculum
 Where bees, striped black and gold, sleep out the blizzard
 Like hieratic stones, and the ground is hard.
 It was good for twenty years, that wintering –
 As if you had never existed, as if I came
 God-fathered into the world from my mother’s belly:
 Her wide bed wore the stain of divinity.
 I had nothing to do with guilt or anything
 When I wormed back under my mother’s heart. (p. 116)

3. Development crisis – Prototypical scenes emerge from developmental crises in the non-pathological sense of Erikson’s psychosocial stage crises where a significant encounter occurs between a person and a particular type of conflict (e.g. between initiative and guilt or between identity and role confusion). Plath’s poem *Electra on Azalea Path* (Plath, 1981), reflects the themes of identification and guilt, whilst her journal entry, dated Sunday, March 29, 1959 (Plath, 2000), refers to the death of her father and her guilty fantasies of killing and castrating him:

Got at some deep things with Beuscher: facing dark and terrible things: those dreams of deformity and death. If I really think I killed and castrated my father may all my dreams of deformed and tortured people be my guilty visions of him or fears of punishment for me? And how to lay them? To stop them operating through the rest of my life? (p. 476)

4. Family conflict – Prototypical scenes usually depict family conflict, either directly or indirectly. Plath’s struggle with life and death revolved around internal conflict and resentment towards both her father and her mother. In her poem, *Electra on Azalea Path* (Plath, 1981), she used the medium of her art to channel her hatred for her mother (whom she blamed for killing her father), and her father (whom she blamed for abandoning her when he died). In an interview with her psychiatrist, Dr. Ruth Beuscher, she vehemently expressed her feelings of animosity towards her parents; especially her mother:

Me, I never knew the love of a father, the love of a steady blood-related man after the age of eight. My mother killed the only man who'd love me steady through life: came in one morning with tears of nobility in her eyes and told me he was gone for good. I hate her for that. I hate her because he wasn't loved by her. He was an ogre. But I miss him. He was old, but she married an old man to be my father. It was her fault. Damn her eyes. (Plath, 2000, p. 431)

5. Thrownness – Prototypical scenes entail varying degrees of thrownness and produce a feeling of disequilibrium in the subject. When Plath finds her father's tombstone, she recalls that she "had never cried for [my] father's death" (Plath, 1981). She then proceeds to lay her face against the marble and, in desperation, howls her loss "into the cold salt rain" (Plath, 1981, p. 135).

Schultz's (2005) description and analysis of prototypical scenes illustrate the concept's value for psychobiographical research. According to Schultz (2005c), not only do these prototypical scenes serve as effective summaries of self, they also unify themes and remind the researcher of the purpose of the research. They thus provide a roadmap in the researcher's search for meaning. In the next section, the conceptual frameworks used by the researcher to construct matrices for the screening and categorisation of data, are discussed.

7.6.3 Conceptual Framework and Matrices

The analysis of case study data is, according to Yin (2003, 2009), one of the least developed and most difficult components of conducting case study research. This is largely due to the fact that analytic techniques and strategies have not been well defined – a limitation which forces investigators to search for recipes, tools or formulas in the hope that familiarity with such formulaic devices will produce the required analytic result (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003, 2009). Although familiarity with these devices and manipulative techniques is helpful, every case study should strive to have a general analytic strategy which defines what to analyse and why, since this fundamentally determines the nature of the study's conclusions and is at the core of all qualitative data analysis (Du Plessis, 2017; Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014; Yin, 2003, 2009).

Morrow (2005) posited that data analysis, interpretation and presentation constitute a continuous, interactive process, the adequacy of which is a prerequisite to rounding out the criteria for trustworthiness. An analytical framework not only assists the researcher in rearranging and structuring the extensive amount of gathered biographical and archival material, it also allows for the emergence of psychologically salient information, enabling the

researcher to interpret the data systematically and meaningfully (Du Plessis, 2017; Morrow, 2005).

The data analysis matrix (Yin, 2003, 2009) which was proposed to facilitate the analysis of data in psychobiographical research (Fouché, 1999) was implemented in this study. Based on the model of Miles and Huberman (1994), it included the creation of two conceptual matrices for both the categorisation of data identified as being salient, as well as the organisation of data in chronological order. Each matrix was designed according to the stages or constructs of the psychological frameworks used by the researcher. The first matrix categorised the major periods of Plath's lifespan according to the framework informed by Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development (see Table 7.2). The second matrix categorised the major periods of Plath's lifespan according to the framework informed by Schwartz's (1995, 2001) internal family systems model (see Table 7.3).

In Table 7.2, the stages of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development (depicted in the six vertical columns at the top right-hand side of the table and discussed in Chapter 3) are schematically arranged in accordance with the significant historical periods in the life of Plath (depicted in the six horizontal rows at the bottom left-hand side of the table, and discussed in Chapter 2).

During the collection, examination, condensation, extraction and analysis of salient biographical material pertaining to Plath's psychosocial development, the researcher paid particular attention to the developmental crises that related to Plath's social and psychological development. Since Plath died at the young age of 30, she did not complete all of Erikson's psychosocial stages of development. Consequently, only six of the eight stages discussed in Chapter 3, were conceptualised in this study and schematically represented in Table 7.2. In Chapter 8, a discussion of the findings related to the psychosocial development of Plath is discussed.

In Table 7.3, the constructs of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model (depicted in the four vertical columns at the top right-hand side of the table, and discussed in Chapter 4) are schematically arranged in accordance with the significant historical periods in the life of Plath (depicted in the six horizontal rows at the bottom left-hand side of the table, and discussed in Chapter 2). During the collection, examination, condensation, extraction and analysis of salient biographical material pertaining to Plath's internal family system, the researcher paid particular attention to the sub-personalities which emerged as distinct parts (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995) as Plath passed through significant moments in her life. The impact of life-changing forces and historical events on the expression of the sub-personalities

throughout Plath's life was also taken into consideration. In Chapter 9, a discussion of the findings related to the structure of Plath's internal family system is discussed. Table 7.2 (representing the stages of psychosocial development as applied to significant historical periods in Sylvia Plath's life) and Table 7.3 (representing the structure of Sylvia Plath's internal family system according to significant historical periods in her life), are presented on the following pages.

Table 7.2

Matrix of Psychosocial Development over the Historical Lifespan of Sylvia Plath⁶

Historical Periods in the Life of Plath	Stages of Psychosocial Development by Erikson					
	Trust Versus Mistrust (0-18mths)	Autonomy versus Shame/Doubt (18mths-3yrs)	Initiative versus Guilt (3-6yrs)	Industry versus Inferiority (6-12yrs)	Identity versus Role Confusion (12-20yrs)	Intimacy versus Isolation (20-40yrs)
Infancy (1932 – 1933): Sylvia, the First-Born, during the Great Depression						
Early Childhood (1933 – 1936): Sylvia, the Sibling Rival, and the Move to Winthrop						
Middle Childhood (1936 – 1939): Sylvia and the Great New England Hurricane preceding the Plath Tragedy						
Later Childhood (1939 – 1945): The Aftermath of Otto Plath's Death during World War II						
Early Adolescence (1945 – 1947): Sylvia's Junior High School Years after World War II						
Middle Adolescence (1947 – 1950): Sylvia's High School Years during the McCarthy Era						
Later Adolescence (1950 – 1952): Sylvia's Junior College Years at the Time of the Cold War						
Adulthood (1953 – 1955): Sylvia's Senior College Years and the Execution of the Rosenbergs						
Adulthood (1955 – 1956): Sylvia in Cambridge, England, at the Time of the Suez Crisis						
Adulthood (1957 – 1959): Sylvia, the Newlywed Poetess in America in the Years of the Space Race						
Adulthood (1960 – 1963): Sylvia's Cold Years in England at the time of Kennedy's Presidency						

⁶ The darkly-shaded blocks represent the predominant crises that Plath faced at respective historical periods.

Table 7.3

Matrix of the Internal Family Structure over the Historical Lifespan of Sylvia Plath

Structure of Internal Family System by Schwartz						
	The Self The active, compassionate, inner leader containing the perspective, confidence and vision to harmoniously lead an individual's internal and external lives.					
	Exiles Young parts that have experienced trauma and often become isolated from the rest of the system in an effort to protect the individual from feeling the pain/terror/fear of these parts.					
	Protectors					
	Managers Parts that run the day-to-day life of the individual. Attempt to keep the individual in control in every situation and relationship in an effort to protect parts from feeling any hurt or rejection.					Firefighters Parts that react when exiles are activated in an effort to control and extinguish their feelings. They can do this in a number of ways, including: Drug or alcohol-use, self-mutilation, excessive working.
Historical Periods in the Life of Plath	Striver	Evaluator	Passive Pessimist	Caretaker and the Entitled One	Worrier or Sentry	
Infancy (1932 – 1933): Sylvia, the First-Born, during the Great Depression						
Early Childhood (1933 – 1936): Sylvia, the Sibling Rival, and the Move to Winthrop						
Middle Childhood (1936 – 1939): Sylvia and the Great New England Hurricane preceding the Plath Tragedy						
Later Childhood (1939 – 1945): The Aftermath of Otto Plath's Death during World War II						
Early Adolescence (1945 – 1947): Sylvia's Junior High School Years after World War II						
Middle Adolescence (1947 – 1950): Sylvia's High School Years during the McCarthy Era						
Later Adolescence (1950 – 1952): Sylvia's Junior College Years at the Time of the Cold War						
Adulthood (1953 – 1955): Sylvia's Senior College Years and the Execution of the Rosenbergs						
Adulthood (1955 – 1956): Sylvia in Cambridge, England, at the Time of the Suez Crisis						
Adulthood (1957 – 1959): Sylvia, the Newlywed Poetess in America in the Years of the Space Race						
Adulthood (1960 – 1963): Sylvia's Cold Years in England at the time of Kennedy's Presidency						

The matrices used in this study and represented schematically in Table 7.2 and Table 7.3, ensured that the biographical and historical material collected on Plath's life could be categorised and analysed systematically and consistently. This not only allowed for the construction of a longitudinal portrait of the psychosocial stages of Plath's development, and the structure of her internal family system, but also enhanced the reliability of the analytic process. The reliability, validity and trustworthiness of any qualitative research study are further enhanced by the researcher's ethical vigilance (Barbour, 2001, Du Plessis, 2017; Haverkamp, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2010, 2014; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). The measures taken by the researcher to increase the standard of ethical vigilance in this psychobiographical study are discussed in the subsequent section.

7.7 Ethical Considerations in Psychobiography

A proposal for the current study was submitted to the Committee for Title Registration. The Committee for Title Registration of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State, acted as an Institutional Review Board and granted permission for this psychobiographical study of the life of Sylvia Plath to be conducted. The researcher sourced data solely from publicly available material, thereby minimising the possibility that any of Plath's surviving family members, friends or colleagues could be harmed or embarrassed by revelations which unpublished controversial information could cause. The researcher also made use of data triangulation to ensure that a credible account based on verified information was presented on Plath's life.

According to Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017), the ethical responsibilities of psychologists conducting psychobiographical research involve legal issues such as privacy and postmortem privacy rights, access to and the use of confidential health records, and a myriad of multifaceted and complex ethical considerations. The psychobiographer's ethical responsibilities are further complicated by the fact that the American Psychological Association's (APA, 2002) Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, amended in 2010 and 2016 (APA, 2010, 2016) does not directly address codes of conduct expected from psychobiographical researchers (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). Nonetheless, there are a number of General Principles and Ethical Standards outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2002, 2010, 2016) that are pertinent to psychobiographical research. Based on these principles and standards, Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017) outlined a six-step ethical decision-making model centred on ethically-important moments in psychobiographical research. Ponterotto (2017) expanded the six-step ethical decision-making model to a ten-step counsellor's guide

that includes reflective questions for psychobiographical researchers. Haverkamp (2005) recommended a contextualised, process-oriented approach to ethical decision-making – one which is informed by trustworthiness and professional reflexivity. These are discussed in the subsequent sections.

7.7.1 Criteria for Trustworthiness

Despite the fact that qualitative research has a long tradition of using conventional scientific criteria borrowed from quantitative methods of rigour, the validity and reliability of psychobiographical research design and methodology have often been criticised (Fouché, 1999, Morrow, 2005; Runyan, 1983). Concerns relating to the criticisms and limitations of psychobiographical research were discussed in Chapter 6. These preliminary methodological considerations included a discussion of the strategies operationalised by the researcher to enhance the transferability, credibility, dependability and conformability of the study.

In summary, the following strategies were operationalised by the researcher to enhance the study's trustworthiness:

1. Data triangulation, theoretical triangulation and researcher triangulation were applied.
2. Biographical information on Plath was studied extensively over a period of five years.
3. Plath's social, cultural and historical contexts were investigated so as to establish a contextual frame of reference for the interpretation of her life story.
4. Plath's functioning and development were examined both from a longitudinal and an eugraphic perspective, allowing for her life story to be viewed not only in terms of suffering, despair and trauma, but also in terms of happiness, achievement and power (a view seldom taken of Plath's life).
5. Plath's life was considered in its entirety and the study included all the historical periods which impacted on her life.
6. The researcher ensured the systematic rigour of fieldwork procedures by sorting data according to clear coding schemes, operational measures and conceptual matrices.
7. The researcher aimed for analytical generalisation and not statistical generalisation.
8. Throughout the research process, the researcher was cognisant of the fact that findings are not conclusive, but rather, that they are speculative and that they add to the existing body of explanations pertaining to Plath's life.

9. The researcher approached the study of Plath's life reflexively so as to manage subjectivity and minimise the negative effects of bias.
10. The researcher also took cognisance of the intimate connection between methodological competence and ethical considerations in psychobiography as suggested by Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017).

7.7.2 Reflexivity

The reflexivity construct emanates from qualitative research methods rooted in the constructivist-interpretivist epistemology (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). This construct recognises the collaborative role of both the researcher and the research subject in the acquisition and construction of knowledge and the meaning which is derived from such knowledge (Ashworth, 2003; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017; Punch, 1993; Taylor, 1999; Willig, 2008).

Reflexivity thus requires researchers to be self-conscious, participatory analysts who can distance themselves from the methods, procedures and goals of the research process to reflect critically on the impact which the research has on the subject and his/her socio-cultural setting (Fine, 1992; Haverkamp, 2005; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). Willig (2008) postulated that there are two kinds of reflexivity: (a) personal reflexivity, and (b) epistemological reflexivity.

In personal reflexivity, researchers are urged to reflect on the impact which their personal beliefs, assumptions, values, interests, goals, political perspectives and life experiences may have on the research process, in an attempt to manage bias and subjectivity (Cresswell & Miller, 2000; Malterud, 2001; Morrow, 2005; Willig, 2008). Rennie (2004, p. 183) defined personal reflexivity as "self-awareness and agency within that self-awareness". A valuable reflexive strategy is for the researcher to consult with a knowledgeable colleague who can reflect on the researcher's responses to the research process and possibly even propose alternative interpretations to those of the researcher (Hill et al., 1997; Hill, Knox, Thompson, Williams, Hess & Ladany, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Morrow & Smith, 2000; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Haverkamp (2005, p. 152) highlighted the importance of "professional reflexivity" as a means to heightening awareness of one's professional role and its implications for ethical practice. The concept of "professional reflexivity" (Haverkamp, 2005, p. 152) correlates with the assertion by psychologists in diverse psychological sub-disciplines that methodological competence based on experience, training and knowledge is a prerequisite for professional

ethical practice in idiographic and qualitative research (Anderson, 2003; Elms, 1994; Haverkamp, 2005, Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017; Runyan, 1982).

In this psychobiographical study, the researcher consulted with her research promoter regarding reflections on her choice of subject, as well as on her expectations, intentions, experiences, emotions and decisions pertaining to the research process. Brief reflexive analyses were included in Chapter 1, section 1.4 (“The Researcher’s Personal Journey”) and in Chapter 11, section 11.6 (“Final Reflections on the Researcher’s Personal Journey”). These reflexive analyses allowed for the evaluation of the context in which the research was moulded and provided the opportunity for the re-analysis of material and the subsequent development of alternative explanations and interpretations, as suggested by Tindall (1999). .

7.8 Conclusion

This chapter sought to provide an overview of the research aims, design and methodology employed in this study. The psychobiographical subject and the selected psychological frameworks, as well as the procedures used to collect, extract and analyse data were also discussed. The identification and extraction of salient information was facilitated through the application of Alexander’s (1988, 1990) model of saliency indicators and Schultz’s (2005) model of prototypical scenes. Conceptual frameworks and matrices were utilised in this study to facilitate the categorisation of extracted, salient data. These were also displayed in this chapter. The chapter concluded with reflections on issues pertaining to ethical practices in psychobiographical research.

In the following chapters, the findings and discussions pertaining to Plath’s life are presented. Chapter 8 presents a discussion of the findings pertaining to the psychosocial development of Sylvia Plath, while Chapter 9 presents a discussion of the findings pertaining to her internal family system. In Chapter 10, an integration of the two sets of findings is presented, thereby providing a comprehensive, comparative discussion of Sylvia Plath’s psychological development over her lifespan.

Chapter 11 is the final chapter of the study and provides a discussion of both the value and limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research in the fields of personality psychology and psychobiographical research.

CHAPTER 8

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: THE PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT OF SYLVIA PLATH

8.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter presents the psychosocial personality development of Sylvia Plath. The chapter begins with a conceptual outline, after which Plath's biographical information is presented with specific reference to the propositions and concepts of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development (as discussed in Chapter 3). Since Plath died at the young age of 30, the research findings are presented across six of the eight stages proposed by Erikson (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980), with each stage relating to a specific historical period in the life of Plath (as delineated in Table 7.2 of Chapter 7). The chapter ends with reflections on the pivotal findings pertaining to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as applied to Plath's life.

8.2 Conceptual Outline to the Exposition of Research Findings

The analysis of research findings in this chapter was facilitated through the exploratory-descriptive approach taken to this study. Psychobiographical research entails the lifespan study of an individual of historic significance, using biographical material which is examined against the backdrop of the individual's socio-cultural context and interpreted through the lens of an established psychological theory (Ponterotto, 2015; Schultz, 2005a).

Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) was used as the theoretical framework within which pertinent biographical material on Plath was analysed and presented. Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development thus provided the framework within which Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development was described. As discussed in Chapter 7, the researcher made use of a conceptual matrix (see Table 7.2) to facilitate the categorisation of data.

8.3 The Psychosocial Personality Development of Plath throughout her Lifespan

In the following section, the six developmental stages applicable to Plath are discussed separately across each of the six historical periods which constitute her life. The stages are discussed with reference to the psychosocial conflict experienced by Plath in each stage of development, as well as the ego qualities or maladaptive and malignant tendencies which

emerged from each stage. The examples presented from the biographical account of Plath's life thus include events which affected Plath's development during a particular stage, as well as events later in her life believed to have emanated from the outcome of a particular stage of development. This allowed for the longitudinal exploration of Plath's psychosocial personality development.

8.3.1 Stage 1: Basic Trust versus Basic Mistrust – Hope (Birth – 18 Months)

According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980), the first stage of life is characterised by the psychosocial developmental crisis of basic trust versus basic mistrust. Erikson (1959) posited that the first psychosocial trait of basic trust is the fundament of all other traits and constitutes the earliest positive psychosocial attitude towards oneself and the world (Erikson, 1964). It thus embodies the cornerstone of a vital personality (Erikson, 1964). Although Erikson (1963) postulated that this stage occurs during an individual's first year of life, Hamachek (1990) indicated that the time span of this stage could be extended to the age of 18 months. During this first stage, development focuses on the organ mode of the mouth and forms the foundation of the psychosocial modality of incorporation (Erikson, 1968). Although food intake is the overriding need at this stage, the infant is receptive to a multitude of stimuli from the social environment and is capable of incorporating information from diverse somatic and social experiences (Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978). The sense of basic trust which emanates from successful resolution of the crisis of this first stage, allows the infant to integrate diffuse somatic and social experiences so that there is unity between the infant's inner and outer world, allowing for the emergence of the ego quality of hope (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1997). However, when these diffuse somatic and social experiences are not balanced successfully by the experience of integration, the infant may experience the social world as threatening, which could result in feelings of insecurity later on in life (Corey, 2005; Erikson, 1968; Morris & Maisto, 2002; Sadock & Sadock, 2003).

8.3.1.1 *Infancy (1932 – 1933): Sylvia, the First-Born, during the Great Depression*

The biographical facts pertaining to this period in Sylvia's life were presented in section 2.2.1. Sylvia was the first-born child of Otto Emile Plath and Aurelia Schober (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Not only was Otto 21 years older than Aurelia, their personalities also differed vastly. Whilst she was described as having a congenial, outgoing disposition, he was described as having a nervous, morbid and even tyrannical disposition (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Added to this was the fact

that he had a relentless work ethic and preferred to work rather than to socialise (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Although Aurelia enjoyed the vicarious satisfaction of being a professor's wife, she was socially unfulfilled and often complained about the fact that her husband had no outside interests and hobbies and that he was always absorbed by his work (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Unfortunately for Aurelia, Otto was headstrong and unwilling to change himself for anybody (Alexander, 1999). He was set in his a-social, regimented ways and Aurelia realised early in the marriage that if she wanted a peaceful home, she would have to become more submissive to his strict and rigid requirements (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). Despite the fact that Otto preferred to be alone, he had stated that he wished to start a family as soon as possible. He never anticipated, however, that his wife would become pregnant only weeks into their marriage, which was taken over instantaneously by Otto's work on his book *Bumblebees and their Ways*, based on his doctoral thesis (Wilson, 2013). Fortunately, Aurelia's pregnancy gave her hope of involving herself in a project that could contain and channel her energies, and give her the outlet to express her creative and intellectual abilities (Wilson, 2013). According to Erikson (1950, 1963), the quality of the maternal relationship is of paramount importance in the infant's development of trust. Not only does the mother have the capacity to fulfill the infant's physiological and emotional needs, she also has the potential to communicate to the infant, through the language of somatic interchange, that the infant may trust her, the world and him/herself (Erikson, 1963). When Sylvia was born, Aurelia devoted herself wholeheartedly to the task of motherhood. Trained by Otto in the methodology of scientific classification, she began to document key moments in her daughter's life to such a detailed extent, that the verbal expression of her maternal energies produced a written creation of her daughter's growth and development (Alexander, 1999; Heller, 1976; Wilson, 2013). Her documentation indicates that Sylvia had a determined personality and that she was eager to shape sounds into words (Alexander, 1999). Sylvia's tenacity to incorporate stimuli from the environment into her verbal repertoire not only corresponds with Erikson's premise that the establishment of trust in the first stage facilitates learning (1958), it also attests to Sylvia's intellectual prowess. This, coupled with Aurelia's zealous involvement in her daughter's upbringing, resulted in Sylvia's early mastery of language (Wilson, 2013).

Aurelia's detailed documentation of Sylvia's first year of life suggests that she was a child bathed in love (Alexander, 1999). Even though parenting trends at the time advocated a strict feeding routine and minimal coddling, Aurelia followed her own instincts and fed Sylvia on demand, rocking her often and pampering her when she cried (Alexander, 1999). Aurelia thus seemed to provide the type of parenting which allowed Sylvia to develop a sense of trust.

However, although it is hypothesised that the mother is the largest influence in the first stage of development, the infant is dependent on all the adult figures in the household for the fulfillment of emotional and physical needs (Corey, 2009). Although Otto was certainly not averse to having a daughter and even seemed to gain pleasure from Sylvia's development, his interest in her seemed to be more from a scientific perspective (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). When she was six months old, he was delighted by the fact that her feet grasped a rope against which he had held her, because it confirmed Darwin's evolutionary process to him (Plath, 1992). At 47 he was already an elderly father when Sylvia was born, and the researcher is of the opinion that the 21-year age gap between him and Aurelia, together with his tyrannical disposition and his authoritarian demand for order, could have impeded the development of Sylvia's sense of trust. In adulthood, Sylvia's resentment of the age difference between her father and mother manifested itself when she wrote:

Dream, shards of which remain: my father come to life again. My mother having a little son: my confusion: this son of mine is a twin to her son. The uncle of an age with his nephew. My brother of an age with my child. O the tangles of that old bed. (Plath, 2000, p.520)

Although Aurelia doted on Sylvia and gave her much attention, it is speculated that her submissiveness towards her husband compromised Sylvia's trust in her. The findings based on Aurelia's writings point to the fact that Otto was so rigid and demanding when it came to order, that he would forbid Aurelia from moving a single paper or book from the dining room table and sideboard, which he used as a depository for the multitude of reference books that he regularly needed to consult for his studies (Wilson, 2013). Consequently, when Aurelia dared to invite guests over for supper, she had to do so secretly on the night of the week that Otto taught, and she had to ensure that everything was returned to its proper place by the time he returned from his lecture (Alexander, 1999). Aurelia even admitted to drawing a plan of the arrangement, so that Otto would find everything exactly as he had left it (Plath, 1992). The researcher surmises that this must have been stressful for Aurelia, who was torn between her responsibilities as a dutiful wife and her need for social interaction with friends. According to Erikson (1963), a mother combines the sensitive care of an infant's individual needs and a firm sense of personal trustworthiness within a trusted cultural framework. Otto's autocratic role as *der Herr des Hauses* (head of the house) (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013) is speculated to have created a threatening environment for Sylvia as an infant. His tyrannical disposition would have compromised Aurelia's own sense of personal trustworthiness and would have negatively affected Sylvia's development of trust. After their marriage, Otto's

wish that Aurelia retire from work to take on the role of housewife and mother (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013), was not purely for the benefit of the children they would have together. Since Otto was not very good at writing, Aurelia was entrusted with the job of revising his scientific treatises, doing research, writing notes, producing rough drafts, editing and proofreading (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Despite the fact that Aurelia set aside hours each day to help Otto with the linguistic expression of his scientific ideas, he never acknowledged the extent of her contribution to his publication (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Not only would Otto's indifference to Aurelia's contribution have affected her personal sense of trustworthiness in a negative way, her obedient involvement in his work would have affected her availability for caring for her daughter, which may have compromised Sylvia's sense of trust. According to Erikson, (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980), if the infant's needs are not met during Stage 1 and the establishment of trust is compromised, the personality development of the individual would be negatively affected. The sense of basic mistrust resulting from unsuccessful resolution of this first stage of psychosocial development would manifest, throughout the individual's life in overt behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1980; Lewicki, Tomlinson & Gillespie, 2006).

Not only would the sense of mistrust negatively affect how an individual functions and conducts him/herself on a daily basis, it would also taint perceptions of self, others, and the world (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1980; Lewicki et al., 2006). Erikson (1963, 1950) added that maladaptations during this first stage often manifest themselves in sensory distortions and in an inability to defend oneself against infection. In extreme cases, this can result in a mental and even physical death (Erikson, 1959, 1963). When one considers the historical data on Sylvia's infancy (as discussed in section 2.2.1), as well as the way in which she progressed through subsequent stages of development, there are clear indications of an early triumph of basic mistrust. Although there were no complications at birth, Sylvia was born three weeks prematurely and suffered from a severe sinus condition which plagued her for her entire life (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). In fact, Sylvia became chronically ill with sinusitis in the very week after her father's death, the illness therefore possibly being a physical manifestation of separation anxiety (Wilson, 2013). Thereafter, her life was characterised by every bout of sinusitis being preceded by a failed relationship or some other unfortunate experience with a male (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

In adulthood, after her separation from Ted, she became so ill, that at one stage her fever measured 103 degrees (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). The poem which she wrote in response to this illness, entitled *Fever 103 °*, reflects not only her desperate feelings

of loneliness, but also her sensitivity to and preoccupation with the socio-historical realities of the time, expressed in the devastating imagery of the atomic bomb and its effects on Hiroshima (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Hughes, 2008).

Sylvia's chronic struggle with sinusitis affected her both physically and emotionally. The sinus infections contributed to a lifetime of severe headaches, which negatively affected Sylvia's productivity and her ability to write, causing her to feel depressed (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In a letter to her mother, Sylvia confessed that the illness made her feel like a depressed maniac (Plath, 1992). Apart from the sinusitis infections, Sylvia was frequently plagued by chronic menstrual pains and insomnia which aggravated her depression (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

During her senior college years (see section 2.2.7.2), Sylvia was exposed to electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) in an effort to shake her out of her depression. Although it was a popular form of treatment for depression in the 1950s, it only worsened Sylvia's anxiety and aggravated her feelings of abandonment, since she was left alone in the recovery room, without the support that should have been provided after each electroshock treatment (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that these poorly administered electroshock treatments reinforced Sylvia's sense of mistrust. Not only did these treatments obliterate the memory of past joyful experiences and replace them with cynicism and doubt, they also negatively affected her mental functions to the point that she felt incapable of writing (Wilson, 2013). In a letter to her mother, she confessed her fear of losing the one talent that defined her and that gave her some sense of worth (Plath, 1992).

Sylvia's story in New York during her guest-editorship month at *Mademoiselle Magazine* provides further evidence of her psychosomatic reaction to stressful circumstances (see section 2.2.7.2). The Rosenberg's, who had been found guilty of communist activity in 1951 of the McCarthy Era, had been sentenced to death by electrocution at New York's Sing Sing Prison (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia, who had followed their high-profile case with keen interest, felt such a strong sense of empathy for the Rosenberg's, that she developed welts all along her arms at the exact time that the Rosenberg executions were to take place (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The fact that she compared their execution to her electroshock treatments and even used this comparison in the opening lines of her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (Plath, 1963), attests to its significance in her life. Apart from the fact that the electroshock treatments left an indelible scar on her sense of security, they also aggravated her inability to sleep to the point that she developed chronic insomnia (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

The insomnia led to a dependency on sleeping pills, which were endorsed by her own mother (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) explained that during the first stage, development centers on the organ mode of the mouth and the psychosocial modality of incorporation. In light of the fact that psychic energy becomes intertwined with the body zones around which the most significant life experiences revolve (Maier, 1978). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) referred to this stage as the oral stage. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) added that inadequate nurturing from parents in the first stage of the infant's life, could enhance the infants' sense of mistrust and lead to the need for self-nurturance in future. Sadock and Sadock, (2007, 2014) supported this by noting that substance-dependent individuals have an excess of oral-dependency needs and sometimes resort to chemical substances in their efforts to self-soothe.

Sylvia's first suicide attempt involved an overdose of sleeping pills (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). She continued to use sleeping pills throughout her life, and in the months before her death when she was caught in the grip of a desperate urgency to write as much as she could, she perpetuated the vicious cycle of insomnia by waking up at four in the morning to write, despite the blurring effects of the sleeping pills she had taken the night before (Rollyson, 2013). Her tendency to resort to sleeping pills and the resultant dependency on these chemical substances, can be seen as a manifestation of Sylvia's oral-dependency and her need to nurture herself. Sylvia had always protested against the use of tobacco (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Her decision to start smoking after Ted's departure when their marriage failed (see section 2.2.10.2) is further evidence of her need to nurture herself, through oral gratification. Sylvia's dependency on sleeping pills and cigarettes confirm her predisposition towards mistrust as a result of maladaptation during the first stage of psychosocial development.

Failure to establish a sense of trust in the first year could also manifest in a variety of disorders and problems later on in life, including: (a) paranoid or persecutory disorders; (b) depressive disorders related to a negative view of the world and others; (c) pervasive pessimism with regard to social relationships; and (d) behaviours (not involving intimacy), that provide stimulating thrills in the individual's quest for self-nurturance and personal satisfaction (Sadock & Sadock, 2014).

Sylvia's habit of attempting potentially harmful acts in times of extreme stress caused by emotional trauma, could be seen as another example of her quest for self-nurturance and personal satisfaction as a result of the inadequate establishment of trust in infancy. Her journal entries written during her senior college years refer to her self-inflicted razor wounds, which

she felt would help her gauge her level of courageousness (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Another potentially harmful act included her attempt to ski down a challenging mountain slope, despite the fact that she had no prior skiing experience (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Similarly, Sylvia attempted to drive herself off the road after her husband left her (Rollyson, 2013). It is surmised that these potentially harmful behaviours were cathartic expressions of her emotional pain based on romantic disappointments (Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia may have used her health problems, as well as the injuries which she sustained from reckless acts of danger, as a way to garner attention from others and as a means to gain satisfaction in the form of self-nurturance.

The sense of basic mistrust which emerges in infants who fail to develop a secure attachment to a trustworthy and nurturing caregiver, can extend into a feeling of insecurity in interpersonal relationships later on in life (Corey, 2005; Maier, 1978, 1988). The infant's experience of the social world as a threatening place would thus hinder the establishment of healthy, trusting relationships in adulthood (Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978, 1988; Morris & Maisto, 2002; Sadock & Sadock, 2003). When the expression of mistrust is excessive, it can result in the malignant tendency of withdrawal, characterised by depression and paranoia (Boeree, 2006), and in extreme cases, results in individuals who regress into schizoid, depressive or psychotic states in which they close up, refusing food and comfort and becoming oblivious to companionship (Erikson, 1950, 1968). This corresponds with the view of Sadock and Sadock (2014), who posited that excessive mistrust can manifest in paranoia and depressive disorders related to a negative view of the world and others; as well as a pervasive pessimism with regard to social relationships.

The biographical data on Sylvia's life (as discussed in Chapter 2), abounds with examples of her insecurities and problematic interpersonal relationships. Even before adolescence (see section 2.2.4), she was socially isolated amongst her classmates (Butscher, 1976, 2003), and as adolescence approached and her concerns about her popularity increased, she had to make a concerted effort to develop her social skills (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009) since she believed herself to be an introvert and lacking in these skills (Plath, 2000). The advent of adolescence only aggravated her social insecurities (see section 2.2.5), and the onset of acne made her feel so ugly and self-conscious that she would restrict herself to her home for fear of what others might think of her (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Social approval mattered to Sylvia, and her inner anguish and mistrust in society's acceptance became so excessive, that she even tried to hurt herself by cutting her face at the age of 14 (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson,

2013). Her behaviour of social withdrawal, accompanied by feelings of depression, paranoia and pervasive pessimism, corresponds with the malignant tendency which manifests itself when Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1980) first stage is unsuccessfully resolved, resulting in the excessive expression of mistrust. Even though Sylvia immersed herself in social activities and tried hard to be cheerful and positive, her adolescent contemporaries often described her as "a daydreamer" and "a loner", based on the fact that she frequently retreated from society into her own private, fantasy world (Butscher, 2003, p.14). In college (see section 2.2.7.1), Sylvia's need to excel far outweighed her need for sociability (Butscher, 2003).

Her difficulty in establishing and maintaining positive relationships with her peers was even more evident in her emotionally tumultuous relationships with men (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's relationship difficulties were rooted not only in her mistrust in people, but also in her mistrust in a society that advocated male supremacy and perpetuated a system of double standards. Sylvia detested the segregation of women in all aspects of life, from sexuality to the literary canon (Rollyson, 2013). Nonetheless, she belonged to a generation of women who placed a high premium on domesticity and she understood full well the need to be both competent and well-rounded in her traditional role as a woman (Butscher, 1976, 2003). This double-bind in which Sylvia found herself (see section 2.2.7.1), not only fuelled her feelings of insecurity and inferiority, it also influenced her choice of men and affected the outcome of her relationships. Although she dated numerous men in adolescence and young adulthood, her choice of men for her more serious college relationships attests to the pressure placed on young college girls to find the right marital partners, preferably from one of the prestigious Ivy League colleges, as these men ensured instant status and respect from fellow college students (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In Sylvia's senior college years (see section 2.2.7.2), she continued to date men who were well-educated and who had a certain social status, but her relationships displayed her tendency to tolerate men who mistreated her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The sense of mistrust which emerges from unsuccessful resolution of Erikson's first stage of development influences the extent to which an individual can bond with others emotionally (Louw & Edwards, 1997). This defines an individual's style of attachment, and has an impact on development, even in adulthood (Louw & Edwards, 1997; Santrock, 2006). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's sense of mistrust negatively affected her attachment style in adulthood, resulting in her tendency to be involved in multiple relationships at the same time (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In a letter addressed to Gordon Lameyer on her 22nd birthday, she expressed her undying devotion to him, yet she was also dating Edwin Akutowicz and Richard Sassoon

at the time when she wrote this letter (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2017; Wilson, 2013). Even when Sylvia moved to Cambridge and met Ted Hughes, the man she would marry, she continued her obsessive pursuit of Sassoon (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Both these relationships were characterised by sado-masochism. In fact, on the night they first met, Sylvia bit Ted on the cheek when he kissed her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although this aggression was a palpable manifestation of the passionate chemistry between them, it also signalled the beginning of an abusive relationship and foreshadowed the destructive outcome of their marriage (see section 2.2.8, 2.9).

Sylvia's choice of partners also reflects the mistrustful nature of her attachment style. It is surmised that Sylvia's choice of men was greatly influenced by the fact that she experienced her father's death as an abandonment (Wilson, 2013). Although her father died when she was eight years old, it reaffirmed the sense of mistrust which was established in her first stage of life, and influenced her choice of future partners and the nature of her adult relationships. The researcher speculates that her choice of husband reflects her desire to find a replacement for her lost father. Like Otto, Ted displayed a volatile temper and in the same way that Otto was consumed by explosive outbursts of anger (Plath, 1992), so too Ted was known to be cruel and even violent when he lost his temper (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In her journal, Sylvia alluded to an incident when Ted was overtaken by an uncontrollable fit of rage and almost choked her to death (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000).

Another example which strengthens the speculation that Sylvia sought a replacement for her lost father in her marriage, can be found in the way in which her marriage mirrored the marriage between her mother and father. Apart from the fact that Aurelia accompanied Sylvia and Ted on their honeymoon in the same way that her mother had done after her marriage to Otto, there are distinct signs that point to the fact that Aurelia and Sylvia played similar roles in their marriages. Aurelia's devotion to helping her husband Otto gain recognition as an expert in his field was modelled and perpetuated by Sylvia, who typed all of Ted's work and submitted it for possible publication, in the hope that he would gain recognition for his literary genius (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Malcolm, 2012; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia's feelings of abandonment regarding her father can also be linked to her feelings of resentment towards her mother. Not only did she resent her mother for marrying a man who was significantly older and therefore closer to death than a younger husband would have been, she also blamed her mother for not loving her father and for being responsible for his "murder" (Plath, 2000, p. 431). Aurelia's decision not to let her children attend their father's funeral only reaffirmed Sylvia's belief that her mother had never loved her father (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson,

2013). The researcher speculates that this would have reaffirmed Sylvia's sense of mistrust in her parents, in the social institution of marriage and in herself. In light of the fact that Sylvia did not acquire a sense of basic trust in her environment and in her own coping abilities, the researcher infers that she did not successfully integrate opposing conflicts during the first stage of development and consequently, would probably not have developed the ego quality of hope. Erikson (1963, 1964, 1997) defined hope as the earliest and most indispensable of virtues, since it lays the foundation for the development of all ego virtues that emanate from subsequent stages, namely will, purpose and competence in childhood; fidelity in adolescence; and love, care and wisdom in adulthood. Throughout Sylvia's lifespan, there is evidence from the biographical material which confirms the researcher's inference that Sylvia did not develop the ego quality of hope. Examples include her acute feelings of incompetence, despite evidence from her academic and literary achievements which attest to her intellectual superiority; her compulsive perfectionism and obsession to please her mother and the significant men in her life in her quest for love; and her pervasive sense of pessimism, which revealed itself in the themes of futility, hopelessness and despair, evident in her journal entries and literary works.

According to Erikson (1997), the life cycle reaches completion when the hope of infancy develops into the faith of old age. This hope, which manifests as a sense of superior certainty not necessarily dependent on evidence or reason, finds expression in organised religion and ensures the faith that will support future generations (Erikson, 1964; Roazen, 1976). Although Sylvia's father came from a very staunch Lutheran background (see section 2.2.1), his fascination with the scientific theories of evolution influenced his religious beliefs and he eventually abandoned his plans to enter the Lutheran ministry and ended up becoming a cynical atheist (Plath, 1963, 1966). The tangible manifestation of Sylvia's disbelief in religion revealed itself when she heard the news of her father's death and exclaimed: "I'll never speak to God again!" (Plath, 1992, p. 25) (see section 2.2.2). Her journal entries and letters written to her mother during adolescence reveal her desire to be a supernatural deity who could turn everyday experiences into extraordinary occurrences (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013), and she went so far as to refer to herself as "the girl who wanted to be God" (Plath, 1992, p. 40) (see section 2.2.6 and 2.2.7.1).

In college, when Sylvia took up holiday work as a helper to a mother who believed in Christian Science, her ability to fake being a keen disciple of the Christian Science doctrine attests to her lack of religious commitment and the fact that she used her superficial regard of religion as a way to manipulate people for her own gain (see section 2.2.7.1). The researcher

speculates that this religious indifference emerged from Sylvia not having acquired the ego strength of hope and faith in the first stage of psychosocial development.

In adulthood, Sylvia's interest in black magic provides further evidence that she lacked the ego strength of hope and faith as a supportive foundation for the future. In her marriage, she and Ted often consulted Tarot cards and an Ouija board in their quest to make contact with the spirits of the occult (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013) (see section 2.2.8). In a letter addressed to her mother, Sylvia expressed the desire to become an expert in Tarot card reading and she hoped to purchase a crystal ball with which to predict the future (Plath, 1992). According to Erikson (1963, 1968) the faith that develops from the hope of infancy becomes an invaluable virtue throughout life because it helps the individual to deal with disappointment and to face new challenges. The fact that Sylvia came to depend on occultish practices in her desperation for answers regarding the future, strengthens the researcher's speculation that she did not resolve the first stage of basic trust versus basic mistrust successfully, which led to her acquiring a sense of mistrust in herself, the people around her and the world. According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980), unsuccessful navigation through the most fundamental psychosocial stage and the resultant dystonic tendency of mistrust, would undoubtedly have impacted negatively on the development of Sylvia's personality and on her ability to cope with life's challenges.

8.3.2 Stage 2: Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt – Willpower (18 Months – 3 Years)

The second and third years of life are characterised by the psychosocial developmental crisis of autonomy versus shame and doubt (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1980). During this stage, muscular maturation, expanded environmental exploration, improved verbalisation and memory, and enhanced neurological and social discrimination and integration, allow for experimentation with the psychosocial modalities of holding on and letting go (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Freiberg, 1987; Maier, 1978). Through this process, the still highly dependent child is afforded the opportunity to exercise his/her autonomous will and attain a certain degree of independence in the world, through the mastery of his/her physical, social and psychological functions (Barnes, 1997; Craig & Baucum, 2002; Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978; Morris & Maisto, 2002). Autonomy is related to a sense of goodwill, pride, inner goodness and self-control, enabling children to become appropriately assertive whilst being protected from the loss of self-esteem (Erikson, 1968; Freiberg, 1987). Shame and doubt are regarded as the opposites of autonomy, with shame referring to self-consciousness and doubt referring to fear of the unknown (Erikson, 1963; Gross, 1987). Successful resolution of the crisis in the second

stage of psychosocial development, allows for the acquisition of the ego strength of will, which Erikson (1964) defined as the determination to exercise both free choice and self-restraint, despite the experiences of shame and doubt in infancy. The ego strength of will not only lays the foundation for the acceptance of law and order, thus influencing the child's attitude towards social organisations and ideals later on in life, it also affects the child's measure of will power and plays an important role in identity formation (Erikson, 1964, 1968; Maier, 1978).

8.3.2.1 *Early Childhood (1933 – 1936): Sylvia, the Sibling Rival, and the Move to Winthrop*

Hamachek (1990) posited that Erikson's second stage applies to children between the ages of approximately 18 months and three years. Biographical facts pertaining to this period in Sylvia's life (see section 2.2.2), indicate that the birth of Otto and Aurelia's second child, Warren, constituted a significant event at this stage of Sylvia's psychosocial development (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Although Aurelia did everything in her power to prepare her daughter for the baby's arrival, Sylvia's reaction to the baby's birth indicates that she felt threatened by the occurrence (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Not only did she express her disappointment about the fact that he was a boy (Plath, 1992), years later she wrote an autobiographical essay entitled *Ocean 1212 – W*, in which she blatantly described his birth as an intrusion and the cause of an existential crisis in her life (Newman, 1970; Plath, 2008).

According to Erikson (1959, 1964), the measure of trust established in Stage 1 greatly influences the measure of autonomy and independence that the child achieves in Stage 2. The researcher speculates that Sylvia's sense of mistrust negatively influenced her acceptance of the new baby. A week before the baby's birth, Aurelia took Sylvia to her parents' home in Point Shirley, and although she stayed with her until the day of the delivery, the fact that Sylvia cried on the day that Aurelia left for the hospital, indicates her discontent (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's sense of insecurity is affirmed by the fact that she demanded more attention after her brother's birth, and whenever Aurelia tried to breastfeed Warren, Sylvia would try to crawl up onto her mother's lap (Plath, 1975, 1992).

Graves and Larkin (2006) posited that clear boundaries are crucial at this stage, since they allow the toddler to explore the environment and satisfy his/her curiosity without transgressing the boundaries into dangerous territory or socially unacceptable behaviour. Although Aurelia seemed to provide the type of parenting which would encourage Sylvia's sense of autonomy, it is speculated that the establishment of boundaries, coupled with Sylvia's sense of mistrust

established in Stage 1, would have enhanced her dependency on her mother and fuelled her desperation to find a substitute for love.

Erikson (1950, 1968, 1997), posited that the establishment of a delicate balance between restrictive and permissive parenting is a prerequisite for successful navigation through Stage 2. Caregivers play a crucial role during this stage as they strive to encourage independence in their children, whilst simultaneously protecting them from unnecessary failure and feelings of inadequacy and doubt about their abilities (Erikson, 1963, 1997). It was around this time that Sylvia discovered the alphabet from the capital letters on packaged goods on the pantry shelves, and whenever Aurelia picked Warren up to breastfeed him, Sylvia would grab a newspaper, sit on the floor in front of her mother and proceed to identify the capital letters (Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013). Biographical material suggests that Aurelia was a very encouraging and self-sacrificing parent, but that she raised her children with the knowledge that there was a correlation between good behaviour and love (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Added to this was the fact that she placed a high premium on self-improvement and academic achievement (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013), reflected in her ambitious programme of reading books aloud to her children so as to enhance their awareness of the world from the perspective of both art and writing (Alexander, 1999; Heller, 1976).

It is surmised that Sylvia's tendency of using words to garner love and approval emerged soon after Warren's birth. Her efforts to counteract the threat of her brother, coupled with her mother's constant literary encouragement, resulted in Sylvia's ever-increasing attachment to words as a substitute for love (Wilson, 2013). Her identification with the physicality of words was so intense that it governed her measure of self-esteem, as reflected in her feelings of worthlessness whenever she suffered from writer's block (Plath, 1992, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Her fall into depression after the theft of her fountain pen in early adolescence, attests to the intensity of her relationship with words as a substitute for love (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). So intense was this attachment to words that Sylvia often wished that she could return to the "womblike space of the printed page" (Plath, 1966a, p. 57).

After Warren's birth, Sylvia sought to impress her father by memorising the Latin names of insects. She also used her astute intelligence and ever-increasing vocabulary to entertain him and to demonstrate her superior intellectual abilities (Plath, 1975, 1992; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia's behaviour elicited praise from Otto, which could have enhanced her self-confidence, it also established a competitive, antagonistic relationship between herself and Warren, and she would often dominate their conversations and try to outsmart him (Plath, 1992). This rivalry would extend into Sylvia's adulthood and manifest in

the nature of her relationships with men and in her attitude to society and politics, as proven when she wrote: “Old rivalry with brother: All men are my brothers. And competition is engrained in the world” (Plath, 2000, p. 519). According to Erikson (1963, 1968, 1977), the way in which individuals navigate through the second stage of psychosocial development influences the choices of their cultural, economic and historical era and determines the extent to which they grant each other autonomy in relationships, in work and in political life.

Sylvia’s rivalry with Warren symbolised the larger battle that she had to fight with men throughout her life in order to gain recognition at a time in history when social and political conventions restricted the independence and growth of women (Kendall, 2001; Kirk, 2009; Wagner-Martin, 1987; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia’s attachment to her father was strengthened even more by the fact that Warren was a sickly child who needed more of his mother’s attention (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Not only was Sylvia often told how much she resembled her father, she also came to depend on her father precisely because Aurelia was less available to care for her after Warren’s birth (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Erikson (1968) posited that a secure sense of basic trust is a prerequisite for the development of autonomy in the second stage. Although Sylvia’s parents praised and encouraged her intellectual capabilities and linguistic accomplishments, the Plath household was run on severe Germanic principles and dominated by a controlled, austere atmosphere (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013).

Aurelia’s Calvinistic background made of her the type of parent who enforced a strict moral regime, not necessarily through punishment, but through martyrdom to principles and values (Rollyson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Aurelia’s habit of rewarding only good behaviour, coupled with Otto’s tyrannical outbursts of anger, created a threatening environment for Sylvia. Not only would this have reinforced her sense of mistrust established in Stage 1, it would also have had a negative impact on the resolution of the autonomy versus shame and doubt crisis of Stage 2. It is surmised that the praise and encouragement which Sylvia received for her intellectual feats was outweighed by the harsh demands and explosive outbursts from Otto, and the fact that Aurelia succumbed to his demands. This would have resulted in a sense of shame and doubt in Sylvia, which would have limited her capacity to deal with the world (Corey, 2009). An excess of shame and doubt leads to the malignant tendency of compulsiveness, which can be seen in a meticulous adherence to rules and a striving for perfection (Boeree, 2006). Individuals who have the malignant tendency of compulsiveness also appear to be excessively stingy and retentive in matters relating to affection, time and money, and they run the risk of developing severe compulsive self-doubt, which later finds

expression in paranoid fears (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Sylvia experienced a number of fears in childhood. Her irrational fear of bobby pins and buttons was so intense, that the mere mention of the word button would send her running and screaming in fear (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). She associated bobby pins with “disgusting intimate contact with dirty hair” (Plath, 2000, pp. 52-53). Her abhorrence of dirt continued throughout her life and manifested in her strict adherence to domestic and moral cleanliness (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Her fascination with radio heroes like the Lone Ranger and Superman emanated from her desire for a symbolic clean-up which would make the world morally immaculate (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia’s visceral dislike of moral and physical imperfections explains her extreme reactions later in life to her husband’s deplorable physical and moral hygiene (Rollyson, 2013).

In Erikson’s second stage, the improved co-ordination of urethral and sphincter muscles, permit the development of voluntary release and retention through which the child can regulate his/her eliminative function (Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978). In light of the fact that the anal-urethral muscles are the main body zones around which the child is afforded the opportunity to experiment with the psychosocial modalities of holding on and letting go, this stage is referred to as the anal stage (Erikson, 1950, 1968; Freiberg, 1987; Maier, 1978).

The researcher speculates that the sense of shame and doubt which emerged as a result of Sylvia’s unsuccessful navigation through the second stage, also affected her turmoil regarding her own sexuality and moral cleanliness later on in life. Her adolescent diary entries reveal the development of her sexuality and her struggle to suppress this development because she believed that it constituted the “impure side of her personality” (Wilson, 2013, p. 67). As adolescence progressed, Sylvia found herself increasingly distracted by her growing sexual desires, which fuelled her inner conflict and negatively affected her relationships with boys (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003, Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). It is surmised that her inability to deal with this conflict was exacerbated by the conflicting cultural expectations which prevailed in the 1950s with regard to women’s sexuality (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Although the socio-cultural milieu encouraged sexual attractiveness in women, it simultaneously advocated rigid rules of religious and social propriety which stifled personal desire (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

The researcher speculates that the puritan, socially-conservative tradition imposed on women by 1950s society placed contradictory and irreconcilable pressures on Sylvia, which reaffirmed the sense of shame and doubt established in Stage 2. Consequently her relationships with men were emotionally tumultuous and characterised by complex feelings which vacillated between love and hate (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). By the time she reached senior

college, Sylvia displayed a tendency of tolerating men who mistreated her and getting involved in unhealthy relationships marked by sado-masochism (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980) assertion that unsuccessful navigation through Stage 2 can result in an excessive sense of shame and doubt which leads to compensatory behaviour, can be seen in Sylvia's competitive drive and compulsive perfectionism. Not only did she strive to be good at everything she did, she strove to be perfect (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Although this striving for perfection resulted in an outstanding record of achievement which Sylvia maintained throughout her life, it also enslaved her and did nothing to dispel the feelings of self-doubt which haunted her throughout her life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Despite her remarkable accomplishments, her journal entries bear witness to an inexplicable sadness and an eternal dissatisfaction with herself (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). This dissatisfaction and feeling of self-doubt permeated to every area of her life, including her social relationships (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In college, her fears of inadequacy made her isolate herself so that she remained an outsider despite her efforts to belong (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Even though she garnered a string of academic accolades and was reputed for her many social conquests with distinguished young men from prestigious colleges, Sylvia continued to be plagued by the feeling that she was not good enough (Alexander, 1999; Butscher 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Throughout her life she seemed to cast herself in the role of female Icarus, desperately striving towards an abstract concept of perfection that she knew she could never attain (Wilson, 2013). In her journal entries and letters to her mother she confessed her self-doubt by admitting that she felt incapable of keeping up with all the academic work, and she stated that journalism appealed to her because it made her feel less self-conscious (Plath, 1992, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

Self-consciousness or the experience of feeling completely exposed and conscious of being looked at, is symptomatic of the sense of shame which develops when individuals fail to achieve autonomy (Erikson, 1963). Sylvia's self-consciousness intensified at the start of adolescence when the onset of acne made her feel so unattractive that she preferred to isolate herself at home for fear of embarrassing herself in public (Wilson, 2013). In her journal, she referred to herself as an "ugly introvert" (Plath, 2000, p. 130) and hated herself for being "torn between I know not what within me" (Plath, 2000, p. 30). Although she recognised that "there is joy, fulfillment and companionship", she felt overpowered and devastated by "the loneliness of the soul in its appalling self-consciousness" (Plath, 2000, p. 31). In order to protect herself from being hurt, Sylvia hid her vulnerability behind a veneer of cynical sarcasm and an attitude

of indifference (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Erikson indicated that failure to develop autonomy can result in the emergence of a precocious conscience, which manifests as preoccupation with one's own power and control (Graves & Larkin, 2006). Sylvia's preoccupation with being a god-like figure (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013), attests to her precocious conscience. The researcher speculates that this precocious conscience enabled Sylvia to "seal herself off" from others and to control and manipulate them "for what they could give her" (Butscher, 2003, p. 35).

The researcher further speculates that Sylvia's lack of trust impeded the development of autonomy even more, resulting in an excessive need to be in control. According to Erikson (1963, 1980) the lack of control in childhood, as well as the fear that one may lack control later in life can result in one developing exaggerated self-coercion or impulsive self-will. This can play a large role in the development of obsessions and compulsions (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1980). Sylvia's obsessive-compulsive tendencies manifested in childhood. Her mother had always encouraged her to use all her senses to observe the world and write down what she experienced, and it was from her mother that she picked up the obsession for documenting the details of everyday life (Wilson, 2013). At the age of 12, she won a two-week stay at a camp in Massachusetts and the 90-page book which she wrote during her stay attests to her obsessional tendencies (Wilson, 2013). The documentation of her camp schedule included even the minutest details, from the list of foods she ate to the number of paces it took her to walk certain distances (Wilson, 2013). Even more disconcerting is the fact that Sylvia counted the number of letters which she had received from her mother during her stay at summer camp. In keeping with her attachment to words as a substitute for love, each letter represented a token of love to Sylvia and because she received the most letters, she concluded that she was loved more than any other girl (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's obsessive perfectionism and her desire to please her mother and play the part of the dutiful daughter were reinforced by her mother's habit of rewarding good behavior (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that this not only strengthened her obsessive-compulsive tendencies, but also fuelled her dependency on her mother, making it even more impossible for her to establish a sense of autonomy. This dependency had been reinforced years before when her father died and her mother, being the sole bread-winner, had moved the family to the town of Wellesley for financial reasons. Because the two-bedroom house which she had bought was appreciably smaller than the one that the family had inhabited in Winthrop, Sylvia had been forced to share a room with her mother (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). For a pre-teen girl, these cramped living arrangements were less than desirable and prompted Sylvia to use her writing as a form

of escape (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Years later, it also prompted her decision to gain a place at Smith College which was situated about 90 miles from Wellesley, thus giving her the space she felt she needed from her mother and her family (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Unfortunately, however, Sylvia's dependency on her mother was so extreme that she found it difficult to adapt to life away from home after school and she slipped deeper and deeper into loneliness and depression (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her dependency was also evident in her written confessions to her mother, which became increasingly compulsive over time, to the point that they become a curse to Sylvia (Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia wrote not only to discharge some of her secret anxieties, but also to secure her mother's love (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The habit of dedicating her writing to her mother began in childhood and became a tool through which Sylvia could assure her mother of her good behaviour whenever her mother had to be hospitalised or Sylvia was away from home (Wilson, 2013). In the same way that Sylvia had used language to garner her parents' praise and guarantee their love after Warren's birth, so she continued to use her linguistic ability in childhood and adolescence to obtain recognition from her mother, whom she regarded as an extension of herself, rather than as a separate person (Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's over-dependency on her mother, whose love depended on Sylvia's good behaviour, continued to obstruct the development of autonomy in Sylvia, even in adulthood. Even after she graduated from Smith College, Sylvia continued to be plagued by feelings of self-doubt, despite the fact that she was one of only four summa cum laude graduates and had managed to obtain a Fulbright scholarship to study literature at Cambridge University in England (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although she was excited about the prospect of beginning a new life in England, she was also thwart with insecurities and anxieties, since it would be the first time that she was leaving the routine and comfort of home (Wilson, 2013).

The fact that Sylvia failed to develop a sense of autonomy in Erikson's second stage also manifested in her dependency on Ted after their marriage. Sylvia wrote to her mother and confessed that she had finally found peace in her new life with Ted, whom she described as her reward and her life's work (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2017; Rollyson, 2013). Although Sylvia projected an idealised image of Ted and their marriage, their relationship was not without its challenges (Rollyson, 2013). The researcher surmises that these challenges were exacerbated by the symptoms of Sylvia's excessive sense of shame and doubt. The malignant tendency of compulsiveness which emerges from an excess of shame and doubt manifested not only in her

meticulous planning and striving for perfection, but also in her abstemious nature which made her keep meticulous record of every penny that she spent (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). This compulsive need for control hampered her ability to deal with even the smallest disappointments, and when things did not go as planned, she needed the reassurance that it did not constitute a crisis of cosmic proportions (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Her deep-rooted obsession with cleanliness was another manifestation of the malignant tendency of compulsiveness, aggravated by the fact that Ted paid little attention to personal hygiene and grooming (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In adulthood, Sylvia's lack of autonomy was also reflected in her dependency on Ted, and mirrored her dependency on her mother in childhood and adolescence. Although Sylvia continued her correspondence with her mother right through her life, once she had left home for college she felt guilty about turning to her mother in times of emotional crisis (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In a letter to a friend, she acknowledged that her mother had worked hard to give her and Warren the very best in education and upbringing and that her mother had even sacrificed her health in the process (Plath, 2017). Consequently Sylvia felt that the least she could do to convince her mother that her efforts had not been in vain, was to pretend to be happy with life (Wilson, 2013). This pretence, however, did nothing to allay Sylvia's anxieties about the everyday responsibilities of adult life and only served to augment her doubt concerning her ability to be an independent adult who could earn her own living (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). It also aggravated the deeper-rooted problem of the mystery of her own identity (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The identity gain which emanates from Erikson's second stage of human development plays an important part in identity formation because it contributes to the individual's courage in choosing and guiding his/her own future independently (Erikson, 1968). Sylvia's failure to attain this identity gain is discussed in greater detail in section 8.3.5.2.

The researcher has referred to it in this section because it is surmised that Sylvia's lack of autonomy and the subsequent feelings of doubt, together with her realisation that she could no longer turn to her mother for emotional support, prompted her to find a substitute for her dependency in Ted. This dependency was reinforced by the fact that Ted was a substitute for Otto, who remained a constant force in Sylvia's imagination. Not only did Sylvia write about the loss of her father and the associated emotions in her journal, she also used her literary works as a vehicle to reify the lost father figure (Wilson, 2013). Throughout her life she continued to recreate her father in her works, using words as a substitute for his absence and the love she craved from him (Wilson 2013). In her diary, she admitted to being in search of "the gigantic paternal embrace of a mental colossus" (Plath, 2000, p. 163), believing that there was a strong

link between the loss of her father and her compulsive desire to find a replacement for him in the men she dated (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's excessive dependency on Ted was particularly evident in her final year at Cambridge. Although they were married, financial constraints and Sylvia's fear of losing her scholarship forced them to live apart (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). So intense was Sylvia's emotional dependency on Ted that the separation resulted in her falling into depression, despite the success that she was garnering as a professional writer (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Her letters written at the time, attest to her dependency on Ted who, being aware of Sylvia's emotional state, responded frequently with letters of comfort and encouragement (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2017). Nonetheless, Sylvia continued to be distraught by the separation.

In a letter to her mother, she confessed that she lived for Ted, enclosing a poem that, although expressive of her deep love for Ted, also foreshadowed an ominous end (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2017). One of Sylvia's Cambridge professors was worried about Sylvia's over-dependency on Ted and encouraged her to tell the Newman and Fulbright officials that she was married (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Fortunately, they neither criticised her nor threatened to retract her scholarship, and by the end of that year, she and Ted were living together (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

The researcher surmises that although the new living arrangements may have allayed some of Sylvia's insecurities, they did nothing to reduce her dependency on Ted, and may even have resulted in her developing a false sense of autonomy. Erikson (1968, 1980) posited that a false sense of autonomy enables an individual to pretend that he/she is self-sufficient despite evidence to the contrary. This results in an unstable foundation for development and leads to deficits and complications later on in life. The devastating effects of Sylvia's false sense of autonomy manifested themselves after Sylvia and Ted's break-up, when she fell into a depression from which she never recovered (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Plath, 2017; Rollyson, 2013). Although Sylvia fluctuated between loathing Ted for having abandoned her and hoping for a reconciliation with him, it is speculated that the negative experience reaffirmed her sense of mistrust and obliterated any attempt at autonomy, thus strengthening her debilitating sense of shame and self-doubt. This is affirmed by a letter written to her mother a week before her suicide. In the letter she confessed that she was finally seeing the finality of everything and that she felt lonely and burdened by grim problems from which she could not escape (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2017).

The outcome of Erikson's second stage also determines the political authority which the child will find most satisfactory as an adult (Erikson, 1968, 1980; Maier, 1978). Erikson

regarded the principle of law and order as particularly important because the sense of doubt evident in many children is often a consequence of the parents' frustration in marriage, work and citizenship (Erikson, 1968, 1980). Even before Sylvia's birth, her father had been under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for suspected pro-German leanings. Although the FBI files show that he was eventually cleared of any pro-German sympathies, his family continued to feel the negative repercussions of anti-German sentiment even after his death (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's political awareness began in adolescence. Being a pacifist like her father, she detested the idea of war and saw no purpose to it except as a manifestation of extreme anti-communism (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Throughout her life she used her writing as a vehicle to express her pacifist ideas (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In adulthood, her confessional style of writing proved to be particularly suitable for the articulation of personal concerns, as well as concerns about bigger political issues like Hiroshima and the advent of the Cold War (Alexander, 1999; Gill, 2008) (see sections 2.2.6, 2.2.7.2, 2.2.8, 2.2.9).

The researcher speculates that Sylvia's enhanced sense of doubt, which Erikson (1963) referred to as fear of the unknown, heightened her feelings of anxiety about the possibility of world war and simultaneously strengthened her pacifist convictions. Her protestations against war could thus be seen as manifestations of her fear of the unknown. It is surmised that after the birth of her first child, Frieda, this fear extended beyond herself to the fear of what a war-ravaged world would be like for her daughter. In light of this, it seems particularly pertinent that Frieda's very first baby outing was a ban-the-bomb political protest march (Alexander, 1999). The findings pertaining to Sylvia's third stage of psychosocial development are discussed in the subsequent section.

8.3.3 Stage 3: Initiative versus Guilt – Purpose (3-6 years)

The third psychosocial stage occurs between the third and sixth year of life and is characterised by the developmental crisis of initiative versus guilt (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1980, 1997; Hamachek, 1990). Erikson (1963, 1968, 1980) regarded this as an optimistic stage of growth since children of this age have a surplus of energy which enables them to explore new challenges enthusiastically and lays the foundation for a realistic sense of ambition and purpose.

At this age, children's ever-increasing sense of independence and curiosity about the world and how they can influence it, broadens their fields of activity and imagination (Erikson, 1963; Maier, 1978, 1988). Whilst the weight of responsibility which they are expected to assume for

themselves and for the things in their world may frighten them, their new-found capacities to provoke reactions and influence the world around them, may result in feelings of guilt about initiated acts (Boeree, 2006; Maier, 1978, 1988; Watts et al., 2009). The fundamental task of this stage is thus to find the balance between actively exploring the social environment and curtailing initiative whenever conflict arises (Maier, 1978, 1988).

Erikson, who was trained in the Freudian tradition, included Oedipal/Electra experiences in this psychosocial stage of development and referred to it as the genital-locomotor or play age (Erikson, 1963). According to Erikson (1963), the resolution of the Oedipal/Electra conflict promotes the development of the superego and identification with the same-sex parent. Parents thus play a crucial role in the successful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis, which lays the foundation for a sense of morality and guides the child towards that which is permissible and possible for the future (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Successful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis leads to the psychosocial virtue of purpose. This contributes significantly to later identity development in that it frees the child's initiative and sense of purpose for adult tasks which promise the potential fulfillment of the individual's range of capacities (Erikson, 1964, 1968).

8.3.3.1 Middle Childhood (1936 – 1939): Sylvia and the Great New England Hurricane preceding the Plath Tragedy

Biographical facts pertaining to this period in Sylvia's life (see section 2.2.2) indicate that the beginning of her third stage of psychosocial development coincided with the onset of her father's ill health. He began to lose weight, was afflicted by a terrible cough and sinusitis, and seemed constantly irritable and short-tempered (Wilson, 2013). Otto spent the greater part of his time in his large study downstairs and the onset and progression of his illness exacerbated not only his physical strength, but also his already erratic and volatile temperament (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In order to protect Sylvia and Warren from Otto's explosive temper, Aurelia would troop the children upstairs to a large bedroom which she had converted into a playroom for them (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). There Sylvia and Warren would have their supper and entertain themselves while Aurelia and Otto had dinner downstairs. For half an hour before bed, Sylvia and Warren would be allowed downstairs to spend time with and entertain their father (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980, 1997) aptly labelled the third stage of psychosocial development the play age, for in play children are provided with the opportunity to initiate

exploration of reality and experimentation with new roles through their imitation of adults (Crowne, 2009).

As Otto's health deteriorated, so his temper worsened, to the point that Aurelia took Sylvia and Warren and went to live with her parents at their home in Point Shirley (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Some months later, the Plaths made the decision to move from their small apartment in Prince Street to a more spacious house situated at the coast in Winthrop, close to Aurelia's parents (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). This constituted a major event in Sylvia's life. It was in Winthrop that Sylvia acquired her powerful, almost obsessive love and fear of the ocean, romantically envisioning it as the mother of the universe that transformed the ordinary process of life into poetry (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Another significant event which took place during Sylvia's third psychosocial stage was her commencement with formal education. Although Sylvia was only four at the time that Aurelia enrolled her at a private elementary school, she could already read and performed so well, that within a year she was ready to take on the more rigorous academic programme of Winthrop's public elementary school (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). From the very start of her academic career she maintained a straight A profile, impressing her teachers with her intelligence and her dedication (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). The Great New England Hurricane of 1938 was another major event which took place in Sylvia's third psychosocial stage of development. The hurricane, which caused massive destruction and the loss of two hundred lives from Long Island to Canada, left an indelible impression on Sylvia and fuelled her artistic imagination (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

According to Erikson (1963; 1980), a sense of initiative is imperative for any action or form of learning which one undertakes. Despite the fact that Sylvia's father was not a very pleasant man, and was often consumed by "explosive outbursts of anger" (Plath, 1992, p. 18), Sylvia's sharp mind and her well-developed sense of imagination enabled her to enjoy an idyllic, fantastical childhood (Wilson, 2013) in a "never-never land of magic, of fairy queens and virginal maidens, of little princes and their rose bushes" (Plath, 2000, p. 35). Although living arrangements changed with the onset of her father's illness, the short periods of time which she got to spend time with and entertain him proved to be positive experiences for her and she came to depend upon his praises (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The move to Winthrop and Sylvia's subsequent fascination with the ocean fuelled her imagination and she often associated the "potently rich sea" of her subconscious with the dark ocean floor of her childhood, believing that she needed to return to that place if she wanted to attain success as a writer (Plath, 2000, p. 168). The move to Winthrop also afforded Sylvia the opportunity to

establish a closer relationship with her grandparents, whose old-fashioned lifestyle she admired (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Adults play an important role in Erikson's third stage of psychosocial development. Through their own example and through the gentle encouragement of curiosity and imagination, adults can guide and discipline children in initiating various activities which promote self-confidence and a realistic ambition for the future (Corey, 2005; Craig & Baucum, 2002; Erikson, 1963, 1968). The researcher speculates that the praise which Sylvia received from her father, as well as the secure relationship with her grandparents, provided her with the opportunity to take initiative, to learn new skills and to feel purposeful in the responsibilities which she assumed (Boeree, 2006). This explains why Sylvia did not present with a complete lack of initiative in her adult life stages. The researcher argues that Sylvia's active efforts at learning how to read and compose poems might indicate a well-developed sense of initiative at this stage. By the age of five she was already writing well-crafted poems (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The fact that Sylvia's environment at age four had expanded to include formalised schooling (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003), means that she would have been exposed to more opportunities to learn through school and play activities. Her environment at this stage could thus have been conducive to the development of initiative.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the guilt which children experience over their goals and the actions initiated during this stage may be crippling if parents and significant adults are overbearing, condemning and ridiculing, and fail to model appropriate conscience and responsibility (Crowne, 2009; Gross, 1987). The role of parents is particularly pertinent in the measure of guilt which children will experience, since the conflict between initiative and guilt determines the outcome of the Oedipal/Electra conflict which, if unsuccessfully resolved, can lead to generalised anxiety disorder, impotence, frigidity, inhibitions or psychosomatic disorders (Linn, Fabricant & Linn, 1988; Sadock & Sadock, 2007; Shapiro & Fromm, 2000). Increasing independence of movement and the eroticisation of the genitals form the prototypical organ modes of the third stage of psychosocial development and result in the psychosocial modalities of intrusion and exclusion (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1980). The emergent conflict between their ability to intrude in others' lives through movement, speech, noise and fantasy – and the realisation of moral rules, which are encouraged through their identification with same-sex parents, afford children the opportunity to learn to take on the parental role over themselves, whilst simultaneously satisfying their thirst for initiative (Erikson, 1963, 1980; Meyer et al. 2008; Welchman, 2000). It is thus during this stage that children face the universal crisis of turning from an attachment to their parents to the slow process of becoming their own parent and supervising themselves (Erikson, 1963). Although

the praise and encouragement which Otto and Aurelia gave Sylvia for her intellectual capabilities and linguistic accomplishments could have protected her from feeling guilty over her goals, the researcher surmises that Otto's tyrannical outbursts and Aurelia's strict moral regime outweighed the positive effects of their praise and encouragement, thereby exposing Sylvia to the damaging effects of excessive guilt. It is further surmised that the sense of mistrust established in Stage 1, together with the excessive sense of shame and doubt established in Stage 2, would have undermined Sylvia's ability to relinquish her attachment to her parents. Aurelia's submissiveness towards her husband would also have compromised Sylvia's capacity to identify with her mother, thereby compounding the resolution of this stage of development. According to Sigelman and Rider (2009), individuals who do not resolve Erikson's third stage of psychosocial development successfully, may be left with an excessive sense of guilt and a confused or negative sense of self. Although there were many times in Sylvia's life when she demonstrated successful initiative, there were also areas in her life which were indicative of her excessive sense of guilt. The researcher thus infers from the information on Sylvia's childhood that the initiative versus guilt crisis was most likely unsuccessfully navigated during this psychosocial developmental stage and that it fluctuated between the extremities of initiative and guilt.

Sylvia's profile of academic excellence throughout her life attests to the success of her academic initiatives. She generally left a positive impression on adults, and her teachers, in particular, described her as being outstanding (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Even during stressful times in her life, such as when her mother's health deteriorated due to a gastric haemorrhage (see section 2.2.4), Sylvia continued to maintain an outstanding academic record, impressing her teachers with her intelligence, creativity and penchant for extra work (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Achievement was central to her world, and as essential to her as her deep and abiding respect for books and whoever wrote them (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Another manifestation of Sylvia's sense of initiative can be found in her tenacious ambitiousness. Even before adolescence (see section 2.2.4) she was creating radio melodramas in the schoolyard, and in between learning to master the piano keys at summer camp, she was already writing short stories and plotting novels (Rollyson, 2013). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980, 1997) highlighted the importance of play for successful resolution of the third psychosocial stage of development. From an early age, Sylvia regarded writing as a form of serious play and she used her imagination to produce writing that transported her to a fantasy world (Wilson, 2013).

As she approached adolescence, she became concerned about her popularity and, with concerted effort, took the initiative to develop her social skills (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Her efforts included serving as vice-president for her guidance class, joining the girls' basketball team, and attending various social functions, often escorted by boys (Alexander, 1999). Outside school, she continued to draw, study music and be enthralled by the power that literature had over her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Her sense of initiative continued to reveal itself when she started junior high school. Apart from an excellent academic record and a heavy reading schedule of classical novels, she took the initiative to participate in extra-mural activities such as dancing and playing the viola in the school orchestra (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). By the end of her junior high year Sylvia could boast a plethora of accolades and a myriad of friends, boyfriends and activities, and she again attained the prize for being the highest-achieving pupil in her grade (Butscher, 1976, 2013; Kirk, 2009). Her pattern of academic excellence continued in high school.

Despite her feelings of social awkwardness, she took the initiative to join the high school sorority, Sub-Deb, knowing full well that it entailed submitting oneself to an initiation week characterised by personal and public humiliation (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia's profile of academic excellence and her tenacious ambition with regard to her literary accomplishments testify to successful initiative, the researcher identified areas in her life which are indicative of unsuccessful resolution of the crisis at this stage, as expressed in her excessive sense of guilt. The fact that Oedipal/Electra experiences play a significant role in this psychosocial stage of development and influence the development of the superego and identification with the same-sex parent (Erikson, 1963), is particularly applicable to Sylvia's life. It must be borne in mind that Sylvia's father began to suffer from ill health when Sylvia entered Erikson's third stage of psychosocial development. Despite Otto's tyrannical temperament and explosive anger, Sylvia idolised this "giant of a man" who "feared nothing" (Plath, 2008, p. 320). Not only did she come to depend upon his praises, she was also told repeatedly, while she was growing up, that she resembled her father, whilst her sickly brother was said to take after their mother's side of the family (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Her attachment to her father also strengthened after her brother's birth, and she went out of her way to please Otto, using her quick, retentive intellect to memorise the Latin names for various insects (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia also admired the way in which Otto could handle bees without being stung (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2008; Wilson, 2013). This admiration, together with her striving to be his favourite (Plath, 2008) only served to strengthen her identification with him. Her attachment to her father became even more pronounced after he was diagnosed

with diabetes mellitus, which became a life-threatening condition because he had neglected to obtain medical help when the first warning signs of diabetes appeared (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Due to the severity of Otto's condition, he had to remain under the supervision of a nurse who worked every day except for Wednesday (Alexander, 1999). Sylvia's brother was sent to stay with his grandparents during this trying time, but Sylvia remained at home and was even given a nurse's outfit that had been fashioned from an old uniform so that she could play nurse and perform duties like bringing her father fruit or cool drinks (Wilson, 2013). On the professional nurse's first Wednesday off, Otto insisted that Aurelia take Sylvia to the beach for some fresh air. When they returned from the beach, they found him sprawled on the stairs, seemingly dead (Alexander, 1999). The doctor, who could only be reached the following day, discovered that Otto's left leg had turned gangrenous and recommended an amputation in an effort to save Otto's life (Alexander, 1999, Wilson, 2013). Unfortunately, the gangrene was arterio-sclerotic, and weakened Otto's body, eventually resulting in an embolism and causing death (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

In light of Sylvia's strong attachment to her father and the fact that she had been placed in the position to take care of him, the researcher speculates that his death burdened her with a sense of guilt which was so overpowering that it undermined all her attempts at initiative throughout the rest of her life. Not only is it surmised that Sylvia blamed herself for her father's death, in her journal she blatantly blamed her mother for what she considered to be the "murder" of her father (Plath, 2000, p. 431). Despite his tyrannical and erratic temperament, she outlined in her journal that she missed her father and hated her mother for her lack of tenderness towards him (Plath, 2000). Aurelia's decision to prevent her children from attending their father's funeral for fear that it might be traumatic for them, was interpreted by Sylvia as further proof that her mother had not really loved her father (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Even the modest grave marker which Aurelia organised according to her husband's wishes before he died, was confirmation to Sylvia that Aurelia had not loved her husband (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's resentment towards her mother would have prevented identification with the same-sex parent as required for successful resolution of Erikson's third stage. The researcher further surmises that Sylvia's identification with her father was jeopardised since she interpreted his departure as a deliberate act of betrayal (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Although Sylvia's life-long drive for success fuelled her poetic talent and was an emulation of her deceased father's own discipline and ambition (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rose, 2013), her feelings of guilt and loss outweighed the self-confidence which emanated from successful

artistic initiatives. Throughout her life Sylvia was aware of the link between her childhood artistic initiatives and the traumatic occurrence of her father's death (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rose, 2013). Otto remained a constant force in Sylvia's imagination and although she acknowledged, in her poem *The Colossus*, that she would never be able to get her father "put together entirely/pierced, glued and properly jointed" (Plath, 2008, p. 12), she continued to recreate him in her works, using words as a substitute for his absence and the love she craved from him (Wilson, 2013). So pervasive was his presence in her life, that he haunted her work like a ghost that could not find peace, as can be seen by his ghostly appearance in many of her poems (Rose, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Even Sylvia's intense fascination with the ocean extended to her father whom she described as a Neptune-like-character serving as a "father-sea-god muse" (Plath, 2000, p. 399). In her poem *Full Fathom Five*, Sylvia continued with this sea metaphor, describing this powerful man-turned-sea god as something that emerged from her subconscious to haunt her (Hughes, 1981). In her journal, she admitted to being in search of "the gigantic paternal embrace of a mental colossus (Plath, 2000, p. 163), believing that there was a strong link between the loss of her father and her compulsive desire to find a replacement for him in the men that she dated (Wilson, 2013).

In Sylvia's senior college years (see section 2.2.7.2) when she was caught in the grip of severe depression, she began to associate her depression with her deceased father (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Electroconvulsive shock therapy was recommended, but the researcher surmises that the feelings of abandonment which she experienced after being left alone in the recovery room (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013), only served to reawaken and enhance the feeling of abandonment which she suffered when her father died. In her desperation to alleviate her mental anguish, she began taking trips to places in Winthrop which she associated with her childhood, and she even managed to locate her father's modest tombstone in the graveyard where he had been buried. The discovery only intensified her depression and exacerbated her feelings of guilt and loss. Her anger over Aurelia's neglect of Otto was confounded by her fear that she may have hated her father as much as she had loved him, and she became terrified that a subconscious, secret death wish for her father may have mysteriously contributed to the diabetes which killed him (Butscher, 1976, 2003). So intense were these feelings of guilt, that suicide became not only a possibility, but a desired goal in Sylvia's mind (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although she continued to subscribe to her mother's notion that a brave face had to be shown to the world, beneath the surface, Sylvia's inner turmoil was so intense that it set in motion the plan leading up to her suicide attempt in 1953 (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Not only did Sylvia's obsession with her father influence her relationships with men, it also fuelled her resentment towards her mother. Although she recognised and appreciated the fact that her mother worked tirelessly to give her children everything of the best, her already existing resentment towards her mother over the neglect of her father, was augmented by her resentment of Aurelia's extreme altruism. Aurelia empathised so intensely with Sylvia's every depression, that Sylvia felt the negative reverberations actually prolonged her down periods (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). She also resented the pressure placed on her by her mother to perform, and she confessed that she felt the need to escape from home, especially during periods of intense depression (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Even Sylvia's college friend, Marcia, commented that Aurelia often over-reacted when it came to her treatment of Sylvia, giving the impression that she was breathing on Sylvia every minute (Butscher, 2003). Sylvia's dependency on her mother, which had already been established in Stage 2 of Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory, became all the more pronounced after her father's death owing to Aurelia's over-involvement in her daughter's life and the fact that she was forced to share a room with Aurelia when they moved to the house in Winthrop (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

To escape the suffocating effects of the cramped living arrangements, Sylvia immersed herself even more deeply in her art of writing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her pre-adolescent journal entries were filled with fragments of poems and snatches of stories that articulated her desire to escape to a more exotic world (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her writing not only strengthened her belief in magic and the "otherworldly", since that became the central metaphor through which she could express herself and escape to a magical world (Wilson, 2013, p. 43), it also served as a vehicle to please Aurelia, who reinforced Sylvia's belief that she had to perform in order to be rewarded with love and recognition (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that the guilt associated with resenting a mother who did so much for her children and on whom Sylvia depended so intensely, prompted her to play the role of the dutiful daughter. Subconsciously, however, the guilt surrounding her father's death and her anger over Aurelia's neglect of Otto, only strengthened her ever-growing resentment towards Aurelia (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia's correspondence to her mother reflects the theme of motherly love and adoration which she manifested in her role as the perfect, obedient daughter, beneath the surface, Sylvia resented Aurelia's oppressive bourgeois values and the pressure which this placed on her to perform (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013).

Erikson (1963, 1968) posited that the psychological distress caused by crippling guilt as a result of overbearing or condemning parents is often deflected through resentment and emanates from one of the deepest conflicts in life, namely, the hate for a hypocritical parent. This can result in a morally intolerant individual who is vindictive and suppresses his or her own ego, as well as the egos of others (Erikson, 1963, 1968). Sylvia's vindictive nature revealed itself in her tendency to write cruel comments about those close to her, as can be seen in the malicious caricatures presented in her adolescent poem, *Family Reunion*, and in her semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Aurelia, who was represented by one of the caricatures, described the novel as "a very embarrassing publication" (Wilson, 1999, p. 46), even though, ironically, she had encouraged the sardonic, mocking side of her daughter's personality (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

In adulthood, Sylvia's feelings of dependency and resentment extended to her husband, Ted, and she compared both her mother and Ted to vampires (Plath, 2000). In her therapy sessions with her psychiatrist, Dr Beuscher, Sylvia admitted that she believed her mother had killed her father and hated her for that since, in her mind, her father was the only man who could have loved her steadily throughout life (Plath, 2000). Her father's spirit haunted her not only in her works, but in her everyday existence and she felt simultaneously guided and suffocated by his presence when he appeared as Prince Otto – the family god – when she and Ted called on the spirits of the Ouija board (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

The most obvious manifestation that Sylvia struggled to resolve the crisis of Erikson's third stage of psychosocial development, can be seen in the conflictual nature of her emerging sexuality during adolescence. This conflict was exacerbated by her mother's staunch Calvinistic morality and the puritan expectations imposed on her gender by 1950s society (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Gill, 2008; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her adolescent diary entries attest to the fact that she equated her feelings of intense sexuality to the "impure side of her personality" (Wilson, 2013, p. 67) and consequently tried to suppress them for fear of the guilt which they would provoke. As adolescence progressed, however, she found it increasingly difficult to suppress her growing sexual desires, and her internal conflict became all the more pronounced (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although sexual attractiveness was important to her and was encouraged by her culture, the idea of sex itself was disconcerting to her for moral and personal reasons (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her diary entries and literary works attest to the conflicting demands of her religion and culture and the fact that her relationships with boys were often characterised by complex

feelings that vacillated between love and hate (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The conflict between Sylvia's inner turmoil and her outer display of perfect grooming and moral conduct was nowhere more evident than during adolescence (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

After high school, as she prepared for her new life at Smith College, the reality that she would be leaving home for the first time gave her a new-found freedom to record experiences that she may have felt forced to censor under her mother's watchful eye (Wilson, 2013). The conflict between the free expression of her personal desires and the staunch moral code of her upbringing is clearly portrayed in her journal entries, where her description of how wonderful it is "to be a virgin, clean and sound and young" is immediately juxtaposed by her desire to be raped (Plath, 2000, p. 8) (See section 2.2.6). In college, the socially conservative tradition and double standard which prevailed at the time fuelled Sylvia's sexual ambiguity, making her feel torn between the intriguing mysteries of sexual seduction and the guilt of engaging in sexual acts which morally proper girls were expected to decline (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Gill, 2008; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). This sexual ambiguity compounded Sylvia's intimate relationships, which were characterised by conflicting emotions that left her "tremulous with love and longing, creeping in the dark" (Plath, 2000, p. 19). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's sexual involvement with men before marriage would have been frowned upon not only by her mother, but by 1950s society in general, and that her propensity for guilt as a result of unsuccessful resolution of the psychosocial crisis of initiative versus guilt would have been magnified in adulthood. This would further explain the emotionally tumultuous nature of her relationships in adulthood and the fact that they fuelled her depressive state (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

Unsuccessful resolution of the conflict between initiative and guilt can also result in the development of conversion disorders, phobias or inhibitions (Sadock & Sadock, 2003). Erikson (1968) cautioned that over-compensation for unresolved conflicts over initiative may manifest in recklessness and gratuitous risk-taking behaviour. Sylvia had a habit of attempting reckless and potentially harmful acts whenever she experienced extreme stress caused by emotional trauma. Examples include when she attempted to ski down a challenging mountain slope during her college years, and when she drove herself off the road after her husband left her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her 1962 poem entitled *Ariel* was inspired by a harrowing, adrenalin-filled incident when a horse ran away with her (Hughes, 1981). Although she had been frightened by the runaway incident, she admitted in her journal that the dare-devil change in the horse she was riding and her tenacity to hold onto

him for life made her feel exhilarated and enlightened (Plath, 2000). Erikson (1968) added that individuals who over-compensate for unresolved conflicts over initiative may push themselves too hard, causing enough stress on the body to produce psychosomatic symptoms. Sylvia had a life-long history of psychosomatic symptoms. Throughout her life, her physical well-being was negatively affected by stressful circumstances (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In the week after her father's death, she became chronically ill with sinusitis (Wilson, 2013).

In her college years, Sylvia's friend, Eddie Cohen, observed that every bout of sinusitis was preceded by a failed relationship or some other unfortunate experience with a male and consequently he inferred that the illness was psychosomatic (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In light of the fact that she had a life-long history of falling ill whenever she suffered from extreme stress, the researcher speculates that her physical illnesses after the breakdown of her marriage to Ted (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013), were psychosomatic and manifestations of her vulnerable mental state.

Erikson also indicated that excessive guilt and the fear of not being able to live up to the expectations of others, can drive individuals to strive for perfection (Coetzee, 2017; Dunkley, Lewkowski, Lee, Preacher, Zuroff, Berg, Foley, Myhr & Westreich, 2016). Such individuals learn that in order to obtain praise and recognition and avoid punishment, everything they do must be perfect. Sylvia's life provides numerous examples of her perfectionism. Her competitive nature and perfectionistic tendencies revealed themselves in early childhood when she manifested the need to outsmart her baby brother with her ever-increasing knowledge and vocabulary (Plath, 1992). As she got older, her perfectionism became even more pronounced and was reinforced by her mother's habit of rewarding good behavior (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her compulsive perfectionism emerged from the moral and social framework of her life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013) and manifested itself in (a) her striving for academic excellence throughout her school and college years (see sections 2.2.2 – 2.2.7.2) (b) her determined work ethic, as seen in her internship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* during her senior college years, and her position as lecturer at Smith College during her adult life stages (see section 2.2.7.1, 2.2.9); (c) her pacifist ideas which revealed her desire for a morally-immaculate world, as reflected in her efforts to campaign for world peace (see section 2.2.6, 2.2.7.1, 2.2.7.2, 2.2.8, 2.2.9) (d) her visceral dislike of moral and physical imperfections, as revealed in her extreme reactions to her husband's deplorable physical and moral hygiene later on in life (see section 2.2.8); and (e) her striving to be the perfect mother in adulthood, as confirmed by close family friends who remarked on her calm efficiency in protecting her children and sustaining an idyllic family life (see section 2.2.10.2).

The researcher speculates that Sylvia's striving for perfection was rooted in her unsuccessful resolution of Erikson's third stage of psychosocial development. From a young age she learnt that producing good behaviour and performing well assured her of her parents' praise and recognition. It is surmised that her excessive guilt and her fear of not living up to her parents' expectations, prompted her to do things not only well, but to do them perfectly. Even her childhood friend, Frank Irish, commented that "everything she did had to be not just good, but perfect" (Wilson, 293, p. 56). Subconsciously, perfectionism was her way of securing the love and recognition which she craved. In one of her journal entries entitled *Letter to a demon*, she admonished herself for not being able to stand up against the "murderous" part of herself that demanded perfection and stripped her of her confidence when she was anything less than perfect (Plath, 2000, p. 618). Her lack of confidence and her constant striving for perfection not only depleted her physically, but also suffocated her drive to write (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). This perpetuated a vicious cycle of despair which fuelled her insecurities and her belief that she was worthless. This would explain her depression and sense of hopelessness every time she suffered from writer's block.

According to Erikson (1950, 1964, 1968, 1977), the psychosocial virtue which emanates from finding the balance between enthusiastic action and the tendency to be too strict in self-judgment, is purpose. Like her father, who was known for his structured routine and relentless work ethic, Sylvia believed that structure gave her a sense of purpose. Every time that her life was devoid of a structured routine, as when she returned home to Wellesley after the structured work routine of her internship in New York, she fell into a severe depression. She had experienced the same sense of futility and purposelessness the year before her internship in New York, when ill health had forced her to leave her summer waitressing job at the Belmont and she had to return home to a life so devoid of structure that she compared it to a wasteland (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The antithesis between the over-stimulating, rigidly-structured environment of the Belmont, and the boring, unregulated ambience of home reminded her of a bell jar being lifted off a secure community that had functioned like clock-work with its lid on, but that without the lid, revealed a community of frightened, impotent individuals existing aimlessly (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013) (see section 2.2.7.1). Sylvia used the metaphor of the bell jar as the title of her semi-autobiographical novel, published years later under the pseudonym, Charlotte Lucas. The metaphor captured perfectly her depression and her sense of purposeless detachment from life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). When Ted's affair with Assia Weville was exposed, Aurelia was visiting Sylvia at Court Green. In one of her episodes of rage, Sylvia burned all the letters that her

mother had sent her over the years (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). It is surmised that this act was fuelled not only by Sylvia's resentment of Aurelia, but also by her humiliation at the thought that her mother was witness to her less-than-perfect marriage. This affirms the speculation that Sylvia's perfectionism was driven by guilt and her need for recognition, especially from her mother.

According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977), individuals manifest the ego strength of purpose when they implement bold plans and are proud of their achievements. Although there are many examples of Sylvia's academic and professional achievements throughout the course of her life, the researcher speculates that her lack of trust (Stage 1), her overriding sense of shame and self-doubt (Stage 2) and her excessive sense of guilt (Stage 3) compromised her capacity to acquire the ego strength of purpose. This would explain her recurrent feelings of inadequacy and despair, despite her remarkable achievements. Successful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis fosters positive goals for the future as it sets the direction in which the dreams of childhood can connect to the goals of technology and culture in adult life (Erikson, 1968; Watts et al., 2009). It is for this reason that Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) proffered economic endeavour as the social institution for the third stage. During this stage, the dreams and imagination of childhood are associated with valued goals in adulthood, allowing their fictional counterparts to be replaced with authentic adult heroes (Louw, 2017).

Thanks to Aurelia's ambitious programme of reading books aloud to her children from a young age (Alexander, 1999; Heller, 1976), Sylvia would have been introduced to the authors of classical literature during this stage of psychosocial development. These authors came to be her heroes and role models. The researcher surmises, however, that this also contributed to Sylvia's compromised sense of purpose. Sylvia's association with feminist writers like Virginia Woolf and Sarah Tethsdale (who committed suicide) was exacerbated by the social conventions of the time, which encouraged women to take the initiative in pursuing academic goals, but which simultaneously prevented the attainment of ambitions beyond the realm of domesticity (Friedan, 1963). As Sylvia got older, the gap between her intellectual, emotional and physical ambitions and the socio-cultural expectations of the time became all the more pronounced (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000). Her feelings of guilt and inadequacy, coupled with her persistent unsureness regarding her own identity, made her all the more desperate to fit in, to the point that she allowed her culture to impinge on her (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). This not only undermined her sense of purpose, it also fuelled her ever-growing depression.

According to Erikson (1968), the initiative versus guilt stage contributes significantly to later identity development. The fact that Sylvia was plagued by uncertainty regarding her identity, affirms that she did not navigate the third developmental stage successfully. This consequently stunted the healthy development of her sense of purpose and prevented her from overcoming the struggles in her life. It also affected her successful navigation of Erikson's fourth stage of psychosocial development, namely industry versus inferiority, which is discussed in the following section.

8.3.4 Stage 4: Industry versus Inferiority – Competence (6-12 years)

The fourth psychosocial stage of development constitutes the last phase of childhood and occurs during latency, when the child is between the ages of six and 12 (Erikson, 1963, 1997; Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 1989, 2008; Roazen, 1976). By this time, the child has reached school age and can extend him/herself beyond the nucleus of the family to enter a social reality which includes teachers, peers and members of the community at large (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1963, 1997; Freiberg, 1987). During this stage, the child learns to obtain recognition by producing things and is ready to face the psychosocial crisis of industry versus inferiority (Erikson, 1963, 1997; Meyer et al., 1989, 2008).

Erikson, who was trained in Freudian psychoanalysis, viewed this stage as characterised by latent interests in sex, and consequently referred to it as the “lull before the storm of puberty” (Erikson, 1963, p. 260). During this time, oral and genital concerns are sublimated and the child's imaginative play interests are superseded by interests in productive situations which involve the implementation of work tools (Freiberg, 1987; Hall & Lindsey, 1978). This latent psychosexual stage allows the postponement of further sexual progress until the child becomes part of the larger framework of social responsibility (Erikson, 1964). It thus affords the child the opportunity to focus on the development of mind and body tool possibilities without the distraction of sexual urges (Erikson, 1964).

The school becomes the primary arena for the acquisition of skills and formal ritualisation, allowing the child to develop a sense of industry if he or she is successful in working with tools, producing things satisfactorily, and adapting to the rules of co-operation expected of the structured tasks which the child faces (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Hall & Lindsey, 1978). Conversely, the child who fails to be recognised for his or her efforts or is criticised for mediocrity or inadequacy whilst his or her peers are recognised and praised, runs the risk of developing a sense of inadequacy or inferiority (Erikson, 1968). This ego strength equips the child with the confidence to handle the utensils and tools of the adult world as he or she learns

to collaborate with others (Erikson, 1963). It thus lays the foundation for successful participation in the cultural process of productivity, thereby preparing the child for his or her role in sustaining a family (Erikson, 1963).

8.3.4.1 Later Childhood (1939 – 1945): The Aftermath of Otto Plath’s Death during World War II

Biographical facts pertaining to this period in Sylvia’s life (see section 2.2.2), indicate that significant changes occurred during this fourth stage of her psychosocial development, the most influential one being the death of her father. As discussed in detail in section 8.3.3.1., unsuccessful resolution of the conflict between initiative and guilt determines the outcome of the Oedipal/Electra conflict which, in Sylvia’s case, was compounded by her father’s death. Erikson (1968) posited that although the fourth stage is a very decisive social stage, children may develop an estrangement from themselves and from their tasks if preceding conflicts have not been successfully resolved, leading to a sense of inferiority. Sylvia’s predisposition to a sense of inferiority, as a result of previously unresolved crises, was reinforced by a number of occurrences after her father’s death, the first one being the precarious financial position which the Plath family found itself in after Otto’s death.

Otto’s death placed the Plath family in serious financial difficulties. Otto and Aurelia had managed to save very little during their marriage, apart from Otto’s modest university retirement account (Alexander, 1999), and the little money which constituted Otto’s life-insurance coverage was used to pay doctor, hospital and funeral expenses, leaving barely enough money for Otto’s tombstone (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Consequently, Aurelia was forced to find work. She managed to get a job as a teaching substitute for German and Spanish, but because the position was temporary and involved a daily commute, she later decided to accept a permanent position at Winthrop Junior High School (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The position involved full-time teaching and managing the school’s finances, a combination which put so much pressure on Aurelia that she developed a duodenal stomach ulcer (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). The condition, which began during Otto’s illness, would flare up at intensely stressful moments for the rest of Aurelia’s life and would contribute to Sylvia’s resentment of what she saw as her mother’s attitude of noble martyrdom (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

The financial strain on the Plath family was exacerbated by the fact that Aurelia’s father was forced into early retirement, putting added pressure on Aurelia to be the main breadwinner (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). To alleviate the circumstantially-imposed

financial burden on both families, the Plath's and the Schobers decided to merge their households (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Although it was a sad time for the Schobers, who had to abandon the home they had loved and cared for over so many years, the arrangement was financially beneficial to both families since it allowed them to share expenses (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). More importantly, it ensured that Sylvia and her brother Warren were well taken care of while Aurelia worked (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Aurelia's mother was the epitome of warmth and domesticity and she assumed all domestic responsibilities, including driving the children around (since Otto and Aurelia had never owned a car) (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). To supplement the family income, Aurelia's father assumed the position of waiter at a local country club (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia loved her grandfather dearly and spent much of her childhood with him, she felt a little embarrassed about the fact that he had to work serving tables (Wilson, 2013). Nonetheless, she appreciated his benevolence and the fact that he admired everything she did (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

According to Erikson's theory, parents, teachers and peers play a significant role in combatting feeling of inferiority during Stage 4, since children see them as representatives of the society in which they operate and become attached to them in their efforts to observe, initiate and learn (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Maier, 1978; Watts et al., 2009). Although Sylvia's grandparents could have served as positive role-models for industriousness, the researcher speculation that the financial difficulties of the Plath/Schober household together with Sylvia's embarrassment of her grandfather's waitoring job, would have fuelled Sylvia's sense of inferiority.

According to Coopersmith (1967), children with high self-esteem are more likely to have parents who provide direct experiences of success, the means to achieve success, and the skills to handle adversity in a realistic yet non-destructive manner. Although Sylvia's admiration for her father prompted her to emulate his sense of discipline and industriousness, the fact that his death did not receive the public attention and consideration expected for a man who had achieved an important measure of success in his field, and the fact that the family's financial status did not reflect the academic success he had achieved in his life, would undoubtedly have contributed to Sylvia's lack of self-esteem.

The start of World War II was another significant occurrence which coincided with Sylvia's fourth stage of psychosocial development. Not only did Germany's annexure of Austria in 1938 have negative repercussions on Americans of German heritage, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, resulted in Roosevelt signing a proclamation of war against Germany and Italy,

Japan's Axis partners (Alexander, 1999; Clarke, 2001). The subsequent decision by congress to expand the draft age so that all men between the ages of 18 and 64 could be included for military enlistment, meant that Sylvia's Uncle Frank (Aurelia's brother) was drafted for military service in 1942 (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 2003). Frank, who lived in the Plath/Schober household until his marriage in 1942, often took Sylvia sailing, and years later, she portrayed him as Superman in one of her short stories (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1979). Although the story was created from Sylvia's imagination, a poignant scene from the story is purely autobiographical and captures perfectly the painful reality of war for Germans and their descendants in the states (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 2003; Kirk, 2009) (see section 2.2.3). According to Erikson's theory, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination contribute to feelings of inferiority, especially if children discover that their sense of worth depends on factors which override their wish and will to learn and which are beyond their control (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Freiberg, 1987). It is speculated that the discrimination against American families of German descent, such as the Plath family, would have threatened their sense of security and contributed to Sylvia's feelings of inferiority. Her diary entries bear witness to the fact that she experienced the psychological impact of the war as something horrific which amplified the already existing insecurities coiled in her young, impressionable, preteen mind (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

In 1942, Aurelia's acceptance of a position at Boston University and the subsequent move to Wellesley (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013), constituted another momentous occurrence in Sylvia's life which contributed to her ever-increasing sense of inferiority. Aurelia, whose ethos of self-improvement and bourgeois values ran through her veins, wanted her children to grow up in a community that offered a higher concentration of educated professionals, as opposed to Winthrop's working-class community (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Although Aurelia could not afford to give Sylvia a quality education on her meager teacher's salary (Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013), she knew that her daughter was eligible for a scholarship based on her outstanding academic record (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Although Aurelia was confident that she had made the right decision in moving the family to Wellesley, for Sylvia, the dual tragedy of losing both her father and the familiar coastal wonderland of Winthrop, constituted a watershed moment in her life, since it essentially represented the loss of her entire childhood (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Not only did the family's move inland after her father's death seal her off from the

enchantments of childhood, it also represented a source of great anxiety to Sylvia, who had to adapt to a completely new world (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that the pressure to perform in order to secure scholarships to attend elite schools not only added to Sylvia's anxieties, but also served as a constant reminder of her financial inferiority. This feeling of inferiority continued to haunt her throughout her life (Wilson, 2013). Not only did it turn her into a very abstemious person (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013), it also contributed to her sense of social inferiority, since she was constantly surrounded by peers who came from a higher financial bracket. This resulted in her being socially isolated amongst her classmates (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

According to Erikson (1968), peers play as important a role as parents in combatting inferiority and fostering self-esteem, since they provide the criteria for the measurement of a child's own success or failure, thereby serving as an additional source of extra-familial identification. Although Sylvia consistently succeeded in excelling academically, she was always reminded of the fact that she was not in the same financial bracket as her peers. Sigelman and Rider (2009) posited that when the comparisons which children make with their peers during the fourth stage are unfavourable, there is a greater likelihood that those children will develop a sense of inferiority. Sylvia's profound sense of inferiority continued to manifest itself during her adolescence and was reinforced by the fact that her peers came from wealthy families. By comparison, she was thus always at a disadvantage. Even though she graduated as valedictorian of her class at the end of high school and managed to garner numerous scholarships to attend the prestigious Smith College, she did not have the means to join her peers on their pre-college summer vacation through Europe. In fact, she was even forced to find summer work to cover additional college expenses not included in her scholarships (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia's entry to Smith College only worsened her feelings of inferiority (see section 2.2.7.1). Since she did not come from a wealthy, socially-elite family, her scholarships always depended on her obtaining top academic grades. Failure to do this would result in her scholarships being retracted and her being dismissed from college (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her fear of losing her place at Smith College impelled her to work even harder than she had in high school. Although this ensured her habitual string of extraordinary academic achievements, it also plunged her into a vicious cycle characterised by social isolation, physical exhaustion and emotional instability (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Erikson (1968) maintained that good teachers can combat feelings of inferiority in that they know how to alternate play and study and can recognise and encourage special talents in children who may experience school as something to endure rather than enjoy. Throughout her school career, Sylvia left a positive impression on adults, particularly teachers, and they remembered her even long after she had disappeared from their lives (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her tremendous drive and ambition to excel academically enhanced her popularity with teachers who described her as brilliant and outstanding in every way (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that the positive encouragement which Sylvia received from her teachers could have contributed to her industriousness in academic endeavours.

An example of her industriousness can be seen in the fact that, by the time that she entered the sixth grade, she had already read so many books that she received an honorary certificate from the Massachusetts Division of Public Libraries' Department of Education (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Her superior creative ability and meticulous work ethic were matched by her intelligence, which measured in the genius range on an intelligence test conducted on her in the seventh grade (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her intellectual superiority and her enthrallment with literature were reflected not only in the number of books she read and the proliferation of poems, short stories and journal entries which she wrote, but also in the awards which she garnered at the end of grade seven. At a special awards ceremony at the end of that academic year, she won the Wellesley award for the seventh grade and an honours certificate stating that she had won first prize for excellence in English expression (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). The fact that she received commendation cards for her unusual creativity in English, for the outstanding quality of her oral and written work, and for the excellent service she had rendered in managing war stamp sales (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013), further attests to her academic superiority and her industriousness.

In high school, Sylvia's teachers continued to encourage her academically, quickly recognising her superior creative ability and her passion for literature (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her high school English teacher, Mr. Wilbury Crockett, played a particularly significant role in Sylvia's life. In him, she found a positive father figure – one who had all of Otto Plath's intellectual virtues, but none of his supposed imperiousness and despotism (Butscher, 1976, 2003). To Sylvia, Mr. Crockett was nothing less than "the teacher of a lifetime" (Alexander, 1999, p. 51). Not only did he bring out her competitive nature, he also inspired her to write about subjects such as the Korean War and the atomic bomb, thus affording her the opportunity to follow her father's pacifist politics (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia's

extraordinary talent for writing so impressed Mr. Crockett, that he described her as “too talented to believe” (Butscher, 2003, p. 31). Her work was always highly perceptive, well-argued, and meticulously typed, mirroring an almost compulsive attention to detail that was typical of everything she did and wrote (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia’s accomplishments were so outstanding that she graduated from Bradford High School as valedictorian of her class (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although she obtained a scholarship to attend the prestigious Smith College, her scholarship depended on her obtaining top academic grades (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her efforts to maintain her record of outstanding academic achievements can be seen as further evidence of her sense of industry under the tutelage and encouragement of inspiring teachers like Mr. Crockett. In college, Sylvia maintained her reputation of academic industriousness. The reward for her industriousness and the highlight of her academic career occurred when she graduated from Smith College as one of only four summa cum laude graduates (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Apart from winning a plethora of prizes, she also received the news that she had been granted a Fulbright scholarship to study literature at Cambridge University in England (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Notwithstanding all the praise and recognition which Sylvia received, and the fact that, to the outside world at least, she seemed destined for fame and success, beneath the surface lurked a loner who doubted her talent and questioned her identity (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Erikson noted that the maladaptive tendency which results from excessive industry is called narrow virtuosity, which is seen in children who are pressurised to excel in one area of competence, at the expense of broader interests (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989). Sylvia was known to invest all her energy in her ambitious striving for academic excellence and public literary recognition, even at the expense of isolating herself socially and remaining an outsider (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The effect of this was that Sylvia’s peers looked at her suspiciously, often making nasty remarks both behind her back and in her face (Wilson, 2013). Unfortunately this perpetuated a vicious cycle of negativity which fuelled Sylvia’s fears of inadequacy and heightened her sense of inferiority.

At the opposite extreme, and more common than narrow virtuosity, is the malignant inclination toward inertia, which corresponds with Adler’s (1929) inferiority complex and is described by Erikson as being the obstinate shadow of the school age (Boeree, 2006). Although it can be seen in individuals who avoid tasks which they may have failed in childhood or for which they feel they have not developed the required skills (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989),

Erikson cautioned that inertia can also manifest through compensatory behaviour later on in life as seen in individuals who are extremely driven for power, money and prestige (Sadock & Sadock, 2007; Shapiro & Fromm, 2000). According to Wilson (2013), the exhilarating experience of garnering awards for her writing and seeing her name printed beside a published poem or story, strengthened Sylvia's sense of existence and became an addictive ambition that she would pursue for the rest of her life. The researcher speculates that her drive for public success and recognition can be seen as compensatory behaviour for her inertia as a result of her deeply-rooted feelings of inferiority.

In early adolescence, Sylvia bought a scrapbook into which she began to paste photographs of herself accompanied by autobiographical diary entries (Wilson, 2013). In this diary, Sylvia recorded that she aspired to become the world's greatest author and artist. Her ambitious nature and her insatiable appetite for success and public recognition (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013) are manifestations of her compensatory behaviour with regard to her feelings of inferiority. Throughout high school, Sylvia continued to read, write and submit poetry and short stories to publishing companies, despite a full academic schedule (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her short story *And Summer Will Not Come Again* was rejected 45 times before eventually being published (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Her refusal to be discouraged by repeated rejections earned her not only the position of school editor in her senior year of high school, but also the reputation of a professional writer who had the tenacity to stick to a task until its completion (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her tenacity can be seen as further evidence of compensatory behaviour, reflected in her zealous drive for recognition and prestige.

In the months preceding her final junior exams at Smith College, Sylvia's days were filled with a plethora of social and academic obligations. Despite the hectic schedule of responsibilities, she fervently wrote publishable work for national periodicals. Her industriousness not only afforded her the position of editor for the *Smith Review*, it also led to her winning national recognition from renowned publications and culminated in her winning a guest editorship at the elite *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

In her senior college years, her drive for success revealed itself in her continued striving for academic excellence and in her efforts to obtain a Fulbright scholarship so she could fulfill her dream of studying at Oxford or Cambridge (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In her marriage, Sylvia industriously typed and submitted both her writing and that of her husband in the hope that their work would be published and attain international acclaim (Alexander,

1999; Kirk, 2009; Malcolm, 2012; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). Thanks to her tenacious submissions programme and her enthusiastic marketing of his work, Ted garnered more publishing accomplishments in the first few years of their marriage than Sylvia had been able to accumulate in years (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Her tenacity eventually paid off in her own work when her poetry collection, *The Colossus*, was published both in England and in America (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992). It is speculated that her compulsive striving for international acclaim is further evidence of her effort to compensate for her sense of inferiority. Sylvia and Ted's life at their Court Green country home in North Tawton also revealed her compensatory behaviour. Despite the domestic demands of their countryside estate, together with the added demands of motherhood after the birth of Sylvia's second child, the year spent at Court Green proved to be Sylvia's most productive in terms of her writing achievements (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although she had a very busy schedule, Sylvia industriously started farming with bees, applying herself to this new endeavour with the same determination that characterised all her endeavours (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009).

Even after Ted's departure, when she was caught in the grip of a severe depression, her industriousness revealed itself in her many efforts to maintain a stable home for her children and protect them from the trauma of their father's abandonment (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Her efforts included taking her children on outings, cooking decadent meals, helping to harvest the season's apples, collecting honey from the beehives, going for horse-riding lessons and interacting as cheerfully as always with the locals (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Unfortunately her efforts did nothing to dispel her feelings of despair and the reality of her growing depression, which manifested itself clearly in her poetry (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). In the final year of her life, her efforts to establish herself in London close to publishing houses, in the hope that she could generate money for herself (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009), was eventually outweighed by severe depression and the reality of practical problems from which she could not escape (Plath, 1992). Research has shown that negative self-appraisal and persistent feelings of inferiority are highly associated with depressive disorders (Allan & Gilbert, 1997; Gilbert & Allan, 1998; Gilbert, Allan, Brough, Melley & Miles, 2002).

Successful navigation of the fourth stage of psychosocial development results in the ego strength of competence, which Erikson (1968, p. 126) defined as "the free exercise of dexterity and intelligence in the completion of serious tasks unimpaired by an infantile sense of inferiority". Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) cautioned that unsuccessful navigation of the

psychosocial stages, prevents the development of ego strengths or virtues. Despite Sylvia's history of academic and professional accolades, she continued to be plagued by feelings of inferiority (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Even the letters she received from editors who expressed interest in her future literary works and encouraged her to write books, did nothing to dispel the feeling that she was not good enough (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). According to Wilson (2013) her life was characterised by a desperate striving towards an abstract concept of perfection that she knew she could never attain. In light of this, the researcher infers that Sylvia was unsuccessful in resolving the industry versus inferiority crisis and that she consequently did not acquire the ego strength of competence in all areas of her life. It is further surmised that unsuccessful navigation through the first four stages of psychosocial development negatively affected her ability to resolve the identity versus role confusion crisis of Stage 5. The findings pertaining to this stage are discussed in the following section.

8.3.5 Stage 5: Identity versus Role Confusion – Fidelity (12-20 years)

The fifth stage of psychosocial development marks the end of childhood and presents adolescents with the challenge of successfully resolving the conflict between ego identity and role confusion (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963; Gross 1987; Hamachek, 1990). This stage occurs between the ages of 12 and 20 and is characterised by physiological and anatomical changes, sexual maturity, cognitive development and social expectations. These changes force adolescents to re-evaluate themselves as they search for a sense of identity and prepare for adulthood (Maier, 1978; McAdams, 1994; Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al., 2009). Erikson's (1958, 1963, 1968, 1980) epigenetic principle is particularly significant during this fifth stage of psychosocial development in that the attainment of a sense of identity rests on the resolution of the sub-conflicts characteristic of the first four stages of childhood. The integration of previous skills, competencies, roles, wishes, expectations and the opportunities provided by society, allows the adolescent to find a principle of order whereby past, present and future form a coherent biography conducive to the unified experience of self (Blasi, 1988).

In the same way that the resolution of past crises is instrumental in shaping adolescent identity; so too are all the people whom adolescents turn to in their quest for close relationships. These usually include parents, teachers, neighbours and peers (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963; Maier, 1978; Watts et al., 2009). Society also plays a significant role in shaping adolescent identity in that it provides clear rites of passage and active support in the form of social institutions which allow for the clarification of roles that distinguish the adult from the child

(Boeree, 2006; Meyer et al., 2008). According to Erikson (1997), society also provides a psychosocial moratorium which allows the adolescent to postpone definitive commitment to a set identity. The difficult transition from childhood to adulthood, coupled with the adolescent's heightened sensitivity to social and historical change, can result in the experience of identity confusion which manifests in feelings of isolation, emptiness, anxiety, indecisiveness, lack of self-confidence, apathy, hopelessness about the future, depression and even suicide (Erikson, 1968, 1980; Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Shaffer & Kipp, 2007).

Successful resolution of the fifth stage of psychosocial development results in the ego strength of fidelity (Erikson, 1963, 1964, 1968, 1997). This is defined as the ability to sustain loyalty and commitment to chosen values, ideals, affiliations and social roles, despite the inevitable confusions and contradictions inherent in diverse value systems (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963, 1964, 1968, 1997; Markstrom et al., 1998; Meyer et al., 2008; Stevens, 2008).

8.3.5.1 Early Adolescence (1945 – 1947): Sylvia's Junior High School Years after World War II

Biographical facts pertaining to this period in Sylvia's life (see section 2.2.5) indicate that the beginning of her fifth stage of psychosocial development coincided with the end of World War II. It was in this period of optimism that Sylvia entered junior high school (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Apart from an outstanding academic record, she participated in a variety of extra-mural activities and appeared, to the outside world at least, to be a normal, happy teenager (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). The fifth stage is characterised by the adolescent's quest for a sense of identity, which Erikson (1958) described as the search for some meaningful resemblance between what one has come to see in oneself and what one's sharpened awareness tells one others judge and expect one to be. The attainment of identity thus involves making important decisions about who one is and what one will become. It is related to three categories: body, cognition and society; and results in commitment to three important facets that pave the way to adulthood, namely: commitment to an occupational identity; commitment to intimacy with a potential life partner; and commitment to a belief system or ideology (Crowne, 2009; McAdams, 1994), all of which allow for the establishment of what Erikson (1968) regarded as "a firm commitment to the freedom of self-realization" (p. 133).

With regard to the first of the three categories related to the attainment of identity, namely body, biographical material pertaining to this stage of adolescence attests to the fact that Sylvia had a ravenous appetite and that she developed acne (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Rapid bodily growth and the significant physiological and anatomical changes which

characterise this phase of development shake adolescents' trust in the mastery of their bodily functions and force them to re-evaluate themselves as they prepare for adulthood tasks (Maier, 1978; Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al, 2009). In Sylvia's case, the sense of mistrust which she carried with her as a result of an unsuccessfully resolved first stage, made her experience of the bodily changes in Stage 5 all the more traumatic. This would explain her extreme reaction to the onset of acne in early adolescence. Not only did it make her feel so self-conscious and unattractive that she would confine herself to her home for fear of embarrassing herself in public, it also prompted her to engage in self-cutting behaviour (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). At the tender age of 14 she attempted to harm herself by cutting her face (Wilson, 2013), and it is speculated that this self-cutting was a manifestation of her inner turmoil and identity confusion.

With regard to the second of the three categories related to the attainment of identity, Sylvia's cognitive abilities proved to be both a curse and a blessing in her life. Although her extraordinary talent for English facilitated her attainment of public approval and recognition, it also enslaved her, as she confirmed when she said: "there is no escaping the mind" (Butscher, 2003, p. 27; Wilson, 2013). Despite the fact that one of Sylvia's closest friends described her as being "all fun and laughter" (Wilson, 2013, p. 2, gallery section), beneath the façade of positivity and cheerfulness, lurked a dark and morbid teenager who often suffered from monstrous nightmares which included visions of murder, death and unspeakable horrors (Wilson, 2013). At the young age of 13, Sylvia began to keep a dream book in which she recorded her night-time visions of escape (Wilson, 2013). She used the nightmares as inspiration to write Gothic mystery stories which, although disturbing, provided an outlet through which she could express some of the darkness and morbidity which she hid inside herself (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Despite her efforts, the darkness and morbidity which she tried to keep hidden became increasingly overwhelming as adolescence progressed (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Erikson (1980) stated that confidence in one's ability to maintain inner continuity and sameness in accordance with the continuity and sameness of one's meaning for others, is a prerequisite for the development of a defined personality during adolescence. Erikson (1980, 1982) added that the development and consolidation of one's ego identity depends on successful resolution of each of the stages leading up to adolescence. The researcher speculates that Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of the crises leading up to adolescence, together with the discrepancy between her sense of self and the view others had of her, jeopardised her efforts to find her identity and contributed to her sense of role confusion.

Erikson (1997) highlighted that adolescence is a time of psychosocial moratorium in which the adolescent is permitted to postpone definitive commitment to a set identity. During this time, the adolescent has the freedom to actively experiment with numerous adult roles and explore a wide range of political, religious and economic ideologies before arriving at a complete decision about a tailor-made identity (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2005; Maier, 1978; Marcia, 1980, 2002; Meyer et al. 2008). Not only was Sylvia driven to experiment with everything in life, she also excelled at everything with which she experimented (Wilson, 2013). At the age of 14, in the holiday preceding ninth grade, she went through a collection of poems that she had written over the previous nine years and decided to select, arrange in chronological order, and copy by hand those that she considered to be her best (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She illustrated many of her poems with crayon and ink drawings and called her homemade anthology *Poems by Sylvia Plath* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). This anthology is an example of Sylvia's commitment to an occupational identity. Her poem *Fireside Reveries* which was published in *The Phillipian* in the same year that she turned 15, bears further witness to her commitment to an occupational identity. The poem not only captured Sylvia's zealous aspiration to be great; it also expressed her belief that the direction of her life would involve a literary career (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

The inference can thus be made that even at this young age, Sylvia's developing sense of identity was incorporating literary themes and that some striving towards continuity of experience was probably already present in her thoughts about a future career. This affirms Erikson's premise that ideology is particularly significant at this stage, since it presents adolescents with different social values and beliefs to be explored as they strive to develop their identities (Erikson, 1963; Stevens, 2008).

Erikson (1963) posited that, apart from the development of an individual sense of identity, adolescence also entails the search for a social identity as young people become increasingly focused on how their view of themselves compares to the view which society has of them. According to biographical data, family, close friends and authority figures like teachers saw Sylvia as being polite, respectable and caring (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The fact that she was elected as president of her home room within only a week of entering eighth grade, attests to her popularity and to the fact that she presented a positive, cheerful disposition to society (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

As adolescence progressed, however, the dark, morbid side of her personality seemed to increase, and her adolescent contemporaries often described her as a "loner" and "a daydreamer", on account of her frequent retreats from society into a private, secret universe

where the self had “supernatural powers” (Butscher, 2003, p. 14). Sylvia’s tendency to write cruel comments about those close to her affirms the duality of her personality (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Coupled with this duality, was Sylvia’s tendency to project onto those around her, fantasies, wishes and motivations which often had no bearing on reality (Wilson, 2013). The discrepancy between reality and Sylvia’s imaginary world, or what Wilson (2013, p. 72) referred to as “*the spirit of Ariel*”, can be seen as a manifestation of her conflict between ego identity and role confusion. The researcher infers that, although the adolescent Sylvia had the opportunity to construct a social identity based on her popularity and amiable outer disposition, this was undermined by the contradictory duality of her personality which manifested as a type of splintered identity.

The duality of Sylvia’s personality also revealed itself in her emerging sexuality. Her adolescent diary entries attest to the fact that she was trapped in the conflict between her growing sexual desires and her efforts to control what society had taught her to believe was “the impure side of her personality” (Wilson, 2013, p. 67). The researcher speculates that the unsuccessful resolution of the four crises leading up to adolescence resulted in the discrepancy between Sylvia’s inner reality of despair and her outer façade of perfect amiability. This discrepancy was aggravated by the fact that Sylvia was trapped in a hypocritical society governed by artificial rules of religious and social propriety, which stifled the natural expression of personal desire (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The ever-widening discrepancy between superficial appearances and inner realities obscured Sylvia’s insight into her identity, making it all the more difficult for her to resolve the crisis of Stage 5. The discrepancy between her outer façade of perfect amiability and her inner reality of turmoil and despair is aptly captured in the following journal entry: “I have the choice of being constantly active and happy or introspectively passive and sad. Or I can go mad by ricocheting in between” (Plath, 1982, p. 24). This corresponds with Erikson’s delineation of syntonic and dystonic dispositions, and the importance of finding a balance between the two extremes (Erikson et al., 1986). Sylvia’s experience of herself as being fragmented into many different and often conflicting identities became a recurring theme in her life. She accurately described the experience of lacking a secure identity when she wrote: “And I sit here without identity: faceless... There is so much, and I am torn in different directions...” (Plath, 2000, pp. 26 - 27). Despite the plethora of accolades and the myriad of friends, boyfriends and activities which characterised Sylvia’s junior high school year, the conflict within her generated a level of pain that she could not explain to anyone. It is with this secretly-held pain that she commenced high school.

Sylvia's continued struggle to resolve the conflict between identity and role confusion, as well as the psychosocial moratorium phase during her high school years, are discussed in the subsequent section.

8.3.5.2 Middle Adolescence (1947 – 1950): Sylvia's High School Years during the McCarthy Era

Biographical facts pertaining to Sylvia's high school years are presented in section 2.2.6. The researcher surmises that Sylvia's enthrallment with her new English teacher, Wilbury Crockett, and her admittance to his elite group of superior intellectuals, named Crocketeers (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013), fuelled her academic ambitions and reinforced her commitment to an occupational identity in the field of English literature. Sylvia flourished in the climate of academic rigour which high school offered, and although she received praise and recognition for her extraordinary intellectual talents, the fact that she continued to be plagued by feelings of inferiority, social awkwardness and self-doubt (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013) attests to the fact that she was unsuccessful in navigating the psychosocial conflict between identity and role confusion.

In an effort to overcome the social awkwardness of early adolescence and be accepted by her contemporaries, Sylvia joined the high school sorority, Sub-Deb (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Membership to this sorority entailed submitting oneself to an initiation week characterised by personal and public humiliation (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia initially felt flattered to be invited to join this elite sorority, and although it provided the opportunity for her to expand her social identity and increase her popularity, the researcher surmises that her already-existing sense of inferiority and role confusion would have been aggravated by her membership to a group which subjected its members to humiliating initiation practices and which treated non-members in a condescending manner (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The fact that she wrote about the experience years later attests to the negative effect which it had on her, as can be seen in her comment about the sinister nature of popularity, which she claimed "leached a girl of her individuality" (Plath, 2008, p. 56).

The fact that Sylvia felt "leached... of her individuality" (Plath, 2008, p. 56) reaffirms the absence of a sense of identity. According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, a sense of identity is associated with one's conscious sense of uniqueness, as well as one's unconscious striving towards continuity of experience (Louw, 2017; Stevens, 2008). Erikson's theory also postulates that the malignant tendency of repudiation emerges from lack of identity and that this manifests in adolescents who reject both their membership to the adult world and

their own need for an identity (Boeree, 2006; Erikson & Erikson, 1997). Sylvia's diary entries attest to the fact that, even though she regarded herself as being set apart from others, she also longed to liberate herself of her identity so that she could take on the perspectives of those she wanted to write about (Plath, 2001; Wilson, 2013).

Adolescents who struggle to resolve the identity crisis of Stage 5 often display a deep sense of devotion to things or individuals whom they perceive as role models (Coetzee, 2017; Erikson, 1958). Sylvia associated her father with an idyllic sea-side childhood brought to an abrupt end by his death (Schultz, 2005e). Although she idolised her father and even compared him to a kind of sea god after his death, the ambivalence of her emotions is captured in her later father-centred poems such as *Electra on Azalea Path*, *Full Fathom Five*, *Little Fugue*, *Daddy* and *The Colossus* (Walder, 1976; Wilson, 2013). According to Malcolm (1995), many regard the death of Sylvia's father as "the shadow-event of her life, the wound from which she never recovered" (p. 34). The poems written by Sylvia during her high school years not only reflect the wound, they also express trademark Plathian themes, including the enigmatic nature of identity, the terror of self-knowledge and the sinister nature of deceptively normal day-to-day existence (Wilson, 2013).

Given Sylvia's strong attachment to her father, it is not surprising that she found a father figure in Mr. Crockett – a man who had all of Otto Plath's intellectual virtues, but none of his supposed imperiousness and despotism (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Not only did Mr. Crockett challenge Sylvia intellectually, he also inspired her to write about subjects such as the Korean War and the atomic bomb, thus affording her the opportunity to follow her father's pacifist politics (Rollyson, 2013). Mr. Crockett thus served as a positive role model who could, according to Erikson's psychosocial theory, (a) allow for continuity of experience, since he exhibited all Otto Plath's virtues and could serve as a father-figure to Sylvia; (b) facilitate the clarification of roles for Sylvia as she grappled to resolve her identity crisis; and (c) support and encourage her in her commitment to a belief system or ideology. Mr. Crockett was one of the few people in Sylvia's life who could see beneath her outer façade of perfect manners and grooming (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her physical attractiveness, combined with her willingness to please, not only consolidated her position as class star, but also kept hidden the encroaching darkness which haunted her and flung her between tides of emotional instability (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

The ever-widening discrepancy between superficial appearances and inner realities obscured Sylvia's insight into her identity, which she often experienced as fragmented into many different and often conflicting identities (Wilson, 2013). This correlates with Erikson's

(1968) premise that the symptoms of identity confusion include “a split of self-images... a loss of center and a dispersion” (p. 212). The fact that Sylvia manifested all the symptoms of identity confusion, including feelings of isolation, emptiness, anxiety, indecisiveness, lack of self-confidence, hopelessness about the future and depression (Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Shaffer & Kipp, 2007) attests to the cumulative effect of past unresolved crises and the extent of her identity confusion. The conflict between her inner world of chaos and confusion and her outer façade of perfect bourgeois respectability was nowhere more evident than at this stage in her life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013), and would explain why she sometimes withdrew into bizarre and inaccessible moods, and even social isolation. According to Erikson (1968), these behaviours are also manifestations of identity confusion, as affirmed by Mr. Crockett, who described Sylvia as having the ability to “seal herself off” from others and to manipulate them “for what they could give her” (Butscher, 2003, p. 35).

Sylvia’s identity crisis also manifested in her infantile insistence on black and white extremes, evident in the physical manifestation of her intense depressive episodes whenever she was plagued by sinusitis or menstrual pains (Butscher, 1976, 2003). The researcher speculates that she compensated for the confusion engendered by the identity crisis by being excessively disciplined in her academic and writing endeavours (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia also found release from her psychological turmoil and inner confusion through her written confessions to her mother. This act of purging her delicate frame of mind to Aurelia became increasingly compulsive and, although cathartic, eventually became a curse to Sylvia (Wilson, 2013). Her journal entries and letters to her mother reflect not only her identity confusion, but also her desire to possess a divine insanity which could transform everyday experiences into something extraordinary, thus turning her into a type of deity (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2008; Wilson, 2013).

According to Erikson’s theory, the maladaptive tendency which emerges from excessive ego identity development is fanaticism. This refers to those adolescents who become so involved in a particular societal role or subculture, that they seem incapable of tolerating other views or belief systems and cling rigidly to their membership of cults and ideologies (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1986, 1989; Stevens, 2008). The researcher surmises that Sylvia’s excessive identification with the written word would explain her fanatical efforts to immortalise her writing. Her attachment to words as a substitute for love (Wilson, 2013) and her identification with the physicality of words began in childhood (see section 8.3.2.1) and became all the more pervasive as she got older. In a letter written to her friend Eddie Cohen during adolescence, Sylvia captured perfectly her inner confusion when she referred to “the

chaos that seethes behind my exterior” (Wilson, 2013, p. 106). The researcher speculates that Sylvia’s fanatical attachment to words emerged in response to her desperate striving for ego identity. The overt manifestation of her fanaticism can be seen in her devotion and staunch adherence to the ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche. Not only did Sylvia use his ideas in some of her poems, she also incorporated them in the personal mythology which she created regarding her life (Wilson, 2013). The most chilling parallels between Nietzsche’s ideas and Sylvia’s life are captured in the poems *Lady Lazarus* (based on Sylvia’s 1953 suicide attempt) and *Kindness*, written two weeks before her suicide in 1963. In light of the fact that Sylvia sacrificed everything in her life so as to immortalise her writing, Nietzsche’s advice to ambitious writers to “write with blood” (Nietzsche, 1932, p. 72) and to “Die at the right time” so as to ensure eternal fame (Nietzsche, 1932, p. 125) can be seen as omens in Sylvia’s life, ironically brought to life when she wrote in the poem *Kindness*: “The blood jetty is poetry / There is no stopping it” (Hughes, 1981, p. 27). Rollyson (2013) confirmed Sylvia’s fanaticism with regard to the written word and the power it had over Sylvia when he stated: “She would live and die by it” (p. 15).

Mr. Crockett was not the only person who contributed to Sylvia’s commitment to a belief system or ideology. In the same year that she started high school, she began a pen-pal correspondence with a German teenager called Hans Joachim Neupert (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson). In Hans, Sylvia found not only a correspondent through whom she could sharpen her writing skills, but also a confidante with whom she could share her ideas about war (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia’s correspondence with Hans spanned a five-year period and was greatly motivated both by her strong feelings about the war and her keen interest in discovering what the war felt like to a young teenage boy living in a war-torn environment (Rollyson, 2013). Erikson (1963) maintained that peers play an important role in the adolescent’s attainment of identity since they form important intermediaries between the developing adolescent and society at large. Through Hans, Sylvia had the opportunity to consolidate her early pacifist ideas and to commit more intensely to her pacifist ideology. As with all the things that Sylvia was passionate about, this pacifist ideology would find expression through her writing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In 1950, when the United States revealed that it would continue to support the development of the hydrogen bomb, 18-year-old Sylvia and her friend Perry Norton, wrote a letter to the *Christian Science Monitor* expressing their outrage (Wilson, 2013). The letter, entitled *Youth’s Plea for World Peace*, was published a month later and criticised both the arms race and the absurd notion that a weapon of mass destruction could be created to bring about world peace (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia detested the

idea of war and saw no purpose to it except as a manifestation of extreme anti-communism (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). She defined pacifism not only as the rejection of war, but also as the establishment of a sense of solidarity with other people from other places (Rollyson, 2013). What upset Sylvia was the way war destroyed everything, including acts of generosity and kindness; and she believed strongly that peace could be attained through the spread of world federalism (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Erikson highlighted the importance of ideology for adolescents, since the exploration of different social values and beliefs forms an integral part of the development of their own identities (Coetzee, 2017; Erikson, 1963; Stevens, 2008). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's commitment to her pacifist ideology provided her with the opportunity to consolidate her identity based on continuity of experience, since it incorporated the values modelled by her father and Mr. Crockett, and encouraged by her peer correspondent, Hans. Unfortunately, Sylvia's efforts at consolidating her identity were undermined both by previously unresolved crises and by the socio-historical climate which reigned at the time. Despite the unsettling effects of the Cold War, the Korean War and McCarthyism on the country's politics, 1950s America was characterised by a complacent attitude of conformity and consumerism, and Sylvia was not only intensely aware of the safe, suburban upbringing of the typical American teenager, but also intensely disgusted in the country's seeming indifference to war (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The sense of mistrust which emanated from her unsuccessful resolution of Stage 1, was thus reinforced by a socio-cultural milieu which Sylvia considered to be hypocritical. The researcher thus surmises that Sylvia's efforts at establishing her identity in high school were thwarted. Her anti-war poem, *Bitter Strawberries*, based on her holiday work experience on *Lookout Farm* after she graduated from high school, not only depicts the socio-cultural realities of America in the 1950s, it also aptly captures Sylvia's sentiments about war. Perhaps equally apt, is Butscher's (2003, p. 38) notion that the strawberries which turn "thick and sour" whilst the horseflies "buzzed, paused and stung "like bombers", foreshadowed the bitter pain that awaited Sylvia in college and that would eventually consume her.

The next section explores the magnitude of this pain and provides supporting evidence as to why Sylvia failed to attain the ego virtue of fidelity, which results from successful resolution of the identity versus role confusion crisis.

8.3.5.3 *Later Adolescence (1950 – 1952): Sylvia’s Junior College Years at the Time of the Cold War*

Although Erikson posited that society plays an important role in shaping adolescent identity by providing social institutions which allow for the clarification of roles (Boeree, 2006; Meyer et al., 2008), Sylvia’s entry into Smith College was compounded by the fact that she felt socially inferior to her peers since she did not come from a wealthy, socially-elite family (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although she relished the idea of leaving home and having the space she felt she needed from her mother and her family (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013), her feelings of inferiority and her fears of inadequacy made her isolate herself socially to the point that she remained an outsider (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The effect of this was that some of the college girls looked at her suspiciously, often making nasty remarks both behind her back and in her face (Wilson, 2013). Fortunately, Haven House on Smith Campus was home to many ambitious individualists and brilliant academic loners with whom Sylvia could associate and compete in an inspiring, yet safe academic environment (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In accordance with Erikson’s (1963) postulation, Sylvia was temporarily helped through much of her discomfort in her college years by forming cliques with these individualists and loners, who stereotyped themselves, their ideals and their enemies.

Apart from a few college friends, Sylvia also came to depend on a pen-pal correspondence with Eddie Cohen – a 21-year-old Chicago student majoring in English (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Eddie, who had written Sylvia her first fan letter, became not only Sylvia’s informed literary critic, but also her confidante (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia came to depend heavily on Eddie’s analyses of her psyche, she dreaded the thought of actually meeting him in person, because she felt that their relationship existed only in a “paper world” which to her, was “unreal” (Rollyson, 2013, p. 32). The unreal quality of their relationship gave Sylvia the freedom to write openly to Eddie about her innermost desires, fears and questions about life’s complexities (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia rejected Eddie as a romantic prospect, he continued to write and respond to her letters, displaying an accurate understanding of the complexities of her personality (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The fact that Sylvia felt free to reveal herself to Eddie without the danger of psychosocial or romantic involvement meant that he could respond openly to her questions about relationships and sex (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). The researcher thus speculates that Eddie provided Sylvia with the opportunity to explore her sexual identity, thereby paving the way to the discovery of her capacity for commitment to intimacy with a potential life

partner. Unfortunately, this exploration and discovery was undermined by Sylvia's insecurities and the socially conservative tradition and double standard which prevailed at the time (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

Sylvia's journal entries and letters written throughout her college dating years bear witness to the contradictory and irreconcilable pressures placed on young women in America during the 1950s (Gill, 2008). They were expected to date distinguished young college men with promising futures, yet they had to ensure that they remained chaste; they had to excel academically to ensure self-improvement, yet they had to keep in mind that the ultimate goals in life were marriage, children and a home (Gill, 2008; Plath, 1992; Plath, 2003). According to Gill (2008), this period in history preceded what came to be known as second wave feminism, and had a profound influence on Sylvia's life. Her letters to her mother speak of the prejudice against girls who were too clever, and in her journals and her semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar*, Sylvia exposed the devastating effects that the ideologies of that historical period placed on women (Gill, 2008; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). Her poem, *Lady Lazarus*, tells of a woman who is forced to perform a striptease, for which she is condemned (Plath, 1966b). The poem captures not only Sylvia's personal feelings of inner turmoil, but also her disdain for the double standards of American life in the late 1950s (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Gill, 2008; Nelson, 2002). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's unsuccessful navigation of the first psychosocial crisis and the resultant sense of mistrust was reinforced by the double standards embedded in the ideological changes of the time. These double standards caused a cultural shift in all aspects of life, not least of which was the role of women in the changing dynamics of American family life (Gill, 2008).

Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1980) maintained that the integration of identity is characterised by a dual process whereby the adolescent can differentiate from the social mass and develop a sense of individualism, yet simultaneously become more fully a member of society by internalising its cultural norms and playing different roles. In Sylvia's case, it is inferred that the integration of her identity was impeded by her lack of trust in a society whose expectations were at odds with her intellectual, emotional and physical ambitions (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000). For Sylvia, who had such high ambitions to achieve greatness, the contradictory roles expected of women and the strain of keeping up appearances, left her feeling lost and stripped of identity (Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013). Her feelings of inferiority, coupled with her persistent unsureness regarding her own identity, made her all the more desperate to fit in, to the point that she allowed her culture to impinge on her (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). This fuelled her confusion and intensified her anxiety

and depression. Her emotionally tumultuous relationships with men, together with her physical vulnerability whenever she suffered from emotional trauma, attest to her identity confusion.

Sylvia's emotional turmoil during her junior college years was also aggravated by the fact that even home had lost its value as a place of security and comfort. She ascribed one of the reasons for her deep depression over her first Christmas holiday back at home from college, to the fact that she had to fake being happy in front of her mother (Wilson, 2013). In a letter to a friend she acknowledged that her mother had worked hard and sacrificed her health for her two children, and she felt that the least she could do to convince her mother that her efforts had not been in vain, was to pretend to be happy with life (Plath, 2017; Wilson, 2013). The strain of maintaining the pretence, coupled with the realisation that she could not depend on her mother for emotional support, added to her anxieties about the everyday responsibilities of adult life and worsened her depression. She started to question not only her confidence to be an independent adult who could earn her own living, but also the deeper-rooted problem of the mystery of her own identity (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

The researcher surmises that, apart from Sylvia's mistrust in 1950s society as a provider of equal opportunities for women, Sylvia's unsuccessful navigation of the stages preceding adolescence made her doubt her ability to do what needed to be done as an independent adult (autonomy) and made her question her capacity for taking the initiative and being sufficiently industrious to earn her own living (initiative, industry). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1980) maintained that adolescents stop experimenting with different social roles when they have achieved integration of identity. This process is characterised by differentiation from the social mass, yet simultaneous integration with society as an independent adult who is certain about one's identity and who has the capacity for being loyal to one's commitments, ideals, values and social roles (Crowne, 2009; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Markstrom et al., 1998; Meyer et al., 2008; Stevens, 2008). It is speculated that Sylvia did not achieve identity integration and that she prioritised her literary accomplishments to compensate for her identity crisis and the confusion which emanated from this crisis. Her journal entries, in which she expressed her wish to be everyone so that she could come back and write about her thoughts and emotions as the many people she had been (Plath, 2000), provide the most poignant evidence of her identity crisis, her obsession with the concept of individual consciousness and her eternal dissatisfaction with herself, despite her high achievements (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's constant striving to achieve more, to be more intelligent and to be more attractive than she felt she was, is a further manifestation of her lack of self-confidence as a result of role confusion. In her journal she declared that she was envious of all those who could think, write, draw, ski, look, live and love

better than she could (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). The fact that Sylvia felt dissatisfied and inexplicably sad, despite her remarkable accomplishments, also attests to her identity crisis. She attributed her dissatisfaction and unhappiness to her realisation that she was incapable of inhabiting a multitude of different personalities. She also resented having to choose between alternatives and her belief that this was perhaps why she wanted to be everyone – “so no one can blame me for being I. So I won’t have to take the responsibility for my own character development and philosophy” (Plath, 2000, p. 44) is perhaps the most overt manifestation of her fragmented identity.

When Sylvia returned to Smith College after her first Christmas holiday at home, her depression worsened at the news that one of her closest college friends, Ann Davidow, had decided to leave college (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia’s journal entries at the time reflect her distress not only because of the loss of a friend whom she felt balanced her and provided psychological support, but also because she feared the end of the world due to nuclear war (Plath, 2000). She described the Cold War period following World War II as a “dark age” and compared the demise of America to that of the Roman Empire (Plath, 2000, p. 32). Sylvia’s distress and anxiety, as well as her hopelessness about the future, attest to her identity crisis, since these feelings correspond with Erikson’s description of an adolescent experiencing identity confusion (Hall & Lindsey, 1978; Shaffer & Kipp, 2007).

According to Gill (2008) the Cold War period in America following World War II was characterised by profound contradictions which greatly influenced Sylvia’s cultural and literary milieu and which the researcher surmises, contributed to Sylvia’s identity confusion. Although it was a time of peace and relative abundance (due to the financial benefits which America had acquired by providing supplies to allied forces during World War II), it was also a time of extreme anxiety and uncertainty. Factors such as the conflict between American right and left wing politics, the threat of communist infiltration and the Soviet Union’s superiority in developing technology for the creation of the atomic bomb, all contributed to America’s growing sense of vulnerability, and added momentum to the anti-communist drive known as McCarthyism (Gill, 2008). The uncertainty and pervasive culture of suspicion gave rise to organisations such as the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which sought to systematically purge America of all traces of communism (Gill, 2008).

The fact that Sylvia’s beloved high-school teacher, Mr. Crockett (who was a pacifist), was questioned for his alleged involvement in communism, just as Sylvia’s father had been questioned for suspected pro-German leanings (Wilson, 2013), would undoubtedly have fuelled Sylvia’s insecurities and her disdain for the double standards of the 1950s American

society which she inhabited (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Gill, 2008; Nelson, 2002). According to the researcher, this would have thwarted Sylvia's attempts at successful identity integration, preventing her from acquiring the ego virtue of fidelity. This made it difficult for Sylvia to commit to a specific role and negatively affected her feelings about herself as well as her relationships with other people. Her relationships with the men she dated during her college years exemplified perfectly the consequences of Sylvia's identity confusion within the context of a hypocritical society which stifled women's ambitious aspirations (Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013).

In her efforts to live up to a society which dictated that she sacrifice her ambitions and subordinate herself and her creativity to the will of a potential future husband (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013), Sylvia displayed the tendency to forge a false identity just to be accepted by others (Wilson, 2013). She confirmed this tendency in one of her journal entries when she admitted that she was more intrigued by the idea of the love story than by love itself (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). Her belief that romantic love entailed sacrificing one's ambitions and one's love of self, plunged her into an even deeper state of depression and hampered both her commitment to a romantic relationship, as well as her commitment to a religious ideology. This is clearly exemplified when she wrote:

The most saddening thing is to admit that I am not in love. I can only love (if that means self-denial – or does it mean self fulfillment? Or both?) by giving up my love of self and ambitions – why, why, why, can't I combine ambition for myself and another?... But God, who is to say? You, God, whom I invoke without belief, only I can choose, and only I am responsible. (Plath, 2000, p.102)

Torn by society's alternatives of spinsterhood and marriage, and by the extreme pressure imposed on her by her own splintered identity, Sylvia felt herself slipping deeper and deeper into a vacuum of despair during her college years (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her emotionally tumultuous relationships with men also fuelled her depressive state (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013), as did the pressure to present herself to the world as an unfragmented, confident, complete individual (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In her letters she wrote about her desire to gather all her different selves together (Plath, 2017; Wilson, 2013), and she confirmed in her journal her "strange" ability to "be so many women to so many people" (Plath, 2000, p. 137). Her journal entries attest to her inner turmoil and the fact that she felt as though she was drowning in a sea of negative emotions, including fear, envy, doubt, self-hate and madness (Plath, 2000). These negative emotions affirm Sylvia's identity crisis, as does her college paper entitled *Dialogue*, in which she described her identity as being nothing more than an empty shell (Wilson, 2013).

The researcher surmises that Sylvia's identification with brilliant female writers like Virginia Woolf and Sara Teasdale – both of whom committed suicide – compounded Sylvia's identity crisis. Although she aspired to be a great writer, like Woolf and Teasdale, the antithesis between her ambitious aspirations and society's socio-cultural expectations, only served to intensify her depression (Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013), leading to the self-destructiveness that was evident in the lives of many great female writers of that time (Jacobus, 2012).

By the end of Sylvia's junior college years, her depression was so severe, that she saw suicide as her only solution (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Irrespective of all the academic and public accolades which she managed to garner by the end of junior college, her journal entries attest to the fact that nothing could dispel the feeling that she was not good enough (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Nonetheless, Sylvia resolved to continue wearing the mask of normality until she found the strength to commit suicide (Wilson, 2013). In her journal, she wrote: "Masks are the order of the day – and the least I can do is cultivate the illusion that I am gay, serene, not hollow and afraid" (Plath, 2000, p. 151).

The researcher infers that Sylvia's masks exemplify perfectly Erikson's (1968) "split of self-images- a loss of center and a dispersion" (p. 212), which he claimed are the symptoms of identity confusion. The full extent of Sylvia's identity crisis is aptly captured in her analogy of a tree with a multitude of branches and offshoots (Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia used this analogy in *The Bell Jar* to describe her insecurities and the predicament of being an aspiring female writer in 1950s America, the researcher is of the opinion that it accurately captures the dilemma of her identity crisis. The analogy suggests that Sylvia felt so fragmented and overwhelmed by the myriad of identities with which she was confronted, that she withdrew from committing herself definitively to a set identity (Erikson & Erikson, 1997). In this confused state characterised by hopelessness and despair, Sylvia not only sabotaged her successful navigation of the next stage, namely intimacy versus isolation, she also set in motion the foreboding prophecy of her death when she alluded to the fact that her inability to make up her mind would ultimately starve her to death.

I saw my life branching out before me like the green fig tree in the story. From the top of every branch, like a fat purple fig, a wonderful future beckoned and winked. One fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor ... I saw myself sitting in the crotch of this fig tree, starving to death, just because I couldn't make up my mind which of the figs I would choose. I wanted each and every one of them, but choosing one meant losing all the rest, and, as I sat there, unable

to decide, the figs began to wrinkle and go black, and, one by one, they plopped to the ground at my feet. (Plath, 1963, p.73)

8.3.6 Stage 6: Intimacy versus Isolation – Love (20 – 40 years)

The sixth stage of psychosocial development marks the first adult stage and is characterised by the young adult's investment of developmental energies in the pursuit of career, work and love (Hamachek, 1990; Maier, 1978; Schaffer, 2002). This stage, which occurs between the ages of 20 and 40, depends most crucially on successful resolution of prior crises, since they are most likely to re-occur during this period of development if they have not been resolved previously (Watts et al, 2009). Successful development is particularly dependent on successful identity formation during adolescence since it provides the young adult with a secure sense of self-definition, allowing for fusion of identities without the fear of losing oneself (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1963, 1968; Marcia, 2002; Watts et al., 2009). In the same way that adolescence requires the development of a sense of identity, so the first stage of adulthood requires a sense of shared identity, which western culture accommodates through the ritual of marriage, allowing for the celebration, fostering and protection of intimacy between people who love each other (Hamachek, 1995; Meyer et al., 2008; Stevens, 2008).

Erikson (1963, 1968), who was strongly influenced by the psychoanalytic school of thought, used the term *genitality* to describe the physical force of the sixth stage of psychosocial development. This stage thus marks the beginning of genuine, mutually interactive and genital sexuality, distinct from the phallic or vaginal strivings of earlier development where sexuality centers around the formation of identity (Erikson, 1963, 1968). The acts of loving and working constitute fundamental goals of Erikson's intimacy versus isolation stage.

Erikson (1963, 1968) emphasised that identity formation must be well-established before young adults can commit themselves to sharing their identities in a mutually satisfying and ethical relationship that requires sacrifice and compromise. The more certain young adults are of their identities, the more successfully they can establish psychologically intimate relationships with others (Erikson, 1980). Failure to accomplish such intimate relationships with others and with one's inner resources ultimately leads to a profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation, which explains why suicide might be a highly prevalent risk at this stage of development (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Watts et al., 2009).

Successful integration of the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation leads to the ego virtue of love. In the context of Erikson's theory, love has evolutionary and generational value in that it transforms the love received throughout the childhood stages of development into the

care given to others during adult life (Erikson, 1964). Mutuality of devotion enables young adults to share mutual trust, work, procreation and recreation, all of which promote the development of their partnership, their children and society as a whole (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1963; Maier, 1978, 1988).

8.3.6.1 Adulthood (1953 – 1955): Sylvia’s Senior College Years and the Execution of the Rosenbergs

Biographical facts pertaining to this period in Sylvia’s life (see section 2.2.7.2) indicate that the first two years of Sylvia’s sixth stage of psychosocial development coincided with her final student years at Smith College. Erikson’s (1950, 1963, 1968, 1974) assertion that the success of the sixth stage depends most crucially on the successful resolution of prior crises, is supported by findings on Sylvia’s life. Erikson explained this by positing that for two individuals to engage in an intimate relationship, they must trust one another, be autonomous, exhibit initiative and industry, be sure of themselves and exhibit maturity both sexually and as productive members of society (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974; Morris & Maisto, 2002). The fact that the previously unresolved crises leading to the sense of mistrust, shame and doubt, guilt, inferiority and role confusion in Sylvia continued to occur throughout her adult life, attests to Sylvia’s unsuccessful resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis. Despite all her academic and literary accolades, including her acquisition of a prestigious guest editorship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York, Sylvia continued to be plagued by feelings of inferiority (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her journal entries bear witness to the fact that she felt undesirable to men, despite her many social conquests, and in her letters to her family, she confessed her insecurities and her inability to deal with high-pressure situations (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1992; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

Erikson (1980) emphasised that the establishment of a secure sense of identity during adolescence enables young adults to experience genuine intimacy with others, and even with the self. The more certain young adults are of their identities, the more successfully they can establish psychologically intimate relationships with others (Erikson, 1980). A strong ego is necessary to prevent the fear of ego loss in situations which may require self-abandon, for example, in sexual encounters and orgasms, close affiliations and friendships, and experiences of inspiration by teachers (Erikson, 1963). The avoidance of such experiences of interpersonal intimacy because of fear of a perceived loss of self may result in highly stereotyped and formal interpersonal relationships which lack fusion, spontaneity and warmth (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1980).

When one considers Sylvia's experience of her guest editorship at *Mademoiselle Magazine*, it is evident that her insecure sense of identity negatively affected her capacity for interpersonal intimacy. Cyrilly Abels, the managing editor to whom Sylvia was assigned, commented years later that Sylvia wore a stiff mask of unrelenting pleasantness which made her appear false and unspontaneous (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Emotionally, although she felt deeply, she did not give much of herself, except to very close friends (Wilson, 2013). The internship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* involved not only a heavy workload and immense pressure to meet deadlines, but also the expectation to attend social functions and appear in public to promote advertising and magazine sales. The young guest editors were thus expected to be both journalists and runway models on show for the magazine's advertising campaigns (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Consequently, the magazine's photographer accompanied the young girls on all their group outings, and took photographs of them at every opportunity (Butscher, 1976, 2003). To the self-conscious Sylvia, whose unsuccessful resolution of Stage 4 resulted in a profound sense of inferiority, the incessant public exposure made her feel all the more vulnerable and only served to aggravate her ever-increasing sense of distress (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). The researcher surmises that this propelled Sylvia to experience yet another identity crisis. In a letter to her mother, she admitted that life was so difficult and fast, that she sometimes wondered who she was (Plath, 1992). It is speculated that, to compensate for her weakness in relation to identity potential, Sylvia strengthened her façade of perfect self-control and social poise. Even the unedited graphologist's analysis of her handwriting, submitted during her stint at the magazine, indicated that Sylvia's weakness lay in her superficial, stilted behaviour and her rigid outlook (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Despite her inner turmoil and ever-increasing depression, Sylvia continued to play the part of a busy, efficient, well-balanced young girl (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The fact that she participated in arranged social activities with minimal emotional involvement, supports Erikson's premise that fear of a perceived loss of self can prompt young adults to avoid experiences of interpersonal intimacy (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1980). Sylvia's failure to accomplish such intimate relationships with others and with her own inner resources resulted in a profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation. This was reflected in her written reflections and letters, all of which conveyed her depression. In a letter to her brother, she confessed that her experiences in New York made her mind want to split open (Plath, 1992, 2018), and the fact that she used death imagery in the letter affirms the severity of her emotional turmoil (Wilson, 2013).

Sylvia's time in New York was made all the more difficult by her unsuccessful resolution of Stage 2, which resulted in her compulsive quest for perfection. Although Sylvia recognised that working for a national magazine was invaluable to her career as a writer, her striving for perfection made her workload all the more exhausting and affected her both physically and emotionally (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of Stage 3 also had a bearing on her physical and emotional well-being, as affirmed by her psychosomatic reaction to the Rosenberg executions, which took place in the month of her guest-editorship. Her condition only worsened when she returned home to find both her mother and grandmother afflicted by illness (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Apart from the physical strain of having to run the Plath household during this time, the news that her application to a Harvard writing course had been rejected put so much emotional strain on Sylvia that she fell into a severe depression (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her depression was aggravated by the fact that summer loomed before her like a wasteland, devoid of the structured routine which Sylvia believed gave her purpose (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson 2013). Her sense of purposelessness reaffirms her unsuccessful navigation of Stage 3 and explains her sense of purposeless detachment from life, as portrayed in her metaphor of the *Bell Jar* (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013).

After receiving the news that her application had been rejected, Sylvia considered enrolling for another course at Harvard, but gave up on the idea due to financial constraints (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In her journal she expressed her resentment about not being born into a wealthy family, and not having the financial resources to meet the following year's college expenses (Plath, 2000). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's financial predicament reinforced her sense of isolation since it prevented her from participating in campus activities which offered opportunities for interpersonal intimacy. Although she took the initiative to create her own disciplined structure of routine activities, nothing seemed to alleviate her depression and even those activities like writing, for which she had talent, became strenuous and difficult to accomplish (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1992; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In light of Sylvia's pervasive feelings of self-doubt and inferiority as a result of previously unresolved crises, it is surmised that her inability to accomplish those tasks at which she had always excelled, only served to reinforce her feelings of failure and inferiority. As Sylvia's symptoms worsened, she began to lose interest in all the activities she had ever loved (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Not only did she isolate herself by hardly ever leaving the house, thereby sabotaging her opportunities for interpersonal intimacy, she also became obsessed with thoughts that she was disappointing significant people in her life, like her beloved high-school

English teacher, Wilbury Crockett (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In a disturbing letter written to him during this period, Sylvia apologised for being a disappointment, adding that she surmised he would never want to see her again (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Apart from the physical manifestations of her depression, Aurelia's description of her daughter's state of mind, as well as Sylvia's very own journal entries which were fraught with negative images of fear, confusion, frustration and despair, suggest that she had all the symptoms of clinical depression (Plath, 1992; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). The researcher speculates that her sense of mistrust, as a result of unsuccessful resolution of Stage 1, extended at this stage in her life, into a feeling of insecurity in interpersonal relationships. According to Erikson's theory, an excessive expression of mistrust results in withdrawal characterised by depression and paranoia (Boeree, 2006). Erikson also posited that the profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation which results from unsuccessful resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis, explains why suicide might be a highly prevalent risk at this stage of development (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Watts et al., 2009). In light of Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of prior crises, which compounded the successful resolution of Stage 6, it is not surprising that she began to plan the method that she would use to commit suicide during this stage of her life. Although she continued to hide behind the mask of normality, subscribing as always to her mother's notion that a brave face had to be shown to the world, beneath the surface she was making plans to end the anguish of her inner turmoil. In one attempt she slit her wrists with a razor blade, and in another she tried drowning herself in the ocean, but neither of these methods worked and she eventually decided that she would use the traditional method of sleeping pills (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013) (see section 2.2.7.2).

Sylvia's psychiatric treatment at McLean Hospital after her suicide attempt, affirms the problematic nature of her interpersonal relationships. In her therapy sessions she opened up to her psychiatrist, Dr. Beuscher, about her deep-rooted resentment towards her mother, and her ever-increasing frustrations regarding the double standards of sexuality for men and women (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's resentment towards her mother and her frustrations towards society were rooted in her previously unresolved crises, and that these unresolved crises impeded her from establishing psychologically intimate relationships with others, thereby contributing to her profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation. The most pertinent manifestation of Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis can be found in her relationships with men (see section 2.2.7.2). According to Erikson's theory, young adults who are not sure of their identities may develop the maladaptive tendency of promiscuity, which characterises youths

who throw themselves too freely and easily into superficial acts of intimacy with lovers, friends, neighbours and even the entire community (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Erikson et al., 1989).

Sylvia's suicide attempt and the treatments which she had to undergo thereafter resulted in her not being able to graduate with her class that year. Fortunately she was awarded a substantial scholarship to attend Smith College the following year, as well as a scholarship to attend Harvard Summer School (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). At the time, she believed herself to be in love with a naval officer named Gordon Lameyer. This did not stop her, however, from dating other men, and she recorded all her encounters meticulously, within her journals (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). One of these encounters was with a Science professor named Edwin Akutowicz who reportedly raped her, resulting in internal tearing which caused her to haemorrhage. Despite this traumatic incident, Sylvia continued to date Edwin (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Although their relationship was short-lived, it marked the beginning of Sylvia's tendency to tolerate men who mistreated her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

That summer, Sylvia also dated a Harvard tutor named Ira O. Scott Jr., describing him as her new godfather (Wilson, 2013). On her 22nd birthday she wrote to Gordon Lameyer, expressing her undying devotion to him, yet at the same time she was dating both Edwin Akutowicz and Richard Sassoon (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Richard's letters to Sylvia make reference to him wanting to spank her and attest to her involvement in yet another unhealthy relationship marked by sado-masochism (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

After graduating from Smith College and garnering a Fulbright scholarship to study literature at Cambridge University in England, Sylvia seemed so infused with enthusiasm for the future, that she even appeared to be cured of her depression (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In her letters to her family she expressed her satisfaction with the fact that everything seemed to be going right for her and she enthusiastically declared that even an entire lifetime would be insufficient for all the projects which she planned to complete (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013).

Apart from her enthusiasm for her career prospects, Sylvia also developed an enthusiastic interest in Peter Davison, a well-educated, handsome young man of Scottish descent, who had graduated from Harvard and spent a year in Cambridge on a Fulbright scholarship (Wilson, 2013). Despite the fact that she was in a relationship with Richard Sassoon, Sylvia began entertaining the idea of marrying a man like Davison, and she even confessed to her mother that she was enthralled by his "Britishy" voice (Plath, 1992, pp. 176-177). Her interest in

Davison did not stop her from continuing her correspondence with both Sassoon and Lameyer and attests to her inability to establish secure interpersonal relationships characterised by genuine intimacy, spontaneity and warmth. This corresponds with Erikson's premise that avoidance of commitment to interpersonal intimacy emanates from a deep-rooted fear of losing one's sense of self, and often results in highly stereotyped and formal interpersonal relationships (Erikson, 1959, 1963, 1968, 1980). This would explain why the discrepancy between Sylvia's façade of confidence and her inner turmoil often resulted in her feeling alienated from herself and emotionally detached from her romantic conquests (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Davison, 1991; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's interest in Davison did not last long and she ended the relationship by telling him that she was in search of a man who could anchor her instability (Davison, 1991).

The researcher surmises that Sylvia's inner turmoil and her choices in men were the result of previously unresolved crises and the fact that she experienced her father's death as an abandonment. Not only did she write about her loss and the associated emotions in her journal, according to Wilson (2013), she also used her poetry as a vehicle to reify the lost father figure. After his death, Sylvia continued to recreate her father in her works, using words as a substitute for his absence and the love she craved from him (Wilson, 2013). In her diary, Sylvia admitted to being in search of "the gigantic paternal embrace of a mental colossus" (Plath, 2000, p. 163). Although she harboured the dream of marrying a "demigod of a man", she acknowledged the impossibility of that desire when she wrote: "I want a romantic nonexistent hero" (Plath, 2000, p. 182). The researcher surmises that this realisation prompted her to retreat into a world of isolation where she unconsciously manufactured her own personal absolute of male perfection through her poetry and literature (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

8.3.6.2 *Adulthood (1955 – 1956): Sylvia in Cambridge, England, at the Time of the Suez Crisis*

Biographical facts pertaining to this historical period were presented in section 2.2.8. Sylvia's departure for Cambridge both excited and frightened her (Butscher, 1976, 2003). It is speculated that the unsuccessful resolution of prior crises and the resultant feelings of mistrust, doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion were aggravated by the fact that she was leaving the familiarity of the only country she had ever known. This increased her already existing insecurities and anxieties, making her both emotionally and physically vulnerable. The physical manifestation of this vulnerability revealed itself within days of her starting the new term when she fell ill with a terrible sinus infection (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson,

2013). The fact that Sylvia was appalled by the English treatment of sinusitis (which included nothing more than an aspirin) attests to the psychosomatic nature of her illness, which Erikson (1968) maintained is the pathological consequence of over-compensation of unresolved conflicts over initiative. In America, the treatment included penicillin, cocaine sprays and sleeping pills, and the fact that Sylvia had come to depend on this choice of treatment, reinforces the speculation that her unfilled love needs prompted her to resort to self-soothing in the form of medicinal drugs. Her unfulfilled love needs not only fuelled her emotional vulnerability but also impeded her ability to establish the committed, genuine, interpersonal intimacy dictated by Erikson's sixth stage of psychosocial development. This inability manifested itself within days of her being on board the ship which took her to England, when she began a romance with Carl Shakin, a Physics graduate who was also on his way to England on a Fulbright scholarship (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) postulated that the sense of mistrust which results from unsuccessful resolution of Stage 1, not only impairs one's capacity to establish meaningful commitments, but also impairs one's sense of ethics. The fact that Sylvia was undeterred by the fact that Carl had married only eight weeks previously, attests to her lack of an ethical sense. This ethical sense can only be acquired if intimacy is valued and nurtured in a relationship and is a prerequisite for the successful resolution of Stage 6 (Massey, 1986).

Although Sylvia applied herself to embracing every aspect of her new life in Cambridge, as evidenced by her joining the Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC), her quest for perfection (unsuccessful resolution of Stage 2), as well as her fear of loss of self (unsuccessful resolution of Stage 6), outweighed her industrious attempts at overriding her feelings of inferiority and she wrote to her mother saying that she would rather be a mediocre writer than a bad actress (Plath, 1992). The researcher surmises that the ease with which Sylvia obtained the role of the mad poetess in the ADC and the fact that she adored performing for an audience, attests to the multiplicity of her mind and the identity confusion which she experienced as a result of unsuccessful resolution of Stage 5 of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development.

Erikson's premise that young adults who are not sure of their identities develop the maladaptive tendency of promiscuity (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Erikson et al., 1989) is clearly evident in Sylvia's dating behaviour during this stage in her life. She dated a plethora of young men (section 2.2.8), including Dick Wertz, a former roommate of Richard Sassoon. Their conversations about him prompted Sylvia to resume her correspondence with Sassoon, who arrived to visit her at Cambridge, only to be treated by her with indifference (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's tendency to be swept away by the idea of love, only to be disillusioned when

confronted by its imperfect reality (Butscher, 2003; Wilson, 2013), attests to her unsuccessful resolution of prior crises and her resultant incapacity to establish the ego strength of love. According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1964, 1968, 1980, 1997), love, which emerges from successful integration of the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation, is a dominant universal virtue and has both evolutionary and generational value in that it transforms the love received through the childhood stages of development into the care given to others during adult life.

The researcher surmises that Sylvia's childhood tendency of escaping to the magical, fantasy-world which she created for herself through her literature, continued into adulthood and served as compensation for her unsuccessfully resolved crises. Although an illusion, that fantasy world held the promise of all the ego strengths which she had failed to achieve in her life, including hope, willpower, purpose, competence, fidelity and love. Unfortunately, the realisation that this delusional fantasy world constituted an impossible ideal, hurled Sylvia into even greater distress and she ended up feeling more insecure and incompetent than ever before (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). In a letter to Olive Higgins Prouty, she expressed her distress about this realisation, adding that her lack of confidence and courage made her incapable of facing difficult situations in adulthood, thereby perpetuating her tendency of hiding in a delusional fantasy world to escape the pain that accompanied tragedy or loss (Plath, 1992).

In December 1955, Sylvia set off to meet Sassoon on what was supposed to be the romantic holiday of a lifetime (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although she had dated other men prior to the trip, she had decided that Sassoon was the only man whom she really wanted (Alexander, 1999). It thus came as a devastating shock to Sylvia when Sassoon suggested, at the end of their idyllic trip, that they end the relationship and start seeing other potential partners. He confessed that he had met a Swiss girl and that they had even discussed marriage (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's sense of loss not only intensified her insecurities, but that it also reinforced her sense of isolation. Erikson posited that individuals who fail to establish intimate relationships with others often retain a profound sense of isolation (Louw & Edwards, 1997; Erikson, 1968), which Sylvia manifested by breaking all contact with the men she had become acquainted with at Cambridge (Wilson, 2013). She often wore black, and in her journal she wrote impassionately about her cold and comfortless existence (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). Her anguish and heartache were intensified by the fact that *The New Yorker* had rejected her short story based on her holiday in France with Sassoon, and it is surmised that this reinforced her ever-present feelings of inferiority as a result of unsuccessful resolution of Stage 4 of Erikson's theory. To make matters worse, her grandmother was diagnosed with stomach cancer around

the same time and Sylvia felt that she had no one to whom she could turn for comfort, advice and guidance (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

At the time, Cambridge was experiencing one of its worst winters and Sylvia was constantly plagued by illness (Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that the bitter cold weather, her heavy work schedule, her poor health and the fact that she had received poor reviews for her poems published in a local college paper, reinforced the malignant tendencies of withdrawal (Stage 1), compulsive self-doubt (Stage 2), psychosomatic illness (Stage 3), inferiority (Stage 4), weakness in relation to identity potential (Stage 5) and isolation (Stage 6); and hurled Sylvia into a depression as severe as the one which had precipitated her suicide attempt in 1953. Sylvia believed that her suicidal depression was provoked by the relentless stresses that knawed at her, causing conflict between her ambitiousness and her fear of not attaining perfection (Alexander, 1999). In terms of Erikson's theory, Sylvia's quest for perfection is attributed to the unsuccessful resolution of Stage 2. In this vulnerable emotional state, Sylvia seemed to be constantly plagued by colds and flu, and she was advised by the medical personnel at the college infirmary to see a psychiatrist (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). In her psychiatric session, Sylvia opened up about her then recent break-up with Sassoon and her longing for an older role model at Cambridge (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). Although she did not speak to the psychiatrist about her father, in her journal entry she acknowledged her need to be comforted by a father figure and she wrote: "I cry so to be held by a man; some man, who is a father" (Plath, 2000, p. 199). The researcher attributes Sylvia's psychosomatic complaints to the unsuccessful resolution of Stage 3, and her sense of abandonment regarding her father, to the unsuccessful resolution of Stage 1. The fact that Sylvia continued to be plagued throughout the sixth stage by the negative outcomes of unsuccessfully resolved prior crises, including mistrust, self-doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion, affirms Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) premise that prior ego strengths need to be relatively well established for successful resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis.

It is speculated that Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of prior crises influenced not only her choice of men, but also the nature of her relations with these men. Erikson (1968, 1980, 1982) maintained that the inability to establish a secure identity impedes one's capacity for love in the purest sense and can even result in relationships characterised by competitiveness and aggression. Not only did Sylvia have a history of relationships marked by sado-masochism, her first encounter with her future husband, Ted Hughes, was also characterised by violent chemistry. At the party where they met for the first time, Ted wasted no time in grabbing Sylvia, ripping off her headband and earrings, and kissing her hard on the mouth. She

reciprocated by biting him so hard on the cheek that it bled and left a scar for days afterwards (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Despite the fact that Sylvia was attracted to Ted, she was still madly in love with Sassoon and wrote him a long letter begging him to see her in Paris (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's promiscuous nature, which Erikson (1968) identified as the maladaptive tendency of Stage 6, revealed itself when she continued flirting with Ted despite her passionate declaration to Sassoon (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Even her sleepless night of wild sex with Ted did not curb her obsessive impulse to get to Sassoon's apartment (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

The researcher surmises that the rejection which Sylvia experienced when the concierge told her that Sassoon had left for Spain, reinforced Sylvia's sense of mistrust, thereby aggravating her feelings of insecurity and depression. In this vulnerable state, Sylvia's dependency on Ted as a substitute for love was reinforced, and she went straight back to him upon her return to England (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). They were married on the 16th of June, 1956, less than six months after their first encounter (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). After the wedding, Aurelia (like her mother before her) accompanied the newlyweds on their honeymoon to Paris (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). This unusual arrangement reaffirms Sylvia's dependency on her mother as a result of unresolved prior crises. Although Sylvia idolised Ted and projected an idealised image of him and their marriage, their relationship was not without its faults (Rollyson, 2013). Ted had a tendency to be cruel and even violent when he lost his temper, and was described by Sylvia herself as having a tendency of "bashing people around" (Rollyson, 2013, p. 117). Prouty predicted that Ted would be an unfaithful husband and cautioned Sylvia against him, but Sylvia believed that she could manage Ted's sadistic and womanising tendencies, and she continued to portray him as the only man with whom she could find fulfillment (Rollyson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's dependency on Ted was fuelled by the fact that he resembled her father and always seemed to be at her disposal. Their shared affinity for literature would also have reinforced her attraction to Ted. Their union would have made him part of her fantasy world – a world created according to her idealistic, albeit unrealistic standards of perfection.

According to Erikson (1963), the first stage of adulthood requires a sense of shared identity characterised by the "utopia of genitality", which should include: (a) mutuality of orgasm, (b) with a loved partner, (c) of the opposite sex, (d) with whom one can enjoy work, procreation and relaxation and, (f) in so doing, secure for offspring all the stages of successful development. Although Erikson's theory has been criticised for being sexually biased in asserting that the utopia of genitality can only be achieved with a member of the opposite sex, his criteria sheds

light on the requirements for a successful interpersonal relationship, and can be applied to Sylvia and Ted's marriage. Although the researcher surmises that Sylvia's heightened sense of mistrust compounded and even prevented her capacity to experience complete "utopia of genitality", the fact that they shared a passion for their work certainly explains Sylvia's initial marital bliss. Sylvia and Ted both believed that they would learn a lot from each other. Ted valued Sylvia's perceptive and supportive reading of his work and she admired the grounded, bold, forceful style of his poetry (Rollyson, 2013). They both enjoyed sketching, and one of their favourite pastimes was a game involving the completion of quotations. Even in their differences, they seemed to complement each other. Ted taught Sylvia about the wonders of nature, while she attended to the business of typing and submitting their writing for publication, much like Sylvia's mother had done for her father (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In such ways Ted and Sylvia created a symbiotic partnership which enhanced their poetry (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Although Sylvia and Ted's marriage appeared to fulfill the conditions for the establishment of a mutually satisfying and ethical relationship that requires sacrifice and compromise (Erikson, 1963, 1968), it is inferred that Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of prior crises thwarted her attempts at successful integration of the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation. This is evident in Sylvia's excessive dependency on Ted and her inability to cope without him. Due to financial constraints and the fact that Sylvia wanted to keep their marriage a secret for fear that she might lose her Fulbright scholarship, after their marriage Sylvia returned alone to Cambridge for her final year, whilst Ted went back to Yorkshire to stay with his parents (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). The separation proved too much for Sylvia, and the fact that she fell into a depression, despite the success that she was garnering as a writer (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009), attests to her dependency on Ted.

According to Gross (1987), the ego strength of love which emanates from successful resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis, enables the individual to endure times of isolation. This is because successful resolution of the first stage of life gives rise to the ego virtue of hope. According to Erikson (1997), the life cycle reaches completion when the hope of infancy develops into the faith of old age. This faith becomes an invaluable virtue throughout life because it helps the individual to deal with disappointments and to face new challenges (Erikson, 1963, 1968). The fact that Sylvia lived for Ted and felt incapable of coping without him, attests to the extent of her over-dependency on him and affirms her unsuccessful navigation of Stage 1. Fortunately, Sylvia did not lose her Fulbright scholarship

when she announced that she was married, and by the end of that year, she and Ted were living together.

8.3.6.3 *Adulthood (1957 – 1959): Sylvia, the Newlywed Poetess in America in the Years of the Space Race*

Biographical facts pertaining to this historical period were presented in section 2.2.9. The historical period discussed in this section focuses on the development of Sylvia's literary career. During this stage, she completed her studies and seemed intent on devoting herself to the roles of wife, writer and teacher (Peel, 2002). It was during this stage that Sylvia and Ted left England to start a new life in America (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). According to Erikson (1963) a strong ego is a prerequisite for successful navigation through Stage 6 since it serves to prevent the fear of ego loss in situations which may require self-abandon. According to the available biographical material, Sylvia was exposed to a variety of situations requiring self-abandon during this stage of her development. These included her marriage and family life, her attempts to attain recognition as a world-class writer, her teaching role at Smith College, and her retreat at the Yaddo Artists' colony. Specific examples are given for each of these aspects at this stage of Sylvia's development.

- ***Marriage and Family Life:*** This stage of Sylvia and Ted's marriage was characterised by a mutually-inspiring working relationship (Hughes, 1998,2009; Rollyson, 2013). Not only did Sylvia and Ted support one another, their letters suggest that they inspired greatness in each other and that they were, as Sylvia had succinctly described, each other's counterparts (Hughes, 1998, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). In the same way that Aurelia had worked in the background to help her husband Otto gain recognition as an expert in his field, so too Sylvia typed Ted's work and submitted it for possible publication, in the hope that he would be recognised for his talent and genius (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Malcolm, 2012; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). Surely enough, thanks to Sylvia's tenacious submissions programme and her enthusiastic marketing of his work, Ted garnered more publishing accomplishments in the first year of their marriage than Sylvia had been able to accumulate in years (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In the same way that Sylvia glamorised Ted and put him on a pedestal, so too Ted ascribed his success and fulfillment as a writer to his marriage to Sylvia (Rollyson, 2013). Although this mutually-beneficial working relationship could have provided the ideal circumstances for successful integration of the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation, thereby allowing for the emergence of the ego virtue of love, evidence suggests that both Sylvia and Ted's personalities were volatile and often

violent in nature and that their marriage was not as harmonious as it seemed on the surface (Rose, 2013).

The researcher surmises that Ted's womanising tendencies fuelled Sylvia's sense of mistrust and heightened her insecurities. When Sylvia caught Ted in the company of a young, blonde female student at Smith College, the argument which ensued between them became so violent, that they physically assaulted one another (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). A day after the incident, Sylvia commented in her journal that within two years, Ted had managed to transform her "from a crazy perfectionist and promiscuous human-being-lover, to a misanthrope" (Plath, 2001, p. 386). Sylvia's feelings of insecurity about herself in relation to Ted, whom she considered to be her superior, coupled with the stress of not being able to fall pregnant, motivated her to resume her therapy sessions with her psychiatrist, Dr. Beuscher (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

Although Sylvia acknowledged that she and Ted were perfectly attuned to each other's moods and that this confirmed her belief that he was her counterpart, she resented her ever-growing dependency on him and compared their relationship to that of vampires who feed on one another (Plath, 2000). She used the same vampire imagery when she compared her mother to a walking vampire. In her therapy sessions with Dr Beuscher, she admitted that she hated her mother for having killed the only man who could have loved her steadily throughout life (Plath, 2000). She also opened up to Dr Beuscher about the fact that she often found herself being torn between blind devotion to Ted and anger because, like her father, she felt that he had failed to be there for her (Alexander, 1999). Her therapy sessions with Dr Beuscher revealed that her intense feelings of possessiveness and jealousy in her marriage stemmed from her unresolved feelings of abandonment about her father. Like Ted, Otto had loved her, but she felt that he had abandoned her (Plath, 2000). According to Bawer (2007), Sylvia found a father-substitute in Ted. She failed, however, to see the danger of relying on Ted to be everything her mother and father had not been (Rollyson, 2013). The researcher surmises that the volatile and unstable nature of her marriage to Ted reinforced the reoccurrence of prior crises. Sylvia's heightened sense of mistrust, doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion served as obstacles which made it impossible for her to resolve the intimacy versus isolation crisis.

It was at this time that Sylvia started including the theme of the dead father in her work (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). Prompted by Dr Beuscher's suggestion, Sylvia visited her father's grave for the very first time in her life (Rollyson, 2013). Her journal entry expressing her desire to dig up his grave as proof that he had really existed and really was dead (Plath, 2000), as well as her poem written in response to her experience of

the grave visit, attest to the extent of her feelings of isolation, chillingly captured in her prophetic confession, “It was my love that did us both to death” (Plath, 2008, p. 117).

- **Literary Career:** True to her nature, Sylvia continued to apply herself to her writing with discipline and dedication. Every day, she followed a strict writing routine starting at six in the morning before Ted left for work (Rollyson, 2013). She also made time to memorise the poems of well-known poets and work on love stories that she planned to submit to New York magazines (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). Her dedication paid off in that she succeeded in breaking through the British market with the publication of her poems *Black Rook in Raining Weather* and *Spinster* in the *London Magazine* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Despite these literary accomplishments, Sylvia struggled to produce anything noteworthy for her novel, tentatively entitled *Falcon Yard* (Rollyson, 2013). In her journal, she described the frustration at not being able to write, and her lack of confidence in her ability to write induced both anxiety and depression (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). This was aggravated by the fact that her work was often rejected by publishing companies. The researcher surmises that Sylvia’s inability to write reignited the feeling of inferiority which emerges from unsuccessful resolution of the industry versus inferiority crisis (Stage 4). According to Erikson (1963), the ego strength of competence, which emerges from successful resolution of the industry versus inferiority crisis, lays the foundation for successful participation in the cultural process of productivity. Erikson (1968) expressed the contribution of this particular stage to a sense of identity as: “I am what I can learn to make work” (p. 127). It is thus speculated that Sylvia’s inability to write fuelled both her feelings of inferiority and her sense of identity confusion. To comfort herself, Sylvia read the diary of Virginia Woolf, who also experienced the pain and humiliation of having her work rejected by prestigious publishing houses, and who eventually committed suicide by drowning herself as a result of severe depression (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

Like Woolf, Sylvia resorted to domestic activities like cooking and baking in her efforts to ward off depression. Apart from the fact that she loved Woolf’s work, she took great pride in the fact that they had so much in common (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia’s identity confusion and her lack of confidence made her more vulnerable and more likely to identify with a writer like Woolf. Although Sylvia may have been inspired by Woolf’s greatness, the researcher further speculates that Sylvia’s identification with Woolf may have aggravated her depression and increased her risk of committing suicide. In light of Erikson’s (1963, 1968) premise that identity formation must be well-established for the intimacy versus isolation crisis to be successfully resolved, one can

infer that Sylvia's identity issues and her feelings of incompetence and inferiority as a writer, impeded her from successfully resolving Erikson's sixth stage of psychosocial development.

- **Teaching Career:** During this stage of Sylvia's development, she was offered a teaching position at Smith College (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Although Sylvia initially felt thrilled about getting the position, she soon discovered that the heavy workload exhausted her and depleted her of all creativity, thus negatively affecting her already strained writing efforts (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). From the beginning, Sylvia felt incompetent in her new teaching role and she felt intimidated by her students who were less than seven years her junior (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). In a journal entry, Sylvia admonished herself for not being able to stand up against that "murderous" part of herself that demanded perfection and stripped her of her confidence when she was anything less than perfect (Plath, 2000, p. 618). Sylvia's compulsive quest for perfection and her pervasive feelings of self-doubt reiterate the unsuccessful resolution of her autonomy versus shame and self-doubt crisis (Stage 2). According to Erikson (1963, 1968), the malignant tendency of compulsiveness which emerges from excessive shame and doubt, may prompt an individual to be retentive in matters relating to affection, time and money. Such an individual would run the risk of developing severe compulsive self-doubt which, in adulthood, would find expression in paranoid fears concerning hidden persecutors or secret persecutions (Erikson, 1963, 1968, 1980). Based on Sylvia's feelings of excessive self-doubt in her teaching position at Smith College, the researcher infers that her decision to leave Smith College may have been based on her paranoid fears concerning possible persecutory action from colleagues and students, thereby affirming Erikson's (1963, 1968) premise that previously unresolved crises negatively affect future behaviour and serve as an impediment in the successful resolution of adult crises.

This is affirmed by Sylvia's second reason for wanting to leave Smith College. Ted had a reputation for enjoying the attention of women, and Sylvia confessed to her mother that she did not want to expose her husband to Smith girls, for they too had a reputation for luring male professors of all ages (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992). It is thus evident that Sylvia's sense of mistrust as a result of her unresolved trust versus mistrust crisis (Stage 1) continued to manifest itself in subsequent stages, as Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1974) said it would, and that this negatively affected Sylvia's ability to establish a genuine intimate relationship based on trust. This would invariably promote a heightened sense of isolation and self-preoccupation and would explain why Sylvia continued to spiral downwards into depression, despite her literary accomplishments.

- ***Yaddo Artists' Colony:*** Sylvia and Ted's writing retreat at the Yaddo Artists' Colony in Saratoga Springs (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013), provides further evidence of Sylvia's dependency on Ted. Although she and Ted wrote apart from one another, Sylvia continued to be led by Ted's tutelage (Alexander, 1999). Ted controlled more areas of Sylvia's life than just her writing. She allowed him to take the lead in most things, even something as simple as entering the room (Alexander, 1999), and her behaviour suggested that Ted was the more important one in their relationship (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). As was often the case in Sylvia's life, she continued to suffer from insomnia and disturbing dreams whilst at Yaddo (Alexander, 1999). Her dependency on Ted for hypnosis and their preoccupation with the occult serves as further evidence of Sylvia's insecurities and lack of trust, not only in her own capabilities, but also in the value of organised religion. Erikson (1964, 1968) claimed that this value is indispensable in helping individuals to deal with disappointments and to face new challenges throughout life. Sylvia's ever-increasing inner turmoil, as expressed in the poem *The Burnt-Out Spa*, affirms her belief that she was doomed to live a life devoid of nourishment and healing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1981), and attests to her profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation at this stage.

8.3.6.4 *Adulthood (1960 – 1963): Sylvia's Cold Years in England at the time of Kennedy's Presidency*

Biographical material pertaining to this historical period was presented in section 2.2.10. During this time, Sylvia and Ted had moved back to England and were garnering numerous publishing successes as writers. Despite these successes, Sylvia continued to struggle with the fact that her work was not being accepted in America, especially since her British husband had succeeded in publishing some of his work in America (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The researcher surmises that this sparked the symptoms of past unresolved crises, including her mistrust in a society that supported male supremacy, her sense of inferiority as a result of publishing rejections and her identity confusion with regard to her expected role in a male-dominated society.

It was also during this time that Sylvia gave birth to their first child, after having struggled to fall pregnant (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In a letter to her mother, Sylvia wrote, "I have never been so happy in my life" (Plath, 1975, p. 374). The researcher infers that this birth provided Sylvia with the opportunity to experience a sense of intimacy within the context of her nuclear family. Not only did the experience of motherhood have a positive creative effect on Sylvia's writing, it also ignited a sense of ethical responsibility which Erikson (1963) regarded

as a precursor and a prerequisite for the establishment of generative concern. This is affirmed in a letter written by Sylvia to a friend. In the letter, Sylvia confessed that the entire experience of giving birth and having a baby was far deeper and “closer to the bone, than love and marriage” (Plath, 1992, p. 50). The fact that the baby’s very first outing was a ban-the-bomb political protest march (Alexander, 1999), provides further evidence of Sylvia’s generative concern.

In the summer of 1961, the couple moved to Court Green, a countryside estate in North Tawton, far removed from the glamour and cultural attractions which they were accustomed to in London (Alexander, 1999). Although Sylvia found the environment to be depressing and isolated, she was determined to create a happy home for her family (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). The researcher speculates that the birth of her second child and the fact that the period was Sylvia’s most productive in terms of her writing achievements, compensated to a certain extent, for prior, unresolved crises and created the opportunity for Sylvia to re-attempt integration of the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation, in the hope of acquiring the ego virtue of love. Her journal entries attest to the fact that it was a time of domesticity, stability and sociability (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). The researcher further speculates that in her role as mother, Sylvia acquired some clarity regarding her identity, and that this enabled her to forge psychologically intimate relationships with others. This is confirmed by Sylvia’s concerted efforts to ingratiate herself in the lives of the villagers. Although she missed the company of more academically-orientated mothers with whom she could converse about literature and politics, the fact that she forged friendships with neighbours and contented herself with conversations about motherhood and babies (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Rollyson, 2013), attests to the importance which she ascribed to her role as mother and explains why she channelled her striving for perfection into that role. All who knew Sylvia attested to the fact that she was an excellent mother, and close family friends remarked on her calm efficiency in protecting her children and sustaining an idyllic family unit (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

This idyllic family unit was, however, threatened by Sylvia and Ted’s friendship with David and Assia Weville. Sylvia and Ted invited the Weville’s to Court Green one weekend. Over the course of that weekend, the interaction between Assia and Ted became all the more inappropriate (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Assia was exceptionally attractive and was known for having affairs, especially with poets. Given Ted’s reputation of flirtations with women, it is not surprising that an affair developed between Ted and Assia (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Although Sylvia was aware of what had transpired between Ted and Assia over that ill-fated weekend, she continued her

regimen of domestic activities as though nothing had happened (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She wrote to her mother declaring that this was the happiest time in her life (A.S. Plath, 1992). She and Ted had made their mark in literary circles and she took pleasure in life's simple pleasures, including gardening, reading, strolling through the countryside and spending time with her children (Alexander, 1999). The researcher speculates, however, that Sylvia was merely repeating the habitual behaviour which had characterised her earlier stages of development – that of subscribing to her mother's notion that a brave face always had to be shown to the world (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Beneath that brave face, however, Sylvia hid all the symptoms of previously unresolved crises.

Although she presented a façade of security, confidence and self-control (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013), the ominous sense of foreboding that threaded its way through her poetry, attests to the fact that the joy, fulfillment and confidence which she exhibited to the world were merely facets of the mask she wore to hide her pain (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). In the month following David and Assia's visit, Sylvia decided to start farming with bees (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Although the danger of being stung by the bees and their association with her father was harrowing, Sylvia persisted and soon mastered the bee-tending art, applying herself with the same determination that characterised all her endeavours (Butscher, 1976, 2003). The researcher surmises that this was yet another manifestation of Sylvia's façade of normality. That same month, Aurelia arrived for a visit from America. Although Sylvia enjoyed entertaining Aurelia at Court Green and spoke enthusiastically about her blissful life in the country, Aurelia sensed an uncomfortable tension between Sylvia and Ted, and an underlying depression in Sylvia (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Kirk, 2009). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's idealistic portrayal to her mother of her perfect life was symptomatic of her obsessive perfectionism and her desire to please her mother and play the part of the dutiful daughter – characteristics which were reinforced in Sylvia's childhood by Aurelia's habit of rewarding good behavior (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). This corresponds with Rollyson's (2013) observation that a humiliated Sylvia could not bear the thought of her mother being witness to a less-than-perfect marriage, when Ted's affair with Assia was exposed. The occurrence, which occurred when Ted fell down the stairs in his urgency to intercept a call from Assia, shattered Sylvia's façade of perfect self-control. Sylvia, who had answered the phone before Ted could get to it, recognised the caller's voice immediately, despite Assia's efforts to disguise her voice (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia calmly handed the phone to Ted, but after he had hung up, she ripped

the telephone line from the wall, exposing her knowledge of Ted's affair and revealing the reality of her anguish (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

It is speculated that Sylvia's excessive dependency on Ted as a result of unresolved prior crises, compounded her sense of loss after his betrayal. This would have resulted in a profound sense of isolation and a pervasive feeling of anxiety, hopelessness and despair, which would have prevented her from successfully navigating the intimacy versus isolation crisis. The researcher's inference that Sylvia would not have been able to acquire the ego strength of love, is supported by Sylvia's declaration that her perfect marriage had been ruined and that she felt destroyed because, "when you give your heart to somebody, you can't take it back, if they don't want it, it's gone" (Alexander, 1999, p. 284). Although Sylvia asked Ted to leave Court Green and decided to apply for a legal separation, his absence proved to be too much for her to bear. She felt trapped in the country amongst cows, children and neighbours who had no idea of the torment that plagued her complex personality (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Ted had been her only intellectual stimulation and his absence made her feel desperate and lonely, darkening her already weakened mental state (Butscher, 1976, 2003). This affirms Gross's (1987) notion that individuals who fail to acquire the ego strength of love, struggle to endure times of isolation.

In September, Sylvia and Ted went to Ireland, leaving the children in the care of a nanny (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia had convinced Ted to go in the hope that they might save their marriage. Ted's sudden and unexpected departure left Sylvia feeling abandoned and humiliated. The researcher surmises that this would have evoked her childhood feelings of abandonment after her father died, and that it would have reinforced the feelings of mistrust, shame, self-doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion from past unresolved crises, leading to a profound sense of isolation. Erikson's (1963, 1968) premise that individuals experiencing such a profound sense of isolation are at a higher risk of committing suicide, can be seen in Sylvia's behaviour. On one occasion, she drove off a road into an airfield. It is unclear whether it was an accident or another attempt by Sylvia to end her life (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Either way, friends and family were concerned about Sylvia's mental stability (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

On the advice of her psychiatrist, Sylvia went to London to see a lawyer about a possible divorce from Ted (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although she detested the idea of getting divorced and still clung to the hope of a reconciliation, Sylvia acknowledged, in a letter to her mother, the realisation that Ted was never coming back (Plath, 1992). Although she did not mention the reality of her growing depression in her letters, her despair manifested itself clearly in her poetry (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Her depression fuelled her

isolation and her despair, but it also fuelled her writing and provided a new stream of creativity (Butscher, 1976, 2003). The nights were the worst for Sylvia and she resorted to taking sleeping pills and waking up again at four in the morning to write (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). This weakened her already vulnerable state. In those final months of 1962, Sylvia wrote a plethora of poems, dating each one in a collection that would become her greatest contribution to American literature (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia's identification with Virginia Woolf, who displayed the same determination and frenzy before committing suicide (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009), could possibly be seen as a manifestation of Sylvia's unresolved identity crisis. Her identity confusion and inner turmoil can also be inferred from her poems, which fluctuated between hopeless despair and absolute confidence.

Sylvia's return to London at the end of 1962 possibly represents the final manifestation of her failure to resolve the intimacy versus isolation crisis. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) used the term *distantiation*, defined as the act of distancing or isolating oneself from an object of scrutiny, to describe the pathological consequence of an unresolved intimacy versus isolation crisis. Although Sylvia's motive for returning to London was to be close to publishing houses, in the hope that she could generate more money for herself (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009), it distanced her from the friendships she had forged in North Tawton, and heightened her sense of isolation and self-preoccupation. Her moods fluctuated between loathing Ted for having abandoned her and hoping for a reconciliation with him, but in her final letter to her mother, written a week before her suicide, she confessed that she was seeing the finality of everything and that she felt lonely and burdened by grim problems from which she could not escape (Plath, 1992). Her sense of isolation was exacerbated by the practical frustrations of her new home, which included not having a phone or electricity (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

To make matters worse, England was experiencing one of its coldest winters, and the extreme subzero temperatures coupled with the fact that Sylvia and the children had colds and high fevers, resulted in them being confined to the apartment (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). This would undoubtedly have aggravated Sylvia's sense of isolation. In a letter to her mother, Sylvia admitted that her flu, the challenges of the previous six months and the responsibilities of caring for two sick babies, had made her lose her identity (Plath, 1992). Her profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation is reflected in the poems written shortly before her suicide. Although poems like *Balloons*, *Kindness* and *Child* show that motherhood still gave her much joy, the other poems convey a sense of futility, hopelessness and ultimate despair. In the final week of Sylvia's life, she felt lonelier and more isolated than she had ever

felt before (Butscher, 1976, 2003), affirming Erikson's premise that this stage of development poses a high risk of suicide if the intimacy versus isolation crisis is not successfully resolved (Erikson, 1963, 1968, Watts et al, 2009). In Jillian Becker's memoir describing Sylvia's final days, she wrote that although Sylvia donned her usual cheerful exterior, internally she was tormented by self-hatred related to woes that included the death of her father, her husband's infidelity and the underlying pressure to succeed for her mother (Becker, 2003). Sylvia even believed that her failed marriage was a reflection of her failure as a woman, and she loathed the shame which such failure would impel her to experience (Becker, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). So intense was Sylvia's experience of self-loathing that she even found it difficult to fulfill her duties as a mother (Alexander, 1999; Becker, 2003; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia's feelings of self-hatred, fear of failure, shame and inferiority reiterate previously unresolved crises and explain why death seemed like the only means of escape to Sylvia. In a journal entry written more than ten years before her suicide, Sylvia compared death to a fainting spell with no awakening (Plath, 2000). Similarly, in a journal entry written after a dentist had anaesthetised her to extract her wisdom teeth, she recalled the ease and simplicity with which unconsciousness could be achieved through gas and she compared the experience to a type of death which took her out of her body (Plath, 2000).

In light of these associations to death, it is hardly surprising that Sylvia chose gas as her means of death. After sealing off the children's bedroom and the kitchen windows and door to prevent the gas from poisoning her sleeping children, Sylvia turned on all the gas taps, knelt on the floor and placed her head on a folded towel deep in the gas oven (Alexander, 1999; Alvarez, 1972; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Erikson (1968) summed up the existential experience of young adults who have transcended identity and resolved the intimacy versus isolation crisis in the words: "We are what we love" (p. 138). The crisis of Erikson's sixth stage of psychosocial development can thus aptly be summed up in the syntonic and dystonic questions "Will I be loved?" or, "Will I be alone?" Sylvia's suicide bears witness to the fact that her life culminated in absolute isolation as a result of unresolved crises which reverberated right through her life. The researcher speculates that the reaffirmation of Sylvia's sense of mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion propelled her to the zenith of isolation, and ultimately led her to committing suicide.

8.4 Concluding Remarks on Sylvia Plath's Psychosocial Development

Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980, 1997) theory of psychosocial development as applied to the life of Sylvia Plath, yields certain significant findings which can be highlighted from

information presented in this chapter. Those significant findings pertain to the similarities and differences between Erikson's theory of psychosocial development and the life of Sylvia Plath, namely (a) the proposed conflicts characterising different stages of psychosocial development; (b) the emergence of ego virtues as a result of successful integration of the opposing polarities inherent in the psychosocial conflicts, and (c) the timing of Erikson's psychosocial developmental stages in the individual's lifespan.

With regard to the integration of opposing polarities as applied to Sylvia's life and discussed in section 8.3, evidence suggests that each stage of her life was characterised by maldevelopment and the emergence of malignant and maladaptive tendencies which made the resolution of subsequent psychosocial conflicts all the more complicated. Biographical material on most of the psychosocial stages was sufficient enough to allow the researcher to make inferences of unsuccessful integration of conflicting forces, but not always sufficiently comprehensive to allow for a full description of Sylvia's experiences with regard to the opposing poles of each crisis of psychosocial development. This applies in particular to the psychosocial stages located in Sylvia's childhood. Although the dystonic disposition of these childhood stages could be discussed in detail, the syntonic dispositions elaborated mostly on Sylvia's development as a writer. As indicated in section 8.3, Sylvia associated with the physicality of words and developed an attachment to words as a substitute for love (Wilson, 2013). The fantastical "never-never land of magic, of fairy queens and virginal maidens, of little princes and their rose bushes" (Plath, 2000, p.35) which she created through her writing, served as her escape and place of security. In that world, her identity was clearly defined. Unfortunately, Sylvia could not integrate that fantastical world with the reality of her everyday experiences. Even as a writer, her socio-cultural milieu and the restrictions it placed on women at the time, was one of the contributing factors that prevented her from reaching her ideals and attaining the ego virtues which could have prevented her fall into depression.

Biographical material pertaining to Sylvia's childhood stages was mostly extracted from subjective descriptions by family members, friends, teachers and from Sylvia's mother, in particular. This could have resulted in a polarized interpretation, with limited information on Sylvia's own experience of that socio-cultural period in history. Sylvia's mother, for example, was aware of the fact that there were multiple cases of depression in the Plath family. In fact, Otto's mother had suffered from such severe depression that she had required hospitalisation (Alexander, 1999). The fact that Aurelia never shared this important information with anyone, not even Sylvia, confirms that the objectivity of her descriptions may have been jeopardised by her own personal agendas. To circumvent the influence of subjective interpretations, the

researcher triangulated the biographical material of each stage with material from future or previously navigated stages. In this way, the researcher could make speculations based on Erikson's predictions for successful or unsuccessful resolution of crises, rather than making analyses based on restricted data limited to a specified historical period. The last two stages of Sylvia's psychosocial development, namely: identity versus role confusion and intimacy versus isolation, allowed for more detailed descriptions from which conclusions could be generated, since these stages offered the most comprehensive biographical material and included Sylvia's personal reflections in the form of her journal entries. The findings pertaining to these two stages (see sections 8.3.5 and 8.3.6), allowed for a greater understanding of Sylvia's experience of both the syntonic and dystonic dispositions and the consequences of their unsuccessful synthesis, than that of preceding psychosocial conflicts. The triangulation of biographical material did, however, afford the researcher the opportunity to obtain greater clarity with regard to significant occurrences in Sylvia's childhood stages. The death of her father, for example, occurred when Sylvia was in Erikson's stage of industry versus inferiority (see section 8.3.4). The triangulation of biographical material with data from the previous stage of initiative versus guilt (see section 8.3.3), as well as data from the last two stages of Sylvia's life, allowed the researcher to understand the significance of her father's role in her life and its effect on her attempted resolution of subsequent crises.

The second constituent of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development as applied to the biographical material on Sylvia Plath, pertains to the ego virtues which emanate from successful integration of opposing dispositions. Based on the unsuccessful resolution of the stages discussed in this chapter, the researcher infers that Sylvia would not have acquired the ego virtues of hope, willpower, purpose, competence, fidelity and love. It must be noted that although Sylvia's literary legacy attests to her industriousness and competence as a writer, this was undermined by her personal feelings of insecurity and inferiority, which impeded the attainment of ego virtues as outlined by Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980). According to Erikson's epigenetic principle (as discussed in Chapter 3) progress through each of the developmental stages hinges on the success, or lack of success, in resolving various crises (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968). Erikson (1950, 1963) defined these moments as critical turning points of maturation during which time the individual is presented with two opposing developmental opportunities prescribed by the culture and society in which the individual lives (Boeree, 2006; Corey, 2005; Gross, 1987). The cumulative effect of Sylvia's unsuccessfully resolved crises affirms Erikson's premise that unsuccessful crisis resolution at an early stage of development negatively affects an individual's ability to resolve later crises, causing deep-

rooted personal problems within the individual (psyche) and in his/her relationship with others (social) (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968; Hamachek, 1990; Yount, 2008).

The third constituent of Erikson's psychosocial theory of development as applied to Sylvia Plath's life pertains to the timing of the developmental stages. In general, the findings of Sylvia's life cycle, as discussed in section 8.3, are consistent with the interrelated nature of the psychosocial conflicts as proposed by Erikson. The biographical material analysed by the researcher indicates, however, that the timing of Sylvia's experience of some of the developmental conflicts varies from Erikson's theory. As discussed in section 8.3.3, Sylvia commenced with formal education at the young age of four, which would coincide with Erikson's third stage of psychosocial development, namely initiative versus guilt. According to Erikson's theory, children are only expected to start school during the fourth stage of psychosocial development (industry versus inferiority). Although Sylvia's outstanding academic record attests to the fact that she may have been intellectually ready to start school, the researcher speculates that her previously unresolved childhood crises would have negatively affected her emotional readiness for formal schooling. This would have contributed to her feelings of insecurity and could possibly explain the exaggerated sense of inferiority which Sylvia experienced throughout her life, despite her remarkable literary achievements.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development postulates that the developmental process refers not only to the succession of stages, but also to the interrelatedness of growing parts which exist in some form before their decisive and critical time, and which re-emerge later in an individual's developmental cycle (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1969; Friedman, 1999). This supports Westemeyer's (2004) suggestion that Erikson's tasks not necessarily be viewed as mutually exclusive or limited to specific time frames and ages. Although Sylvia committed suicide long before the expected emergence of Erikson's seventh stage of psychosocial development, namely generativity versus stagnation, the researcher proposes that her frenzied urgency to produce as much poetry as she could in the final months of her life, can be seen as evidence of her attempt at generativity. Her desire to leave a legacy and to be remembered for her literary accomplishments is captured in a letter written to her mother shortly before her death: "I am a writer... I am a genius of a writer; I have it in me. I am writing the best poems of my life; they will make my name" (Plath, 1992, p. 468).

The researcher's proposition supports Erikson's premise of a *Life in Time* (Erikson, et al., 1986). According to this premise, development is a life-long process that proceeds cumulatively, with each developmental stage being reliant on the successful negotiation of earlier stages (Erikson, 1963, 1980). The principle of *Life in Time* (Erikson et al., 1986)

highlights that an individual is never struggling only with the tension that is focal at the time of a specific stage. Rather, at every successive stage of development, the individual is simultaneously engaged in the anticipation of tensions that have yet to become focal and in re-experiencing those tensions that were focal at an earlier stage (Erikson et al., 1986). Although Erikson claimed that the lack of resolution of an earlier stage would negatively affect the resolution of later stages, he did make provision for spontaneous recovery from developmental mistakes or inadequacies (Meyer et al., 2008; Watts et al., 2009). The principle of *Life in Time* thus not only imbues Erikson's theory with an optimistic view of development, it also helps to clarify numerous mechanisms that underlie the positive relationships between generativity and well-being throughout the life cycle (An & Cooney, 2006; McAdams et al., 1993). Although Sylvia's life stages were characterised by unsuccessful resolution of crises, which would lead one to assume that it would have been impossible for her to acquire generativity and the ego virtue of care had she reached Erikson's seventh stage, the success which she garnered as a writer and the wealth of literature which she produced in such a short period of time, attest to the positive value which Erikson's theory holds for ingenious and creative artists who manage to achieve greatness despite developmental mistakes or inadequacies.

With regard to the criticism that Erikson's theory is dominated by a male Eurocentric perspective which emphasises the achievement of individuality and autonomy (Roazen, 1976; Wastell, 1996), the following points need to be considered. Gilligan (1982, 1991) asserted that Erikson's theory fails to emphasise the distinctiveness of a woman's experience (see section 3.7). According to Gilligan (1982), Erikson's portrayal of a woman is that:

She holds her identity in abeyance as she prepares to attract the man by whose name she will be known, by whose status she will be defined, the man who will rescue her from emptiness and loneliness by filling the inner space. (p.12)

When one considers that Sylvia resented the fact that society expected her to sacrifice her ambitions and subordinate herself and her creativity to the will of her future husband (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013) it would appear that the criticism levelled against Erikson's theory could be justified. Sylvia came to the conclusion that a woman was limited in fulfilling her talents either with or without a husband and children, because a woman's intellectual, emotional and physical ambitions would always be at odds with societal expectations (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000). This view echoes Gilligan's (1982, 1991) criticism that Erikson's theory portrays women as inferior, weak and dependent on men. Although Gilligan (1982, 1991) makes a valid point, the researcher is of the opinion that Erikson's theory validates the important role played by one's socio-

cultural and historical context in shaping human development. Since Erikson developed his theory in the same historical period in which Sylvia Plath lived, his theory confirms that the gender-related criticism should be levelled against the gender-biased norms which prevailed at the time, rather than against the theorists who themselves succumbed to its influence.

Furthermore, it must be borne in mind that Erikson's identity constructs of independence and interdependence have bearing only on the last four stages of psychosocial development. In light of the fact that Sylvia was unsuccessful in resolving the crises of the first four stages, her failure to establish an identity is seen as emanating from unresolved childhood crises, rather than from an inadequacy in Erikson's theory. The researcher agrees with Horst's (1995) proposition that Erikson's theory be understood in its context rather than be criticised for its gender stereotypes. This will not only maintain the integrity of Erikson's theory, it will also provide an important foundation for a constructive feminist stance from which research can be expanded so that the experiences of women can be better understood (Horst, 1995).

8.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings and discussion pertaining to the six stages of Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development according to the theory of Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980, 1997). The applicability and relevance of Erikson's theory to the life of Sylvia Plath was also highlighted. In the following chapter, the findings pertaining to the Internal Family Systems model of Schwartz (1995) are presented.

CHAPTER 9

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION: THE COMPOSITION OF SYLVIA PLATH'S INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEM

9.1 Chapter Preview

In this chapter, Sylvia Plath's subpersonalities according to the Internal Family Systems model (IFS) of Schwartz (1995, 2001) are presented and discussed. The conceptual outline of the chapter is given, after which Plath's biographical information is presented with specific reference to the principles and concepts of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model (as discussed in Chapter 4). The research findings include a discussion of the role of the subpersonalities of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) IFS model, in each of the stages of Plath's life, within the context of specific historical periods (as outlined in Table 7.3 of Chapter 7). The chapter concludes with reflections on the focal findings pertaining to Schwartz's model of Internal Family Systems as applied to Plath's life.

9.2 Conceptual Outline to the Exposition of Research Findings

The analysis of research findings in this chapter was facilitated through the exploratory-descriptive approach taken to this study. As outlined in Chapter 7, psychobiographical research entails the lifespan study of an individual of historic significance, using biographical material which is examined against the backdrop of the individual's socio-cultural context and interpreted through the lens of an established psychological theory (Ponterotto, 2015; Schultz, 2005b).

The Internal Family Systems model (IFS) of Richard C. Schwartz (1995; 2001) was used as the second framework with which pertinent biographical material on Plath was collected, extracted, analysed and presented. Schwartz's (1995, 2001) IFS model thus provided the framework within which Sylvia Plath's personality development was described.

In the following section, the findings pertaining to Sylvia Plath's personality development are presented and discussed in terms of the subpersonalities proposed by the Internal Family Systems model (see section 4.5). This is accomplished by providing examples from the biographical material on Sylvia's life of the emergence of subpersonalities and their role in her functioning at each stage of her development. As indicated in Chapter 7, a conceptual matrix (see Table 7.3) was used to facilitate the categorisation of data.

9.3 Synopsis of the Internal Family Systems Model

According to the IFS Model, individuals are naturally subdivided into parts (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). These parts exist from birth and develop a distinctive character as the individual passes through significant points in life (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995). According to Schwartz (1995), a part can be described as an autonomous and discrete mental system which has an idiosyncratic style of expression, range of feelings, set of desires, abilities and views of the world. Based on this description of parts, IFS compares an individual's personality to a family of different people, each of whom reveals different talents, temperaments, interests and even ages (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). IFS also posits that each individual is born with a Self and that when it is fully differentiated, this Self exhibits the qualities of compassion, clarity of perspective, confidence, courage, curiosity, calmness, connectedness and creativity (the eight C's of the Self) (Schwartz, 2001, 2013). The Self described in IFS functions as an active, non-coercive, collaborative leader who observes, experiences and interacts with other people and with the different subpersonalities of the internal family system. It has the vision to lead both internal and external life harmoniously and sensitively so that the person can feel more unified, with a sense of continuity and integration which allows for Self-leadership (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995).

Unfortunately, Self-leadership becomes blocked when burdens are transmitted from adults to children (Krause, 2013). Schwartz (1995, 2001) described burdens as those parts within an individual's internal family system which take on extreme beliefs, emotions and behaviours derived from extreme events or interactions with others in an individual's life (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). According to Schwartz (2013), these burdens contain all the terrible traumas and betrayals that the individual suffered as a child. When these traumatised, wounded parts are forced into exile, the protective parts in search of solutions become polarized (Krause, 2013). The burdens can cause severe disruption to the leadership, balance and harmony of the internal family system, forcing protective parts to become even more extreme as they fight for influence, with each part fearing that submission could result in damage to the system (Krause, 2013; Watzlawick et al., 1974). The principal task of IFS therapy is thus to work with these burdened parts in such a way that the individual's undamaged core Self can emerge and deep emotional healing can take place (Schwartz, 2013a).

It must be pointed out that IFS was originally developed as a therapeutic treatment model, and not as a psychological theory per se. It has subsequently been used to treat a wide range of problems, including relationship problems, trauma, addiction, parenting, grief, eating disorders, borderline personality disorders, dissociative disorders, anxiety, depression and even

racism (Green, 2008; Haddock et al., 2017; Lucero et al., 2017; Matheson, 2015; Schwartz, 2004; 2013; Schwartz et al., 2009; Twombly & Schwartz, 2008; Uys, 2010).

Although IFS has been criticised for lacking statistical data from empirical research to demonstrate its effectiveness (Ditkoff, 2012; Lucero et al., 2017; Pignotti, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2009), recent findings indicate that it has proven to be successful in the treatment of anxiety, depression and other mood disorders (Green, 2008; Haddock et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2013a, 2013c; Uys, 2010). In fact, the National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices has acknowledged the IFS model as an evidence-based treatment for successfully treating panic, phobia and generalised anxiety disorders, depressive symptoms and physical health conditions (Matheson, 2015). IFS therapy has also frequently been used to treat trauma and has been endorsed by numerous trauma experts, including Schwartz, as a beneficial treatment approach (Lucero et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2004; Schwartz et al., 2009; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014; Twombly & Schwartz, 2008). Consequently, the researcher deemed it an appropriate model through which to explore and describe the personality development of Sylvia Plath. Whilst the inferences drawn from the IFS model to explain Sylvia's internal family system are purely speculative, the researcher felt that the IFS concept of polarized parts lent itself to understanding the nature of Sylvia's inner conflict and her view of herself as split and fragmented: "I am still so naïve; I know pretty much what I like and dislike; but please, don't ask me who I am, a passionate, fragmentary girl, maybe?" (Plath, 2000, p. 163). Furthermore, although the IFS model of Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2009) is not a feminist theory per se, its focus on subpersonalities allowed for the illustration of Sylvia's feminist voice, because the model addresses the very concepts exemplified in Sylvia's outlining of the "female divided self's dilemma" (Kriel, 2011, p. 81). Nancy Chodorow (1989), one of the leaders in feminist object relations theory, posited that a girl's identification with her mother hampers her efforts at individuation. This is because a girl's unquestioning adherence to her mother's example often recreates the oppression and subordination to men experienced by her mother (Chodorow, 1989). Schwartz's (1995, 2001) outline of Caretakers (the managerial roles typically assumed by women), and Entitled Ones (the managerial roles typically assumed by men) (see section 4.5.2.4), exemplifies many features outlined by feminist object relations theory. Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model was thus deemed an applicable model to explore the life of Sylvia Plath, especially against the backdrop of prototypical femininity in 1950s America.

9.4. The Parts of Sylvia Plath's Internal Family System Throughout her Lifespan

9.4.1 Infancy (1932 – 1933): Sylvia, the First-Born, during the Great Depression

According to Krause (2013), the parent/child family system is not characterised by equality, and children are usually powerless to alter the nature of their relationships within the family system without support from at least one of the parents. In an ideal world, Self-led parents welcome all their children's parts compassionately and lovingly, thereby allowing their children to develop spontaneously into Self-led adults (Krause, 2013; Neustadt, 2017). However, in the real world, parents are invariably either partially or completely parts-led, and how they respond to their own parts will determine how they respond to similar parts in their children and in other individuals (Krause, 2013; Neustadt, 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009).

According to biographical material pertaining to the infancy period in Sylvia's life (see section, 2.2.1), her father, Otto, was a nervous, morbid man with a tyrannical disposition (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). He had a relentless work ethic and was so absorbed by his work, that outside interests, hobbies and socialising activities were excluded from his life (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's mother, Aurelia, on the other hand, had a congenial, outgoing disposition and loved to socialise (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although she was unfulfilled and often complained that their marriage consisted of all work and no play (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003), she realised that if she wanted a peaceful home and marriage, she would have to become more submissive to her husband's strict, regimented and often tyrannical ways (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia's birth gave Aurelia the opportunity to involve herself in a project that could contain and channel her energies, and give her the outlet to express her creative and intellectual abilities (Wilson, 2013), the researcher speculates that the 21-year age gap between Otto and Aurelia, together with his tyrannical disposition and authoritarian demand for order, could have resulted in polarizations of Sylvia's external family system. This would inevitably have created an imbalanced system in which members were forced to leave their preferred roles to take on roles that competed with or were opposed to those of other members (Schwartz, 1995). When polarization occurs, parts become antagonistic as each member of the polarization clings rigidly to his or her position, fearing that the system will be damaged if that rigidly-held position is relinquished (Watzlawick et al., 1974). Not only would the polarizations of Sylvia's external family system have caused imbalances in her internal family system, they would also have created burdens which would affect Sylvia's future development and if unresolved, negatively impact on her capacity for healing.

Schwartz (2013b) maintained that one of life's great injustices is that so many individuals who were traumatised as children continue to be reinjured throughout their lives because the original hurt has left them raw and reactive. This is aggravated by the fact that for all individuals, to some degree, the healing energy of the Self is blocked as a result of traumatic emotional experiences, imperfect care-taking and existential anxiety (Becker, 1973). As a result, individuals carry sadness, fear, shame and emotional pain that is not fully metabolised because they were too young and too poorly equipped to process it, and because parents were not fully available and not fully capable to help them through these traumas due to their own constraints on Self energy (Mones & Schwartz, 2007). The tendency of Western culture to regard the expression of emotional pain as a sign of weakness, has led to the belief that painful events must be forgotten as soon as possible and painful parts must be blocked from awareness (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Since the expression of emotional pain is often met with impatience, denial, criticism, revulsion or distraction, even more injury is added to the already injured inner-child parts (Schwartz, 1995). The hurt child then not only becomes an imprisoned exile, but also has to deal with the burden of added rejection and abandonment for feeling hurt, and the ensuing feelings of unlovability, shame or guilt (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014).

When one considers the biographical details pertaining to Sylvia's parents, the role of transferred burdens and the impact of exiles on the family system become evident. Otto Plath had emigrated from Germany to start a new life in America, thanks to his grandfather who was already living in America and who offered to pay for Otto's education on condition that he enter the Lutheran ministry and devote his life to the family religion (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Otto grabbed the opportunity, not only because it offered him the higher education which he would not have been able to afford in Germany, but also because it exempted him from military service which, as a confirmed pacifist, he dreaded (Plath, 1975, 1992). After graduating from college with a sterling academic record, Otto proceeded to the Lutheran Seminary, as promised to his grandfather (Alexander, 1999). Although he had every intention of conforming to the prescriptions of the seminary, he became disenchanted with the right-wing synod's conservatism and the fact that Darwin's writings were forbidden, and consequently abandoned his plans to enter the ministry (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013). This decision resulted in Otto's grandfather striking his name from the family Bible and excommunicating him from the family (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013).

Otto Plath ended up becoming a cynical atheist, and although he had a relentless work ethic which ensured his academic success, the researcher speculates that his excommunication from the family would have created burdens in his internal family system, which in turn, could have been transferred to Sylvia. Schwartz (1995) posited that, not only is it common for the extreme part of a parent or authority figure to be imitated by the approval-craving parts of a child; it is also quite common to see the same burdens being passed down from generation to generation in families. Biographical material indicates that Sylvia's relentless work ethic resembled her father's, an attribute which contributed to her lifelong striving for perfectionism. From infancy she would have been exposed to her father's way of doing things and her internal family system would undoubtedly have been influenced by his values and beliefs. According to Sinko (2017), transferred burdens which involve family rules, loyalties and values are called legacy burdens. They are transferred via patterned interactions amongst members of the external family system and broader culture and usually involve prejudice with regard to differences. These legacy burdens are like implicit contracts made between parents and children and they govern everything, from how we feel about religion, sexual orientation and body weight, to how we respond to death (McGoldrick, 1982; Sinko, 2017). Sylvia's lack of commitment to religion and her interest in occultish practices later on in life are hardly surprising when one considers that she was born into a family system dominated by an atheist father. The fact that she became a staunch pacifist like her father, can also be explained in terms of Schwartz's (1995) notion of transferred legacy burdens, exiles and imitated parts. According to Schwartz (1995), young children are particularly susceptible to absorbing transferred burdens and their self-esteem is influenced by the approval and appraisals which they receive from their parents. Although biographical material suggests that Sylvia was a child bathed in love, Otto's tyrannical disposition and Aurelia's submissiveness to his autocracy would have caused an imbalanced family system characterised by burdened parts, exiles and extreme polarization.

According to the IFS model, when a child feels embarrassed, ignored, dismissed, ashamed, humiliated or terrified, he/she will run the risk of developing a burden, based on the acquired belief that he/she is unlovable, unloved and worthless (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009, 2013). Some of the child's parts may take on qualities of the person who stole his or her self-esteem and sense of safety, and can become so desperate to win the approval of that person, that the child ends up imitating him or her in an effort to feel more acceptable (Schwartz, 1995). Sylvia's parts took on the qualities of both her mother and father, which could explain why she felt torn between her mother's bourgeois values of domesticity and perfect social amiability and her father's relentless drive to excel and to succeed professionally (Alexander, 1999;

Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). This conflict in Sylvia's internal family system became all the more pronounced as she developed into adulthood and was aggravated by the socially-conservative tradition and double standards which characterised the socio-cultural milieu of the time (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

A premise of the IFS model is that parts acquire burdens as a result of attachment disruptions which range from mild traumas to neglect, sexual and physical abuse, and more extreme forms of interpersonal trauma (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 2013a). Berne (1961) referred to a similar phenomenon in transactional analysis when he described the controlling or critical parent. In IFS, these inner critics or moralisers carry the burden of perfectionism, believing that if they can make the child perfect, he or she will finally be redeemed (Schwartz, 1995). Sylvia's incessant striving for perfection and her inability to attain the standards of perfection imposed by her burdens, attests to the extent of the polarizations within her family system. According to Schwartz (1995, 2001) parts can take on burdens other than just the burden of perfectionism. Commonly transferred burdens identified by Schwartz (1995, 2001) include having to protect other family members; having to attain a high level of success; and believing that one will never succeed or that the world is a very dangerous place. Sylvia manifested these burdens, as evidenced in her letters and journal entries (Plath, 1992, 2000, 2017, 2018) all of which express her anxiety about the state of the world, her pervasive feelings of worthlessness and her harrowing fears of failure, despite evidence to the contrary. In terms of the IFS model, a parent's critical, angry, judging parts can create burdens, just as caretaking parts with the agenda of alleviating parental anxiety can create burdens (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013).

Sylvia's tyrannical father, who was often consumed by "explosive outbursts of anger" (Plath, 1992, p. 18) would have created burdens in Sylvia, as would Aurelia's submissive obeisance to his autocratic rule (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1992). According to the IFS model, burdens are created by parents who are parts-led, rather than Self-led (Krause, 2013; Neustadt, 2017). The extent of burdening depends on the agenda of the parent's parts, how extreme they become and to what extent they are polarized with the parts of the child (Krause, 2013; Krause, Rosenberg & Sweezy, 2017). Parts-led parenting is reactive and prevents Self-leadership, because when parents are in a reactive state, they view the world from the perspective of protective parts (Krause, 2013; Neustadt, 2017; Schwartz, 2013a). In their efforts to prevent the repetition of painful experiences from the past, protective parts try to control the child using strategies that produce polarity with the child's protectors; thereby causing the very thing they fear (Neustadt, 2017). These protective groups exert immense energy to keep the traumatised

parts exiled, even if it means avoiding events or people who might trigger them (Schwartz, 1995, 2009).

In the next section, the researcher presents the subpersonalities which may have been established during this stage of Sylvia's development, as well as their role in her functioning. The subpersonalities are presented according to the categorisation outlined in Table 7.3. In light of the fact that IFS ascribes fundamental importance to the dynamics of the external family system in establishing roles within each family member's internal system (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013), Sylvia's subpersonalities at this early stage of development are explained in terms of her parents' subpersonalities and the polarizations which could have been established by their parts-led parenting style. The researcher reiterates that inferences made on the development of Sylvia's subpersonalities are speculative and based on an integration of Sylvia's biographical material and the characteristics outlined by the IFS model of Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2009).

9.4.1.1 Managers

According to Schwartz (1995), managers exist in all individuals and their task is to protect the individual from harm by ensuring that the exile's feelings, sensations and memories do not escape into consciousness. Managers are strategic, rational and moralising, and although individuals may feel restricted and annoyed by them, they also depend on them for guidance and moral judgement (Schwartz, 2001). Behaviours which are frequently associated with managers include controlling and judging (oneself and others), striving or overachieving, taking care of others, worrying, pleasing or withdrawing from others, denial and passive pessimism (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Managers strive for internal and interpersonal control so that their exiles and their pain are kept at bay (Mones, 2003). They try to control relationships, situations and even a person's environment, in an effort to protect the person from being humiliated, abandoned, rejected, attacked or traumatised in any way (Johnson & Schwartz, 2000). In this way they ensure that the system remains safe and that the person is able to function effectively in life (Schwartz, 1995, 2009).

Biographical information on Sylvia's external family system indicates that her father, Otto, was excessively rigid and demanding when it came to order. For example, Aurelia was forbidden from moving a single paper or book from the dining room table and sideboard, which were used as depositories for the multitude of reference books which Otto regularly consulted for his studies (Wilson, 2013). Otto's obsessive need for order, his controlling and judgemental character and his relentless striving for achievement, are all behaviours associated with

manager parts. The researcher speculates that the severity of Otto's manager parts could possibly be traced back to feelings of shame after he was excommunicated from his family of origin when he abandoned the Lutheran ministry. According to Sweezy (2013), the pain of feeling excluded, unacceptable and alone is typical of shame and can be so poisonous to an individual's current functioning, that the parts who experience it are frequently ostracised and left in the past, with the management of these parts becoming a systemic endeavour that can last for life. The action tendency urges of shame manifest in withdrawal, hiding and avoidance behaviours such as addiction, anxiety, depression, dissociation, psychic numbing and insensitivity to physical and emotional pain (Dearing & Tangney, 2011; Herbine-Blank, 2013; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tracy et al., 2007). Self-attack behaviours include cutting, risk-taking and even suicide, as well as chronic self-loathing and self-criticism (Sweezy, 2013).

Behaviours associated with attacking others include having a threatening attitude and tone of voice, being contemptuous, entitled, dismissive, enraged or disgusted, and even resorting to physical abuse (Gilligan, 1997). Biographical material suggests that Otto was extremely autocratic and that Aurelia dealt with his tyrannical ways either by being submissive and obeying his orders unquestioningly or by secretly doing the things which might upset him (e.g., inviting friends over for social dinners) (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). Aurelia's behaviour suggests that her manager parts polarized with Otto's in an attempt to maintain peace and harmony in the home. This would explain her excessive need to take care of others and to please them, as well as her worrying tendency, which eventually resulted in gastro-intestinal ulcers (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

It is speculated that Otto and Aurelia's manager parts were imitated by Sylvia in her efforts to win their approval and feel more acceptable within the family system. Schwartz (2001, 2009) posited that there are common manager parts in all individuals. Based on biographical data, the researcher infers that the following manager parts were formed during Sylvia's infancy.

9.4.1.1.1 *The Striver*

According to Schwartz (1995), this type of manager tries to motivate an individual by being extremely task-orientated and never being satisfied with an individual's performance. Although this manager is very intellectual and highly effective at solving problems, it is also extremely controlling and critical and may try to motivate an individual to strive for career success, power or wealth so that he or she is distracted from exiled feelings that might cause pain (Schwartz, 1995). Biographical material indicates that Sylvia had a determined

personality and that she started shaping sounds into words at the early age of six to eight weeks (Alexander 1999). By the time she was eight months old, she could already say the words “mama”, “dada” and “bye bye”, and she seemed particularly alert and responsive to stimuli in her surrounding environment (Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia’s determination to learn is indicative of the emergence of her Striver.

Sylvia’s life-long striving to achieve personal and public recognition for her writing endeavours, highlights the significant role played by this managerial part in her internal family system. Although the role of this Striver became more and more pronounced as Sylvia got older, the researcher infers that this manager was formed in infancy, as a result of polarizations in Sylvia’s external family system.

Schwartz (1995) warned that when an individual’s internal family system loses balance, the protector parts try to find safety in the opposite direction in an attempt to balance the burdened system. Although all systems have polarizations, they differ with regard to the intensity of their polarizations (Rosenberg, 2013). According to Krause, Rosenberg and Sweezy (2017), the intensity of the protectors’ behaviour is directly proportional to the extent that the system’s exiles are wounded. Although biographical material does not suggest severe trauma during infancy for Sylvia to have acquired excessively wounded exiles, it must be remembered that, according to the IFS model, she was particularly susceptible at this age to absorbing transferred burdens from her parents. The researcher speculates that, in the same way that Sylvia absorbed transferred burdens from her father, so too she absorbed transferred burdens from her mother, which led to the emergence of the evaluating manager.

9.4.1.1.2 *The Evaluator*

The evaluating manager is perfectionistic about a person’s appearance and behaviour and operates from the premise that a perfect person who pleases everyone will never be abandoned or hurt (Schwartz, 1995). Like the controlling Striver, this type of manager is extremely critical, but for different reasons. Its primary responsibility is to obtain social approval, and consequently, it is always involved in monitoring and evaluating an individual’s popularity, appearance and behaviour, even in relation to others (Schwartz, 2001).

Biographical material indicates that Aurelia Plath grew up in a household which spoke German, and that the language barrier made her feel very isolated at school (Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013). Although Aurelia’s father decided that English should be spoken in the house when she entered grammar school, he and his wife continued to maintain heavy German accents throughout their lives (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975, 1992, 2000). Since the Italian-

Irish neighbourhood of Winthrop did not sympathise with anyone of German descent, especially during the First World War, Aurelia was often bullied and called “spy-face”, which resulted in her childhood being characterised by prejudice (Wilson, 2013, p. 23). Just as Otto experienced feelings of shame after being excommunicated from his family of origin (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013), the researcher surmises that Aurelia developed feelings of shame as a result of being ostracised by her neighbourhood community. To escape the pain of rejection and the ensuing feelings of unlovability, shame or guilt – which, according to the IFS model, explains the formation of exiled, hurt child parts (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014) – Aurelia developed an intense love of reading, which in turn, inspired her to become a writer (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Unfortunately, her father disapproved of this career choice, and so Aurelia abandoned her dream and signed up for a curriculum featuring vocational studies, rather than English and German (which were her first choices) (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that Aurelia’s deep-rooted need to be accepted and to feel loved prompted the development of her evaluating manager. According to Schwartz (1995), the evaluating manager pushes a person to please others so that their approval can be gained. Consequently, these manager parts are also called pleasing/abandoned manager parts (DeLand, Strongin & Schwartz, 2004).

The fact that Aurelia continued to maintain an outstanding academic record despite the fact that she was not pursuing her dream career, attests to her strong desire to please, and to the existence of her evaluating manager. Her strong work ethic and the fact that she graduated as valedictorian of her class in college (Alexander, 1999) indicates the simultaneous existence of her Striver. According to Schwartz (1995), Strivers and Evaluators can exist in the same system, but they are usually in conflict because they have different motives for protecting a person. At the one extreme, the Striver is constantly pushing an individual to work, with no consideration for feelings. At the other extreme, the Evaluator is pushing the person to be friendly and to socialise with others so that their approval can be attained (Schwartz, 1995). Even after her marriage to Otto, Aurelia’s retirement from work so that she could assist her husband with the linguistic expression of his scientific ideas (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013), attests to the strong role played by her evaluating/pleasing manager.

The researcher surmises that Aurelia’s childhood burden of shame, rejection and fear of abandonment, led to the establishment of strong striving and evaluating managers, which could have been absorbed by Sylvia during infancy. Sylvia’s life-long sense of dutifulness, especially to her mother, attests to the existence of her evaluating manager. The fact that Sylvia’s life was characterised by a strong sense of dutifulness and obligation to her mother, despite the

resentment which she harboured against her, attests to the dichotomous polarization of parts which, according to the IFS model, occurs when a system is threatened and parts feel compelled to protect it (Schwartz, 1995). Sylvia's Evaluator also burdened her with the obsessive need for perfection, which manifested itself in childhood and continued to plague Sylvia until her death. Although Sylvia's striving for perfection resulted in an outstanding record of achievements throughout her life, it also enslaved her and did nothing to dispel the feelings of self-doubt which haunted her throughout her life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Schwartz (2001) posited that Strivers and Evaluators are often polarized in conflicting roles with a third type of manager, known as the Passive Pessimist.

9.4.1.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

According to Schwartz (1995), the Passive Pessimist tries to avoid all forms of interpersonal risk that might activate feelings of hostility, sexuality or fear. Consequently, this type of manager will try to induce total apathy and withdrawal to ensure that the individual does not even try to take risks or get close to anyone. Biographical material pertaining to Sylvia's infancy reveals that Otto was not well acquainted with anyone and that he did not make friends (Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Otto's avoidance of close interpersonal relationships attests to the existence of his Passive Pessimist. According to Schwartz (1995, 2001), this type of manager will remind the individual of personal flaws and incidents of rejection and reduce him or her to an apathetic coward who avoids the pursuit of goals or objects of desire for fear of failure. The fact that Otto was excommunicated from his family in early adulthood may have prompted the emergence of his Passive Pessimist. This manager would have reminded him of the rejection by his family, and would have prompted him to avoid interpersonal relationships for fear of further rejection. The fact that Otto was described as a bitter man with a nervous and morbid disposition (Wilson, 2013, pp. 19-20) and that his behaviour was characterised by "explosive outbursts of anger" (Plath, 1992, p. 18), attests to the existence of characteristics which are typical of the Passive Pessimist. The purpose of this manager would have been to keep the feared feelings and thoughts of Otto's exiles securely locked away, both for the protection of his exiles and for the protection of his internal family system as a whole.

Aurelia's renunciation of her dream to be a writer and her submissive obeisance first to her father's rule and later to Otto's autocratic demands, attest to the role of her Passive Pessimist in protecting her from the pain of her exiled parts. The fact that she developed a duodenal stomach ulcer which would flare up at intensely stressful moments in her life; provides further

evidence of the impact of this manager in her life. Although Aurelia was described as being congenial, outgoing and charming (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003), the fact that she would later encourage the sardonic, mocking side of Sylvia's personality (Butscher, 1976, 2013; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013) is a further manifestation of her Passive Pessimist.

The researcher speculates that Sylvia may have absorbed the burdens transferred from her parents' exiled parts, resulting in her taking on the qualities of her parents' Passive Pessimist parts. This would explain the manifestation of Sylvia's neurotic tendencies – anxiety, depression impulsivity, self-consciousness, vulnerability and angry hostility as expressed through the sardonic, mocking side of her personality – all of which correspond with the manager which Schwartz (1995) named the Passive Pessimist.

9.4.1.1.4 The Caretaker and the Entitled One

Schwartz (1995) posited that gender contributes to the type of role that this manager assumes. In Western society, women are socialised to rely on a manager who makes them sacrifice their own needs and selflessly take care of others. Schwartz (1995) named this selfless carer the Caretaker, and postulated that such a manager would criticise a woman for being selfish if she ever asserted herself. Because these caring managers put the welfare of others first and disregard their own needs, it often leads to them being exploited and devalued (Schwartz, 2001). Nowhere is the role of the Caretaker more evident than in Aurelia's submissive compliance to Otto's insistence that she stop working to take on the role of housewife and mother. The fact that she gave up on her dream of becoming a writer, but used her creative and linguistic talents to assist Otto with the completion of his scientific works, bears further testimony to the prominent role played by her caretaking manager. Given that Sylvia's infancy coincided with a period in history which was known for its segregation of women in all aspects of life, from sexuality to the literary canon (Rollyson, 2013), the researcher speculates that Aurelia's caretaking manager would have been all the more compliant, and that it would have been transferred to Sylvia not only in accordance with the expectations of her external family system, but also in accordance with the role of women expected by society at this time.

Unlike women, men are socialised to rely on a manager who makes them dominant and who encourages them to believe that they are entitled to anything they want, even at the expense of others (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Schwartz (1995) called this egotistical manager the entitled one. Otto's selfish insistence on his wife's subservience and the fact that he did not acknowledge the full extent of her contribution to his work, confirm the egotistical role of his Entitled Manager. The researcher speculates that the adult conflict between Sylvia's domestic

ideals and her ambitious striving for literary fame can be traced back to the polarization of conflicting roles transferred to her during infancy by her mother's caretaking manager and her father's entitled manager. This dichotomous polarization would have emerged not only in response to Sylvia's external family system, but also in response to the contradictory and irreconcilable pressures placed on young women in America during this period in history (Gill, 2008).

9.4.1.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

The manager referred to by Schwartz (1995, 2001) as the Worrier or Sentry is extremely anxious and constantly alert for danger. This manager will flash worst-case scenarios in front of an individual in an effort to frighten him or her from taking risks (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Biographical material indicates that in 1918, Otto was under investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for suspected pro-German leanings (Wilson, 2013). Similarly, Aurelia's German descendancy resulted in her childhood being characterised by prejudice, especially during World War One, when she was frequently bullied and called "spy face" (Wilson, 2013, p. 23). The researcher speculates that these incidents led to the establishment of the Warrior or Sentry managers in both Otto and Aurelia. Schwartz (1995, 2009) pointed out that the rigidity or severity of the different managerial strategies corresponds with the degree to which managers think that the individual might be reinjured by potential danger. This rigidity is aggravated even further by the fact that managers carry more responsibility than that with which they are equipped to deal (Schwartz, 1995, 2009). Not only do managers have to deal with what they perceive as external dangers in the outside world, they also have to deal with the internal conflict provoked by dangerous exiles (Schwartz, 1995, 2009). In their desperate efforts to protect the Self from both external and internal threats, these managers are often left feeling neglected, lonely and scared, but hide these vulnerabilities because they feel responsible for keeping the person's life under control (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz et al., 2009). The vicious cycle is perpetuated, because the more competent the managers become, the more the system depends on them, and the more they are overwhelmed by their power and by the belief that they alone are responsible for the individual's success and safety (Schwartz, 1995, 2009). Although the manifestation of Sylvia's Worrier/Sentry manager may not have revealed itself during her infancy, the fact that she imitated her father's pacifist ideology in later stages of development, suggests that this manager may have established itself in Sylvia as a result of the transferred burdens of anxiety and fear which she would have absorbed from her parents during infancy. Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2009) listed a range of managerial manifestations which

are typical of the Worrier or Sentry. These include compulsions, obsessions, passivity, reclusiveness, emotional detachment and a sense of unreality, depressive episodes, panic attacks, phobias, somatic complaints, nightmares and hyper-alertness (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009). The manifestations of these symptoms in different stages of Sylvia's development, as well as her ever-increasing political awareness, expressed through her confessional writing about political issues such as Hiroshima and the advent of the Cold War (Alexander, 1999; Gill, 2008), attest to the development of her Worrier/Sentry manager.

9.4.1.2 Firefighters

According to the IFS model, two sets of protective parts are responsible for keeping the emotional pain of exiles at bay (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). At one end of the spectrum, managers exercise internal and interpersonal control to keep an individual's emotional prison locked so that he/she does not get too close to the experience of painful exiles (Mones & Schwartz, 2007). At the other end of the spectrum, firefighters, in their efforts to protect the individual from being overwhelmed by emotional pain, do whatever they consider necessary to soothe or distract the individual from dreaded, exiled feelings, with little regard for the consequences of their actions (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995).

Although managers and firefighters share the same goal of keeping exiles imprisoned, the roles and strategies which they adopt are very different and often conflictual. Managers are extremely rational and they can anticipate and pre-empt activating situations in a well-planned and structured way. Their goal is to prevent the activation of exiles by keeping strict control at all times and trying to please others, especially those on whom the person depends (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). As discussed in the previous section, Otto's regimented and structured routine and Aurelia's submissive obeisance to his orders to please him, serve as examples of their managers, put in place to prevent the activation of exiles, since activated exiles would remind them of painful and traumatic experiences from the past.

Managers thus try to intervene *before* an exile is aroused. Firefighters, on the other hand, will try to intervene *after* the exile is aroused, and often implement more extreme techniques, such as self-mutilation, binge eating, drug or alcohol abuse, excessive masturbation, promiscuity and other sexually compulsive activities, excessive demonstrations of rage, kleptomania, and even suicidal attempts (Riskin, 2013; Schwartz, 1995). Unlike managers, firefighters are impulsive, unthinking, reactive and prone to making an individual lose control (Schwartz, 1995), providing a "quick fix" analgesic to the painful casualties of trauma (Mones

& Schwartz, 2007, p. 323). The researcher speculates that Otto's "explosive outbursts of anger" (Plath, 1992, p. 18) attest to the role of his firefighters in warding off painful emotions from past traumatic experiences. Although there is no biographical material in Sylvia's infancy to exemplify the role of her firefighters at this stage of her development, her self-mutilating tendencies, her addiction to sleeping pills, her promiscuity and her suicide attempts in later stages of development are but a few examples of the extreme measures taken by her firefighters to extinguish the pain of her exiled parts. More pertinent manifestations of Sylvia's firefighters will be discussed in subsequent stages of her development.

9.4.2 Early Childhood (1933 – 1936): Sylvia, the Sibling Rival, and the Move to Winthrop

Biographical material pertaining to Sylvia's early childhood (see section 2.2.2), indicates that the birth of her brother, Warren, constituted a significant event at this stage of her development (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Despite the fact that Aurelia did everything in her power to prepare Sylvia for Warren's arrival, her reaction to his birth indicates that she felt threatened by the occurrence (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Years later she wrote an autobiographical essay entitled *Ocean 1212-W*, in which she expressed that before Warren's birth, she had experienced what she called a "beautiful fusion" with the world, but that his arrival resulted in her feeling separated and no longer special (Plath, 2008, p. 24).

The researcher speculates that Warren's birth may have resulted in Sylvia's internal family parts acquiring burdens as a result of attachment disruptions which she experienced as traumatic and which made her feel unlovable, unloved and worthless. According to the IFS approach, each part of the internal family system has immense value and good intentions (Schwartz & Sparks, 2014). When the different parts or inner-family members relate harmoniously to one another, the individual will feel as though his or her mind is unitary because all the individual members are in sync and working together to create a harmonious, balanced unity (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a, 2017). This would explain Sylvia's experience of being beautifully fused with the world before Warren's arrival. The IFS approach posits, however, that when the inner family is imbalanced or suffers trauma, the system tends to polarize, resulting in a fragmented system of antagonistic parts (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2001).

Sylvia's experience of separation after Warren's birth attests to the polarization of her internal family system. In a polarized system, members of the system are forced to leave their

preferred, familiar roles to take on roles that either compete with or are fighting those of other members (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2017). In such a case, each member of the polarization defends his or her role to protect the vulnerable system from damage (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2017). Sylvia's rivalry with Warren can be explained in terms of her polarized system, and the fact that his birth forced her internal family parts to leave their preferred roles to take on roles believed to protect the system.

Although Aurelia described Sylvia's childhood as being overwhelmingly "laughter-shared" (Wilson, 2013, p. 28), biographical material points to the fact that the arrival of her baby brother negatively affected Sylvia's sense of security. This is affirmed by the fact that she demanded more attention after Warren's birth, and whenever Aurelia tried to breastfeed Warren, Sylvia would try to crawl up onto her mother's lap (Plath, 1975, 1992). According to IFS, children must look to their parents and other significant adults (relatives, caretakers, teachers) in order to gain a sense of identity and to feel loved (Krause, 2013). Although Aurelia was a self-sacrificing and encouraging mother who regularly sang and read to her children, biographical material indicates that she enforced a strict moral regime and that she had a habit of rewarding only good behaviour (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). After Warren's birth, she was also less available to dote on Sylvia, since he was often ill due to an asthmatic condition (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Consequently, Sylvia's attachment to her father strengthened after Warren's birth, and she went out of her way to please Otto, using her quick, retentive intellect to memorise the Latin names for various insects (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

The researcher speculates that Warren's birth resulted in Sylvia feeling ignored, dismissed and possibly even humiliated. According to the IFS model, a child will develop burdens when such feelings reinforce the belief that he/she is unlovable, unloved and worthless (Krause, 2013). In an effort to protect Sylvia from the memory of these painful and negative emotions, her protectors (managers and firefighters) would have tried to imprison her injured inner-child parts. According to IFS, not only would her hurt child have become an imprisoned exile, it would also have had to deal with the burden of added rejection and abandonment for feeling hurt, and the ensuing feelings of unlovability, shame and guilt (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014).

According to Schwartz (1995), exiles are desperate to be valued, cared for and loved, and will go to extreme measures to escape from their prisons so that their story may be heard. This would explain Sylvia's zealous attempts to impress her father with her intellect. IFS also posits that, in their desperation, exiles may give an individual flashbacks, nightmares or sudden,

extreme tastes of pain or fear (Schwartz, 1995). Sylvia experienced a number of fears in childhood. According to biographical material, she developed an irrational fear of bobby pins and buttons, to the extent that even the mention of the word button would send her running and screaming in fear (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). She also feared vacuum cleaners, subways, and burglars who might steal into her room and hide in the cupboards. Her terror of subways emanated from the anxiety that she might stand too close to the edge of the platform and either fall or get pushed into the path of an oncoming train (Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that these fears were manifestations of Sylvia's exiled child parts. Exiles often absorb the feelings that other parts do not want to carry, leaving them with unbearable amounts of fragility, vulnerability, rejection, worthlessness, sadness, shame, emptiness, hopelessness and helplessness, which they try to transfer to other parts or to the Self at any opportunity (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). In their desperation to be saved, exiles will idealise anyone who offers to help and will regard such a helper as a redeemer (Norman & Schwartz, 2003). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's reinforced attachment to her father after Warren's birth and her adoration of him as a "giant of a man" who "feared nothing" (Plath, 2008, p.320), can be explained in terms of her exiled child parts desperately seeking to be helped, and idealising the one who is available to offer such help.

Schwartz (1995) warned that the desperate, distressed and needy state of exiles makes them dangerous. As long as they are locked away in their prison cells and frozen in the past, they are protected from being hurt by events in the present. Releasing them, however, not only overwhelms the person with unpleasant memories and negative feelings, but also makes the person more vulnerable to injury (Schwartz, 1995). In light of the fact that exiles threaten the survival of the system, it is not surprising that they are intensely feared by managers and firefighters (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995).

9.4.2.1 *Managers*

The constant pressure to maintain internal and external control often over-burdens managers with responsibility, and because they represent the inner self-hating voices that people despise, managers are often resented and left feeling unappreciated (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Managers do not enjoy what they do, but they are forced into roles which they believe are necessary to protect the individual and the system as a whole (Schwartz, 2001). The researcher speculates that the following managers emerged during Sylvia's early childhood.

9.4.2.1.1 *The Striver*

Biographical material indicates that Sylvia discovered the alphabet soon after Warren's birth, and that whenever Aurelia picked Warren up to feed him, Sylvia would grab a newspaper, sit on the floor in front of her mother and proceed to identify the capital letters (Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's striving manager pushed her to strive for literary excellence so that she could be distracted from exiled feelings of worthlessness that might cause pain. Schwartz's (1995) premise that this type of manager is excessively task-orientated and always dissatisfied with an individual's performance, is verified by Sylvia's academic zealotry and her constant striving for intellectual superiority. Sylvia's tenacious persistence to learn the alphabet and her subsequent attachment to words as a substitute for love (Wilson, 2013), attests to the powerful influence of her critical, controlling Striver. Sylvia identified with the physicality of words to such an extent that she often wished, as she expressed in *The Bell Jar*, that she could return to the "womblike space of the printed page" (Plath, 1966a, p. 57). This is a further manifestation of the control exerted by her critical Striver. The researcher surmises that Sylvia's striving manager was reinforced by the fact that she inhabited a household run on strict Germanic principles and dominated by a controlled, austere atmosphere (Plath, 2000). This would explain Sylvia's goal-directed efforts at excelling linguistically, even at such a young age. Her mother's constant literary encouragement (Wilson, 2013), coupled with her father's relentless work ethic and ambitious drive to succeed (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013), fuelled her achievement striving, thereby giving all the more power to the Striver described by Schwartz (1995) in the IFS model. The researcher speculates that this manager exerted such a strong influence on Sylvia that the pursuit of personal achievement became a life-long obsession which both inspired and haunted her.

9.4.2.1.2 *The Evaluator*

Sylvia's efforts to impress her mother with her early identification of letters, and her striving to please her father by memorising the Latin names for various insects (Butscher, 1976, 2003), attest to the role of her evaluating manager. This managerial part focuses on anticipating what other individuals want and acting accordingly in order to please them and avoid being abandoned (DeLand et al., 2004). Sylvia's efforts to counteract the threat of her brother, coupled with her mother's constant literary encouragement, resulted in Sylvia's ever-increasing attachment to words as a substitute for love (Wilson, 2013). It is surmised that this attachment to words was reinforced by Sylvia's belief that if she was capable of perfecting her

linguistic capabilities, she would please her parents and they would not abandon her. This would explain the manifestation of Sylvia's conscientiousness, especially with regard to linguistic and literary accomplishments. Not only did Sylvia impress her parents with her intellectual competence and her linguistic deliberation, she also pleased them with her sense of dutifulness and her self-disciplined work-ethic. Given that the Plath household was run on strict Germanic principles of order and discipline (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1975, 1992; Wilson, 2013), the researcher infers that Sylvia's conscientiousness would have greatly pleased her parents and reinforced the role of her evaluating manager.

9.4.2.1.3 The Passive Pessimist

According to biographical material, Sylvia's identification with the physicality of words emerged during early childhood and proved to be so intense that it governed her measure of self-esteem throughout her life (Plath, 1992, 2000; Wilson, 2013). This is attested to by her feelings of worthlessness whenever she suffered from writer's block (Plath, 1992, 2000; Wilson, 2013). According to Schwartz (1995), the manager which he called the Passive Pessimist will often try to break down an individual's confidence and may even try to sabotage performance. In an effort to spare a depressed individual from further pain, the Passive Pessimist may even choose to paralyse the individual by forcing the exiled part into making him or her feel totally apathetic, withdrawn, helpless and worthless (Schwartz, 2001). Although Sylvia and Warren had a close relationship, it was extremely competitive and sometimes characterised by bullying and fighting (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). On one occasion, the fighting escalated to the point that Sylvia accidentally cut Warren's neck with a flick of the blade on her ice skate (Wilson, 2013).

In terms of Schwartz's (1995) IFS model, Sylvia's angry hostility towards Warren can be seen as a manifestation of her Passive Pessimist. This rivalry with Warren extended into Sylvia's adulthood and came to symbolise the larger battle that she had to fight with men throughout her life in order to gain recognition at a time in history when social and political conventions restricted the independence and growth of women (Kendall, 2001; Kirk, 2009; Wagner-Martin, 1987; Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's Passive Pessimist forced her to feel withdrawn, helpless, worthless and inferior to men. It did so in an effort to spare her from the pain that would surface if she persisted in fighting for her rights in a male-dominated society that segregated women and devalued their contribution to society.

9.4.2.1.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

Sylvia's development coincided with a period in American history characterised by double standards. These double standards were embedded in the ideological changes of the time and they caused a cultural shift in all aspects of life, not least of which was the role of women in the changing dynamics of American family life (Gill, 2008). Whilst women were encouraged to develop themselves academically, they were simultaneously urged to focus their ambitions on domesticity (Friedan, 1963).

The women in this period of history belonged to a generation that did not question social standards, because they knew full well that a woman's intellectual, emotional and physical ambitions would always be at odds with societal expectations (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000). These women were expected to study hard to ensure self-improvement, but they had to keep in mind that the ultimate goals in life were marriage, children and a home (Gill, 2008; Plath, 1992, 2003).

The researcher speculates that the socially conservative tradition and double standards which prevailed at the time caused Sylvia's selfless, caretaking manager (the Caretaker) and her egotistical, entitled manager (the Entitled One) to be polarized in conflicting roles. Her rivalry with her brother, Warren, attests to the dichotomous nature of this polarization. Whilst her caretaking manager would have expected her to sacrifice her own needs and selflessly take care of Warren, her entitled manager would have encouraged her to believe that she was entitled to anything she wanted, even at the expense of her brother's needs. This would explain the loving, yet competitive relationship that existed between Sylvia and Warren. Biographical material indicates that even at this young age, Sylvia would often "monopolize" conversations and try to outsmart Warren with her ever-increasing knowledge and vocabulary (Plath, 1992, p. 19). This sibling rivalry, which commenced during Sylvia's early childhood, extended into a rivalry with men in Sylvia's adulthood and came to represent everything she hated about American 1950s society (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). For Sylvia, who had such high ambitions to achieve greatness, the contradictory roles expected of women and the strain of keeping up appearances left her feeling lost and stripped of identity (Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that she felt lost and stripped of identity because her Caretaker and Entitled One were polarized in conflicting roles. This conflict became all the more pronounced as Sylvia developed into adulthood and explains her resentment of the fact that society expected her to sacrifice her ambitions and subordinate herself and her creativity to the will of a future husband (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). According to the researcher, the polarization between

Sylvia's Caretaker and Entitled One may have activated the manager which Schwartz (1995, 2001) called the Worrier or Sentry.

9.4.2.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2009) posited that some managers give people the outward appearance of success and provide the drive that is needed for them to excel, be it academically, in their careers or in making money. Such high levels of success and achievement not only provide a certain measure of control over relationships and choices, they also distract people from or compensate for their inner shame, sadness, fear or despair (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009).

The researcher speculates that Sylvia's competitiveness towards Warren and her efforts at outsmarting him not only provided a certain measure of control over the sibling relationship, but also distracted her from and compensated for her fear of abandonment and failure. Given the contradictory and irreconcilable pressures placed on women in America at the time (Gill, 2008), it is hardly surprising that Sylvia felt threatened by the arrival of a brother, since he represented the larger battle which she had to fight against men for independence and recognition (Kendall, 2001; Kirk, 2009; Wagner-Martin, 1987; Wilson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher surmises that Sylvia's Worrier or Sentry was triggered to prevent her from taking risks in a male-dominated society which regarded marriage as the only real life-changing mechanism to be hoped for by a woman.

9.4.2.2 *Firefighters*

The conflictual, yet complementary relationship between managers and firefighters often results in an individual being caught in a vicious cycle (Schwartz, 1995). Managers depend on firefighters to block intrapsychic pain, but then scornfully attack them afterwards for reducing the individual to someone weak-willed and indulgent (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995). Given that Aurelia had a habit of rewarding only good behaviour, and that Otto was a man who intimidated people through his autocratic, domineering insistence on order, the researcher speculates that Sylvia's clingy, needy behaviour after Warren's birth may have ignited a critical attack from her inner managers, as well as from the managers of the disapproving adults around her. This would have reactivated her exiles and the associated feelings of sadness, fear and shame. In turn, this would have triggered Sylvia's firefighters to extinguish the scorching flames of her painful emotions, which would then have fostered increased self-abusive behaviour. According to the IFS model, the impulsive response from

reactive firefighters triggers further attack from the critical managers, thereby perpetuating a vicious cycle of intrapsychic and/or interpersonal triggers that are embedded in body memory (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Pert, 1997; Riskin, 2013; Rothschild, 2000).

Biographical material indicates that, although Sylvia inhabited a household dominated by a severe and controlling atmosphere, in her mind she lived in a fantastical “never-never land of magic, of fairy queens and virginal maidens, of little princes and their rose bushes” (Plath, 2000, p. 35). The researcher speculates that Sylvia’s tendency of escaping to an exotic, fantasy world (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013) attests to the emergence of her dissociating parts. According to DeLand et al. (2004), dissociating parts include manager and firefighting parts which protect the system by disconnecting from thoughts, feelings, the body and situations perceived as threatening. Behaviours associated with dissociating parts include foggy thinking, disappearing from oneself, or experiencing oneself outside one’s body (DeLand et al., 2004). It is surmised that Sylvia’s vivid imagination was fuelled by her creative and linguistic ability, and that her firefighters prompted her to escape to a fantastical “never-never land of magic” to protect her from the painful reality of her exiled parts.

9.4.3 Middle Childhood (1936 – 1939): Sylvia and the Great New England Hurricane preceding the Plath Tragedy

Biographical material pertaining to this stage of Sylvia’s childhood (see section 2.2.2) indicates that the onset of her father’s ill health constituted a significant occurrence at this time – one which would have a profound impact and extensive ramifications on subsequent stages of her development. Her father began to lose weight, was afflicted by a terrible cough and sinusitis, and seemed constantly irritable and short-tempered (Wilson, 2013). He spent the greater part of his time in his large study downstairs and the onset and progression of his illness not only depleted his physical strength, it also exacerbated his already erratic and volatile temperament (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In order to protect Sylvia and Warren from Otto’s explosive temper, Aurelia would seclude the children upstairs in a large bedroom which she had converted into a playroom for them (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). There Sylvia and Warren would have their supper and entertain themselves while Aurelia and Otto had dinner downstairs. For half an hour before bedtime, Sylvia and Warren would be allowed downstairs to spend time with and entertain their father (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that the separation between the parental and child units of the external family system may have aggravated the polarization of parts, resulting in members clinging all the more rigidly to their positions within the system.

The researcher further surmises that the children's segregation in the upstairs playroom may have made Sylvia feel all the more ignored, dismissed, humiliated, ashamed, embarrassed or terrified, and that this would invariably have fuelled her belief that she was unlovable, unloved and worthless, thereby making her burdens all the more extensive.

Biographical material indicates that Otto's temper worsened as his health deteriorated, to the point that Aurelia took Sylvia and Warren and went to live with her parents at their home in Point Shirley (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Some months later, the Plaths made the decision to move from their small apartment in Prince Street to a more spacious house situated at the coast in Winthrop, close to Aurelia's parents (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). This constituted a major event in Sylvia's life. It was in Winthrop that Sylvia acquired her powerful, almost obsessive love and fear of the ocean, romantically envisioning it as the mother of the universe that transformed the ordinary processes of life into poetry (Butscher, 1976, 2003). It is surmised that Sylvia's obsessive love and fear of the ocean symbolised the conflictual nature of her polarized parts and the extent of burdening within her internal family system. The move to Winthrop and Sylvia's subsequent fascination with the ocean fuelled her imagination and she often associated the "potently rich sea" of her subconscious with the dark ocean floor of her childhood, believing that she needed to return to that place if she wanted to attain success as a writer (Plath, 2000, p. 168). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher speculates that the "potently rich sea" of Sylvia's subconscious (Plath, 2000, p. 168), represented her exiled parts, and that her attempts at accessing this dark ocean floor of her childhood were constantly sabotaged by her critical, controlling managers and her impulsive firefighters.

It is further speculated that Otto's deteriorating health and ever-increasing outbursts of anger, together with the move to Winthrop, added injury to Sylvia's already injured inner-child parts. According to the IFS model, the imprisonment of the hurt child's exile becomes all the more intense and is aggravated by the fact that it has to deal with the burden of added rejection and abandonment for feeling hurt, and the ensuing feelings of unlovability, shame and guilt (Schwartz, 1995, Schwartz & Sparks, 2014).

Shame and guilt emerge when an internal audience gives a mental thumbs down to an individual's Self (Sweezy, 2013). In the case of guilt, the judgment is directed at behaviour (e.g., I did something wrong), whilst in the case of shame, the judgment is global (e.g., I am a bad person) (Lewis, 1971; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tracy et al., 2007). When an individual believes that he/she is being judged and that his/her personal defects risk being exposed, the emotional, physical and cognitive manifestations of the shame experience reveal themselves in feelings of queasiness, heaviness, shrunkenness, foolishness, stupidity, unwantedness,

unlovability, aloneness and worthlessness (Mills, 2005; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Tracy et al., 2007).

Other theorists have also made reference to the dissociative state which the IFS model explains through the use of the term exiles. As early as the beginning of the 20th century, Janet (1911) described dissociation of ego states as a defensive psychological function that takes place unconsciously so as to reduce anxiety and psychic conflict. Barbieri (2008) defined trauma as the inability to fight or escape from overwhelming circumstances, leading to a dissociation of the mind. Research has shown that extreme cases of trauma, such as childhood neglect, parents suffering from attachment disorders and abandonment, can result in Dissociative Disorders (DDs) and even borderline personality disorder (Lyons-Ruth, 2003). In terms of the IFS model, individuals who show symptoms of dissociation have exiles who carry burdens of extreme beliefs and emotions, as well as managers and firefighters who are either easily overwhelmed or rigidly controlling (Twombly, 2013).

The researcher speculates that Sylvia's tendency of escaping to another world through her poetry can be indicative of the extent of burdening on her traumatised, injured child parts. This would explain the ever-increasing role of her dissociative parts (managers and firefighters) and their efforts to protect her internal family system by disconnecting from feelings, thoughts, the body and threatening situations, and finding refuge in the poetic world of her imagination. By the age of five, Sylvia was already writing well-crafted poems. Of her early attempts, the first one that she recopied in final form, dated and saved, was entitled *Thoughts*, an unrhymed couplet celebrating Christmas, written in 1937 (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Her first poems were innocent distillations of daily life, but as time passed and the tragedy of her father's deteriorating health began to unfold, Sylvia's poetry began to change. It is surmised that this change in her poetry occurred as a result of added trauma to her already burdened inner child parts. Schwartz (1995, 2009) posited that the more exiles threaten the survival of a system, the more extreme protective groups (managers and firefighters) become in their attempts to keep the traumatised parts exiled.

9.4.3.1 Managers

Managers try to arrange an individual's life and psyche so that the pain of exiles never arises. They are proactive and act with foresight to ward off pain (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995). They focus on functioning, learning and being stable and prepared, and are thus constantly on guard to prevent an individual's internal system from being flooded with the emotions generated by traumatised, injured inner-child parts (exiles) (Sweezy & Ziskind, 2013).

Consequently, managers often adopt an array of harsh techniques, including relentless shaming and criticising, so as to ensure that an individual remains task-orientated and oblivious to feelings (Schwartz, 1995, 2001; Sweezy & Ziskind, 2013). The role of the different managers at this stage of Sylvia's childhood development, is discussed in the next section.

9.4.3.1.1 *The Striver*

According to biographical material, Sylvia was only four years old when Aurelia enrolled her at a private elementary school (Alexander, 1999). Although she was under-age, her sharp mind, coupled with Aurelia's ambitious reading programme, resulted in her being able to read from a very young age and ensured that she was ready for school (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia performed so well, that within a year she was ready to take on the more rigorous programme of Winthrop's public elementary school (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Although the academic programme was far more rigorous than she had been used to at her previous school, Sylvia maintained a straight A profile from the very beginning, impressing her teachers with her intelligence and dedication (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

The researcher speculates that Sylvia's outstanding academic profile can be attributed to the powerful influence of her critical, controlling Striver. Schwartz's (1995) premise that this type of manager is excessively task-orientated and never satisfied with an individual's performance, can be seen in Sylvia's life-long record of achievement striving. Not only did Sylvia exhibit a life-long tendency of investing all her energy in pursuit of personal achievement, she also displayed the tendency of being perpetually dissatisfied with her performance, no matter how remarkable her accomplishments were. Despite her remarkable accomplishments, her journal entries bear witness to an inexplicable sadness and an eternal dissatisfaction with herself (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). According to DeLand et al. (2004), the manager which Schwartz (1995) described as a Striver, is extremely self-critical and represents all the internal voices that criticise and admonish an individual for not performing better.

According to the premises of the IFS Model, the severity of Sylvia's critical Striver would be indicative of the extent of her exiles' feelings of unworthiness. The researcher infers that this manager forced Sylvia to strive for outstanding achievement not only to distract her from her own personal feelings of unworthiness and inferiority, but also to distract her from the legacy burdens transferred to her by her rigid and controlling parents (see section 9.4.1.2). This would explain why Sylvia's pursuit of personal achievement manifested at such a young age, and why it exerted such a pervasive influence throughout her life.

9.4.3.1.2 *The Evaluator*

As indicated by biographical material (see section 9.4.3), Sylvia and Warren were given the opportunity to spend time with and entertain their father for half an hour before bed time (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's desire to please her father would have been reinforced by her anxiety about his illness and the fact that her time with him was limited. Not only is this type of manager anxious about obtaining social approval (Schwartz, 2001), it is also anxious about being criticised, rejected and abandoned (DeLand et al., 2004, Schwartz, 2001). Apart from the fact that both Sylvia's parents were extremely critical (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013), the fact that Otto was ill, may have increased Sylvia's fear of abandonment and reinforced the role of her pleasing Evaluator. Biographical material indicates that, although living arrangements changed with the onset of her father's illness, the short periods of time which Sylvia got to spend with and entertain him proved to be positive experiences for her and she came to depend upon his praises (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Her attachment to her father was strengthened not only by his praises, but also by the fact that she was told repeatedly, whilst she was growing up, that she resembled him (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Her admiration for her father, together with her striving to be his favourite (Plath, 2008) only served to strengthen her identification with him, and attests to the influence of her evaluating manager.

Sylvia's tendency of desiring to please authority figures, like her father, persisted throughout her life. At school, although she often isolated herself socially and remained an outsider to her peers (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013), adults, particularly teachers, were always impressed by her outstanding academic accomplishments, and they remembered her even long after she had disappeared from their lives (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). This reinforces the researcher's opinion that Sylvia's evaluating manager was reinforced by her polarized relationship with her father, and that it prompted her to excel and to behave perfectly in an attempt to keep her exiled fears of abandonment and unworthiness securely imprisoned.

9.4.3.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

According to Schwartz (1995), in its efforts to avoid all forms of interpersonal risk that might activate feelings of hostility, sexuality or fear, the Passive Pessimist will try to induce total apathy and withdrawal. Biographical material indicates that Otto neglected to obtain medical help when the first warning signs of diabetes mellitus appeared, resulting in the condition becoming life-threatening (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). In light of the fact that Otto was such an intelligent man and that he would undoubtedly have understood the

implications of his self-neglect, the researcher speculates that his Passive Pessimist may have prompted him to dismiss the severity of his symptoms so as to protect him from unbearable feelings of fear. Considering the extent to which Sylvia identified with her father, it is surmised that his burdens were transferred to her, thereby enhancing the role of her Passive Pessimist. This would explain why Sylvia sometimes withdrew into bizarre and inaccessible moods, and even social isolation (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

According to Schwartz (1995), the Passive Pessimist tries to keep a person's internal family system safe by forcing the exiled part into making the person even more withdrawn. Similarly, the Passive Pessimist tries to spare a depressed person from further pain by forcing the exiled part into making that person feel even more apathetic, withdrawn, helpless and worthless (Schwartz, 2001). Sylvia's reluctance to extend herself socially to her peers, as well as her pervasive feelings of worthlessness, throughout her life, attest to the role of her Passive Pessimist. These feelings of inferiority and her fears of inadequacy made her isolate herself even more, to the point that she remained an outsider (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

9.4.3.1.4 The Career and the Entitled One

The researcher speculates that Otto's illness would have reinforced the role of Aurelia's caretaking manager. These caring managers are often exploited and devalued (Schwartz, 2001). Biographical material suggests that Otto exploited Aurelia's assistance when it came to the linguistic expression of his scientific ideas (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). The fact that he did not acknowledge the full extent of Aurelia's contribution to his publication, indicates that he not only exploited her, but also inadvertently devalued her. Given that Aurelia had the tendency to sacrifice herself for her family so that they could have "the world of joy she'd never had" (Plath, 2000, p. 430), it is inferred that the onset of Otto's illness would have driven her to be even more self-sacrificing, and that this burden would have been transferred to Sylvia. Sylvia's identification with her father would, however, have resulted in her egotistical, entitled manager polarizing in a conflictual role with her selfless Caretaker. This would explain Sylvia's drive to emulate her father's ambitiousness, and her resentment of her mother's attitude of noble martyrdom.

9.4.3.1.5 The Worrier or Sentry

The researcher speculates that the progressive severity of Otto's illness may have heightened Sylvia's level of anxiety, making her Worrier all the more alert for danger. According to the IFS model, a hyper-aroused Worrier will exert even greater effort to frighten an individual from

taking risks, because it feels responsible for keeping the individual's life safe and under control (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz et al., 2009). It is inferred that the family's move to the coastal town of Winthrop as a result of Otto's ever-worsening condition, would also have augmented Sylvia's fears and insecurities, since she would have had to adapt to a new environment. According to biographical material, this stage of Sylvia's development also coincided with the Great New England Hurricane which struck in 1938, causing massive destruction and the loss of two hundred lives from Long Island to Canada (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The hurricane left an indelible impression on Sylvia, and although it fuelled her artistic imagination and ultimately led to what she later described as the birth of her artist self (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003), the researcher speculates that the hurricane also fuelled the development of her Worrier.

9.4.3.2 Firefighters

The fact that Sylvia acquired a powerful, almost obsessive love and fear of the ocean in Winthrop (Butscher, 1976, 2003), bears testimony to the extent of polarization of her internal family system. According to the IFS model, manager and firefighter parts are frequently polarized with one another (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Unlike the controlled and ordered nature of manager parts, firefighter parts are characterised by impulsivity and an orientation toward intense thrills, fun and excitement (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995). In the event that firefighting behaviour becomes self-destructive and dangerous, manager parts become even more extreme in their efforts to protect the system, resulting in even greater polarization of the system (Earley, 2012; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2009).

Years after the Great New England Hurricane, Sylvia wrote about her vivid recollections of the occurrence. Apart from associating the storm with the birth of her artist self, she also associated it with her mother's inadequacy (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). This provides yet another example of polarization. According to Krause (2013), when a child's wounded, vulnerable parts are forced into exile, the protective parts in search of solutions frequently become polarized. The more the protective parts battle for supremacy in the internal family system, the more extreme they become (Earley, 2012; Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995). This would explain the polarized and dichotomous nature of Sylvia's relationship with her mother. Although the proactive protectors (managers) of Sylvia's internal family system urged compliance to Aurelia's strict code of conduct, thereby promoting a sense of dutifulness and obedience, her reactive protectors (firefighters) urged rebellion and accounted for Sylvia's deep-rooted resentment towards her mother.

It is thus inferred that Sylvia's poetry served as the vehicle through which her firefighters could dissociate from the pain of her exiled, wounded child parts. This pain became all the more intense as the trauma of her father's deteriorating health increased. When the trauma culminated in tragedy on the day of her father's death, the ordeal (which is discussed in the next section), came to represent all that was not happy in Sylvia's childhood (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

9.4.4 Later Childhood (1939 – 1945): The Aftermath of Otto Plath's Death during World War II

Biographical material pertaining to this stage of Sylvia's childhood, indicates that the events leading up to and including the death of her father, constituted a major traumatic event in her life. Given Sylvia's sensitivity, her imagination and her strong attachment to her father, it was inevitable that her father's death would have a traumatic effect on her (Butscher, 1976, 2003). The researcher surmises that the trauma was exacerbated by the fact that Sylvia, who had been placed in the position to take care of him, felt guilty for not having been there for him when he collapsed on the nurse's first day off (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

According to the IFS model, although the different parts of one's inner family system share common goals such as survival, belonging and safety, they often end up in conflict whilst striving for those goals (Scott, 2017). This conflict results in the establishment of polarities which can severely stress or paralyse a person's internal system (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Whilst loss is an unavoidable part of life to which individuals adapt by grieving, Scott (2017) differentiated between simple grief and grief made complicated by the traumatic and overwhelming nature of the loss. Chronic grief is estimated to affect 15 percent of individuals dealing with loss (Kersting, 2004). A number of circumstances have been identified as being responsible for chronic grief. These include: (a) unresolved, significant loss experienced early in life and/or characterised by a dependency on the lost relationship (Lobb et al., 2010); (b) an ambivalent relationship between the mourner and the deceased (Freud, 1917); and (c) relational factors such as lack of support or an attachment style characterised by anxious ambivalence (Wayment & Vierthaler, 2002).

Despite the fact that Otto had a tyrannical disposition characterised by "explosive outbursts of anger" (Plath, 1992, p. 18), biographical material indicates that Sylvia came to depend upon his praises (Wilson, 2013), whilst her journal entries and literary works attest to the overwhelming and bewildering nature of her loss. The researcher surmises that these factors, coupled with the fact that she was only eight when her father died, led to the chronic and

complicated nature of her grief experience. It is further surmised that the grief was complicated even more extensively by the fact that Sylvia experienced her mother as being unsupportive.

According to Wolfelt (1992), complicated grief manifests in a number of ways, including: (a) displaced feelings of sadness or anger towards other individuals and events; (b) somatisation, whereby grief feelings are converted into physiological symptoms; (c) postponement, whereby the entire loss experience is shelved; (d) replacement of the deceased in order to avoid the grieving process; and (e) minimisation in order to downplay the significance of the loss.

Sylvia's displaced feelings of sadness and anger were evident in her reaction to her father's death. Not only did she blame her mother for what she considered to be the "murder" of her father (Plath, 2000, p. 431), she also hated her for her lack of tenderness towards him (Plath, 2000). The fact that her mother did not let her and Warren attend the funeral only added to Sylvia's anger and resentment. Her displaced sadness and anger were not only directed towards her mother, but also towards her father, since Sylvia experienced his departure as a "deliberate" act of betrayal (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia's exclamation: "I'll never speak to God again!" (Plath, 1992, p.25) attests to the extent of her grief and displaced anger. The fact that she maintained this cynical disbelief in religion throughout her life and even resorted to occultish practices to make contact with her father's spirit, strengthens the researcher's speculation that she was burdened by complicated grief from which she never managed to escape.

According to Scott (2017), when an individual is faced with the trauma of loss, it takes time for the internal family system to conceptualise what has occurred, resulting in different parts reacting at different times, depending on when those parts obtain the information. The grieving process usually starts with first responder parts responding to the loss with disbelief, shock, numbness and even denial. First responder parts are usually closely associated with storytelling parts (Scott, 2017).

Biographical information indicates that Otto's death came to represent all that was not happy in Sylvia's childhood (Alexander 1999; Kirk, 2009). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's poetry emanated from her storytelling parts and that these parts titrated the influence of her vulnerable, exiled parts, thereby allowing the managerial parts of her system to cope with the overwhelming grief of her father's tragedy. Years later, Sylvia acknowledged that poetry had allowed her to fall "into a new way of being happy" (Plath, 2008, p. 22). The fact that Sylvia's first published poem appeared in the *Boston Sunday Herald* only six months after her father's death (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013), strengthens the researcher's speculation regarding the role of her storytelling parts.

This speculation corresponds with Rollyson's (2013) assertion that poetry proved to be the median point between Sylvia and the world. According to Rollyson, words in poetry made Sylvia want to cry, but they also made her very happy: "Poetry had that power over her. She would live and die by it" (Rollyson, 2013, p. 15). The researcher surmises that the contradictory emotions evoked in Sylvia by poetry further support the speculation that her internal family system was polarized and that the extent of polarization was aggravated by the trauma of losing her father. Her father haunts her work like a ghost that cannot find peace, as can be seen by his ghostly appearance in many of her poems (Hughes, 1981; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013).

The trauma of losing her father added even more injury to Sylvia's already injured inner-child parts and reinforced the imprisonment of her exiled parts. In terms of the IFS model, emotional overwhelm experienced by traumatised individuals usually occurs when an exile blends and causes functional collapse, thereby prompting reactive protectors to launch symptoms aimed at distracting and suppressing the exile's emotional anguish (Anderson & Sweezy, 2017). After Otto's death, Aurelia decided not to let Sylvia and Warren attend their father's funeral for fear that it might be traumatic for them (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Although Aurelia justified her decision not to take her children to the funeral by claiming that she tried not to let them see her cry, Sylvia interpreted Aurelia's decision as indifference and a sign that her mother had not really loved her husband (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that Aurelia's decision not only fuelled Sylvia's already existing resentment towards her mother, but also reinforced the suppression of her exiles. Aurelia, who had been raised according to strict Calvinistic values, staunchly believed that a brave face always had to be presented to the world, irrespective of circumstances (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). In light of the fact that Sylvia always came across as being gracious, well-poised and calm, it is speculated that she imitated her mother's façade of perfect self-control, and that this reinforced her tendency to exile painful, emotional experiences. Although biographical material suggests that emotionally, Sylvia felt deeply, reports on her character indicate that she did not give much of herself (Wilson, 2013), and that she came across as being "all façade, too polite, too well brought-up and well-disciplined" (Butscher, 2003, p. 104).

According to the IFS model, the more intense the emotional anguish of exiles, the harsher the efforts of protectors (managers and firefighters) to ensure that exiled pain is kept at bay (Mones, 2003; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). The grief reactions of first responder parts, as described by Scott (2017) (see section 9.4.4), are usually followed by the reactions of the grief cluster.

This cluster includes the internal family system's sad parts, and their reactions include missing, protesting, longing, regretting, searching and feeling guilty (Scott, 2017). Initially, these highly-emotive parts are kept in obedience until the protectors are sure that their emotional distress does not overwhelm the system. Since these parts are eventually given the opportunity to be heard during the grieving process, Scott (2017) referred to them as neo-exiles.

Exiles, on the other hand, are blocked from awareness, and although they persist in trying to escape from their prisons so that their story may be heard, managers and firefighters keep them locked away and frozen in the past to protect them from being hurt in the present (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). According to the IFS model, the grieving process is typically characterised by oscillation between being fully blended with one's grief cluster as one tries to process the loss experience, and the restorative cluster, known for its future-focused, goal-directed action. Stroebe and Schut (2010) indicated that this interplay between planning and grieving ensures episodes of relief at a time which can be excruciatingly painful. Complicated grief usually involves parts which carry stories of painful, unsupported loss, especially during childhood (Krause, 2013; Scott, 2017).

Biographical material indicates that Otto's death was not the only loss suffered by Sylvia during this stage of her development. Aurelia's acceptance of a position at Boston University and her decision to move the family closer to Boston so she would not have to commute to the city every day, had a profound effect on Sylvia, who was only nine at the time (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1975; 1992; Wilson, 2013). Apart from the sadness generated by the loss of her father and her familiar coastal wonderland, the move to the inland town of Wellesley generated immense anxiety in Sylvia (Alexander, 1999), and proved to be a watershed moment since it represented the loss of her entire childhood (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's greatest problems were, however, not only external ones, and Wilson (2013) suggested that she suffered from some sort of mental disturbance even at this early age. In terms of the IFS model, the researcher surmises that this mental disturbance could have been caused by the weight of Sylvia's burdened parts and the extent of her polarized internal family system. The more wounded and vulnerable the child parts are, the more they are pushed into exile, and the less likely the child is to access the Self and trust it for leadership (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013).

According to biographical material, Sylvia's family move inland after her father's death not only sealed her off from the enchantments of childhood, but also trapped her in a world of darkness from which she could never escape (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The researcher equates Sylvia's entrapment in a world of darkness to the relentless

imprisonment of her exiles. Her inability to access what IFS calls the Self, is aptly captured in Sylvia's own description of the painful memory of her childhood losses:

And this is how it stiffens, my vision of that seaside childhood. My father died, we moved inland. Whereon those nine first years of my life sealed themselves off like a ship in a bottle – beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white, flying myth. (Plath, 1979, p.26)

9.4.4.1 Managers

Managers serve as an individual's active guide through life's daily occurrences and their role is to provide improved functioning and stability (Smith, 2017; Schwartz, 1995, Sykes, 2017). Schwartz (1995) posited that when the internal family system is burdened, it gets thrown out of balance, prompting protectors to restore balance by responding in the opposite direction. According to the researcher's speculations, the trauma suffered by Sylvia with the death of her father and the subsequent move to Wellesley, account for the intensity of behaviour of her managerial parts, and is discussed in the following section.

9.4.4.1.1 The Striver

Apart from the authentic beauty of Wellesley, Aurelia chose to move to this more affluent suburb of Boston because it offered an excellent schooling system, which could enhance Sylvia's educational development (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Academic achievement was a priority to Aurelia (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013) and the researcher surmises that the severity of Sylvia's critical, controlling Striver was reinforced both externally through Aurelia's insistence on academic excellence; and internally, as a result of the traumas of loss suffered at this stage of Sylvia's development. In terms of the IFS model, it is thus speculated that Sylvia's Striver motivated her to be outstanding so that she could be distracted and protected from the exiled feelings of trauma that might have caused pain. The IFS model emphasises that the intensity of behaviour of protectors is directly proportional to the pain experienced by the system's exiles (Krause et al., 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). In light of Sylvia's outstanding academic achievements, it is inferred that her Striver exerted immense energy to keep her traumatised parts exiled, even if it meant pushing her to extreme levels of conscientiousness and task-orientated behaviour. This would account for Sylvia's eternal dissatisfaction with her performance and her incessant striving for academic success – characteristics which correspond perfectly with the critical, controlling Striver described by Schwartz (1995).

Outstanding was but one word used to describe Sylvia, and even after she had disappeared from their lives, adults and particularly teachers, remembered her for her meticulous work ethic and her superior creative ability (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In a letter written to one of Sylvia's biographers almost 10 years after her death, one of her teachers said of her: "It is not strange that after all these years I should remember Sylvia so well, for she was truly outstanding in every way" (Butscher, 2003, p. 19).

Despite the anxiety which would inevitably have been generated as a result of having to adapt to a new environment and schooling system, Sylvia managed to attain the highest achievement in everything she did, from academics to managing war stamp sales (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). It was also at this stage that she started garnering awards for her writing, and the exhilaration of seeing her name printed aside a published poem or story, strengthened her pursuit of personal achievement and literary success, and became an addictive ambition that she would pursue for the rest of her life (Wilson, 2013). The biographical details pertaining to Sylvia's plethora of achievements affirm the researcher's speculation that her Striver played a dominant role in her life, prompting her to excel in order to distract her from the pain of her childhood tragedy. Although Sylvia never specifically mentioned Otto's death, her literary works affirm the link between her artistic efforts and the trauma associated with that childhood event (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rose, 2013). Sylvia's drive for success was also an emulation of her deceased father's own discipline and ambition (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rose, 2013). The researcher surmises that, apart from fuelling her poetic talent, this drive also intensified the power of her Striver over her internal family system.

9.4.4.1.2 *The Evaluator*

The primary responsibility of the evaluating manager is to obtain social approval and as such, it is always engaged in monitoring and evaluating a person's popularity, appearance and behaviour, even in relation to others (Schwartz, 2001). According to biographical material, Sylvia had started the first grade at age four, making her two years younger than most of her classmates (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). After the move to Wellesley, Aurelia decided to enroll her in the fifth grade at her new school, rather than the sixth grade which she had already started in Winthrop (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Aurelia believed that putting her back a grade would narrow the physical, emotional and social gap between Sylvia and her peers, and facilitate the transition to a new environment (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although this decision eased Sylvia's academic workload and afforded her the time to pursue extra-curricular

activities and forge new friendships (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013), the researcher surmises that the burdens internalised by her internal family system after her father's death, strengthened her belief that she was unloved and worthless and reinforced the controlling power of her evaluating manager.

The traumatic effect of Otto's death on Sylvia was intensified by the fact that she experienced his departure as a deliberate act of betrayal (Butscher, 1976, 2003). According to Anderson and Sweezy (2017), interpersonal trauma destroys trust in one's relationships. Not only does it sever external relationship ties, it also initiates a persistent inner attack on self-governance and self-worth. Sylvia had come to depend upon her father's praises (Wilson, 2013), and according to Butscher (1976, 2003), she sought compensation in the realms of public approval so as to substitute the loss of parental love. In terms of the IFS model, the researcher infers that this behaviour could be attributed to the role of her evaluating manager and the extent to which it was prepared to go to protect her system from the painful memories of rejection and abandonment embedded in her exiled parts. This would explain Sylvia's obsessive perfectionism and her desire to please her mother and play the part of the dutiful daughter. Apart from the fact that these behaviours were reinforced by Aurelia's habit of rewarding good behaviour (Butscher, 1976, 2013; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013), the researcher infers that they were manifestations of the evaluating manager's belief that the perfect Sylvia who pleased everyone would never be abandoned or hurt again. According to Schwartz (1995), Strivers and Evaluators are often in conflict because they have different motives for protecting a person. In the case of Sylvia, the researcher surmises that at the one extreme, her Striver constantly pushed her to work, with no regard for feelings, thereby fuelling her competitive drive. At the other extreme, her Evaluator pushed her to be amiable and socially polite towards people so that their approval could be attained. It is further surmised that her compulsive perfectionism was fuelled by her belief that the degree of approval by others, especially by her mother, was directly related to her standard of performance, both socially and academically.

The dichotomy between Sylvia's Striver and Evaluator exemplifies the extent of polarization of her parts. According to Wilson (2013), even at this early age, Sylvia's competitive drive and compulsive perfectionism bordered on the pathological. She was described as being incredibly intense, competitive and determined to do things right, to the extent that "everything she did had to be not just good, but perfect (Wilson, 2013, p. 56).

Sylvia's compulsive perfectionism emerged from the moral and social framework of her life, and provided not only the main features of her surface masks, but their underpinnings as

well (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). According to Schwartz (2001), Strivers and Evaluators are often polarized in conflicting roles with the Passive Pessimist. The researcher speculates that Sylvia's strong sense of middle-class propriety and her strict adherence to domestic and moral cleanliness, exemplify the role of her Passive Pessimist, which is discussed in the next section.

9.4.4.1.3 The Passive Pessimist

One of Sylvia's favourite pastimes at this stage of her development was listening to radio shows, her favourite being *The Jack Benny Show*, *The Lone Ranger*, and the radio serial version of the *Superman* comic book (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). According to Rollyson (2013), her enthrallment with super-heroes formed part of a symbolic clean-up that would make the world morally immaculate. In adulthood, her visceral dislike of moral and physical imperfections manifested itself in her extreme reactions to her husband's deplorable physical and moral hygiene (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia's neuroticism with regard to physical and moral hygiene is ascribed to the role of her Passive Pessimist. Schwartz (1995) emphasised that this manager is characterised by apathetic avoidance-behaviour, and that it will even resort to neurotic tendencies in its efforts to protect the internal family system from the feared feelings and thoughts of its exiles. It is surmised that Sylvia's neurotic fear of physical and moral dirt prompted her social withdrawal for fear of rejection.

Biographical material indicates that Sylvia was very close to her mother to the point that she regarded her as an extension of herself, rather than as a separate person (Wilson, 2013). At the same time, however, she resented her mother for her lack of tenderness towards her father (Plath, 2000), as well as for her attitude of noble martyrdom after his death (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). According to the IFS model, when a child's wounded, vulnerable parts are forced into exile, protective manager and firefighter parts will frequently become polarized in their search for solutions (Krause, 2013; Johnson & Schwartz, 2000; Schwartz, 1995, 2001). For example, whilst one part would urge rebellion, another would urge compliance. Sylvia's closeness and obedience to her mother, and her simultaneous resentment of her, illustrate the polarization of her internal family system. The extent of Sylvia's reactions attests to the fact that protective managers, like the Passive Pessimist, become all the more extreme as they battle for power in the system. Another example of this can be found in Sylvia's reaction to her mother's health issues. When Aurelia was admitted to hospital for an acute gastric haemorrhage, Sylvia wrote letters to her every day – a practice which established her habit of dedicating her writing to her mother (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Although a loving

relationship is inferred from this behaviour, the fact that, in later years, Sylvia negatively described her mother to her therapist as “a man and a woman in one sweet ulcerous ball” (Plath, 2000, p. 430), indicates the polarization of her internal family system and exemplifies the role of her Passive Pessimist.

9.4.4.1.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

Biographical material reveals that Sylvia’s writing became a tool through which she could discharge some of her secret anxieties and guarantee her mother’s love (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). At this stage in her life, her writing (and in particular, her poetry) was approached more as a socially accepted avenue to public success and recognition from her mother, than as a tool for unearthing the remains of a buried self (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The fact that Sylvia’s writing could be considered as one long Valentine’s card to her mother (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013), is taken as evidence to support the researcher’s speculation that her writing also served as a tool through which her caring manager could protect her internal family system. This managerial part would also have been reinforced through Sylvia’s identification with both her mother and her grandmother. After Otto’s death, Aurelia became the family’s sole bread-winner because Otto, like Aurelia’s father before him, had lost a substantial amount of money on the stock market (Plath, 2000, p. 430). The stress which Aurelia suffered as a result of having to support a family at a time when a woman’s place in the workforce was undermined (Gill, 2008), was aggravated by Aurelia’s father being forced into early retirement. This led to the decision to merge the Plath and Schober households, so that the circumstantially-imposed financial burdens on both families could be alleviated (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although the arrangement was beneficial to both families in that it allowed them to share expenses, whilst ensuring that the children were taken care of while Aurelia worked (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009), the researcher surmises that it aggravated the polarization of Sylvia’s internal family system. Aurelia’s mother, whom Sylvia and Warren called Grammy, was described by those who knew her as the stereotypical Viennese grandmother – maternal, warm and domestically efficient (Butscher, 2003). This description corresponds with what Schwartz (1995) called the Caretaker in the IFS model.

Even though Aurelia joined a male-dominated workforce in order to fulfill the traditionally-male role of supporting a family, her compulsion to sacrifice herself was yet another manifestation of the caretaking manager, which Sylvia may have felt obligated to emulate. Although Sylvia had both her mother and grandmother as role-models of extreme Caretakers,

the researcher speculates that Aurelia's insistence that Sylvia excel academically so as to ensure future career success, may have confused the preferred identity of her parts, thereby aggravating the polarization of her internal family system.

According to Schwartz (1995, p. 42), when parts of a system are "forced to leave their preferred, valuable roles" to "take on roles that are either competing with or opposed to those of other members", polarization is inevitable. This would explain the conflict experienced by Sylvia in adulthood, when she felt torn between being the competent, domesticated, caring wife who subordinated herself and her creativity to the will of her husband (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013), and being the ambitious, career-orientated woman intent on achieving success, even if it meant destroying anyone who possessed the qualities she did not have (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

9.4.4.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

The day after being informed of her father's death, Sylvia returned home from school and handed her mother a note which read, "I promise never to marry again" (Wilson, 2013, p. 37). Biographical material indicates that the children at school had been mean to Sylvia, telling her that she was going to have a stepfather. Sylvia was apparently devastated by this and thought that she could prevent her mother from remarrying by forcing her to sign the note. From that night onwards, Sylvia kept the note folded up in the back of her diary (Wilson, 2013). The researcher infers from this behaviour that the prospect of her mother remarrying and thereby replacing her father, filled Sylvia with so much anxiety, that it activated her Worrier. According to Schwartz (1995, 2001), this manager is so anxious and alert for danger that it will even assault the mind with worst-case scenarios in its plight to frighten the individual from taking any risks.

It was not only the prospect of a stepfather which fuelled the development of Sylvia's Worrier. It is speculated that the financial challenges brought about by the death of Otto – who had been the main breadwinner in the family – and the subsequent changes, including Aurelia's entry into the work-force and the move away from the familiar coastal wonderland of Sylvia's childhood, contributed to the extent of her anxiety. The fact that these stressful changes aggravated Aurelia's duodenal stomach ulcer (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013) and ultimately resulted in her having to be hospitalised for an acute gastric haemorrhage (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013), caused even more anxiety in Sylvia. In terms of the IFS model, the researcher surmises that the extent of Sylvia's anxiety could be attributed to the fact that her managers had the dual task of dealing with what they perceived as external dangers in

the outside world, as well as dealing with the internal conflict provoked by her traumatised exiles. In their desperate plight to protect the Self from both external and internal threats, these managers are often left feeling neglected, lonely and scared, but hide these vulnerabilities because they feel responsible for keeping the person's life under control (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz et al, 2009). This would explain why Sylvia continued to maintain an outstanding academic record, despite the anxiety and dread associated with her circumstances at this stage of her development. It would also explain the perpetuation of her polarized internal family system. The more competent Sylvia's managers became, the more her system depended on them, and the more they were overwhelmed by their power and by their belief that they alone were responsible for her success and safety. The vicious cycle not only strengthened the role of Sylvia's protective managers, it also triggered her firefighters to extinguish the scorching flames of her painful emotions. The strategies implemented by Sylvia's firefighters during this stage of her development are discussed in the subsequent section.

9.4.4.2 Firefighters

Trauma leads to a number of disturbing after-effects, implemented by protectors as they try to keep the system safe from the dangerous emotions of exiles. These include dissociation, self-shaming, self-harm, addiction and even suicidality. These behaviours intensify the feeling states of exiles and include emptiness, loneliness and worthlessness (Anderson & Sweezy, 2017). These sequelae aggravate the trauma by influencing the individual's thoughts, emotions, body and relationships (Anderson & Sweezy, 2017; Schwartz, 2013a). The more extreme the strategies implemented by firefighters to extinguish the scorching flames of painful emotions, the more self-abusive behaviour becomes (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Pert, 1997; Riskin, 2013; Rothschild, 2000).

In terms of the IFS model and the motivation of parts, an individual experiencing feelings of shame either turns to shaming another individual, or resorts to self-attack. Either way, the victim turns into a perpetrator. An interpersonal perpetrator is usually a firefighter who attempts to control shame through externally-focused anger. On the other hand, an intrapsychic perpetrator generally tends to be a manager who attempts to control shame through internally-focused anger. Since self-attack and self-criticism aggravate the experience of shame, managers are inclined to elicit a wide array of firefighter reactions, involving either the more passive-avoidant responses like denial and dissociation, or the more dangerous behaviours typical of adolescence, like eating disorders, addictions, self-harm, rage and suicide (Sweezy, 2013).

The researcher surmises that Sylvia experienced feelings of shame not only as a result of burdens transferred to her by her parents (see section 9.4.1.1), but also as a result of the guilt which she suffered after her father's death. In light of Sylvia's strong attachment to her father, and the fact that she had been placed in a position to care for him, it is speculated that his death burdened her with excessive guilt, which negatively influenced her for the rest of her life. It was also during this stage of Sylvia's development that Americans of German heritage, like both the Plaths and the Schobers, felt the negative repercussions of anti-German sentiment (Alexander, 1999). The researcher infers that this would have burdened Sylvia with even more shame. According to Sinko (2017), any life-threatening or devaluing event that causes negative feelings and beliefs can result in burdening.

At this pre-adolescent stage of Sylvia's development, her firefighters reacted to her feelings of shame with the more passive-avoidant response of dissociation, expressed through her writing. Her writing became her escape, as confirmed by her journal entries which, at this age, were filled with poem fragments and snatches of stories articulating her desire to escape to a more exotic world (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Her belief in magic and the "otherworldly" became the central metaphor through which she could express herself and escape to that world (Wilson, 2013, p. 43). After the move to Wellesley, her need to escape through her writing became all the more pronounced, and since she no longer had the ocean as her playground, she took to climbing the trees that dominated Wellesley's landscape (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In these trees, which made the heavens seem a little closer to her, Sylvia's imagination would take flight and allow her to produce writing that transported her to a fantasy world (Wilson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher surmises that this fantasy world allowed her to dissociate from the pain of her exiled emotions.

In January 1945, just over four years after her father's death, Aurelia took Sylvia and Warren to see the production of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia was particularly enthralled by the story of Prospero who, finally realising the error of his ways, decides to release the airy spirit of Ariel from more than a decade of captivity in a tree (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). For years thereafter, Sylvia remembered specific speeches, characters and lines from this her first play, and she used the principal metaphor of the play for her later work, entitled *Ariel* (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Throughout her life, Sylvia's intense fascination with the ocean extended to her father whom she described as a Neptune-like character serving as a "father-sea-god muse" (Plath, 2000, p. 399). In her poem entitled *Full Fathom Five*, Sylvia used the sea metaphor to describe this powerful man-turned-sea god

as something that emerged from her subconscious to haunt her (Hughes, 1981). If one explores this metaphor through the lens of the IFS model, one can infer that the subconscious parts which haunted Sylvia, represented her exiled parts, kept in abeyance by her firefighters, who found expression in her poetic imagination. The more extreme the behaviour of firefighters, the more intensified the efforts of the system's managers to exercise control. Sweezy (2013) compared the escalating polarity that ensues between the system's firefighters and managers to an over-active immune system which, if left untreated, can ultimately be extremely dangerous to an individual's health. This is confirmed by the dynamics of Sylvia's parts during adolescence and is discussed in the following section.

9.4.5 Early Adolescence (1945 – 1947): Sylvia's Junior High School Years after World War II

According to biographical material (see section 2.2.5), Sylvia's adolescence coincided with the end of World War II and marked her entry into junior high school (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The end of the war ushered in a period of extreme optimism, and apart from maintaining her record of outstanding academic achievement, Sylvia also participated in a variety of extra-mural activities, projecting, to the outside world at least, the image of a normal, happy teenager (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). As adolescence progressed, however, the dark, pain-filled, morbid part of Sylvia seemed to increase, and her adolescent contemporaries often described her as a "loner" and "a daydreamer", on account of her frequent retreats from society into a private, secret universe where the Self had supernatural powers (Butscher, 2003, p. 14). In terms of the IFS model, when exiles become desperate, they force managers and firefighters into behaviour that is extreme and powerfully assertive, thereby limiting access to the calm and clarity of the Self. Because exiles are so desperate to be valued, cared for and loved, they often resort to extreme measures to make their stories heard. These extreme measures include giving an individual flashbacks, nightmares or sudden, extreme tastes of pain or fear (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Biographical material indicates that Sylvia frequently suffered from monstrous nightmares, which included visions of murder, death and unspeakable horrors (Wilson, 2013). At the young age of 13, she began to keep a dream book in which she recorded her night-time visions of escape (Wilson, 2013). She used the recorded nightmares as inspiration to write Gothic mystery stories which, although disturbing, provided an outlet through which she could express some of the darkness and morbidity that she hid behind her outer mask of normality and perfect amiability (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

The researcher speculates that Sylvia's monstrous nightmares were manifestations of the desperation of her exiles and the severity of pain with which they were burdened. The IFS model posits that exiles are known to absorb the painful emotions that other parts do not want to carry, leaving them with unbearable amounts of fragility, vulnerability, rejection, worthlessness, sadness, shame, emptiness, hopelessness and helplessness, which they try to transfer to other parts or to the Self at any opportunity (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Sylvia's journal entries attest to the severity of pain with which her exiles were burdened, as manifested in her imagery of herself drowning in a sea of negative emotions, including fear, envy, doubt, self-hate and madness (Plath, 2000).

According to Krause (2013), an internal family system that is parts-led is in desperate need of firefighters, since no manager has the ability to suppress exiles successfully all the time. At some point or other, every exile gets activated and, were it not for the emergency tactics of firefighters, emotions such as humiliation, worthlessness, terror, shame, guilt, sadness, helplessness and hopelessness would overwhelm the system and make the individual even more vulnerable to injury (Engler, 2013; Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995). In terms of IFS adolescent therapy, the extent to which exiles can be unburdened is associated with an adolescent's degree of dependency on his/her parents, with some exiles remaining inaccessible until the adolescent is financially independent (Krause, 2013). It is thus surmised that the extent to which Sylvia's exiles were burdened was associated with her dependency on her mother at this stage of her development. Biographical material indicates that Sylvia's dependency on her mother was not only financial. Due to financial constraints after her father's death, she was forced to share a room with her mother (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013), and she became so emotionally dependent on her mother that she regarded her as an extension of herself, rather than as a separate person (Wilson, 2013).

9.4.5.1 Managers

Managers are task-orientated and their job is to keep the individual safe, organised, stable and functioning effectively (Schwartz, 1995). To this end, they may insist on perfectionistic behaviour, obsessive worry, exhaustive care-taking, and the more passive behaviours of avoidance, denial, discouragement and devaluation (Engler, 2013; Schwartz, 1995). Ironically, the more extreme managers become in their efforts to protect the system from the pain of exiled injured parts, the more harm they inflict and the more vulnerable the system becomes (Engler, 2013; Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014). The exiled injured parts that are burdened with dysfunctional beliefs and emotional pain are then in a position to override managers and

literally “hijack” the individual in a process known as “blending” (Engler, 2013, p. xviii). In this state of blending, the individual identifies with his/her exiles to such an extent, that he/she becomes these exiles (Engler, 2013; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a).

The following mangers were identified during Sylvia’s early adolescence. Their manifestation affirms the IFS premise that behaviours typically seen as symptomatic of underlying psychiatric conditions are, in effect, protective strategies implemented to keep a vulnerable system safe.

9.4.5.1.1 *The Striver*

The Striver represents those critical inner voices that push an individual to perform and that are never satisfied, irrespective of how outstanding an individual’s accomplishments are (DeLand et al., 2004). Biographical material on Sylvia’s adolescence is fraught with examples of the pervasive role of her Striver at this stage of her development. Her adolescent school years were characterised by outstanding academic achievement, particularly in English – a subject for which she displayed an extraordinary talent (Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The extent of her striving managerial part can be seen in her adolescent diary entries expressing her aspiration to become the world’s greatest author and artist (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Similarly, her poem *Fireside Reveries*, published when Sylvia was 14, around the same time as the above-mentioned diary entries, attests to her zealous drive and her belief that the direction of her life would involve a literary career (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her ambitious nature and her insatiable appetite for success and public recognition are captured perfectly in the line, “My thoughts to shining fame aspire” (Wilson, 2013, p. 67) and support the speculation that Sylvia’s Striver resorted to extreme measures to protect the integrity of her internal family system. The list of awards which Sylvia garnered at the end of her junior high school year affirms the effectiveness of her Striver in making her excel at everything with which she experimented. Not only did she receive a special student award and recommendation cards for punctuality, art excellence and for obtaining straight As during her three years at Phillips Junior High School, she also obtained awards for fifth and sixth letters based on her exceptionally high credit score and the fact that she was the only pupil in the history of the school to attain enough credits for a sixth letter (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

9.4.5.1.2 *The Evaluator*

The Evaluator focuses on anticipating what others want and is extremely anxious to please others, believing that the perfect individual who pleases everyone will never be abandoned or hurt (Schwartz, 1995). Although this type of manager is extremely critical, like the Striver, it is primarily motivated by social approval and as such, is permanently engaged in monitoring and evaluating an individual's popularity, appearance and behaviour (Schwartz, 2001). Biographical material indicates that looks mattered to Sylvia (Rollyson, 2013), and that the onset of acne during adolescence made her feel so self-conscious and unattractive, that she would confine herself to her home for fear of embarrassing herself in public (Wilson, 2013) (see section 9.4.5 for explanation of her self-cutting behaviour related to her self-consciousness). Sylvia's compulsion to be perfect in appearance, behaviour and performance so as to attain social approval from authority figures and peers, attests to the role of her approval-seeking Evaluator at this stage of her development. Her ninth-grade English teacher, Miss Helen Lawson, described her as being extremely neat, both in her personal appearance and in her work, and even labelled her as a "perfectionist" and "one of the few who stood out personally - quiet, easy, willing, and good morally and scholastically" (Butscher, 2003, p. 22). Sylvia's polite, respectable and caring side ensured her popularity, as evidenced in eighth grade when she was elected as president of her home-room (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009), and in ninth grade when she wrote a touching memorial poem for a teacher who had passed away (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

9.4.5.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

The Passive Pessimist is always on guard and keeps people at a distance for fear of being disappointed (DeLand et al., 2004; Schwartz, 1995). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's habit of retreating from people into a private, secret universe is indicative of her Passive Pessimist – the manager who avoids interpersonal closeness for fear of being disappointed or hurt by others. Sylvia also gave expression to her Passive Pessimist through her writing. Although she had the ability to write tender, moving poetry, she also had the tendency to write cruel comments about those close to her (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Her compulsive need to lift people and experiences from her personal life and immerse them into her creative writing started during adolescence and became such a habit, that it transformed into a trademark feature of her literature throughout her profession (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). According to Butscher (1976, 2003), it was precisely this autobiographical feature of her writing that gave genuine coherence to her work and made it convincing.

9.4.5.1.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

According to biographical material (see section 2.2.6), Sylvia found herself increasingly distracted by her growing sexual desires during adolescence, and this resulted in yet another source of conflict for her (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although sexual attractiveness was important to her and was encouraged by her culture, the idea of sex itself was disconcerting to her, for personal and moral reasons (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Her diary entries and literary works attest to the conflicting demands of her religion and culture and the fact that her relationships with boys were often characterised by complex feelings that vacillated between love and hate (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that this vacillation was brought about by the polarization between Sylvia's Caretaker and her Entitled One

9.4.5.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

Although biographical material indicates that the start of Sylvia's adolescence coincided with the end of World War II, the issue of war remained a source of anxiety for her. True to the legacy burdens transferred to her by her pacifist father (see section 9.4.1.), Sylvia detested the idea of war and saw no purpose to it except as a manifestation of extreme anti-communism (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Apart from her anxieties related to political issues, the researcher speculates that the family's precarious financial position may also have fuelled Sylvia's Worrier/Sentry. When her fountain pen was stolen, Sylvia fell into a depression not only because the pen represented her relationship with the written word, but also because Sylvia knew that her mother would not be able to replace it at short notice, given the family's financial constraints (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia developed into a very abstemious person as a result of these financial constraints and she kept meticulous record of every penny that she spent (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). It is surmised that her Worrier/ Sentry prompted her to develop into such an abstemious person, since she was constantly plagued by the fear that she would not be able to make ends meet. Even in adulthood when she had made a mark in the literary world, Sylvia continued to feel anxious about future sources of income.

9.4.5.2 *Firefighters*

Hall (1904, 1916), one of the first psychologists to propose a theory of adolescence, posited that the significant physical and psychological changes which characterise puberty are responsible for the storm and stress of this period. The IFS model also considers adolescence

to be a challenging time, but ascribes the difficulties associated with this period of development, to the way in which adolescents produce firefighters (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013; Krause, 2013). Since firefighters are the hair-trigger, reactive, emergency managers of the system, their reactions can seem reckless and out-of-control, especially to an adult's managerial parts (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995; Smith, 2017). Typical adolescent firefighter reactions include: bingeing and purging, extreme exercise, the restriction of calories, extreme sports, extreme hairstyles and clothing, reckless driving, alcohol and drug use, rage, sexual promiscuity, silence, withdrawal, self-cutting behaviour and even suicide (Engler, 2013; Krause, 2013; Riskin, 2013; Schwartz, 1995). Biographical material pertaining to this stage of Sylvia's adolescence, attests to the fact that she had a ravenous appetite and that she devoured food as heartily as she devoured literature (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). IFS posits that excessive eating (or bingeing) is a manifestation of firefighting parts trying to suppress emotional pain (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995, 2003).

Looks were important to Sylvia (as were good manners, diction and what she wore) (Rollyson, 2013). Consequently, she was devastated by the onset of acne, which made her feel so self-conscious and unattractive, that she would confine herself to her home for fear of embarrassing herself in public (Wilson, 2013). So extreme was Sylvia's repulsion with herself, that at the young age of 14, she attempted to harm herself by cutting her face. The researcher speculates that Sylvia's self-cutting behaviour was a manifestation of the extent to which her system's firefighters were prepared to go to keep the pain, darkness and morbidity of her imprisoned exiles, securely locked away. Of all the techniques implemented by firefighters in their attempts to extinguish the scorching flames of painful emotions, suicide attempts are amongst the most extreme (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Riskin, 2013; Schwartz, 1995). Scott (2017) highlighted that suicide parts are common in individuals who have suffered complicated grief, and are usually foreshadowed by physical distress since exiled feelings are frequently communicated somatically.

Biographical material indicates that Sylvia often suffered from sinusitis and that her first bout of sinusitis occurred in the week after her father's death, the illness thus possibly being a physical manifestation of separation anxiety (Wilson, 2013). The fact that every bout of sinusitis in Sylvia's lifespan was preceded by a failed relationship or some other unfortunate experience with a male, attests to its psychosomatic nature (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's chronic struggle with sinus infections not only contributed to a lifetime of severe headaches, but also left her feeling extremely depressed (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson,

2013). In a letter to Aurelia, she even confessed that the illness made her feel like a “depressive maniac” (Plath, 1992, p. 82).

9.4.6 Middle Adolescence (1947 – 1950): Sylvia’s High School Years during the McCarthy Era

Sylvia’s tendency to write cruel comments about those close to her reinforces the inference that her internal family system was polarized, as does the fact that she often projected onto those around her, fantasies, wishes and motivations which seldom had bearing on reality (Wilson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher attributes the discrepancy between reality and Sylvia’s imaginary world, or what Wilson (2013, p. 72) referred to as “the spirit of Ariel” to the polarized position of her protective parts. According to Krause, Rosenberg and Sweezy (2017), when protectors are activated and forced into a polarized relationship over an extended period of time, they do their job of protecting the system so automatically, repetitively and compulsively, that their behaviour becomes the dominant personality style. Not only does such polarization obstruct the individual’s access to the healing powers of Self-leadership, it also obscures the individual’s insight into his or her own identity (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a, 2017; Sweezy, 2013). With regard to the search for one’s identity during adolescence, Ames et al. (1988) posited that adolescence is primarily about searching for one’s self, and that this includes finding, identifying, counting on and depending on oneself. For this to happen, one must free oneself of one’s childhood veneration of and dependency on one’s parents – an endeavour which demands experimentation with a multitude of diverse personalities. In the adolescent’s quest to differentiate from parents and establish independence, his or her parts often experiment with new and diverse behaviours which meet with parental disapproval (Krause, 2013). In their quest to control extreme behaviour and thereby protect adolescents, authority figures, like parents and teachers, tend to lead from their managerial parts, and resort to the use of anger, criticism, bribery, logic, nagging, punishment and worry to curb what they consider to be unacceptable behaviour (Krause, 2013; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). In terms of the IFS model, adults who lead from their parts rather than from the Self become blended and automatically polarize with an adolescent’s firefighters (Krause, 2013; Neustadt, 2017; Schwartz, 2013a).

Although biographical material indicates that Aurelia was a very encouraging and self-sacrificing parent, it is also indicated that she raised her children with the knowledge that there was a correlation between good behaviour and love (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013), and that she enforced a strict moral regime, not through punishment, but through martyrdom to

principles and values (Rollyson, 2013). Whilst Rogers (1951) would define this type of parenting as being based on conditional love and acceptance, the IFS model, as expounded by Schwartz (1995), would refer to it as parts-led parenting. Parts-led parenting invariably creates burdens, which not only polarize the system, but also obstruct the emergence of the child's Self, thereby preventing the clarity of insight required for the establishment of a clear identity (Neustadt, 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a).

The IFS model emphasises the importance of the Self in facilitating differentiation, so that polarized parts can reconnect and the individual can feel more unified (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013) described the Self as the central place from which an individual can experience pure joy, peace and spiritual connectedness, thereby allowing for the emergence of leadership and healing. According to Schwartz (1995, 2013a, 2013b), the role of the Self is so important, that the individual is organised to protect it, no matter what it costs the system. That explains why parts dissociate and separate the Self from the negative body sensations associated with trauma (Anderson & Sweezy, 2017). In cases of extreme pain or fear, the Self is not only taken out of the body, but is actually moved to a safe place where it cannot observe and thus remains oblivious to the trauma experienced (Anderson, 2013; Anderson & Sweezy, 2017). Unfortunately, when such negative experiences force a person's parts into a position of having to protect the Self, they lose faith in the Self's ability to lead and increasingly believe that they have to take over leadership (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). The Self's resources then become obscured by the various extremes of the parts trying to protect it (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). According to Krause, Rosenberg and Sweezy (2017), extreme parts always operate in pairs, and the stress and anxiety generated by their disagreements strengthens their polarization and fuels their extremity. The fact that Sylvia came across as polite, respectable, caring (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013), positive, cheerful and even popular (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009) to the outside world, whilst being haunted internally by feelings of loneliness, sadness, fear and morbidity (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013) attests to the polarization of her internal family system. The intensity of her protectors' behaviours attests to the extent of pain experienced by her exiles and explains why her only recourse to some semblance of Self-led leadership was through her imagination, where the Self had "supernatural powers" (Butscher, 2003, p. 14).

In terms of the IFS model, the researcher ascribes Sylvia's experience of herself as being fragmented into many different and often conflicting identities, to her severely polarized internal family system which prevented the sense of continuity and integration required for effective Self-leadership. She aptly captured the emotional burden of being trapped in a

polarized system when she wrote: “I have the choice of being constantly active and happy or introspectively passive and sad. Or I can go mad by ricocheting in between” (Plath, 1982, p. 24). The fact that Sylvia’s Self was constrained by parts that were afraid to differentiate fully from it, thus preventing the type of Self-leadership that ensures internal and external harmony, is affirmed when she wrote: “I sit here without identity: faceless... There is so much, and I am torn in different directions... (Plath, 2000, pp. 26-27).

9.4.6.1 Managers

In the subsequent section, more information will be provided regarding the managers that were identified during this stage of Sylvia’s adolescence.

9.4.6.1.1 The Striver

Sylvia’s senior years at Gamaliel Bradford High School were even more outstanding than her junior years (see section 2.2.6), and she was one of the few students who managed to gain entrance to an elite group of superior intellectuals known as Crocketeers, named after Mr. Crocket – the teacher who presented advanced English classes and who, to Sylvia, became a source of profound inspiration and intellectual stimulation (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

True to her nature and her academic reputation, Sylvia’s papers were always highly perceptive, well-argued and meticulously typed, mirroring an almost compulsive attention to detail that was typical of everything she did and wrote (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). The descriptions of her as being “too talented to believe (Butscher, 2003, p. 31), “too dangerously brainy” and “a super-normal teenager” (Butscher, 2003, p. 32), not only strengthen the inference that her behaviour was fuelled by an extreme Striver, but also attest to the extent of emotional pain carried by her exiled wounded parts, for despite her extraordinary accomplishments, Sylvia was plagued by an ever-increasing sense of inferiority (Wilson, 2013). The fact that these feelings of inferiority increased in relation to her ever-increasing list of successes, confirms the IFS systemic premise that the more imbalanced a system is, the more extreme the efforts of each polarized part to regain a state of balance and harmony (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013, 2013a). In Sylvia’s case, as her striving manager became more extreme in one direction, compelling her to strive for even greater accomplishments, so her inferior, burdened part countered in the opposite direction. This would explain why Sylvia’s life was characterised by a downward spiral of feelings of inadequacy, despite an ever-increasing upward spiral of academic and literary success.

The ultimate manifestation of this highly-polarized system can be found in her journal entries expressing her desire to possess a divine insanity which could transform everyday experiences into something extraordinary, thus turning her into a type of deity (Plath, 1992; Wilson, 2013). At the one end of her polarized system, Sylvia was “the girl who wanted to be God” (Plath, 1992, p. 40), but at the other end, she felt herself drowning in a sea of uncertainty and negative emotions which she described as “the chaos that seethes behind my exterior” (Wilson, 2013, p. 106).

9.4.6.1.2 *The Evaluator*

In senior high school, Sylvia was so intent on being accepted by her contemporaries, that she was even prepared to submit herself to an initiation week characterised by personal and public humiliation on joining the elite sorority, Sub-Deb (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The researcher attributes her decision to join this sorority to the role of her Evaluator. Although Sylvia initially felt flattered to be invited to join this elite sorority, which would undoubtedly increase her popularity, she later resigned because she disapproved of the condescending manner in which members treated non-members (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009, Wilson, 2013). Later in life, as an adult woman of 30, Sylvia wrote about the negative experience of being trapped between the desire to belong and the drive to maintain one’s individuality, concluding that there was something sinister about popularity, something that “leached a girl of her individuality” (Plath, 2008, p. 56). IFS would attribute the drive to maintain one’s individuality to Self-leadership. Although it is surmised that Sylvia aspired to be Self-led rather than parts-led, biographical material points to the fact that Self-leadership remained an impossible ideal, especially at this stage of her life.

9.4.6.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

In Sylvia’s senior year of high school, a number of her poems were published anonymously, with the poem *Family Reunion* epitomising perfectly Sylvia’s advanced skill with regard to metaphor and the integration of artistic creativity and autobiographical characterisation (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Although Aurelia would be shocked years later to discover the personal, autobiographical nature of Sylvia’s caricatured relatives in her poems, the anonymity allowed Sylvia to give expression to the sardonic, mocking side of her personality (Butscher, 1976, 2003). This side of her personality hid beneath the mask of surface politeness and was, ironically, the persona that was encouraged by Aurelia (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher surmises that

Sylvia's sardonic, mocking side was a manifestation of her Passive Pessimist and that she used her writing as a tool to mask her pessimistic aloofness and negativity towards people.

9.4.6.1.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

It is surmised that the polarization between Sylvia's Caretaker and her Entitled One was aggravated by the artificial rules of religious and social propriety that governed Sylvia's socio-cultural milieu during her high school years. Whilst her culture emphasised the importance of finding and keeping a boyfriend and even encouraged sexual attractiveness (Butscher, 1976, 2003), it simultaneously frowned upon a woman's overt expression of sexual desire. Sylvia's diary entries attest to the conflicting demands of her religion and culture. According to biographical material, her relationships with boys were often characterised by complex, contradictory emotions (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). As was the case in Sylvia's early adolescence, the researcher speculates that these contradictory emotions emanated from the polarized struggle between her Caretaker and her Entitled One.

9.4.6.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

In the same year that Sylvia started high school, she began a pen-pal correspondence with a German teenager called Hans Joachim Neupert (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In Hans she found not only a correspondent through whom she could sharpen her writing skills, but also a confidante with whom she could share her ideas about war (Rollyson, 2013). In 1950, when the United States revealed that it would continue to support the development of the hydrogen bomb, 18-year-old Sylvia and her friend, Perry Norton, wrote a letter to the *Christian Science Monitor* expressing their outrage (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia's early pacifist ideas would never be forsaken and would find expression, as with all the things she was passionate about, through her writing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's Worrier fuelled the expression of her pacifist ideas in her writing.

9.4.6.2 *Firefighters*

According to Sylvia's beloved high school teacher, Mr Crocket, she had the ability both to "seal herself off" from others and to manipulate them "for what they could give her" (Butscher, 2003, p. 35). Like the sea which Sylvia felt so connected to, her moods fluctuated between high waves on dark, tempestuous days, to tranquil ripples on calm and sunny days (Rollyson, 2013). This fluctuating tide of emotions surfaced in many of the poems written by Sylvia during this time. Malcolm (1995, p. 34) posited that the death of Sylvia's father is considered

by many to be “the shadow-event of her life, the wound from which she never recovered”. The poems written by Sylvia during her high school years not only reflect the wound, they also express trademark Plathian themes, including the enigmatic nature of identity, the terror of self-knowledge, and the sinister nature of deceptively day-to-day existence (Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia’s poetry, especially her father-centered poetry, was fuelled by her firefighters in their desperate efforts to suppress the pain that emanated from the loss of her father. The poem, *Bereft*, for example, was composed in 1947 and takes the form of a lament to an unnamed being who leads the poetess down to the sea and says goodbye eternally (Wilson, 2013). The fact that the father theme featured so prominently in Sylvia’s work, especially in the final year of her life, affirms the researcher’s speculation that her writing served as a vehicle to help her dissociate from the pain of her loss. The fact that she alluded to suicide in many of her final poems, attests to the ever-increasing desperation of her firefighters when they realized that writing did not suffice to douse the flames of her exiled, wounded child parts.

9.4.7 Later Adolescence (1950 – 1952): Sylvia’s Junior College Years at the Time of the Cold War

When it came to her treatment of Sylvia, Aurelia gave the impression that she was “breathing” on her daughter “every minute” (Butscher, 2003, p. 111), and although Sylvia loved her dearly and even referred to her as “my favorite person” (Rollyson, 2013, pp. 28-29), she resented Aurelia’s extreme altruism and the way in which she empathised so intensely with her every depression (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013).

Whilst Sylvia recognised and appreciated the fact that Aurelia worked tirelessly to give her children everything of the best, she detested the obligation it placed on her to perform for her mother, and she confessed that she felt the need to escape from home, especially during periods of intense depression (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). The researcher infers that the stifling protectiveness which Aurelia manifested towards her daughter became particularly burdensome to Sylvia, especially at an age characterised by sexual awakening. Her adolescent diary entries attest to the fact that she felt trapped in the conflict between her growing sexual desires and her efforts to control what society had taught her to believe was “the impure side of her personality” (Wilson, 2013, p. 67). It is surmised that Aurelia’s staunch Calvinistic principles of religious and social propriety, as well as the stifling and hypocritical standards of Sylvia’s socio-cultural milieu, aggravated the polarization of her internal family system. The more extreme the polarization, the greater the power struggle between the individual’s

managers and firefighters, as they try to restore balance to the internal family system (Schwartz, 1995). When managers and firefighters react to the extreme emotional pain of exiles by going into survival mode, their strategies to protect the system intensify (Schwartz, 1995; Sykes, 2017). In such cases, the self-criticism of managers escalates, resulting in an excessive sense of responsibility and an extreme demand for perfection (Schwartz, 1995, 2001; Sykes, 2017). Meanwhile the strategies of firefighters to quench the fire of worthlessness and shame also intensify, but in the opposite direction, resulting in a shift in gears away from responsible behaviour towards rest and escapism. (Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995, 2001; Sykes, 2017).

Extreme polarization between managers and firefighters who are attempting to mediate or control the emotional pain of exiles is at the core of what Sykes (2017, p. 29) calls the addictive process, and tends to manifest in compulsive cravings for food, mood-altering substances, sexual activity and other dissociative behaviours. Biographical material indicates that Sylvia's adolescence was characterised by such compulsions, especially for food and sexual activity.

The conflict between Sylvia's polarized parts was particularly evident during her adolescence. Her infantile insistence on black and white extremes attests to this polarization, evident in the physical manifestation of her intense depressive episodes whenever she was plagued by sinusitis and menstrual cramps. Whilst her writing served as a tool through which she could discharge some of her secret anxieties and guarantee her mother's love (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013), it also served as a tool through which Sylvia could dissociate and express the ever-increasing surge of sexual energy. Given that Sylvia felt stifled by her mother's bourgeois values of respectability and social decorum, as well as by society's expectation of repressed female sexuality, it is not surprising that Sylvia's journal entries became an outlet for the myriad of emotions that burdened her exiles. Sexual fantasies made numerous appearances in her journal entries and attest to the polarized struggle of her internal family system. Her journal entries describing how wonderful it is to be a "virgin, clean and sound and young" is, for example, immediately juxtaposed by her desire to be raped (Plath, 2000, p. 8). She also wrote of her desire to be driven off to a mountain cabin "and be raped in a huge lust like a cave woman, fighting, screaming, biting in a ferocious ecstasy of orgasm..." (Plath, 2000, p. 174).

In the next section, the extreme measures taken by Sylvia's managers in their quest to provide stability, is discussed.

9.4.7.1 *Managers*

In the subsequent section, more information will be provided regarding the managers that were identified during the final stage of Sylvia's adolescence.

9.4.7.1.1 *The Striver*

True to Sylvia's persona of academic excellence, she graduated from Bradfield High School as valedictorian of her class, collecting a plethora of awards and prizes for her outstanding achievements in History, English, Writing and Art (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Although Sylvia's collection of accolades assured her a scholarship at the prestigious Smith College, it did nothing to dispel the feelings of inferiority which haunted her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). According to the researcher, the discrepancy between Sylvia's academic accomplishments and her feelings of inferiority was aggravated by the fact that her scholarship depended on her maintaining top academic grades. In the event of her marks slipping, her grant money would be retracted and she would be dismissed from Smith College (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). It is inferred that her fear of losing her place at Smith, impelled her Striver to push her even harder than when she had been in high school. Although this ensured her habitual string of extraordinary academic achievements and laudatory acclamations from lecturers, the researcher surmises that the heavy workload and overwhelming pressure burdened her system and aggravated polarization to such an extent, that it resulted in her being overwhelmed by depression and loneliness.

Irrespective of her "tremendously well-organised study habits" (Butscher, 2003, p. 45) and her remarkable accomplishments, both in college and professionally, Sylvia continued to be tormented by feelings of inadequacy. Even the letters which she received from editors who expressed interest in her future literary works and encouraged her to write books, did nothing to dispel the feeling that she was not good enough (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). By the end of Sylvia's junior college years, she had garnered a string of academic accolades, the position of editor for the Smith Review, national recognition from renowned publications and a guest editorship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Notwithstanding all these accomplishments, her journal entries written at the time, attest not only to her ever-worsening feelings of dissatisfaction and sadness (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013), but also to the fragmented nature of her identity. Sylvia strove constantly to achieve more and to be more intelligent and attractive than she felt she was, and she declared in her journal that she was envious of all those who could think, write, draw, ski, look, live and

love better than she could (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). She also resented the fact that she could not inhabit a multitude of different personalities and concluded that this was perhaps why she wanted to be everyone – “...so no one can blame me for being I. So I won’t have to take the responsibility for my own character development and philosophy” (Plath, 2000, p.44).

The researcher attributes the fact that Sylvia did not want to take responsibility for her character development to the fact that her Self was constrained by her polarized parts. Her internal family system was polarized to such an extent that she was incapable of experiencing the sense of continuity and integration which allows for Self-leadership. The fact that her polarized parts did not have faith in her Self’s ability to lead the internal family system, is affirmed by her inability to take responsibility for her character development, and reinforces the researcher’s speculation that her Self was not fully differentiated.

9.4.7.1.2 *The Evaluator*

The researcher surmises that, at the time, Sylvia’s need to please others and to be accepted, even at the expense of her individuality, attests to the fact that her Self’s resources were obscured by the various extremes of the parts trying to protect it. This explains the feeling of difference and isolation experienced by Sylvia at this age. Not only did her polarized internal family system prevent her from connecting her different parts, it also prevented her from connecting with other people. Biographical material indicates that although Sylvia could mingle easily with a wide variety of people and that she always came across as being resourceful, gracious, well-poised, calm and gentle (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013), one of her best friends at Smith College commented that Sylvia’s need to excel far outweighed her need for sociability (Butscher, 2003). According to Ann Hayes (a close college friend), although Sylvia was very aware of the importance of building friendships and belonging to a group, she did not want to pay the price of making friends with too many people and consequently she isolated herself socially and remained an outsider (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

According to Schwartz (1995, 2011), the inability to connect with other people stems from the disconnection which occurs when the internal family system is polarized and the Self is prevented from differentiating and harmonizing the inner system. The researcher speculates that Sylvia’s inability to achieve the sense of integration and differentiation afforded by Self-leadership, accounted for the fact that she had the tendency to forge a false identity just to be accepted by others. Her college correspondent, Eddie Cohen, warned her that this tendency would result in her having a “shapeless, amorphous personality” (Wilson, 2013, p. 15). This

would be equitable to Schwartz's (1995, 2013a) notion of a blended system where the Self has lost its ability to lead, and the system is polarized in so many directions, that one could construe it as being *shapeless*.

9.4.7.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

Although Sylvia presented herself to the world wearing a mask of sweet politeness, on the inside she carried an acidic, sour side which often expressed itself in the form of cynical idealism (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). Sylvia identified with her friend Eddie Cohen's description of himself as "ice-cream and pickles", because it summed up perfectly the paradox of her own character (Wilson, 2013, p. 119). Although Sylvia's vulnerability was often mistaken for insensitivity, she admitted to Eddie that she hid behind a veneer of cynical sarcasm and an attitude of indifference, in order to protect herself from being hurt (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The researcher attributes Sylvia's cynical sarcasm and attitude of indifference to the role of her Passive Pessimist in its efforts to protect her from the pain of rejection that might result from getting too close to anyone.

9.4.7.1.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

Sylvia's inner conflict was aggravated by the fact that she inhabited a socio-cultural environment which imposed restrictions on women and made her feel "stunted, narrowed, warped" (Plath, 2000, p. 31). For Sylvia, who had high ambitions to achieve greatness, the contradictory roles expected of women and the strain of keeping up appearances, left her feeling stripped of identity (Gill, 2008; Wilson, 2013) and "torn between I know not what within me" (Plath, 2000, p. 31).

The researcher speculates that this feeling of being "torn", epitomises perfectly the extent of polarization of Sylvia's internal family system, and explains why she often experienced her identity as being fragmented into many different and conflicting identities (Wilson, 2013). Sylvia felt frustrated by the fact that she had to live in a society which gave men the freedom to be sexually active without tarnishing their reputations, whilst women were forced to suppress their sexual feelings and remain chaste for their prospective husbands (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). She also resented the fact that society expected her to sacrifice her ambitions and subordinate herself and her creativity to the will of a future husband (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

In terms of the IFS model, this dichotomy represents the polarization between Sylvia's caretaking manager and her egotistical, entitled manager. Whilst the caretaking manager

would insist on subservience and self-sacrifice, the entitled manager would demand personal fulfillment, even at the expense of others (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). The conflict between these two managers became all the more pronounced as Sylvia developed into adulthood and explains the tempestuous nature of her relationships with men.

9.4.7.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

Sylvia described the Cold War period following World War II as a “dark age” and compared the demise of America to that of the Roman Empire (Plath, 2000, p.32). According to Gill (2008), the postwar period in America was characterised by profound contradictions which greatly influenced Sylvia’s cultural and literary milieu. Although it was a time of peace and relative abundance (see section 2.2.7.1), it was also a time of extreme anxiety and uncertainty, characterised by the anti-communist drive known as McCarthyism (Gill, 2008). The researcher surmises that the uncertainty and pervasive culture of suspicion which reigned at the time fuelled Sylvia’s Worrier. The fact that her beloved high-school teacher, Mr. Crockett, was questioned for his alleged involvement in communism (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013) added to Sylvia’s feelings of anxiety and disdain for the double standard which characterised American life at the time. Sylvia’s writing attests to the fact that she was influenced by the atmosphere of hostility and suspicion (Gill, 2008). Her *Ariel* poems reflect the tension created by the historical circumstances of the time and provide a backdrop for her exploration of the destructiveness of people around her (Peel, 2002).

According to Schwartz (1995, 2001), the managerial part known as the Worrier is known for flashing worst-case scenarios in front of an individual in an effort to frighten him or her from taking any risks. The manifestation of Sylvia’s Worrier can be seen in a letter written to her brother at the end of her adolescent stage. In it she expressed her fear that the world would be destroyed by war before either of them could start enjoying the rewards of all their hard work (Plath, 1992).

9.4.7.2 *Firefighters*

Sylvia’s letters to her mother during her adolescent years at Smith College became all the more despairing. She confessed that she could not keep up with all the pressure and that she saw the future as consisting of nothing but work (Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). In an unpublished letter to her mother, she even drew a picture of her own gravestone, including a caption that life had been fun while it lasted (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In

her journal, she expressed her despair and her desire to kill herself and to escape from all responsibility by crawling back “into the womb” (Plath, 2000, p. 149).

The theme of suicide became all the more pronounced in her final years of adolescence and by the time she turned 20, she was suffering from such severe emotional turmoil, marked by insomnia and frequent episodes of uncontrollable crying, that she considered going to see a psychiatrist (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Deep down, however, she believed herself to be beyond help, and she saw suicide as her only solution (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Just after the Christmas of 1952, Sylvia attempted to ski down a challenging slope at Mount Pisgah. Since she had no prior skiing experience, the endeavour resulted in an accident in which Sylvia broke her leg (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). According to Rollyson (2013), this was Sylvia’s way of saying that she had reached breaking point. One of her close friends suspected that, much like her sinusitis afflictions, her skiing accident was yet another cathartic expression of her emotional pain based on romantic disappointment (Wilson, 2013). In fact, biographical material indicates that, in times of extreme stress caused by emotional trauma, Sylvia had a habit of attempting potentially harmful acts, as she did when she drove herself off the road after her husband left her (Rollyson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher speculates that Sylvia’s impulsive, dare-devil acts were manifestations of her firefighter parts and the extent to which they were prepared to go to distract her from the unbearable pain harboured in her exiled parts. This pain became all the more unbearable in the final stage of her development and is discussed in the next section.

9.4.8 Adulthood (1953 – 1955): Sylvia’s Senior College Years and the Execution of the Rosenbergs

Biographical material (see section 2.2.7.2) indicates that the end of Sylvia’s junior years at Smith College marked the beginning of her adulthood stage. True to her reputation of academic excellence, by the end of her junior year she had garnered a string of accolades, including the position of editor for the *Smith Review* (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). This position, together with her academic awards and the fact that she had won national recognition from renowned publications, turned Sylvia’s third year at Smith into a triumphant culmination of her artistic talents (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). The crowning glory of this triumph occurred when Sylvia received the news that she had won a guest editorship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York, scheduled to take place

in June 1953 (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Although it is inferred that Sylvia would have been elated at the news of having been chosen for the much sought-after internship at *Mademoiselle Magazine*, the researcher surmises that her dependency on her mother prevented the unburdening of her exiles, making them more vulnerable to being triggered by life events. Her vulnerability is confirmed by her journal entries and her correspondence to her family whilst she was in New York, both of which reveal her insecurities and her inability to deal with high-pressure situations (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1992; Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

In terms of the IFS model, Sylvia's escalating feelings of failure and inferiority, despite all her accomplishments, are attributed to her over-burdened system which prevented access to the healing benefits of Self-leadership. According to Schwartz (2013), burdens contain all the terrible traumas and betrayals that an individual suffered as a child. These burdens can severely disrupt the leadership, balance and harmony of the internal family system, forcing parts into extreme roles, with each part fearing that submission could result in damage to the system (Krause, 2013; Watzlawick et al., 1974). The rigidly-held positions maintained by extreme parts keep the internal family system polarized. This prevents the self-healing benefits of self-efficacy and self-acceptance – benefits which have the power to transform an individual's terror, pain and feelings of worthlessness, so that a deep sense of personal empowerment can be experienced (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 2011, 2013a).

The fact that Sylvia questioned her identity at this stage and felt overwhelmed by a pervasive feeling of inner turmoil and depression, despite an outer façade of perfect self-control and social poise, affirms the researchers assertion that her Self was constrained by parts that were afraid to differentiate fully from it. This prevented the sense of continuity and integration necessary for Self-leadership and self-empowerment.

When Sylvia returned home from her guest-editorship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York, she found the Plath household caught in the grip of tension owing to her grandmother being seriously ill and her mother suffering from severe pain due to an old ulcer (Butscher, 1976, 2003). The researcher surmises that the strain of having to run the Plath household during this difficult time, together with the news that her application to a Harvard writing course had been rejected, put so much emotional strain on Sylvia, that it activated her already over-burdened exiles, resulting in a severe depression. Her depression was aggravated by the fact that summer loomed before her like a wasteland, devoid of the structured routine which Sylvia believed gave her purpose (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The researcher attributes Sylvia's

sense of purposelessness to her lack of Self-leadership. Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013) posited that the Self contains everything that it requires to be a good leader, including compassion, clarity of perspective, confidence, courage, curiosity, calmness, connectedness and creativity. Sylvia's feeling that she was incapable of accomplishing those tasks at which she had always excelled, not only made her lose interest in all the activities she had ever loved (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013), it also reinforced her feelings of failure and inferiority and made her obsessed with thoughts that she was disappointing significant people in her life, like her beloved high-school English teacher, Wilbury Crockett (Butscher, 1976, 2003). Krause's (2013) assertion that beliefs of unlovability and worthlessness result in what IFS calls burdens, can clearly be seen at this stage of Sylvia's development. Apart from the physical manifestations of her depression, Aurelia's description of her daughter's state of mind, as well as Sylvia's very own journal entries containing negative images of fear, confusion, frustration and despair (Plath, 1992, 2000; Rollyson, 2013), suggest that her internal family system could no longer cope with the weight of her exiled burdens. The underlying premise of IFS is that the more wounded the system's exiles are, the more intense the behaviour of the system's protectors becomes and the more disempowered the system's Self feels (Krause et al., 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013). In terms of this premise, it is speculated that Sylvia's anguish of keeping the inner turmoil of her exiles securely locked away whilst trying to meet her managers' demands of efficiency, perfect social poise and absolute self-control, put so much pressure on her internal system, that her firefighters saw suicide as the only solution to saving her (see section 9.4.8.2 for a more detailed discussion of Sylvia's firefighters at this stage of her development).

The researcher further surmises that the Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) recommended by her attending psychiatrist to shake her out of her depression (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013) (see section 2.2.7.2) only served to increase the desperation of her exiled suicide parts. According to Scott (2017), attempts to exile (or block) suicide parts actually increases the risk that an individual will be harmed or killed. This is because the part that agrees to the suicide is usually a compliant managerial part and not the suicide part itself. Although an active suicide part may form an alliance with other protectors and may even claim to speak for the entire system, the reality is that suicide parts do not want to die – they simply see no other solution to handling the extreme turmoil and distress of exiled parts (Schwartz, 2013a; Scott, 2017).

The fact that Sylvia began to associate her depression with her deceased father reinforces the researcher's speculation that the poorly-administered ECT resurrected exiled feelings of

loss and guilt and actually intensified her depression. In this state of despair, Sylvia began to feel haunted by the thought that a subconscious, secret death wish for her father may have mysteriously contributed to the diabetes which killed him (Butscher, 1976, 2003). The researcher surmises that Sylvia may have felt so overwhelmed by the sense of shame that emanated from these haunting thoughts, that suicide became the only means of escape from the toxic emotional pain that flooded her internal family system.

The nature of Sylvia's relationships with men during her senior college years (see section 2.2.7.2) also attests to the extent of polarization of her internal family system. In terms of the IFS model, exiles are so desperate to be valued and cared for, that they are prepared to pay any price for love, acceptance, protection or the hope of redemption, even if it means having to endure degradation and abuse (Green, 2008; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). Sylvia's meticulously-recorded journal entries during her senior college years indicate that she dated numerous men and that she had a tendency of tolerating men who mistreated her (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). The researcher attributes Sylvia's inability to establish secure interpersonal relationships characterised by genuine intimacy, spontaneity and warmth, to her highly polarized internal family system.

According to Schwartz (1995, 2013a, 2013b), polarized internal relationships block parts from finding and adopting their preferred, valuable roles, thereby preventing the Self-leadership required for healthy, loving, interpersonal relationships with others. In terms of IFS couple therapy, access to the Self-energy needed for Self-leadership is a prerequisite for positive growth and change in interpersonal relationships (Herbine-Blank, 2013). It is surmised that Sylvia's inability to access the type of Self-energy needed for a loving relationship with oneself, blocked her capacity to establish a heartfelt, sincere connection with her intimate partners. This would explain her alienation from herself and her emotional detachment from her romantic conquests. Her lack of Self-energy, as exemplified in what Schwartz (2013, p. 4) called the "8Cs" or core qualities of Self-leadership (namely, confidence, clarity, calm, creativity, courage, compassion, curiosity and connectedness), and the impact of its absence on her interpersonal relationships, can be traced in one of her journal entries written during her senior college years:

If only I knew what I wanted I could try to see about getting it ... the three men on the fringe are too far off in time and space and too like unloves and faithless, and though love be a day, I am afraid it will be only that; and though love be a day, I am afraid also that it will be more. What to do? Think & create & love people & give of self like mad. Go outward in love and creation and maybe you will fall into knowing what you want ...". (Plath, 2000, pp. 182-183)

9.4.8.1 *Managers*

In light of the emotional turmoil experienced by Sylvia during her senior college years, it is surmised that the measures implemented by her managers to maintain balance in the internal family system, were even more extreme than in previous stages of her development. The following managers were identified from biographical material in Sylvia's senior college years.

9.4.8.1.1 *The Striver*

Biographical material pertaining to Sylvia's senior college years (see section 2.2.7.2), indicates that her feelings of self-doubt and inferiority impelled her to work even harder and to strive for even greater academic and literary success. Her internship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York attests to the driven nature of her Striver. Despite the gruelling nature of the internship, which was characterised by a heavy workload and immense pressure to meet deadlines (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009), Sylvia executed the tasks expected of her as guest managing editor, with the same efficiency and standard of excellence that had characterised previous academic and literary endeavours. These tasks included writing assignments, reading and providing critique on manuscripts, typing rejection letters, running errands and answering phone calls (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). From a work point of view, her depression did not deter her from fulfilling her responsibilities. Not only did she manage to complete all the assignments expected of her by the magazine, she also contributed to the August issue more than any of the other guest editors (Butscher, 1976, 2003).

After Sylvia's suicide attempt in 1953, her subsequent hospitalisation and psychiatric treatment resulted in her not being able to graduate with her class the following year (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). Despite all the rumours and attention which her suicide had provoked, Sylvia put in a concerted effort to remain positive and enthusiastic and to integrate herself in all aspects of college life (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). True to her academic zealotness, she continued to garner outstanding grades and managed to secure a scholarship for another year at Smith College, as well as for Harvard Summer School (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013).

The fact that Sylvia chose the challenging topic of Dostoevsky for her senior thesis and the fact that she was determined to obtain a Fulbright scholarship so she could study at Oxford or Cambridge, attest to the driven, task-orientated nature of her Striver. In her final year at Smith College, Sylvia was described as the most gifted "top-notch" student who deserved "to be watched, to be encouraged – and to be remembered" (Wilson, 2013, p. 330). Despite a full academic and social programme, she maintained an outstanding academic record, all the while

continuing to write poetry, short stories and pieces for highly-reputed literary magazines (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013).

The highlight of Sylvia's academic career occurred when she graduated from Smith College in 1955 as one of only four summa cum laude graduates (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). The fact that she won a plethora of prizes, as well as a Fulbright scholarship to study literature at Cambridge University in England (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013), affirms the researcher's inference that the ever-increasing emotional pain in her internal family system prompted her protective Striver to be all the more intense in its efforts to maintain balance and to protect her system from the volatile reactions of her exiled parts.

9.4.8.1.2 *The Evaluator*

Sylvia's internship at *Mademoiselle Magazine* in New York provides pertinent evidence of the role of her evaluating manager at this stage of her development. Apart from the heavy workload and the immense pressure to meet deadlines, the girls who were selected to be interns were also expected to attend social functions and to appear in public to promote advertising and boost magazine sales. They thus had to fulfill the dual roles of active working journalists and runway models on show for the magazine's advertising campaigns (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

To the self-conscious Sylvia, the incessant public exposure made her feel all the more vulnerable and only served to intensify her ever-increasing sense of distress (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's ever-increasing sense of distress prompted her evaluating manager to be all the more perfectionistic about her appearance and behaviour. This ensured that she maintained her façade of perfect self-control and social poise, and explains her compulsive quest for perfection. In Sylvia's final year of senior college, the success of her evaluating manager in obtaining social approval, manifested itself when she was elected as president of the Alpha Phi Kappa society. Sylvia's desire to be the best at everything and her tenacious resolution to integrate herself in all aspects of college life attest to the nature of her Evaluator at this stage of her life. Schwartz's (2001) warning that evaluators are often polarized in conflicting roles with a third type of manager, is affirmed by the behaviour of Sylvia's Passive Pessimist, which is discussed in the next section.

9.4.8.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

Unlike the goal-directed, driven Striver and Evaluator, the Passive Pessimist tries to induce total apathy and withdrawal to ensure that an individual does not even try to take risks or get close to anyone (Schwartz, 1995). When Sylvia returned from her internship in New York, Aurelia noted that she had a sombre, listless mood, which was aggravated by the news that her application to Frank O’Conner’s short story writing course at Harvard Summer School had been rejected (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). According to Butscher (1976, 2003), the rejection wounded Sylvia’s already vulnerable self-esteem and increased her existing insecurities about her self-worth. In terms of the IFS model, the researcher surmises that the rejection prompted the reinforcement of her Passive Pessimist. This would explain Sylvia’s loss of interest in all the activities she had ever loved. According to biographical material, she hardly ever left the house and she became obsessed with thoughts that she was a disappointment to significant people in her life (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Schwartz (1995) highlighted that this manager will try to break down a person’s confidence and may even sabotage performance. This would account for Sylvia’s thwarted attempts to keep busy. Although Sylvia considered enrolling for another course at Harvard, such as elementary psychology or 20th century novel, she gave up on the idea because the cost involved would only worsen the family’s already precarious financial position (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In a journal entry, she expressed her resentment about not being born a wealthy girl (Plath, 2000). The researcher attributes Sylvia’s despondency and abnegation to the role of her Passive Pessimist, since Schwartz (1995, 2001) indicated that this manager reminds an individual of personal flaws and incidents of rejection, so that he/she is reduced to an apathetic coward who avoids the pursuit of goals for fear of failure. The manifestation of this manager is aptly captured in Sylvia’s journal entry dated July 14, 1953: “...you tried to shut yourself off from responsibility altogether... you felt scared, sick, lethargic, worst of all, not wanting to cope” (Plath, 2000, pp. 186-187).

9.4.8.1.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

When Sylvia returned to Wellesley after her internship in New York, she found the Plath household caught in the grip of tension owing to her grandmother being seriously ill and her mother suffering from severe pain due to an old ulcer (Butscher, 1976; 2003). Since Sylvia had no choice but to carry the burden of running the Plath home while her mother attempted to recover (Butscher, 1976, 2003), the researcher surmises that the domestic situation prompted the activation of her caretaking manager. It is further surmised that the polarization between

Sylvia's caretaking responsibilities and her personal drive to enhance her professional skills by enrolling for academic courses (prompted by her entitled manager), may have added strain to her already depleted energy sources. This would account for her difficulty to perform even the simplest tasks at this time.

9.4.8.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

Sylvia's *Mademoiselle* internship coincided with an important historical event, namely, the Rosenberg executions (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The Rosenbergs had been found guilty of communist activity in 1951 of the McCarthy era, and had been sentenced to death by electrocution at New York's Sing Sing Prison (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The extent of Sylvia's interest in the Rosenberg case is attributed to the role of her Worrier – the manager who is extremely anxious and constantly alert for danger, and who flashes worst-case scenarios in front of an individual in an effort to frighten him or her from taking any risks (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). The fact that Sylvia developed welts on her arms at the exact time that the Rosenberg executions were to take place (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009), affirms the intensity of her Worrier. Sylvia acknowledged that she felt a natural empathy with the Rosenbergs (Wilson, 2013). Being a pacifist like her father, Sylvia was so disturbed by the apathetic response of Americans to this horrifying execution, that she admitted in a journal entry that all the news about the incident made her feel sick to her stomach (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2009) included somatic complaints in his list of managerial manifestations and the researcher attributes Sylvia's intense reactions to the incident to the extent of polarization of her internal family system. According to Krause et al. (2017), extreme parts always manifest in pairs, and the level of anxiety which their conflict generates, strengthens their polarization and reinforces their extremity. This accounts for the juxtaposition between Sylvia's goal-directed efforts to campaign for world peace through her writing, and her nervous apprehension as revealed in the somatic manifestation of her Worrier/Sentry.

Sylvia's Worrier/Sentry also manifested in the months preceding her departure for Cambridge. Although she was excited about the prospect of beginning a new life in England, she was also fraught with insecurities and anxieties since it would be the first time that she was leaving the routine and comfort of home (Wilson, 2013). The researcher surmises that these anxieties were aggravated by the family's financial constraints, and that this reinforced the power of her worrying managerial part.

9.4.8.2 *Firefighters*

Sylvia's suicide attempt of 1953 provides the most pertinent manifestation of the role of her firefighters during her senior college years. The goal of firefighters is to stop emotional pain after an exile has been aroused, by implementing extreme techniques which will soothe or distract the individual from the dreaded, exiled feelings (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995). Although Sylvia did not write many journal entries in the months preceding her suicide attempt, what she did write was fraught with negative images of fear, confusion, frustration and despair (Plath, 2000).

In one of these journal entries, Sylvia admitted to being her own worst enemy and she admonished herself for thinking selfishly of razors, self-inflicted wounds and suicide (Plath, 2000). Soon afterwards, when her mother noticed cuts on her legs and confronted her about them, Sylvia admitted to having used razor blades on herself in an effort to gauge her level of courageousness (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher infers that her behaviour indicated that her level of emotional pain was unbearable. Sykes (2001) used the term *distractor* rather than firefighter, to emphasise that the role of these protectors extends beyond the extermination of painful emotions. According to Sykes (2001), distractors serve a crucial function in that they complement hard-working, driven managers by introducing novelty, pleasure, relief or comfort into everyday life. The fact that Sylvia would opt for pain-inducing behaviour like self-cutting in an effort to find relief from the torment of her exiled parts, gives an indication of the severity of her emotional pain and is affirmed by her exclamation to her mother: "Oh mother, the world is so rotten! I want to die! Let's die together!" (Plath, 1992, p. 124).

Sylvia's emotional pain induced an array of firefighting responses. In one of her less serious attempts, she slit her wrists with a razor blade, and in another she tried drowning herself in the ocean, but neither of these methods worked (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Eventually she decided to use the traditional method of sleeping pills. Sykes (2017) posited that polarization between managers and firefighters as they try to control the emotional pain of exiles, is fundamental to what he calls the addictive process. Because Sylvia suffered from insomnia, for which her psychiatrist had prescribed sleeping pills, the researcher infers that her choice of sleeping pills to commit suicide is directly related to Sykes' (2017) notion of the addictive process and confirms the polarized nature of her internal family system.

Sylvia's promiscuous behaviour during her senior college years is also a manifestation of the role of her firefighters. Although she believed herself to be in love with a naval officer named Gordon Lameyer, she continued to date other men, recording all her encounters in her

journals (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013). It is surmised that Sylvia's inability to establish a secure interpersonal relationship was aggravated by the fact that she experienced her father's death as an abandonment. The fact that she used her poetry as a vehicle to reify the lost father figure is attributed to the dissociative techniques of her firefighting protectors. Throughout her life, Sylvia recreated her father in her works, using words as a substitute for the love she craved from him (Wilson, 2013). The researcher speculates that Sylvia's firefighters prompted her to manufacture her own personal absolute of male perfection in her writing, to protect her from the pain that emanated from her belief that she would never find anyone who could compare to the father she had lost. This is confirmed in a journal entry in which she expressed her desire for a "demigod of a man... a romantic, nonexistent hero" (Plath, 2000, p. 182).

9.4.9 Adulthood (1955 – 1956): Sylvia in Cambridge, England, at the Time of the Suez Crisis

According to Krause (2013), polarizations between parent and child reinforce the child's dependency on the parent and obstruct complete unburdening. Similarly, Ames, Ilg and Baker (1988) posited that dependency on and veneration of one's parents obstructs the child's search for Self. It is surmised that Sylvia's dependency on her mother and her ever-present veneration of her lost father, prevented her from being Self-led and contributed to the overwhelming insecurity which she felt when she left America to start a new life in Cambridge, England. The fact that she hurled herself into a romance with a newly-married, Fulbright Physics graduate within only days of being on board the liner that transported them to Europe (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013), is attributed to her firefighters and the impulsive measures taken by them to douse the emotional pain of her exiled parts. The intensity of Sylvia's emotional pain is affirmed by the fact that she fell ill with a terrible sinus infection within days of starting her new term in Cambridge (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, Scott (2017) posited that exiled feelings are frequently communicated somatically. When Sylvia checked into the Newnham campus hospital, she discovered that the treatment of sinusitis was very different to the treatment she had received in America. At Smith College, the treatment included penicillin, cocaine sprays and sleeping pills, but at Cambridge, she was given nothing more than an aspirin (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). The fact that Sylvia was appalled by this and checked herself out of hospital, opting instead to get a prescription from the physician at the National Health Services (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009;

Wilson, 2013), affirms the researcher's inference that she was a victim of the addictive process described by Sykes (2017).

The most pertinent manifestation of the desperation of Sylvia's exiles at this stage of her life can be seen in her relationship with Ted Hughes – the man she met whilst in Cambridge. Shortly before meeting him she had been to see a psychiatrist on account of her suicidal depression, which had been provoked by the conflict between her ambitiousness and her fear of not attaining perfection (Alexander, 1999; Wilson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher attributes this conflict to the polarized struggle between her ambitious Striver and her perfection-seeking Evaluator. Although Sylvia did not refer specifically to her father in her session with the psychiatrist, she did express her longing for an older role model at Cambridge (Plath, 2000; Wilson, 2013), and in her journal entry written less than a week before her session, she acknowledged her need “to be held by a man; some man, who is a father” (Plath, 2000, p. 199).

Norman and Schwartz (2003) posited that exiles, in their desperation to be saved, will idealise anyone who offers to help and will regard such a helper as a redeemer. Schwartz (1995, p. 47) wrote that exiles “seek a redeemer who resembles the person who rejected them initially”, so as “to find the love and protection they believe will heal the pain of rejection and finally make them feel safe”. In light of the fact that Sylvia experienced her father's death as a deliberate act of betrayal (Butscher, 1976, 2008) it is surmised that Sylvia's attraction to Ted was prompted by her exiles' desperate search for a “redeemer” (Schwartz, 1995, p. 47) who resembled her father, Otto – the man whom she believed had abandoned, and inadvertently, rejected her. Ted resembled Otto in a number of ways. Not only did Sylvia portray him as the type of overpowering man that her father had been, she also described him as cruel and unkind, with a tendency of “bashing people around” (Rollyson, 2013, p. 117). In fact, biographical material indicates that Ted had a tendency to be cruel and even violent when he lost his temper (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Similarly, Otto Plath was known for his “explosive outbursts of anger” (Plath, 1992, p. 18). Years later, when Sylvia's marriage to Ted was under immense stress, she told the story of an incident in Spain when Ted had been overtaken by an uncontrollable fit of rage. Before Sylvia could even make sense of what was happening, Ted was choking her. Only when she started to lose consciousness, did he loosen his grip, stopping his assault almost as quickly and inexplicably as he had commenced it (Alexander, 1999). According to the IFS model, exiles are prepared to pay any price for love, acceptance, protection and the hope of redemption, even if it means having to endure degradation and abuse

(Green, 2008; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a). This could explain the inability of some individuals to leave abusive relationships, and accounts for Sylvia's tolerance of Ted's abusive behaviour.

Biographical material indicates that Sylvia was particularly vulnerable in the four months after meeting Ted, not only because she felt rejected by Sassoon after she went to visit him in Paris and found that he had left for Spain without her, but also because she felt cut off from her family (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). In her vulnerable state, she succumbed to Ted's warm energy and went straight back to him upon her return to England (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). The researcher attributes Sylvia's impulsivity to her over-burdened system which was so polarized that it prevented her from accessing the Self-energy that allows for Self-leadership. Another example which supports the researcher's speculation that Sylvia was parts-led, can be found in the marriage arrangements between her and Ted. According to Middlebrook (2003), it was Sylvia who proposed to Ted, but because she was afraid of losing her Fulbright scholarship, she thought it best that they wait until after she had completed her studies. However, when Aurelia arrived to visit Sylvia in England that June, the couple announced that they had decided to marry immediately and to keep it a secret until Sylvia graduated the following year (Alexander, 1999). After the marriage and honeymoon, financial constraints and the fact that their marriage was still a secret, resulted in Sylvia having to return alone to Cambridge for her final year, whilst Ted went back to Yorkshire to stay with his parents (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). The separation proved too much for Sylvia who fell into another depression, despite the success that she was garnering as a writer with the publication of two short stories and all the poems she had submitted (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The researcher attributes Sylvia's extreme emotional dependency on Ted to the fact that she had never attained complete independence from her parents, even after moving to a different country, and that this lack of independence prevented the unburdening of her internal family system. Furthermore, it is surmised that her inability to attain the type of independence which promotes unburdening, was aggravated by the fact that she was constrained by the added burden of complicated grief after the death of her father. Krause (2013) indicated that children need to be independent before unburdening can take place, whilst Wolfelt (1992) cautioned that when grieving is avoided by replacing the lost object with a new attachment, it reinforces the system's protective strategies. This would polarize the system even more and debilitate the curative powers of the Self (Schwartz, 2013a). In light of Sylvia's over-dependency on Ted, who served as a replacement for the lost father whom she still grieved, it is not surprising that her exiles' extreme experience of hopelessness catalysed thoughts of suicide. In light of the

threatened survival of her system, it is even less surprising that Sylvia's protective managers and firefighters resorted to such extreme measures to keep her traumatized parts exiled.

9.4.9.1 Managers

In the subsequent section, more information will be provided regarding the managers that were identified during this stage of Sylvia's adult development.

9.4.9.1.1 The Striver

The fact that Sylvia quickly applied herself to embracing every aspect of her new life in Cambridge, attests to the role of her Striver. She decided to join the Amateur Dramatic Club (ADC) and although she adored performing for any audience and was successful in obtaining leading roles in a number of prominent plays, she decided that time devoted to her writing would be better spent than time devoted to acting (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Wilson, 2013). In a letter to her mother, she declared that she would rather be a mediocre writer than a bad actress (Plath, 1992, p. 194). This attests to the driven nature of her Striver, which impelled her to strive for success.

Another example of the critical, driven nature of her Striver can be found in her self-punitive thoughts after the St Botolph's inauguration party where she had met Ted for the first time. After the party, where she "got drunk, very very beautifully drunk" (Plath, 2000, p. 210), she admonished herself for her apathy and tiredness and admitted to feeling guilty about neglecting her language studies. In her journal entry, she wrote about the burden of having a "puritanical conscience", and how it made her castigate herself every time she felt she had done wrong or had not demanded enough of herself (Plath, 2000, p. 215).

9.4.9.1.2 The Evaluator

Since the primary role of the evaluating manager is to monitor an individual's popularity, appearance and behaviour, especially in relation to others (Schwartz, 2001), one can surmise that Sylvia's enchanting and busy social life in Cambridge can be attributed to the role of her Evaluator. The evaluating manager's responsibility of obtaining social approval, presupposes perfectionism in line with the belief that the perfect person who pleases everyone will never be abandoned or hurt (Schwartz, 1995). The manifestation of this tendency in Sylvia can be found in a letter written by her to her benefactress, Olive Higgins Prouty. In the letter, Sylvia lamented her striving for perfection and the distress which she experienced when she realised that this was an impossible ideal (Wilson, 2013).

9.4.9.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

It is surmised that Sylvia's relationship with Richard Sassoon, whilst she was in Cambridge, added even more fuel to her already volatile exiled parts. After what was meant to be the romantic holiday of a lifetime through Europe, Sylvia was devastated by Sassoon's suggestion that they end their relationship and start seeing other potential partners (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013). After Sassoon's confession that he had met a Swiss girl and that they had even discussed marriage (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013), Sylvia returned to Cambridge distraught and wrote to her mother saying that Sassoon was the only boy that she had ever loved (Plath, 1992). In her desperation, Sylvia wrote a heartfelt letter to Sassoon, promising him that she would be faithful while she waited for him, and she broke all contact with the boys she had become acquainted with in Cambridge (Wilson, 2013). The researcher attributes Sylvia's reaction to the role of her Passive Pessimist, since this manager is known for inducing apathy and withdrawal in its efforts to protect an individual from interpersonal hurt. In this time, Sylvia often wore black and she wrote impassionately about her cold, comfortless existence in her journal entries (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). It is inferred that *The New Yorker's* rejection of her short story based on her holiday in France with Sassoon, and the poor reviews of her poems published in a local college paper, not only strengthened the apathetic, avoidant behaviour of her Passive Pessimist, but also activated exiled memories of her suicide attempt in 1953.

The ominous comparison between Sylvia's 1953 suicide attempt and her morbid, cold Cambridge experience in the early months of 1956, is succinctly captured in a journal entry written in February 1956. Not only do Sylvia's words, "A morbid fear ... the mere sensation value of being suicidal ... of coming out of the grave ... my grave winter-pallor ... the creative flood which annihilates all envy, all mere niggling fearful jealousy" (Plath, 2000, p. 199), affirm the powerful role played by her fearfully-driven Passive Pessimist, they also suggest the dangerously vulnerable state of her internal family system which, lacking Self-leadership, would be impelled by her firefighters, to eventually resort to suicide, once again, in its efforts to escape overwhelming pain.

9.4.9.1.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

Sylvia's relationship with Ted provides evidence of the polarized nature of her caretaking and entitled managerial parts. Whereas caretaking managers are typically associated with women and related caretaking duties, entitled managers are typically associated with men and acts of domination (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Biographical material indicates that Sylvia and

Ted complemented each other in their differences. Whilst he taught her about the wonders of nature, including how to cook freshly caught food over a fire, she attended to the business of typing and submitting their writing for publication, much like her mother had done for her father (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Although this attests to the fact that Sylvia's caretaking manager was reinforced by the example set by her mother, the researcher speculates that Ted's willingness to let Sylvia take charge of things, satisfied the needs of her Entitled One, and reinforced the polarization between their managerial parts.

9.4.9.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

As Sylvia approached her final semester at Cambridge, she began contemplating the idea of returning to America with Ted (Kirk, 2009). True to her pacifist ideology, she was totally opposed to Britain's invasion of Egypt after the Suez Canal was nationalised by Nasser, and she openly voiced her objections (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). To Sylvia, England was at fault for violating the sovereignty of another country for materialistic gains (Butscher, 1976, 2003). In a letter to her mother, she expressed her disgust with militarism and her hope that Warren would become a conscientious objector (Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013). The researcher surmises that Sylvia's fear of war emanated from her Worrier and that this manager prompted both her pacifist ideas and her decision to leave England, so she and Ted could start a new life in America – far away from a country which she believed had no future, and whose political policy she detested.

9.4.9.2 *Firefighters*

Sylvia's contradictory and fluctuating emotions, especially with regard to her multitude of unstable interpersonal relationships while she was in Cambridge, attest to the polarized nature of her internal family system. According to biographical information, and true to her contradictory nature, Sylvia seemed to be swept away by the idea of love, only to be disillusioned when she was confronted by its imperfect reality (Butscher, 2003; Wilson, 2013).

Her habit of escaping the pain that accompanied tragedy or loss by hiding in a delusional fantasy world (Plath, 1992) is attributed to her firefighters and the measures taken by them to shield her from pain through the technique of dissociation. Sylvia's exhilaration during a horse-riding incident when a horse ran off with her, provides yet another example of the dare-devil nature of her firefighters. The harrowing, adrenalin-filled incident which inspired her 1962 poem entitled *Ariel*, in which she wrote forebodingly about suicide (Plath, 2004), corresponds perfectly with the IFS premise that firefighters are a system's dare-devil, hair-

trigger emergency protectors and that they will even resort to suicide in an urgent, threatening situation, irrespective of the collateral damage to the system (Engler, 2013; Schwartz, 1995; Smith, 2017).

9.4.10 Adulthood (1957 – 1959): Sylvia, the Newlywed Poetess in America in the Years of the Space Race

Although Sylvia and Ted's letters suggest that they inspired greatness in each other and that they were, as Sylvia succinctly described, each other's counterparts (Hughes, 1998, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013), biographical material indicates that their marriage was characterised by outbursts of aggression, owing to the volatile and often violent nature of both Sylvia and Ted's personalities (Rollyson, 2013; Rose, 2013).

Schwartz (2017) included perpetrator parts in his terminology of the internal family system, but he warned that these parts should be differentiated from excessively critical managers and typical, angry firefighters. According to Schwartz (2017), perpetrator parts constitute a group of protectors characterised by specific qualities, namely: (a) the drive to humiliate and/or dominate others; (b) enjoyment in their experience of power and/or relief when they can take over; (c) an intense loathing of vulnerability and the desire to inflict punishment both inside the individual's system and in others; and (d) the lack of concern for the feelings evoked in their victims or for the outcome of their tyrannical actions. Schwartz (2017) warned that these distinctions are not clear-cut and that one must guard against seeing perpetrator parts as evil. The underlying principle is that all individuals have parts and that these parts will resort to whatever is necessary to keep them alive. Perpetrator parts do not enjoy what they do, but they feel forced into the position of merciless victimiser by circumstances in the past when the individual felt attacked, abused or powerless (Schwartz, 2017).

Based on Schwartz's (2017) experience, individuals who have been betrayed or abused by people with perpetrator parts usually develop a part in a similar role. According to biographical material, Sylvia found a father-substitute in Ted (Bawer, 2007). She failed, however, to see the danger of relying on Ted to be everything her mother and father had not been (Rollyson, 2013). When Ted left Sylvia, he unlocked in her the suppressed fear and anger that she had internalised since her father's death when she was only eight years old (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The IFS model generally views diagnostic categories in terms of how internal family systems organise themselves for protection. Most individuals with severe diagnoses like major depression, have overburdened, wounded exiles whom their managers and firefighters struggle to contain. In their efforts to maintain balance, the system's protectors polarize, with one set

impelling the individual to shut down and withdraw from the outside world and the other set impelling the person to act out in a specific way. The diagnosis would thus depend on which set of protectors dominates the system. This would explain why Sylvia's marriage to Ted was characterised by the juxtaposition between blind devotion to Ted and violent anger towards him. Although she loved Ted with the same adoration that she had felt for her father, she also hated him because, like her father, he eventually failed to be there for her (Alexander, 1999).

In the time that Sylvia was employed as a lecturer at Smith College, she caught Ted in the company of a young, blonde, female student (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Although Sylvia was aware of Ted's sadistic and womanising tendencies, and had even admitted to being able to manage those aspects of his personality (Rollyson, 2013), the incident with the young, blonde, Smith student provoked such a violent argument between Sylvia and Ted, that they physically assaulted one another (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In her journal entry written a day after the incident, Sylvia commented that within two years, Ted had managed to transform her "from a crazy perfectionist and promiscuous human-being-lover, to a misanthrope" (Plath, 2000, p. 386). She reprimanded herself for having put Ted on an "infinitely superior" plane and she remarked that she now felt nothing but revulsion in herself, but even more so in Ted, whose vanity thrived at her expense (Plath, 2000, p. 386). Despite the explosive argument and Sylvia's revulsion, the fact that the couple made peace and resolved to stick to their decision of relocating to Boston, affirms the contradictory nature of perpetrator parts described by Schwartz (2017). Because Sylvia's exiles were frozen in circumstances of abuse and betrayal relating to her father, her volatile, erratic and contradictory reactions to Ted's behaviours can be attributed to the inner battle between polarized perpetrator parts as they struggled to contain her exiled, wounded and traumatised parts.

9.4.10.1 Managers

In the subsequent section, more information will be provided regarding the managers that were identified during this stage of Sylvia's development.

9.4.10.1.1 The Striver

Sylvia's tenacious adherence to a strict writing routine of two hours per day starting at six in the morning before Ted left for work (Rollyson, 2013), attests to the role of her Striver. The fact that she made time to memorise the poems of well-known poets, work on love stories that she planned to submit to New York magazines and help Ted with the typing and submission

of his work (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013), attests to the excessively task-oriented nature of her Striver.

Ted's description of Sylvia as being talented, alert, indefatigable and keenly responsive to everything (Hughes, 1998, 2009; Rollyson, 2013) encapsulates perfectly the goal-directed qualities of a Striver in pursuit of personal achievement. In her role as teacher at Smith College, Sylvia was described as being brilliant – one of the finest Smith's English Department had ever seen (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). The fact that Sylvia did not see herself in this way attests to her highly-polarized, overburdened system and explains her intense depression. According to Krause, Rosenberg and Sweezy (2017), when desperate, over-burdened exiles drive managers and firefighters to be forcefully assertive, preventing access to the calm and clarity of Self-energy, diagnoses like psychosis, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and major depression are, in many cases, inevitable.

9.4.10.1.2 The Evaluator

In a journal entry entitled *Letter to a demon*, Sylvia admonished herself for not being able to stand up against the “murderous” part of herself that demanded perfection and stripped her of her confidence when she was anything less than perfect (Plath, 2000, p. 618). In terms of the IFS model, this “murderous” part resembles Schwartz's (1995) evaluating manager, since this critical protector impels an individual to strive for perfection in its quest for social approval and acceptance.

Schwartz (1995) added that Strivers and Evaluators are often in conflict because they have different motives for protecting an individual. The fact that Sylvia called “this murderous self” her “demon”, believing that it would destroy her unless she fought it by excelling at everything (Plath, 2000, p. 618), attests to the polarized battle between her perfectionistic Evaluator and her excellence-driven Striver.

The polarized struggle between these two demanding managers is further affirmed in Sylvia's acknowledgement that she had to fight shyness and that she struggled to face people easily. *Letter to a demon* not only summed up Sylvia's emotional state at the time, it also revealed her need to control every aspect of her life, which meant being the perfect writer, teacher and wife (Alexander, 1999). This need for absolute control is attributed to the powerfully assertive role of Sylvia's protectors, since these protectors are known to take control or to “blend” (Krause et al., 2017, p. 11) when the safety of an individual's system is threatened by overwhelming exiles.

9.4.10.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

Although Sylvia succeeded in breaking through the British market with the publication of her poems *Black Rook in Raining Weather* and *Spinster* in the *London* magazine, she struggled to produce anything noteworthy for her novel, tentatively entitled *Falcon Yard* (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In her journal entry, Sylvia described the frustration of not being able to write, and her lack of confidence in her ability to write induced both anxiety and depression (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). The researcher attributes Sylvia's episodes of writer's block to the role of her Passive Pessimist, since this manager is known for breaking down an individual's confidence, even if it means sabotaging performance. The Passive Pessimist will remind an individual of personal flaws and incidents of rejection, reducing him or her to an apathetic coward who avoids the pursuit of goals for fear of failure (Schwartz, 1995, 2001). Biographical material indicates that Ted's criticism of Sylvia's work reinforced the static rut in which she found herself (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013). It is inferred that his criticism of her work also reinforced the role of her Passive Pessimist, prompting her to avoid risks and thereby aggravating her writer's block.

The role of Sylvia's Passive Pessimist also manifested itself when she began teaching at Smith College. Not only did she feel incompetent in her new teaching role, she also felt intimidated by her students who were less than seven years younger than she was (Alexander, 1999; Rollyson, 2013). The fact that her new position depleted her of all creativity and negatively affected her already strained writing efforts (Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013) affirms the researcher's inference that her Passive Pessimist was polarized in a conflicting role with her Striver, thereby blocking the creative energy of the Self.

In one of her therapy sessions with her psychiatrist, Dr. Beuscher, Sylvia revealed that one of the obstacles in her life was her fear of failure. This revelation proved to be a major step in her evolution as a writer and contributed to the psychological depth and emotional richness of her *Ariel* poems (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The researcher infers that Sylvia's fear of failure emanated from the role of her Passive Pessimist, and that her therapy sessions with the psychiatrist may have aided in the process which IFS calls unblending (Anderson, 2013; Engler, 2013; Herbine-Blank, 2013; Krause, 2013; Krause et al., 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013; Sowell, 2013; Twombly, 2013). When unblending occurs, parts are differentiated from the Self, allowing access to what Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013) called the eight Cs of the Self - one of them being creativity.

The researcher surmises that Sylvia's creative surge, as manifested in the depth and emotional richness of her poetry at this time, can be explained in terms of her system's attempts

at Self-leadership. It is also surmised, however, that the feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and yearning for redemption, evoked by her overburdened exiles, were so intense, that they activated her protectors to dominate her system, thereby overpowering any attempts at Self-leadership.

9.4.10.1.4 The Caretaker and the Entitled One

The fact that Sylvia typed Ted's work and submitted it for possible publication, in the hope that he would be recognised for his talent and genius (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Malcolm, 2012; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013), attests not only to the role of her caretaking manager, but also to the influence of legacy burdens, transferred to Sylvia by her mother, who had also helped her husband Otto gain recognition as an expert in his field. Legacy burdens develop either directly through the interactions between parent and child, or indirectly through the emotional process of a family (Sinko, 2017). Either way, they exert a powerful influence both within and between family members and they govern everything, from how individuals eat to how they react to death (McGoldrick, 1982; Sinko, 2017). From an IFS perspective, when a family is polarized and lacks the curative, balancing effect that emanates from compassionate leadership, children simply internalise burdens so that they can survive (Schwartz, 1995, 2013a; Sinko, 2017). When physical or psychic pressures outweigh resources, the adaptation techniques of the system's protectors become more extreme, resulting in families (and family members) becoming more polarized with each generation (Hellinger, 2011; Sinko, 2017). The polarization between Sylvia's caretaking manager and the manager who pushed her to assert herself professionally in a male-dominated society, can clearly be seen in her tendency of escaping into "domesticity" (Plath, 2000, p. 269) every time she suffered from writer's block.

The powerful influence of legacy burdens is affirmed by the fact that Sylvia's tenacious submissions programme and her enthusiastic marketing of Ted's work, resulted in him having more publishing accomplishments than Sylvia had been able to accumulate in years. Although Sylvia was extremely driven and intent on attaining literary fame and success, she always put Ted first. Schwartz (1995) posited that selfless, caretaking managers are conditioned to put the welfare of others first and to disregard their own needs. Even though this makes others dependent on them, it also leads to them being exploited and devalued (Schwartz, 2001). Although Ted gave Sylvia the credit for his success and fulfillment as a writer (Rollyson, 2013), he also took advantage of the fact that she depended on him so intensely. In a journal entry, Sylvia expressed her resentment of her ever-growing dependency on Ted, and she compared their relationship to that of vampires who feed on one another (Plath, 2000).

When Sylvia and Ted joined the Yaddo artists' colony, she continued to be led by his tutelage, even though they wrote apart from one another (Alexander, 1999). It was not only in their writing endeavours that Ted controlled Sylvia's life. Biographical material indicates that Sylvia allowed Ted to take the lead in most things, even something as simple as entering the room (Alexander, 1999). Although both of them had an imposing, almost god-like physical presence, Sylvia's behaviour suggested that Ted was the more important one in their relationship (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The researcher surmises that the force of Sylvia's legacy burdens and her loyalty to her system's protectors, kept her exiled feelings of worthlessness and inferiority securely locked in place, thereby aggravating the polarization both internally between her Caretaker and her Entitled One, and interpersonally between herself and Ted. This would account for the volatile nature of their relationship, despite the fact that they considered themselves to be each other's counterparts (Hughes, 1998, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013).

9.4.10.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

Sylvia's attendance of Robert Lowell's creative writing workshop at Boston University in 1959, proved to be a positive creative experience for her because it introduced her to the techniques of a writing style known as confessionalism (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; 2003). Rosenthal (1967) defined confessional poetry as therapeutic, autobiographical and uncompromisingly honest, and Sylvia herself commented that this personal style of writing was a breakthrough for her since it allowed a deeper and more psychological take on emotional experiences previously considered taboo (Gill, 2008). In light of the fact that confessional poetry has since been evaluated as being inescapably political (Brunner, 2001), the researcher surmises that this style of writing allowed Sylvia to give expression to her Worrier or Sentry.

At the time, there was a pervasive anxiety about communism in America and the fear of communist invasion underpinned all aspects of American life (Peel, 2002). For someone like Sylvia, who as early as high school had shown evidence of an ever-increasing political awareness, confessional writing proved to be the ideal vehicle to articulate personal concerns, as well as concerns about bigger political issues such as Hiroshima and the advent of the Cold War (Alexander, 1999; Gill, 2008).

Sylvia's *Ariel* poems (most of which were written in that period) capture the tense atmosphere which prevailed at that time in America (Peel, 2002). Although her poems do not report historical events directly, Peel (2002) noted that the historical circumstances offered an

extremely charged backdrop for the articulation of Sylvia's own emotions "about the madness and destructive tendencies of the men and women around her" (Peel, 2002, p. 183).

9.4.10.2 *Firefighters*

Biographical material indicates that Sylvia and Ted often consulted Tarot cards and an Ouija board in their quest to make contact with spirits who might predict the magazines that would publish their work (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Black magic became a recurrent theme in their marriage and something on which both Sylvia and Ted came to depend (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). Ted's preoccupation with the occult was often based on materialistic pursuits and he frequently used the Ouija board as a vehicle for conversations with regard to how money could be generated (Rollyson, 2013). Sylvia, on the other hand, is reported to have used the Ouija board as a vehicle for conversations with the spirit of her father who appeared as Prince Otto – the family god – when she and Ted invoked the spirits of the magical board (Plath, 2000; Rollyson, 2013).

In line with McGoldrick's (1982) assertion that legacy burdens (which constitute the implicit contracts that individuals make with their parents) govern all things, from how individuals eat to how they respond to death, it is surmised that Sylvia's atheism was transferred to her by her father, and that this contributed to her involvement in occultish practices. When one considers that firefighters are tasked with the responsibility of distracting the individual from the overwhelming pain that lies buried in exiles, and that they even resort to extreme and impulsive techniques, like dissociative practices, in order to do so (Engler, 2013; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013; Sykes, 2017), it can be inferred that Sylvia's participation in occultish practices formed part of the dissociative techniques implemented by her firefighters in their quest to douse the emotional flare-ups of her exiled parts. This would explain her willingness to resort to black magic whenever she was plagued by insomnia and disturbing dreams (Alexander, 1999).

The polarized nature of Sylvia's internal family system also manifested itself when she visited her father's grave. The fact that she was overwhelmed by both anger and sorrow (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013) attests to the polarized, conflicting struggle between opposing protectors as they struggled to keep her raw exiles contained. Her poem *Electra on Azalea Path*, about a daughter who visits her father's grave to ask his forgiveness, was written ten days after her visit to Winthrop Cemetery, and concludes with the almost prophetic confession, "It was my love that did us both to death" (Plath, 2008, p. 117). The

researcher attributes this poem and its reference to death to the dissociative tendencies of Sylvia's firefighters.

In the two months that Sylvia and Ted stayed at Yaddo, they often resorted to hypnosis, meditation, invocation and stream-of-consciousness exercises, in an effort to tap into their imaginations (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). These exercises had startling effects on Sylvia, who managed to produce some of the most mature and intellectually satisfying poems she had ever written (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). This corresponds with Schwartz's (1995, 2013a, 2013b) assertion that meditation can induce the calm state of well-being and connectedness with the universe that allows for differentiation of the Self and that provides access to creativity. Grace Schulman, a writer who attended Yaddo in the 1970s, regarded Sylvia's time at Yaddo as a time of healing and rebirth. These themes of healing and rebirth are reflected in poems like *The Stories*, where Sylvia writes as "one who has lived in fragments and is now reborn" (Schulman, 1985, p. 174). The researcher speculates, however, that Sylvia's internal family system was polarized to such an extent in its efforts to contain the excruciating pain of her exiled parts, that it thwarted all attempts at Self-leadership. This is affirmed by the contents of her poem, *The Burnt-Out Spa*, which contradicts the notion of rebirth suggested by *The Stories*. This poem, which is extremely sad when read against the backdrop of Sylvia's life, ends with the suggestion that no amount of creativity could dispel Sylvia's inner turmoil and that she was doomed to live a life devoid of nourishment and healing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Plath, 1981).

9.4.11 Adulthood (1960 – 1963): Sylvia's Cold Years in England at the time of Kennedy's Presidency

Biographical material indicates that the birth of Sylvia and Ted's first child coincided with the first part of their new life in England after their departure from America (see section 2.2.10.1). In keeping with the common practice at the time, Sylvia gave birth at home with the help of a midwife (Alexander, 1999). Ted stayed at Sylvia's side throughout the labour and birth, soothing her by using the same concentration techniques that the couple had used to facilitate their writing (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Two years later, Sylvia gave birth to a son, and in the same way that she had written to her mother to describe the monumental happiness which she had felt after the birth of her daughter, so too she wrote to her mother after her son's birth, describing it as an epic event (Alexander, 1999; Plath, 1975, 1992). According to Schwartz (1995, 2013a, 2013b), concentration techniques like meditation can allow one to feel confident, free, open-hearted and centered and to experience a calm state of well-being

and connectedness with the universe. Schwartz (2001) summed up this transcendental state by describing the Self as follows: “The idea that at your essence you are pure joy and peace, and from that place you manifest clusters of wonderful leadership and healing qualities and sense a spiritual connectedness” (p. 25).

Krause et al. (2017) warned, however, that one must not confuse the Self with Self-like parts. Although Self-like parts display qualities similar to those of the Self, like curiosity, calmness, energy and connectedness, they do not have the ability to heal. From the perspective of IFS, Self-like parts are managers who play the part of the Self, with the well-meaning intention of preventing emotional overwhelm. Generally, the Self-like part tries to keep exiled parts quiet by making them feel better without letting their stories be heard. Krause et al. (2017) identified the following strategies implemented by Self-like parts in their quest to make exiled parts feel better: (a) comforting and calming exiled parts before they are ready to be comforted (this has often been described as a smothering type of mothering); (b) gently intellectualising to explain why negative things occurred to the exiled parts; and (c) removing feelings and sensations from the visual witnessing processes of exiled parts, so that there is detachment from the pain associated with those parts.

Sylvia’s experience of giving birth proved to be so positive and intense, that she described it as being “closer to the bone, than love and marriage” (Plath, 1992, p. 50). In terms of IFS, the positive creative effect of motherhood on Sylvia’s writing, as manifested in her surge of productivity after the births of her children (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013) could easily be mistaken for the creative benefits of Self-leadership as expounded by Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013, 2013a). However, the researcher speculates that it is more plausible to attribute her creative surge after motherhood to the workings of her Self-like parts, since these parts do not have the Self’s ability to heal. This is affirmed by the fact that Sylvia continued to be plagued by inner emotional turmoil, despite her efforts to maintain her mask of stability and perfect amiability (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013).

When Sylvia and Ted moved to North Tawton, she found the environment to be quite depressing and isolated, but Ted had wished to move to the country and Sylvia was determined to create a happy home for them there (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). Sylvia had a tendency to be influenced by her environment and even by the weather. Even when she lived in Cambridge, she had written to Sassoon saying, “I must stop identifying with the seasons, because this English winter will be the death of me” (Plath, 2000, p. 193). The researcher takes this to be another example of the fact that Sylvia was parts-led and not Self-led. The ultimate

manifestation of the fact that she was not Self-led occurred when she discovered that Ted was having an affair with Assia Weville, the wife of their poet friend, David. Although Sylvia never witnessed any explicit or sexually-inappropriate acts between Ted and Assia, she was well aware of the chemistry between them (Rollyson, 2013), and the poems written after David and Assia's visit to Court Green, attest to the fact that Sylvia understood the impact which their affair would have on her marriage (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Kirk, 2009). Despite Sylvia's perceptions of what had transpired between Ted and Assia after their first visit, she continued her regimen of domestic activities as though nothing had happened (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009) and she even wrote to her mother saying that it was the happiest time in her life (Plath, 1992). The researcher attributes Sylvia's unaffected response to Ted and Assia's affair to the strategies implemented by her Self-like parts, as described by Krause, Rosenberg and Sweezy (2017). It is inferred that by removing feelings and sensations from the visual witnessing processes of her exiled parts, Sylvia could remain detached from the pain associated with those parts.

A month after David and Assia's fateful visit to Court Green, Sylvia decided to start farming with bees (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). In light of the fact that Self-like parts have an agenda (Krause et al., 2017), the researcher attributes Sylvia's decision to start farming with bees and her efficiency in doing so, to the role of her Self-like parts. Unlike the Self's capacity for compassion, Self-like parts are inclined to be empathetic rather than compassionate, and this intensifies the efforts of the system's protectors, who dread being overwhelmed by exiled feelings of pain (Krause et al., 2017; Schwartz, 2014). The fact that Sylvia was deeply affected by the death of her neighbour, Percy Key, at the end of June, strengthens the researcher's speculation that her protectors were finding it more and more difficult to keep her exiled feelings of pain contained. It is inferred that the neighbour's death affected Sylvia so severely, not only because it activated exiled feelings related to her own father's death, but also because Ted and Assia's adulterous relationships had intensified Sylvia's exiled feelings of worthlessness and unlovability.

The culmination of these exiled feelings and the manifestation that they could no longer be contained, occurred exactly one week after Key's funeral when Ted's affair with Assia was exposed. The poem which Sylvia wrote after her interception of Assia's secretive phonecall to Ted – *Words Heard, By Accident, Over the Phone* – skillfully captures Sylvia's feelings of betrayal and anguish and confirms that she had known all along about the affair. Sylvia's impulsive decision to leave her daughter in Aurelia's care and drive off to family friends (the Cromptons) with the baby, as well as the juxtaposition between her hysterical reaction on the

night of the incident, and her calm, indifferent attitude the next morning, affirms the researcher's premise that the threat posed by her agonised exiles and their desperation to be heard, reinforced the polarization of her internal family system and intensified the contradictory nature of her protective parts.

9.4.11.1 The Managers

In the subsequent section, more information will be provided regarding the managers that were identified in the final stage of Sylvia's life.

9.4.11.1.1 The Striver

The fact that Sylvia continued to write and submit her work despite repeated rejections from American publishing houses, attests to the significant role of her Striver. Her lifelong striving for achievement, which in childhood and adolescence had manifested most pertinently in the form of academic excellence, continued to manifest in her adulthood in the form of her literary publishing successes. The news that the publishing house Heinemann wanted to publish her collection of poems, *The Colossus*, set in motion a number of literary successes for Sylvia, including the publication of *Full Fathom Five* and *The Sleepers* in the *London* magazine (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Despite these successes, biographical material indicates that Sylvia continued to struggle with the fact that her work was not being accepted in America, especially since her British husband had already succeeded in publishing *Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal* in the United States (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009).

Although Sylvia indicated in a letter to a friend that she had resigned herself to remaining an exile in England (Peel, 2002), her tenacious drive to break through to the American market eventually paid off with *The New Yorker* offering her a contract for exclusivity to all her poems, and with the publication of *The Colossus* in America in 1961. The researcher speculates that Sylvia's tenacity was fuelled by the persistent, goal-directed nature of her Striver, and that the boost of confidence which she received from the publication of her work in America, reinforced the motivation of this driven manager, as manifested in Sylvia's letter to the publisher, Alfred Kazin, requesting recommendation for a grant to write a novel (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). By the time Sylvia received the grant from the Saxton Foundation, she had already completed her novel. In fact, Heinemann Publishers had already accepted it for publication in England in October (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). The fact that Sylvia published her novel, entitled *The Bell Jar*, under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas (Alexander, 1999; Kirk,

2009; Rollyson, 2013), attests to the role of her evaluating manager and is discussed in the next section.

9.4.11.1.2 *The Evaluator*

Since the evaluating manager is driven by the belief that the perfect person who pleases everyone will never be abandoned or hurt (Schwartz, 1995), the researcher attributes the fact that Sylvia published her novel, *The Bell Jar*, under the pseudonym of Victoria Lucas, to the approval-seeking nature of her Evaluator. Sylvia had a compulsion to lift people and experiences from her personal life and immerse them into her creative writing (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). According to Butscher (1976, 2003), it was precisely this autobiographical feature of her writing that gave genuine coherence to her work and made it convincing. Sylvia was also aware, however, that her tendency of using real-life stories as inspiration for her writing could offend the people whom her caricatured characters represented. In a letter to her mother, Sylvia admitted that all her best work contained a “germ of reality” (Plath, 1992, p. 87). According to Wilson (2013), although the autobiographical feature of Sylvia’s writing fuelled her search for her identity, it also had the potential to both attract and annihilate those who strayed in its path. In light of the fact that the Evaluator is responsible for obtaining social approval (Schwartz, 2001), it is understandable that Sylvia published her novel under a pseudonym.

Sylvia’s evaluating manager also manifested itself when she and Ted moved to Court Green, a countryside estate in North Tawton. The image that she projected in North Tawton was that of a happy, extroverted and intelligent American woman who was kind to everyone (Butscher, 1976). From the beginning, Sylvia tried to ingratiate herself in the lives of the villagers, and although she missed the company of more academically-orientated mothers with whom she could converse about literature and politics, she forged friendships with neighbours and contented herself with conversations about motherhood and babies (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976; Rollyson, 2013). The fact that all who knew Sylvia attested to the fact that she was an excellent mother – so excellent that they even referred to her as a perfectionist – affirms the researcher’s speculation that her calm efficiency in protecting her children and sustaining an idyllic family unit was prompted by the pleasing, perfection-seeking nature of her evaluating manager.

Even after the disintegration of her marriage to Ted, Sylvia continued to maintain the appearance that nothing had happened (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). Not only did she portray an amicable relationship with Ted in public, she also interacted as cheerfully as

always with the locals (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). It is surmised that this behaviour was another indication of her Evaluator in its efforts to maintain popularity and social approval in relation to others.

9.4.11.1.3 *The Passive Pessimist*

After the publication of her very first poetry collection, *The Colossus*, in England, Sylvia anxiously awaited reviews of her book. When the book failed to get the attention she had hoped for, Sylvia became so discouraged that she decided to write fiction for women's magazines rather than write poetry (Alexander, 1999). Since the primary role of the Passive Pessimist is to induce apathy and withdrawal so that an individual does not take risks (Schwartz 1995), it is speculated that Sylvia's decision to stop writing poetry after the weak reception of her poetry collection, was prompted by the apathetic, avoidant behaviour of Schwartz's (1995) Passive Pessimist.

It was not only in her professional capacity as writer and poetess that Sylvia's Passive Pessimist manifested itself. In Jillian Becker's memoir describing Sylvia's final days, she wrote that although Sylvia donned her habitual cheerful exterior, internally she was tormented by self-hatred related to woes that included the death of her father, her husband's infidelity and also the underlying pressure to succeed for her mother (Becker, 2003). In terms of the IFS model, the researcher surmises that Sylvia's incessant need to make an impression on Aurelia aggravated the polarized nature of her internal family system as her protectors strove to contain the unbearable pain of her exiled parts. This would explain the excessive guilt which Sylvia experienced every time she failed to live up to certain expectations. It would also explain the excessive shame which she experienced when her marriage failed. Sylvia's decision to burn all her mother's letters after her break-up with Ted, affirms the researcher's inference that her need to impress her mother reinforced the polarization of her parts and drove them to their extremity. According to Rollyson (2013), a humiliated Sylvia could not bear the thought of her mother being witness to a less-than-perfect marriage. The fact that Sylvia's system was so burdened with feelings of guilt and shame that she even found it difficult to fulfill her duties as a mother in her final days, affirms the debilitating power of her Passive Pessimist and the extent to which it was prepared to go to protect the integrity of her internal family system.

9.4.11.1.4 *The Caretaker and the Entitled One*

The publication of Ted's second book, *Lupercal*, resulted in a plethora of letters, requests and invitations to give poetry readings (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). The fact that Sylvia

took on the responsibility of responding to the mountain of correspondence and administrative obligations (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992), attests to the role of her caretaking manager.

Although Sylvia delighted in her husband's successes, it is surmised that her husband's accomplishments aggravated the polarization between her selfless caretaking manager and the manager who prompted her to believe that she was entitled to literary success, even in a male-dominated professional milieu which disregarded the professional contributions of women. The researcher infers that this polarization found expression in the disembodied voice of her *Ariel* recordings for BBC. Although unnerving for some listeners, these recordings captured perfectly Sylvia's outrage at a society that restricted women, expecting them to be perfect wives and mothers, but simultaneously preventing them from reaching the level of perfection that she sought. After Ted's unexpected departure from Ireland – where Sylvia had hoped they might save their marriage – her resoluteness to provide a stable home for her children despite her severe depression, provides further testimony of the polarized struggle between her protectors in their efforts to extinguish the pain that emanated from exiled feelings of abandonment.

It is surmised that Sylvia's habitual practice of domestic efficiency, as revealed in the way in which she looked after her children, cooked decadent meals, helped to harvest the season's apples and collected honey from the beehives (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013), was prompted by her caring manager. On the other hand, her determination to succeed professionally, as revealed by the plethora of poems that she wrote after Ted's departure, attests to the promptings of her Entitled One.

It is further surmised that Sylvia's internal family system coped with the frustrations of being a woman in a male-dominated society, through the dissociative practice of escaping to the imaginary world of her literary works. In her poem *Daddy*, Sylvia addressed not only her life-long frustration with male-dominating characters like Otto and Ted, but also her desire to insert herself in twentieth-century history and imprint her legacy on events that shaped the world (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson 2013).

9.4.11.1.5 *The Worrier or Sentry*

The poem *Daddy*, apart from affirming the researcher's inference that Sylvia's writing served as a tool to distract her from the overwhelming pain of her exiles, also provides evidence of Sylvia's Worrier – the manager which Schwartz (1995, 2001) described as being extremely anxious and constantly alert for danger. Not only does the poem reveal Sylvia's preoccupation with world-changing events like World War II, it also reveals Sylvia's attempts to identify with

her German “panzer-man” father/persecutor and let go of all the things she has ever yearned for (Hughes, 2008, p. 223).

Sylvia’s desire to be reunited with her father, who was so omnipotent that he seemed like “a bag full of God” (Hughes, 2008, p. 222) is immediately juxtaposed by her desire “to kill” him, the man she has “always been scared of”, so that she can finally be a woman in her own right (Hughes, 2008, pp. 222-223). This juxtaposition not only affirms the researcher’s speculation that Sylvia’s parts were driven to their extremities by the highly polarized nature of her internal family system, it also affirms the extent of pain trapped in her exiled parts. This pain was so intense, that it was inevitable that it would eventually overpower the efforts of her firefighting protectors. This speculation is discussed in the next section.

9.4.11.2 Firefighters

The most blatant manifestation of Sylvia’s highly polarized system and the fact that her protectors ultimately failed in their attempts to keep her exiles contained, can be found in the final months of her life after Ted’s affair with Assia was exposed. Given that firefighters are the hair-trigger, impulsive emergency managers who intercede when a crisis is perceived (Mones & Schwartz, 2007; Schwartz, 1995; Smith, 2017), the extreme measures implemented by Sylvia’s firefighters in these final months, attest to the severity of the crisis and the inability of her system to manage it.

Although Sylvia and Ted frequently resorted to occultish practices in the form of Tarot cards and the Ouija board, Sylvia’s preoccupation with black magic after the break-up of their marriage became so intense, that she seemed entranced by it. On the night that Sylvia had driven off to the Cromptons after exposing her knowledge of Ted’s affair, she told the Cromptons that one night, a piece of unburned paper had drifted from her fireplace and landed at her feet. The piece of paper had a name written on it and Sylvia saw this as a warning sign from the mystical powers of the occult that ruled her destiny (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003).

The researcher speculates that Sylvia’s staunch belief in the occult emanated from the desperate measures of her firefighters to protect her internal family system. Writing proved to be another recourse taken by Sylvia’s firefighters in their efforts to extinguish the fire of worthlessness and shame buried in her vulnerable exiles. In the same way that Sylvia had wielded words to win parental affection in childhood, identifying with the physicality of words to such an extent that they created her life and served as her only comfort (Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013), so too the researcher surmises that words became her most dependable

firefighters and that she relied on them to such an extent that they even foreshadowed her suicide. This is affirmed by her poem *Kindness*, written days before her suicide, in which she declared, “The blood jet is poetry, / There is no stopping it” (Plath, 2008, p. 270).

The magical power which words held for Sylvia manifested itself when she made a bonfire in the backyard and threw the original manuscript of her sequel to *The Bell Jar* into the raging flames (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Rollyson, 2013). In another episode of rage, Sylvia burned all the letters her mother had sent to her over the years (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). Sylvia’s third bonfire exorcism after Ted’s betrayal was to destroy all his belongings, which included letters, papers, poetry drafts and other writings. After throwing his belongings into the fire, she proceeded to dance around it, as though to exorcise Ted from her world (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009). According to Rollyson (2013), Sylvia’s burning rituals were not merely acts of revenge or manifestations of a psychologically disturbed woman, they were also purging rituals. Her poem *Burning Letters*, written six months before Sylvia’s suicide, captures both Sylvia’s rage and her pathos as her life is consumed by a “merciless” fire that cannot be extinguished, “but goes on/dyeing the air” (Hughes, 2008, p. 205).

The researcher attributes the inextinguishable fire referred to in Sylvia’s poem to the inextinguishable flames of her overburdened exiles. Not only were Sylvia’s burning rituals manifestations of the desperate efforts of her firefighters, they were also tangible manifestations of the excruciating pain that her exiles carried and that could no longer be contained. The IFS premise that independence is a prerequisite for the unburdening of exiles (Krause, 2013) is affirmed by Sylvia’s reaction to Ted’s departure. Her dependency on Ted had been reinforced by the fact that he had served as a substitute for her lost father, as well as a representation of everything her mother and father had not been (Bawer, 2007; Rollyson, 2013). His departure thus not only unleashed all the fear and anger that Sylvia had internalised since her father’s death when she was only eight years old (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009), it also hurled her into a severe depression from which there seemed to be no escape (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 1992; Rollyson, 2013; Wilson, 2013).

Another tangible manifestation of the extent of Sylvia’s inner turmoil was her decision to start smoking, especially since she had always protested against the use of tobacco (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). This, together with her addiction to sleeping pills, in the final months of her life, affirms the researcher’s inference that the escalating, polarized battle between Sylvia’s protectors as they sought to contain her emotional pain, led to the extreme measures implemented by her firefighters. Similarly, the somatic expression of her suicide parts, as manifested in her poem *Fever*, and in the fact that Sylvia’s final months

were characterised by intermittent bouts of influenza and high temperatures, attests to the relentless struggle of her firefighters.

According to biographical material, Sylvia's medication may also have contributed to her suicide (Rollyson, 2013). From an IFS perspective, Anderson (2013) added that firefighters frequently override the effects of medication out of fear that they may lose their protective role in the system. Consequently they may be unwilling to take medication and may even sabotage the benefits of medication.

In the last week of Sylvia's life, her fluctuating emotions, her intermittent high temperatures and her exhaustion from waking at four in the morning to write poetry, weakened her already vulnerable mental and physical state, making her feel all the more afraid and insecure (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). The cold only added to her despair, making her feel lonelier and more isolated than she had ever felt before (Butscher, 1976, 2003). From an IFS perspective, the researcher surmises that in this state of physical and mental depletion, Sylvia's firefighters had little energy to protect her system from the danger posed by her volatile exiles. It is speculated that the feeling of hopelessness experienced by Sylvia's exiles was so extreme, that it catalysed her suicide. As indicated by Schwartz (2013), suicide parts do not want to die, they simply see no alternative to handling the extreme turmoil and distress of exiles.

In a journal entry written more than ten years before Sylvia's suicide, she compared death to a fainting spell with no awakening (Plath, 2000). Similarly, in a journal entry written in 1950 after the dentist anaesthetised her to extract her wisdom teeth, she recalled the ease and simplicity with which unconsciousness could be achieved through gas and she compared the experience to a type of death which took her out of her body (Plath, 2000). The researcher attributes this out-of-body feeling experienced by Sylvia to the IFS process which occurs when a system is threatened by intensely negative emotions and parts dissociate from the Self in order to protect it from trauma (Anderson, 2013; Anderson & Sweezy, 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2013a).

The reality of Sylvia's impending suicide manifested clearly in her poetry (Butscher, 1976, 2003; Rollyson, 2013). In fact, Butscher (1976, 2003) maintained that Sylvia's last two poems, *Balloons* and *Edge* could be seen as her suicide notes. These poems, written in the very week of her suicide, capture perfectly the turmoil of a woman caught between the despair of an imperfect life and the hope of escape promised by death (Rollyson, 2013). In terms of the IFS model, the turmoil generated by the juxtaposition between despair and hope captures the very essence of Schwartz's (1995) model and aptly explains how the anxiety and turmoil generated

by Sylvia's opposing parts reinforced the polarization of her internal family system to such an extent, that it drove her to the extreme recourse of suicide.

9.5 Concluding Remarks about Sylvia Plath's Internal Family System

Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model (IFS) as applied to the life of Sylvia Plath, yields certain significant findings which can be highlighted from information presented in this chapter. These significant findings pertain to the similarities and differences between Schwartz's Internal Family Systems model and the life of Sylvia Plath, namely (a) the different parts characterising the human system and their response to the threats which cause polarizations; (b) the connection between the internal family system of the individual and the parts of other individual members within the family system; and (c) the existence of a healing, undamaged Self beneath the surface of an individual's different parts and its capacity to guide an individual to recovery and well-being.

With regard to the different parts characterising Sylvia's internal family system and discussed in section 9.4, evidence suggests that each stage of her life was characterised by parts-led functioning as a result of transferred burdens, imperfect care-taking, existential anxiety and traumatic emotional experiences. This resulted in polarization of her different parts, which blocked the healing energy of her Self and aggravated feelings of worthlessness, shame and guilt. Biographical material on all the stages of Sylvia's life was sufficient enough to allow the researcher to make inferences of unsuccessful integration of opposing parts. Although the full description of Sylvia's experience with regard to the polarization of parts during her childhood may have been limited, Schwartz's notion of transferred burdens allowed for a comprehensive explanation of the impact of polarization on her internal family system, even as early as the infancy stage. The triangulation of biographical material of each stage, with material from future or previously navigated stages, helped to strengthen the researcher's speculations pertaining to Schwartz's predictions for successful or unsuccessful Self-leadership.

The second constituent of Schwartz's model of Internal Family Systems as applied to the biographical material on Sylvia Plath, pertains to the connection between Sylvia's internal family system parts and the parts of other individual members within her family. In light of the fact that Sylvia's father has been described as "the central obsession from the beginning to the end of her life", whilst his death has been described as the traumatic wound from which she never recovered (Butscher, 2003, p. 3), Schwartz's model proved to be both relevant and applicable to the life of Sylvia Plath, since it (a) highlights the important role played by all

parts both in internal and external family systems, and (b) emphasises the need for the effective processing of traumatic and/or painful life experiences.

The third constituent of Schwartz's model of Internal Family Systems as applied to Sylvia Plath's life, pertains to the existence of a healing, undamaged Self beneath the surface of an individual's parts. The findings of Sylvia's life, as discussed in section 9.4, are consistent with the notion of Self-differentiation proposed by Schwartz. According to Schwartz (1995, 2001), Self-differentiation decreases the feeling of difference and isolation and enables the individual to reconnect the different parts and to connect with other people. Biographical material analysed by the researcher indicates that Sylvia failed to achieve the Self-differentiation required for Self-leadership. Schwartz's model thus provided an applicable framework from which to explain Sylvia's inability to fully connect with other people and her ever-increasing sense of fragmentation.

With regard to the criticism that Schwartz's model includes concepts which are non-specific and vague, in the study of Sylvia Plath's life this proved to be a strength rather than a limitation. It ensured that the analysis of Sylvia's life was not restricted by concepts which are age or culture-specific. Schwartz's model is based on systems theory and was developed in an attempt to integrate systems thinking with an individual's intrapsychic processes and the larger political and cultural issues that impact on these processes (Breunlin et al., 2001; Goulding & Schwartz, 1995; Nichols & Schwartz, 2001). The model thus allowed for a comprehensive framework from which to analyse the life of Sylvia Plath, against the backdrop of her socio-cultural milieu.

Although the IFS model has been criticized for its lack of clearly-defined, empirical studies, the fact that the National Registry of Evidence Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) has acknowledged it as an evidence-based treatment for successfully treating psychological and physical health issues, suggests that this criticism is losing ground, and affirms the potential of IFS therapy for advancing and promoting emotional healing and mental well-being (Matheson, 2015). Furthermore, the Center for Self-Leadership (<http://www.selfleadership.org>) now offers an IFS Personality Scale based on the Internal Family Systems model. The scale is the product of an extensive research project conducted by Lia DeLand in collaboration with Richard Schwartz, and has proven to be an effective tool in the practice of IFS. The scale is available via an online website (<http://www.ifs-scale.com>). In light of the fact that Sylvia's life has always been explored through a pathological lens, Schwartz's IFS model provided an alternative perspective from which to analyse her life. This not only allowed for a more hopeful, optimistic interpretation of Sylvia's life, it also allowed the researcher to answer

Elms's (1994) request to move psychobiography away from theoretical narrowness, and to shift its focus from pathography to the study of more holistic and eugraphic approaches.

9.6 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings and discussion pertaining to the internal family system of Sylvia Plath according to the model of Schwartz (1995). The applicability and relevance of Schwartz's model to the life of Sylvia Plath was also highlighted. In the following chapter, the integrated findings pertaining to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development and Schwartz's model of Internal Family Systems are presented.

CHAPTER 10

INTEGRATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

10.1 Chapter Preview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an integrated discussion pertaining to the psychosocial development and internal family system composition of Sylvia Plath's life. The conceptual outline for the chapter is presented, after which the study's two psychological frameworks are compared in terms of their similarities and differences. Thereafter, a comparative summary is presented of the two frameworks in relation to Sylvia Plath's biographical material for each of the stages of her life, within the context of specific historical periods. The chapter concludes with reflections on the focal similarities and differences pertaining to the comparative summary of findings.

10.2 Conceptual Outline to the Exposition of Integrated Findings

This study made use of two psychological frameworks to formulate and structure a psychological understanding of Sylvia Plath's life. These included: (a) Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) stage theory of psychosocial development, and (b) Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model of Internal Family Systems (IFS). This chapter aims to present and discuss the integrated findings pertaining to the stages of Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development (as discussed in Chapter 8), and the composition of her internal family system (as discussed in Chapter 9).

The two psychological frameworks are first presented in terms of the similarities and differences relevant to their application to this psychobiographical life history study. Thereafter, the researcher presents and discusses comparisons of the findings for the 11 historical periods outlined in Chapter 7. The focal points of the findings of each framework are tabulated and juxtaposed to explore the complementarity of the frameworks when applied to a particular stage and historical period in the life of Sylvia Plath.

10.3 Comparison between the Psychological Frameworks Used in this Study

The comparison between Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial development theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model, indicates that there are points of divergence as well as points of convergence. These points need to be

appraised before a meaningful integration of the findings pertaining to the biographical material on Sylvia Plath's life can be made.

10.3.1 Points of divergence

The researcher observed the following points of divergence between Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial development theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model.

10.3.1.1 Developmental, Lifespan Approach

Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial development theory proposes an explanation for human development in terms of eight progressive stages which cover the entire lifespan of an individual. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968) explained these developmental stages in terms of the epigenetic principle and posited that personality develops according to predetermined steps based on an individual's readiness to be driven toward, to be aware of and to interact with an ever-increasing context of significant person's and social institutions.

Although Schwartz's (1995, 2001, 2009) Internal Family Systems model acknowledges the developmental nature of human systems as they strive for balanced and harmonious functioning, it is not a stage-based model and does not propose progression through predetermined developmental life tasks. Rather, it proposes that an individual's personality is made up of different parts characterised by diverse interests, talents, temperaments and even ages (Schwartz, 1995, 2001), and that these parts are forced into roles dictated by family dynamics and not by predetermined ages or stages of development.

10.3.1.2 Dynamic Balance of Opposites versus Differentiation of Self

According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, each of the eight stages of psychosocial development is composed of two opposing tendencies, namely, a syntonic and a dystonic disposition, which must come into balance to produce the stage's virtue or ego strength (Erikson, 1950; Erikson et al., 1986). Erikson's (1950; Erikson et al., 1986) solution to a developmental crisis is thus neither achieved by excluding one of the opposites, nor by some form of compromise between the two. Rather, it is attained through a synthesis that includes both syntonic and dystonic dispositions, although the syntonic pole always seems to carry more weight than the negative. This synthesis not only allows for the emergence of each ego strength, it also enables the individual to advance to a higher level of development (Erikson et al., 1986; Meyer et al., 2008).

According to Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model, the human mind is made up of a core Self and a number of subpersonalities or parts. Whilst Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory proposes a synthesis of opposing parts, Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model views the mind as existing on a continuum of coherence (DeLand, 2003/2004; DeLand et al., 2004). The healthier and more balanced an internal family system is, the greater the co-operation and sense of harmony amongst the parts. Conversely, when parts are in conflict with one another, they polarize and result in antagonistic, escalating sequences of behaviour (Schwartz, 1995; Watzlawick et al., 1974). In extreme cases of polarization, "blending" (Engler, 2013, p. xviii) occurs. Although Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory proposes that the synthesis of opposing parts is a prerequisite for optimal development, the IFS model posits that "blending" (Engler, 2013, p. xvii) is unhealthy since it is indicative of an imbalanced, polarized system in distress.

In terms of the IFS model, unblending is a prerequisite for optimal development (Anderson, 2013; Engler, 2013; Herbine-Blank, 2013; Krause, 2013; Krause et al., 2017; Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013; Sowell, 2013; Twombly, 2013). When unblending occurs, parts are differentiated from the Self, allowing access to what Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013) called Self-leadership. It must be pointed out that although Erikson's notion of synthesis and Schwartz's notion of unblending may be construed as contradictory, the two frameworks share important points of convergence. Despite the differences in terminology, both frameworks suggest that optimal development is characterised by a sense of continuity, integration and balance which allows an individual to feel unified and promotes healthy development. More pertinent examples of convergence between the two frameworks are discussed in the next section.

10.3.2 Points of Convergence

10.3.2.1 Eugraphic Approach

Erikson (1964, 1985) posited that the ego strengths represented on his epigenetic chart of psychosocial stages, exist throughout the lifespan with each strength demonstrating an ascendance in association with the positive resolution of its corresponding psychosocial crisis. Erikson (1964, 1985, 1997) also referred to the ego strengths as virtues, and he described them as instructional, inherent qualities acquired by optimally-functioning individuals. Although Erikson (1985) maintained that the antipathic counterpart of each ego strength is counterproductive to both the positive resolution of a psychosocial crisis and the establishment of its associated ego strength, he emphasised that the presence of a certain degree of antipathy

is not only inevitable, but also necessary and desirable. Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development thus not only focuses on the positive resolution of psychosocial crises and the emergent virtues which characterise optimal development, it also highlights that the antipathic counterparts of ego strengths are prerequisites for (a) making sense of the world, (b) coping with anxiety and conflict, and (c) finding balance.

Similarly, Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model of Internal Family Systems is eugraphic in its approach. According to Schwartz (1995, 2001), the Self is never seen as being defective, immature or inadequate. Like Erikson (1964, 1985, 1997), who emphasised the instinctual, inherently positive nature of ego strengths, so too Schwartz (1995) and Goulding and Schwartz (1995) emphasised the inherent ability of the Self to lead both internal and external life harmoniously and sensitively, so that an individual can feel more unified, with a sense of continuity and integration. Although the Self described by Schwartz (1995) does not have to develop through stages like Erikson's (1968) ego, it is similar to Erikson's (1968) conceptualisation of the ego as an inner "agency" (p. 218), in that it is described as the central core of an individual and the place from which "you manifest clusters of wonderful leadership and healing qualities and sense a spiritual connectedness" and creativity (Schwartz, 1995, 2001, 2013). These qualities, which Schwartz (1995, 2001, 2013) referred to as the eight Cs of the Self, are comparable to Erikson's ego strengths or virtues in that they characterise optimal development.

The eugraphic nature of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model is also comparable to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development in that it acknowledges the importance of accepting all parts, even those which may be perceived as dysfunctional. In line with the approaches advocated by family therapy, the IFS model proposes that individual improvement is attained not through the removal of a dysfunctional part, but rather through the acceptance that each part is significant and valuable (Green, 2008). In Schwartz's (1995, 2013a) view, when parts are acknowledged and accepted, and given the chance to tell their stories, it creates the opportunity for balance to be restored in the system, thereby allowing access to the healing energy of the Self.

10.3.2.2 Interrelated, Holistic Approach

Erikson (1963, 1997) postulated that there are three complementary levels on which a person's life must be understood. The first level is that of the body (*soma*), and includes all the constitutional givens with which the individual is endowed, including sexual and libidinal dynamics. The second level is that of the ego (*psyche*) and refers to the individual's

characteristic ways of synthesising psychic experiences through ego synthesis, so as to make sense of the world and be able to cope with anxiety and conflict. The third level is that of the family and social milieu (*ethos*), and refers both to the individual's developmental history within the family and the particular societal, cultural and historical ethos which shapes, and in the case of extraordinary individuals, is shaped by the individual (Erikson, 1963, 1997; McAdams, 1994; McAdams & Ochberg, 1988; Stevens, 2008).

Similarly, the Internal Family Systems model provides a holistic, integrative treatment approach based on modern as well as post-modern theories (Lucero et al., 2017). The systemic approach taken by IFS therapists affords them the opportunity to relate to every level of the human system - including the biological, intrapsychic, familial, community, cultural and societal - with the same concepts and methods (Schwartz, 1995). The systemic approach views individuals as being interconnected in a relational network in which changes to the individual affect the whole system, just as changes to the systems as a whole impact on the individual (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003). The interrelatedness and connectedness of individuals within the system not only allows for a seamless transition between family and individual treatment (Green, 2008), it also ensures that the whole which is created through the integration of different parts, is greater than the sum of its individual parts (Anderson & Sabatelli, 2003).

The interrelated, collaborative, non-pathologising approach of the IFS model assumes that, much like a large family system, each internal part has well-meaning intentions and profound value, and that all parts are connected to and influenced by the larger systems (e.g., family and society) in which they are embedded (Schwartz, 1995; Schwartz & Sparks, 2014).

10.4 Comparative Summary

The following section outlines the most significant findings from the two psychological frameworks used in this study. The findings are presented in tabular format for each of the stages in Sylvia Plath's life, within the context of specific historical periods. The findings are compared not only to explore their complementarity, but also to highlight their differences.

10.4.1 Infancy (1932-1933): Sylvia, the First Born, during the Great Depression

Table 10.1 includes the summary of findings for Sylvia's first year of life. This stage of Sylvia's life coincided with the Great Depression, and yields significant similarities between the psychological explanations offered by Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model of Internal Family Systems. The stock market crash of 1929 was one of the significant contributing factors to the Great

Depression. Otto, like Aurelia's father before him, had lost a substantial amount of money on the stock market (Plath, 2000). After his death, the Plath family found itself in serious financial difficulties, with no income available beyond what Aurelia could bring in by going out to work (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). The family's financially precarious position had a profound impact on Sylvia and contributed significantly to her sense of inferiority, from the perspectives of both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model.

Table 10.1

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the First Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p><i>Stage 1: Basic Trust versus Basic Mistrust</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aurelia's devotion to the task of motherhood as expressed through her loving behaviour and her zealous involvement in Sylvia's upbringing seemed to provide the type of parenting which would allow Sylvia to develop a sense of trust. • The 21-year age gap between Otto and Aurelia, together with his tyrannical disposition and his authoritarian demand for order, could have created a threatening environment for Sylvia and could negatively have affected her development of trust. • Aurelia's submissiveness towards Otto's tyranny could have compromised not only Aurelia's own sense of personal trustworthiness but also Sylvia's trust in her mother. • Although Sylvia's determined personality and her eagerness to shape sounds into words were encouraged by her parents, resulting in her early mastery of language, the overpowering effects of a threatening home environment characterised by an autocratic, abusive father and a subservient, obedient mother, could have compromised the successful resolution of Sylvia's first stage of psychosocial development. • The sense of mistrust which emanated from Sylvia's unsuccessful development, manifested throughout her life in a number of ways, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) her inability to defend herself against infections; (b) her psychosomatic reactions to stressful circumstances; (c) her negative view of herself, others and the world; (d) her pervasive pessimism with regard to social relationships; and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otto's tyrannical disposition and authoritarian demand for order and Aurelia's submissive obeisance to his autocratic ruling, are speculated to have created an imbalanced system, resulting in polarizations of Sylvia's internal and external family system. • It is speculated that the polarizations which could have been established by Otto and Aurelia's part-led parenting style could have resulted in the activation of the following protectors in Sylvia: <p><i>Managers:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Striver</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's early mastery of language and her determined efforts to learn are indicative of the emergence of her task-orientated Striver. • Her life-long striving to achieve personal and public recognition for her writing endeavours, highlights the role of this managerial part in her internal family system. • Although the role of this Striver became more pronounced as Sylvia got older, it is inferred that this manager was formed in her infancy as a result of polarizations in her external family system and her imitation of her parents' meticulous and critical work ethic. 2. <i>The Evaluator</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that Aurelia's childhood burdens of shame, rejection and fear of abandonment, led to the establishment of strong striving and evaluating managers, which prompted her to excel academically and to exhibit a congenial, outgoing disposition so as to obtain social approval. • According to the IFS model, it is speculated that Sylvia would have absorbed Aurelia's evaluating managers during infancy. This would explain (a) her life-long sense of dutifulness and obligation

<p>(e) her habit of attempting potentially harmful acts in times of extreme stress caused by emotional trauma.</p>	<p>to her mother; and (b) her obsessive need for perfection.</p> <p>3. <i>The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otto was described as a bitter man with a nervous and morbid disposition, and the tendency to avoid close interpersonal relationships. • Aurelia submissively obeyed both her father and her husband, and developed a duodenal stomach ulcer which flared up at intensely stressful moments in her life. • It is speculated that Sylvia may have absorbed the burdens transferred from her parents' exiled parts, resulting in her taking on the qualities of her parents' Passive Pessimist parts. • This would explain the manifestation of Sylvia's neurotic tendencies: anxiety, depression, impulsivity, self-consciousness, vulnerability and angry hostility, as expressed through the sardonic, mocking side of her personality. <p>4. <i>The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aurelia's submissive compliance to Otto's insistence that she stop working to take on the role of housewife and mother, and the fact that she sacrificed her dream of becoming a writer and used her talents to assist her husband instead, bear testimony to the role of her caretaking manager. • Otto's selfish insistence on Aurelia's subservience and the fact that he did not acknowledge the full extent of her contribution to his work, confirm the egotistical role of his Entitled Manager. • It is speculated that the adult conflict between Sylvia's domestic ideals and her ambitious striving for literary acclaim in adulthood can be traced back to the polarization of conflicting roles transferred to her during infancy by her mother's caretaking manager and her father's entitled manager. <p>5. <i>The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that Otto and Aurelia both suffered the consequences of prejudice and discrimination as a result of their German descendency, is speculated to have activated their Worrier/Sentry managers. • Although Sylvia's Worrier/Sentry may not have revealed itself during her infancy, it is speculated that this manager may have established itself in Sylvia as a result of the transferred burdens of fear and anxiety which she would have absorbed from her parents during infancy. • The manifestations of this manager revealed themselves at different stages of her development and included, (a) the imitation of her father's pacifist ideology; and (b) her anxiety with regard to internal conflict, interpersonal conflict and politically-related world events.
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	<p><i>Firefighters:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otto's "explosive outbursts of anger" (A.S. Plath, 1992, p.18) attest to the role of his firefighters in warding off painful emotions from past traumatic experiences. • Although there is no biographical material in Sylvia's infancy to exemplify the role of her firefighters at this stage, her self-mutilating tendencies, her addiction to sleeping pills, her promiscuity and her suicide attempts in later stages provide examples of the measures taken by her firefighters to extinguish the pain of her exiled parts.
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Both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model emphasised the powerful influence of parenting on a child's developmental trajectory, and both acknowledged the important role of the socio-cultural milieu in shaping personality. The application of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory to Sylvia's infancy, indicated an early triumph of basic mistrust. The sense of mistrust emerges when diffuse somatic and social experiences are not balanced successfully by the experience of integration, and account for Sylvia's experience of the social world as threatening and her feelings of insecurity later on in life. Similarly, the application of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model to Sylvia's infancy provided evidence of an imbalanced system which resulted in the polarization of parts and prevented Self-leadership. Although Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model differ in terms of their terminologies, they both viewed balance as a prerequisite for Sylvia's optimal health and development, and both allowed for a psychological explanation of her inability to develop optimally. Erikson (1963, 1950) posited that maladaptations during the first stage often manifest themselves in sensory distortions and in an inability to defend oneself against infection as a result of a weakened immunity. Similarly, Schwartz (1995, 2001) posited that unresolved polarizations cause imbalances and create burdens in one's system which negatively impact on one's capacity for healing. Sylvia's sinus condition emerged during infancy and plagued her for her entire life (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003). It can be explained in terms of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1980) notion of mistrust and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) notion of polarized parts – both of which affected Sylvia's physical and mental well-being.

Another similarity exists between Sylvia's first stage of psychosocial development of trust versus mistrust (Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory) and the activation of some managers in her internal family system. According to Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, although the two frameworks differ in terms of their conceptualisation of development, both

are similar in that the manifestation of outcomes can be explained in terms of a failure to integrate opposing forces. With regard to Sylvia's early mastery of language as examined through the lens of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, the linguistic encouragement and support provided by her parents could have contributed to the establishment of trust, which would have facilitated learning. However, the fact that the encouragement and support were outweighed by a threatening home environment, would explain the triumph of mistrust, as manifested in Sylvia's insecurities and negative view of herself, despite all her accomplishments.

In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, Sylvia's early mastery of language, her determined efforts to learn and her life-long striving to achieve personal and public recognition for her writing endeavours, could all be attributed to role of her protective Striver. Although this critical manager would have prompted her to excel, the fact that it was motivated by an imbalanced, polarized system which sought to keep exiled feelings of pain and insecurity at bay, would explain why Sylvia's insecurities and negative view of herself (manifestations of her exiles), prompted her Striver to be even stricter in its demand for excellence.

10.4.2 Early Childhood (1933-1936): Sylvia, the Sibling Rival, and the Move to Winthrop

Table 10.2 presents the summary of findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period, which coincided with the birth of Sylvia's brother and the family's move to Winthrop. Both these events constituted significant occurrences which impacted profoundly on Sylvia's development and functioning.

Table 10.2

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Second Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p><i>Stage 2: Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's sense of mistrust negatively influenced her acceptance of her new baby brother's arrival. • Although Aurelia was a very encouraging and self-sacrificing parent, she was strict and she raised her children with the knowledge that there was a correlation between good behaviour and love. • It is speculated that Aurelia's display of conditional love based on good behaviour, coupled with the strict enforcement of boundaries after Warren's birth, could have fuelled Sylvia's insecurities and her desperation to find a substitute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The birth of Sylvia's brother, Warren, constituted a threatening event, which left her feeling separated from the world and no longer special. • It is speculated that Warren's birth resulted in Sylvia's internal family parts acquiring burdens as a result of attachment disruptions, which she experienced as traumatic and which made her feel unlovable, unloved and worthless. • The trauma aggravated Sylvia's polarized system, resulting in a fragmented system of antagonistic parts.

<p>for love. This would have been compounded by the sense of mistrust established in Sylvia's first stage of development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's tendency of using words to garner love and approval emerged soon after Warren's birth. • Her identification with the physicality of words governed her measure of self-esteem, as reflected in her feelings of worthlessness whenever she suffered from writer's block. • The praise which Sylvia received from her father for her intellectual capabilities, may have enhanced her self-confidence, but it also established a competitive, antagonistic relationship between herself and her brother. • This rivalry would extend into Sylvia's adulthood and manifest in the nature of her relationships with men and in her attitude to society and politics. • Aurelia's habit of rewarding only good behaviour, coupled with Otto's tyrannical outbursts of anger, created a threatening environment for Sylvia. Not only could this have reinforced Sylvia's sense of mistrust, it could also have impacted negatively on the resolution of the autonomy versus shame and doubt crisis of Stage 2. • Although Sylvia received praise and encouragement from her parents for her intellectual feats, this was outweighed by the harsh demands and explosive outbursts from Otto, and the fact that Aurelia succumbed to his demands. This could have resulted in a sense of shame and doubt, which would have limited Sylvia's capacity to deal with the world. • An excess of shame and doubt leads to the malignant tendency of compulsiveness, which manifested in Sylvia's meticulous adherence to rules and in her striving for perfection. • Her compulsiveness also manifested in her excessive stinginess in matters relating to affection, time and money. • Sylvia's intense, irrational fear of bobby pins and buttons affirms Erikson's (1963, 1968) premise that severe, compulsive self-doubt can find expression in paranoid fears. • Sylvia associated bobby pins with "disgusting intimate contact with dirty hair" (Plath, 2000, pp. 52-53). Her abhorrence of dirt continued throughout her life and manifested in her strict adherence to domestic and moral cleanliness. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's sense of insecurity resulted in a rivalry with Warren and prompted her to demand more attention from her mother. • Warren's physical fragility as a result of his asthmatic condition resulted in Aurelia having to give him more attention, and prompted Sylvia to establish a stronger attachment to her father, whom she sought to please and impress by means of her intellectual abilities. • Warren's birth resulted in Sylvia feeling ignored, dismissed and possibly even humiliated. Aurelia's strict moral regime and her habit of rewarding only good behaviour could have resulted in Sylvia feeling even more unloved. • In their desperation to be valued, cared for and loved, Sylvia's exiles could have resorted to extreme measures to escape from their prisons so that their stories could be heard. This manifested in Sylvia's childhood fears of bobby pins and buttons, vacuum cleaners, subways and burglars. • The desperation of Sylvia's exiles, prompted her system's protectors (managers and firefighters) to be even more severe in their efforts to imprison injured inner-child parts so that the memory of painful and negative emotions could be securely locked away. • Her exiled, hurt child would have had to deal with the burden of added rejection and abandonment for feeling hurt, and the ensuing feelings of unlovability, shame and guilt. • In their desperation to be saved, Sylvia's exiles idealised her father, whom she described as "a giant of a man" who "feared nothing" (Plath, 2008, p.320). • Her desperate, distressed and needy exiles posed a threat to her internal family system and prompted the activation of the following protectors: <p>Managers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Striver</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's tenacious persistence to learn the alphabet and her subsequent attachment to words as a substitute for love, attests to the powerful influence of her critical, controlling Striver. • Her Striver pushed her to strive for literary excellence so that she could be distracted from exiled feelings of worthlessness that might cause pain. • The excessive task-orientated nature of this Striver and the fact that Sylvia inhabited a household run on strict Germanic principles and
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sense of shame and doubt which emerged as a result of Sylvia's unsuccessful navigation through the second stage, affected her turmoil regarding her own sexuality and moral cleanliness later on in life. • It is speculated that the puritan, socially-conservative tradition imposed on women by 1950s society placed contradictory, irreconcilable pressures on Sylvia, which reaffirmed the sense of shame and doubt established in Stage 2. This manifested in Sylvia's emotionally tumultuous relationships with men later in life and the fact that these relationships were characterised by sado-masochism. • Sylvia's later dependency on her husband, Ted, also attests to the unsuccessful resolution of the autonomy versus shame and doubt crisis of the second stage of psychosocial development. • Excessive shaming contributed to Sylvia's competitive drive and her compulsive perfectionism. • It also resulted in excessive self-doubt in every area of her life. Her excessive self-doubt and compulsive perfectionism resulted in her perpetual feeling of dissatisfaction with herself, irrespective of the magnitude of her accomplishments. • Her dissatisfaction and feeling of self-doubt also made her feel inadequate in later social relationships and resulted in her isolating herself and remaining an outsider during college, despite all her efforts to belong. • According to Erikson (1963), the sense of shame which develops when an individual fails to achieve autonomy, results in excessive self-consciousness. Sylvia's self-consciousness intensified during adolescence and resulted in her isolating herself at home for fear of embarrassing herself in public. • Failure to develop autonomy can also result in the emergence of a precocious conscience, which Sylvia manifested in her preoccupation with being a god-like figure. • Sylvia's lack of trust impeded the development of autonomy even more, resulting in an excessive need to be in control. This led to the development of exaggerated self-coercion or impulsive self-will, and manifested itself in her obsessive-compulsive tendencies. • Sylvia's obsessive perfectionism and her desire to please her mother and play the part of the dutiful 	<p>dominated by a controlled, austere atmosphere, fuelled Sylvia's academic zealotry and her constant striving for intellectual superiority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The power of Sylvia's Striver was also augmented by her mother's constant literary encouragement and her father's relentless work ethic and ambitious drive to succeed. • The powerful influence of Sylvia's Striver manifested in her life-long pursuit of personal achievement, and the fact that it became an obsession which both inspired and haunted her. <p>2. <i>The Evaluator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's efforts to impress her mother with her early identification of letters, and her striving to please her father through her intellect, attest to the role of her Evaluator. • Sylvia's efforts to counteract the threat of her brother, coupled with her mother's constant literary encouragement, resulted in her ever-increasing attachment to words as a substitute for love. • It is speculated that her attachment to words was reinforced by her belief that perfecting her linguistic capabilities would guarantee her parents' love and ensure that they never abandoned her. • Her conscientiousness and her striving for perfection, as well as her efforts to please her parents with her sense of dutifulness and her self-disciplined work-ethic, would probably have pleased her strict and disciplined parents, and reinforced the role of her Evaluator. <p>3. <i>The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's feelings of worthlessness whenever she suffered from writer's block attest to the role of her Passive Pessimist as it sought to break down her confidence and sabotage her performance. • The fact that the relationship between Sylvia and Warren was extremely competitive and characterised by bullying and fighting, also attests to the role of her Passive Pessimist. • This rivalry with Warren extended into Sylvia's adulthood and came to symbolise the larger battle that she had to fight with men throughout her life in order to gain recognition as an independent, successful woman. <p>4. <i>The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's caretaker would have expected her to sacrifice her own needs and selflessly take care of Warren, whilst her entitled manager would have encouraged her to believe that she was entitled to anything she wanted, even at the expense of her brother's needs. • It is speculated that the socially conservative tradition and double standards which prevailed at the time, caused Sylvia's selfless manager (the
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<p>daughter, were reinforced by her mother's habit of rewarding good behaviour.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that this not only strengthened her obsessive-compulsive tendencies, but that it also fuelled her dependency on her mother, making it even more impossible for her to establish a sense of autonomy. • Sylvia used her writing as a tool through which she could discharge her anxieties and secure her mother's love. • It is speculated that her over-dependency on her mother, whose love depended on Sylvia's good behaviour, continued to obstruct the development of autonomy in Sylvia, even in adulthood. • Sylvia's excessive sense of shame and doubt resulted in the malignant tendency of compulsiveness, which manifested not only in her meticulous planning and striving for perfection, but also in her abstemious nature and compulsive need for control. • This compulsive need for control hampered her ability to deal with disappointments and made her intolerant of Ted's inattention to personal hygiene and grooming in adulthood. • Sylvia's pervasive feeling of shame and self-doubt prevented her from having the courage to choose and guide her own future independently, which in turn prevented her attainment of a well-established sense of identity. • Sylvia's enhanced sense of doubt, which Erikson (1963) referred to as fear of the unknown, heightened her feelings of anxiety. This strengthened her pacifist convictions during adolescence and adulthood. 	<p>Caretaker) and her egotistical manager (the Entitled One) to be polarized in conflicting roles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would explain the loving, yet competitive relationship between Sylvia and Warren, and her attempts at monopolizing conversations and trying to outsmart him. • It is speculated that the contradictory roles expected of women and the strain of keeping up appearances left Sylvia feeling lost and stripped of identity because her Caretaker and Entitled One were polarized in conflicting roles. <p>5. <i>The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given the contradictory and irreconcilable pressures placed on women in America at the time, it is speculated that the arrival of a brother aggravated Sylvia's fears of abandonment and failure. • Warren represented the larger battle which Sylvia had to fight against men for independence and recognition. • It is speculated that Sylvia's Worrier or Sentry was triggered to prevent her from taking risks in a male-dominated society which regarded marriage as the only real life-changing mechanism to be hoped for by a woman. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's tendency of escaping to an exotic, fantasy world attests to the emergence of her dissociating parts. • Her firefighters prompted her to escape to a fantastical "never-never land of magic" (Plath, 2000, p.35) to protect her from the painful reality of her exiled parts.
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Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model both emphasised the impact of one's immediate and larger social environment on development and personality composition. The application of both frameworks highlighted the fact that Sylvia's parents did not succeed in providing a secure, non-threatening home environment and that this negatively affected her capacity for autonomy (Erikson) and Self-leadership (Schwartz). In both cases, this affected Sylvia's sense of worth and fuelled her dependency on other's for a sense of security.

When examined through the lens of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's inability to integrate the opposing tendencies of autonomy and shame or self-doubt,

resulted in feelings of inadequacy and insecurity which prompted her to find a substitute for love. Similarly, the application of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model to Sylvia's second historical period indicated that Warren's birth constituted a traumatic event which aggravated the polarization of her internal family system and left her feeling unlovable, unloved and worthless. In both cases, the insecurity and feeling of unlovability prompted (a) an attachment to words as a substitute for love, (b) a compulsive striving for perfection, (c) paranoid fears, (d) self-consciousness, (e) a highly competitive nature, (f) a conflicted sense of identity, and (g) heightened feelings of anxiety.

Both frameworks also allowed for an exploration of Sylvia's experience of the male-dominated society which she inhabited. According to both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, the socially conservative tradition and double standard which prevailed at the time, would have aggravated Sylvia's sense of shame and self-doubt, and increased her feelings of worthlessness and disempowerment.

According to Erikson (1959, 1964), the measure of trust established in Stage 1 greatly influences the measure of autonomy and independence that the child achieves in Stage 2. Erikson used the term epigenesis to explain the notion that progress through each of the developmental stages hinges on the success, or lack of success, in resolving various crises (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968). Although Erikson maintained that unsuccessful resolution at an earlier stage will negatively affect an individual's ability to resolve later crises, his cumulative account of development allows for individuals to rectify and alter resolutions of previously unresolved or negatively resolved stages at any time (Craig, 1996; Marcia, 2002). Whilst Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model does not make use of the epigenetic model to explain progression through the different stages of development, it does emphasise the transformative power of the Self and the fact that Self-differentiation and subsequent Self-leadership can occur at any time.

Sylvia's second historical period, as represented in Table 10.2, indicates that her failure to acquire a sense of hope during the first stage of psychosocial development, negatively affected the successful resolution of her second stage, as well as subsequent stages of development. The cumulative effect of her sense of mistrust can be traced through all the stages of her development and exemplifies the epigenetic nature of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory. Although Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model does not offer a cumulative account of development based on the successful/unsuccessful resolution of crises at different stages, it does indicate that transferred burdens and the polarization of parts can obstruct access to Self-leadership and keep protectors stuck in their polarized roles.

10.4.3 Middle Childhood (1936-1939): Sylvia and the Great New England Hurricane preceding the Plath Tragedy

Table 10.3 includes the summary of findings for the two psychological frameworks for this historical period. The Great New England Hurricane of 1938 occurred during this historical period, causing massive destruction and the loss of 200 lives from Long Island to Canada (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 1976, 2003; Wilson, 2013). Although no one in Sylvia's family was injured, the hurricane left an indelible impression on Sylvia, which fuelled her artistic imagination.

Table 10.3

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Third Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p><i>Stage 3: Initiative versus Guilt</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sylvia's commencement with formal education at the young age of four, provided the opportunity for the development of initiative. <li>• Her ability to read and her outstanding academic achievement resulted in her being able to take on the move rigorous academic programme of Winthrop's public elementary school at the young age of five. <li>• The praise which Sylvia received from her father, as well as the secure relationship with her grandparents, provided her with the opportunity to take initiative, to learn new skills and to feel purposeful in the responsibilities which she assumed. <li>• Sylvia's active efforts at learning how to read and compose poems suggest a well-developed sense of initiative at this stage. <li>• Her exposure to a formalised school environment would have provided her with more opportunities to learn through school and play activities, which could have been conducive to the development of initiative. <li>• Although Otto and Aurelia praised and encouraged Sylvia for her intellectual capabilities and linguistic accomplishments, it is speculated that Otto's tyrannical outbursts and Aurelia's strict moral regime outweighed the positive effects of their praise and encouragement, thereby exposing Sylvia to the damaging effects of excessive guilt. <li>• The sense of mistrust established in Stage 1, together with the excessive sense of shame and doubt established in Stage 2, would have 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The onset of Otto's ill health constituted a significant occurrence which had a profound impact on Sylvia's development. <li>• The onset and progression of his illness, exacerbated his physical strength and his already volatile temperament. <li>• Aurelia secluded Sylvia and Warren in an upstairs bedroom to protect them from Otto's explosive temper. <li>• Sylvia and Warren were allowed downstairs to spend time with and entertain their father for half an hour before bedtime. <li>• It is speculated that the separation between the parental and child units of the external family system may have aggravated the polarization of parts. <li>• This may have made Sylvia feel all the more ignored, dismissed, humiliated, ashamed, embarrassed and terrified, which would have fuelled her belief that she was unlovable, unloved and worthless, and made her burdens all the more extensive. <li>• Otto's temper worsened to the point that Aurelia took Sylvia and Warren to live with her parents. Some months later, they moved to a more spacious house at the coast in Winthrop, close to Aurelia's parents. <li>• The move constituted a major event in Sylvia's life. She acquired a powerful, almost obsessive love and fear of the ocean and this fuelled her poetic imagination.

<p>undermined Sylvia's ability to relinquish her attachment to her parents.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aurelia's submissiveness towards her husband could have compromised Sylvia's capacity to identify with her mother, thereby compounding the resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis. • Although there were times in Sylvia's life when she demonstrated successful initiative, there were also areas in her life which were indicative of her excessive sense of guilt. • It is speculated that the initiative versus guilt crisis was unsuccessfully navigated during this stage of Sylvia's psychosocial development and that she fluctuated between the extremities of initiative and guilt. • Sylvia's profile of academic excellence throughout her life attests to the success of her academic initiatives. • Sylvia also demonstrated her initiative through the artistic expression of her imagination. Even before adolescence, she was creating radio melodramas, writing short stories and plotting novels. • Sylvia regarded writing as a form of serious play and she used her imagination to produce writing that transported her to a fantasy world. • Otto began to suffer from ill health when Sylvia entered Erikson's third stage of psychosocial development, and it is speculated that this had a profound influence on Sylvia's resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis. • Despite Otto's tyrannical temperament and explosive anger, Sylvia idolised this "giant of a man" who "feared nothing" (Plath, 2008, p.320). • Sylvia's attachment to her father strengthened after her brother's birth, and she went out of her way to impress him with her sharp mind. • Her admiration of her father, together with her striving to be his favourite, strengthened her identification with him. • Her attachment to her father became even more pronounced after he was diagnosed with diabetes mellitus. Although her brother was sent to stay with his grandparents during this trying time, Sylvia remained at home to help look after him. • In light of Sylvia's strong attachment to her father, and the fact that she had been placed in the position to take care of him, it is speculated that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that Sylvia's obsessive love and fear of the ocean symbolised the conflictual nature of her polarized parts and the extent of burdening within her internal family system. • It is further speculated that the "potently rich sea" of Sylvia's subconscious (Plath, 2000, p.168) represented her exiled parts and that her attempts at accessing this dark ocean floor of her childhood were constantly sabotaged by her critical, controlling managers and her impulsive firefighters. • Otto's deteriorating health and ever-increasing outbursts of anger could have added injury to Sylvia's already injured inner-child parts, resulting in the intensification of polarization of her internal family system. • In their efforts to protect Sylvia's internal family system, her dissociative parts may have prompted her to disconnect from the trauma of her overburdened, injured child parts by escaping to the poetic world of her imagination. • The extent of burdening on Sylvia's traumatised, injured child parts increased as the tragedy of her father's deteriorating health began to unfold, prompting a more extreme response from her system's protectors. <p>Managers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Striver</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aurelia enrolled Sylvia at a private elementary school at the young age of four. • Although she was under-age, her sharp mind, coupled with Aurelia's ambitious reading programme, resulted in her early mastery of reading and readiness for formal schooling. • Sylvia maintained an outstanding academic profile, exhibiting superior intelligence and extreme dedication. • Despite Sylvia's remarkable accomplishments, her journal entries bear witness to the fact that she was eternally dissatisfied with herself. • It is speculated that Sylvia's critical Striver impelled her to strive for outstanding achievement to distract her both from her own personal feelings of unworthiness, and from the legacy burdens transferred to her by her own rigid and controlling parents. 2. <i>The Evaluator</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's desire to please her father would have been prompted by her Evaluator and reinforced by her anxiety about his illness and the fact that her time with him was limited.
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<p>his death burdened her with a sense of guilt which was so overpowering that it undermined all her attempts at initiative throughout the rest of her life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not only did Sylva blame herself for her father's death, she also blatantly blamed her mother for what she considered to be the "murder" of her father (Plath, 2000, p.431). • It is speculated that Sylvia's resentment of her mother prevented identification with the same-sex parent as required for successful resolution of Erikson's third stage. The fact that she interpreted her father's death as a deliberate act of betrayal, would also have jeopardised Sylvia's identification with her father, thereby further compounding the successful resolution of Stage 3. • The electroconvulsive shock therapy which Sylvia underwent during her senior college years could have reawakened and enhanced the feeling of abandonment which she suffered when her father died. Her anger over her mother's neglect of her father was confounded by her fear that she may have secretly wished for his death. Sylvia's suicide attempts attest to the intensity of her guilt and suggest her unsuccessful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis and her failure to acquire the ego quality of purpose. • Although the guilt associated with the resentment of her mother, may have prompted Sylvia to play the role of the perfect, obedient daughter, it also prompted the sardonic, mocking side of her personality, as revealed in the malicious caricatures of those close to her. • The conflictual nature of Sylvia's emerging sexuality during adolescence provides further evidence of her unsuccessful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis. • This conflict was exacerbated by her mother's staunch Calvinistic morality and the puritan expectations imposed on her gender by 1950s society. • As adolescence progressed, Sylvia found it increasingly difficult to suppress her desire to demonstrate initiative in sexual activities, and her internal conflict between taking initiative and feeling guilty became all the more pronounced. • The unsuccessful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis would have magnified Sylvia's propensity for guilt in adulthood, and accounts for the emotionally tumultuous nature of her relationships and the fact that they fuelled her depressive state. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The severity of his illness may have increased Sylvia's fear of abandonment and reinforced the role of her pleasing Evaluator. • Sylvia's attachment to and identification with her father was strengthened by his praises and by the fact that she resembled him. • Sylvia's Evaluator could have prompted her to excel and to behave perfectly in an attempt to keep her exiled fears of abandonment and unworthiness securely imprisoned. <p>3. <i>The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otto's neglectful attitude to the warning signs of his illness may have been prompted by his Passive Pessimist, to protect him from unbearable feelings of fear. • As a result of Sylvia's identification with her father, his burdens may have been transferred to her. • Sylvia's reluctance to extend herself socially to her peers, as well as her pervasive feelings of worthlessness, attest to the role of her Passive Pessimist. • Her feelings of inferiority and her fears of inadequacy made her isolate herself to the point that she remained an outsider. <p>4. <i>The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Otto's illness could have reinforced the role of Aurelia's caretaking manager, which would have been transferred to Sylvia. • Sylvia's identification with her father would, however, have resulted in her egotistical, entitled manager polarizing in a conflictual role with her selfless Caretaker. • This conflict manifested in her emulation of her father's ambitiousness and her resentment of her mother's attitude of noble martyrdom. <p>5. <i>The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's level of anxiety could have been heightened by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) the family's move to Winthrop; (b) the progressive severity of Otto's illness; and (c) the Great New England Hurricane. • Although the hurricane fuelled her artistic imagination and led to what she described as the birth of her artist self, it would also have fuelled the development of her Worrier. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia associated the Great New England Hurricane with the birth of her artist self, and also with her mother's inadequacy. • Although she always complied with her mother's strict code of conduct, her deep-rooted resentment towards her mother is indicative of the rebellious nature of her firefighters.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's habit of attempting reckless and potentially harmful acts whenever she experienced extreme stress caused by emotional trauma, and the fact that her physical well-being was negatively affected by stressful circumstances, suggest that she over-compensated for unresolved conflicts over initiative. • Sylvia's striving for perfection is speculated to have emanated from her unsuccessful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis. Subconsciously, perfectionism was her way of securing the love and recognition which she craved. • It is speculated that Sylvia's lack of trust (Stage 1), her overriding sense of shame and self-doubt (Stage 2), and her excessive sense of guilt (Stage 3) compromised her capacity to acquire the ego strength of purpose. This would explain her recurrent feelings of inadequacy and despair, despite her remarkable achievements. • Sylvia's uncertainty regarding her identity also suggests that she did not navigate Erikson's third developmental stage successfully. This is speculated to have stunted the healthy development of her sense of purpose, which in turn negatively affected the successful navigation of subsequent stages of development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's poetry served as the vehicle through which her firefighters could dissociate from the pain of her exiled, wounded child parts.
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The comparison between Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model of Internal Family Systems as represented in Table 10.3, yields a significant parallel finding in that both frameworks highlighted the important role played by Sylvia's parents during this historical period.

According to the psychosocial development theory, the role of parents is particularly pertinent in the measure of guilt which children will experience, since the conflict between initiative and guilt during Stage 3, determines the outcome of the Oedipal/Electra conflict. If unsuccessfully resolved, this conflict can lead to generalised anxiety disorder, impotence, frigidity, inhibitions or psychosomatic disorders (Linn, Fabricant & Linn, 1988; Sadock & Sadock, 2007; Shapiro & Fromm, 2000). Although Sylvia identified with her father and felt extremely attached to him, her interpretation of his death as a deliberate act of betrayal, jeopardised her identification with him. Furthermore, Sylvia's resentment of her mother prevented identification with the same-sex parent as required for successful resolution of the Electra conflict of Stage 3.

Although the Internal Family Systems model does not refer to the Oedipal/Electra conflict in its explanation of personality development, the conceptualisation of parts and their role in a

polarized system allowed for an explanation of the role of Sylvia's parents in the perpetuation of her polarized family system. Sylvia's identification with her father and her emulation of his ambitiousness is speculated to have been prompted by her Entitled One. The society in which she lived would, however, have advocated that she emulate her mother's example of domesticity and self-sacrificial subservience, as exemplified in the characteristics of the Caretaker. The conflict between her Entitled One and her Caretaker would, however, have polarized her internal family system and prevented the balance required for access to Self-leadership. Sylvia's unsuccessful navigation through the third historical period can thus be explained in terms of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial development theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family System model, since both frameworks advocate that interpersonal relationship problems with parents can cause imbalances, which prevent successful development and personality functioning.

The notable difference which can be observed in Table 10.3 between Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model, lies in the role played by her imagination. Although both frameworks highlighted the fact that Sylvia used her imagination to produce writing that transported her to a fantasy world, in the case of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, writing constituted a serious form of play, which Erikson considered imperative for learning and successful resolution of the third psychosocial crisis, since play is a manifestation of initiative. In terms of the IFS model, Sylvia's tendency of escaping to a fantasy world was interpreted as a sign of a highly polarized system in which her firefighters resorted to methods of escape which could help her to dissociate from the pain of her exiled, wounded child parts.

10.4.4 Later Childhood (1939 – 1945): The Aftermath of Otto Plath's Death during World War II

Summaries of the findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period are included in Table 10.4. World War II occurred during this historical period and Sylvia was particularly susceptible to the negative repercussions of anti-German sentiment during this time. Not only did the war affect Sylvia's development and shape her views of herself and the world, it also fuelled her artistic imagination. Her short story, entitled *Superman and Paula Brown's New Snowsuit*, was inspired by events during that disturbing time of war and captured perfectly the painful reality of war for Germans and their descendants in America (Alexander, 1999; Butscher, 2003; Kirk, 2009).

Table 10.4

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Fourth Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p>Stage 4: Industry versus Inferiority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fourth stage is a very decisive social stage, according to Erikson (1968). However, because Sylvia's preceding conflicts were not successfully resolved, she may have developed an estrangement from herself and from her tasks, which could account for her sense of inferiority. • Sylvia's predisposition to a sense of inferiority, as a result of previously unresolved crises, was reinforced by a number of factors after her father's death, including financial constraints, which necessitated a merging of the Plath and Schober households. • Although Sylvia's grandparents could have served as positive role-models for industriousness, it is speculated that the financial difficulties of the Plath/Schober household, together with Sylvia's embarrassment of her grandfather's waitoring job, would have fuelled Sylvia's sense of inferiority. • The fact that Otto's death did not receive the attention expected for a man of his academic stature, and the fact that the family's financial status did not reflect his academic success, could also have contributed to Sylvia's lack of self-esteem. • Since World War II coincided with Sylvia's fourth stage of psychosocial development, it is speculated that the discrimination against American families of German descent (like the Plath family), could have threatened their sense of security and contributed to Sylvia's feelings of inferiority. • Aurelia's acceptance of a position at Boston University and the family's subsequent move to Wellesley, provoked anxiety in Sylvia, who had to leave her coastal wonderland and adapt to a completely new world inhabited by people in a higher financial bracket. • The pressure on Sylvia to perform in order to secure scholarships to attend elite schools, and the fact that she was constantly surrounded by peers who came from a higher financial bracket, is speculated to have contributed to her sense of financial and social inferiority. • Throughout her life, Sylvia's scholarships depended on her obtaining top academic grades. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Events leading up to and including the death of her father, constituted a major traumatic event in Sylvia's life. • The following factors are speculated to have contributed to the chronic and complicated nature of her grief experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) Sylvia's sensitivity and imagination; (b) Her dependency and strong attachment to her father; (c) Her age at the time of his death; and (d) Sylvia's experience of her mother as being unsupportive. • It is speculated that Sylvia's poetry emanated from her storytelling parts and that these parts titrated the influence of her vulnerable, exiled parts, thereby allowing the managerial parts of her system to cope with the overwhelming grief of her father's tragedy. • The contradictory emotions evoked in Sylvia by poetry further support the speculation that her internal family system was polarized and that the extent of polarization was aggravated by the trauma of losing her father. • The trauma of losing her father added even more injury to Sylvia's already injured inner-child parts and reinforced the imprisonment of her exiled parts. • It is speculated that Sylvia's mental disturbance could have been caused by the weight of Sylvia's burdened parts and the extent of her polarized internal family system. • The unrelentless imprisonment of Sylvia's exiles trapped her in a world of darkness and prevented her from acquiring access to the healing benefits of Self-leadership. • The trauma suffered by Sylvia with the death of her father and the subsequent move to Wellesley are speculated to have magnified the polarization of her internal family system, and account for the intensity of behaviour of her protective parts. <p>Managers:</p> <p><i>1. The Striver</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The severity of Sylvia's critical, controlling Striver could have been reinforced both externally through Aurelia's insistence on academic excellence, and internally, as a result of the traumas of loss suffered at this stage of her development. • It is speculated that Sylvia's Striver motivated her to be outstanding so that she could be distracted and protected from the exiled feelings of trauma that might have caused pain.

<p>Although her fear of losing her place at prestigious academic institutions impelled her to be extremely industrious, it also plunged her into a vicious cycle characterised by social isolation, physical exhaustion and emotional instability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The positive encouragement which Sylvia received from teachers could have contributed to her industriousness in academic endeavours. • Sylvia's academic industriousness revealed itself throughout her life. Not only did she win a plethora of prizes for her academic accomplishments, she also obtained the highest academic awards in junior high school, graduated as valedictorian of her class in senior high school, and was named as one of only four summa cum laude graduates at Smith College. These accomplishments ensured her attainment of a Fulbright scholarship to study literature at Cambridge University in England. • The fact that Sylvia continued to doubt her talent and question her identity, affirms the speculation that she was unsuccessful in resolving the industry versus inferiority crisis of Stage 4. • The maladaptive tendency of narrow virtuosity which results from excessive industry manifested in Sylvia's social isolation. The negative feedback which Sylvia received from her peers could have fuelled her fears of inadequacy and heightened her sense of inferiority. • Sylvia's drive for public success and recognition is speculated to have emanated from her deeply-rooted feelings of inferiority, which prompted her to exhibit compensatory behaviour for her malignant inclination toward inertia. • Sylvia's tenacity to stick to a task until its completion could be regarded as further evidence of compensatory behaviour, reflected in her zealous drive for success and recognition. • Sylvia's tenaciousness and industrious striving for public acclaim, led to the publication of her work and to her winning a guest editorship at the elite <i>Mademoiselle Magazine</i> in New York during her senior college years. • In adulthood, Sylvia's industriousness revealed itself in her enthusiastic marketing of her husband's work, which resulted in him garnering a plethora of publishing accomplishments. Her tenacity also paid off when her own poetry collection was published in England and America. • Sylvia's compulsive striving for international acclaim could be regarded as further evidence of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her striving to attain public acclaim for her literary works would also have been prompted by her Striver. The exhilaration of having her work published, strengthened her pursuit of personal achievement and literary success, and became a life-long striving. • Sylvia's Striver exerted immense energy to keep her traumatised parts exiled, even if it meant pushing her to extreme levels of conscientiousness and task-orientated behaviour. This would account for her eternal dissatisfaction with herself and her incessant striving for academic success. <p><i>2.The Evaluator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that the burdens internalised by Sylvia's internal family system after her father's death, strengthened her belief that she was unloved and worthless, thereby reinforcing the controlling power of her Evaluator. • The traumatic effect of Otto's death on Sylvia was intensified by the fact that she experienced his departure as a deliberate act of betrayal. • Sylvia's obsessive perfectionism could be attributed to the role of her Evaluator and the extent to which it was prepared to go to protect her system from the painful memories of rejection and abandonment embedded in her exiled parts. • Her striving for perfection and her desire to please her mother and play the part of the dutiful daughter may have been prompted by her Evaluator's belief that the perfect Sylvia who pleased everyone would never be abandoned or hurt again. • Sylvia's compulsive perfectionism is speculated to have been fuelled by her belief that the degree of approval by others, especially by her mother, was directly related to her standard of performance, both socially and academically. <p><i>3.The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's strict adherence to domestic and moral cleanliness could have been prompted by her Passive Pessimist. • Her enthrallment with super-heroes at this stage of her development may have formed part of a symbolic clean-up that would make the world morally immaculate. • It is speculated that her neurotic fear of physical and moral dirt prompted her social withdrawal for fear of rejection. • Sylvia's closeness and obedience to her mother, and her simultaneous resentment towards her mother as expressed in her negative comments to her therapist about her mother, exemplify the polarization between her Evaluator and her Passive Pessimist.
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<p>her effort to compensate for her sense of inferiority.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia and Ted's life at their Court Green country home also revealed her compensatory behaviour. Despite the demands of domesticity and motherhood, the year spent at Court Green proved to be Sylvia's most productive in terms of her writing achievements. • Her industriousness also revealed itself when she decided to start farming with bees. • After Ted's departure, Sylvia's industriousness revealed itself in her efforts to maintain a stable home for her children and protect them from the trauma of their father's abandonment. • The fact that no amount of industriousness could outweigh her persistent feelings of inferiority, attests to the unsuccessful resolution of her fourth stage of psychosocial development, and accounts for her ever-worsening depression. • Despite Sylvia's history of academic and professional accolades, she continued to be plagued by feelings of inferiority • It is speculated that her unsuccessful navigation through the first three stages of psychosocial development negatively affected her ability to resolve the industry versus inferiority crisis of stage 4, and that this prevented the acquisition of the ego strength of competence. 	<p><i>4.The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's identification with both her mother and her grandmother could have reinforced the role of her Caretaker. • Sylvia may have felt obligated to emulate their self-sacrificing behaviours of caring domesticity. • Aurelia's insistence that Sylvia excel academically so as to ensure future career success, may have confused the preferred identity of her parts and aggravated the polarization of her internal family system. • This polarization would account for Sylvia's adult conflict when she felt torn between being a domesticated, caring wife (the Caretaker) and being an ambitious, career-orientated woman (The Entitled One). <p><i>5.The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following circumstances are speculated to have fuelled the development of Sylvia's Worrier: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) The prospect of her mother remarrying and thereby replacing her father; b) The financial challenges brought about by her father's death; c) Aurelia's deteriorating health and subsequent hospitalization as a result of an acute gastric haemorrhage. • The extent of Sylvia's anxiety could be attributed to the fact that her managers had the dual task of dealing with what they perceived as external dangers in the outside world, as well as dealing with the internal conflict provoked by her traumatised exiles. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The following factors are speculated to have prompted feelings of shame in Sylvia: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Burdens transferred to her by her parents; b) Guilt, as a result of feeling responsible for his death; and c) The negative repercussions of anti-German sentiment during World War II. • At this stage, Sylvia's firefighters reacted to her feelings of shame with the more passive-avoidant response of dissociation, expressed through her writing. • Her belief in magic and her imaginative escape to the fantasy world created through her writing, could have allowed her to dissociate from the pain of her exiled emotions.
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According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination contribute to feelings of inferiority, especially if children discover that their sense of worth depends on factors which override their wish and will to learn and which are beyond their control (Boeree, 2006; Erikson, 1968; Freiberg, 1987). In terms of the Internal

Family System model, discrimination with regard to differences creates legacy burdens which are transferred via patterned interactions amongst members of the external family system and broader culture, and they govern feelings of worth in all things from religion, to how one responds to death (McGoldrick, 1982, Sinko, 2017). Although the frameworks in this study made use of different terminologies, both highlighted the debilitating effects of socio-cultural prejudice, and both explained these negative effects in terms of the inability to integrate opposing forces.

Erikson noted that the maladaptive tendency which results from excessive industry is called narrow virtuosity (Boeree, 2006; Erikson et al., 1989). At the opposite extreme is the malignant inclination towards inertia, which Erikson described as the obstinate shadow of the school age (Boeree, 2006). Erikson's notion of narrow virtuosity at the one end of the continuum, and inertia at the opposite extreme, finds accord with Schwartz's (1995, 2001) description of the excessively task-orientated Striver that is often polarized in a conflicting role with the apathetic, withdrawn Passive Pessimist. Both frameworks thus allowed for an explanation of Sylvia's pervasive feeling of inferiority and worthlessness, despite her remarkable accomplishments.

From the perspective of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's drive for public success and recognition could be seen as compensatory behaviour for her inertia as a result of her deeply-rooted feelings of inferiority. This proposition is complemented by Schwartz's (1995, 2001) delineation of the Striver managerial part. Sylvia's critical, controlling Striver may have motivated her to strive for academic excellence so that she was distracted and protected from the exiled feelings of trauma that might have caused pain after her father's death. Both frameworks thus explained Sylvia's striving for academic and career success in terms of compensation for inferiority or loss.

The main difference between the psychosocial development theory on the one hand and the Internal Family Systems model on the other, lies in their conceptualisation of balance and the terminology used to describe the benefits of such balance. According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's inability to synthesise the opposing dispositions of industry and inferiority, would have accounted for her failure to acquire the ego strength of competence. According to Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, Sylvia's inability to differentiate between the opposing parts of her polarized internal family system, would have accounted for her failure to acquire Self-leadership. Although the two frameworks adopted different terminologies to explain the consequences of imbalance, both emphasised that a balanced system is conducive to optimal development.

10.4.5 Early Adolescence (1945 – 1947): Sylvia’s Junior High School Years after World War II

Table 10.5 includes the summary of findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period, ranging from the end of the Second World War in 1945 to the end of Sylvia’s junior high school years in 1947. Although the end of the war heralded a period of extreme optimism for society, for Sylvia it marked the commencement of an adolescence period characterised by self-consciousness, inner turmoil, harmful behaviour and identity confusion.

Table 10.5

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Fifth Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p>Stage 5: Identity versus Role Confusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia’s fifth stage of psychosocial development coincided with the end of World War II and marked her entry into junior high school. • It is speculated that Sylvia’s sense of mistrust, as a result of an unsuccessfully resolved first stage, made her experience of the bodily changes in Stage 5 all the more traumatic. • She had a ravenous appetite and developed acne, which made her feel so self-conscious and unattractive that she would confine herself to her home for fear of embarrassing herself in public. • Her acne and resultant self-consciousness also prompted her to engage in self-cutting behaviour, which is speculated to have been a manifestation of her inner turmoil and identity confusion. • Although Sylvia’s extraordinary talent for English facilitated her attainment of public approval and recognition, it also provoked inner turmoil since her imagination was often fuelled by monstrous nightmares, which included visions of murder, death and unspeakable horrors. • Sylvia’s sense of self was characterised by darkness and morbidity, even though she presented a façade of positivity and cheerfulness to others. • It is speculated that Sylvia’s unsuccessful resolution of the crises leading up to adolescence, together with the discrepancy between her sense of self and the view others had of her, jeopardised her 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the age of 13, Sylvia began to keep a dream book in which she recorded her monstrous nightmares. • Sylvia used the recorded nightmares as inspiration to write gothic mystery stories. • These stories provided an outlet through which she could express some of the darkness and morbidity that she hid behind her outer mask of normality and perfect amiability. • It is speculated that Sylvia’s monstrous nightmares were manifestations of the desperation of her exiles and the severity of pain with which they were burdened. • Sylvia’s journal entries also bore testimony to the severity of pain with which her exiles were burdened, as manifested in her imagery of herself drowning in a sea of negative emotions, including fear, envy, doubt, self-hate and madness. • The extent to which Sylvia’s exiles were burdened is speculated to have been associated with her dependency on her mother at this stage of her development. • Not only was Sylvia financially dependent on her mother, she also had to share a room with her and she became so emotionally dependent on her, that she came to regard her as an extension of herself, rather than as a separate person. <p>Managers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Striver</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia’s Striver is speculated to have prompted her outstanding academic achievement,

<p>efforts to find her identity and contributed to her sense of role confusion.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During this stage of psychosocial moratorium, Sylva experimented with numerous adult roles and explored a range of ideologies, showing excellence of everything with which she experimented. • Sylvia's commitment to an occupational identity revealed itself in her dedication to her writing and in her zealous aspiration to attain public literary acclaim. • Socially, Sylvia was always polite, respectable and caring and she presented a positive, cheerful disposition to society. • As adolescence progressed, the morbid side of her personality seemed to increase and her peers often described her as a "loner" and "a daydreamer" who retreated from society (Butscher, 2003, p.14). • Sylvia had a tendency to write cruel comments about those close to her, and to project onto those around her, fantasies, wishes and motivations which often had no bearing on reality. • Although the adolescent Sylvia had the opportunity to construct a social identity based on her popularity and amiable outer disposition, it is speculated that this was undermined by the contradictory duality of her personality, which manifested as a splintered identity. • The duality of Sylvia's personality also revealed itself in her emerging sexuality, since she felt trapped in the conflict between her growing sexual desires and her efforts to fulfill the role which society expected of women. • It is speculated that Sylvia's insight into her own identity was obscured by her unsuccessful resolution of the four crises leading up to adolescence, and by the fact that she felt trapped in a hypocritical society governed by artificial rules of propriety for women. • Despite the plethora of accolades and the myriad of friends and activities which characterised Sylvia's junior high school year, her inability to find balance between the syntonic and dystonic dispositions of identity and role confusion, resulted in her feeling fragmented into many conflicting identities. 	<p>particularly in English, the subject for which she displayed the most talent.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In her adolescent diary entries, she expressed her aspiration to become the world's greatest author and artist – another possible manifestation of the extreme measures taken by her Striver to protect the integrity of her internal family system. • The list of awards which she garnered at the end of her junior high school year affirms the effectiveness of her Striver in making her excel at everything with which she experimented. <p>2. <i>The Evaluator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's compulsion to be perfect in appearance, behaviour and performance so as to attain social approval from authority figures and peers, is speculated to have been prompted by her approval-seeking Evaluator. • Her Evaluator also prompted her polite, respectable and caring side, which ensured her popularity. <p>3. <i>The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's habit of retreating from people and avoiding interpersonal closeness for fear of being disappointed or hurt, is speculated to have been prompted by her Passive Pessimist. • Sylvia's compulsive need to lift people and experiences from her personal life and immerse them into her creative writing, often in the form of cruel caricatures, could also be attributed to the role of her Passive Pessimist. <p>4. <i>The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conflict between Sylvia's growing sexual desires and the expectations of a society governed by artificial rules of propriety for women, is speculated to have aggravated the polarization between her Caretaker and her Entitled One. <p>5. <i>The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's Worrier/Sentry is speculated to have been fuelled by her anxieties related to political issues. • Her political anxieties could have been aggravated by the legacy burdens transferred to her by her pacifist father. • The family's precarious financial position could also have fuelled Sylvia's Worrier/Sentry, which could account for her abstemious nature, even in adulthood after she had made her mark in the literary world. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's ravenous appetite and excessive eating at this stage could be seen as a manifestation of firefighting parts trying to suppress emotional pain.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's self-cutting behaviour, after the onset of acne, could be indicative of the extent to which her system's firefighters were prepared to go, to keep the pain of her imprisoned exiles securely locked away. • The psychosomatic nature of Sylvia's sinus infections could be indicative of the extent of her complicated grief after her father's death. • The somatic expression of Sylvia's exiled feelings is speculated to have been a manifestation of the activation of her firefighting suicide parts and attests to their desperation.
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Important points of comparison can be made from Table 10.5 regarding Sylvia's identity crisis. Although Sylvia presented a façade of positivity and social amiability to the outside world, beneath the surface, her sense of self was characterised by darkness and morbidity. This duality corresponds with Erikson's (1950; Erikson et al., 1986) delineation of syntonic and dystonic dispositions, and the importance of finding a balance between the two extremes. According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's experience of herself as being fragmented into many different and often conflicting identities is explained in terms of the unsuccessful resolution of the four crises leading up to adolescence, and in terms of her entrapment in a hypocritical society governed by artificial rules of propriety for women. Similarly, Schwartz's (1995, 2001) notion of polarized parts as a result of exiles burdened by both internal conflict and societal pressures, accounts for Sylvia's sense of fragmentation.

Sylvia's identity confusion is nowhere more evident than in the conflict sparked by her emerging sexuality during this historical period. According to Erikson (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980), her sense of mistrust, shame and self-doubt, guilt and inferiority as a result of unresolved prior crises would have been aggravated by her socio-cultural milieu. This could have negatively affected her interpersonal relationships with boys, and undermined her capacity for fidelity.

In terms of the IFS Model, Sylvia's desire to attain social approval from boys during this period of sexual awakening would have been prompted by her Evaluator. However, her mother's staunch Calvinistic morality, coupled with the conflicting demands imposed on her by a hypocritical socio-cultural milieu, would have prompted the activation of her Passive Pessimist. Although Evaluators and Passive Pessimists share the responsibility of protecting one's internal system, they are often in conflict because their methods of protection differ. At the one extreme, the Evaluator pushes a person to be amiable and to socialise with people so that their approval can be attained. At the other extreme, the Passive Pessimist will do

everything in its power to prevent an individual from all forms of interpersonal risk that might activate feelings of hostility, sexuality or fear.

The polarization between a manager that encourages social interaction and one that encourages withdrawal is comparable to the conflict inherent in Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) developmental stage crises. Although the two frameworks differ in that Schwartz (1995 2001) identified and named different parts within the internal family system (e.g., Evaluator and Passive Pessimist), they are similar in that they both acknowledge the effect of one's socio-cultural milieu on identity formation, and both emphasise the impact that one's sense of identity can have on interpersonal relationships. Whilst Erikson (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) would explain Sylvia's tumultuous interpersonal relationships in terms of her inability to acquire the ego strength of fidelity, Schwartz (1995, 2001) would explain her unsuccessful relationships in terms of her inability to acquire Self-leadership.

10.4.6 Middle Adolescence (1947 – 1950): Sylvia's High School Years during the McCarthy Era

Table 10.6 presents the summary of findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period, which marked Sylvia's entry into senior high school. At the time, the United States of America was characterised by its complacent attitude of conformity and consumerism. None the less, there was a pervasive feeling of uncertainty due to the unsettling effects of McCarthyism (Gill, 2008) on the country's politics, and Sylvia was profoundly affected by the country's seeming indifference to the Cold War and the Korean War.

Table 10.6

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Sixth Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p><i>Stage 5: Identity versus Role Confusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's enthrallment with her new English teacher, Mr. Crockett, and her admittance to the Crocketeers, is speculated to have fuelled her academic ambitions and reinforced her commitment to an occupational identity in the field of English Literature. • Despite her achievements, Sylvia continued to be plagued by feelings of inferiority, social awkwardness and self-doubt. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's tendency to write cruel comments about those close to her, and projecting onto others, fantasies, wishes and motivations which seldom had bearing on reality, could have been the result of a highly polarized internal family system. • The polarized position of Sylvia's protective parts could have contributed to the discrepancy between reality and Sylvia's imaginary world, as well as to her obscured insight into her own reality. • Although Aurelia was a very encouraging and self-sacrificing parent, she raised her children with the knowledge that there was a correlation

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an effort to overcome her social awkwardness, Sylvia joined a high school sorority that was reputed for its humiliating initiation practices. • It is speculated that her membership to this group aggravated her already-existing sense of inferiority and role confusion. • Sylvia's diary entries, in which she expressed her longing to liberate herself of her identity, reflect the malignant tendency of repudiation (rejection of one's need for an identity). • Sylvia's struggle to resolve the identity crisis of Erikson's fifth stage manifested in her ambivalent feelings of adoration and anger towards her father. • Sylvia's devotion to the English teacher who resembled her father, is also indicative of her identity crisis. • Her English teacher, Mr. Crockett, served as a positive role model who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) allowed for continuity of experience; (b) facilitated the clarification of roles; and (c) supported and encouraged her in her commitment to a belief system. • Sylvia's physical attractiveness and willingness to please consolidated her position as class star, but also kept hidden her encroaching darkness and emotional instability. • Sylvia's feelings of isolation, emptiness, anxiety, indecisiveness, lack of self-confidence, hopelessness about the future and depression, are attributed to the cumulative effect of past unresolved crises and the extent of her identity confusion. • The conflict between Sylvia's inner world of chaos and confusion and her outer façade of perfect respectability correlates with Erikson's description of identity confusion. • The physical manifestation of Sylvia's intense depressive episodes whenever she was plagued by sinusitis or menstrual pains is a further indication of her identity crisis. • Sylvia's excessively disciplined academic and writing endeavours are speculated to have been manifestations of compensatory behaviour for the confusion engendered by her identity crisis. • Erikson's maladaptive tendency of fanaticism manifested in her attachment to words and is speculated to have emerged in response to her desperate striving for ego identity. 	<p>between good behaviour and love, and she enforced a strict moral regime through martyrdom to principles and values.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In terms of the IFS model, it is speculated that Aurelia's parts-led parenting style created burdens for Sylvia, which polarized both the external family system and Sylvia's internal family system. • The polarization is speculated to have obstructed the emergence of Sylvia's Self, thereby preventing the clarity of insight required for the establishment of a clear identity. • Sylvia's experience of herself as being fragmented into many different and often conflicting identities is speculated to have emanated from a severely polarized internal family system which prevented the sense of continuity and integration required for effective Self-leadership. • The intensity of behaviour of Sylvia's protectors is attributed to the extent of pain experienced by her exiles, and would explain why her only recourse to some semblance of Self-led leadership was through her imagination where the Self had "supernatural powers" (Butscher, 2003, p.14). <p>Managers:</p> <p><i>1.The Striver</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's outstanding academic achievement in senior high school and her admittance to the elite group of superior intellectuals known as Rocketeers, is speculated to have been prompted by her critical, task-orientated Striver. • Sylvia's outstanding accomplishments attest not only to the critical, demanding nature of her Striver, but also to the extent of emotional pain carried by her exiled, wounded parts. • The fact that Sylvia was plagued by feelings of inferiority, despite her remarkable accomplishments, could be attributed to her highly-polarized system and the efforts of her protectors to attain balance. <p><i>2.The Evaluator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's efforts to overcome her social awkwardness by joining a high school sorority could be attributed to the role of her Evaluator. • Although Sylvia initially felt flattered to be invited to join the elite sorority, which would increase her popularity, she later resigned because of the condescending manner in which non-members were treated by the sorority.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overt manifestation of Sylvia’s fanaticism manifested in her devotion and staunch adherence to the ideas of Nietzsche, who suggested that ambitious writers “write with blood” (Nietzsche, 1932, p.72) and “Die at the right time” so as to ensure eternal fame (Nietzsche, 1932, p.125). • Sylvia’s German pen-pal, Hans Joachim Neupert, played an important role in consolidating her early pacifist ideas and committing more intensely to her pacifist ideology. • As with all the things that Sylvia was passionate about, this pacifist ideology found expression through her writing. • Sylvia’s commitment to her pacifist ideology could have provided her with the opportunity to consolidate her identity based on continuity of experience, since it incorporated the values modelled by her father and Mr. Crocket, and encouraged by her friend, Hans. • It is, however, speculated that Sylvia’s attempts at consolidating her identity were undermined both by previously unresolved crises and by the socio-historical climate which reigned at the time, and which Sylvia considered to be hypocritical. 	<p><i>3.The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia’s resignation from the sorority could have been prompted by her Passive Pessimist – the managerial part that induces withdrawal from interpersonal risk-taking. • It is speculated that Sylvia’s sardonic, mocking side was a manifestation of her Passive Pessimist and that she used her writing as a tool to mask her pessimistic aloofness and negativity towards people. <p><i>4.The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The polarization between Sylvia’s Caretaker and her Entitled One is speculated to have been aggravated by the artificial rules of religious and social propriety that governed Sylvia’s socio-cultural milieu. • Whilst her culture emphasised the importance of finding and keeping a boyfriend and even encouraged sexual attractiveness, it simultaneously frowned upon a woman’s overt expression of sexual desire. • Sylvia’s relationships with boys were often characterised by complex, contradictory emotions which are speculated to have emanated from the polarized struggle between her Caretaker and her Entitled One. <p><i>5.The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia’s pen-pal correspondence with Hans Neupert – a German teenager - provided her with the opportunity to share her ideas about war. • Sylvia’s pacifist ideas found expression through her writing and are speculated to have been prompted by her Worrier. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that Sylvia’s poetry, especially her father-centered poetry, was fuelled by her firefighters in their desperate efforts to suppress the pain that emanated from the loss of her father. • The fact that the father theme featured so prominently in Sylvia’s work, especially in the final year of her life, affirms the speculation that her writing served as a vehicle to help her dissociate from the pain of her loss.
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As can be observed from Table 10.6, both sets of findings reflect the challenges which Sylvia faced during her high school years, and both support the speculation that Sylvia’s inner conflict and the hypocritical socio-historical climate which reigned at the time, contributed to her experience of herself as fragmented into many different and often conflicting identities. From the viewpoint of Erikson’s (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, an adolescent’s devotion to things or individuals perceived as role models is indicative of a poorly-resolved identity crisis. This viewpoint finds accord with Schwartz’s (1995, 2001) model, which posits

that exiles, in their desperation to be saved, idealise anyone who offers help, and regard such a helper as a redeemer. Sylvia's adoration of her father and her devotion to the English teacher who resembled him intellectually, could thus be explained in terms of both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model.

Sylvia's compensatory behaviour of excessive self-discipline with regard to academic and writing endeavours, as described through Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, compares favourably with the compensatory behaviour of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Striver in its attempt to restore balance to a polarized system. The cumulative effect of past unresolved crises and the extent of Sylvia's identity confusion as described according to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, are speculated to have resulted in feelings of isolation, emptiness, anxiety, indecisiveness, lack of self-confidence, hopelessness about the future and depression. In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, these same feelings could have resulted from Sylvia's severely polarized internal family system, which prevented the sense of continuity and integration required for effective Self-leadership.

10.4.7 Later Adolescence (1950-1952): Sylvia's Junior College Years at the Time of the Cold War

Table 10.7 presents the summary of findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period, which marked Sylvia's entry into junior college. Although the Cold War period following the Second World War was a time of peace and relative abundance, it was also a time of extreme anxiety and uncertainty, which greatly influenced Sylvia's cultural and literary milieu.

Table 10.7

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Seventh Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p><i>Stage 5: Identity versus Role Confusion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although Sylvia's entry into Smith College could have provided the opportunity for the clarification of roles required for successful navigation of the identity versus role-confusion stage, it was compounded by the fact that she felt socially inferior to her peers. • Her feelings of inferiority and her fears of inadequacy made her isolate herself socially to the point that she remained an outsider. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aurelia's staunch Calvinistic principles of religious and social propriety, and the stifling, hypocritical standards of Sylvia's socio-cultural milieu, could have aggravated the polarization of her internal family system. • Sylvia's adolescent compulsions, especially for food and sexual activity, could be attributed to the polarized struggle between her managers and firefighters as they sought to control the emotional pain of her exiles.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia is speculated to have been helped through much of her discomfort in her college years by forming cliques with ambitious individualists and academic loners. • Sylvia's friendship with her pen-pal correspondent, Eddie Cohen, could have provided her with the opportunity to explore her sexual identity, thereby paving the way to the discovery of her capacity for commitment to intimacy with a potential life partner. • The exploration of Sylvia's sexual identity is speculated to have been undermined by her insecurities and the socially conservation tradition and double standards which prevailed at the time. • Sylvia's unsuccessful navigation of the first psychosocial crisis and the resultant sense of mistrust could have been reinforced by the double standards embedded in the ideological changes of the time. • It is speculated that the integration of Sylvia's identity was impeded by her lack of trust in a society whose expectations were at odds with her intellectual, emotional and physical ambitions. • For Sylvia, who had high ambitions to achieve greatness, the contradictory roles expected of women and the strain of keeping up appearances, intensified her anxiety and depression and left her feeling lost and stripped of identity. • Sylvia's eternal dissatisfaction with herself and subsequent striving to achieve more, to be more intelligent and to be more attractive than she felt she was, is speculated to have emanated from her lack of self-confidence as a result of the identity versus role confusion crisis. • Sylvia's feelings of anxiety and hopelessness about the future during the seventh historical period, were fuelled by the profound contradictions which characterised the Cold War period in America after World War II, and could have contributed to her identity confusion. • The conflict between her ambitious aspirations and the socio-cultural expectations imposed on women at the time could have compounded Sylvia's identity crisis and intensified her depression, and accounts for her identification with brilliant female writers like Virginia Woolf and Sara Teasdale – both of whom committed suicide. • Irrespective of all the academic and public accolades which Sylvia managed to garner by the end of junior college, her journal entries attest to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The physical manifestation of Sylvia's depressive episodes whenever she was plagued by sinusitis and menstrual cramps could also have emanated from the conflict between her polarized parts. • Sylvia's writing served as a tool through which she could dissociate from the painful emotions that burdened her exiles. <p>Managers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <i>The Striver</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irrespective of the fact that Sylvia graduated from high school as valedictorian of her class, thereby securing a scholarship to study at Smith College, she continued to be plagued by feelings of inferiority. • Although her fear of losing her place at Smith College is speculated to have prompted her Striver to push her even harder academically, the heavy workload and extreme pressure aggravated the polarization of her overburdened system and resulted in her being overwhelmed by depression and loneliness. • The discrepancy between Sylvia's remarkable accomplishments and her exaggerated feelings of inferiority could have contributed to the fragmented nature of her identity. • Sylvia's inability to take responsibility for her character development could be attributed to the fact that her Self was constrained by her polarized parts. • Her internal family system is speculated to have been polarized to such an extent that it made her incapable of experiencing the sense of continuity and integration required for Self-leadership. <i>The Evaluator</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's need to please others and to be accepted, even at the expense of her individuality, could be attributed to the fact that her Self's resources were obscured by the various extremes of the parts trying to protect it. • Although Sylvia always came across as being highly sociable, calm, gracious and well-poised, her need to excel far outweighed her need for sociability, with the result that she isolated herself socially and remained an outsider. • Sylvia's inability to achieve the sense of integration and differentiation afforded by Self-leadership, could account for her tendency to forge a false identity just to be accepted by others. <i>The Passive Pessimist</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The conflict between Sylvia's outer mask of sweet politeness and her inner turmoil of cynical idealism is attributed to the polarized struggle between her Evaluator and her Passive Pessimist. • It is speculated that Sylvia's cynical sarcasm and her attitude of indifference were prompted by her
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<p>her feelings of inferiority and indicate that she saw suicide as her only solution.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of prior developmental crises, together with the conflicting demands of her socio-cultural milieu prevented her successful navigation of the identity versus role confusion crisis. • Sylvia's analogy of her life to a tree with a multitude of branches and offshoots suggests that she felt so fragmented and overwhelmed by the myriad of identities with which she was confronted, that she withdrew from committing herself definitively to a set identity. • The analogy not only reflects the extent of Sylvia's identity confusion, it also suggests the unbearable pain which such confusion engendered. 	<p>Passive Pessimist in its efforts to protect her from the pain of rejection that could have resulted from getting too close to anyone.</p> <p>4. <i>The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's inner conflict could have been aggravated by the fact that she inhabited a socio-cultural environment which imposed restrictions on women. • Sylvia felt torn between her creative genius and ambition for fame, and society's expectation that she sacrifice her ambitions and subordinate herself and her creativity to the will of a future husband. • It is speculated that the polarized struggle between her self-sacrificing Caretaker and self-centered Entitled One, left her feeling fragmented into many different and conflicting identities, and negatively affected her relationships with men. <p>5. <i>The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the postwar period in America was characterised by peace and relative abundance, it was also a time of extreme anxiety and uncertainty, characterised by the anti-communist drive known as McCarthyism. • It is speculated that Sylvia's Worrier was fuelled by the uncertainty and pervasive culture of suspicion which reigned at the time. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The theme of suicide became all the more pronounced in Sylvia's final adolescent years at Smith College. • Apart from her despair and desire to kill herself, as reflected in her journal entries, she also exhibited the habit of attempting potentially harmful acts in times of extreme stress caused by emotional trauma. • It is speculated that Sylvia's impulsive dare-devil acts were manifestations of her firefighter parts and the extent to which they were prepared to go to distract her from the unbearable pain harboured in her exiled parts.
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According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's feelings of social inferiority as a result of not coming from a wealthy, socially-elite family could have compounded her identity development during this historical period. Her feelings of inferiority and her fears of inadequacy made her isolate herself socially and often resulted in her being treated badly by some of her peers. According to Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, Sylvia's social withdrawal as a result of feelings of inferiority could be explained in terms of her Passive Pessimist – the managerial part that protected her internal family system from exiled feelings

of shame, by prompting withdrawal from social interactions with girls whom Sylvia regarded as socially superior.

In terms of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's integration of identity was unsuccessful because she could not successfully differentiate from the social mass and simultaneously play the different roles expected of her by society. Her mistrust in 1950s society as a provider of equal opportunities for women fuelled her identity confusion and prevented her attainment of the ego virtue of fidelity. Similarly, Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model explained Sylvia's identity confusion and sense of fragmentation in terms of her inability to differentiate from the conflicting roles transferred to her by her perfectly domesticated, subservient, caring mother (Caretaker) and her egotistical, self-serving, ambitious father (the Entitled One). This enhanced the polarized struggle between Sylvia's internal family parts, thereby preventing access to the healing benefits of Self-leadership. Both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model could thus account for Sylvia's failure to develop optimally in terms of internal conflict and the impact of socio-cultural role expectations. Sylvia's feelings of inferiority as a result of the identity versus role confusion crisis prompted her incessant and ambitious striving for excellence and perfection, according to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory. In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) notion of polarization, Sylvia's Striver and Evaluator prompted her to strive for excellence and perfection in order to compensate for feelings of inferiority prompted by her Passive Pessimist.

10.4.8 Adulthood (1953 – 1955): Sylvia's Senior College Years and the Execution of the Rosenbergs

Summaries of the findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period are included in Table 10.8. This historical period commenced with Sylvia's editorial internship in New York and coincided with her senior college years at Smith College. The Rosenberg execution formed part of the anti-communist McCarthy drive during this period in history, and affected Sylvia so severely that she reacted psychosomatically to the occurrence.

Table 10.8

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Eighth Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<i>Stage 6: Intimacy versus Isolation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sylvia's dependency on her mother could have prevented the unburdening of her exiles, making

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previously unresolved crises which had led to a sense of mistrust, shame and doubt, guilt, inferiority and role confusion in Sylvia, continued to manifest during this historical period, and interfered with her successful resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis. • Sylvia's insecure sense of identity negatively affected her capacity for interpersonal intimacy. • Sylvia's internship at <i>Mademoiselle Magazine</i> involved not only a heavy workload and pressure to meet deadlines, but also the expectation to attend social functions and appear in public. • To the self-conscious Sylvia, whose unsuccessful resolution of Stage 4 resulted in a profound sense of inferiority, the incessant public exposure made her feel all the more vulnerable and this could have propelled her to experience another identity crisis. • It is speculated that Sylvia strengthened her façade of perfect self-control and social poise in order to compensate for her weakness in relation to identity potential. • Sylvia's fear of a perceived loss of self could have prompted her to avoid experiences of interpersonal intimacy, and would account for her participation in arranged social activities with minimal emotional involvement. • Sylvia's failure to accomplish such intimate relationships with others and with her own inner resources resulted in a profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation. • Sylvia's internship at <i>Mademoiselle Magazine</i> in New York was made all the more difficult by her unsuccessful resolution of Stage 2, which resulted in her compulsive quest for perfection. • Her striving for perfection made her workload all the more exhausting and affected her both physically and emotionally. • Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of Stage 3 also had a bearing on her physical and emotional well-being, and manifested in her psychosomatic reaction to the Rosenberg executions. • When Sylvia returned from her guest-editorship in New York she experienced a sense of purposeless detachment from life, which is speculated to have emanated from her unsuccessful resolution of Stage 3. • The family's financially precarious situation could have reinforced Sylvia's sense of isolation since it 	<p>her more insecure and vulnerable to being triggered by life events.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's escalating feelings of failure and inferiority, despite all her accomplishments, could be attributed to her over-burdened system which prevented access to the healing benefits of Self-leadership. • The fact that Sylvia questioned her identity and felt overwhelmed by inner turmoil and depression, despite an outer façade of perfect self-control and social poise, could suggest that her Self was constrained by parts that were afraid to differentiate fully from it. • The lack of differentiation prevented the sense of continuity and integration necessary for Self-leadership and Self-empowerment. • Sylvia's sense of purposelessness when she returned from her guest-editorship in New York could have emanated from her lack of Self-leadership. • It is speculated that Sylvia's anguish of keeping the inner turmoil of her exiles securely locked away, whilst trying to meet her managers' demands of efficiency, put so much pressure on her internal family system, that her firefighters saw suicide as the only solution to saving her. • The Electroconvulsive Therapy (ECT) to which Sylvia was subjected, only served to increase the desperation of her exiled suicide parts, thereby intensifying her depression. • Sylvia's inability to establish secure interpersonal relationships characterised by genuine intimacy, spontaneity and warmth, is speculated to have emanated from her highly polarized internal family system. • Sylvia's inability to access the type of self-energy needed for a loving relationship with oneself, blocked her capacity to establish a heartfelt, sincere connection with her intimate partners. <p>Managers:</p> <p><i>1. The Striver</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's feelings of self-doubt and inferiority impelled her to work even harder and to strive for even greater academic and literary success. • The ever-increasing emotional pain in Sylvia's internal family system prompted her protective Striver to be all the more intense in its efforts to maintain balance and to protect her system from the volatile reactions of her exiled parts.
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<p>prevented her from participating in campus activities which offered opportunities for interpersonal intimacy.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that Sylvia's sense of mistrust, as a result of unsuccessful resolution of Stage 1, extended during this historical period, into a feeling of insecurity in interpersonal relationships. • The unsuccessful resolution of prior crises compounded the successful resolution of Stage 6, leaving Sylvia with a profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation. • Although Sylvia continued to hide the anguish of her inner turmoil, she secretly began to plan the method that she would use to commit suicide. • In one attempt, Sylvia slit her wrists with a razor blade, in another she tried drowning herself, and eventually she decided to use the traditional method of sleeping pills. • In her therapy sessions at McLean Hospital, Sylvia expressed her resentment towards her mother and her frustration regarding the double standards of sexuality for men and women. • The maladaptive tendency of promiscuity is speculated to have emanated from Sylvia's insecurity regarding her identity. • Sylvia's inner turmoil and her choices in men could be attributed to previously unresolved crises and the fact that she experienced her father's death as an abandonment. • She used her poetry as a vehicle to reify the lost father figure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that she graduated from Smith College as one of only four summa cum laude graduates, and also won a plethora of prizes and a Fulbright scholarship to study literature at Cambridge, attests to the severity of her Striver. <p><i>2.The Evaluator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The incessant public exposure during her guest-editorship at <i>Mademoiselle Magazine</i>, made the self-conscious Sylvia feel all the more vulnerable and distressed. • Sylvia's ever-increasing sense of distress could have prompted her Evaluator to be all the more perfectionistic about her appearance and behaviour. • The effectiveness of Sylvia's Evaluator manifested in her ability to maintain her façade of perfect self-control and social poise, and accounts for her compulsive quest for perfection. <p><i>3.The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rejection of Sylvia's application to the Frank O'Connor short story writing course at Harvard wounded her already vulnerable self-esteem and increased her insecurities about her self-worth. • The rejection, coupled with the family's financially precarious situation, could have reinforced the role of Sylvia's Passive Pessimist, as manifested in her withdrawal and loss of interest in all the activities she had ever loved. <p><i>4.The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When Sylvia returned from her internship in New York, she found both her grandmother and mother afflicted by ill health. • The domestic situation prompted the activation of Sylvia's Caretaker, since she had no choice but to carry the burden of running the Plath home. • The polarization between Sylvia's caretaking responsibilities and her personal drive to enhance her professional skills by enrolling for academic courses (prompted by her Entitled One), could have strained her already depleted energy sources, resulting in Sylvia's difficulty to perform even the simplest tasks at this time. <p><i>5.The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's interest in the Rosenberg case and her somatic response to their execution could be attributed to the powerful role of her Worrier. • Being a pacifist, like her father, Sylvia was disturbed by the apathetic response of Americans to this horrifying execution. • Sylvia's anxieties about leaving America to start a new life in England were aggravated by the family's financial constraints, and reinforced the power of her Worrier.
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	<p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's suicide attempt of 1953 provides the most pertinent manifestation of the role of her firefighters during her senior college years. • Sylvia's emotional pain induced an array of firefighting responses, including self-inflicted cuts, a drowning attempt, the abuse of sleeping pills and promiscuous behaviour. • Sylvia's inability to establish a secure interpersonal relationship was aggravated by the fact that she experienced her father's death as an abandonment. • The fact that she used her poetry as a vehicle to reify the lost father figure, could be attributed to the dissociative techniques of her firefighting protectors.
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According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's resentment towards her mother and her frustrations regarding the double standards of sexuality for men and women were rooted in her previously unresolved crises. These unresolved crises impeded her from establishing psychologically intimate relationships with others, thereby contributing to Sylvia's profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation. Her unresolved identity crisis resulted in her developing the maladaptive tendency of promiscuity. In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, Sylvia's resentment towards her mother and her frustrations regarding hypocritical standards of sexuality for men and women, emanated from the polarized struggle in her internal family system. Sylvia's promiscuous behaviour could be explained in terms of her system's protective firefighters. As a result of a highly polarized internal family system, Sylvia's access to Self-leadership was blocked and accounted for her failure to establish secure and fulfilling intimate relationships.

In terms of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's avoidance of commitment to interpersonal intimacy as a result of a deep-rooted fear of losing her sense of self was also reflected in the findings from Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model. According to Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, the polarized struggle between Sylvia's Evaluator and her Passive Pessimist prevented differentiation of the Self, and negatively affected her capacity for interpersonal fulfillment.

From Table 10.8, three notable differences can be observed between Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial development theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family System model. Whilst both the theory and the model recognised Sylvia's compulsive perfectionism, Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory attributed it to the unsuccessful resolution of the autonomy versus shame and doubt crisis of Stage 2, whereas Schwartz's

(1995, 2001) model attributed it to the role of her Evaluator – the managerial part that pushes one to be perfect so that social approval is maximised. Erikson’s (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz’s (1995, 2001) model also differed in terms of their explanations for Sylvia’s sense of purposelessness. Whilst Erikson’s (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory attributed it to the unsuccessful resolution of the initiative versus guilt crisis of Stage 3, Schwartz’s (1995, 2001) model attributed it to her lack of Self-leadership. Lastly, Table 10.8 indicates a difference with regard to the way in which Erikson’s (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz’s (1995, 2001) model explained Sylvia’s suicide attempt during this historical period. Erikson’s (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory explained Sylvia’s suicide attempt in terms of the profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation caused by unsuccessfully resolved prior crises which, in turn, negatively affected her successful resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis of Stage 6. Schwartz’s (1995, 2001) model, on the other hand, attributed Sylvia’s suicide attempt to the role of her firefighters in their desperation to douse the emotional pain of her exiled parts.

10.4.9 Adulthood (1955-1956): Sylvia in Cambridge, England, at the Time of the Suez Crisis

Table 10.9 includes the summary of findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period, which marked Sylvia’s new life as a Fulbright scholar at Cambridge University in England. Historically, this period was characterised by Britain’s invasion of Egypt after the Suez Canal was nationalised by Nasser. True to her pacifist ideology, Sylvia was against Britain’s political policy and she wrote vehemently about her disgust with militarism.

Table 10.9

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Ninth Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p><i>Stage 6: Intimacy versus Isolation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Previously unresolved crises and the resultant feelings of mistrust, doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion continued to manifest in Sylvia during this historical period, and were aggravated by the fact that she had to leave the familiarity of the only country she had even known. • Within days of starting her new life in Cambridge, Sylvia fell ill with a terrible sinus infection which 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia’s dependency on her mother and her veneration of her lost father, could have prevented her from being Self-led and would have contributed to the overwhelming insecurity which she felt when she left America to start a new life in England. • Her impulsive romance with a newly-married physics graduate on board the ship which took her to England could be attributed to her firefighters

<p>is speculated to have been psychosomatic and which could be seen as the pathological consequence of over-compensation for unresolved conflicts over initiative.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's unfulfilled love needs not only prompted her to resort to self-soothing in the form of medicinal drugs, but also impeded her ability to establish committed, genuine interpersonal intimacy. • Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of the trust versus mistrust crisis of Stage 1 impaired her sense of ethics, and within days of being on board the ship which took her to England, she began a romance with a newly-married physics graduate. • Although Sylvia embraced every aspect of her new life in Cambridge, it is speculated that her quest for perfection (unsuccessful resolution of Stage 2), as well as her fear of loss of self (unsuccessful resolution of Stage 6) outweighed her industrious attempts at overriding her feelings of inferiority. • Sylvia's dating behaviour during this historical period is suggestive of the maladaptive tendency of promiscuity as a result of poor identity development. • Sylvia's tendency to be swept away by the idea of love, only to be disillusioned when confronted by its imperfect reality, could be attributed to her unsuccessful resolution of prior crises and her resultant incapacity to establish the ego strength of love. • Sylvia's habit of escaping to the magical fantasy-world which she created for herself through her literature, continued during this historical period, and could have served as compensation for previously unresolved crises. • Sylvia's failed relationship with Sassoon is speculated to have intensified her insecurities and reinforced her sense of isolation. • Her sense of isolation as a result of unsuccessfully resolved crises, manifested when she broke all contact with the men she had become acquainted with. • It is speculated that the malignant tendencies of withdrawal (Stage 1), compulsive self-doubt (Stage 2), psychosomatic illness (Stage 3), inferiority (Stage 4), weakness in relation to identity potential (Stage 5) and isolation (Stage 6), as a result of unresolved prior crises, hurled Sylvia into a depression as severe as the one which had precipitated her 1953 suicide attempt. 	<p>and the impulsive measures taken by them to douse the emotional pain of her exiled parts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that Sylvia fell ill with a terrible sinus infection within days of starting her new term in Cambridge, is suggestive of the somatic expression of her exiled parts. • Sylvia's volatile relationship with Ted Hughes provides the most pertinent manifestation of the desperation of her exiles during this historical period. • In light of the fact that Sylvia experienced her father's death as a deliberate act of betrayal, it is speculated that her attraction to Ted was prompted by her exiles' desperate search for a "redeemer" (Schwartz, 1995, p.47). • Sylvia's impulsive decision to succumb to Ted after her failed relationship with Sassoon, could be attributed to her over-burdened system which was so polarized that it prevented her from being Self-led. • It is speculated that Sylvia's failure to attain complete independence from her parents, prevented the unburdening of her internal family system, resulting in emotional over-dependency on Ted. • Sylvia's over-dependency on Ted, who served as a replacement for the lost father whom she still grieved, could have aggravated her exiles' extreme experience of hopelessness and catalysed thoughts of suicide. • In light of the threatened survival of her system, Sylvia's protective managers and firefighters are speculated to have resorted to extreme measures to keep her traumatised parts exiled. <p>Managers:</p> <p><i>1.The Striver</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's conscientiousness and goal-directed efforts to attain success are speculated to have been prompted by her Striver. • Her journal entry describing how her "puritanical conscience" (Plath, 2000, p.215) made her castigate herself every time she felt that she had not demanded enough of herself, reflects the characteristics of Schwartz's demanding, critical Striver. <p><i>2.The Evaluator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's enchanting and busy social schedule in Cambridge could have been prompted by her Evaluator in its efforts to obtain social approval.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's quest for perfection could be attributed to the unsuccessful resolution of the autonomy versus shame and doubt crisis of Stage 2. • Her unsuccessful resolution of the crisis of Stage 1 and Stage 3 manifested in the psychosomatic nature of her physical complaints, and in her sense of abandonment regarding her father. • Sylvia's unsuccessful resolution of prior crises is speculated to have influenced not only her choice of men, but also the nature of her relations with these men. • Not only were her relationships characterised by competitiveness and aggression, they were also marked by sado-masochism and promiscuity. • The unsuccessful resolution of prior crises is also speculated to have reinforced her dependency on both her mother and her husband, Ted. • Sylvia's dependency on Ted could have been fuelled by his resemblance to her father, and the fact that she felt incapable of coping without him attests to her over-dependency on him and affirms her unsuccessful navigation of the trust versus mistrust crisis of Stage 1. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the evaluating manager's quest for social approval ensured Sylvia popularity and impeccable social poise, it also placed her under immense pressure to reach unrealistic goals of perfection. <p><i>3.The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's reaction to Sassoon after their break-up is attributed to the role of her Passive Pessimist, who prompted her to break all contact with the boys she had become acquainted with in Cambridge. • <i>The New Yorker's</i> rejection of one of her short stories and the poor reviews which she received of her published poems could have strengthened the apathetic, avoidant behaviour of her Passive Pessimist. <p><i>4.The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's relationship with Ted is suggestive of the polarized nature of her caretaking and entitled managerial parts. • The fact that Sylvia helped Ted to advance in his career much like her mother had done for her father, supports the speculation that Sylvia's caretaking manager was reinforced by the example set by her mother. • Ted's willingness to let Sylvia take charge of things, could have satisfied the needs of her Entitled One, but is speculated to have reinforced the polarization between their managerial parts. <p><i>5.The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • True to her pacifist ideology, Sylvia was totally opposed to Britain's invasion of Egypt after the Suez Canal was nationalised by Nasser. • Sylvia's fear of war is speculated to have emanated from her Worrier and prompted both her pacifist ideas and her decision to leave England – the country whose political policy she detested. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's contradictory and fluctuating emotions, especially with regard to her multitude of unstable interpersonal relationships during this historical period, could be indicative of the polarized nature of her internal family system. • Sylvia's habit of escaping the pain that accompanied tragedy or loss by hiding in a delusional fantasy world, could be attributed to her firefighters and the measures taken by them to shield her from pain through the technique of dissociation. • Her affinity for harrowing, adrenalin-filled incidents could also have been prompted by her firefighters in their quest to distract her system from the pain of exiled parts.
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Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model both identified significant events and factors that impacted on Sylvia's development and functioning during this historical period, namely: (a) the role of Sylvia's parents and the impact of their parenting style on her future development and functioning; (b) the psychosomatic nature of her sinusitis infections; (c) the promiscuous nature of her interpersonal relationships; (d) her over-dependency on her husband, Ted; and (e) the nature of her suicidal ideation. Nonetheless, the theory and the model varied with regard to their interpretations of the way in which those occurrences and factors impacted on Sylvia's development and functioning.

According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, the fact that Sylvia's parents did not succeed in creating a safe, trusting, environment negatively affected her capacity to resolve the trust versus mistrust crisis of Stage 1, which in turn negatively affected the resolution of all future crises. In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, the parts-led parenting style of Otto and Aurelia as a result of their own burdened internal family systems resulted in the polarization of Sylvia's system, which negatively affected her capacity for Self-leadership. With regard to Sylvia's psychosomatic complaints, Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory would have regarded them as the pathological consequence of over-compensation for unresolved conflicts over initiative. Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, on the other hand, would have regarded them as an expression of the emotional pain of Sylvia's exiled parts. Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory attributed Sylvia's maladaptive tendency of promiscuity to unsuccessful identity development as a result of previously unresolved crises. Conversely, Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model attributed Sylvia's promiscuity to her firefighters and the impulsive measures taken by them to douse the emotional pain of her exiled parts.

Sylvia's over-dependency on her husband, Ted, was explained by Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory in terms of her unsuccessful navigation of the trust versus mistrust crisis of Stage 1. Her dependency on Ted was reinforced by the fact that he resembled her father, whose death she experienced as an abandonment. In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, Sylvia's over-dependency on Ted was attributed to the fact that she failed to attain complete independence from her parents, which prevented the unburdening of her internal family system. This, in turn, aggravated the extreme experience of hopelessness of Sylvia's exiles and catalysed thoughts of suicide. Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, on the other hand, explained Sylvia's depression and suicide ideation in terms of previously unresolved crises which left her feeling betrayed, insecure, guilty, inferior, confused and isolated.

10.4.10 Adulthood (1957-1959): Sylvia, the Newlywed Poetess in America in the Years of the Space Race

Table 10.10 presents the summary of findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period, which coincided with Sylvia and Ted's return to the United States of America. The threat of nuclear war during the years of the Space Race fuelled the political tension at the time and greatly influenced Sylvia's poetic voice and her confessional style of writing.

Table 10.10

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Tenth Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p>Stage 6: Intimacy versus Isolation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During this historical period, Sylvia completed her studies and seemed intent on devoting herself to the roles of wife, writer and teacher. • The mutually-beneficial working relationship between Sylvia and Ted, could have provided the ideal circumstances for successful integration of the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation, thereby allowing for the emergence of the ego virtue of love. • Unfortunately, previously unresolved crises continued to surface during this historical period and could explain why Sylvia and Ted's marriage was not as harmonious as it seemed on the surface. • Ted's womanising tendencies are speculated to have fuelled Sylvia's sense of mistrust and heightened her insecurities. • Sylvia's dependency on both her mother and her husband is speculated to have emanated from past unresolved crises. • In her therapy sessions during this historical period, Sylvia revealed that her intense feelings of possessiveness and jealousy in her marriage stemmed from her unresolved feelings of abandonment regarding her father. • The volatile and unstable nature of Sylvia's marriage to Ted could have ignited the reoccurrence of prior crises. • Sylvia's heightened sense of mistrust, doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion is speculated to have prevented the successful resolution of the intimacy versus isolation crisis, and accounts for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that Sylvia's exiles were frozen in circumstances of abuse and betrayal relating to her father. • Her volatile, erratic and contradictory reactions to Ted's sadistic and womanising tendencies could thus be attributed to the inner battle between polarized perpetrator parts as they struggled to contain her exiled, wounded and traumatised parts. <p>Managers:</p> <p><i>1.The Striver</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's tenacious adherence to a strict writing routine and her goal-directed attempts to promote Ted's work, attest to the task-orientated nature of her Striver. • In her role as teacher at Smith College, Sylvia was described as brilliant, whilst her husband described her as being talented, alert, indefatigable and keenly responsive to everything. • The fact that Sylvia did not see herself as being brilliant could be explained in terms of her highly-polarized, overburdened system and would account for her depression. <p><i>2.The Evaluator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that Sylvia's excellence-driven Striver was in a polarized battle with her perfectionistic Evaluator. • The polarized struggle between these two demanding managers manifested in Sylvia's acknowledgement that she had to fight shyness and that she struggled to face people. • Sylvia's Evaluator demanded perfection and stripped her of her confidence when she was anything less than perfect.

<p>Sylvia's inability to establish genuine intimate relationships.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The appearance of the dead father theme in Sylvia's work could have emanated from her feelings of isolation as manifested in her prophetic confession: "It was my love that did us both to death" (Plath, 2008, p. 117). • Sylvia's inability to produce any noteworthy writing during the first part of this historical period could have reignited feelings of inferiority due to her unsuccessful resolution of the industry versus inferiority crisis of stage 4. • The absence of the ego virtue of competence is speculated to have fuelled Sylvia's feelings of inferiority as well as her sense of identity confusion. • Sylvia's identification with the writer Virginia Woolf, could have emanated from her identity confusion and lack of confidence, and increased her risk of committing suicide. • Sylvia's striving for perfection and her pervasive feelings of self-doubt featured prominently during her teaching years at Smith College, and are speculated to have emanated from her unsuccessful resolution of the autonomy versus shame and self-doubt crisis of Stage 2. • Sylvia's dependency on Ted for hypnosis and their preoccupation with the occult could have emanated from Sylvia's insecurities and lack of trust, not only in her own capabilities, but also in the value of organised religion. • Previously unresolved crises contributed to Sylvia's profound sense of isolation and self-preoccupation during this historical period, and reinforced her belief that she was doomed to live a life devoid of nourishment and healing. 	<p><i>3. The Passive Pessimist</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's episodes of writer's block during this historical period could have been prompted by her Passive Pessimist. • Ted's criticism of Sylvia's work could have reinforced the role of her Passive pessimist, prompting her to avoid risks and thereby aggravating her writer's block. • It is speculated that Sylvia's Passive Pessimist was polarized in a conflicting role with her Striver, thereby blocking the creative energy of the Self. • The psychological depth and emotional richness of Sylvia's <i>Ariel</i> poems, suggest that her therapy sessions during this period could have helped her parts to differentiate from the Self, thereby allowing access to the creative benefits of Self-leadership. • It is speculated, however, that the feelings of worthlessness, loneliness and yearning for redemption, evoked by Sylvia's overburdened exiles, were so intense, that they activated her protectors to dominate her system, thereby overpowering any attempts at Self-leadership. <p><i>4. The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fact that Sylvia typed Ted's work and submitted it for publication attests not only to the role of her Caretaker, but also to the influence of legacy burdens, transferred to Sylvia by her mother, who had helped her husband, Otto, to gain recognition in his field of expertise. • The polarization between Sylvia's Caretaker and the manager who pushed her to assert herself professionally in a male-dominated society, manifested in her tendency of escaping into "domesticity" (Plath, 2000, p. 269) every time she suffered from writer's block. • Despite Sylvia's ambition to attain literary fame and success, she always put Ted first. • Although Ted gave Sylvia the credit for his success and fulfillment as a writer, he also took advantage of the fact that she depended on him so intensely. • It is speculated that the force of Sylvia's legacy burdens and her loyalty to her system's protectors, kept her exiled feelings of worthlessness and inferiority securely locked in place, thereby aggravating the polarization both internally between her Caretaker and her Entitled One, and interpersonally between herself and Ted. <p><i>5. The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's confessional style of writing allowed her to give expression to her Worrier or Sentry. • At the time, the pervasive anxiety about communism in America and the fear of
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	<p>communist invasion underpinned all aspects of American life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The historical circumstances of this period offered an extremely charged backdrop for the articulation of Sylvia's personal and political anxieties. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that Sylvia's atheism was transferred to her by her father, and that this contributed to her involvement in occultish practices during this historical period. • Sylvia's participation in occultish practices could have formed part of the dissociative techniques implemented by her firefighters in their quest to douse the emotional flare-ups of her exiled parts. • The polarized nature of Sylvia's internal family system also manifested itself in a poem written after a visit to her father's grave. The poem – <i>Electra on Azalea Plath</i> – could have been prompted by the dissociative tendencies of Sylvia's firefighters.
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Both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model acknowledged the role that Sylvia's parents played in shaping her views of herself and the world. Furthermore, both the theory and the model acknowledged that the trauma which Sylvia experienced due to her father's death was influential in her personality development and in the nature of her interpersonal relationships during this historical period. Table 10.10 indicates, however, that the theory and the model differed in the way in which they explained and described Sylvia's reaction to the trauma and its effect on her development and functioning.

According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, the death of Sylvia's father proved to be a traumatic experience which ignited unresolved feelings of abandonment as a result of previously unresolved crises. It is speculated that Sylvia's threatening home environment during the first historical period as a result of her autocratic, abusive father and her Calvinistic, morally-rigid mother, could have compromised the successful resolution of the trust versus mistrust crisis of Stage 1. Sylvia's sense of mistrust was reinforced when her father died, since she experienced his death as a deliberate act of betrayal. In terms of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's promiscuity and her inability to establish a secure interpersonal relationship based on genuine intimacy and trust, aggravated her sense of isolation and insecurity. When Sylvia met Ted, she found a substitute for the father she had lost. Although Ted's resemblance to her father and her conviction that he was her perfect counterpart, reinforced her dependency on him, it also placed her in a vulnerable position and compromised her attainment of the ego virtue of love.

According to Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, the death of Sylvia's father resulted in complicated grief which added injury to her already injured inner-child parts and reinforced the imprisonment of her exiled parts. It is speculated that the weight of Sylvia's burdened parts and the extent of her polarized internal family system prevented her from interacting from a position of Self-leadership in her interpersonal relationships. The volatile, aggressive nature of Sylvia's relationship with Ted could have aggravated the polarized conflict between her perpetrator parts, thereby making her access to the healing benefits of interpersonal interaction all the more complicated.

10.4.11 Adulthood (1960-1963): Sylvia's Cold Years in England at the Time of Kennedy's Presidency

Summaries of the findings from the two psychological frameworks for this historical period are included in Table 10.11. This period saw Sylvia and Ted's return to England. Despite the move to England, Sylvia's fervent interest in American politics continued and she voiced her support of Kennedy in the presidential elections between Kennedy and Nixon. She also continued to use her confessional writing as a vehicle to articulate personal concerns, as well as concerns about bigger political issues.

Table 10.11

Psychosocial Development and Internal Family System in the Eleventh Historical Period

Psychosocial Development	Internal Family System
<p><i>Stage 6: Intimacy versus Isolation</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During this historical period, Sylvia and Ted moved back to England and garnered numerous publishing successes as writers. • Despite these successes, Sylvia continued to struggle with the fact that her work was not being accepted in America, especially since her British husband had succeeded in publishing some of his work in America. • It is speculated that the non-acceptance of Sylvia's work in America rekindled the symptoms of past unresolved crises, including her mistrust in a society that supported male supremacy, her sense of inferiority as a result of publishing rejections and her identity confusion with regard to her expected role in a male-dominated society. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although Sylvia's surge of creativity after the births of her children could be attributed to the creative benefits of Self-leadership, it is more plausible to attribute it to the workings of her Self-like parts. • Self-like parts do not have the Self's ability to heal and could thus account for Sylvia's incessant inner emotional turmoil, despite her efforts to maintain her mask of stability and perfect amiability. • Sylvia's decision to start farming with bees could also have been prompted by her Self-like parts. • It is speculated that the death of a neighbouring friend affected Sylvia profoundly, not only because it activated exiled feelings related to her own father's death, but also because Ted's infidelity had intensified her exiled feelings of worthlessness and unlovability.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The birth of Sylvia's first child could have provided the opportunity for a sense of intimacy within the context of her nuclear family. • The experience of motherhood had a positive creative effect on Sylvia's writing and could have ignited the sense of ethical responsibility required for the establishment of generative concern. • The period in which Sylvia's second child was born proved to be the most productive in terms of her writing achievements and could have compensated, to a certain extent, for prior, unresolved crises. • The compensation could have provided Sylvia with the opportunity to re-attempt integration of the opposing forces of intimacy and isolation, in the hope of acquiring the ego virtue of love. • It is speculated that Sylvia acquired some clarity regarding her identity in her role as mother and that this enabled her to forge psychologically intimate relationships with others. • Although Sylvia presented a façade of perfect domesticity and amiability during her time at Court Green, beneath her brave face she hid all the symptoms of previously unresolved crises. • Sylvia's excessive dependency on Ted as a result of previously unresolved crises could have compounded her sense of loss after his betrayal and departure from Court Green. • It is speculated that the profound sense of isolation prevented Sylvia's successful navigation of the intimacy versus isolation crisis, thereby preventing her acquisition of the ego strength of love. • Ted's sudden and unexpected departure could have evoked Sylvia's childhood feelings of abandonment after her father's death. • The reinforced feelings of mistrust, shame, self-doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion from past unresolved crises could have magnified Sylvia's sense of isolation, and increased the risk of her committing suicide. • Although depression fuelled Sylvia's sense of isolation and despair, it also fuelled her creativity and resulted in a poetry collection that would become the greatest contribution to American literature. • Sylvia's identification with Virginia Woolf – the writer who displayed the same determination and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The juxtaposition between Sylvia's hysterical reaction on the night that Ted's infidelity was exposed, and her calm, indifferent attitude the following morning, could affirm the speculation that the threat posed by her agonised exiles reinforced the polarization of her internal family system and intensified the contradictory nature of her protective parts. <p>Managers:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>The Striver</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's lifelong striving for achievement continued to manifest during this historical period in the form of her literary publishing successes. • Her tenacity to break through to the American market, despite the fact that she inhabited a society that gave preference to male writers and poets, attests to the persistent nature of her goal-directed Striver. • The boost of confidence which Sylvia received from the publication of her work in America, could have reinforced the motivation of her Striver, prompting her to request a grant to write a novel. 2. <i>The Evaluator</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since Sylvia was aware of the fact that she could offend the people whom the caricatured characters in <i>The Bell Jar</i> represented, it is speculated that her Evaluator (the manager responsible for obtaining social approval) prompted her to publish her novel under a pseudonym. • Sylvia's calm efficiency in protecting her children and sustaining an idyllic family unit is also speculated to have been prompted by the pleasing, perfection-seeking nature of her Evaluator. 3. <i>The Passive Pessimist</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's decision to stop writing poetry after the weak reception of her poetry collection could have been prompted by the apathetic, avoidant behaviour of her Passive Pessimist. • The fact that Sylvia's system was so burdened with feelings of guilt and shame that she even found it difficult to fulfill her duties as a mother in the final days of this historical period, affirms the debilitating power of her Passive Pessimist. 4. <i>The Caretaker and the Entitled One</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ted's literary accomplishments could have aggravated the polarization between Sylvia's selfless caretaking manager and the manager who prompted her to believe that she was also entitled to literary success. • After Ted's departure, Sylvia's resoluteness to provide a stable home for her children despite her severe depression, could be indicative of the polarized struggle between her protectors in their
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<p>frenzy before committing suicide – could be suggestive of her unresolved identity crisis.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Her identity confusion and inner turmoil could be inferred from her poems, which revealed fluctuations between hopeless despair and absolute confidence. • Sylvia's return to London could be seen as the pathological consequence of her unresolved intimacy versus isolation crisis, referred to as distantiation. • Her sense of isolation was exacerbated by the practical frustrations of her new home, and by the extreme cold which kept Sylvia and her children confined to their apartment. • Sylvia's belief that her failed marriage was a reflection of her failure as a woman could have emanated from previously unresolved crises which prompted feelings of shame. • It is speculated that the reaffirmation of Sylvia's sense of mistrust, shame, doubt, guilt, inferiority and identity confusion propelled her to the zenith of isolation, and ultimately led her to committing suicide. 	<p>efforts to extinguish the pain that emanated from exiled feelings of abandonment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's habitual practice of domestic efficiency is speculated to have been prompted by her Caretaker. • On the other hand, her determination to succeed professionally, as revealed by the plethora of poems that she wrote after Ted's departure, is speculated to have been prompted by her Entitled One. <p>5. <i>The Worrier or Sentry</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sylvia's poem, <i>Daddy</i>, reveals her preoccupation with world-changing events like World War II, and could provide evidence of the role of her Worrier. • Although Sylvia idolised her father and longed to be reunited with him, she also admitted to wanting "to kill" him, the man she had "always been scared of" (Hughes, 2008, pp. 222-223). • The juxtaposition affirms the speculation that Sylvia's parts were driven to their extremities by the highly polarized nature of her internal family system. <p>Firefighters:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The most blatant manifestation of Sylvia's highly polarized system and the fact that her protectors could no longer keep her exiles contained, can be found in the final months of her life. • The extreme measures implemented by Sylvia's firefighters in these final months, attest to the severity of the crisis and the inability of her system to manage it. • Sylvia's preoccupation with black magic intensified after the break-up of her marriage, and could be indicative of the desperation of her firefighters. • Her firefighters also prompted her to escape to the imaginary world of her literary works through dissociation. • The fact that Sylvia made a bonfire on three different occasions to burn (a) the original manuscript of her sequel to <i>The Bell Jar</i>; (b) her mother's letters, and (c) Ted's belongings and writings, could be indicative of the extent of her exiles' pain and the fact that this pain could no longer be extinguished by her firefighters. • The extent of Sylvia's inner turmoil and the desperation of her firefighters to keep her pain contained, also manifested in (a) her decision to start smoking; (b) her addiction to sleeping pills; (c) the somatic expression of her suicide parts in the form of influenza and high temperatures. • Sylvia's fluctuating emotions, her intermittent high temperatures, her exhaustion from waking at four in the morning to write poetry, and the unrelenting cold weather, could have contributed
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	<p>to Sylvia's despair, and made her feel lonelier and more isolated than she had ever felt before.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is speculated that in this state of physical and mental depletion, Sylvia's firefighters had little energy to protect her system from the danger posed by her volatile exiles. • The feeling of hopelessness experienced by Sylvia's exiles is speculated to have been so extreme, that it catalysed her suicide.
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Important comparisons can be drawn from Table 10.11. Both perspectives highlighted Sylvia's difficulty with regard to her expected role in a male-dominated society. From the perspective of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development, the fact that her work was not initially accepted in the United States of America, whilst Ted's work was accepted, could have reaffirmed her mistrust in a society that supported male supremacy. The fact that this society encouraged women to develop academically, but simultaneously expected them to submit themselves to the will of their husbands, could have fuelled Sylvia's sense of inferiority and aggravated her identity confusion. When examined through the lens of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model, Sylvia's sense of inferiority as a result of publishing rejections in a male-dominated society, triggered exiled feelings of shame and worthlessness. This resulted in a highly polarized struggle between her caretaking role of subservient wife, and her self-serving role of ambitious poetess.

Both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model recognised that the conflict generated by a hypocritical society that supported male supremacy, could hinder optimal development and complicate the fulfillment of Sylvia's role as wife, mother and successful poetess. It is also evident from Table 10.11 that both perspectives acknowledged Sylvia's dependency on Ted and both recognised the destructive effect of his infidelity on her well-being. According to Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Ted's infidelity would have aggravated Sylvia's already-fragile sense of mistrust, thereby thwarting her attempts at successful navigation of the intimacy versus isolation crisis. This would have prevented the development of the ego quality of love. In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, Ted's infidelity would have wounded Sylvia's already-burdened inner-child parts, thereby aggravating feelings of unlovability, shame and guilt and preventing access to the healing benefits of Self-leadership.

Lastly, Table 10.11 indicates that both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model recognised that Sylvia saw suicide as her only escape from the feelings of hopelessness and despair that haunted her. According to Erikson's (1950, 1964,

1968, 1974, 1980) theory, Sylvia's profound sense of isolation put her at a higher risk of committing suicide because it reiterated previously unresolved crises and reinforced her feelings of self-hatred, failure, shame, inferiority, confusion and isolation. In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, Sylvia's feelings of worthlessness, unlovability, inferiority, shame and guilt burdened her system to such an extent, that they reinforced the conflict between the despair of an imperfect life and the hope of escape promised by death. The anxiety and turmoil generated by this conflict, reinforced the polarization of Sylvia's internal family system to such an extent, that it drove her to the extreme recourse of suicide.

10.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided an integrated discussion pertaining to the psychosocial development and internal family system composition of Sylvia Plath's life. The two psychological frameworks were compared in terms of pertinent similarities and differences. Thereafter, a comparative summary was presented of Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development and internal family system composition for each stage of her life, within the context of specific historical periods. The final chapter follows and presents the conclusions and limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter concludes the study by reviewing the research aim and furnishing a brief summary of the research findings. The study's value as well as its limitations are outlined, and recommendations for future research are proffered. The chapter ends with the researcher's reflections on her journey of exploration through this study of Sylvia Plath's life.

11.2 The Research Aim Reviewed

The aim of the study was to conduct a longitudinal study, so as to provide a psychologically-grounded exploration and description of a single life, by applying psychological frameworks to biographical and historical data. The study's primary aim was to explore and describe Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development and the structure of her internal family system throughout her life and against the backdrop of her socio-historical context. Due to the exploratory-descriptive nature of this study, the objective can be said to fall within the inductive research approach. In accordance with this approach, the researcher conceptualised Sylvia Plath's life in terms of specific psychological concepts based on Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems (IFS) model.

The descriptive-dialogic nature of the deductive approach taken to this study allowed for the informal assessment of the two psychological frameworks applied to Plath's life, and constituted the secondary objective of the study.

11.3 Summary of Research Findings

To begin with, Sylvia Plath's life was explored and described from the perspective of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development. When the biographical material on her life was examined and selected for interpretation, it became apparent that each stage of Sylvia's life was characterised by maldevelopment and the emergence of malignant and maladaptive tendencies, which made the resolution of subsequent psychosocial conflicts all the more complicated. Based on unsuccessful resolution of the psychosocial stages of development proposed by Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980), the researcher arrived at the conclusion that Sylvia did not acquire the ego virtues of hope,

willpower, purpose, competence, fidelity and love. Although Sylvia's literary legacy is suggestive of her industriousness and competence as a writer, the analysis of biographical data indicated that this was undermined by her personal feelings of insecurity and inferiority, which impeded the attainment of ego virtues as outlined by Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1980). According to Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1969, 1999) theory, the developmental process refers not only to the succession of stages, but also to the interrelatedness of growing parts which exist in some form before their decisive and critical time, and which re-emerge later in an individual's developmental cycle. Although Sylvia committed suicide long before the expected emergence of Erikson's seventh stage of psychosocial development (generativity versus stagnation), her frenzied urgency to produce as much poetry as she could in the final months of her life, could be seen as evidence of her attempt at generativity.

The Internal Family Systems (IFS) model of Schwartz (1995, 2001) constituted the second psychological framework that was applied to Sylvia Plath's life in this study. When the biographical material on Plath's life was examined and selected for interpretation according to Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, it became apparent that each stage of her life was characterised by parts-led functioning as a result of transferred burdens, imperfect care-taking, existential anxiety and traumatic emotional experiences. This resulted in polarization of her different parts, which blocked the healing energy of her Self and aggravated feelings of worthlessness, shame and guilt. Biographical material on all the stages of Sylvia's life was sufficient enough to allow the researcher to make inferences of unsuccessful integration of opposing parts. Based on the unsuccessful integration of opposing parts, the researcher concluded that Sylvia failed to achieve the Self-differentiation required for Self-leadership as proposed by Schwartz (1995, 2001). This failure could explain her inability to fully connect with other people and her ever-increasing sense of fragmentation.

The application of both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model to the biographical material on Sylvia Plath's life, highlighted the important role played by her socio-historical context and its impact on her development and her intrapsychic processes. Both frameworks recognised that the conflict generated by a hypocritical society that supported male supremacy, hindered Sylvia's optimal development and complicated the fulfilment of her role as wife, mother and successful poetess.

11.4 The Value of the Study

The study's most significant value lies in the fact that it provided a psychological exploration and description of an imminent figure of literary acclaim in feminist history. None

of the works which currently exist on Sylvia Plath provided an in-depth psychological perspective on her life, and this study's value lies in the fact that it addresses the void in the existing body of information on this pioneer of the feminist movement. In light of South Africa's efforts to promote female empowerment in this post-apartheid era (Akala & Divala, 2016; Magubane, 2003) the study of significant and exceptional women who shaped history, whether in South Africa or abroad, could be of great value in our current society, which seeks to empower women, but simultaneously expects them to occupy multiple roles. Although Plath's life was short-lived, the plethora of poems, short stories, letters and journal entries which were published after her death, attest to the fact that she succeeded in leaving a legacy, despite the despair and trauma which characterised her life. Steinem (Alexander, 1999) described Sylvia as being an early prophet who used her suffering to describe societal problems. She thus succeeded in crystallising not only the traumas of her generation, but also various literary works as a response to the ideology of her age (Kumlu, 2011). Although Plath's life stages were characterised by unsuccessful resolution of crises, which would lead one to assume that it would have been impossible for her to acquire generativity and the ego virtue of care had she reached Erikson's seventh stage, the success which she garnered as a writer and the wealth of literature which she produced in such a short period of time, attest to the positive value which Erikson's theory holds for ingenious and creative artists who manage to achieve greatness despite developmental mistakes or inadequacies. This study thus contributed to the current body of knowledge on imminent individuals who achieve greatness despite personal and contextual setbacks.

Sylvia's father has been described as "the central obsession from the beginning to the end of her life", whilst his death has been described as the traumatic wound from which Sylvia never recovered (Butscher, 2003, p. 3). The application of the Internal Family Systems model to the life of Sylvia Plath not only highlighted the important role played by all parts both in internal and external family systems, but also emphasised the need for the effective processing of traumatic and/or painful life experiences.

According to Elms (1994), psychologists need to assess the personal value of hypotheses by applying these hypotheses to a single life. The contextual and demographic variables unique to Plath's life, ensured the establishment of real-world scenarios against which the study's psychological frameworks could be assessed. Although it was not an explicit objective of this research project, the exploration of Sylvia Plath's life created the opportunity for the informal assessment of the study's psychological frameworks, by testing the relevance and applicability

of (a) psychosocial development and (b) the structure of internal family systems, to a single life.

The fact that two psychological frameworks were applied to interpret aspects of Sylvia Plath's life also proved to be of great value, since it allowed the researcher to explore a more extensive field of biographical material than would have been the case had only one psychological framework been used. In addition, the application of multiple psychological frameworks illuminated some of the intricacies of the single life and prevented an oversimplification of the subject's life story.

Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) psychosocial theory of development proved to be of great value in this psychobiographical study in that it emphasised the intricate process of Plath's adaptation and growth, and placed the periods of her life into a developmental context. Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model proved to be of great value in that it allowed for a non-pathologising approach to Sylvia Plath's life. The framework allowed for the categorisation of Plath's biographical material in terms of multiple parts and a Self, within the context of her larger political and cultural environment. The integration of the study's two psychological frameworks also proved to be valuable. Their shared eugraphic and holistic focus (see section 10.3) allowed for a dynamic description of Plath's development and a comprehensive exploration of her internal family system. The integration of the study's frameworks thus allowed for a description of Plath's positive attributes, as well as insight into the dynamics of some of her strengths.

The integrative, holistic approach of the study's psychological frameworks also allowed for an extensive exploration and description of different constructs and dimensions, and ensured that Plath's life was explored against the backdrop of her socio-historical context, since both psychological frameworks highlighted the impact of one's political, cultural and historical environment on one's development and intrapsychic processes. Both Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory and Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model recognised that the conflict generated by a hypocritical society that supported male supremacy, could hinder optimal development and complicate the fulfilment of Sylvia's role as wife, mother and successful poetess.

The difference between the two psychological frameworks in terms of a developmental, lifespan approach emphasised the importance of considering alternative explanations with regard to different aspects of a researched life. For example, although both frameworks highlighted the fact that Plath used her imagination to produce writing that transported her to a fantasy world, they differed in terms of the way in which they interpreted the dynamic

interplay between Plath's imagination and her creative expression. In terms of Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, writing constituted a serious form of play for Plath during childhood, which Erikson considered imperative for learning and successful resolution of the third psychosocial crisis, since play is a manifestation of initiative. In terms of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model, however, Plath's tendency of escaping to a fantasy world was interpreted as a sign of a highly polarized system in which her firefighters resorted to methods of escape which could help her to dissociate from the pain of her exiled, wounded child parts (see section 10.4.3).

Apart from contributing to the body of knowledge on Sylvia Plath and to the frameworks of psychosocial development and internal family systems, this study also added to educational objectives in the field of psychobiography. The use of specific methodological strategies proved to be particularly valuable in the extraction and analysis of data in this study. The researcher made use of Alexander's (1988, 1990) nine indicators of psychological saliency (see section 7.6.1.1) and Schultz's (2003, 2005) model of prototypical scenes (see section 7.6.2), to facilitate the organisation and prioritisation of biographical data. In order to manage the proliferation of data available on Sylvia Plath's life, the researcher posed specific questions to the data, which allowed for the extraction of units of analysis relevant to the research objectives of the study (see section 7.6.1.2). The researcher made use of two conceptual matrices (Yin, 2003, 2009) to facilitate the analysis of data in psychobiographical research as proposed by Fouché (1999). This ensured the systematic categorisation and consistent analysis of biographical data collected on Sylvia Plath's life, according to the stages of her psychosocial development and the constructs of her internal family system, and in terms of the socio-historical contexts which impacted on her life.

11.5 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

The criticism that Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development is dominated by a male Eurocentric perspective which emphasises the achievement of individuality and autonomy (Roazen, 1976; Wastell, 1996), could hold true in this psychobiography, and was discussed in section 8.4. Although this criticism could be justified when one considers that Sylvia resented the fact that a woman's intellectual, emotional and physical ambitions were at odds with societal expectations (Alexander, 1999; Kirk, 2009; Plath, 2000), the researcher is of the opinion that Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory validates the important role played by one's socio-historical context in shaping human development. Future research may benefit from explaining and describing Sylvia Plath's

lifespan development from alternative perspectives – which address gender-related criticisms. This will provide an important foundation for a constructive feminist stance from which research can be expanded, so that the experiences of women can be better understood (Horst, 1995). With regard to the specific age-range delineation applied in this study, although it proved useful in operationalising Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory, it also resulted in a more rigidly-applied approach than that suggested by Erikson. The rigidity regarding age-range specifications was, however, mitigated through the use of Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model, since the constructs delineated in the Internal Family Systems model are not restricted to specific, age-bound developmental stages. Although Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model has been criticised for including concepts which are non-specific and vague, in the study of Sylvia Plath's life, this criticism proved to be a strength rather than a limitation, since it ensured that the analysis of Plath's life was not restricted by concepts which are age or culture-specific.

In light of the fact that the National Registry of evidence Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) has acknowledged the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model as an evidence-based treatment for successfully treating psychological and physical health issues (Matheson, 2015), future research may benefit from including IFS in the array of psychological frameworks from which to conduct psychobiographical studies.

Another criticism against Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) theory of psychosocial development is that the development of adults is described in only three stages. Research has indicated that psychosocial crises are linked to psychological, physical and social changes during adulthood (Holz, 2014; Peck, 1968). Consequently, Newman and Newman (2012) suggested that the number of adulthood stages be increased to provide a more accurate representation of this lengthy phase of development. Since Sylvia Plath only reached the age of 30, the researcher was limited to exploring only six of Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development. This limitation was, however, mitigated by Erikson's principle of *Life in Time* (Erikson et al., 1986). According to this principle, one is never struggling only with those tensions that are focal at a specific time, but also with those tensions that are to become focal in future. The principle of *Life in Time* thus enabled the researcher to explore Sylvia Plath's development on a continuum of past and future, thereby allowing for a conceptual and operational understanding of the construct of generativity as it manifested in Plath's developmental trajectory.

In Chapter 6, the potential limitations regarding the choice of psychobiographical subject for this study were discussed. These included subjectivity and researcher bias, the elitist nature

of the psychobiographical approach and the possible impact of cross-cultural, trans-historical differences between the researcher and the subject selected for this study. Since the study's major limitations, as well as the researcher's efforts to mitigate their impact on the study have been presented in Chapter 6, the researcher concludes the shortcomings of this study by reviewing Ponterotto's (2015) suggestions for a more scientifically-orientated approach to psychobiography. These suggestions include: (a) the application of more empirically validated and testable psychology theories; (b) the utilisation of more rigorous historiographic research approaches that include quantitative research methods; and (c) consideration of ethical guidelines when planning, executing and reporting psychobiographical studies (Ponterotto, 2015).

Furthermore, the researcher recognises Anderson's (1981) suggestions by emphasising that the psychological explanations and interpretations presented in this study do not replace other explanations and interpretations (including political, economic and historical), but rather add to them. The researcher also emphasises that the explanations and interpretations presented in this study are speculative and not conclusive. The findings of this psychobiography thus neither represent a decisive, all-encompassing answer to Sylvia Plath's psychosocial development and the structure of her internal family system, nor do they replace explanations and interpretations of her life from other disciplines.

This psychobiography affirms the researcher's conviction that an examination of the lives of extraordinary women who used their creative genius to address socio-historical issues, continues to be a significant endeavour for future psychobiographical researchers. The researcher is of the opinion that future researchers may find the methodological strategies applied in this study, useful in addressing the aforementioned research aim. The application of alternative models and theories to examine the life of Sylvia Plath, could provide insightful and valuable interpretations and descriptions which fall beyond the scope of this study, but which are strongly recommended for future research.

Erikson's (1950, 1964, 1968, 1974, 1980) stage-based, psychosocial theory of development has proven to be befitting for psychobiographical research studies and is thus recommended for future use. Specific recommendations regarding the use of the psychosocial theory include: (a) the application of alternative psychological theories, to mitigate the gender-related criticism against Erikson's theory; (b) awareness of the fact that rigid age-range specifications, although useful in establishing a framework from which to organise and contextualise biographical data, go against Erikson's "gentle and implicit" (Roberts & Newton, 1987, p. 154) approach to the unfolding of the life cycle, and could pose challenges for the psychobiographical researcher;

and (c) the utilisation of the ninth stage of psychosocial development, as expounded by Joan Erikson (Erikson & Erikson, 1997), could help to shape future researchers' conceptual and operational understanding of constructs such as gerotranscendental well-being, quality of life and life satisfaction.

Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model also proved to be valuable as a psychological framework within the psychobiographical context and is recommended for future research. Although it has been criticised for its vague, non-specific constructs, it allows for a comprehensive framework from which to analyse a single life, whilst acknowledging the impact of larger political and cultural issues on an individual's intrapsychic processes. Furthermore, it allows for a more hopeful, optimistic interpretation of an individual life, thereby promoting a more holistic and eugraphic approach to psychobiography. Although Schwartz's (1995, 2001) model is not a feminist theory per se, its focus on subpersonalities, such as the Caretaker and the Entitled One, allowed the researcher to illustrate Plath's feminist voice, since the model proposed by Schwartz (1995, 2001) addresses the very concepts exemplified in Plath's outline of the "female divided self's dilemma" (Kriel, 2011, p. 81). The researcher is of the opinion that the study could have benefitted from the addition of a third psychological framework, namely a feminist theory. Since this was beyond the scope of this study, the researcher's proposal for future research is that a feminist theory be applied together with Schwartz's (1995, 2001) Internal Family Systems model to examine the life of Sylvia Plath, as this could provide insightful and valuable descriptions and interpretations.

11.6 Final Reflections on the Researcher's Personal Journey

The motivation to embark on this psychobiographical exploration of Sylvia Plath, emerged from the researcher's personal interest in English feminist literature. As a senior English teacher, the researcher has taught different aspects of English literature, including the impact of the feminist movement on different genres of literature. Over the years of teaching English literature, the researcher has developed a particular fascination not only with the poetry of Sylvia Plath, but also with the impact which her works had on the feminist movement. Although the researcher initially had limited knowledge of Plath's personal life, the qualitative, in-depth nature of the psychobiographical approach provided the opportunity to explore and understand her life from a psychological vantage point. In light of the fact that the researcher is also a Counselling Psychologist, this study provided the added opportunity for the researcher to merge her two occupational disciplines, resulting in a deeper appreciation and understanding of both literature and psychology.

The researcher was also intrigued by the historical period in which the subject lived and by the pervasive socio-historical influence which the period had on her development, both as woman and as writer. This prompted the researcher to choose psychological frameworks which give prime importance to the role of socio-historical contexts in shaping an individual's life story. The fact that the subject inhabited a different historical period compared to that in which this psychobiographical study was conducted, necessitated an extensive literature study regarding the political, social, historical and cultural milieu in which Plath lived. This not only ensured sensitivity to the contextual considerations applicable to this study, it also highlighted significant differences and similarities between the researcher and subject, which needed to be addressed in order to circumvent the dangers of subjectivity and researcher bias. Although the researcher and the subject differed in terms of historical life period, country of origin, home language, cultural group and religious beliefs, they shared a family history of emigration and a passionate interest in literature. In the same way that Plath's grandparents and parents had emigrated from Europe to establish a better life in the United States of America; so too the researcher's grandparents and parents emigrated from Italy in the hope of finding a better life in South Africa. Both the researcher's grandparents were prisoners of war during the Second World War and they shared many of their war-time stories with the researcher whilst she was growing up. Consequently, the researcher has always been fascinated by stories of people who lived in that period of history.

As immigrants in a foreign country after World War II, many of the experiences of the researcher's grandparents and parents transformed into narratives of courage, optimism and hope. However, some of the experiences also told narratives of discrimination and prejudice. Apart from the language barrier owing to the discrepancy between Italian and Afrikaans, the researcher's grandparents and parents sometimes felt ostracised and judged owing to their foreign nationality, much like Plath's family had felt owing to anti-German sentiment in America after World War II. The researcher found it extremely valuable and beneficial to discuss her reactions to the subject and her historical background with her promoter. Apart from the fact that a postgraduate study of this nature has a profound impact on one's life in terms of time, effort and resources, the researcher found it to be insightful and meaningful both on a personal and a professional level. Not only did the researcher enjoy the in-depth exploration of Sylvia Plath's life and works, she also found the holistic and eugraphic exploration of the life of such a creative and talented woman enriching. Since the researcher teaches and counsels adolescent girls, many of whom struggle to realise their full creative potential as a result of familial, socio-cultural and psychological obstacles, the researcher

experienced this study as a life-changing, personal endeavour which enhanced both her teaching practice and her work as a Counselling Psychologist.

11.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter concluded the psychobiographical study of the life of Sylvia Plath. The research aim was reviewed and a summary of the research findings was presented. The value of the study was discussed, after which the researcher outlined the limitations of the study and provided recommendations for future research. The researcher concluded the chapter by offering her final reflections regarding her personal journey as psychobiographer of Sylvia Plath's life story. The researcher is of the opinion that there is still much which can be discovered from the life (and works) of Sylvia Plath, and therefore ends with the words of Sylvia Plath's daughter, Frieda Hughes, who wrote in the postscript of the restored *Ariel* edition (Plath, 2004):

Over the years the picture that I have built up of my mother is of a woman with good and bad parts; huge talent and emotional difficulties, huge love and an aptitude for jealousy – just like many of us. We are all a balance of the parts that make us, and it is up to us which of those parts we allow most emphasis. My mother fought with the negative parts of her makeup, and, even though she lost her battle in the end, she used the material of it in her poetry. (pp. 6-7)

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