

**THE PSYCHOFORTOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES OF  
MASTER'S DEGREE STUDENTS IN PROFESSIONAL  
PSYCHOLOGY PROGRAMMES: AN  
INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

by

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BLOEMFONTEIN**

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November 2011

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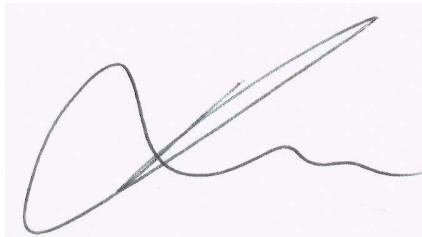
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# PROOF OF LANGUAGE EDITING

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Please contact me should there be any queries.

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative study was to explore and describe the psychofortigenic experiences of master's degree students in professional psychology programmes in South Africa. Since most research on the topic of master's students in psychology is conducted from a pathogenic paradigm, this study aimed to describe these students' experiences from a positive psychology approach. Eight participants were purposively selected from four universities. The participants engaged in reflective writings and three semi-structured interviews over a one-year span. Four rich cases were identified and data were analyzed according to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The phenomenological approach of this study was useful in exploring the lived worlds of the participants. Themes were conceptualized and operationalized within the structure of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989), general positive psychology literature, as well as literature based on the development and dynamics of master's students in professional psychology training. Thorough interpretation of the findings yielded eight themes of significance across the cases, which were all indicative of enhanced levels of psychological well-being as an outcome of the participants' experiences. The first theme refers to specific goals and high motivation levels with regard to becoming a psychologist, which created a strong sense of meaning and contributed to personal growth in the students. Self-reflection as a trigger for self-awareness was identified and found to be a powerful element that can contribute to personal growth and autonomy in these students' journeys. The findings further indicated that personal growth is a positive outcome of the experience. Intrapersonal dynamics also aided participants towards greater self-acceptance. The study showed that participants identified interpersonal growth as a positive outcome of the experience and that positive relationships with others were found to be a useful coping mechanism throughout the year; thus, contributing to the psychological well-being domain of environmental mastery. Supervision practices positively influenced the psychological well-being domain of autonomy and were also proven to contribute towards the participants' personal growth. Furthermore, spiritual deepening resulted from the experience of being a master's student in professional psychology and spirituality was employed as an effective coping mechanism. The group dynamics of the master's class and the relationships with class colleagues were found to be crucial factors that positively contributed to the participants' psychological well-being, specifically within the domain of autonomy and positive interpersonal relationships. Lastly, the findings indicated that the participants identified



and employed individual coping strategies throughout their journey, which contributed to the domain of environmental mastery. Overall, the important finding was that, while the experience of becoming a psychologist is known to be a long and difficult journey, it can also be rewarding and holds the potential to enhance psychological well-being. The study concluded with a discussion of the implications, limitations and strengths of the study as well as recommendations for future research.

*Key words: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis; master's students; phenomenology; positive psychology; professional training in psychology; psychological well-being.*

## OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie kwalitatiewe studie was om die psigofortologiese ervarings van meestersgraadstudente in professionele sielkundeprogramme in Suid-Afrika te verken en te beskryf. Aangesien die meeste van die navorsing oor die onderwerp van meestersgraadstudente in sielkunde vanuit 'n patologiese paradigma gedoen word, poog hierdie studie om die studente se ervarings vanuit 'n positiewe sielkunde benadering te beskryf. Agt deelnemers van vier universiteite is deur middel van 'n doelgerigte steekproef gekies. Die deelnemers het reflektiewe skryfwerk gedoen, asook drie semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude oor 'n tydperk van een jaar ondergaan. Vier ryk gevalle is geïdentifiseer en die data is deur middel van Interpretatiewe Fenomenologiese Analise geanaliseer. Die fenomenologiese benadering in hierdie studie het nuttig geblyk om die leefwêreld van die deelnemers te ondersoek. Temas is gekontekstualiseer en geoperasionaliseer binne die struktuur van psigologiese welstand (Ryff, 1989), literatuur oor positiewe sielkunde, asook literatuur gebaseer op die ontwikkeling en dinamika van meestersgraadstudente in professionele opleiding in sielkunde. Deeglike interpretasie van die bevindinge het agt beduidende temas tussen die gevalle gelewer, wat almal op hoër vlakke van psigologiese welsyn as 'n uitkoms van die deelnemers se ervarings gedui het. Die eerste tema verwys na die spesifieke doelwitte en hoë motiveringsvlakke wat betrokke is in die proses om 'n sielkundige te word – hierdie twee aspekte skep 'n sterk sin van betekenis en dra by tot persoonlike groei. Verder is selfrefleksie nie net as sneller vir selfinsig geïdentifiseer nie, maar ook as 'n kragtige element wat tot persoonlike groei en outonomie in die studente se reis kan bydra. Die bevindinge het verder aangedui dat persoonlike groei 'n positiewe uitkoms van al die deelnemers se ervarings was. Intrapersoonlike dinamika het ook die deelnemers tot groter selfaanvaarding bygestaan. Die studie het getoon dat die studente interpersoonlike groei as 'n positiewe uitkoms van die ervaring geïdentifiseer het en dat positiewe verhoudings met ander as 'n nuttige hanteringsvaardigheid regdeur die jaar gebruik is en dus tot die psigologiese welstandsdomein van omgewingsbemeestering bygedra het. Supervisiepraktyke het 'n positiewe invloed op die psigologiese welstandsdomein van outonomie gehad en het ook tot die studente se persoonlike groei bygedra. Verder het spirituele verdieping gespruit uit die meestersgraadstudente se ervaring van hulle opleiding in professionele sielkunde, en spiritualiteit

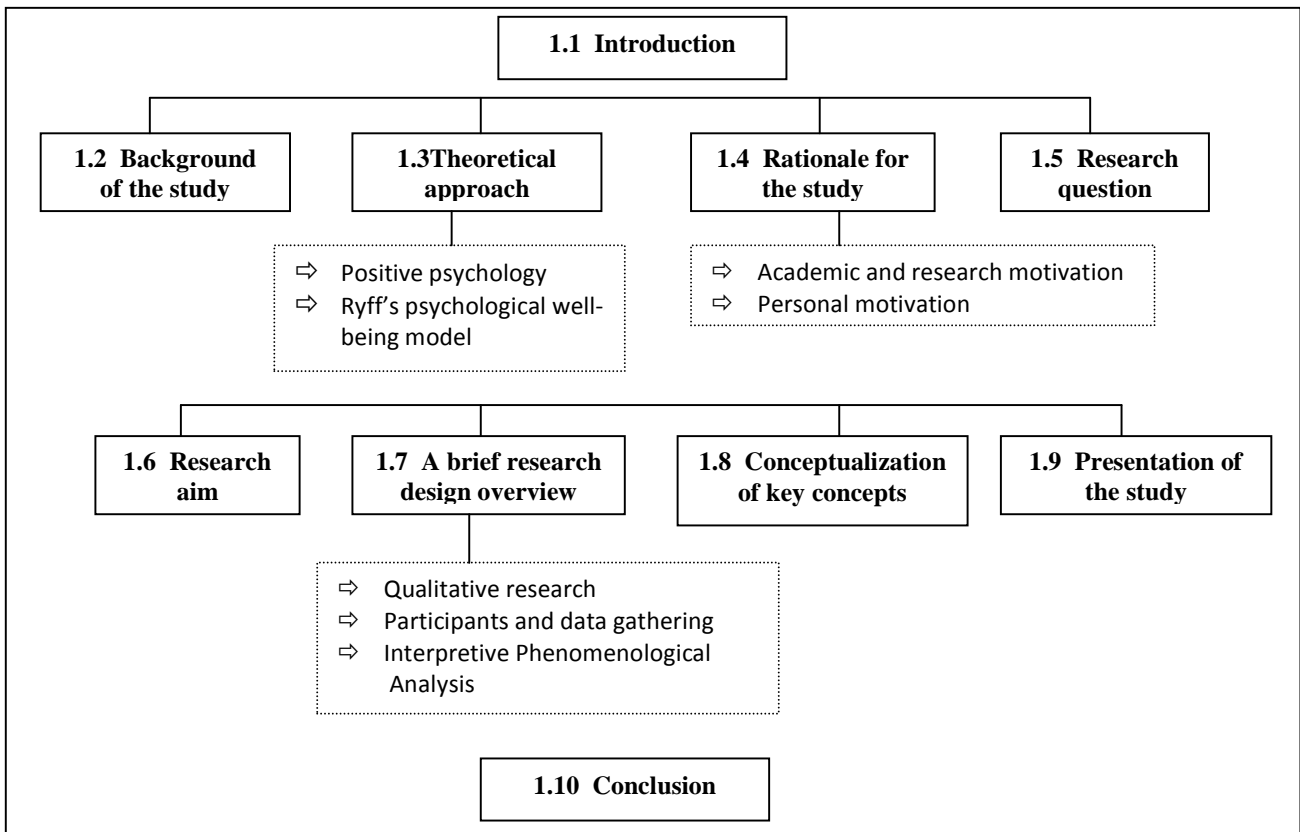
is as effektiewe hanteringsmeganisme ingespan. Die groepdinamika van die meestersgraadklas en die verhoudings met klaskollegas het as belangrike faktore geblyk wat positief tot die deelnemers se psigologiese welstand bygedra het, spesifiek in die domein van outonomie en positiewe interpersoonlike verhoudings. Laastens het die bevindinge aangedui dat die deelnemers individuele praktiese hanteringstrategieë geïdentifiseer en toegepas het, wat tot die domein van omgewingsbemeestering bygedra het. Oor die algemeen was die belangrikste bevinding dat, alhoewel die ervaring van die proses om 'n sielkundige te word as 'n lang en moeilike reis bekend staan, dit ook lonend kan wees en die potensiaal het om psigologiese welstand te verhoog. Die studie sluit af met 'n bespreking van die implikasies, beperkings en sterk punte van die studie, asook aanbevelings vir toekomstige navorsing.

*Sleuteltermes: Interpretatiewe Fenomenologiese Analise; fenomenologie; meestersgraadstudente; positiewe sielkunde;; professionele opleiding in sielkunde; psigologiese welsyn.*

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Figure 1. Visual display of the outline of Chapter 1.



### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

As indicated in Figure 1, this chapter focuses primarily on the context in which the research was conducted and serves as an introduction to the study. The general aim and rationale of this research are addressed to substantiate the significance of the current study. To contextualize the study, its paradigm and theoretical framework are discussed briefly. This chapter further aims to briefly orientate the reader with regard to the research design employed in this research. These practices are only discussed briefly, as detailed descriptions follow in the subsequent chapters. Key concepts are clarified and an outline of the various chapters is presented in order to optimize the 'reader friendliness' of the document.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

A fundamental goal of psychological training is to produce competent psychologists who are able to deliver high-quality, humanistic care to clients (Pillay, 2003). To register as a qualified psychologist in South Africa, a limited number of selected students undergo master's training in a professional psychology programme, offered at 15 universities across South Africa (HPCSA, 2011).

The personal developmental journey towards becoming a psychologist, with specific focus on the master's year, is known to be challenging and is characterized by many hardships (Elman & Forrest, 2007; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006; Kottler & Swartz, 2004; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Rosenberg, Getzelman, Arcinue, & Oren, 2005). According to a 2004 South African study by Kottler and Swartz, the journey of becoming a psychologist has been associated with an initiation process, linking it to experiences of separation and confusion. Holzman, Searight and Hughes (1996) investigated the reasons for postgraduate psychology students' entering psychotherapy and found that they often seek assistance for unique stressors associated with their training or for emotional issues that arise once they begin to practice psychotherapy. In another study White and Franzoni (1990) reported a significantly high number of psychology students suffering from psychological disturbance, related to a number of variables, after having started their training programmes. These variables include the fact that a student's psychological issues may be uncovered by learning to practice psychotherapy, by exposure to methods of self-analysis, and by balancing student roles with professional roles, a heavy workload including a compulsory mini-dissertation<sup>1</sup>, and family responsibilities, just to mention a few (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Dearing, Maddux, & Tangney, 2005; Holzman, et al., 1996; Howard, Inman, & Altman, 2006; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007; Stratton, Kellaway, & Rottini, 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Truell, 2001).

Empirical evidence suggests that these pressures experienced by master's students in professional psychology training can have a negative impact on their professional development

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<sup>1</sup> The term "treatise" is also used at some institutions.

(Furr & Carroll, 2003; Radeke & Mahoney, 2000). Although much research has focused on the development of psychologists, most studies have focused on the above-mentioned negative effects of psychology training (Lee, Eppler, Kendal, & Latty, 2001).

However, it is important to know the degree of satisfaction, happiness and other characteristics of the good life that students experience during this journey. As an investigation of the experiences of psychology students would illuminate not only their struggles, but also their successes, the researcher assumed that professional training in psychology, specifically on master's level, should surely also benefit students' psychological well-being. Previous international studies indicated that master's students improve and develop across a diverse set of competencies such as better coping strategies (Hill, Sullivan, Knox, & Schlosser, 2007), higher levels of autonomy (Tryon, 2000), more self-reflection practices (Coster & Schwebel, 1997), the maintenance of healthy relationships (Lee, et al., 2001) and personal fulfilment (Furr & Carroll, 2003). Another more positive research approach to this journey should be considered because positive elements foster willingness and motivation to undertake the necessary activities towards personal well-being and to persevere through the many and widely discussed difficulties (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

### **1.3 THEORETICAL APPROACH**

#### **1.3.1 Positive psychology**

This study aimed to explore and describe the psychofortigenic experiences of master's students in professional psychology programmes. It has been highlighted that most studies that centred on this master's journey and its related aspects, have been designed from a pathological approach, focusing on the hardships, difficulties and obstacles relevant to the journey (Elman & Forrest, 2007; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006; Kottler & Swartz, 2004; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Rosenberg et al., 2005; Skovholt, 2005). A strength-based paradigm, however, allows both the researcher and the participants to understand their journey through the lens of personal growth, professional development, coping strategies and attempts to make sense of the related difficulties.

The current study was therefore designed from a fortigenic perspective, which is different from the pathogenic orientation, and is a presentation of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) formulation of the subdiscipline named positive psychology. Positive psychology has its origin in earlier theories of psychology such as (a) the self-actualization theory of Maslow (1954); (b) the conceptualization of the fully functioning person by Rogers (1961); and the positive mental health theory of Jahoda (1958), although it has not been formalized as a separate subdiscipline by any of these authors. It was only in the late 1990s that attempts were made to define and conceptualize the construct of positive psychology. Seligman (1998) actively put forward his belief that all individuals possess strength and virtue, which should be emphasized, researched and described within a subdomain distinct from general psychology. Positive psychology thus represents "a movement away from psychological problems, psychopathology, weaknesses and deficits in human nature towards a focus on positive behaviour, human strengths, virtues and what makes life worth living" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 13). Over the last 15 years positive psychology has been established as a strong subdiscipline of psychology and research activities became vibrant, both nationally and internationally (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007). Locally, the term *psychofortology* has been coined by Wissing and Van Eeden (1997) and refers more specifically to the origin, nature, manifestation and enhancement of psychological well-being.

Well-being is a main focal point within the subdiscipline of positive psychology and is represented by two schools of thought, namely hedonia and eudaimonia (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Strümpfer, 1995). Hedonia claims that happiness and well-being are caused by the experience of pleasure and the avoidance of negative affect. The hedonic viewpoint focuses on subjective well-being which is often described as happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). The current study, however, incorporated a eudaimonic stance, which implies that the emphasis leans towards human potential, optimal functioning and sustainable levels of well-being. Psychological well-being is rooted within a eudaimonic approach of well-being and serves as the theoretical model for this study.

### **1.3.2 Theoretical model: Psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989)**

The theoretical model that was employed in this study forms a part of the first pillar of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and aims to conceptualize psychological well-being. Many definitions and models are found in the literature, all highlighting different aspects of the psychological well-being construct. However, Ryff (1989) conceptualized psychological well-being as “an issue of engagement in living” (p. 2) expressed in (a) purposeful living; (b) meaningful connections with others; and (c) self-regard and mastery. The choice for using Ryff’s (1989) model is substantiated on the ground that it has a thorough theoretical basis as well as empirical evidence supporting the practical operationalization of the model (Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

Ryff (1989) critiqued the subjective well-being formulation and argued that well-being should be conceptualized from a eudaimonic viewpoint. Ryff (1989) studied positive functioning from subfields of psychology such as Erikson’s (1959) psychosocial stages, Buhler’s (1935) basic life tendencies, Neugarten’s (1973) personality changes, Maslow’s (1968) concept of self-actualization and Rogers’ (1961) depiction of the fully functioning person. This resulted in the formulation of her well-known and widely used model of psychological well-being and the development of the Psychological Well-being Scales (PWBS). Ryff (1989) posited a psychological well-being model comprising six well-being domains, namely (a) personal growth; (b) purpose in life; (c) autonomy; (d) self-acceptance; (e) positive relationships with others; and (f) environmental mastery.

## **1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

### **1.4.1 Academic and research motivation**

A variety of factors was considered for the academic and research motivation for this study. The first refers to the personal well-being and development of the master’s students themselves. For psychologists, ongoing focus on self-care and personal well-being is an ethical imperative and critical to the prevention of impairment and burnout (Barnett, Baker, Elman, & Schoener, 2007). Coster and Schwebel (1998) argued that, for psychologists, paths to well-being should be



identified early, preferably already in graduate programmes. Akhurst (2004) also put forward that “the challenge for academics is how the curriculum must be adjusted” (p. 29) to help psychology students build on the complex constructs for the successful development of themselves, both personally and professionally. An important role of academic programmes is developing a student’s affective and non-cognitive abilities. Literature illustrates that the effective training of psychologists is an important responsibility that must be upheld (Kottler & Swartz, 2004). Academics responsible for professional training in psychology can obtain ideas on relevant issues in training and how to develop confident and well-rounded psychologists. Furthermore, the results from this study can teach future students more healthy ways to cope with a demanding professional craft.

The second factor refers to the ripple effect of psychological practices. Due to the nature of the profession and its potential level of influence in people’s lives and the broader community, psychologists-to-be must be equipped in the best possible way to ensure that a sound and competent work method is maintained. This does not only refer to the acquisition of theory and skills (formal education), but also to their development in all its forms, especially with regard to quality of life and personal well-being. Linley, Joseph, Harrington and Wood (2006) posed that, if psychology is to alter the future direction of communities and create an integrative and holistic approach to the human condition, this will only lastingly come about through changes at the grassroots level of psychological training. Young psychologists in professional training will have to balance their understanding of the human condition through the lens of both positive and negative experiences, where personal insight in growth processes would be a promising point of departure.

The third factor refers to psychology as a profession and academic practice. Silva, Conroy and Zizzi (1999) called for the understanding of the graduate student’s journey as an issue demanding attention in order to ensure the future reputation of psychology as a discipline. In contrast to the many studies that focus on the hardships, struggles and difficulties experienced by master’s degree students in psychology, a limited number of studies (Guse, 2010; Human, 2006) focusing on the positive experiences of these students, especially within the South African context, could be traced through electronic searches such as Ebscohost, Academic Search

Premier, Sabinet and Nexus. Although work by Brown and Hirschfeld (2008) moved towards more qualitative approaches to the study of the post-graduation experiences of psychology students' in the United Kingdom, there is a gap in the current literature regarding the positive experiences of students related to psychology master's courses in Southern Africa.

Most training programmes in professional psychology focus mainly on the teaching of helping skills or providing specific training in manualized treatments. However, it is not known whether these foci fit the personal developmental needs from the students' perspective. A psychofortigenic investigation of becoming a psychologist would focus on the development of the strengths needed not only to cope with the training, but to indeed flourish during this demanding experience. Shedding light on these positive experiences will allow for the incorporation of elements conducive to the well-being of students within these training programmes. Researchers have argued that psychology training must be modified by including a wellness philosophy which needs to extend beyond academic purposes and be infused in all aspects of the individual (Guse, 2010; Human, 2006). Also, if professional developmental paths are better understood, supervisor and supervisee will be able to establish more effective learning experiences (Truell, 2001; Tryon, 2000). With the focus of this study being the exploration and description of the psychofortological experiences related to master's training in professional psychology, this study can be seen as contributory to the establishment of such a wellness philosophy within master's training. This could further contribute to the more effective application of the specific guideline of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), which indicates that the personal moulding and tuition by a mentor should take up between 10% and 20% of the professional psychology programme (HPCSA, 2011).

The fourth factor pertains to positive psychology and psychofortology being relatively new directions in psychology with a concomitant need for research in this area. The emphasis on human strengths instead of weaknesses has been the primary reason why the researcher has chosen the psychofortological approach with which to conceptualize and operationalize this research.

Wissing proposed that research after the year 2000 should have a greater focus on processes that facilitate well-being. Furthermore, Strümpfer (2005) recommended that research must focus more on the complexity of and contextual factors that influence psychological well-being. In this regard he suggested that research be undertaken from a qualitative stance to produce deeper understanding of the factors and processes that have a positive impact on well-being. In sum, although some research has been conducted on the well-being of novice psychologists (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Sheikh, Milne, & MacGregor, 2007; Stratton, et al., 2007), more investigation is needed into the range of positive training and personal experiences instead of merely the critical incidents. This can allow for the inclusion of personal well-being aspects within master's training. Therefore, the researcher hoped that, with regard to psychology training, the findings of this study might have implications for master's students, academia, the broader community, as well as for psychology as a profession.

#### **1.4.2 Personal motivation**

As a doctoral candidate, lecturer and supervisor, the researcher realized early on that the focus of research on this topic must shift to the fostering of personal growth in order to equip master's students with the essential confidence and motivation to commit to this journey. In order to be successful in this journey, the positive experiences relating to the training of master's students should be known and understood. This study is important because, as a trainer of new psychologists, the researcher has often considered her most important goal to be the teaching of the tasks of psychotherapy, the helping skills, and the theoretical approaches to psychotherapy. Less often did she deliberately seek ways to help students manage their personal struggles, which are an inevitable part of the training, and focus on the enhancement of their personal well-being, which she recognized to be of equal importance.

### **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION**

The crucial question asked in this study can be formulated as follows: What are the psychofortigenic experiences, with reference to psychological well-being, that form part of the developmental journey of master's students towards becoming psychologists?

## **1.6 RESEARCH AIM**

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the experience of four master's degree students in professional psychology programmes in South Africa. The psychofortigenic experiences were identified from their overall experience and were conceptualized and operationalized within the structure of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Although only one theoretical model was formally utilized in this study, general positive psychology literature, as well as literature based on the development and dynamics of master's students in professional psychology training, were integrated in the interpretation and discussion of the findings.

## **1.7 A BRIEF RESEARCH DESIGN OVERVIEW**

### **1.7.1 Qualitative research**

In an attempt to answer the research question posed in section 1.5, and to provide detailed interpretations of the experiences of these students, a *qualitative research* design was found to be the most suitable. The aim of the study required an in-depth and rich understanding of the experience of master's students in professional psychology training through the "voices" of the participants. The results of a qualitative investigation allowed for an in-depth, detailed and intricate picture of the experience of a master's year in professional psychology which is often omitted in investigations of training processes conducted according to traditional quantitative methodologies. Qualitative research captures the individual's perspective and the use of rich data-gathering methods, such as in-depth interviews, which allows for the focus on the individual's experience (Howitt, 2010). Chamberlain (2000) has provided a general critique of qualitative studies, where qualitative researchers are often at risk of merely categorizing and illustrating participants' accounts instead of developing provocative and insightful interpretations that could contribute to meaningful theory building. Therefore, this study attempted to synthesize the findings into a coherent model and to link it to relevant psychological literature. The active role of the researcher is generally accepted within qualitative research (Dyer, 2007; Etherington, 2007; Jootun, McGhee, & Marland, 2009; Primeau, 2003). Reflexivity in this study was respected through the researcher's sensitivity towards the influence of her previous experience as

a master's student in professional psychology. The researcher's reflexive process is often presented throughout this research document and a reflexive journal is included as Appendix B.

### **1.7.2 Participants and data gathering**

Data for this study were gathered through a total of 12 semi-structured interviews and reflective writings from four participants over a one-year span. Both these data-gathering methods are able to generate extensive and rich data from participants (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Howitt, 2010; Jasper, 2005; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Toohey, 2002). Howitt (2010) stressed that, although Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) uses semi-structured, in-depth interviews almost exclusively, other kinds of personal accounts such as journals and diaries can be used if suitable to the overall research aim. Smith and Osborne (2003) suggested that an IPA sample should consist of a small number of cases, of which all are exposed to the same approximate experience. All four participants in this study were enrolled in master's programmes in professional psychology from four different universities. They met the researcher at the beginning, middle and end of their academic master's year.

### **1.7.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The data gathered in this study were analyzed by means of IPA. The understanding of experience is the essence of psychology and IPA offers researchers the opportunity to learn from the experts – the research participants themselves (Smith & Osborne, 2004). IPA can be used when psychological experiences are being studied from the person's own perspective and is unique in that the interpretation focuses primarily on meaning-making processes (Howitt, 2010).

IPA offers the researcher the chance to engage with the research question on an idiographic level in which the participant's lived experience is coupled with a subjective and reflective process of interpretation (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin, 2005). Data analysis were performed through IPA, which includes the steps of (a) familiarization with the data; (b) preliminary theme identification; (c) theme interconnectedness identification; (d) systematic tabling of themes; and (e) cross-case analysis. IPA allows for the use of a theoretical framework, but the analysis should not be led by

pre-existing theory. It is urged that the research must remain open to new ideas emerging from the interviews; thus being done inductively instead of deductively (Smith, 2004). An advantage of this method of analysis is that IPA is rooted firmly in psychology and does not in any way collide with mainstream psychology (Howitt, 2010). IPA also appealed to the researcher because of the transparency of the approach, as it encouraged reflexivity throughout the process and recognized preconceptions and experiences that might have influenced the study. Although the majority of studies that have employed IPA lie within the field of health psychology, Reid et al. (2005) stressed that: “In keeping with the broad premise of positive psychology (e.g., Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) there is scope for IPA research to become less disease- and deficit-focused, and for participants to be given a chance to express their views about strength, wellness and quality of life” (p. 21).

## 1.8 CONCEPTUALIZATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

Although a variety of conceptualizations can be posed for the following concepts, they are defined below in the way they were primarily used, understood and conceptualized within this study.

**Positive psychology:** Positive psychology represents a movement away from psychological problems, psychopathology, weaknesses and deficits in human nature towards a focus on positive behaviour, human strengths, virtues and “what makes life worth living” (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 13).

**Psychofortology:** The neologism *psychofortology* has been suggested (Wissing & Van Eeden, 1997) since there is no specific domain in psychology to allot the study of psychological strengths to. These authors stated “that in this domain not only the origins of psychological well-being should or will be studied, but also the nature, manifestations, and consequently ways to enhance psychological well-being and develop human capacities” (p. 5).

**Eudaimonia:** The concept of eudaimonia stems from the philosophical works of Aristotle and refers to an approach which attempts to understand optimal well-being in terms of human

potentials, functions and values. In recent research the approaches to eudaimonia differ, but they fit together in their attempt to determine which ways of living best represent and promote human wellness and flourishing (Kashdan, Biswas-Diener, & King, 2008).

**Psychological well-being:** For the purpose of this study psychological well-being was conceptualized according to the model of Ryff (1989) in which psychological well-being is seen as a multifaceted construct that incorporates the domains of self-acceptance, purpose in life, personal growth, environmental mastery, positive relationships with others and autonomy.

**Master's students in professional psychology programmes<sup>2</sup>:** For the purpose of this study “master's students in professional psychology training” refers to those students in their first year of master's training within an applied educational/counselling/clinical psychology programme (thus excluding a master's degree in research in psychology).

**Psychologists<sup>3</sup>:** For the purpose of this study “psychologists” refers to professional health care practitioners with a qualification in clinical/counselling/educational psychology.

**Phenomenology:** Phenomenology refers to both a 20<sup>th</sup>-century school of philosophy associated with Husserl (1970) and a type of qualitative research. For the purpose of this study, phenomenology was conceptualized as a research approach that “is a study of people's conscious experience of their life-world that refers to their everyday life and social world” (Schram, 2003, p. 71). “Phenomenological analysis attends to ferreting out the essence or basic structure of a phenomenon and produces rich thematic descriptions that provide insight into the meaning of the lived experience” (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1376).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA):** IPA is a qualitative research method of analysis and according to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), IPA is “committed to the examination of how people make sense of their major life experiences” (p. 1). The meaning and

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<sup>2</sup> The terms “students” and “trainees” are used interchangeably due to the difference in preference internationally.

<sup>3</sup> The terms “psychologist”, “psychotherapist”, and “counsellor” are used interchangeably due to the difference in preference internationally.

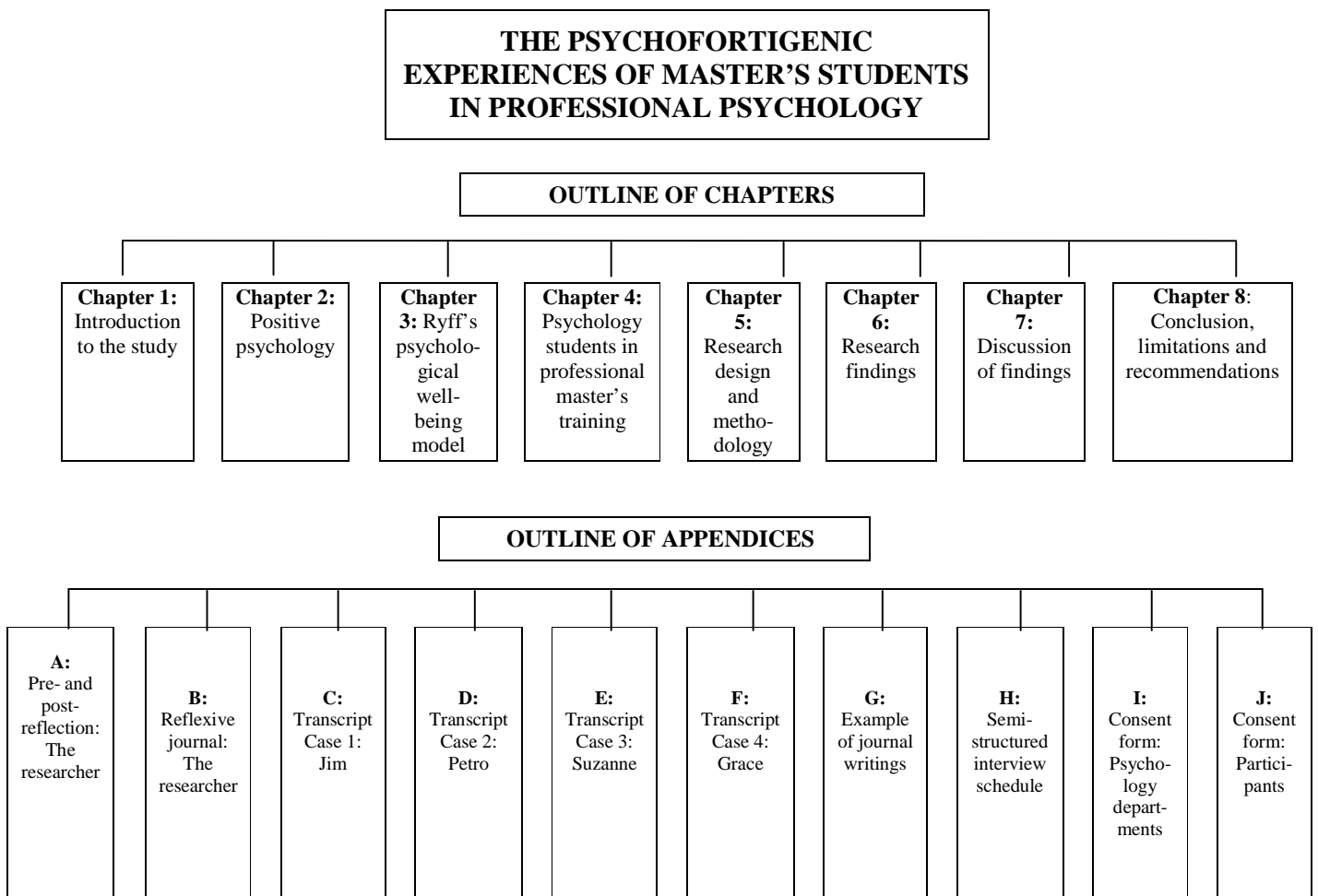
understanding of and insight into experiences are central to this approach (Smith & Osborne, 2004). IPA is rooted in phenomenology and explores the way in which individuals make sense of their experiences by focusing on the internal psychological meanings evident in their accounts (Smith, Jarman, & Osborne, 1999; Smith & Osborne, 2004).

## **1.9 PRESENTATION OF THE STUDY**

This research document comprises eight chapters and 10 appendices. On the first page of each chapter a visual display structure of the content of the chapter is presented to enhance “reader friendliness”. This chapter sketched the context within which the study was conducted, provided the rationale for the study, described the aim and presented a brief overview of the research design of the study. Chapter 2 introduces the emerging field of positive psychology and discusses its focus on strengths and well-being. Chapter 3 presents and explores psychological well-being as conceptualized by Ryff (1989). Chapter 4 reviews the theory and research in the area of master’s students in psychology, with specific focus on their developmental journey and the different stakeholders and dynamics of this journey. Chapter 5 describes the design and methodology employed in this study. The research findings are presented in Chapter 6 and discussed in Chapter 7. The study concludes with Chapter 8, in which the implications of the findings, the limitations, value of the study and recommendations for future research are discussed. Figure 2 provides a visual display of the chapters and appendices.



Figure 2. Visual display of chapters and appendices



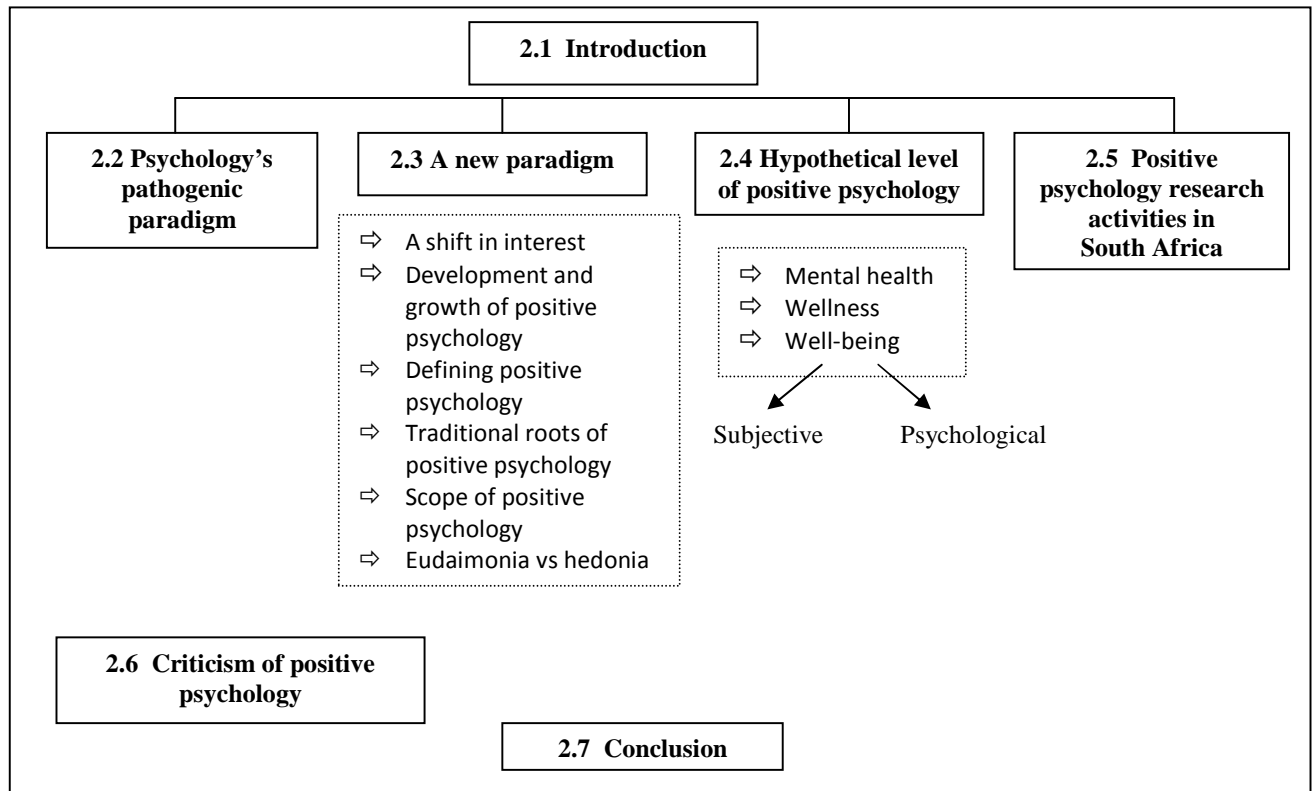
## 1.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter the research context, rationale and aim of this study were addressed, introducing the reader to the topic of a master's year in a professional psychology programme and the negative focus of previous research on this topic. Thereafter the theoretical approach was briefly presented as well as the specific theoretical model within which this study was contextualized. To further orientate the reader towards this study a brief overview of the research design was provided. Concepts that are regularly used in the study were described in order to clarify further reading. Lastly, this chapter provided the reader with a visual outline of the divisions of this research document. In the next chapter positive psychology, being the theoretical approach of this study, is discussed.

# CHAPTER 2

## POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Figure 3. Visual display of the outline of Chapter 2.



### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The focus of the present study is the exploration and description of the psychofortological experiences of master's students in applied professional psychology programmes. A review of positive psychology perspectives will provide the necessary background as psychofortology forms the theoretical basis for this study. Therefore, this chapter, as illustrated in Figure 3, contains a broad outline of positive psychology with the aim to contextualize psychological well-being within the discipline. The chapter consists of five main sections. Firstly, the pathological stance that psychology held for many years is discussed in order to explain the context from which a more positive psychology has developed. Secondly, positive psychology as a relatively

new subdiscipline is reviewed by discussing aspects such as the traditional roots, different definitions, the scope, and the two different philosophical approaches. Thirdly, this chapter focuses on mental health, wellness and well-being as psychological constructs. To illustrate the multidimensionality of well-being specifically, several theories and models are discussed, and the issue of assessing well-being is raised. Fourthly, the positive psychology research activities in South Africa are included to further create context for the current study. Lastly, criticisms of positive psychology are briefly discussed.

## **2.2 PSYCHOLOGY'S PATHOGENIC PARADIGM**

Why has psychology developed the way it has? Many researchers argue that the profession's first psychologist was responsible for the field of psychology becoming preoccupied with the negative in people. This argument is motivated through the concept of *thanatos* associated with Freud (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009), which is used to describe a death wish coupled with a desire for destruction and hatred, and to give up on life. Although the field of psychology has shifted its focus away from Freudian perspectives, the remnant of the negative aspects has persisted for many years.

Another argument receiving much attention in the literature is that of psychology's re-entrance after both World Wars. During the Wars, and mainly due to the lack of psychiatric personnel, psychologists were introduced to working in hospitals and an almost exclusive focus on pathology was established through the adoption of the medical model of human nature in psychology. In addition, the discovery of antipsychotic and other psychiatric medication led to an over-awareness of mental diseases and reinforced the focus on suffering, pain and cure (Saleebey, 1997; Seligman, 2002b; 2003a; Whiteley, 1980). Subsequent to World War II, psychology became a science devoted to healing, based on a disease model (Seligman, 2002a; 2003a; Strümpfer, 2006). In effect, only the first of the three pre-World War II missions of psychology was practised upon, namely curing mental illness (Strümpfer, 2005).

Other arguments attempting to answer the above question involve the Veterans Administration (1946) and the National Institute of Mental Health (1947), which were largely responsible for the

focus of psychology on identifying and treating psychological deficits and an illness ideology (Maddux, Snyder, & Lopez, 2004). Research in psychology moved along the same themes as those emphasized by practitioners and was predominantly engaged in discovering ways to describe and ameliorate suffering (Compton, 2005). Traditionally, research in psychology mainly focused on negative emotions such as depression and anxiety, and was conducted from a disease framework with the aim to repair the damage (Larson, 2000; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This exclusive focus on pathology, which dominated the discipline, resulted in a model that viewed human beings as lacking positive features of what makes life worth living. Strümpfer (2005) agreed with this argument to a large extent, but added that many developments, which did not necessarily focus on illness and disease, were also taking place in psychology during past times.

## **2.3 A NEW PARADIGM**

### **2.3.1 A shift in interest**

The field of psychology achieved remarkable success with its first mission, namely the curing of mental illness (Compton, 2005; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). In light of the above, a new paradigm with emphasis on the other two pre-World War II missions of psychology, namely helping all people to live fulfilled lives and identifying and nurturing genius and talent, were necessary and welcomed (Ryff & Singer, 1998). As it became clearer that normal functioning could not be understood solely within a problem-oriented framework, researchers and psychologists revisited the missions of the profession and initiated a paradigm shift towards developing and maintaining well-being and strengths. Researchers were reminded that, although the majority of people thrive in their daily existence and rate themselves as happy and satisfied human beings, relatively little is known about how to encourage and foster human thriving (Compton, 2005). The usefulness of a problem-focused paradigm was therefore largely questioned. It was, however, suggested that the new paradigm be viewed as complementary to the disease model and not as a total replacement (Myers, 1992). In contrast to the traditional focus described in section 2.2, a growing number of researchers began to focus their efforts on the positive end of the emotional spectrum. The person steering the initial shift was the

sociologist, Aaron Antonovsky (1979; 1987; 1994), who stated that “the human sciences have recently experienced a noticeable paradigm shift from pathogenesis to *salutogenesis*; a shift to a perspective of strength, emphasising health rather than illnesses” (1987, p. 51). Antonovsky, a late professor at Ben-Gurion University in Israel, developed the construct “salutogenesis” from the Latin word “salus” meaning health and the Greek word “genesis” meaning origins. Strümpfer (1993) conceptualized Antonovsky’s work as a renewed emphasis on an appreciative set of assumptions and attributions about health, motivation, capacities, potential and human functioning.

### **2.3.2 The development and growth of positive psychology**

In 1998 Martin Seligman used his American Psychological Association (APA) presidency to formalize the shift towards a more positive psychology. This followed a holiday meeting between Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi in 1997, and an eye-opening account with his daughter while gardening (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Seligman’s initiative was catalyzed by meetings with scholars who could assist in the conceptualization and the early groundwork of positive psychology. The positive psychology steering committee was established by Seligman, Csikszentmihalyi, Diener, Jamieson, Peterson, and Vaillant. Seligman coined the new paradigm *positive psychology*, which was officially launched at the APA in 1998 (Strümpfer, 2005). A special issue of *The American Psychologist* (2000) was devoted to positive psychology research topics and in its opening article, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi highlighted that psychology is also about strength and virtue and that treatment is not just about fixing what is broken, but also about nurturing what is best. These authors both shared now well-known, personal stories of how they arrived at the conviction that a shift towards positive psychology was needed. This widely cited new millennium issue of *The American Psychologist* promoted a broad range of positively oriented activity in psychology across the world. In this issue Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) openly declared that the time was right for psychology to look beyond the victim and they called for a research impetus on positive psychology topics. They defined the aim of positive psychology as follows: “to catalyse the change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life, to also building positive qualities” (p. 5). Strümpfer (1995) added that this new paradigm is based on three assumptions: (a) that stressors, adversity and other inordinate demands are part of the human condition; (b) that sources of strength exist

which can endure or transcend this condition; and (c) that difficulties and suffering can stimulate continuous growth and lead to the discovery of capacities and potential.

Since its inception, the positive psychology paradigm gained tremendous momentum (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). While psychologists once focused mainly on mental illness, many shifted their attention to human strength and virtue. The establishment of the Positive Psychology Network (now the Positive Psychology Centre at the University of Pennsylvania), the convening of a variety of international conferences, the publication of numerous positive psychology books and special issues of journals devoted to positive psychology, as well as the first dedicated positive psychology journal, *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, followed over the 13-year period since the formal establishment of positive psychology. Much attention has been evoked by this subdiscipline and many areas of human inquiry have been included (Sandage, Hill, & Vang, 2003; Wong, 2006). Research studies were conducted, accentuating positive traits such as resilience, hardiness and temperament (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004); coping (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Snyder, 1999; Tugade, Fredrickson, & Barrett, 2004); positive personality characteristics (Mayne, 2001) or states (Seligman, 2002a; 2003b); health psychology (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001; Snyder, Tennen, Affleck, & Cheavens, 2000); and spirituality and religion (Snyder, Sigmon, & Feldman, 2002). According to Wong (2006), it did not take long for positive psychology to infiltrate psychotherapy practices, and *positive therapy* was soon the topic of many scholarly discussions. The identification and enhancement of clients' strengths and virtues were identified as the most important aim of well-being therapy (Delle Fave, 2006; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Seligman & Peterson, 2003).

Studies that have developed into formal theories include the *broaden and build theory* (Fredrickson, 1998), focussing on the capacity of positive emotions to facilitate skills and resources; the *hope theory* (Snyder, 1994; 1995); the formal classification of human strengths (*Values-in-Action Project*) by Peterson and Seligman (2004); the *self-determination theory* (Deci & Ryan, 2008), and Ryff's (1995) multidimensional psychological well-being facets. These theories are briefly discussed below.

Fredrickson (2001) developed the broaden and build model based on the assumption that the purpose of positive emotions differs from that of negative emotions. This model poses that positive emotions broaden awareness and, in effect, build towards emotional and intellectual resources. In contrast, negative emotions are regarded as narrowing down the options of thought and action. Therefore, this theory proves positive emotions to have a broadening, building and undoing effect (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). This theory received tremendous attention as it was one of the first theories describing the potential value of positive emotions (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009).

Many of the old hope theories only focused on the idea of expectations for success in attaining goals. However, Snyder's hope theory (1994; 1995) combines both expectation and agency as processes producing hope. Agency is seen as the willpower and belief that one can sustain movement towards reaching goals, and pathways are seen to refer to the individual's confidence that routes are available to reach desired goals and that these routes will lead to the ability to seek alternative goals when obstacles occur (Compton, 2005; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011).

According to Seligman (2002b), one of the tasks of positive psychology was to develop a classification system of strengths such as the existing classification systems of mental disorders and dysfunction. Peterson and Seligman (2004) developed such a classification system known as the Values-in-Action Classification Project which consists of 24 different strengths clustered into six core virtues (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009; Compton, 2005; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Through this classification system, human strengths became amendable to scientific exploration and assessment. Similarities with Aristotle's virtues are quite striking, although these authors acknowledge that other virtues do exist in other contexts.

Research has devoted great attention to identify different types of psychological needs and their relation to personal well-being across cultures (Seligman, et al., 2005). Following an extensive review on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Deci and Ryan (2000) formulated the self-determination theory which postulates the factors that influence intrinsic motivation. They identified three basic needs as the basis for self-motivation, namely competence, relatedness and autonomy (Compton, 2005; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011) whose expression is associated with

psychological health and flourishing in diverse cultures. This theory was found to be valuable since it offers another conception of well-being that embraces a eudaimonic view (see section 2.4.2) of happiness (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Ryff (1995) reviewed mental health theories and proposed a *six-dimensional model of psychological well-being*. Based on the facets of autonomy; self-acceptance; purpose in life; positive relationships with others; environmental mastery; and personal growth, she developed the Psychological Well-Being Scales (PWBS), which have demonstrated validity within many populations (Ryff, 1995; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) (see Chapter 3). Although the above topics and areas of interest seem much varied, they all share an emphasis on positive features and health, rather than on limitations and failures. On an empirical level, the overlap in manifestations of these constructs has been investigated as well as their correlation with other indices of functioning (Strümpfer, 1995).

### **2.3.3 Defining positive psychology**

Various definitions have been put forward for positive psychology, all with specific core themes and consistencies, but also differences in emphasis and interpretation. As part of the official launch of positive psychology, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) provided a working definition of positive psychology: “Positive psychology represents a movement away from psychological problems, psychopathology, weaknesses and deficits in human nature towards a focus on positive behaviour, human strengths, virtues and ‘what makes life worth living’” (p. 13). Sheldon and King (2001) defined positive psychology as “the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues, which ‘adopts a more open and appreciative perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities’” (p. 216). With the aim of highlighting its focus, Seligman (2002a) added that positive psychology studies the preconditions and promoters of mental well-being and happiness.

When reviewing the work of the so-called pioneers of positive psychology, two comprehensive definitions can be attempted. Positive psychology is the study of positive human strengths, traits, motives, virtues, and behaviour, with the avowed goal of understanding how to optimize these



qualities in peoples' lives (Peterson & Park, 2009; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon & King, 2001). Positive psychology is a burgeoning movement which aims to correct mainstream psychology's preoccupation with human weaknesses and diseases by promoting a greater emphasis on positive human qualities, strengths and behaviour (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Keyes & Haidt, 2003; Linley & Joseph, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon & King, 2001; Snyder & Lopez, 2002b).

When attempting to define positive psychology from a metapsychological view (the way in which it is valuable to the discipline in general), Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) simply stated that "positive psychology is to begin to catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities" (p. 5). Linley et al. (2006) reviewed a number of definitions of positive psychology and provided their own definition:

Positive psychology is the scientific study of optimal human functioning. At the meta psychological level, it aims to redress the imbalance in psychological research and practice by calling attention to the positive aspects of human functioning and experience. At the pragmatic level, it is about understanding the wellsprings, processes and mechanisms that lead to desirable outcomes (p.5).

Other more informal definitions include "positive psychology [is] revisiting the average person, with an interest in finding out what works, what is right, and what is improving" (Sheldon & King, 2001, p. 216) and "positive psychology is the study of those things that make life worth living" (Dunn & Brody, 2008, p. 414). Antonovsky's initial work was mentioned in section 2.3.1, including the coining of the term salutogenesis. To indicate a broader focus Strümpfer (1995) expanded this construct to *fortigenesis* (*fortis* = strong), which refers to sources of strengths. He was of the opinion that Antonovsky alluded to sources of strength in general, which goes beyond the concern of health. As mentioned, fortigenesis refers to the origins of psychological strength and focuses particularly on the understanding of well-being and its dynamics. This concept was found to be more embracing and holistic than salutogenesis (Strümpfer, 1995).

Wissing and Van Eeden (1997; 2002) expanded this concept and suggested a new subdiscipline, namely *psychofortology*. Psychofortology is derived from the term *fortology* and poses an alternative designation to positive psychology without the exclusive emphasis on psychology (Strümpfer, 2006). This subdiscipline incorporates the nature, dynamics and enhancement of psychological well-being, as the authors claim that the value of developing a science geared towards better understanding of psychological well-being lies in capacity building, prevention and enhancing quality of life (Wissing & Van Eeden, 1997). They contend that “in this domain [psychofortology], not only the origins of psychological well-being should be studied, but also the nature, manifestations and consequent ways to enhance psychological well-being and develop human capacities” (p. 5).

#### **2.3.4 Traditional roots of positive psychology**

Although the above description portrays positive psychology as a new paradigm, it has, in fact, an ancient origin (Linley & Joseph, 2004; Snyder & McCullough, 2000; Strümpfer, 2005). It is stressed that, instead of being viewed as a new paradigm, positive psychology should be seen as a return to some of the ideas of earlier psychologists who were also interested in human strengths. Harris and Thoresen (2006) agreed by stating that the strength-promoting industry existed ages before the term positive psychology was popularized. Strümpfer (2005) felt strongly about revealing all the developments in the discipline and he critiqued researchers who did not acknowledge the pre-1980 literature and research on aspects regarding positive psychology. Later Seligman and colleagues (2005) acknowledged that positive psychology builds upon the work of others.

In his 2005 article *Standing on the shoulders of giants: Notes on early positive psychology (psychofortology)*, Strümpfer investigated the contributions made during the first eight decades of the 20th century and provided a comprehensive overview of the diverse contributions of predecessors and well-known authors in the paradigm of positive psychology.

Reviews on the origin of descriptions of human capacity and strengths date back to Aristotle's writings on eudaimonia, which reflect an interest in what is good about humans and their lives, and in optimal human functioning (Linley & Joseph, 2004) (see section 2.3.6). In modern psychology, and mainly from the paradigm of humanistic psychology, James (1902) was concerned with optimal human functioning as illustrated in his writings on *healthy mindedness* (Harris & Thoresen, 2006). People's ability to become their optimal self through individuation was described by Jung during 1933. Soon after, Jahoda (1958) raised questions about the constituents of mental health. Allport (1961) expanded Jung's work and dedicated his time towards describing the mature individual (Linley et al., 2006).

When studying concepts of positive psychology, the name of Abraham Maslow is often referred to, who stated: "The science of psychology has been far more successful on the negative than on the positive side; it has revealed to us much about man's shortcomings, his illnesses, his sins, but little about his potentialities, his virtues, his achievable aspirations, or his psychological height" (Maslow, 1954, p. 201). In 1954 Maslow already used the term positive psychology (p. 201) and referred to the human instinct to fulfil potential, namely self-actualization. He viewed self-actualization as a process of development which will only be accessed once other, more basic needs have been met. He described a self-actualized person by means of 15 characteristics grouped into four categories: openness to experience, autonomy, positive relations with others, and strong ethical standards.

Carl Rogers (1961) recognized the innate need of all individuals to develop potential as one of the principles of client-centred therapy, for which he became known. Rogers (1961) introduced the term *the fully functioning person*, which refers to (a) someone with an openness to experience; (b) an existential way of living; and (c) trust in own organismic experience. Rogers (1961) claimed that these three characteristics will result in a higher sense of freedom and creativity. Both these humanistic psychologists aspired to understand the full range of human experience – from the negative to the positive (Harris & Thoresen, 2006). Although Rogers and Maslow might have hold visions similar to those of the positive psychologists, they were also fierce critics of the medical model, and it was their alternative view of human nature that made their positive psychology also a humanistic psychology.

### 2.3.5 The scope of positive psychology

As with any metatheoretical construct, positive psychology cannot only be constructed by loose topics, but needs to be theoretically organized through logical classification systems or subsections. Although several views of positive psychology have been developed (Linley et al., 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Wissing & Van Eeden, 2002), Maddi (2006) argued that it is hardly an organized field of study and that more attention needs to be paid to the way in which the topics fit together logically. Uncertainty about appropriate classification systems for, and the boundaries of, positive psychology has also been raised as an issue of concern by Linley et al. (2006), who pointed out the challenge to expand a classification context in order to synthesize the diverse states, traits and outcomes in relation to one another. These domains of psychological strengths should be clearly understood in relation to, and in interaction with one another.

According to the literature (Compton, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman et al., 2005), positive psychology stands on three main pillars: (a) *positive subjective experiences* (i.e., well-being, contentment and satisfaction [past], hope and optimism [future], and flow and happiness [present]); (b) *positive individual traits* (e.g., the capacity to love, vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, forgiveness, wisdom); and (c) *positive institutions* (which represents the group level, focusing on development and sustaining institutions that enrich human potential, healthy families, work environments, schools and whole communities). The latter is viewed as providing the context which enables the first two pillars to develop. Peterson and Seligman (2004) suggested that positive psychology focuses on three related topics and used more or less the same broad clusters, namely the study of positive subjective experiences, the study of positive individual traits, and the study of institutions that enable positive experiences and positive traits. Later Seligman et al. (2005) described positive psychology as an umbrella term for the study of positive emotions, positive character traits and enabling institutions which provide human beings with a sense of well-being, satisfaction and the “good life”.

In another attempt to grasp the essence of positive psychology, and with a particular focus on well-being, Seligman (2002) distinguished between manifestations and experiences of three levels of well-functioning: *the pleasant life* refers to seeking experiences of delight which have clear sensory, bodily and emotional components; *the good life* is experienced when signature strengths and virtues are enacted and used; and *the meaningful life* is experienced when involved in something greater than the self. He concluded that, when a person lives all three lives, it is *a full life*. Defining and describing the nature of the good life fits well with the agenda of positive psychology and, in this regard, three elements are relevant: positive connections to other people, positive personal qualities and life regulation qualities (Compton, 2005). Positive connections to others include altruism and the ability to love, forgive and maintain healthy friendships. Positive individual traits refer to characteristics such as integrity, wisdom, a sense of humour and creativity. Lastly, life regulation qualities include those that help to regulate day-to-day behaviour in a purposeful way (Compton, 2005).

A unique approach to defining positive psychology (which resulted in another way of constructing the field) was taken by Linley et al. (2006) who distinguished between the metapsychological level and the pragmatic level. The metapsychological level was employed to understand the aims of positive psychology as well as the way in which it offers an overall vision for psychology and beyond. In this regard they used the definition of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000, p. 5): “The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities.” In addition to this metapsychological level of positive psychology, they proposed a pragmatic level of what positive psychologists do in terms of their research and their practice as opposed to what their objectives are. Here, four levels of analysis for positive psychology were distinguished.

Firstly, the *wellsprings of interest* to positive psychology include aspects such as the genetic foundations of well-being and the early environmental experiences that allow the development of strengths and virtues. Secondly, the *processes of interest* to positive psychology are those psychological ingredients (such as human strengths and virtues) that lead to the good life. Thirdly, the *mechanisms of interest* to positive psychology, which may be defined as those extra-

psychological factors that impede the pursuit of a good life or the obstacles to leading a good life, for example, a life of meaning and fulfilment. In this regard these authors stressed that positive psychology should seek to understand the factors that facilitate optimal functioning as much as those that prevent it. These factors can include personal and social relationships, working environments, organizations and institutions, communities, and the other broader systems in which our lives are rooted. Lastly, the *outcomes of interest* to positive psychology may be defined as the subjective, social and cultural states that characterize a good life, including factors such as happiness, well-being, fulfilment and health (at the subjective level); positive communities and institutions that promote good lives (at the interpersonal level); and political, economic and environmental policies that promote harmony and sustainability (at the social level) (Linley, et al., 2006). On a philosophical level two different approaches provide context for the understanding and interpretation of positive psychology, namely eudaimonia and hedonia. These are described in the section to follow.

### **2.3.6 Eudaimonia vs hedonia**

In his historical account of the idea of happiness, Von Wright (1963) identified two main traditions in thinking about the human good (Kopperud & Vittersø, 2008). These two different philosophical conceptions from which positive health can be understood were rendered in Ryan and Deci's (2001) integrative review regarding hedonism and eudaimonism. In the broadest sense these different traditions can be described as dealing with happiness and one dealing with human potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Similar to Ryan and Deci, well-being researchers have distinguished between eudaimonic happiness (e.g., meaning and purpose; taking part in activities that allow for the actualization of one's skills, talents and potential); and hedonic happiness (e.g., high frequencies of positive affect, low frequencies of negative affect, and evaluating life as satisfying). Scholars agreed and have drawn on this Aristotelian distinction to suggest that modern well-being research falls into these two conceptual camps (Waterman, Schwartz, & Conti, 2008). This distinction has gained widespread acceptance among researchers, providing them with a language for discussing well-being which resulted in an increasing number of studies and articles that cover well-being within these categories (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Keyes, Schmotkin, & Ryff, 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Most familiar is the hedonic tradition, which points to the issue of what makes life pleasant and unpleasant, or hedonism as the idea that pleasure is the only good in human life. These ideas stem from Aristippus and Epicurus, Greek philosophers from the fourth century BC. According to them, the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain are the ultimate goals in life (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Happiness was simply viewed as the totality of one's hedonic moments. Psychologists who adopted this view focused on the broad conception of hedonism which includes the preferences and pleasures of the psyche as well as of the body. They view well-being as subjective happiness, implying the mere presence of pleasure versus displeasure (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). Today, hedonic well-being, also commonly referred to as subjective or emotional well-being, is viewed as a combination of life satisfaction and a tendency to experience more pleasure or positive emotions than displeasure or negative emotions (Diener, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Aristotle considered hedonic happiness to be an insulting idea and instead posited that true happiness is found in the expression of virtue and doing what is worth doing (Ryff & Singer, 1998). To the ancient Greeks the good life was based in the pursuit of eudaimonia (having a good guardian spirit), which translates into an objective state meaning the highest possible human good (Craig, 1998). Eudaimonia is often wrongly translated as "happiness" and actually signifies "truly fortunate" or "possessed of true well-being" (Compton, 2005). Thus, the eudaimonic approach suggests that there is more to well-being than mere happiness and that it is based on a tradition which characterizes well-being as a life in the pursuit of meaningful goals congruent with deeply held values and morals (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Vittersø, 2004; Waterman, 1993). According to the eudaimonic perspective, pleasantness is not considered sufficient to justify living a good life, to which Ryan and Deci (2001) added that eudaimonic well-being is mostly associated with fulfilling one's true nature. Ryff and Singer (1998) identified eudaimonia as the new "buzzword" in studies of happiness and well-being. The primary difference between eudaimonic well-being definitions and the hedonic well-being definitions hinges on two key constructs: feeling and functioning. Reasons why eudaimonia is commonly more accepted than hedonia includes that eudaimonia is viewed as more objective, comprehensive and morally valid than hedonia (Annas, 2004; Waterman, 1993).

Although the distinction between the two approaches have largely been accepted and adopted in many studies, they are not without criticism (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011; Vittersø, 2004). Critics highlighted that some translations of Aristotle's work suggest equivalence between hedonia and eudaimonia, which was deeply contrary to Aristotle's distinction between the satisfaction of right and wrong desires (Ryff & Singer, 1998). According to Winkelmann and Winkelmann (1998), it is even more troubling that the essence of eudaimonia – the idea of striving towards excellence based on one's unique potential – was omitted. They reminded of Aristotle's objective, which was not to describe the nature of human well-being, but to formulate an ethical doctrine that would provide guidelines for living. Keyes and Annas (2009) posed the question regarding the relation of Aristotle's eudaimonia to eudaimonism in psychology. According to these authors, the contemporary distinction between objective and subjective does not fit well with Aristotle's writings as he did not associate eudaimonia with a subjective state. Empirical evidence currently suggests that hedonic and eudaimonic well-being overlap conceptually, and that they are psychological mechanisms which operate together instead of apart. Other researchers are concerned about the potential dangers of people misinterpreting the distinction between hedonic and eudaimonic happiness to mean that they are two unrelated experiences of happiness. These researchers agreed with Ryan and Deci (2001) that, although there are two intellectual traditions of happiness research, it is crucial to look through a variety of lenses when interpreting happiness. Since positive psychology's scope is illustrated as broad and embracing a variety of concepts and theories, the next section selectively focuses on the hypothetical level of positive psychology including mental health, wellness and well-being.

## **2.4 HYPOTHETICAL LEVEL OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

The hypothetical level can be described as the level which includes models and theories on phenomena studied in domains of scientific inquiry. Consequently, mental health, wellness and well-being are discussed.



### 2.4.1 Mental health

Since one of the aims of positive psychology is the enhancement of mental health over mental illness, the question arises as to what is implied by mental health. Mental health can be socially constructed and defined by different professions, communities, societies and cultures. Understanding health as the mere absence of disease or illness does not capture the real meaning of being well (Ickovics & Park, 1998; Ryff & Singer, 1998). Defining a concept in terms of the absence of another phenomenon creates conceptual problems, but finding a commonly accepted definition that is more elaborate than just indicating the absence of psychopathology, has proven to be challenging. Most definitions include aspects of emotional, social and psychological well-being, portraying mental health as a multidimensional construct (Caplan, Englehardt, & McCartney, 1981; Gelso & Fretz, 2001). Health is therefore described as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

As indicated earlier, Antonovsky (1987) introduced the concept of a single bipolar continuum of health ease/disease, rejecting the idea that a person is either ill or well. He believed that health is relative and that a person progresses or regresses along this continuum. Keyes (2002) defined mental health as a syndrome of symptoms of hedonia, and positive functioning as operationalized by measures of subjective well-being, namely individuals' perceptions and evaluations of the quality of their functioning in life. Based on this definition and derived from theory, factor analysis and rational criteria, he proposed a multidimensional model of mental health (named the *mental health continuum*) comprising three domains: psychological, emotional and social well-being. This model suggests that mental health and mental illness are related, yet distinct dimensions (Keyes, 2002; 2005) and the model enables the measurement of mental health either categorically or continuously. The terms *flourishing* and *languishing* lie at the extreme ends of the continuum, with *moderate mental health* as the middle marker. Flourishing is applicable when an individual experiences high levels of positive emotion and functions well both psychologically and socially. Languishing is "conceived of as emptiness and stagnation, constituting a life of quiet despair" (Keyes, 2002, p. 210). Moderate mental health describes those individuals who do not meet the criteria for either flourishing or languishing mental health.

The functionality of Keyes' model has been empirically tested and supported, and is widely accepted (Keyes, 1998).

In other models, such as the *cone model* of Adams, Bezner and Steinhardt (1997), health refers to the balance between the various dimensions of human functioning at the top (health) or bottom (illness). Regardless of the model used, health should be accounted for by applying observations from more than one dimension. Mental health for each individual is affected, either positively or negatively, by experiences, social interactions, societal structures and cultural values. The constructs *health* and *wellness* have, to a certain extent, the same connotations and can be used as synonyms. However, for historical reasons, they are sometimes used as terms with separate meanings. Traditionally, health has been primarily more concerned with the physical body (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

## **2.4.2 Wellness and well-being**

As part of the rise of positive psychology, research on well-being and wellness has blossomed in recent decades and, as a result, well-being and wellness paradigms, models and conceptualizations have been established in various disciplines (Diener et al., 1999; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011; Kahneman, Diener & Schwarz, 1999). Since Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being model is used as the theoretical model in this study, a closer look into well-being is provided. Wellness as psychological construct is also discussed to better orientate the reader with regard to the differentiation between these two concepts and in order to contextualize the concept of psychological well-being clearly.

### **2.4.2.1 Differentiation between wellness and well-being**

Well-being and wellness are often used interchangeably but should be distinguished on the basis of definition. Wellness and well-being differ from each other in three regards. The first refers to application. Early studies on wellness defined the concept primarily based on the physiological dimension although theorists later agreed that wellness is more than just a physical issue (Ardell, 1988; Hermon & Hazler, 1999; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Wellness refers to well-functioning

in daily life within different practical life domains, whereas well-being implies the connectedness of these domains over a longer period of time and includes the aspect of cognitive evaluation named satisfaction with life (Hermon & Hazler, 1999). Wellness thus can be applied in a more concrete, practical and measureable way than well-being, which refers to a more subjective experience to be defined by individuals themselves (Hermon & Hazler, 1999).

Secondly, wellness is regarded as a holistic metatheory in which well-being is only one dimension. Wellness recognizes, in particular, the multidimensional nature of human health with focus on the total lifestyle. Well-being however, refers to (a) the subjective experience of happiness (the presence of positive affect and absence of negative effect) and the cognitive evaluation of satisfaction of life (together these two concepts are referred to as subjective well-being); and (b) optimal functioning within psychological facets (psychological well-being), and is primarily conceptualized within the field of psychofortology (Wissing, 1997).

The third field of differentiation refers to individual responsibility. Wellness is currently broadly construed as the upper end of a continuum of holistic well-being in important life domains (Hattie, Meyers, & Sweeney, 2004). Schafer (1996) concurred by stating that wellness refers to a process of living one's life at the highest possible level and also promoting the same to others. Drawing on the self-responsibility of one's wellness, Jobson (2003) described wellness as an integrated and dynamic level of functioning oriented towards living one's best life, based upon self-responsibility and good choices. Myers (1991) referred to wellness as "the maximizing of human potential through positive life-style choices" (p. 183). In this regard well-being is viewed in a less prescriptive way with less emphasis on practical daily choices made by an individual (Jobson, 2003). In conclusion, wellness has a more holistic nature than well-being *per se* (Strümpfer, 1995).

#### 2.4.2.2 Wellness as psychological construct

The term wellness was introduced by Dunn (1961) who is widely credited as being the architect of the modern wellness movement. He defined *high-level wellness* as an integrated method of functioning, which also includes the maximization of human potential. Ardell (1988) and Hettler

(1984) further developed Dunn's work with specific focus on wellness programmes that encourage healthy life styles. For psychology, wellness research blossomed with the rise of positive psychology in the nineties. Both Schafer (1996) and Myers (1992) promoted wellness education and a movement towards a wellness culture. Most wellness definitions draw on a holistic approach which implies that wellness refers to a wholeness in mind, body, spirit and community (Schafer, 1996; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). In Myers' 1991 article, *Wellness as the Paradigm for Counselling and Development*, six premises of well-being were examined, namely (a) wellness is not new; (b) wellness is not synonymous with health; (c) wellness programmes are cost effective; (d) a paradigm shift is not required to incorporate wellness in psychology; (e) wellness and counselling are already partners; and (f) the time is right for wellness work to be noticed.

#### 2.4.2.2.1 Wellness dimensions

Several holistic models of wellness have been developed, many referring to the physical, interpersonal/social, psychological/emotional, spiritual and intellectual dimensions of wellness. Although some models propose other dimensions as well, the above-mentioned dimensions are found to be most evident in theories and models (Adams et al., 1997; Schafer, 1996; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992), and are defined below.

*Physical wellness* refers to a positive perception and expectation of physical health. It entails personal responsibility and the understanding of one's body and how it works. Physical well-being has been positively correlated with higher levels of physical activity and self-esteem, and negatively correlated with symptoms, diseases and psychological problems (Adams et al., 1997).

*Social wellness* is defined as the perception of having support available and of being a valued support provider and refers to people's well-functioning in their social life and within the broader community (Keyes, 1998). Keyes' (1998) multidimensional model of social wellness consists of five dimensions that indicate whether, and to what extent, individuals are functioning well in their social world: (a) social integration (individuals' appraisal of the quality of their own relation with their society and community); (b) social contribution (the feeling of being a vital

member of society, with something important to offer the world); (c) social acceptance (trusting others, and having favourable opinions about human nature); (d) social actualization (the evaluation of society's potential to improve); and (e) social coherence (the perception that the social world is well organized). Social wellness emphasizes the interdependence between people and the impact one can have on multiple environments. In several studies the associations between social support and physical and psychological well-being indicated the negative associations with distress symptoms and psychopathology (Adams et al., 1997).

*Emotional wellness* refers to the possession of a secure self-identity and a positive sense of self-regard, and is represented by life satisfaction, happiness and positive affect (Keyes, 1998; Rath, Harter, & Harter, 2010). Furthermore, it includes the ability to recognize, manage and accept your emotions. Emotional wellness has been positively correlated with quality relationships and independent behaviour (Adams et al., 1997).

*Spiritual wellness* has been defined as a belief in a unifying force, resulting in a positive perception of meaning and purpose in life. It includes the development of a deep appreciation for the depth and expanse of life. Spiritual wellness demonstrated positive associations with self-esteem, social skills and coping beliefs, and negative associations with loneliness and depression (Adams et al., 1997).

*Intellectual wellness* is defined as the perception of being internally energized by an optimal amount of intellectually stimulating activity. It recognizes one's knowledge and skills and is evident in, among others, high levels of curiosity (Adams et al., 1997).

*Occupational wellness* (or career wellness) recognizes the satisfaction and enrichment in one's life through work. At the centre of occupational wellness lies the premise that one's attitude and values are consistent with one's work. Choice of profession, job satisfaction, career ambitions and personal performance are all important components of overall occupational wellness (Adams et al., 1997; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011).

Based on their respective conceptualizations of wellness, some researchers (Ardell, 1988; Eberst, 1984; Hettler, 1984; Seeman, 1989; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991) developed models with a strong psychological grounding. These are discussed in the next section.

#### 2.4.2.2.2 Wellness models

A variety of models of wellness have been proposed, of which the earliest ones are based on the physical health professions (Ardell, 1988; Hettler, 1984; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Wellness models, with different emphasis and foci, aim to provide structure to the understanding and assessment of psychological wellness since it has been defined as part of this broader construct (Myers, 1992). These models further vary depending on their angle, whether it is the origins, the descriptions, the dynamics or the enhancement of wellness. Researchers from disciplines other than psychology, such as dietary, nutritional, health and industrial, developed wellness models from their own schools of thought (Adams et al., 1997). However, psychology is a discipline that highlights the importance of a holistic understanding of human beings and promotes that wellness models require an integrated and multidisciplinary approach (Els & De la Rey, 2006).

Hettler (1984), a health physician and considered to be the father of the wellness movement, viewed wellness as a process through which choices are made in order to ensure a successful existence. He proposed a six-dimensional model which consists of (a) physical; (b) social; (c) emotional; (d) spiritual; (e) occupational; and (f) intellectual well-being. This holistic model describes the interconnectedness of each wellness dimension and how they contribute to a well-lived life. The model is illustrated as a hexagon with each component equal in size. Although acknowledging the importance of each dimension, this model is mostly used to promote an understanding of wellness from a physical health position. Since Hettler's model was introduced, other authors have built on or made use of this model (Bloom, 1987; Milner, 2002; Sackney, Noonan, & Miller, 2000).

Eberst (1984) described a conceptual model of holistic health that includes (a) physical; (b) emotional; (c) mental; (d) spiritual; (e) social; and (f) environmental aspects of health. This model was predominantly framed from a physical health viewpoint and with specific focus on

promoting health within the school context. The environmental dimension is unique to this model and takes into account the interaction between the individual and the environment.

Ardell (1988) has been one of the leading figures in the wellness movement and held similar views on wellness as those of Hettler. Both these researchers viewed wellness as a proactive approach to life that optimizes human potential. He proposed eight areas of wellness, describing how health can be reoriented from regulating hospital planning to promoting healthy lifestyles. These eight areas of wellness include: (a) psychological; (b) spiritual; (c) physical fitness; (d) job satisfaction; (e) relationships; (f) family life; (g) leisure time; and (h) stress management (Ardell, 1988).

Seeman (1989) developed a special interest in optimal functioning and published the well-known article, *Toward a model of positive health*, in 1989. In this article he introduced a model based on his comprehensive formulation of positive health wherein he described health by using the concept of *organismic integration*. According to this model, several subsystems communicate with one another to generate congruent information within one's life. The subsystems include the (a) biochemical; (b) physiological; (c) perceptual; (d) cognitive; and (e) interpersonal.

Based on an investigation of healthy behaviours that contribute to longevity, Witmer and Sweeney (1992) proposed the *wheel of wellness and prevention*. As true of the earlier models mentioned, the wheel model evolved from existing knowledge of well-being components, but is nevertheless regarded as the first model of wellness based on counselling. The characteristics of the healthy person is described over five life tasks, based on the perception that wellness may be brought about by the fulfilment of these tasks. The five tasks include (a) spirituality (placed in the centre of the wheel); (b) self-regulation; (c) work; (d) friendship; and (e) love. The fulfilment of these tasks takes place in interaction with life forces, namely (a) families; (b) communities; (c) faith; (d) education; (e) government; (f) media; and (g) business. Global natural and other events also influence the fulfilment of these tasks. Witmer and Sweeney (1992) presented this model as “an effort to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the characteristics of the healthy person, the life tasks and the life forces” (Adams et al., 1997, p. 140).

Myers and Sweeney (2005) expanded the wheel model to *the indivisible self: an evidence based model of wellness* by providing different selves with a specific aim of use for wellness counselling. The indivisible self comprises the (a) creative self; (b) the coping self; (c) the social self; (d) the essential self; and (e) the physical self. In the final wheel model, spirituality has been moved from the central position and appears only as a component of wellness. Surrounding the centre are 12 spokes in the life task of self-direction which all assist in regulating the self in performing the tasks of (a) work and leisure; (b) friendship; and (c) love. The model is ecological in that it illustrates a change in one area to cause a change in other areas of the model. Changes through time are included in the newer model, because wellness involves the chronic and acute effects of lifestyle behaviours and choices throughout the life span (Myers & Sweeney, 2005). In conclusion, wellness models incorporate a variety of life domains aiming at optimal health. The next section focuses on well-being as psychological construct.

#### 2.4.2.3 Well-being as psychological construct

Contemporary literature seems to agree with the idea that well-being is a multidimensional construct encompassing up to three dimensions, namely subjective, psychological and social which, in fact, are differentiating three forms or levels of overall well-being. Each of these dimensions is also described as multidimensional (Diener et al., 1999). Deci and Ryan (2000) added that well-being is a complex construct that concerns optimal experience and functioning, while Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) agreed that well-being is an active process of living one's life to the full. All these definitions emphasize core features of well-being, that of striving towards the highest level of functioning and the holistic view it takes on people. Furthermore, well-being is viewed as a continuous process and not a fixed state to be reached, and seems not to be prescriptive, but to be defined by individuals themselves (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011).

##### 2.4.2.3.1 Well-being theories and approaches

There are a number of theoretical frameworks (theories and models) within which well-being is examined (Myers, 1992). Firstly, *subjective and objective theories* are distinguished. Subjective theories refer to those theories according to which subjective psychological states contribute to a



person's well-being. Based on this definition the *life satisfaction theory*, *happiness theories* and hedonism are all subjective theories. Objective theories claim that not all components of well-being depend on a person's attitude towards it. Most wellness theories connected to a healthy lifestyle can thus be regarded as objective theories (Tiberius & Hall, 2010). Secondly, *top-down and bottom-up* (Diener, 1984) approaches towards well-being are differentiated on the basis of how happiness is brought about. Bottom-up theories claim that the positive and negative moments which comprise a person's life are summed in order to produce that person's subjective well-being. In contrast, top-down theories claim that a person's attitude to experience the world in a certain way will produce that person's subjective well-being (Compton, 2005). Thirdly, and related to the top-down approach, are theories that value the power of cognitive processes in determining individual well-being. Typically, these *cognitive theories* focus on the impact of memory, attention and interpretation on well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002). The fourth group of theories are known as *goal theories* (also telic theories) and refer to theories claiming that a subjective state of well-being can be reached through goal pursuit (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Other theories that attempt to explain the correlates and outcomes of subjective well-being include *adaptation theories* (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996) and *discrepancy theories* (Crawford, Diener, Wirtz, Lucas, & Oishi, 2002). Adaptation theories include those theories which incorporate the evolutionary adaptation process and pose that humans have a natural happiness set-point to which they always return after positive or negative experiences (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996). Discrepancy theories, on the other hand, posit that well-being levels will stay relatively stable despite an increase in wealth or economic inquiry (Myers, Sweeney, & Witmer, 2000; Schwartz, 2000).

#### 2.4.2.3.2 Subjective well-being

The concept of subjective well-being emerged in the late 1950s in the search for useful indicators of quality of life and to monitor social change and improve social policy (Land, 1975). In reaction to the negative focus on factors that lead to psychopathology, researchers began to focus mainly on how people feel. Positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction have begun to be complemented by a heightened interest in how well people perceive aspects of their functioning, (e.g., the extent to which they feel they are in control of their lives, feel that what they do is

meaningful and worthwhile and have good relationships) (Abbott, Ploubidis, Huppert, Kuh, Wadsworth, & Croudace, 2006). Researchers also began to examine the antecedents of happiness, self-esteem, optimism and other indicators of well-being (Lucas, Diener & Suh, 1996). Subjective well-being is a broad category that developed from these research studies and is, according to Strümpfer (2005), the primary concern of fortology. Ever since, subjective well-being has been identified as a distinct construct, which represents a cognitive and global evaluation of the quality of one's life as a whole (Pavot & Diener, 1993).

In a general overview on subjective well-being, Diener and Ryan (2009) identified subjective well-being as an umbrella term to describe the level of well-being that people experience according to their subjective evaluations of their lives. These evaluations, which can be both positive and negative, include judgments and feelings about life satisfaction, interest and engagement, affective reactions such as joy and sadness to life events, and satisfaction in other important domains. More informally, Diener (2000) stated that subjective well-being refers to what we think (the cognitive component) and how we feel (the affective component) about our lives. Diener (2000) further argued that the cognitive component refers to a discrepancy between the present situation and what is thought to be the ideal life. As these descriptions indicate, subjective well-being consists of three elements, namely life satisfaction, the presence of positive mood and the absence of negative mood (Myers & Diener, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). A combination of the last two elements is often referred to as happiness (Ryan & Huta, 2009).

Happiness is thus a reflection of pleasant or unpleasant affect, while satisfaction with life is an evaluative, longer-term assessment of one's life (Kammann & Flett, 1983; Lucas et al., 1996). Although strongly inter-correlated (Diener, 1984; Lucas et al., 1996), the affective component received more attention in general than the cognitive component of subjective well-being (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffon, 1985). Because it can take on so many meanings, happiness can be understood and defined in many ways (Diener, 1984). One definition of happiness poses that it is the positive judgement outcome when an individual weighs up positive versus negative affect (Diener, 1984). From a need and goal perspective, Snyder and Lopez (2005) viewed happiness as a desired end state to which all activity is directed. Other definitions

draw upon the process, rather than single-event assumption (Argyle, 2001) and a genetic predisposition to happiness (Haidt, 2006). Seligman (2002b) coined the term *authentic happiness* with reference to the frequent exercise of inherent signature strengths. In his conceptualization of this term he stated that happiness is attainable through the activity in which the individual engages and which must be consistent with noble purposes.

The life satisfaction component of subjective well-being has been conceptualized as “the cognitive evaluation of one’s life” (Diener, 1984, p. 550). Other definitions have been posed, such as a global assessment of individual’s total contextual estimate of quality of life in various areas (Strack, Argyle, & Schwarz, 1991) and individual’s assessment of quality of life on the basis of their own set of criteria (Pavot & Diener, 1993). From the definitions provided it is clear that satisfaction with life adheres to a holistic approach towards an individual’s own sense of well-being as measured cognitively. Despite a lack of agreement about the number of dimensions of subjective well-being, the cognitive and affective components discussed above are generally recognized (Carr, 2011; Diener et al., 1985; Snyder & Lopez, 2002b). Other theorists, however, have proposed additional conceptual models for understanding subjective well-being. Seligman (2000) distinguished between feelings of meaning, pleasure (including happy emotions), and engagement (interest and flow), and approached subjective well-being only in terms of happiness. He identified the following substructure of happiness: (a) pleasure (or positive emotion); (b) engagement; and (c) meaning (Seligman, et al., 2005). Additionally in Csikszentmihalyi’s model (1990), subjective well-being depends on being involved in interesting activities, i.e., those with an optimal balance between challenge and skill.

Diener (1984) and Diener and Larson (1984) reported the relative stability of subjective well-being over time and across different life domains. Based on three components, Compton (2005) added that subjective well-being occurs when people feel happy, are satisfied with their lives, and experience low levels of neuroticism. A general consensus among researchers was reached that the strongest predictors of subjective well-being in Western cultures are (a) extroversion; (b) a sense of control; (c) positive social relationships; (d) positive self-esteem; (e) optimism; (f) meaning and purpose in life; and (g) the resolution of inner conflicts (Diener et al., 1999; Myers,

1992). Carr (2011) added to these predictors: happiness, flow, optimism, emotional intelligence, giftedness, creativity and wisdom.

#### 2.4.2.3.3 Psychological well-being

Empirical research on well-being based on the eudaimonic approach of the good life argued that living well is not simply a matter of experiencing more pleasure than pain as suggested with subjective well-being; instead, it involves a striving for fulfilment and realization of one's true potential (Ryff, 1989).

Endeavours regarding psychological well-being began in the 1980s and stemmed from human development theories and existential challenges in that they posed questions about meaningfulness and purpose in life. Both these traditions hold humanistic values that explore human capacity and wellness. The work of Ryff and colleagues are at the forefront of this endeavour. Psychological well-being fits well under the umbrella of eudaimonia (Keyes et al., 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Keyes (1998) referred to the extent to which people excel in their lives in relation to concepts such as self-acceptance and meaning in life. Both subjective and psychological well-being assess well-being, but they address different aspects of the meaning of well-being. As indicated above, subjective well-being involves more global evaluations of affect and satisfaction, whereas psychological well-being looks into a person's thriving through challenges (evident from, among others, the pursuit of meaningful goals; growing and developing as a person; and establishing quality ties with others) (Ryff, 1995). However, researchers have discussed how these different perspectives might complement rather than contradict one another in the study of well-being (Keyes et al., 2002; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Following a review of positive mental health theories, Ryff and colleagues developed a model called *psychological well-being*, which incorporates eudaimonic approaches to happiness and was meant to serve as a more complete description of subjective well-being since it includes the facet of positive functioning. (See Chapter 3 for an elaborate discussion of this model.) In this model psychological well-being is posed as a multidimensional construct that consists of six distinct facets: (a) positive attitude towards oneself (self-acceptance); (b) satisfying relationships with others (positive relationships with others); (c) independence and self-determination

(autonomy); (d) a sense of mastery and competence (environmental mastery); (e) a sense of goal directedness in life (purpose in life); and (f) feelings of personal continued development (personal growth).

From this perspective, psychological and subjective well-being are both valid models and should be viewed as representing different facets of positive mental health or well-being. Critics of the psychological well-being approach argue that it attempts to impose the researcher's perceptions of well-being onto individuals and fails to take into account how individuals might evaluate and define well-being for themselves; thus, undermining the subjectivity involved (Diener, Sapyta, & Suh, 1998).

#### 2.4.2.3.4 Measuring well-being

The assessment of well-being will vary depending on the specific approach, theory or model utilized to measure the level of well-being. Measuring general well-being or specific domain well-being is another deciding factor in choosing the method of assessment. According to Compton (2005), the main reasons that hold back research on psychological and subjective well-being revolve around the difficulty of defining the concept and how to measure it. Hefferon and Boniwell (2011) claimed that the measurement of well-being is one of the most fundamental issues regarding positive psychology.

However, a number of quantitative measurement instruments were developed in this research endeavour such as the *Satisfaction with Life Scale* (Diener et al., 1985); the *Affectometer* (Kamman & Flett, 1983), and the *Subjective Happiness Scale* (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). Self-report measures are commonly used to assess subjective well-being and generally show high convergence with one another (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Personal subjective evaluations are also important as they allow for the interpretation of "facts" from an individual viewpoint. They further enable the conceptualization of happiness as a construct since individuals attach their own meaning to them through personal self-reports (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009).

Despite much criticism of the reliability of well-being measurements due to the subjectivity thereof, they can also be measured objectively in verbal and non-verbal behaviour, actions, biology, attention and memory (Compton, 2005; Diener & Ryan, 2009). A substantial amount of research shows, however, that self-report measures have sound psychometric properties (Diener & Lucas, 1999). Yet, the issue of concern remains the danger of measurement bias. To minimize the possibility of such bias and in order to achieve an objective measure of well-being, researchers also utilize non-self-report methods such as observer reports, facial measures, physiological measures and emotion-sensitive tasks (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2002; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Although the measurement of well-being will always remain a controversial issue, the future of well-being research rests on the inclusion of daily diary methods, qualitative descriptions as well as more longitudinal and experimental designs (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). To evaluate the situation nationally, the positive psychology research activities in South Africa are subsequently discussed.

## **2.5 POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

As cultural differences proved to have an influence on perceived well-being and most positive psychology research has been conducted in Western individualistic cultures, South African research is crucial.

In a 2007 study by Coetzee and Viviers, the positive psychology research done in South Africa was reviewed. These authors posited that, similar to international trends, positive psychology research only really began to blossom in the last 15 years. The first to make a real contribution within this field in South Africa was Strümpfer (1995) in his article based on the work of Antonovsky (1987). He proposed the term fortology in 1995, which was soon expanded to psychofortology by Wissing and Van Eeden (1997) (see section 2.3.3). Other activities include the 1<sup>st</sup> South African Wellness Conference in 2000, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> South African Work Wellness Conferences in 2002 and 2004, and the South African Conference on Positive Psychology, held in Potchefstroom in 2006. Although many research projects related to positive psychology are executed by academics from different institutions, the North West University seems to be leading the field with national and international projects in this regard.

To collect data for their study on the positive psychology research activities in South Africa, Coetzee and Viviers (2007) searched positive psychology-related studies in South Africa by means of the South African Bibliographic Information Network (SABINET). The earliest references detected on this electronic database date back to 1970. They included studies over the past 36 years in their review. Their search included articles from peer-reviewed South African journals; online full-text articles from peer-reviewed South African journals; and listed, current and completed unpublished doctoral theses and master's dissertations at South African universities. They also considered conference presentations from the 2nd South African Work Wellness Conference held in 2004 and the South African Conference on Positive Psychology held in 2006; and funded research projects as documented on the Nexus database. These authors used the three fields of positive psychology as posed by Seligman (2002a) as a workable categorisation framework for their review. Their study yielded the following findings: Within the category of individuals' subjective positive experiences, 127 studies could be traced. Most of the studies in the category of valued subjective experiences were related to present experiences. Of these present experiences, engagement was most often investigated. Within the category of individuals' positive traits, 976 studies were considered. It became evident that South African researchers did extensive research on earlier positive psychology constructs, such as coping, before the onset of the year 2000. The category of groups, institutions and interventions yielded 74 studies (Coetzee & Viviers, 2007).

Coetzee and Viviers (2007) concluded that few studies focused on valued subjective experiences. However, of these valued subjective experiences, the aspects of engagement, flow, and psychological and emotional wellness or well-being led to most research initiatives. With reference to methodology, the results indicated that quantitative, non-experimental studies constitute the bulk of studies undertaken in this field in South Africa.

A volume on well-being research in South Africa as part of a series on cross-cultural advancements in positive psychology is in its final stages before submission for publication (M.P. Wissing, personal communication, June 20, 2011).

## 2.6 CRITICISM OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Despite the plethora of research and activities within the field of positive psychology, criticism remains. Firstly, not all psychologists were impressed with the term positive psychology and raised questions regarding the dismissal of their earlier work as “negative psychology”. Secondly, Sheldon (2009) strongly advocated for an integrative framework within positive psychology at the beginning of his article on missing parts in positive psychology. He viewed the lack of a framework, in which the many different positive psychology topics and phenomena can be unified, as a major obstacle for the field. He further argued that, without such a framework, it would be impossible to derive more abstract understandings of human flourishing. Thirdly, and as already indicated in section 2.3.6, some researchers are of the opinion that eudaimonia entered the field of positive psychology with minimal scientific scrutiny (Kashdan, et al., 2008). Fourthly, Barbara Held (2004) explored three ways in which the construction and presentation of the positive psychology movement itself is negative – in the first place, the negative side effects of the positive psychology movement, especially of its dominant, separatist message. In this regard Held claimed that the professional culture is saturated with positive thinking ideas and an oversimplified view of being happy, healthy and wise. She argued that, from a positive psychology viewpoint, unhappy people who do not manage to transcend their pain can end up feeling worse and guilty. This is also evident as critics of positive psychology often refer to it as a so-called “happiology” (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). In the second place, Held raised the issue of negativity to be found within the positive psychology movement. Among other topics raised, she added that “when Seligman reportedly said in the *Monitor* that the positive psychology movement does not replace negative social science and psychology, which are flourishing enterprises that I support” (Kogan, 2001, p. 74), “his pledge of support failed to reassure” (p. 19). In the third place, she argued that the forerunners of positive psychology “differentiated their movement not only from humanistic psychology but from the rest of psychology (and social science) as well” (p. 36). Moreover, humanistic psychology criticizes positive psychology for its short-sightedness in separating itself from the humanistic discipline, as this has limited the generalization of findings (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011).



In summary and with some overlap with the above-mentioned points of criticism, Hefferon and Boniwell (2011) collated the major criticisms of positive psychology. They state that, firstly, the question arises as to why the positive is being studied when the negative is more immediate in the present time. In addition, Van Deurzen (2007) mentioned that the people of this century are lost and find their lives devoid of meaning; therefore, rendering a very limited contribution to positive psychology. Secondly, Hefferon and Boniwell (2011) highlighted Lazarus' (2003) critique regarding the use of methodology within positive psychology research. According to him, too much emphasis is placed on cross-sectional correlation research. Another general point of criticism indicated by Hefferon and Boniwell (2011) is the simplistic viewpoint on the dimensionality of emotions. Larsen, McGraw and Cacioppo (2001) and Larsen, McGraw, Mellers and Cacioppo (2004) argued that positive psychology views emotions as either positive or negative when, in fact, most emotions are both. A part of these authors' main criticism is the debate concerning the oversimplified view of positive psychology on complex issues which, according to critics, "advocates self-help techniques that have not been properly validated through psychological experimentation" (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011, p. 224).

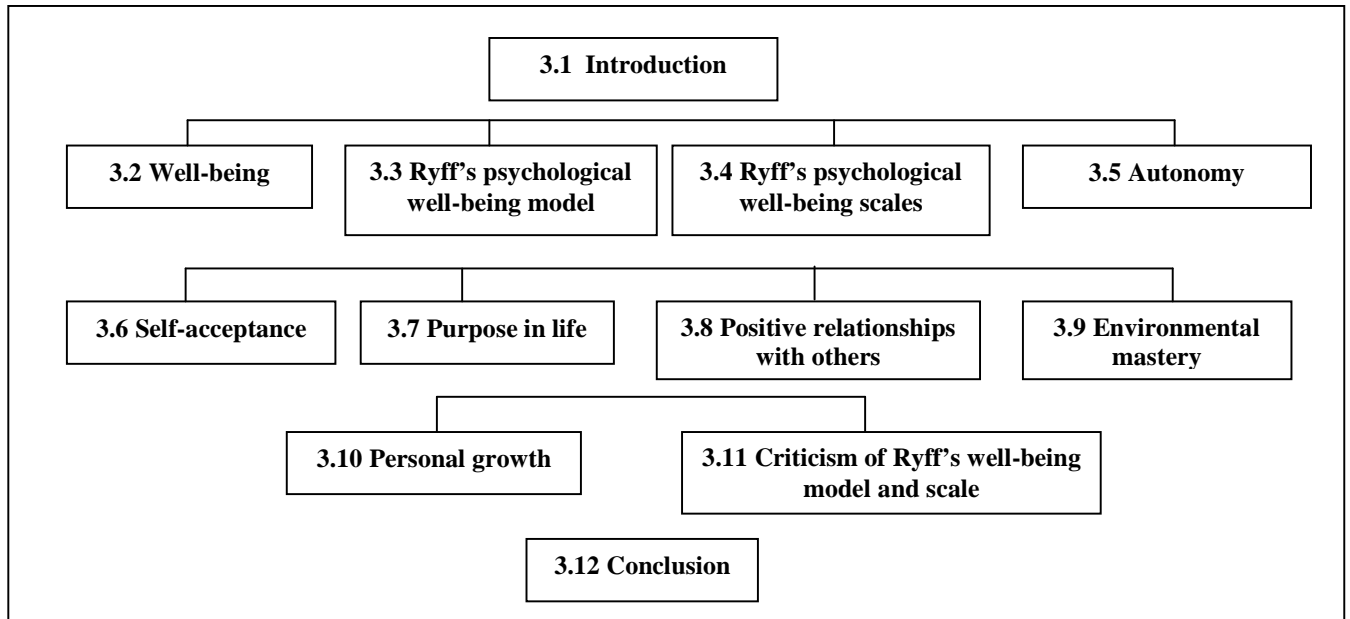
## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the rise of the profession's newest subdiscipline, positive psychology, was discussed. Traditionally, psychology operated from a disease model, but this chapter illustrated why and how a shift towards a model of mental health developed. An overview of the concepts of wellness and well-being highlighted the multidimensionality of these constructs and provided different views from various theories, models and philosophical stances. The focus then shifted towards well-being, with specific reference to psychological well-being, since Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being model serves as the theoretical model within this study. In conclusion, this chapter illustrated that positive psychology is alive and vibrant in South Africa, even though criticism of this subdiscipline, in general, remains. The next chapter takes a more selective stance when Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being model is discussed in full.

## CHAPTER 3

### RYFF'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING MODEL

Figure 4. Visual display of the outline of Chapter 3.



#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2 positive psychology as the theoretical approach for this study was broadly discussed. Chapter 3 provides a closer look at the psychological well-being model developed by Ryff (1989) as it functions as the main theoretical model for this study. Figure 4 visually displays the outline of this Chapter. Firstly, eudaimonic well-being is highlighted in order to create the broader context for this chapter. Secondly, the philosophy of Ryff's model, which informs the importance of the development of a psychological well-being model, is explained, including Ryff's view on mental health. Thirdly, the psychological assessment instrument based on Ryff's model, namely the Psychological Well-being Scales, is discussed. The reason for this inclusion is twofold: such a discussion provides evidence for the applicability and effectiveness of Ryff's theoretical model and it provides deeper insight into the descriptions of the different psychological well-being domains. Fourthly, an explanation of the critical issues regarding each

domain follows. Each domain will be discussed with reference to (a) its description and meaning within psychology; (b) its development and contextualization from earlier psychological theories; and (c) its use as a coping mechanism. Lastly, a critical discussion of Ryff's psychological well-being model is provided. The focus throughout this chapter will be predominantly on health and how the psychological well-being domains identified by Ryff contribute to overall well-being.

### **3.2 WELL-BEING**

In Chapter 2 various definitions of well-being were posed. In its broadest sense and in psychology, well-being has been defined as optimal human functioning as it is operationalized within a holistic view of people. The major distinction between different definitions of well-being is based on two approaches: hedonism and eudaimonism. As mentioned previously, eudaimonism refers to the expression and fulfilment of inner potential, whereas hedonism views happiness as the totality of one's pleasurable moments (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009). Thus, eudaimonic well-being refers broadly to human flourishing. Qualities of eudaimonia often represent what people want most in life (Flanagan, 2007; King & Napa, 1998). Although specific definitions of eudaimonia vary, they all contain aspects in addition to hedonic happiness such as meaning in life, pro-social growth, intrinsic motivation, vitality, wisdom or psychosocial maturity (Bauer, McAdams, & Pals, 2008; King & Hicks, 2007; Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman, et al., 2008).

It has been illustrated that a broad range of positive psychology constructs fit within an eudaimonistic approach, including (a) intrinsic motivation and the pursuit of goals (Ryan, et al., 2008); (b) psychological and social well-being (Keyes; 2003; Ryff, 1989); (c) the satisfaction of essential human needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Maslow, 1954); (d) living in accordance with meaning and purpose in life (McGregor & Little, 1998; Seligman, 2002a) and participation in activities that make people feel engaged and fulfilled (Waterman, 1993; Waterman et al., 2008); (e) curiosity and openness with an orientation towards change and personal growth (Kopperud & Vittersø, 2008; Vittersø, 2003; 2004); and (f) vitality, zest or energetic feelings (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999; Waterman, 1993). Examples of eudaimonic

well-being models are, among others, Rogers' (1959) fully functioning personality, Maslow's (1954) self-actualization personality, and Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory.

The distinction between subjective and psychological well-being was also highlighted (see sections 2.4.2.3.2 and 2.4.2.3.3) by means of addressing different aspects of the meaning of well-being. Subjective well-being involves more global evaluations of affect and satisfaction, whereas psychological well-being is concerned with a person's thriving through challenges evident from, among others, the pursuit of meaningful goals, growing and developing as a person and establishing quality ties with others (Ryff, 1995). The accuracy of these approaches with regard to measuring and defining well-being has been debated and critics of the subjective well-being approach have argued that this approach lacks a theoretical basis and relies too heavily on individual definitions and evaluations of happiness (Ryff & Singer, 1998). Ryff (1989) agreed with these opinions and identified the need to develop an original well-being model. Ryff and Keyes (2002) also criticized early research on psychological well-being for not focusing on the basic question of what well-being really means.

Various approaches to conceptualizing psychological well-being are in existence, for example, goal achievement (Diener, 1984), experiencing positive affect and the absence of negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). However, according to Ryff (1989), these theories had limited impact due to too few credible assessment procedures, the diversity of the criteria proposed for well-being, and being too value-laden. Schmutte and Ryff (1997) concurred by adding that a return to well-being, which addresses more diverse aspects than merely life satisfaction and happiness, was crucial. These opinions, and her belief that subjective well-being is not necessarily a condition of mental health, convinced Ryff to undertake the task of distilling theories in order to develop a psychological well-being model from a eudaimonic perspective (Diener, 2009; Gallagher & Lopez, 2009; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

### **3.3 RYFF'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING MODEL**

#### **3.3.1 Development and philosophy of the model**

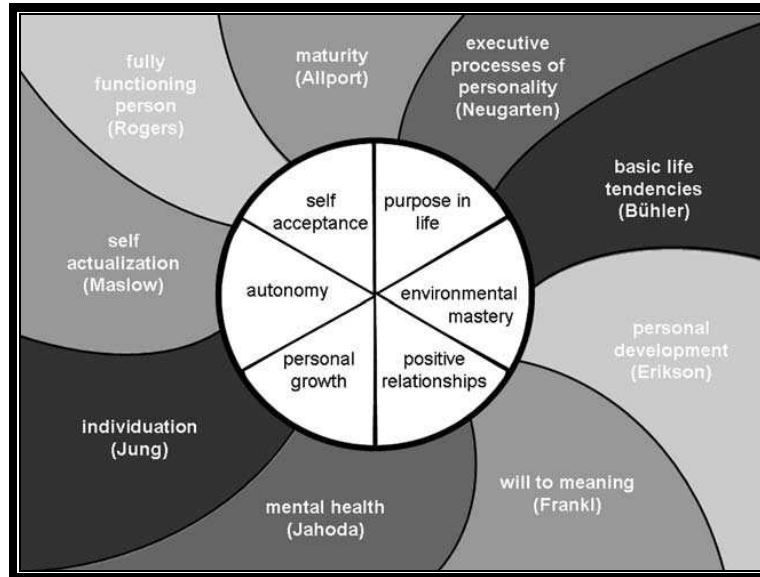
Ryff (1989) critiqued research on subjective well-being for what she saw as its impoverished theoretical basis. She acknowledged that current approaches to subjective well-being had been extensively evaluated, and that psychometrically solid measures had been constructed. She does not take issue with particular measures and indices *per se*, but instead holds the view that “subjective well-being research was a result of historical accident and was not designed to define the basic structure of psychological well-being” (1989, p. 1070). Acting on the basis of her critique, she developed an alternative approach to well-being which she referred to as psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989).

Ryff's multidimensional model does not connect psychological health with the mere absence of psychopathology, neither is it directly linked to happiness, which she viewed as a hedonistic approach to well-being (Keyes et al., 2002). The model was developed from the viewpoint of well-being being the “byproduct of a life that is well-lived” (Ryff & Singer, 1998, p. 5). In her attempt to represent a distinct form of well-being based in the eudaimonic theoretical perspective, Ryff first revisited key concepts from Aristotle in order to strengthen conceptual foundations of eudaimonic well-being. This led to her belief that well-being theories suggested equivalence between eudaimonia and hedonism, “something that was deeply contrary to Aristotle's distinction between the satisfaction of right and wrong desires” (Ryff & Singer, 2008, p. 14). Engaging with Aristotle's work also confirmed that the essence of eudaimonia, namely human excellence based on unique potential, was omitted from many of the then existing well-being theories. This observation directed Ryff to prioritize self-realization in the development of a psychological well-being model as she viewed well-being as “the striving for perfection that represents the realization of one's true potential” (Ryff, 1995, p. 100).

Being aware of the various forms that well-being can take, Ryff revisited earlier theories that attempted to describe levels and domains of psychological well-being. An extensive literature review, much of which was generated in the 1950s and 1960s, articulated the contours of optimal human functioning. In this regard Maslow's (1954) concept of self-actualization, Rogers' (1959)

view of the fully functioning person, Bühler's (1935) basic life tendencies, Erikson's psychosocial stages, Jung's (1933) formulation of individuation, Allport's (1961) views of maturity, Jahoda's (1958) concept of mental health and Neugarten's processes of personality were consulted (Fava & Ruini, 2003; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). Ryff drew on her training as a life span developmental psychologist to allow room for the developmental tasks and challenges that confront individuals at different life stages within the conceptualization of the well-being model (Ryff & Singer, 2008; Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). Findings from existential and humanistic psychology (Allport, 1961; Frankl, 1959; Rogers, 1962) were incorporated in order to acknowledge the complexity of finding meaning and purpose in life. The few positively oriented formulations of mental health available from clinical psychology (Jahoda, 1958; Jung, 1933) were also incorporated. Finally, Ryff included the ideas of two utilitarian philosophers, Mill and Russell, whose work greatly overlapped with Aristotle's. Ryff (1995) argued that all these perspectives hold similar and complementary criteria of positive psychological functioning. The challenge regarding all of the above-mentioned theories and perspectives was integrating them into a coherent unit, which was achieved through a progressive process that aimed at identifying recurrent themes. Drawing on points of convergence in these theoretical formulations, Ryff (1989) suggested an integrative multidimensional model of psychological well-being that condensed six psychological dimensions of challenged thriving. This process, along with other studies investigating well-being as an outcome in various life challenges, underscores the multidimensional structure of eudaimonic well-being and confirms that it is unidimensional. Figure 5 illustrates the full scope of prior thinking that informed Ryff's model:

Figure 5. Core dimensions of personal well-being and their theoretical foundations (Ryff & Singer, 2008, p. 20).



In the centre of Figure 5 are the six key dimensions of psychological well-being, representing aspects of what it means to be healthy, well and fully functioning. The six dimensions are surrounded by their conceptual underpinnings. The model presents six conceptually distinct realms of psychological functioning, namely a sense of self-determination (autonomy); the positive appraisals of oneself and one’s past life (self-acceptance); the belief that one’s life is purposeful and meaningful (purpose in life); the presence of high-quality interpersonal relationships (positive relationships with others); the capacity to effectively manage one’s life and environment (environmental mastery); and a sense of continued growth and development as an individual (personal growth). These six constructs define psychological well-being, both theoretically and operationally, and specify that which promotes both emotional and physical health (Compton, 2005; Keyes, et al., 2002).

This perspective has created a new model of health based on the conception of health as “not only the absence of illness but the presence of something positive” (Ryff & Singer, 1998; WHO, 1984). Ryff’s (1989) psychological well-being model has had implications for practice as this model also forms the basis of Fava’s well-being therapy (1999). The goods promoted as

psychological well-being (i.e., autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, personal growth, self-acceptance, happiness, and the freedom to live life as one sees fit) overlap to a significant degree with the goods that shape most of the treatment goals of interventions in counselling. The goal of well-being therapy is to improve the levels of psychological well-being according to the aforementioned dimensions by means of cognitive behavioural techniques (Fava, 1999).

### **3.4 RYFF'S PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING SCALES**

#### **3.4.1 Development and uses of Ryff's psychological well-being scales**

For much of the past century psychological well-being had little empirical impact due to its lack of credible measures. Because credible theoretically derived assessments of psychological well-being were non-existent, non-theoretical conceptions were frequently used, although limited in their definition of constructs (Ryff, 1989). Ryff recognized the need for an instrument to measure theoretically driven constructs of psychological well-being and developed an instrument (based on her theoretical model) that is now widely used by researchers working in the well-being field (Keyes, et al., 2002; Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). This construct-oriented approach to theoretical framework and scale development led to the psychological assessment instrument known as the Psychological Well-being Scales (PWBS) (Ryff, 1989) and is also often referred to as Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-being.

The PWBS (medium form) consists of six 9-item self-report subscales (54 questions) which measure autonomy, self-acceptance, purpose in life, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, and personal growth. The full version of the PWBS contains 20 items per scale, producing a 120-item inventory. Each scale includes both positively and negatively phrased items, and responses are made on a six-point Likert-type scale. Ryff (1989) hypothesized that the six factors are unified by a second-order factor called well-being. A composite well-being score is computed by summation of the six scale scores. The following are example statements from each of the areas of well-being measured by the PWBS:



- Autonomy: I have confidence in my opinions, even if they are contrary to the general consensus.
- Self-acceptance: I like most aspects of my personality.
- Purpose in life: Some people wander aimlessly through life, but I am not one of them.
- Environmental mastery: In general, I feel I am in charge of the situation in which I live.
- Positive relations with other people: I would describe myself as a giving person, willing to share my time with others.
- Personal growth: I think it is important to have new experiences that challenge how you think about yourself and the world.

Studies have documented socio-demographic variability (by age, gender and education) in the dimensions of the PWBS (Clarke, Marshall, Ryff, & Rosenthal, 2000; Keyes & Ryff, 1998; Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 1996). The PWBS has also been extensively used by researchers to study well-being outcomes, varying from small-scale studies to national surveys (Perron, 2006). The measurement of psychological well-being in response to various life challenges, for example, marital status change (Marks & Lambert, 1998), body and health consciousness (McKinley, 1999), work aspirations and achievements (Carr, 2011), and recovery from depression (Fava, Rafanelli, Grandi, Conti, & Belluardo, 1998), blossomed soon after the development of this long-awaited scale (Keyes et al., 2002; Perron, 2006).

The PWBS has been used in higher education in many different ways such as in counselling centres, as part of health or wellness curricula, in facilitating debates on the journey towards finding meaning, as well as a tool to determine the programmes which enhance students' psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Findings from multiple studies using this scale with primarily white participants have shown replicable age and gender differences on aspects of well-being. Some aspects of well-being, such as purpose in life and personal growth, show notable decrements cross-sectionally from young adulthood through midlife and old age, while others, such as environmental mastery or positive relations with others (for men), show age increments, and still others (self-acceptance) show no age differences. In addition, evidence shows that women have higher profiles on positive relations with others, and sometimes on personal growth, than men (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Past research (Keyes et al., 2002; Ryff, 1989) has found these measures to be reliable and to be related, but distinct from measures of subjective well-being. The six subscales exhibited adequate levels of internal consistency; alpha reliabilities for the six scales ranged from 0.70 to 0.86 (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007). In the original validation study (Ryff 1989) each of the six dimensions of well-being was operationalized with a 20-item scale that showed high internal consistency and test-retest reliability as well as convergent and discriminant validity with other measures (Ryff, Keyes, & Hughes, 2003). Based on a sample of 321 men and women using multiple age groups, Ryff (1989) reported that the internal consistency of (a) the subscales ranged from 0.86 to 0.93; and (b) the test-retest reliability ranged from 0.81 to 0.88. Steger, Kashdan, Sullivan and Lorentz (2008) reported alphas ranging from 0.74 to 0.85. The instrument described by Ryff (1989) was thus found to satisfactorily describe the variations in psychological well-being (Fava & Ruini, 2003).

Ryff's work has been widely used both as a theoretical framework and psychological instrument in studies. Already in 2006 her two key papers, Ryff (1989) and Ryff and Keyes (1995), had been cited in more than 500 published studies (Springer, Hauser, & Freese, 2006). In the next section autonomy as psychological well-being domain is discussed.

### **3.5 AUTONOMY**

#### **3.5.1 Autonomy as psychological construct**

In Ryff's well-being model autonomy reflects the sense of self-direction and an ability to resist social pressures (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007). In addition, Ryff and Singer (2008) indicated that a person who scores a high level on this scale of the PWBS regulates behaviour from within and evaluates the self by personal standards. A low score is indicative of an over-concern about the expectations and evaluations of others and the tendency to rely on judgements of others to make important decisions.

Ryff (1989) equates autonomy with attributes such as self-determination, independence, internal locus of control, individuation, and internal regulation of behaviour. Underlying these attributes is the belief that one's thoughts and actions are one's own and should not be determined by agencies or causes outside one's control (Christopher, 1999). Keyes et al. (2002) added that autonomy is a result of an attempt to sustain individuality within a larger social context, the desire to be self-determined and to gain a sense of personal authority. Beck (1976) described autonomy as the personal interest in independence, individuality and attainment of personal goals. According to him, autonomous individuals take their sense of well-being from personal achievements and control over their own activities and environment. Mele (1995) defined autonomy as "consisting primarily in a person's capacity to judge, decide, and act on the basis of her own attitudes and reasoning" (p. 138).

Autonomy as an aspect of well-being aspect is undoubtedly the most Western of all the dimensions (Helwig, 2006). Findings from an emerging body of cross-cultural research, however, proved that fundamental notions of freedom of choice and autonomy are held across a wide spectrum of cultures and are characterized by similar kinds of behaviour (Yau & Smetana, 2003). Although autonomy as value may be shared across cultures or time, it may be afforded different significance or ranked differently within the hierarchy of values and assumptions of a specific culture. Although autonomy and respect are values found in both Western and non-Western cultures, the non-Western cultures place more weight on respect, whereas Western cultures give priority to autonomy. Thus, both the meaning and weighting of autonomy can vary, depending on local contexts (Helwig, 2006).

These conceptualizations of personal autonomy are the foundation for universal claims to people's rights and freedom found across different cultural contexts (Helwig, 2006). Research in a variety of cultures, including many often classified as "collectivist", has indicated that individuals' well-being is associated with their perceived ability to autonomously pursue goals held to be important to them (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Nearly all notions of autonomy reveal the central aspect as the capacity for critical reflection. One has to be able to reflect on situations to decide to either distance from it or to identify with it (Blöser, Schöpf, & Willaschek, 2010).

In a conceptualization of autonomy it is critical that autonomy is not viewed as the opposite of relatedness, as Helwig (2006) illustrated the co-existence of these two aspects within social relationships. The self-determination theory also posits that both autonomy and relatedness are crucial universal needs to be satisfied for healthy human functioning and that they contribute jointly towards a good life (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

### **3.5.2 Early psychological formulations of autonomy**

Autonomy is one of the main ideals and defining values of individualism (Lukes, 1973). It is related to the Western concepts of liberty and freedom, and it is our capacity for autonomy that affords us our dignity as human beings. Autonomy is strongly connected to well-being in two other well-being conceptualizations, that of self-actualizers (Maslow, 1954) and the fully functioning person (Rogers, 1959). Maslow (1954) indicated that self-actualizers show autonomous functioning and can resist enculturation. Rogers (1959) accentuated autonomy as one of the three personality traits of someone who is functioning optimally and described it as an internal locus of evaluation whereby others are not looked to for approval. Thus, self-evaluation is based on personal standards.

Autonomy was also posited by Erikson (1963) as an important developmental milestone to be achieved. He described it as turning inwards later in life and gaining a sense of freedom from norms governing everyday life (Fava & Ruini, 2003). Erikson (1963) viewed a sense of autonomy as constructed within the context of rising abilities that is related to the successful negotiation of conflicts between these abilities and external demands. Life span development theories further described the desire to choose the way in which one wants to live as a natural human characteristic that manifests in different ways at different ages. Helwig (2006) elaborated that autonomy entails universal psychological needs pertaining to identity formation, which is expressed differently in different developmental periods. It is generally believed that autonomy is related to the development of a sense of self and an important ingredient in the construction of personal identity (Helwig, 2006; Moshman, 2005).

Autonomy is represented within the framework of Piagetian-Kohlbergian developmental moral psychology as the post-conventional stage of development which is primarily concerned with being more autonomous in the decision-making process (Cuypers, 2009). Within well-being therapy autonomy is framed as the ability to develop a strong sense of self-worth, leading to assertive behaviour. Clients are thus able to give their opinions and not go along with situations that are not in their best interest. They value their own needs as equally important as those of others and, by doing so, they enhance environmental mastery and purpose in life (Fava & Ruini, 2003).

### **3.5.3 Autonomy as coping mechanism**

According to self-determination theory, autonomy is manifested through intrinsically motivated behaviour. As individuals develop, autonomous activity is expanded gradually by the integration of regulatory processes, which results in their being aware of emotional states and managing their emotions and impulses. When autonomy is high, individuals persist more, are more effective and show better physical and mental health (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This theory poses that greater autonomy is associated with better persistence at tasks, adherence to medical programmes, compliance with healthy lifestyle programmes and engagement in activities within intimate relationships (Carr, 2011). On a therapeutic level, Deci and Ryan (2008) illustrated that the application of the self-determination theory can be particularly useful since it focuses on the enhancement of autonomy, which is viewed as one of the central tasks of therapy. Knee and Zuckerman (1998) found that high levels of autonomy correlate positively with better ego development, higher self-esteem, more persistence in working towards meaningful goals, greater work satisfaction and less boredom.

In a 2010 study by Adebayo and Ezeanya on effects of job autonomy among health workers in Nigeria, the conclusion was drawn that autonomy had a significant effect on health workers' experience of burnout. They found that the higher the levels of autonomy, the lower the levels of professional burnout. This finding is substantiated by the study of Ramarajan, Barsade and Burack (2008) who confirmed that, when workers perceive their job as allowing them the opportunity to become a part of the decision-making processes that will lead to a feeling of

belongingness, they are less likely to experience burnout. The next section focuses on self-acceptance as a psychological well-being domain.

## **3.6 SELF-ACCEPTANCE**

### **3.6.1 Self-acceptance as psychological construct**

Self-acceptance is one of the most recurrent criteria for well-being as indicated in a variety of research (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Fava & Ruini, 2003; Kernis, 2006; Neff, 2003). Ryff (1989) maintained that “holding positive attitudes toward oneself emerges as a central characteristic of positive psychological functioning” (p. 1071). Obtaining a high score on the self-acceptance scale of the PWBS implies a positive attitude towards the self and the ability to acknowledge and accept aspects of the self, including good and bad qualities. A high score further indicates satisfaction with past and present life (Ryff & Singer, 2008), which can thus be described as the positive evaluations of oneself and one’s past life even while aware of one’s own limitations (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007; Keyes, et al., 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

According to Rogers (1959), self-acceptance refers to individuals’ satisfaction or happiness with themselves and is thought to be essential for good mental health. Self-acceptance involves self-understanding and insight, which leads to a realistic, albeit subjective awareness of one’s weaknesses and strengths. This awareness creates a feeling of unique worth whereby one distinguishes between growth potential and acceptance of unchangeable characteristics (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007). Shepard (1979) confirmed that self-accepting persons, aware of both their strengths and weaknesses, value themselves. An important constituent of self-acceptance is individuals’ perception of effectiveness in meeting daily demands. Bandura (2000) defined this as “beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p. 3). If the sense of self-efficacy is high, an individual will tend to be more accepting of the self (Bandura, 2000). Self-acceptance may be of more concern within Western cultures and may, as a result, obtain a more prominent position in the hierarchy of psychological virtues (Helwig, 2006).

### **3.6.2 Early psychological formulations of self-acceptance**

According to Ryff and Singer (2008), the Greek philosophers were the first to suggest that we must know ourselves, implying that it is important to accurately perceive our own actions, motivation and feelings. Consequently, many psychological theories included the acceptance of the self as crucial to optimal functioning, for example: (a) Jahoda's (1958) view of mental health wherein self-acceptance is one of the central features; (b) Jung's (1933) process of individuation where coming to terms with one's darker side (the shadow) is underscored; and (c) inner harmony as one of Coan's (1977) modes of fulfilment. Rogers (1961) formulated 19 propositions from which the person-centred approach was developed. One of these formulations poses that, when individuals are able to symbolize most of their experiences and integrate them within the self-concept, they will display a high sense of self-acceptance towards mistakes made in the past (Grobler & Schenck, 2009). Self-acceptance was regarded as synonymous with mental health to such an extent that Rogers (1959) referred to the actual-self and ideal-self correlations as measures of healthy adjustment. In this regard Rogers (1959) stated that the higher the correlation between the actual self and the ideal self, the closer the individual is to acceptance of the self.

Ellis (1977) viewed self-acceptance as a crucial part of self-esteem and incorporated the construct within rational-emotive behaviour therapy. Ellis distinguished between self-esteem and self-acceptance. According to him, self-esteem is probably the greatest emotional disturbance known to humans. Self-esteem results in praising oneself when one's actions are approved by others. Consequently, one punishes oneself when one does not perform well enough and others disapprove. Ellis argued that humans need more than self-esteem; they need self-acceptance. He provided a thorough explanation of self-esteem and self-acceptance, examining the thinking of great religious teachers, philosophers and psychologists, including Benedict de Spinoza (1632-1677), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and the Dalai Lama. From their work Ellis (1977) defined self-acceptance as follows: "the individual fully and unconditionally accepts himself whether or not he behaves intelligently, correctly, or competently and whether or not other people approve, respect or love him" (p. 101). Ellis' approach suggests that emotional difficulties

are often found in people with conditional or partial self-acceptance since they view themselves in light of their accomplishments instead of their basic worth as a person (Ellis, 1977).

### **3.6.3 Self-acceptance as coping mechanism**

Self-acceptance has been put forward as a concept that underpins psychological health, as it leads to an individual view of being a fallible human who can make mistakes at times (Macinnes, 2006). A lack of self-acceptance is often the result of unrealistically high standards and expectations driven by perfectionist attitudes or the external standardization of standards. Well-being is neutralized through a constant dissatisfaction with the self, which is likely to result in other symptoms of maladjustment (Fava & Ruini, 2003). Ellis' (1993) views of rational-emotive behaviour therapy offers a logical explanation for the high correlation between self-acceptance and well-being. Rational-emotive behaviour therapy functions from the principle that depression is a natural consequence of negative self-rating, given that such negative self-views foster feelings of rejection and failure.

Rational-emotive behaviour therapy holds the same views regarding anxiety and proposes that self-acceptance correlates negatively with depression and anxiety, and positively with happiness and general well-being (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001). Consistent with the views of rational-emotive behaviour therapy, Chamberlain and Haaga (2001) found that people who were more accepting of themselves tended to yield lower scores on depression and anxiety scales and higher scores on general well-being scales. Flett, Besser, Davis and Hewitt (2003) also recognized that lower levels of self-acceptance are associated with higher levels of psychological problems.

Rational-emotive behaviour therapy does not, however, suggest that self-acceptance is the key to experiencing no negative emotions, but that emotional responses towards events are muted (e.g., mild disappointment versus severe despair) because the sense of self-worth is not threatened (Ellis & Harper, 1997). In the case of personal failure or rejection, self-acceptance allows for the healthy and adaptive emotions of frustration and regret instead of dysfunction and the debilitating feeling of total incompetence and complete failure (Chamberlain & Haaga, 2001). A 1995 study by Ellis revealed that rational-emotive behaviour therapy advocates the rating of



oneself based on the notion that a human being is an incredibly complex mix of actions and traits and that self-acceptance develops from rating behaviours instead of the person as a whole.

Chamberlain and Haaga (2001) explained this phenomenon by claiming that self-acceptors do not only manage their negative emotional responses by way of engaging in self-accepting internal dialogue, but also through their self-accepting beliefs and philosophies that are already sufficiently internalized. Ellis and Dryden (1997) offered another explanation, stating that, although self-acceptance is a habit that can never be perfectly acquired, it is reasonable to think that people who generally strive to be accepting of themselves, will more often than not view themselves as being able to cope and manage difficult situations. Self-acceptance further allows individuals to pursue excellence and to seek approval based on desires and preferences and not on internalized absolutes or others' perceptions (Ellis, 2003). Shepard (1979) found that the self-accepting person is likely to be accepting of others, which positively influences the domain of interpersonal relationships. Therefore, holding positive attitudes towards oneself emerges as a central feature of positive psychological functioning. The next section highlights purpose in life as psychological well-being domain.

### **3.7 PURPOSE IN LIFE**

#### **3.7.1 Purpose in life as psychological construct**

According to Seligman (2004), people today seem to search for a sense of purpose and meaning in life more than ever before. What does purpose in life mean? Mawere (2010) opened his discussion on purpose by stating that defining the term is not easy, but also not impossible. He argued that, similar to other philosophical ideas, the concept of purpose is quite vague. Mawere draws on the definition of Nozick (1981) and defined purpose as “the reason for which something is made or done” (p. 274). Given the emphasis on finding meaning and direction, purpose in life is regarded to be the most existential element of well-being (Ryff, et al., 2003). Ryff (1989) suggested that having “a clear comprehension of life’s purpose, a sense of directedness, and intentionality are important parts of the feeling that there is purpose and meaning to life” (p. 1071). According to her, this dimension refers to the possession of goals and

a sense of directedness which creates meaning to the present and past life and results in more aims and objectives for living (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The belief that one's life is purposeful and meaningful is a vital endeavour in order to ensure optimal well-being (Keyes, et al., 2002; Steger, 2009; Wong & Fry, 1998). Wissing and Van Eeden (2002) added that purpose in life is the awareness of goals and the understanding of how these goals fit together to create meaning and direction. According to Schimmack and Oishi (2005), purpose in life is believed to be a subjective judgement based on various sources of accessible information. The meaning to be found is, however, unique and can only be satisfied by individuals themselves, directing their life towards a specific, important goal (Strümpfer, 2005). Damon, Menon and Bronk (2003) suggested that a definition of purpose includes three components. According to them, purpose represents an ultimate aim towards which one can progress; it is meaningful to the self as it should be voluntary and self-motivated; and it is meaningful to others as it represents an act in a larger world or in pursuit of a larger cause.

Researchers have further subdivided the construct. Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema and Larson (1998) suggested a two-dimensional construal of meaning as "sense-making" and meaning as "benefit-finding". Sense-making relates to finding a reason for what happened, integrating it into existing schemata, such as religion, knowledge about health, or consequences of life stress. Benefit-finding, on the other hand, pertains to positive implications of a negative event or the pursuit of the silver lining of adversity.

Kashdan and McKnight (2009) aimed to provide a theoretical model of purpose development. They posed that purpose in life is characterized as a central, self-organizing aim. Their description implies that it reflects a predominant theme of an individual's identity (central) and that it provides a framework for systematic daily behaviour (self-organizing). These authors viewed goals and projects as the result of a life aim which, in turn, is viewed as a process and not something that can be fully achieved. They added that goals provide a sense of meaning and purpose in life, although simply having a goal will not necessarily indicate a purpose. Elements that form the basis of their definition of purpose in life are that purpose (a) stimulates behaviour consistency; (b) generates approach-oriented, motivated behaviours; (c) stimulates psychological flexibility; and (d) fosters efficient resource allocation and leads to more productive cognitive,

behavioural and psychological activity (see section 3.7.3). The foregoing descriptions underscore the fact that purpose in life is not an end state to be reached, but an ongoing day-to-day process, strongly related to personal goals that drive behaviour.

### **3.7.2 Early psychological formulations of purpose in life**

Throughout philosophical writings purposeful living is emphasized. Russell (1958) linked interest and curiosity with the individual's search for meaning and stated that these two aspects protect one from boredom and sustain the mind. Frankl's (1964) logotherapy concerned itself directly with this dimension of well-being in the sense that it is aimed at helping people find meaning and purpose in their life occurrences and suffering (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). His concept of *will to meaning* proposed three benefits of finding purpose in life: (a) creative; (b) experiential; and (c) attitudinal value (Frankl, 1964; Steger, 2009). Frankl wrote "suffering ceases to be suffering in some way until the moment it finds meaning" (Frankl, 1964, p. 115). Frankl (1964) viewed our contemporary preoccupation with purpose and meaning as "our collective neurosis" (p. 117). In addition, Frankl (1964) suggested that having a high level of purpose in life enables people to endure hardships and that purpose in life emerged as the distinguishing feature between those who survive and those who do not (Mawere, 2010).

Since Frankl's contribution, other sources of meaning have been identified, including achievement, acceptance, relationships, religion and self-transcendence (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2009). Jahoda's (1958) view of mental health includes purpose in life as she highlighted the importance of holding specific beliefs which create a sense of meaning in life. Allport's (1961) definition of maturity emphasizes a clear comprehension of life's purpose, which include a sense of directedness and intentionality. Antonovsky (1987) formulated the construct *sense of coherence* of which meaningfulness forms an integral part. Antonovsky (1994) described meaningfulness as the motivational belief that it makes sense to cope despite difficulties and found that a higher sense of purpose is associated with physical and psychological health. According to Antonovsky (1987), having a sense of purpose is a key feature of the operationalization of such coherence. Life span development theories refer to the changing goals that characterize different life stages, such as being creative or productive in midlife, and turning

towards emotional integration in later life (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Moreover, positive functioning includes goals, intentions and directedness, all of which contribute to meaningfulness and overall well-being (Steger, et al., 2008).

Kashdan and McKnight (2009) developed a model identifying the roles that biological components, vulnerabilities, psychological processes and social environments play in the development of purpose in life. Their model illustrates that the final outcome of purpose in life results from various initial ingredients which operate collaterally in different configurations. Curious exploration, which leads to the formation of interest, forms the proactive (first) stage of purpose development. This model poses the recognition and capitalization of situations and opportunities as the second important ingredient in the formation of purpose. Finally, a degree of chance or serendipity is required for embedding the purpose. These authors further acknowledge the role of transformative life events (death of a loved one, terminal illness diagnosis, etc.) in the development of purpose of life. Thus, diverse psychological approaches convey the message that, to live well, life must have purpose.

### **3.7.3 Purpose in life as coping mechanism**

If a sense of purpose contributes to well-being, it seems understandable that individuals are motivated to search for this component in their lives. Pursuing a purpose involves aspects of both the good life and the meaningful life and, in this way, purpose is indirectly linked to subjective well-being (Steger, et al., 2008).

People are thought to be motivated to both have and search for meaning in life, as it facilitates their comprehension of their place in the world (Steger et al., 2008). The search for meaning is defined as a strength since it adds to the significance of a life well lived. King and Napa (1998) and McGregor and Little (1998) claimed that a combination of happiness (positive and negative affect as well as satisfaction with life) and meaning (purpose and growth akin to eudaimonia) create overall well-being. More studies proved that individuals with purpose in life are psychologically more healthy than those without (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Sheldon & Kasser, 2001). Several other investigations have recently reaffirmed the link between meaning in

life and well-being (King, Hicks, Krull, & Del Gaiso, 2006; Mascaro & Rosen, 2005; Moomal, 1999; Steger & Frazier, 2005; Steger, Frazier, Oishi, & Kaler, 2006). Finding meaning, seeing benefits, engaging in cognitive restructuring and reframing situations are ways to understand and adapt to the changes brought by a negative event (Tennen & Affleck, 2002). Thompson, Coker, Krause and Else (2003), for example, found that having a purpose in life helped in recovering from and coping with stressful life events such as spinal cord injury. Opposing these viewpoints of search for meaning and purpose as a strength, are Baumeister (1991) and Klinger (1998) who suggested that this search occurs only when basic psychological needs have not been met. Baumeister (1991) proposed four needs for meaning: (a) purpose (objective goals and subjective fulfilment); (b) efficacy and control; (c) value and justification; and (d) self-worth. Each of these can be regarded as general goals of coping with life stress.

Another viewpoint of purpose in life as coping mechanism focuses on purpose as a foundation that allows a person to be more resilient to stressors and strain (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009). Equally interesting is the idea of being aware of a larger mission in the background, resulting in increased persistence and willingness to confront difficult challenges. McKnight and Kashdan (2009) emphasized the strength between purpose and positive outcomes, such as health and well-being, and stressed that awareness may also increase this strength. From the psychoneuroimmunology literature it became evident that purpose also pertains to immune functioning as it ought to serve as a buffer in stressful times (Cohen, Janicki-Deverts, & Miller, 2007). This is explained by the fact that uncontrollable events (which cause stress) are less demanding for people with a central, motivating life purpose (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009). In this sense purpose acts as one of the potentially explanatory variables of how a person becomes resilient (Ryff, 1995).

Ryff (1995) posited that the search for meaning and purpose is a universal feature which is not time or culture specific, but varies in its forms of expression. In addition, Nozick (1989) offered various avenues for making life purposeful and meaningful, including creating, parenting, loving and goal achievement. From an African perspective further explicit routes for finding meaning in life have been highlighted such as family life, societal harmony and social order (Mawere, 2010). In his philosophical accounts, Russell (1958) pointed to the importance of work in providing

continuity of purpose in that it also prevents boredom and a sense of meaninglessness. Russell's observation highlighted that finding purpose and meaning is not effortless, but results from an invested and committed way of living. In sum it can be said that purpose in life has a "spillover effect" into other life domains, which enhances psychological, physical and social well-being (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009).

### 3.7.3.1 Religion and spirituality as component of purpose in life

Over the last decades a large body of research has explored the associations between spirituality, religiosity and mental health outcomes (George, Ellison, & Larson, 2002; George, Larson, Koenig, & McCullough, 2000; Leondari & Gialamas, 2009). Reviews of this literature illustrated that purpose in life is associated with spirituality and religiosity (Adams, Bezner, Drabbs, Zambarano, & Steinhardt, 2000; Byron & Miller-Perrin, 2009; Leondari & Gialamas, 2009; Lyons, Deane, & Kelly, 2010).

Robinson, Cranford, Webb and Brower (2007) defined spirituality as "a person's feelings, thoughts, experiences and behaviours that arise from a search for and connection to the sacred, defined broadly to include not only a divine being but ultimate reality, transcendent truth, or existential meaning" (p. 282). Pargament (2002) described spirituality as "a search for meaning, for unity, for connectedness, for transcendence" (p. 34). From these definitions the positive link between high well-being and spirituality is evident in that spirituality can create meaning and purpose in life. According to Adams et al. (2000), spirituality is having a sense of life purpose; thus, creating a theoretical link between these constructs. Individuals, who identify themselves as spiritual, experience more purpose in life than their non-spiritual peers (Mahoney & Graci, 1999). Gerwood, Leblanc and Piazza (1998) similarly proved spirituality to be associated with life purpose and well-being.

A 2009 study by McKnight and Kashdan clarified the difference between purpose in life and religiosity. In short these authors proposed that religious faith is not necessary for purpose, but that purpose can serve as an outcome of religious teachings and beliefs. They illustrated how purpose and religious beliefs have a bi-directional relationship. Paloutzian, Richardson and

Rambo (1999) suggested that religion is the only area in which commitment to an ultimate purpose is encountered. The way in which spirituality and religion provide well-being benefits is still under debate, but it is likely to occur through a combination of mechanisms, including (a) social support; (b) expanded psychological resources; (c) positive health practices; and (d) a strong sense of coherence (George et al., 2002). Participation in religious activities, strength of religious affiliation, relationship with God, and prayer have all been associated with higher levels of well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Ferriss, 2002; Helliwell, 2007; Paloutzian & Park, 2005). The social networks and support systems created by churches and other institutions of organized religion (Diener, 2009) are additional factors that explain the above-mentioned correlation. To summarize, spiritual development and religious beliefs enhances one's sense of life purpose and, in this way, contribute to overall psychological well-being. The next psychological well-being domain under discussion is that of positive relationships with others.

### **3.8 POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS**

#### **3.8.1 Positive relationships with others as psychological construct**

Within psychology, efforts to delineate central features of psychological well-being repeatedly evoke the interpersonal realm. Ryff (1989) defined positive relations as warm, trusting relationships with others. This domain of well-being includes a general sense of the welfare of others and the ability for empathy, affection and intimacy. She further described the construct as the understanding of the give-and-take principle of human relationships. The interpersonal realm additionally involves the willingness to make compromises in order to sustain important ties with others (Ryff & Singer, 2008). A low score on this domain of the PWBS is indicative of having a few close and trusting relationships and finding it difficult to be warm and open towards others, which result in frustration and isolation in interpersonal relationships. From a cultural perspective universal endorsement of the relational realm as a key feature of a well-lived life does exist (Ryff & Singer, 1998).

From a sociological perspective Keyes (1998) conceptualized social well-being as another important aspect of this domain. According to him, social well-being refers to being integrated

into one's community and being able to contribute to society. The need to belong is found in all humans and in all cultures, although cultural differences with regard to closeness do exist (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Ryff (1995) argued that people everywhere and in almost all contexts do have the abiding need for connections with others. Thus, the external manifestations of close ties with others do vary, yet they are unquestionably critical elements in any formulation of positive human health.

### **3.8.2 Early psychological formulations of positive relationships with others**

Early philosophical accounts illustrate that this domain of psychological well-being forms an integral part of eudaimonia. Aristotle's lengthy discussions on friendship and love pointed to the significance of the establishment of quality ties with others as is the case in Mill's autobiography and Russell's viewpoint of affection as a major source of happiness (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Russell (1958) was also of the opinion that zest in life stems from feeling loved and giving love. His philosophy recalls that love enhances all the best pleasures in life. In psychology the need for personal relationships was asserted by Freud (1949), although he viewed the motive as derived from sexual drives.

The ability to love was also posed by Jahoda (1958) as criterion for mental health, while Maslow (1954) regarded feelings such as intimacy, empathy and affection as characteristics of self-actualizers and ranked "love and belongingness needs" in the middle of his hierarchy of human needs. Allport (1961) argued that close unions with others is indicative of maturity, while the developmental stage theory of Erikson (1963) posed intimacy and generativity (guiding and directing others) as important tasks to be completed in life. Bowlby (1969) added to the discussion on relatedness with his attachment theory of the beginning relationships in one's life, which he viewed to be responsible for later feelings of security and trust. Evidence for the positive relationship between attachment security and well-being is manifold (Hazan & Shaver, 1987; La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000; Simpson, 1990).

The third element of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) is relatedness, referring to the fact that all people have a basic need to belong. More precisely, the belongingness



hypothesis states that individuals have a pervasive drive to form and maintain lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Central to all of the above-mentioned theories and conceptualizations is that positive relationships with others are strongly connected with optimal human functioning.

### **3.8.3 Positive relationships with others as coping mechanism**

Social interactions have consistently been correlated with high levels of well-being (Diener, 2009; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Dunn & Brody, 2008; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Myers, 1999). Diener and Biswas-Diener (2008) found that individuals with a greater number of close relationships tend to have higher levels of well-being, which implies better coping. In contrast loneliness has consistently shown a negative correlation with positive affect and well-being (Anderson & Arnoult, 1985), as has social isolation with various patterns of happiness (Myers, 1999). Work by Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe and Ryan (2000) confirmed that daily feelings of relatedness predict indicators of well-being, including positive affect and vitality. Social benefits gained from establishing and maintaining close relationships include the provision of camaraderie, the creation of shared experience and social support – all of which can be used as coping mechanisms (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005).

Myers (1999) explained social relationships as a coping mechanism in that they buffer major life stresses. In addition, Mikulincer and Florian (2001) suggested that positive relationships serve the purpose of a general resilience factor across the life span. Lyubomirsky and Ross (1997) explained social interactions as a coping mechanism by means of social comparison processes and posed that people who report higher levels of well-being tend to use downward social comparisons more than upward comparisons. Larsen and Prizmic (2008) concurred by adding that downward comparisons are used to regulate emotional well-being.

Several positive interpersonal factors, such as having secure attachment relations (Bowlby, 1969), the presence of autonomy support from authorities (Deci & Ryan, 2000), motivating interactions with colleagues (Warr, 2007), recreation in which socializing takes place (Baker &

Intagliata, 1982) and social groups that share interests (Myers, 1999), all mediate with general well-being and happiness. A study by Frese (1999) found that social support acts as a moderator between work stressors and psychological dysfunction. Frese (1999) reported that both affective support and direct aid increase an individual's level of work satisfaction.

On a physiological level, Ryff, Magee, Kling and Wing (1999) reviewed evidence that positive relationships are associated with the secretion of oxytocin, which is related to positive affect and stress relief. Uchino (2006) supported this viewpoint by stating that social support is positively correlated with the functioning of cardiovascular and endocrine systems. Efforts to adapt to stressors often draw on quality connections with others and can both support and be supported by a sense of mastery, meaningfulness and positive self-regard (Contrada, 1998). In support of Ryff's theory on psychological well-being, it was found that people experienced greater well-being when they feel understood, are having fun with others or engage in stimulating dialogue (Ryan, et al., 2008). According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), "it seems fair to conclude that human beings are fundamentally and pervasively motivated by a need to belong, that is a strong desire to form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments" (p. 522). The next section focuses on environmental mastery as psychological well-being domain.

### **3.9 ENVIRONMENTAL MASTERY**

#### **3.9.1 Environmental mastery as psychological construct**

Within Ryff's model (1989) environmental mastery is described as the possession of a sense of competence in managing the everyday environment and reality of one's life. It further refers to the control of complex external activities and the effective use of surrounding opportunities, as well as "the ability to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values" (Ryff & Singer, 2008, p. 1071). Individuals high on personal growth place emphasis on continued development across the life span, which occurs by virtue of seeking new experiences (Ryff, 1989).

Ryff and Keyes (1995) summarized this domain as “the capacity to manage one’s life and surrounding world effectively” (p. 720). Gallagher and Lopez (2007) add that environmental mastery encompasses the shaping of one’s environment in a desirable way. In their model of well-being therapy, which is conceptually based on Ryff’s psychological well-being model, Fava and Ruini (2003) defined environmental mastery as the feeling of being able to change or improve undesirable contexts, which results in a sense of competence. Environmental mastery as construct is Jahoda’s (1958) sixth dimension of mental health. The criterion for this dimension includes six subcategories, namely (a) the ability to love; (b) the ability to work and play; (c) good interpersonal relations; (d) the ability to meet demands of situations with a sense of self-efficacy; (e) the ability to balance efforts in order to change the external world to better suit one’s own psychological world; and (f) the ability to use adequate problem-solving strategies.

Ryff and Singer (2008) acknowledged that this dimension of well-being overlaps with other psychological constructs such as a sense of control and self-efficacy, but that the distinction lies in finding or creating a context that suits one’s needs and desires. Although many Western cultures encourage the pursuit of self-chosen goals through efforts to master their environment, many non-Western cultures advocate adaptation to the social order (Christopher, 1999).

Competence refers to an internal belief that one is able to manage the environment effectively – this definition forms part of the self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (2000). These authors described competence as the propensity to have an effect on the environment as well as to attain valued outcomes with it. It can thus be said that competence fosters environmental mastery.

### **3.9.2 Early psychological formulations of environmental mastery**

Environmental mastery presupposes a particular view of the world as, to use Weber’s (1946) term, disenchanted, namely without deeper purpose. The mature individual is one who can rationally face this disenchanted world and determine effective means of accomplishing self-chosen goals. The ability to manipulate, control or master the environment both confirms and proves this vision of the world as disenchanted (Taylor, 1989). In 1961 Phillips introduced the

concept of environmental mastery and described it as an instinct that progresses through five stages: isolation, dependency, autonomy, cooperation and independence (Perron, 2006). Through these five stages individuals slowly gain a sense of mastery up to a point where independent actions can determine their personal vision of what life should be (Perron, 2006).

In their account of how Ryff's model was developed, Ryff and Singer (2008) drew attention to how life span development theories accentuated the ability to manipulate and control complex environments, as well as the ability to change and act upon the world with mental and physical activities. They also stressed that Allport's (1961) criteria of maturity included the ability to extend the self, implying that a mature person can take part in significant spheres of endeavour that go beyond the self. They posed that, from these two perspectives, the active participation in, and mastery of, the environment are crucial components of an integrated framework on positive psychological functioning. As mentioned above, Jahoda (1958) included environmental mastery as one of the dimensions of positive mental health. It is therefore evident that the concept of environmental mastery originated from a variety of thought schools and psychological approaches.

### **3.9.3 Environmental mastery as coping mechanism**

Environmental mastery is considered an important psychological resource and can be achieved in various ways (Cristopher, 1999). In a 2011 study by Knight, Davison, McCabe, and Mellor environmental mastery was negatively correlated with depression in older adults. These authors commented that a sense of self-efficacy or mastery over environmental demands, which reflects a sense of control, has been a robust predictor of psychological health. This study further proved that environmental mastery enables the individual to manage health-related challenges effectively by using problem-focused coping skills in order to mobilize resources.

As described in section 3.9.1, competence can be viewed as an integral part of environmental mastery. Niemiec, Ryan and Deci (2009) investigated competence within educational practices and noted that, when students feel competent, they are more able to meet the challenges posed by their studies. Furthermore, the satisfaction of the competence need is essential to maintain

intrinsic motivation, which leads to higher levels of overall well-being (Niemi et al., 1999). The use of humour in a stressful situation is considered to be a positive, adaptive coping strategy towards environmental mastery. Numerous studies have supported the anecdotal view that humour and laughter are therapeutic for relieving tension and anxiety (Kuiper & Martin, 1998; Moran, 1996; Moran & Massan, 1999) which can, for this reason, be seen as a way of mastering the environment. Individuals who have a sense of humour manage their stressors better and report better immune system functioning, muscle relaxation, control of pain and discomfort, positive mood states, and overall psychological health, including a healthy self-concept (Ruch & Kohler, 1998). Freud (1949) and other theorists defined humour as a suitable and efficient coping strategy. May (1953) stated that a sense of humour facilitates the enhancement of environmental mastery and is a way of achieving a new perspective on problems by receding from them. Rogers (1961) and Maslow (1954) agreed that humour is one of the main characteristics of a self-actualized person and can lead to an overall sense of being able to manage difficulties.

Empowering processes are those in which people create or are given opportunities to control their destiny and influence the decisions that affect their lives, which are generally viewed as being able to master the environment. These processes are a series of experiences in which individuals learn to see a close correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, gain greater control over resources and achieve mastery over their environments (Zimmerman, 1995). The sixth and last psychological well-being domain, namely personal growth, is discussed in the section that follows.

### **3.10 PERSONAL GROWTH**

#### **3.10.1 Personal growth as psychological construct**

The phenomenon of personal growth is often defined without much precision. Growth can mean anything from a mere gain to an organismic, progressive process (Bauer & McAdams, 2010). Along with the day-to-day natural development, personal growth has its meaning beyond simply growing older. Within Ryff's (1989) well-being model personal growth refers to continued development and the view of the self as growing and expanding. It includes openness to

experience and an overall sense of realizing personal potential. Ryff and Singer (2008) added that personal growth is operationalized in changed behaviour which results in greater self-knowledge and effectiveness and is viewed as an improvement in the self. Self-actualization and the realization of potential are central to the perspectives on personal growth (Maslow, 1954). Furthermore, personal growth involves being conscious of one's thoughts, feelings, prejudices, and judgements and using this personal knowledge to act with mindfulness and in greater accordance with one's values and potential (Levine, et al., 2006).

A hallmark of personal growth is continual development in the face of new challenges (Levine et al., 2006). According to Wright et al. (2006), personal growth is defined as any process by which individuals gain in awareness or understanding of themselves (personal awareness) and, as a result, experience changes in their feelings, beliefs, attitudes, behaviours, or views of themselves in a direction of improved effectiveness, accuracy or health. Eudaimonic growth is a related term which can operationally be defined as increases in eudaimonic well-being over time (Bauer & McAdams, 2010). Bauer and McAdams (2010) studied how people intentionally plan their lives in ways that might lead to eudaimonic growth and found that eudaimonic growth has subjective and objective components: a subjective desire for personal development and an objective attainment of personality development.

### **3.10.2 Early psychological formulations of personal growth**

Personal growth may be the dimension that comes closest to Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia (Keyes, 2005; Ryff & Singer, 2008). This notion of self-growth has clear roots in both the Enlightenment<sup>4</sup> and Romantic heritages<sup>5</sup>. For example, Taylor (1989) pointed out how, during the Enlightenment, the notion was prevalent that the self could be remade. For the Romantics,

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<sup>4</sup> The Enlightenment heritage refers to the historical period between mid-18th to early 20th century when higher criticism and individual thought was gaining popularity in Europe (Markus & Kitayama, 1998).

<sup>5</sup> The Romantic heritage refers to the historical period in the second half of the 18th century in Europe when emphasis was placed on allowing the expression of strong emotions (Markus & Kitayama, 1998).

the self was seen as containing an inner force that must continue to express itself against external obstacles (Taylor, 1989).

Keyes et al. (2002) highlighted that personal growth reflects the self-fulfilment meanings of eudaimonic well-being. Psychosocial developmental theories focus on the aspect of personal growth and share characteristics such as that development (growth) occurs in series, stages or tasks and that development consists of qualitative personal and interpersonal change related to thoughts, feelings, behaviours, values and relationships. The major theories of psychosocial development for college students and young adults emerged from Erikson's work on development in the mid-1900s. Erikson (1963) posed that continued growth depends on the individual's engagement in new and challenging tasks at different periods in life. Maslow's theory (1954) is explicitly concerned with the realization of personal potential and the strive towards psychological growth and development, similar to Jahoda's (1958) perspectives on mental health. Rogers' fully functioning person (1959) is characterized by an openness to experience, which is described as the awareness of both external and internal stimuli and the minimum use of personal defence mechanisms. Through such openness Rogers implied that both pleasant and unpleasant experiences are allowed equal access to the consciousness and will result in personal growth (Compton, 2005).

### **3.10.3 Personal growth as coping mechanism**

Personal growth is a critical component of psychological well-being (Wright et al., 2006). There is no doubt that the continuous pursuit of self-understanding and personal growth is one of the most important concerns for any person who wants to become a competent health worker (Vivian, 2009). Levine et al. (2006) also found that physicians who are aware of their personal growth are more compassionate and satisfied in their work.

Personal growth can be achieved in various ways. For example, nurturing creativity can have a powerful influence on personal growth (Kashdan, Rose, & Fincham, 2004), crisis experience can facilitate personal growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004) as well as the pursuit of life goals (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Openness to experience is also one of the many paths towards personal growth

(Schutte & Ryff, 1997). Stress and coping research has further included the functionality of the personal growth component in stressful encounters (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Janoff-Bulman, 2004; Schwarzer, 2000; Taylor, 1989).

Robitschek (1998) proposed the idea of personal growth initiative, which describes how people foster personal growth as an intervention towards psychological well-being. She elaborated that personal growth involves being open to experiences, searching for direction in life and setting personal goals. In this regard she linked personal growth to coping mechanisms such as capitalizing on opportunities and finding avenues for creative solutions. Fava and Ruini (2003) argued that people tend to focus on their distance from expected goals, instead of their progress towards goal achievement, which results in a sense of stagnation and frustration. If the emphasis can shift towards goal achievement, personal development and growth can be harnessed as a vital motivator to maintain efforts in this regard.

Personal growth has also been associated with leadership (Schwarzer, 2000). Schwarzer (2000) stated that proactive leaders take responsibility for their own growth and that the course of life is not fully determined by external forces, but can be chosen instead. It was added that proactive leaders have a vision and create meaning in life by striving towards ambitious goals. They imagine what could be and set goals in line with this vision. Levine's study (2006) on personal growth during medical internship identified triggers or catalysts for personal growth. These triggers were often experiences that evoked intense emotions, challenging their values or sense of self. Recurrent themes included caring for critically ill and dying patients, receiving feedback, witnessing unprofessional behaviour, experiencing personal problems, and dealing with the increased responsibility of internship.

As implied by the triggers mentioned above, people often show tenacious resilience in the aftermath of adversity and ultimately experience personal growth (Taubman-Ben-Ari, Shlomo, & Findler, 2011). Challenging or powerful experiences may foster personal growth and development (Wright et al., 2005). Stress- and growth-related models propose that stressful experiences provide more opportunities to experience growth and to thrive (Park, 1998). According to Shaefer and Moos (1992), four factors contribute to growth: (a) personal



characteristics; (b) characteristics of the environment; (c) characteristics of the life event; and (d) the coping response. The term *posttraumatic growth* has been coined to describe personal growth resulting from traumatic or difficult experiences. Research focusing on posttraumatic growth provides additional insights into how people may react to and accommodate stress or trauma. In particular, research addressing the process of personal growth and its relevance to clinical practice (Linley, & Joseph, 2004; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004) offers personal growth as a potential outcome of stress responses.

### **3.11 CRITICISM OF RYFF'S WELL-BEING MODEL AND SCALE**

Despite the widespread interest and use of Ryff's theoretical model and the psychological well-being scales, criticism remains. Critics' arguments mainly revolve around three topics. Firstly, critics of psychological well-being reason that it attempts to impose specific domains and perceptions of well-being onto individuals and neglects the subjectivity involved in how individuals construct their own definition of well-being (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007). In their defence, Keyes et al. (2002), using data from the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) survey, documented that psychological well-being, is conceptually related to, but empirically distinct from, subjective well-being and should therefore not be judged on a subjective/objective basis. Still regarding the conceptualization of the construct of psychological well-being, Contrada (1998) argued that overly inclusive definitions of well-being run the risk of blurring useful distinctions with other adaptive outcomes, which can introduce problems of oversimplification. Contrada (1998) added that the strong body-mind connotation of psychological well-being fails to sufficiently focus on indirect behavioural routes to health and illness such as eating, sleeping and physical exercise patterns. This author further argued that people may also have quality ties within the context of street gangs, militias and cults, which surely is not beneficial to their well-being, as is the pleasure and positive emotions that an alcoholic may create from excessive drinking. Contrada concluded that, although Ryff calls for a multidimensional dynamic process perspective of well-being, "she does not fully utilize such a perspective in grappling with conceptual and practical difficulties that arise from the good-bad judgement implied in her notion of positive human health" (Contrada, 1998, p. 31). In this study, however, the data were

analyzed through IPA which led the case studies to develop as a single meaningful unit and no specific pre-determined domains were imposed on the findings.

Secondly, although Ryff's model is notable for embracing a multifaceted approach to psychological well-being, Dunn and Brody (2008) criticized it for flattening that which might better be considered a hierarchy of elements contributing to well-being. More specifically, they claimed that, if positive relations form part of the definition of psychological well-being, they cannot be studied as an antecedent or outcome of well-being. They suggest that researchers who use this model should maintain the separation of the domains as a means of delineating between the psychological experience of well-being and the contributors to that experience. Throughout the analysis of this study's data, the domains were separated and a clear distinction was made between the psychological experiences as such and the contextual factors that contributed to the experience.

Thirdly, psychometric properties of the subscales of the PWBS remain contentious. The results of a psychometric investigation of multisamples by Springer et al., (2006), based on the internal construct validity of the domains, provided evidence that the items of the psychological well-being scales measure less than six distinct constructs, or that the theoretical construct exists at two levels of definition. More specifically, Springer et al. (2006) found very high factor correlations among the domains of personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance and environmental mastery. They argued that, although Ryff and Singer (2008) reported satisfactory psychometric properties for the scales, the set of correlates that they discuss is commendably broad as it includes too many psychological, social and demographic variables. The investigation of Springer et al. (2006) led them to the conclusion that four of the six domains of the PWBS are not properly distinguishable. Although being aware of this specific limitation, the PWBS were not used in this study; therefore, this limitation is less relevant. During the data analysis and the interpretation of the findings, however, it was a priority to establish and maintain the boundaries of each psychological well-being domain.

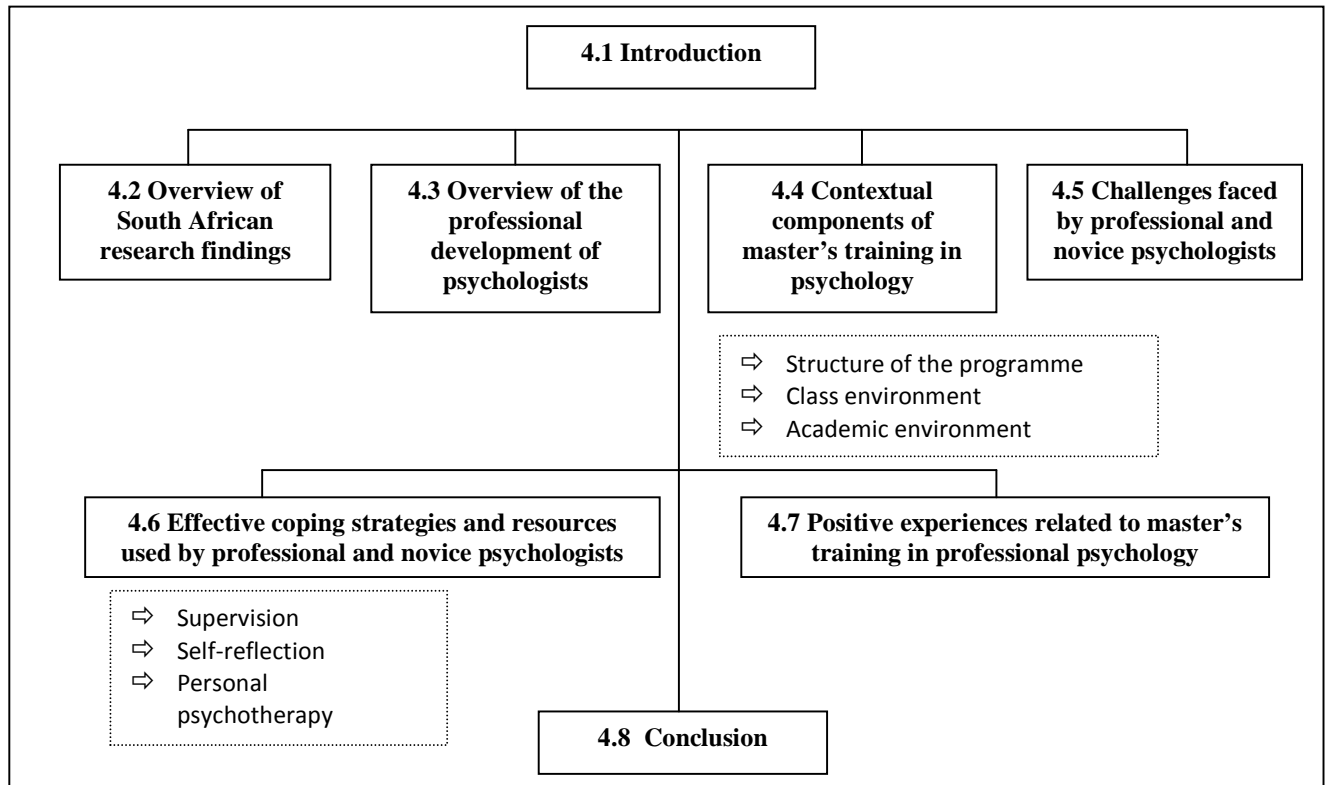
### **3.12 CONCLUSION**

This chapter aimed at providing an in-depth view of Ryff's model of psychological well-being. The need for such a model was identified by Ryff (1989) who developed a model based on a variety of mental health and developmental and counselling theories in psychology. In addition, she developed psychological well-being scales with a view to measuring an individual's level of psychological well-being. The domains of autonomy, self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, personal growth, purpose in life and environmental mastery all proved to enhance psychological well-being across all cultures. In this study Ryff's model is used as the theoretical model in terms of which the findings are interpreted. The next chapter presents and integrates the literature regarding master's students in professional psychology programmes.

## CHAPTER 4

### PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS IN PROFESSIONAL MASTER'S TRAINING

Figure 6. Visual display of the outline of Chapter 4.



#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The participants in this study, all master's students in professional psychology programmes in South Africa, are contextualized in this chapter through the discussion of relevant literature. The overarching aim of this study is to explore and describe the psychofortological experiences of these students. Therefore, and as indicated in Figure 6, it was crucial to investigate and discuss the context in which the students function, as well as the factors known to have had an impact on their experiences. Because the training to become a psychologist is a long and eventful process, only the main factors, as indicated in the literature, have been identified for the purposes of this study. An investigation of the experiences of psychology students in professional programmes

illuminates not only interpersonal dynamics and role players, but also intrapersonal struggles and successes. This chapter therefore creates the context for the study by drawing on current research findings from South African studies with relation to master's training in psychology and by referring to the professional developmental journeys of psychologists. Attention is paid to the contextual components of master's training in psychology in order to establish the context of the participants in this study. Furthermore, research findings on the challenges faced by experienced and novice psychologists, as well as their coping strategies, are reviewed and critically discussed in this chapter. Finally, the positive experiences related to training in psychology are provided.

While some studies mentioned in this chapter comment on findings from experienced psychologists, it may be fair to assume that psychology students in training experience similar phenomena. In these cases, a more focused review pertaining to students (or novice psychologists) is also provided. Due to the limited research in this field on a national level, this chapter draws heavily on relevant international findings in order to explore current trends and developments regarding the training of master's students. This chapter was approached from a psychofortological stance to fit within the theoretical approach of the study.

## **4.2 OVERVIEW OF SOUTH AFRICAN RESEARCH FINDINGS**

During the past decade, several studies regarding the training of master's students in professional programmes in psychology in South Africa were published. The following studies, of which some are directly and others indirectly related to master's training, were identified through literature searches such as Ebscohost, Academic search Premier, Sabinet and Nexus.

In 2003 Newmark focused on the selection of master's students in educational psychology at Stellenbosch University in South Africa. He summarized the actions taken by this university towards facilitating equity and justice in the selection process. A study by Pillay and Kramers (2003) explored issues related to employment and equity with regard to South African clinical psychology interns. The study revealed no significant increase in the intake of black interns in the post-apartheid period (1994-2000). The authors recommended that the goals of the profession

be re-examined and that concerted efforts be developed to attain them. The intake of students, as well as their training, was considered to be one of the main aspects to be re-evaluated.

In the same year, Pillay (2003) conducted a study on the training of educational psychologists in performing community practice within a South African context. The focus of Pillay's study was more on content such as how to integrate community psychology into the training of psychologists. However, Pillay made practical recommendations pertaining to master's training in psychology in South African training programmes. These recommendations included more cross-cultural training; more practical training as opposed to theoretical training; a collective rather than individualistic focus; more action research practices; an ecosystemic training perspective; focusing on prevention rather than cure; and the need for generic rather than specific training. Concerning the latter it was recommended that training programmes focus on exposing students to as many approaches as possible as opposed to in-depth training in one specific psychology domain.

In 2004 a study on master's selection was published by Mayekiso, Strydom, Jithoo and Katz. The aim of this study was to critically evaluate the extent to which South African institutions had developed processes in order to align selection criteria and procedures with developments taking place within the broader South Africa. They concluded that professional training programmes in psychology had limited success in addressing the need for justice, equity and redress in the selection of students. These authors suggested a coordinated strategy involving different role players to achieve the required transformation in the field of psychology in South Africa.

The question as to whether any progress was made with regard to training in clinical psychology in the post-apartheid period was raised in a 2004 study conducted by Ahmed and Pillay. The findings indicated that the training in clinical psychology was then still a cause for concern, as it remained racially skewed and important issues regarding recruitment, selection processes and policies were not being discussed. Ahmed and Pillay (2004) formulated the challenges related to moving towards a South African clinical-community psychology and they suggest that teaching models should be re-examined and reformulated to make them more relevant within the current South African context.

In another 2004 study Kottler and Swartz associated the journey of becoming a psychologist with an initiation process, linking it to experiences of separation and confusion. This association led the authors to stress the importance of good supervision, the need to recognize the identity transformation of those involved in the process, and that training should be viewed and utilized as a transformational opportunity for both the student and the profession as a whole. The focus point of a 2006 study by Pillay and Harvey was the experiences of the first clinical psychologists to have performed community service as part of their training in South Africa. This study concluded that, for training on master's level, students need to be better prepared for training community members and practical community-based work.

With the focus on the institutions that train black clinical psychologists, Pillay and Siyothula (2006) aimed to provide an indication of the number of black psychologists and the institutions that trained them. Results showed that the number of black clinical psychologists registered by the end of 2006 represented 14.2% of clinical psychologists in South Africa. Medunsa and the University of the Witwatersrand were identified as the two major training institutions of black clinical psychologists. The authors concluded that serious changes in professional training programmes were needed in order to improve the alignment of academic education with the South African context. Human (2006) investigated the effect of an adventure-based medium, known as "ropes courses", on the personal growth and professional development of master's students in psychology at the University of Pretoria. Five main themes emerged from the data, namely that adventure-based activities challenged students' personal boundaries; an awareness of anxiety levels and the way it is dealt with was triggered by the adventure-based activity; students became aware of the different roles they played in the group while engaging in the adventure-based activity; an adventure-based medium helped restore the cohesion of the group; and an awareness pertaining to trust in oneself and others was brought about by the activity. Considering these themes, Human (2006) recommended adventure-based training, as it proved to hold considerable promise in the promotion of personal growth and professional development.

A relevant component of master's training in psychology is the undertaking of a mini-dissertation. Pillay and Kritzinger (2007) surveyed clinical psychologists who graduated between

five and 10 years ago and established that almost 70% of the students took longer to complete their mini-dissertations than the stipulated time. Most of the students were of opinion that the mini-dissertation had minimal influence on their work as clinical psychologists. In short, they recommended the re-examination of the mini-dissertation as an essential component of professional training, and suggested that research topics should at least be of direct value for psychology practice. More recently, Guse (2010) conducted a qualitative study, which aimed to explore the personal and professional impact of including positive psychology in the professional training of clinical and counselling psychologists. Her main findings indicated that the integration of positive psychology into the professional training curriculum was valuable and enriching on both a professional and personal level. The participants in Guse's study reported an experience of positive emotions and an increased sense of self-understanding and psychological well-being. They also experienced an increased sense of self-efficacy on a professional level. She recommended that the implementation of a positive psychology stance in the training of psychologists be considered, as it could potentially prevent burnout and stress and seems relevant to working in the South African context.

### **4.3 OVERVIEW OF THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF PSYCHOLOGISTS**

All developmental theories share certain basic features, regardless of theoretical orientation. These features include an inevitable change of some sort, which is usually systematically organized and involves the succession of tasks over time (Skovholt, 2005). Therefore, much overlap exists among the different developmental theories regarding the development and growth of professional psychologists. The professional development of psychologists has been examined from many different perspectives and paradigms, resulting in various models and frameworks. Most of these studies (Dahlgren, Hult, Dahlgren, Segerstad, & Johansson, 2006; Sheikh, et al., 2007; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992a; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987) focus on professional development over the full career span, and very few studies with specific focus on student development could be traced. Some of these models or frameworks are briefly discussed below.



Stoltenberg, McNeill and Crethar (1994) proposed a model comprising three levels of therapist development for students enrolled in graduate training programmes, but with special focus on supervision practices. These levels are (a) the entry level where students are high in motivation and in anxiety; (b) level two where students are at mid-level and confidence fluctuates based on success with clients; and (c) level three in which students feel essentially secure and start to use the therapeutic self in therapy. Rønnestad and Skovholt (2003) integrated previous developmental theories and postulated six stages of counsellor development, which include (a) the lay helper; (b) the beginning student; (c) the advanced student; (d) the novice professional; (e) the experienced professional; and (f) the senior professional. The first three stages focus on the novice trainee. These stages raise the issues of the trainees being assigned their first clients and the concomitant feelings of insecurity and anxiety. They also highlight that doubting one's competence is common during these stages. Being a master's student in psychology includes the gradual transition from senior student to novice worker in the field. In a study by Dahlgren et al. (2006) this transition was investigated. They found that in a psychology master's programme at Linköping University in Sweden students developed a professional identity to suit their professional role. According to Barnett et al. (2007), the process of becoming a professional includes engagement in more than one discourse that is often beyond the limits of a professional-client transaction. From reviewing many different developmental models (Sheikh, et al., 2007; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992a; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987), it is evident that a variety of factors have an impact on the development of psychologists. Specific contextual components relevant to the training of master's students in psychology were found to be an integral part of the professional development of psychologists. The next section provides a discussion of the most influential components.

#### **4.4 CONTEXTUAL COMPONENTS OF MASTER'S TRAINING IN PSYCHOLOGY**

##### **4.4.1 Structure of the training programme**

The effective training of future psychologists is a critical responsibility that must be evaluated and improved regularly in order to ensure that students are afforded the best opportunity to develop into professional practitioners (Jones, 2008). Stepping up to professional practice in

psychology can be an exciting but uncertain time (Woodcock, Richards, & Mugford, 2008). It involves rather rigorous screening processes through which a limited number of students are admitted to training programmes. The success of any graduate programme depends, *inter alia*, on a fair and well-designed admission process which will ensure that only 'fit' students enter (Barnett et al. 2007; Bischoff, Barton, Thober, & Hawley, 2002). Selection criteria usually include personality traits such as openness, insight, good stress management skills, well-developed interpersonal skills, social awareness and community mindedness (Mander, 2004; Mayekiso et al., 2004). Students' prior exposure and experiences will differ, resulting in a unique group of students who, as class members, establish a professional group. In general, applicants express their desire to help others and their interest in the human psyche (et al., 2007; Bischoff et al., 2002; Mander, 2004). Quinodoz (1996) stated that many trainees have been students with high achievements and a sense of order.

In South Africa psychology in professional clinical/counselling or educational psychology is offered by 15 accredited institutions (HPCSA, 2011). Training programmes should comply with the requirements of the HPCSA, including elements of clinical experience, individual case formulation, theory acquisition, clinical supervision and personal growth (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Human, 2006; Worthen & McNeill, 1996). Most programmes are based on the scientist-practitioner model used in the United States, which means that a research component, in the form of a compulsory mini-dissertation, is included in the training. As mentioned previously in the chapter, students feel overwhelmed by, and are disinterested in, the mini-dissertation and deem its impact on their professional development to be minimal (Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007).

The successful completion of an accredited training programme (including the mini-dissertation) and an internship in addition to passing the Professional Board for Psychology examination enable students to register as psychologists with the HPCSA. In South Africa the practical conditions of each programme differ, depending on the relevant department's underlying academic philosophy and the priorities identified by course coordinators and lecturers. However, in most cases students are expected to attend classes or seminars from 08:30-17:00 and they are situated together in university clinics or department offices, which might imply separation from family members and other students. Moreover, students who were not prepared for the identity

transformation (Kottler & Schwarz, 2004) brought about by such a programme, may start questioning the self and the world (see section 3.6). The aspect of personal moulding involved in training stands in contrast to many other forms of professional training in which the focus is on academic and practical skill development instead of the personal processes of becoming (Kottler & Swartz, 2004).

In a South African study on students' experiences related to positive psychology training, Guse (2010) mentioned that students should be provided with opportunities to identify and enhance their own psychological strengths and well-being. This is supported by Coster and Schwebel (1997) who highlighted the necessity of including skills of self-reflection and personal well-being above the pure gaining of knowledge. Rosenberg et al. (2005) are of opinion that, in light of the importance of personal growth and development for trainees, it is crucial that the training programmes not only include methods of enhancing personal growth and insight, but also integrate the evaluation thereof into the curriculum philosophy in which the programmes are embedded.

#### **4.4.2 The class environment**

Master's degree psychology programmes are usually offered to a small number of selected students. These students form a professional group with, in effect, compulsory membership. Kottler and Swartz (2004) stated that these students often see one another more frequently than their partners. Close bonds are formed, as many professional programmes expect students to work in teams and do group assignments (Rosenberg et al., 2005; Volet & Mansfield, 2006). Besides the occasional frustration with one another, this setting is often students' first experience of what it means to be a co-worker and colleague (Lee, et al., 2001). Class activities assist students in analysing different perspectives and afford them the opportunity to hear their own opinions voiced. Class discussions can help reduce the negative effects of learning psychology, and when students see their peers struggling with similar developmental issues, they can become less distracted by these issues and be able to make better sense of their current experiences (Lee et al., 2001; Truell, 2001). In addition, the opportunity for mutual construction of knowledge among peers is created through class discussions (Baxter-Magolda, 2002). Moreover, teaming

classmates together can lead to the establishment of cooperative, trusting relationships with colleagues, which can be a dynamic coping resource for the future (Coster & Schwebel, 1997). Guse (2010) confirmed that positive group experiences in training can be conducive to students' well-being. Ideally, these students should support one another by sharing material and providing encouragement (Walker, Wright, & Hanley, 2001).

Due to the nature of the field of psychology, students often have to be open to self-disclosure of their private feelings, causing the class to form a community in which they share a common struggle (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Kottler & Swartz, 2004). On the other hand, self-disclosure in the classroom setting can be stressful, causing feelings of vulnerability (Truell, 2001).

#### **4.4.3 The academic environment**

Academics can have a significant impact on students' attitudes and behaviours in the process of becoming psychologists (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Holzman, et al., 1996; Kottler & Swartz, 2004; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Tonn & Harmison, 2004). Students' defencelessness and dependent states create a sense of gratefulness in them for the support of more advanced members of the profession (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Walker, et al., 2001). With regard to self-care and personal well-being, departmental staff should model behaviours indicative of the importance thereof (Barnett, 2007).

A positive learning culture within a supportive department/faculty is beneficial to all students in the respective programmes (Dunn, McCarthy, Baker, Halonen, & Hill, 2007; Neufeldt, Karno, & Nelson, 1996). According to Schwebel and Coster (1998), it is not uncommon to find that students welcome a friendly and supportive learning environment. When considering the academic context of master's students in psychology training, it is clear that it is accompanied with general and specific challenges.

#### **4.5 CHALLENGES FACED BY PROFESSIONAL AND NOVICE PSYCHOLOGISTS**

The literature on the life of practising psychologists indicates consistency in that psychologists are faced with a variety of stressors and demands and that the practice of psychology can be emotionally taxing (Barnett et al., 2007; Case & McMinn, 2001; Green & Hawley, 2009; Jordaan, Spangenberg, Watson, & Fouché, 2007; O'Connor, 2001; Schwebel & Coster, 1998; Sherman & Thelen, 1998). A South African study conducted in 2007 found that 56.3% of psychologists had above average anxiety levels, while 54.2% were mildly depressed (Jordaan et al., 2007). Another study, which explored burnout and its correlates among South African psychologists, indicated that approximately half of the participants of the study experience moderate to high levels of burnout (Jordaan et al., 2007). Mahoney (1997) stressed that anxiety and depressive symptoms among psychologists are related to other health concerns, substance abuse and relationship difficulties. In his study on the personal problems and self-care patterns of, the most common personal problem reported by the sample clustered around emotional exhaustion and fatigue. These problems can become so prevalent that Corey, Corey, and Callanan even described psychotherapy as a “hazardous profession” (1993, p. 47).

Psychologists are considered to be experts in treating emotional difficulties (Barnett & Hillard, 2001), but it seems that not all of them are equally able to manage such difficulties in their own lives, which may add to the risk of distress and impairment (Barnett, 2007; Radeke & Mahoney, 2000). Psychologists are expected to be receptive towards often disturbing and dysfunctional clients and environments, which can lead to emotional exhaustion and professional burnout (O'Connor, 2001; Sherman & Thelen, 1998). Another reason for the above-mentioned anxiety and depressive symptomology might be due to their inability to accept the same emotional problems and patterns within themselves as those displayed by their clients (Jordaan et al., 2007). In light of the above, it is vital to provide a review on the similarities between the students' situation and that of the professionals, keeping in mind that trainees are less likely to have an integrated balance between their professional and personal lives.

The past decade has seen a growth in research literature focusing on the difficulties faced by students and trainees (Elman & Forrest, 2007; Gaubatz & Vera, 2006; Rosenberg et al., 2005).

There is general consensus among several authors (Barnett et al., 2007; Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2001; Tod, Marchant, & Andersen, 2007; Tonn & Harmison, 2004) that many students are anxious and self-doubting at the beginning of various careers. Students typically find the beginning of their psychology careers exciting, but equally tiring (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). A disturbing finding from a study involving students from an APA-certified clinical psychology programme indicated that 25% of the entire sample reported being depressed during their graduate training (Holzman, et al. 1996). As mentioned previously in this chapter, the journey of becoming a psychologist has been associated with an initiation process, linking it to experiences of separation and confusion, and also involving a shift in identity. Howard et al. (2006) explained this shift as the students' need to integrate an understanding of themselves, in relation to being a psychologist, into their overall understanding of themselves as individuals.

In addition, a study on the stressors of graduates in the United Kingdom by Truell (2001) indicated that becoming a psychologist is more than something to be "learned", and that pain is a necessary part of the journey. This research added that students experience significant disruptions in their relationships with family and friends. In this regard students reported a process of re-examining their relationships with others. More specifically, Lee et al. (2001) reported that feelings of anxiety can become so intense that they result in somatic symptoms which can inhibit effective functioning.

The belief that most psychologists are indeed wounded healers who attempt to heal themselves through the insight gained from others' troubles imply that many students may have had earlier emotional pain and psychological issues which can be uncovered or exacerbated by the emotional demands of learning to practise psychotherapy and by exposure to methods of self-analysis triggered by "learning" psychotherapy (Stratton, et al., 2007). This was confirmed by Murphy (2005) in a study on mandatory personal therapy during training, when all the participants agreed that personal issues did present during their training. Psychological mindedness is the term that Farber (1985) used to describe the ability of therapists to engage strangers, all their working life, in discussions about human motivation and which often lead to the over awareness of underlying dynamics and constant analysis of the meaning and motive of one's own and others' acts. Truell (2001) also identified psychological mindedness as a stressful

factor as students are likely to compare their own development and issues with that of their clients and class colleagues.

According to Cushway and Tyler (1996), psychologists' stress levels peak during clinical training, a phenomenon that warrants investigation. Students often experience unique stressors related to their training (Holzman et al., 1996) and, in particular, when being assigned their first client (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Considering that, in many psychology programmes, students are given cases that would be challenging to experienced psychologists (Kottler & Schwartz, 2004), this process is all the more frightening to the trainee. Students then realize that the transition from lay helper to professional needs to take place, which creates an evaluative focus and anxiety-provoking context. This realization can be overwhelming, as the integration of theory and practice is often found to be challenging for most students (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Baxter-Magolda (2002) called this phase the "crossroads", during which students acknowledge the inevitability of the shift from external to internal authority. The study conducted by Lee et al. (2001) proved that, since students have no, or a limited, foundation of clinical experience on which to evaluate new situations, any situation dealing with a new client can result in a decrease in confidence. For example, students commented that cancelled appointments, clients who don't show up, and premature termination of therapy are directly linked to their competence and skill (Lee et al., 2001).

When students were questioned on their experiences of problematic peers in academic professional psychology programmes, almost all of them indicated that they were aware of a peer whom they believed to have a serious impairment in professional functioning due to personal problems. This may have detrimental effects on the rendering of psychological services (Rosenberg et al., 2005). The integration of results of five studies (Bischoff et al., 2002; Hill, et al., 2007; Howard et al., 2006; Lee et al., 2001; Williams, Judge, Hill, & Hoffman, 1997) found that self-criticism and reactions to clients are the main contributing factors to the above-mentioned scenarios. Furthermore, financial debt, registration requirements, establishing a professional identity and the more formal competition for internships are other factors that complicate the experiences of master's students in psychology (Green & Hawley, 2009). Furthermore, Stratton et al. (2007) identified the volume of work, anxiety-provoking

expectations, dual professional roles and lateral professional comparisons as contributing stressors. Stressors outside of academic training, for example, students who juggle other roles such as spouse and parent, should also not be overlooked (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Dearing, et al., 2005; Stryker & Burke, 2000) as students often find themselves torn between the demands of their professional development and personal lives (Lee et al., 2001). Further role confusion might occur when students feel that, in one sense, they are evaluated and supervised and, in another sense, they are treated as colleagues in the profession. Many of the experiences that these students are exposed to may not be discussed outside of the training context, which compels them to withdraw from other postgraduate students and family members. The resulting feeling of isolation can also contribute to depression and anxiousness (Kottler & Schwartz, 2004). Furr and Carroll (2003) used a phenomenological approach to report on critical incidents that have an impact on development as identified by master's students specialising in school and community counselling. They found that many of these incidents were directly associated with personal relationships undergoing changes as a result of the student participating in the programme. In this study students reflectively indicated that they were not expecting the amount of self-analysis that occurred in the programme. The stress of self-analysis and the concomitant emotional awareness can become problematic if not dealt with effectively and, therefore, Radeke and Mahoney (2000) suggested that psychology students be better prepared for the impact their choice of career might have on their personal lives.

#### **4.6 EFFECTIVE COPING STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES USED BY PROFESSIONAL AND NOVICE PSYCHOLOGISTS**

For psychologists, ongoing focus on self-care and personal well-being is an ethical imperative and critical for the prevention of impairment and burnout (Barnett et al., 2007). Paths to well-being should be identified early, preferably already in graduate programmes (Coster & Schwebel, 1997). These paths that psychologists use to buffer against professional or personal impairment have been investigated and described for many years and it has been demonstrated that effective coping can be beneficial in many ways, especially to ensure a high quality of work and optimal health (Jordaan et al., 2007).



Findings of different studies are remarkably consistent. With specific focus on difficult clients, Medeiros and Prochaska (1988) identified six coping strategies that psychologists use, namely (a) self-evaluation and wishful thinking; (b) a sense of humour; (c) optimistic perseverance; (d) seeking social support; (e) seeking inner peace; and (f) contingency control and avoidance. Kramen-Kahn and Hansen (1998) reported helpful actions, which they termed “positive career sustaining behaviours”. These include striking a balance between personal and professional demands, seeking diversity in professional tasks, taking regular breaks, ensuring adequate rest and exercise, healthy eating, and attending to emotional, physical and relationship needs outside of the work context. Schwebel and Coster (1998) ranked items regarding the well-functioning of psychologists as (a) self-awareness and monitoring; (b) personal values; (c) preserving the balance between personal and professional lives; (d) relationships with family and friends; (e) personal therapy; (f) vacations; (g) professional identity; and (h) mentors. Mahoney (1997) identified the following frequently used coping strategies: engaging in a hobby; pleasure reading; trips or vacations; attending movies, museums or artistic events; physical exercise; peer supervision; playing recreational games; and practising prayer or mediation. Personal psychotherapy, activities outside of work and engaging in religious activities also proved invaluable coping mechanisms to prevent professional burnout among health care practitioners (Jordaan et al., 2007; Jordaan, Spangenberg, Watson, & Fouchè, 2006; Norcross & Guy, 2005; Owen, 1993; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001).

With reference to spiritual coping, Case and McMinn (2001) found spiritual practices to be among the most popular mechanisms in the prevention of distress for religious psychologists and are considered to play an important role in the well-functioning of professionals. Religious beliefs are especially helpful in that they usually allow suffering to be viewed as growth opportunities, providing the sufferer with a sense of purpose and meaning (Case & McMinn, 2001). Research findings also proved that a supportive work environment and networking with colleagues can help the individual to adapt effectively to the challenges encountered (Barnett et al., 2007; Coster & Schwebel, 1997; Norcross, 2005; Owen, 1993; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Schwebel & Coster, 1998; Sheikh, et al., 2007). Furthermore, Lee et al. (2001) added that peers often brainstorm ideas for treatment, share session successes and frustration, and discuss issues

regarding the self as therapist, which can be purposeful on two levels. Firstly, it provides peers with valued opinions and, secondly, it can result in feelings of competence.

Hill et al. (2007) found that students develop a range of coping strategies and resources. Graduate students in psychology in different programmes in the United States identified three inherent protective factors in their own emotional struggles – psychological hardiness, a sense of humour and optimism (Stratton et al., 2007). Studies aiming to identify the sources of positive influence on professional development consistently found direct experience with patients, formal case supervision and personal therapy to be the three major sources (Orlinsky, Botermans, & Rønnestad, 2001; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Students repeatedly mentioned that specific supervision behaviours helped them to deal with emerging anxieties (Green & Hawley, 2009; Hill et al., 2007; Stratton et al., 2007). Positive self-talk, focusing on the client (in the case of in-session tension) and a sense of humour were additionally identified as positive coping mechanisms (Truell, 2001). Firstly, the role of supervision and its effectiveness as a coping strategy and resource will be discussed.

#### **4.6.1 Supervision**

The question arises as to how students' self-awareness, being so pivotal in their developmental journey, can be heightened without mandatory personal therapy. Supervision is the key in answering this question, as supervisors are the guides needed by students in their journey of becoming psychologists. Within the last decade, a renewed interest in clinical supervision developed internationally, with many studies focusing on the development of clinical supervision and sound supervision practice (Bernard, 2005; Gonsalvez, 2008; McAlpine & Norton, 2006; Peake, Nussbaum & Tindell, 2002). Clinical supervision is a valuable part of professional development and not restricted to the training years (Coster & Schwebel, 1997). Given the many obstacles faced by master's students, formal clinical supervision, as opposed to personal psychotherapy, is usually a requirement of training programmes in psychology. In a study with 4 000 therapists, Orlinsky et al. (2001) found that formal case supervision is regarded as the most salient influence on career development. McAlpine and Norton (2006) indicated that psychologists not only regard supervision as crucial to learning, they also recommend more

supervision for training programmes. Similarly, Lucock, Hall and Noble (2006) found current and past supervision to be rated the highest factor influencing clinical training. Bischoff et al. (2002) stated that “beginning therapists see their supervisors as having a reservoir of experiences on which they can rely until their own reservoir is developed” (p. 379).

Historically, supervision practices have been approached from many different perspectives. Fleming (1953) employed a developmental approach and described the beginning stage of the psychotherapist’s development as involving the trainee imitating the supervisor mostly, with the supervisor focusing on teaching, suggestion and demonstration. Hogan (1964) worked from an emotional stance and suggested that students are insecure and dependent, with little insight into their motivation for being psychotherapists. Furthermore, he contended that novice trainees learn through imitation. In contrast, Grater (1985) suggested that novice trainees readily adopt basic skills and the psychotherapist’s role in order to manage their acute anxiety and are much less dependent on supervision than suggested.

Supervision is central to the transformation of the new professional identity and although it should not merely serve a psychotherapeutic function to the student (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004), students often have dependency needs and a sensitive supervisor must be prepared to give personal advice when necessary (Bischoff et al., 2002; Gray, Ladany, Walker, & Ancis, 2001; Truett, 2001). A supervisor can be seen as a co-therapist, which may lead to the students feeling “safe” to apply their knowledge (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Neufeldt et al., 1996; Tod et al., 2007). In addition, Tryon (2000) pointed to the significant development of self-rated autonomy among students due to good supervision practices. In this regard supervision promotes self-reflection and can, if needed, raise awareness towards own unresolved issues. This can, in turn, have an impact on the psychotherapeutic process with a client (Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Holzman et al., 1996). Lee et al. (2001) found that, when students perceive their supervisors to be familiar with the stressors they experience, supervision does indeed make students feel comfortable. This perception leads the students to normalize their anxiety by contextualising it as a part of the developmental process. The quality of the supervisor-student relationship is a core dimension of supervision (Peake et al., 2002; Worthen & McNeill, 1996). Graduate students in psychology from a large Midwestern university gave their viewpoints of the role of supervisors

in their training. Findings suggested that supervisors serve a supportive function and can promote professional competence (Cronan-Hillix, Gensheimer, Cronan-Hillix, & Davidson, 1986). In this study the personality dimension of a good supervisor included a good sense of humour, honesty, dedication, compassion, flexibility and loyalty. Other studies on supervision events (Gray et al., 2001; Hill et al., 2007; Hutt, Scott, & King, 1983; Worthen & McNeill, 1996) identified warmth, acceptance, respect, understanding, trust, as well as the supervisor's ability to integrate both task- and person-oriented behaviour, as components of good supervisory relationships. A study on critical incidents among novice trainees (Howard, et al., 2006) revealed supervision as an aid towards positive growth.

Over the course of an entire year, the supervision needs of the student change. Research within the field of clinical supervision showed that, at first, there is a greater need for the acquisition of skills (proactive) and, later, towards developing self-awareness and insight (reactive) (Worthington, 1987). It can thus be reasoned that a good supervisor should be aware of the stage in which the student is and should promote professional and personal growth in each developmental stage. On the basis of research, Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2001) recommended that attention be paid to providing students with supervision experiences that promote growth. However, an important notion, namely that of self-reflection, is necessary for the student to use these experiences to their advantage.

#### **4.6.2 Self-reflection**

According to Simons and Anderson (1995), knowing oneself is the most important part of being a psychologist. The ability to reflect is a distinctive characteristic of psychologists and can occur on an individual level, scrutinising own thoughts and feelings, and on a collective level, whereby discussions between colleagues add to the feeling of professionalism (Dahlgren et al., 2006; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001). Neufeldt et al. (1996) described self-reflection as a focused inquiry aimed towards understanding the self in one's professional work.

Continual self-reflection is considered good practice for professional development and is viewed, in general, as an essential aspect of any psychologist's developmental journey and a prerequisite

for optimal development (Kaslow, Dunn, & Smith, 2008; Neufeldt et al., 1996; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Woodcock et al., 2008). Cain (2007) suggested that psychologists function best once they have found their distinctive voice. The significance of self-reflection for psychologists was indicted in a 2009 study by Rizq and Target (2008) in which most participants (all psychologists) spontaneously spoke about their awareness of a reflective aspect of themselves as being a part of the reason for their choice of career. Furthermore, Murphy (2005) stressed that psychotherapy involves the self, which implies that a degree of self-awareness should be reached through reflection in order to separate personal issues from client issues. In a study by Coster and Schwebel (1997), self-awareness was identified as one of the main factors contributing to well-functioning in professional psychologists. These authors view self-awareness as a prelude to self-regulation and argue that it enables psychologists to acknowledge the need for assistance beyond peer groups or other informal relationships.

However, self-reflection should not be restricted to the qualified professional, but viewed as a crucial part of training (Baxter-Magolda, 2002; Neufeldt et al., 1996; Tsang, 2003). Particularly on master's level, it should be an in-depth, integrated thought process (Fowler & Newman, 2006). According to an experiential model for professional development constituted by Sheikh et al. (2007), reflection is identified as one of the four essential modes for adapting to the professional environment – one of the main tasks of a master's student in psychology. Howard et al. (2006) discussed self-awareness and self-insight separately and viewed them as critical incidents, influencing novice counselling trainees. Self-awareness is described as moments in which the students become aware of an internal reaction towards a client, whereas self-insight is described as a more sophisticated level of awareness, namely an awareness of how these reactions towards clients are affecting the self.

Toohy (2002) highlighted the benefits of self-reflection on graduate level as allowing students to develop their own understanding of their competencies. Students reported that gaining personal awareness is as powerful in their development as acquiring therapeutic skills in an academic context (Bennett-Levy, Turner, Beaty, Smith, Patterson, & Farmer, 2001; Furr & Carroll, 2003). Professional psychologists mentioned the long-term impact of self-awareness gained during training and expressed their belief that, over time, it develops into a deep change

in one's capacity to create meaning (Neufeldt et al., 1996). Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) have similarly shown that self-reflection leads to a "deeper sense of knowing" (p. 203). Apart from this, the positive values placed on self-awareness have also proved to reduce students' stress and anxiety levels through creating a context for their affective and emotional experiences (Woodcock et al., 2008). In contrast, a study conducted by Ellis and Crombie (2004) found that the majority of a group of graduate students did not benefit from constant reflection and disclosure of their feelings. Given the bulk of research that does, however, confirm the benefits of self-reflection (Dahlgren et al., 2006; Kaslow et al., 2008; Neufeldt et al., 1996; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Woodcock et al., 2008), Ellis and Crombie's (2004) finding is indeed arguable. Apart from supervision practices and self-reflection notions, personal psychotherapy has also been indicated as one of the coping strategies and resources which are commonly employed by professional and novice psychologists (Orlinsky, et al., 2001; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003).

#### **4.6.3 Personal psychotherapy**

The necessity of self-reflection has been noted in section 3.6.1, and the unsettling figures regarding students' depression and anxiety levels have been reported (see section 4.5). There is overall agreement that personal psychotherapy is a means through which self-awareness can be achieved and is a generally accepted form of treatment for depression and anxiety (Murphy, 2005; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Sheikh et al., 2007). Qualified psychologists receiving psychotherapy is an issue that has been widely researched (Gilroy, Carroll, & Murra, 2001; Gilroy, Carroll, & Murra, 2002; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001) and has, apart from case supervision, been identified as the most salient influence on the career development of psychologists (Orlinsky et al., 2001). However, graduate students' reasons for, and experience of, entering psychotherapy might be very different from those of qualified professionals. Therefore, considerable debate exists about personal psychotherapy as a requirement for training (Barnett, 2007; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001); a debate which dates back to 1976 when Wampler and Strupp made a case for a definite position for personal psychotherapy in training programmes. Studies in the United States and in Europe showed that at least 75-78% of mental health professionals have undergone personal therapy and findings suggested that the prevalence may be higher among graduate students in psychology training programmes (Gilroy et al., 2002;

Holzman et al., 1996; Norcross & Guy, 2005; Rizq & Target, 2008). Therapists engaging in their own psychotherapy report personal improvement as well as a strong positive professional influence on their development as therapists (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Guy, Stark, & Poelstra, 1988; Orlinsky et al., 2001). This explains the assumption often held that trainees are in psychotherapy while in training (Kottler & Swartz, 2004; Rake & Paley, 2009). Evidence for the value of psychotherapy during training was obtained through a study carried out by Rothery (1992) in which the results reflected that at least half of the respondents preferred one-to-one therapy as a method to bring about personal growth during training. Murphy (2005), too, conducted a qualitative study on mandatory personal therapy during training and identified the benefits it holds for counselling practice. Truell (2001) identified personal psychotherapy as a useful method for reducing the negative effect of intense training in psychology. Firstly, the attitudes required for a psychologist, such as unconditional positive regard and empathic understanding, can be experienced and, secondly, a positive relationship can develop between training organizations and counselling service providers. For these reasons and many more, Coster and Schwebel (1997) argued that the role of personal psychotherapy in promoting self-reflection during training should be emphasized. Reasons that students offer for not seeking therapy included no need for therapy, or adequate support received from other sources (Gilroy et al., 2002; Holzman et al., 1996).

The sections above included, among others, the challenges experienced and the coping strategies and resources employed by novice psychologists, which sketched a rather pessimistic picture of the journey of becoming a psychologist. The next section underlines the positive experiences related to master's training in professional psychology in an attempt to provide a more balanced view of this journey.

#### **4.7 POSITIVE EXPERIENCES RELATED TO MASTER'S TRAINING IN PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGY**

Many studies (Hays-Thomas, 2000; Holzman et al., 1996; Human, 2006; Jones, 2008; Kottler & Swartz, 2004; Rosenberg et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2001) have been conducted on the research topic of master's training in psychology, especially focusing on the process from a pathologic viewpoint. However, not every student will experience the training programme as traumatic and

powerful positive experiences related to master's programmes in psychology have been identified in previous studies (Sheikh et al., 2007). Benefits of being a master's student in psychology include preparation for the future, mastering the skill of transferring knowledge from one area to another, and personal excitement. Enthusiasm and achieving success are also functions of larger contextual issues mentioned by students. In addition, students discovered the desire to maintain healthy relationships, as well as mental, physical and spiritual health (Lee et al., 2001).

In the aforementioned studies, students commented on their gratitude for being offered the position and stated that the training was a growth-filled experience. They further mentioned the personal fulfilment they have experienced and the tremendous joy emerging from the process in spite of the many challenges. Parallel with these challenges, students reported gains in using the helping skills, becoming less self-critical, acquiring the ability to connect with others, improving their self-understanding and increasing their confidence in their competence (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Hill et al., 2007; Stratton et al., 2007). Given the many hardships involved in these training programmes, students need to be highly motivated and persevere through hard work, while the programme needs to offer relevant development experience and growth opportunity. An attitude of openness to learning and acceptance of the complexities of the profession are crucial for students in these training programmes and they should be prepared for learning that also takes place on the affective level (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Jones, 2008; Neufeldt et al., 1996).

Due to self-care being regarded as an ethical imperative, training programmes should not only create the opportunity for students to identify struggles and implement effective coping strategies in the form of a proactive coping programme, but should also promote more positive experiences (Barnett, Elman & Forrest, 2007; Howard et al., 2006; Jordaan et al., 2006; Kottler & Swartz, 2004; Orlinsky, et al., 1999; Owen, 1993; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Rosenberg et al., 2005; Schwebel & Coster, 1998). Truell (2001) concluded that trainers do not always effectively address issues with students and recommended that an additional training component, which focuses on the process of becoming a psychologist, should be built into existing training structures. In programmes where such a component is built in, students report having a more



realistic perception of their chosen profession and discovering the importance of self-awareness to how they develop, both personally and professionally (Lee et al., 2001).

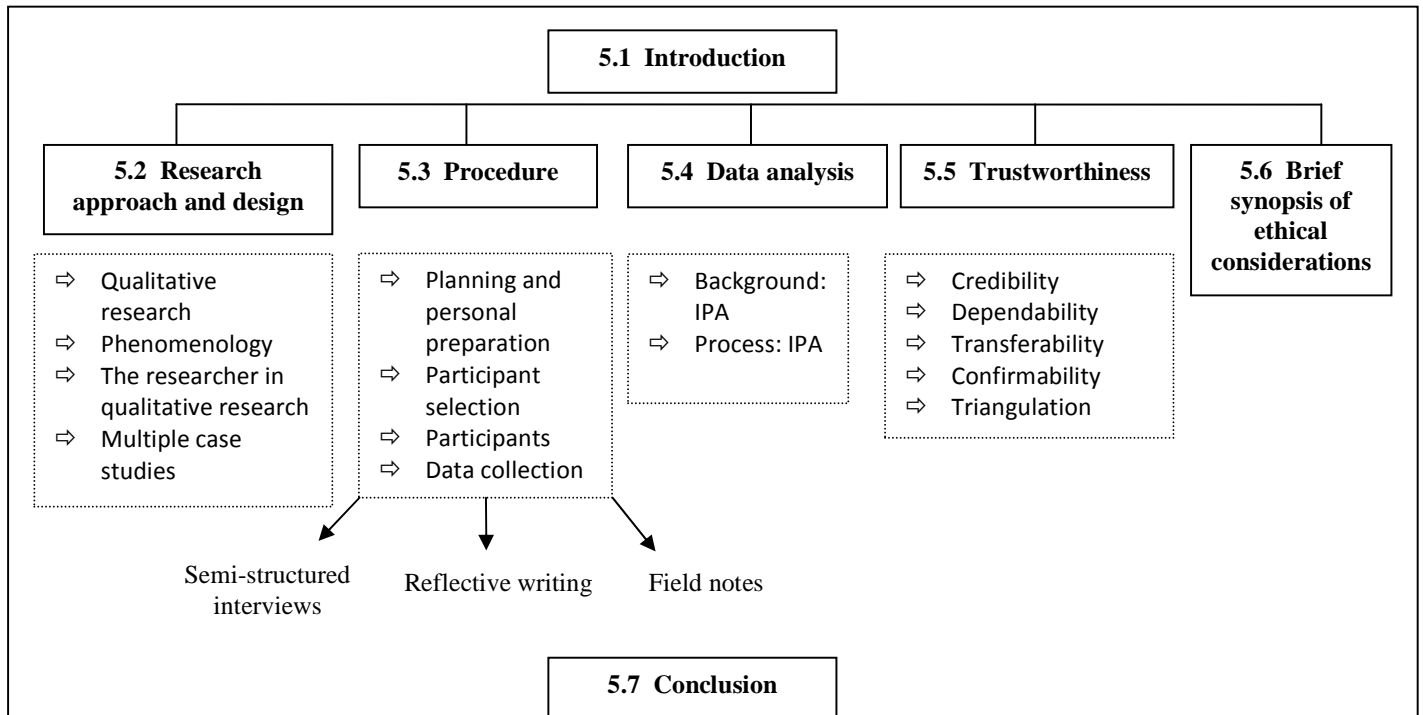
#### **4.8 CONCLUSION**

The processes involved in being a master's student in psychology seem to be many and often quite challenging. This chapter outlined these processes and drew attention to a number of South African studies on the topic. Challenges mainly pertain to staying mentally healthy when taking part in the emotionally taxing activities accompanying a psychologist's training and job. However, the effective coping strategies and resources used by professional and novice psychologists offer an explanation as to why many psychologists still enjoy what they are doing. In this regard it seems as if supervision, self-reflection and personal psychotherapy are helpful. What was found to be reassuring, despite the number of challenges discussed, are the positive experiences related to master's training in psychology which were identified and explored. The next chapter represents the research design and methodology of this study.

# CHAPTER 5

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Figure 7. Visual display of the outline of Chapter 5.



### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters the theoretical approach and model in which this study was conducted were reviewed and critically discussed. Literature was explored in order to provide the context to the design and methodology section of the study. Most researchers will agree that it is vital to explore the philosophical underpinnings of a study prior to making decisions on approaches and designs. A qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach was utilized in this study. This approach is both exploratory and descriptive, which was clearly displayed in the four case studies.

This chapter aims to explain the processes of the study in order to highlight the methodical decisions made, as well as the reasons thereof. Figure 7 displays that, apart from the chosen

research approach and research design, the data collection procedures, the data analysis as well as the trustworthiness of the study will be discussed in this chapter. The relevant ethical considerations are referred to and interwoven in the different sections of the chapter. This chapter should be viewed with the main research objective in mind, namely to explore and describe the positive experiences of master's degree students in professional psychology programmes in South Africa.

## **5.2 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN**

In this study a qualitative research approach was used. A multiple case study design was employed and data were analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

### **5.2.1 The nature of qualitative research**

As mentioned previously, a qualitative approach was applied in this study. Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach and is primarily interested in exploring, describing and understanding human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2005). While some authors are of the opinion that qualitative research totally rejects predefined categories and hypotheses usually reflected in quantitative research, others argue that we would lose sight of the value of qualitative research if we were to do so, as evidence exists of the conciliation between the two approaches (Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, & Tindall, 1994; Howitt, 2010). Many different definitions and descriptions are posed for qualitative research, depending on the focus, which can vary from the nature of the phenomena being explored, to the different language used in qualitative research. In spite of the different attempts to define qualitative research, the main feature is that it is interested in understanding *how* people experience and interpret their worlds. The results are communicated through rich, thick, in-depth descriptions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Moreover, qualitative research adopts a broadly constructivist (or interpretivist) approach to the social world, which can (based on almost all the definitions posed) easily be distinguished from quantitative research (Babbie & Mouton, 2004). Qualitative research should, however, not be defined by only focusing on key methodological and epistemological differences with quantitative research, but also by recognizing that, ultimately, the value of any scientific method

must be evaluated in its ability to provide meaningful and useful answers to the questions that motivated the research. Thus, the nature of qualitative research should first be understood by its *philosophical underpinnings* (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

Qualitative research has an eclectic history since it has evolved from a variety of theories and practices including phenomenology, sociology, hermeneutics, anthropology, semiotics and psychology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Some of these practices have a longstanding history, while others arose later as a reaction and in protest to traditional positivistic practices (Banister et al., 1994). What is commonly termed “qualitative research” can be located back to 1883 when Dilthey stated that the human being is different to the subject matter of the natural sciences, which is measurable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It is clear that what is commonly viewed as a “new” approach or paradigm of research is, in fact, as old as the social sciences itself (Howitt, 2010; Tesch, 1990). Despite the dominance of positivistic methods in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, small groups of researchers continued with qualitative studies in all spheres of social sciences (Howitt, 2010; Merriam, 2009).

It is important to recognize that methodologies differ from philosophies. Researchers present mostly four common methodological frameworks used within qualitative research, i.e., phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography and discourse analysis (Nicholls, 2009). A phenomenological approach was selected for this study (see section 5.2.2). The exploratory nature of qualitative research has been emphasized. It is especially relevant to this study as exploratory studies are used to conduct a preliminary investigation into unknown areas of research (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The descriptive nature of this type of study presents a detailed picture of the participants’ experience throughout their first year of master’s studies in professional psychology programmes. Results are presented through dense and rich descriptions with the intention to do justice to the chosen research approach.

### **5.2.2 Phenomenology**

Many different research designs emerged from the various qualitative research practices mentioned earlier. The research aim is central in determining whether, for example, a case study,

grounded theory, narrative analysis, biography, phenomenological or feminist design is used. When choosing a qualitative methodology a number of important issues need to be considered, for example: What does the researcher want to discover? What kind of data is required? While each approach and design has particular merits, researchers always strive to find the most suitable approach and design, or combination, for a specific study. In this study a *phenomenological approach* (being both explorative and descriptive) was used for the multiple case study design. In its broadest sense phenomenology refers to a person's perceptions of the meaning of an event or experience, as opposed to how it exists external to the person. Maslow (1968) added by describing phenomenology as the use of subjective and first-person experience as a source of knowledge. The phenomenological perspective focuses especially on the life world of the subjects from their own perspective and experience, claiming these perspectives and experiences to be the only important reality (Kvale, 1996; McLeod, 2011). Drew (1993) complemented this approach by purporting that it "honours human experience" (p. 346). Phenomenology is built upon the premise of social constructivism in that it recognizes the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning. Due to the fact that this study aimed to explore a particular lived experience, namely the experience of being a master's student in a professional psychology programme, the phenomenological approach was found most appropriate. This approach is highly suited to help understand the significance of an event and to help answer "what" and "how" questions. The aim of phenomenological research is not to solve problems, but to describe the meaning that people attach to their daily experiences instead. The operative word in phenomenological research is "describe" (De Vos & Fouché, 1998). Starks and Trinidad (2007) are of the opinion that, at the end of a phenomenological account, the readers should feel as if they had vicariously experienced the phenomena under study.

For psychology, Giorgi, an early member of the Duquesne School<sup>6</sup> of psychology, did ground-breaking work when he became committed to phenomenology, the branch of European philosophy that emerged in reaction to the objectification efforts in the social sciences. He encouraged other phenomenological researchers to publish their work and, by doing so, triggered

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<sup>6</sup> Duquesne University of the Holy Spirit is a private Catholic university in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, United States. It was founded by members of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit in 1878 (Wikipedia, 2011).

a vibrant debate concerning phenomenological psychological research (Tesch, 1990). For the purposes of this study, and for the specific reasons of (a) the nature of the research aim; and (b) the chosen data analysis method (IPA), phenomenology is considered a research strategy instead of a research paradigm only. As some researchers would disagree with this stance for phenomenology, it should be noted that, in order to gain full understanding of phenomenology as a research method and specific approach, one should first consider phenomenology as a philosophical stance.

In her article on hermeneutics, Dowling (2004) tabled three different schools of phenomenological philosophy. The first school is eidetic or descriptive phenomenology, steered by the work of Husserl (1859-1938), who acted as a central figure in the development of phenomenology as a philosophy, and who was primarily interested in the question as to what we as persons know (Koivisto, Janhonen, & Vaisanen, 2002). His approach is also referred to as objective hermeneutics, which aims to obtain fundamental knowledge of phenomena. and strongly rejects the notion that there is anything more fundamental than experience. Patton (2002) explained that “by phenomenology Husserl meant the study of how people describe things and experience through their senses” (p. 105). Husserl also placed much emphasis on methods used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of preconceptions that may taint the research process. The core philosophical basis of Husserl’s approach was a rejection of the notion that there is anything more fundamental than experience (Dowling, 2004). The many approaches that developed since Husserl’s initial work share the basic principles proposed by him. Husserl was set against the dualistic separation of subject and object, and emphasized that the only certain knowledge we have of anything is attained through conscious processes (Larkin & Watts, 2006; Moran, 2000). The essence of consciousness is intentionality, which means that all mental acts are intentional in that they point to something that is not consciousness itself. Husserl therefore posed that the building of our knowledge should start with conscious awareness (Koivisto et al., 2002).

The second school of phenomenology is hermeneutics, guided by Heidegger (1889-1976), with the aim of the interpretation of phenomena. The interpretation as such is done with the intention of uncovering hidden meanings and underlying conditions, and compared to the first school,

focuses much less on the elimination of presuppositions (Dowling, 2004). The essence of Heidegger's views lies in that a person is always a "person-in-context" and his version of phenomenology maintains that "intentional" thought is essential to human activity. His views differ from Husserl (who acted as his mentor at some point) in that he denied that this intentional thought is mental but rather a product of the importance of being instead, since being in the world is more important than consciousness. In other words, he turned away from intentional mental thought towards the experience of "being-in-the-world" (Larkin et al., 2006).

The third school within the phenomenological philosophy presents a combination of descriptive and interpretive phenomenology and was originally posed by the Dutch school with academics such as Van Manen. Van Manen (1990) stated that phenomenology requires gaining access to the phenomenon and the exploration thereof in order to make its meaning clear. He also contended that it is primarily a writing exercise, as it is only through writing and rewriting that meaning is distilled. In this sense it is, once again, implied that prior beliefs are temporarily put aside through the process of bracketing, also known as *epoche*, a Greek word meaning "to refrain from judgement" (see section 5.2.3). Bracketing implies setting aside (but not abandoning) prior knowledge and assumptions, with the analytic goal of attending to the participants' experiences with an open mind (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

For the purposes of this study, the descriptive and interpretative nature of phenomenology, as presented in the third school described above, was adhered to. A central focus of phenomenology is on how the individual perceives the world (McLeod, 2011), which was applied in this study in that the participants gave *their own account* of being a master's student in a professional psychology programme, which was then used as the data to work with.

### **5.2.3 The researcher in qualitative research**

Qualitative research is the interpretative study of a specified issue or problem in which the researcher is central to the sense that is made from the data (Parker, 1998). It is clear that space is created for the personal involvement of the researcher and that it should be seen in a positive sense, and as an asset, instead of a pitfall to be avoided (Merriam, 2009; Smith, 1999).

The researcher him/herself acts as an active and involved instrument bringing a particular view to the research. The phenomenological approach holds the belief that any discovery to be made must be a function of the relationship between researcher and subject (Drew, 1993; Dyer, 2007; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Smith, 1999). The researcher is an inclusive part of the world he/she describes, or the reality that exists. The researcher thus presents a paradigm, which serves as a framework within the qualitative research, that can either be one or a combination of, among others, post-positivistic, interpretive, critical, postmodern, feminist, critical or pragmatic approaches (Merriam, 2009). Due to this more direct position taken by qualitative researchers, they engage in a process named reflexivity in which the research procedures, together with the personal experience of the researchers, are reflected on throughout. The emphasis is on acknowledging the central position of the researcher in the construction of the knowledge. Reflexivity may be defined as both a central component of being human (positioning the self) as well as the ability to reflect and consider the underlying dynamics between researcher and data. Reflexivity also respects the meanings that the researcher brings and is an ethical advantage to a qualitative study (Dyer, 2007; Jootun, et al., 2009; Primeau, 2003). Etherington (2007) urged that researchers themselves must become aware of, and reveal, their own subjective lens through which they filter the literature, data and interpretations, knowing that it is impossible to disregard their own experiences which serve as the foundation of their interpretations. Reflexivity is an invaluable tool to promote understanding of the experience under study as it reveals the influence of the researchers' role and demonstrates the researchers' willingness to acknowledge how they affect all stages of the research process.

On a practical level the researchers' cognitive process, which attempts to set aside their perceptions of the topic or phenomenon, is known as bracketing (Etherington, 2007). Speziale and Carpenter (2007) stated that, by bringing all the preconceived ideas and beliefs to the surface, researchers are in a better position to conduct true and honest research. Bracketing is presented as two forms of researcher engagement: with data, and with evolving findings. The first form is the well-known identification and temporary setting aside of the researchers' assumptions. The second engagement is the hermeneutic revisiting of data and of one's evolving comprehension of it in light of a revised understanding of any aspect of the topic (Tufford & Newman, 2010).



This level of personal engagement and awareness thereof is referred to as personal reflexivity (Callaway, 1981). The subjective nature of qualitative research should by no means be seen as a “shadow side” to the approach, but as an opportunity to provide a reflexive account that can add rigour to the process instead (Jootun et al., 2009). Dickie (2003) pleaded for qualitative researchers “to tell the reader about the thinking that went on during the process of transforming data into a coherent description and sound interpretations” (p. 51).

#### **5.2.4 Multiple case studies**

Case studies are widely used in the social sciences and enough evidence exists (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 1998; Edwards, 1998; Seawright & Gerring, 2008; Stake, 1995) to claim that they are, in their own right, a rigorous research design. Like other traditions within the qualitative research paradigm, case studies are used primarily when researchers wish to obtain in-depth understanding of a relatively small number of individuals, problems or situations (Baxter & Jack, 2008). According to Creswell (1998), when multiple cases are used, a typical format is to provide a detailed description of each case and then present the themes within the case (within case analysis), followed by thematic analysis across cases (cross-case analysis). Creswell (1998) argued that studying multiple cases may not enable the same rich descriptions as studies of single cases, but multiple cases are unique in the sense that they enable the analysis of data across cases.

Many definitions are posed for case studies, but most researchers (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) agree in their conceptualizations that a case study consists of reconstruction and interpretation, based on the best evidence available from the story of a person’s life. Qualitative case studies share characteristics with other forms of qualitative research in that it (a) searches for meaning and understanding; (b) acknowledges the important active role of the researcher; and (c) richly describes the end product (Merriam, 2009). Viewpoints from Yin (2009) and Stake (1995) with regard to defining and describing case studies are significant to the current study. When using as a research design, Yin (2009) argued that the distinguishing characteristic of case studies is their attempt to examine phenomena in their real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the context and the phenomena (or experience) are not clearly demarcated.

Stake (1995) stressed that case studies should look intensely into accounts of the subjects themselves. These two authors mainly differ in their view of the role of theory in case studies. Stake (1995) claimed that theory can be absent from a study that focuses on describing the case and its issues, while Yin (2009) was of the opinion that theory must guide the case study in an exploratory way.

Case studies were adopted from medicine which aimed to illustrate what was known about a particular condition through example (Howitt, 2010). Many schools of thought in the social sciences have had an influence on the development of the case study method throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, including anthropology and sociology. The philosophical underpinning of case studies is based on a constructivist paradigm which claims that truth is relative and dependent on personal perspectives (Yin, 2009). Hence, case studies are evident as early forms of illustrating behaviour in psychology. One example would be the well-known case studies of Sigmund Freud from as early as 1856. Many other classic examples of case studies exist in the history of psychology, including the work of Murray and Allport, Rogers and May (Edwards, 1998). They often included large amounts of descriptive data without any form of quantification. The recognition of the value of case studies decreased over the years as the keenness grew towards quantitative methodologies (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Whitehead, 2004). However, case studies continued to exhibit characteristic strengths and weaknesses.

The case study has been subjected to scrutiny and criticism at various times. The critique mainly concentrates on the theory, reliability and validity, in other words, the status of the case study as a scientific method. Frequent criticisms of case study methodology focus on the lack of the systematic handling of data and the fact that its dependence on a single case renders it incapable of providing a generalizing conclusion. Furthermore, case studies are said to contain a bias towards verification, (i.e., the tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions) (Flyvbjerg, 2006). In addition, it is also extremely time consuming, expensive to conduct and, due to the depth of information shared, it necessitates a high level of emotional involvement (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Whitehead, 2004).

In the current study, the single case study design where only one unit is studied was rejected in favour of a multiple case study design entailing four individual case studies. A multiple case study design (also called collective case study design) refers to a series of cases that are examined, implying that the procedures are repeated; thus, enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings. Within a multiple case study design, cross-case analysis can qualify and/or extend the findings of the first case and enable the researcher to explore comparisons between cases in order to reach even more in-depth data (Yin, 2009). A multiple case study design seemed a credible option in this study for different reasons. Firstly, to provide more compelling evidence for the study, and secondly, to ensure that the findings are not directly restricted to the experiences of students from one specific professional master's programme (see section 5.3.2). For this reason, a single case unit would not have been efficient. Another reason for this methodological decision is based on what Yin (2009) stated as unclear boundaries between phenomenon (or experiences, in this case) and context. It would have been unlikely for the researcher to gain a clear picture of experiences of master's students in professional psychology programmes without considering the context in which they occurred. Another advantage refers to the fact that case studies examine people in their real world (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Overall, the evidence coming from this design is considered to be robust and reliable and it provides the opportunity to gain rich and dense data (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009).

## **5.3 PROCEDURE**

### **5.3.1 Planning stage and personal preparation**

Because the initial process of decision making is the foundation of any research study and is often overlooked, it was decided to include this section to illustrate the connection between the researcher and the research topic as well as to serve as a reflective and thus ethical guard to the study. Banister et al. (1994) stressed that we need to reveal how our understandings as qualitative researchers were formed so as to allow the reader to judge the content in the context of the perspectives in which they were framed. The researcher's interest in this study stems from her own experience as a master's student in a professional psychology programme during 2002. Being a master's student in a professional psychology programme was, on a personal level, an

overwhelming and enriching experience for the researcher. The researcher realized, however, that this was not necessarily the case with fellow classmates and that the students tend to focus much more on the negative aspects of the experience. The researcher, in later years a lecturer, informally asked her students to reflect on their positive experiences and personal growth during their master's year. It became obvious that it had many positive effects that lecturers and supervisors (and sometimes students themselves) are not aware of, inspiring the researcher's decision to commit to this study. The researcher was of the opinion that she was at an advantage by having experienced this journey of becoming a psychologist herself, but also with her everyday connection to the world of master's students in a professional psychology programme as a lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State (UFS).

After the researcher's initial commitment to this choice of topic, the next step was to become acquainted with the related research studies and literature. The importance of having a thorough understanding of the broader notion of research methodology (prior to conducting a doctoral study) was clear to her. The researcher deemed it essential to first understand the theoretical, epistemological and value underpinnings of a research design before embarking on the decision-making process regarding the study. Therefore, a period followed in which she enrolled for qualitative research workshops and courses, and also co-supervised seven qualitative master's degree mini-dissertations, together with other more experienced supervisors. Intensive reading was crucial during this period. Engaging with literature was, however, not limited to research-related topics, and other early readings included books and articles on positive psychology as well as literature on the processes of becoming a psychologist, more specifically master's studies in professional psychology. The next phase of this project was to consider the ethical issues facing the researcher when working with students and conducting such a study. Consultations with colleagues proved crucial. Discussing the study with them, assisted in determining its feasibility. One major ethical dilemma emerged concerning her position as lecturer and researcher within one department. The researcher would also have been the clinical supervisor for some of these students. Based on the possible risk of such a dual role, the decision was made to exclude master's students in professional psychology from the UFS from the intended sample.

A brief pilot study is one way to determine the feasibility of a study. Following three pilot interviews with master's students in professional psychology programmes at the University of the Free State (UFS (these interviews were informally conducted and the students were not participants in this study) the researcher came to the conclusion that there were endless opportunities and avenues from which to cover the master's training in psychology experience, and that it might be too broad a field to delve into without proper demarcation. Therefore, within the research proposal, the study was demarcated in selected ways to determine a clear focus. The decision was made to only focus on the positive experiences of the students' journeys and to make use of Ryff's (1989) theoretical model of psychological well-being to contextualize the data more specifically and in depth. Although only one theoretical model was formally utilized in this study, general positive psychology literature as well as literature based on the development and dynamics of master's students in professional psychology training were employed in the interpretation and discussion of individual cases. Ryff's (1989) conceptualization of psychological well-being also incorporates many earlier psychological theories, as discussed in Chapter 3. The proposal for this study was submitted to the research committee of the Department of Psychology as well as to Committee for Title Registrations of the Faculty of Humanities, UFS. Both committees approved the proposal.

Guba and Lincoln (1988) claimed that qualitative researchers should prepare themselves for the practice of research and develop their interpersonal skills and their capacities for reflection. Thus, while writing the proposal the researcher had to begin challenging her metacognitions and to reflect on her thinking. This prepared her for reflexivity which was, as mentioned earlier, a high priority in this study. With reference to the interviews, the listening and questioning skills required from a good qualitative researcher was less of a conscious area to prepare for, as the researcher is a qualified psychologist and continually attempts to better these skills. The challenge was thus to not focus on the psychotherapist and lecturer roles but to be an excellent prompting and empathic researcher while conducting the interviews. The researcher's own training and experience enabled her to contain, reflect upon and, at a later stage, analyze and interpret the experiences that the participants shared with her.

### 5.3.2 Participant selection

Phenomenological researchers depend almost exclusively on the accounts of a carefully selected sample of participants, all of whom have had direct experience with the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 1998; Larkin, et al., 2006; Merriam, 2009). Due to the amount of time required for collection, transcription and interpretation of data through IPA, as well as the risk of losing subtle reflections of meaning as associated with large sample sizes, the sample size typically varies between four to eight participants in most IPA studies (Banister et al., 1994; Barecca & Wilkins, 2008; Howitt, 2010; Larkin et al., 2006; Reid, et al., 2005; Smith & Osborne, 2003). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is increasingly characterized by purposive homogeneous sampling, using small numbers of participants selected for their ability to illuminate specific research questions or areas (Smith & Osborne, 2003). This is supported by the fact that IPA sampling tends to select participants who will shed light on particular phenomena instead of aiming to attain a representative sample (Brocki & Waerden, 2006). In most cases these participants are selected purely based on their ability to yield the most information about the topic (purposively) (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Sanders, 2010).

Because training experiences are undoubtedly influenced by the co-ordinator, the individual lecturers and the curriculum, it seems reasonable that participants in this study had to be enrolled in applied psychology master's programmes from different universities. Eight South African universities offering a master's programme in professional psychology were contacted and four indicated their willingness to collaborate. Although no identifying information about the participating universities can be provided due to confidentiality, the universities that participated were representative of a relatively wide range of institutions – Afrikaans- and English-medium institutions as well as institutions from different provinces.

Permission was sought from the heads of departments of the programmes, and written informed consent was obtained from them. Two students from each programme were non-randomly identified and contacted. No specific exclusion criteria were considered with regard to the participants. Reid et al. (2005) claimed that IPA participants are only recruited on the basis of

understanding the principles of the research, giving consent and showing willingness to participate. Since it was highlighted previously in the study that the search for meaning in accounts surpasses any truth or reality, no exclusion criteria other than the above-mentioned three applied. These principles were thus the only requirements, along with currently being a master's student in professional psychology at one of the identified universities.

Participants were informed about the nature of the study and their anonymity was assured. All eight participants agreed to meet me in order to discuss the study prior to their final commitment to take part. The data collection process was undertaken with all eight participants, after which four individuals were finally identified to build case studies upon. In other words, all eight participants participated in the data collection phase of this study and all eight participants' interviews were transcribed. However, due to the enormous amount of data yielded through this process, and with the intention to keep the study as focused as possible, four participants were chosen based on the following criteria: Firstly, the researcher screened for four rich cases as suggested by Larkin et al. (2006). A rich case is defined on the basis of information, but more specifically the level of intensity of that information. Information that lies deeper than just the obvious is regarded to be rich. Secondly, it was important to choose four participants from four different programmes (universities). Thirdly, it was a high priority to include an atypical case from the eight available cases, as Seawright and Gerring (2008) argued that the inclusion of an atypical or diverse case may provide additional viewpoints to the phenomena under study and, in effect, add rigour to the study. It was only after the careful consideration of these guidelines that the decision was made to use the case studies of Jim (participant 1), Petro (participant 2), Suzanne (participant 3), and the atypical case of Grace (participant 4). Eisenhardt (1991) mentioned that the number of cases to be studied in multiple case designs is not pre-determined. According to Eisenhardt, the appropriate number of cases depends on (a) how much is known about the phenomenon after studying a case; and (b) how much new information is likely to emerge from studying further cases. Both the research questions and the collected data determine at what point the researcher has collected data from sufficient cases to enable appropriate analysis. The four participants whose data were transcribed but not interpreted for the purposes of this specific study were informed of the decision. These participants all approved of the

decision and gave consent that their data may be stored and used in any follow-up study conducted by the researcher.

In sum, a flow diagram is included to illustrate the planning and procedure phase of this study:

Figure 8. Flow diagram of planning and procedure phase of study.

Researcher's interest ► researcher's commitment to the study ► researcher's literature journey ► consideration of all ethical implications ► brief pilot study ► proposal ► approval of proposal ► contact eight South African universities ► written consent from four South African universities ► identification of two master's students in each of the four professional psychology programmes ► written consent from all eight participants ► data collection over a one-year span (all eight participants) ► transcription of interviews (all eight participants) ► identification of four participants to build case studies upon ► analyses of four participants' accounts.

### 5.3.3 PARTICIPANTS

#### 5.3.3.1 Participant demographics

The small number of participants is consistent with the chosen methodology which is cautious of moving to generalization (Howitt, 2010; Larkin et al., 2006; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002).

Table 1

#### *Participants' demographics*

Participant	Name	Gender	Age	Programme/University	Programme (Clinical; Counselling)
1	Jim	M	39	A	Clinical
2	Petro	F	28	B	Counselling
3	Suzanne	F	23	C	Clinical
4	Grace	F	27	D	Clinical



Three female students and one male student participated. In accordance with the gender ratio in most of these programmes, only one male participant was identified. Their ages ranged from 23 to 39. All four participants were from different institutions.

#### 5.3.3.2 Ethical considerations regarding the participants

Part of the planning phase was to consider the ethical issues facing the researcher. Being master's students in a professional psychology programme they are *per se* familiar with ethics regarding research and would be aware of confidentiality matters. Therefore, confidentiality emerged as an issue of importance and was discussed during the first interview. As the interviews and writings aimed to uncover research participants' experiences relating to being a master's student in professional psychology, particular care was necessary to reassure participants that all resulting material would be treated in confidence and that care would be taken not to mention names (including that of their clients, lecturers and supervisors) during the interviews.

The participants were made aware that permission was obtained from other role players (heads of departments and master's course co-ordinators) prior to the selection of participants. Once they informally agreed to take part in the study, formal informed consent was obtained from all eight the initial participants. As informed consent is viewed as a legal document within formal research, the researcher consulted samples of consent forms from other studies in order to protect both the researcher and the participants (see Appendices I and J). Being aware of the fact that a master's year can be a busy time, it was important to inform the participants of what they agreed to. They were provided with a document stipulating all the research-related activities they would have to engage in. This document indicated the times of the year that the interviews would take place to allow for proper preparation within their time schedules. Participants were thus fully informed about all the aspects that could alter their decision to participate prior to giving consent. All participants were assured that if they were to display signs or symptoms of severe emotional distress during the research process, they would be granted the option of referral for professional counselling and would be free to withdraw at any time. Other ethical aspects discussed included the purpose of the study, how it was to be conducted and, most importantly, what would happen

to the material they presented. Concerning the latter, participants were informed that if they so wished, the general findings of the study would be made available to them once completed. With reference to the focus of the study, participants were aware of the psychofortigenic nature of the aim of the study but because the psychofortigenic experiences would often flow from hardships and difficult experiences encountered, participants were encouraged to share their experience as a whole.

The researcher found it vital to include some information regarding herself to allow the participants to judge the credibility of the research in relation to the influence of her experience and background. Brinkman (2007) argued that the power position of the researcher, with special reference to conducting interviews with the participants, is an ethical issue to be aware of from the beginning. In this regard the researcher constantly reminded herself of her participants as the “masterminds” behind their own lives. Another ethical consideration was the likelihood that, as a psychologist, the relationship with the participants could easily become pseudo-therapeutic, resulting in therapist/researcher role confusion and complicating the research process. In the researcher’s experience peer discussions assisted a great deal in this regard. Concerning ethical matters, integrity and professionalism once again proved to be the crucial components of conducting good research. Anonymity and confidentiality are more difficult in qualitative research as people are not being translated into numbers (McLeod, 2011). Mindful of this, tape-recordings were heard only by the researcher, who transcribed them herself, and were destroyed once she no longer had use of them for the study. The researcher also left the choice of interview venue to the participants as she felt this ensured their privacy and comfort as far as possible.

#### **5.3.4 DATA COLLECTION**

The underlying ethical principle guiding this study was to gather data that were genuine and a true reflection of the participants’ subjective experiences.

#### 5.3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, data were gathered using face-to-face semi-structured interviews. This is according to suggested IPA methodology and case study research (Howitt, 2010; Larkin et al., 2006; Merriam, 2009). This type of interview involves an interview schedule that consists of open-ended questions to elicit further information and was found to be well suited for developing a real understanding of experiences and providing rich and detailed sketches (Gibson & Brown, 2009; Howitt, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The interview starts with a general open question from which funnelling questions develop (Gibson & Brown, 2009). In this study all the interviews started with the question “What is your experience of being a master’s student in a professional psychology programme like?” Although the interview schedule was constructed based on the research aim, it was used in a flexible way (see Appendix H). Interviews began by providing the participant with the opportunity to share all personal experiences (positive and negative) related to being a master’s student in a professional psychology programme, after which the researcher skilfully further investigated the more positive experiences shared, aiming to avoid leading questions. The flexible use of the researcher’s interview schedule meant that the participants were free to express their own views of the experience, using their own words. Paradoxically, Kvale (1996) shed light on this aspect by saying that a research interview can never be accepted as an absolute independent and that the knowledge will be produced as a result of the interaction between the researcher and the participant. Since most IPA studies relate to highly personal experiences, Smith and Osborne (2003) highlighted general features of the semi-structured interview within an IPA study. Firstly, the slow pace of the interview should be respected, as rapport and trust need to develop in order to share personal information. Adequate time should be allowed for participants to give proper and full answers, often requiring some reflection from their side. The researcher should also be sensitive to the emotional effect that the interviews may have on the participants. All of these guidelines were considered throughout the study. As indicated earlier, although 24 interviews were conducted from eight participants over a one-year time span, the researcher decided to only use 12 interviews from four participants in the analysis and interpretation stage. Prior to each interview, permission was sought to record the interview and care was taken to ensure high-

quality sound on the recordings. Rapport was established before the first interview formally started, and the participants all seemed relaxed and comfortable with the situation. With reference to rapport building, the researcher introduced herself and discussed the nature of the study in order to ensure that participants are fully oriented. Rapport was further maintained through genuine interest, effective non-verbal communication and the acknowledgement of both positive and negative emotions. Participants were also asked to clarify and elaborate on phrases and words the researcher did not understand or in the case of ambiguity or lack of clarity.

The researcher attempted to maintain a focus on understanding the experience as it was being related by the participant. The interviews each lasted an average of one hour, after which they were immediately transcribed by the researcher. In the process, 29 hours of recorded data were collected which required approximately 80 hours of transcription, and yielded almost 300 pages of interview transcripts. After the identification of four cases (see section 5.3.2), the researcher was left with approximately 150 pages of interview transcripts. These figures only refer to the interviews and do not include the personal reflective writings as part of the data.

On a personal level the researcher also preferred interviewing as method of data gathering since she, being a qualified psychologist, is comfortable with the interview processes. The researcher found it to be beneficial in many ways. Firstly, it helped the researcher to gain a detailed picture of each participant's experience as a master's student in professional psychology. Secondly, the flexible use of questions and probes allowed for follow-up avenues presented by the participants which might not have emerged otherwise. Interview questions and focus areas were formulated with the aim of exploring the experiences of master's students in professional psychology programmes. Focus areas included, among others, their coping mechanisms, their interpersonal relationships, their intrapersonal growth experiences, their experiences of learning psychology and the effect of the underlying dynamics to the programme such as supervisors, seeing clients and class colleagues. The researcher was guided by the participant instead of any predefined focus areas, as the participants discussed all issues they felt were relevant to their experience. Suggestions from Smith and Osborne (2008) were used as guidelines for the questions posed, although the interview process remained flexible and open. These suggestions include Smith and Osborne's (2008) recommendation that the interviewer must start with an open, general question.

They added that the interviewer should feel free to probe interesting areas that arise and follow up on the respondents' interests and concerns. Questions should include an element of meaning making and the interviewer should probe the underlying process of interpretation of the experience. Funnelling can take place whereby the interviewer elicits general views as well as responses towards specific concerns. Smith and Osborne (2008) stressed the importance of avoiding value-laden questions, jargon and closed questions.

Smith (1995) described a "natural fit" between the semi-structured interview and the purpose of qualitative analysis, as a great amount of detail can be provided via a verbatim interview. This interactive construction of knowledge leads to the necessity of considering the power relationship between the researcher and the participant. In this regard the researcher took care not to be too formal and refrained from questions related to academic performance. In keeping with the general purpose of IPA the interview schedule was only used as a guide to generate potential topics of interest to let participants still have control over the interview and to feel free to discuss issues they regarded to be important. The decision to employing face-to-face semi-structured interviews was considered in spite of the amount of travelling and related expenses involved. This was countered for by attempting to visit two universities in one trip in order to cut costs and time away from work.

#### 5.3.4.2 Reflective writing

Each participant was additionally asked to engage in reflective writing. There is a wealth of research on journals and diaries as a relatively common form of data collection in the area of personal development (Jasper, 2005; Toohey, 2002; Wright, et al., 2006). This research confirms that writing as a form of personal development is multifunctional and widely used. These writings can also be regarded as researcher-generated documents as they have the specific purpose of presenting topics of interest from a researcher point of view to the participants. Topics such as day-to-day experiences, challenges faced, emotions experienced as well as dealing with these challenges and emotions were provided in order to guide the students' writings. A positive characteristic of reflective writing as data collection method is that participants can take their time and reflect on their responses more deeply than what is possible

in an interview (Jasper, 2005). From the four participants, two submitted all three their personal writings in between the formally scheduled interviews. This allowed the researcher to have contact with them at six different time points during the year. The other two participants, due to their busy schedules, submitted two of the three journal writings. The writings formed part of the data of each case and, together with the interview transcriptions, formed a holistic data package which was analyzed in the same way by making use of IPA. Although journals/diaries and reflective writings are indicated as a data collection method for IPA, “there has been little published IPA work to date using diaries/journals/reflective writings” (Reid et al., 2005, p. 22). Although all eight of the initial participants engaged in reflective writings, only the final four chosen participants’ data are displayed in Table 2.

The following table illustrates the data collected using the two methods mentioned above:

Table 2

*Data collected from four participants*

Participant	Interview 1 (February)	Reflective writing 1 (April)	Interview 2 (August)	Reflective writing 2 (October)	Interview 3 (November)	Reflective writing 3 (December)
Jim (Participant 1)	√	√	√	√	√	√
Petro (Participant 2)	√	√	√	X	√	√
Suzanne (Participant 3)	√	√	√	X	√	√
Grace (Participant 4)	√	√	√	√	√	√

#### 5.3.4.3 Field notes

Anything that the researcher sees, hears and feels can bring important dynamics to the context of the research process. Because the researcher was aware that data collection and analysis were inevitably influenced by her assumptions and values, she openly wanted to acknowledge her biases and speculated how these may have influenced the way in which she conducted the research. In this regard Jasper (2005) argued that the reflective writings of the researcher herself can be seen as secondary data and an integral part of the study. For these reasons, notes

containing detail of the setting, the communication and the actual discussions were taken and formed part of the researcher's reflexive diary (field notes were interweaved in the researcher's reflexive journal: Appendix B). These reflective notes were subjectively used as part of the interpretation stage of the findings, not during the initial data analysis, and included observation notes, personal notes and methodological notes. The researcher found it extremely helpful to be able to constantly check with the "insider's" perspective and these notes served as a contributory angle for the interpretations made. On a personal level, this journal, in which the researcher also noted how her perspectives were developing, enhanced sensitivity and self-awareness. Examples from this journal are set out in Chapter 6 under the heading "Researcher's reflection" (see sections 6.2.1, 6.3.1, 6.4.1 and 6.5.1).

## **5.4 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **5.4.1 Background to and rationale for using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a dual process in which "the participants are trying to make sense of their world; the researcher is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith & Osborne, 2003, p. 51). Larkin et al. (2006) concurred by stating that it is "more appropriate to understand IPA as a 'stance' or perspective from which to approach the task of qualitative analysis, rather than a distinct method" (p. 104).

The identified psychofortigenic experiences from the interviews and reflective writings were analyzed by making use of IPA. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is a relatively young approach to qualitative research and has been developed (specifically within psychology) by Jonathan A. Smith during the last 15 years. Although IPA began by (for many different reasons) gaining attention in health psychology, Smith (2004) urged researchers to make use of IPA in other areas of psychology and, as a result, IPA has more recently begun to gain popularity in social, clinical and counselling psychology (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Howitt, 2010; Larkin et al., 2006; Reid, et al., 2005; Smith & Osborne, 2007). Smith (2004) claimed that, if a researcher is interested in (a) exploring lived experiences; (b) searching for how these make sense; and (c) providing a detailed idiographic case examination, then IPA is a feasible option,

irrespective of the subdiscipline within psychology. The most distinctive characteristics of IPA are that it explores how people ascribe meaning to their experiences and that language is representative of a person's cognitive state (Howitt, 2010; Smith et al., 1999). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is used to produce a subjective view, as opposed to producing an objective statement of an object or event (Smith, et al., 1999). The elements of IPA each have their own developmental path, but by bringing together these elements, IPA claims to, firstly, be phenomenological in nature (the P in IPA). This sensitivity and responsiveness is central to Heidegger's phenomenological approach. By implication, an account can be used to reveal someone's experience, but only if that account is positioned in relation to their world or reality which constituted that experience. While rooted in phenomenology, it also shares similarities with symbolic interactionism in that it assumes that knowledge of your world is gained through active interpretation, and that this knowledge is not completely idiosyncratic, but bound to social context (Brocki & Waerden, 2006; Howitt, 2010). It also recognizes the central role of the researcher in making sense of the participant's perception of events, or "insider's view" (Larkin et al., 2006, p. 103); thus, being rooted in the interpretative tradition (the 'I' in IPA) (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Howitt, 2010; Sanders, 2010). Instead of attempting the impossible task of diminishing the researcher's role and influence, IPA acknowledges and explores this role as it notes that one cannot gain access to the participants' worlds without the use of the researcher or interpreter (Shaw, 2001).

Another central characteristic of IPA, as indicated by Smith (2004), is that IPA is strongly idiographic and the researcher is encouraged to do a very detailed analysis of each participant's lived experience of the phenomenon under study. This detailed analysis allows for real understanding and can be described as a "real meaning"; hence, further linking IPA with phenomenology. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis often uses this term because many of its exemplar studies focus on *specific* individuals in their dealing with or making sense of *specific* situations or events. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is also inductive since it does not set fixed hypotheses and is flexible and open for any unanticipated theme related to the research question which may emerge (Smith, 2004). This does not imply that IPA does not acknowledge (or use) existing psychological literature. Smith (2004) recommended that the analysis must be viewed in relation to the extant psychological knowledge available (an aspect



that distinguishes IPA from grounded theory approaches) (Eatough & Smith, 2006; Gibson & Brown, 2009). After the close textual analysis, IPA does systematically make more formal connections with theory. Drawing on theory is, however, usually done at a later stage of the analysis, being mindful to allow the phenomenological experiences to emerge inductively. Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) also stressed that the participants' accounts should be both maintained and theoretically embedded in a framework related to the phenomenon under study. Smith (2004) stated that IPA is especially appropriate to studies that aim to relate findings to theories as IPA's inductive approach enables the researcher to conduct analyses in light of varied existing psychological models, theories and approaches. It should be clear from the above discussion that IPA does not only consist of the retelling of participants' accounts but must provide analytic sketches of these accounts in view of already existing theories or knowledge on the phenomena in question.

From the discussion above, it is clear that IPA indeed shares characteristics with other forms of qualitative data analysis methods and that its distinctive characteristics refer mainly to the fact that it does not regard participants as mere providers of text. Participants bring many more elements to the data set than their actual words (Howitt, 2010). It can be concluded that IPA's first aim is to understand the participants' worlds and to give an account thereof and, secondly, to develop a more interpretative analysis which contextualizes the initial sketch within a wider psychological context (Larkin et al., 2006).

In choosing IPA for this study, the researcher committed herself to exploring, describing, interpreting, and situating the means by which the four participants made sense of their experiences related to being a master's student in professional psychology. Moreover, it allowed the researcher to focus on how the participants made sense of their personal world. Another reason for choosing this specific qualitative approach is that IPA offers the opportunity to develop understanding of the participants and what it means to them to be in a particular situation (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Besides these reasons, the choice was also made on Smith's (2004) recommendation that IPA is essential to employ when investigating "life transforming events" (p. 49) and based on the requirement for an idiographic approach, in which

the centrality and meaning of participants' subjective experiences could be explored and engaged with.

#### 5.4.2 The process of conducting Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Table 3

*Summary of IPA steps applied in this study*

IPA step	Description of the step
Step 1: First-order analysis	Generate patterns of meaning through cumulative coding within cases.
Step 2: Connections of themes within a case: second-order analysis	Themes are clustered to form subordinate and superordinate themes which are presented as an individual case study. Presented in sections 6.2-6.5.
Step 3: Interpretation of individual cases	Description and interpretation processes are used to provide meaning and deeper understanding of each case.
Step 4: Cross-case analysis	Identification and description of common events of positive experiences that contribute to the psychological well-being of the participants. These experiences are then integrated in Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being. Although only one theoretical model was formally utilized in this study, general positive psychology literature as well as literature based on the development and dynamics of master's students in professional psychology training were also employed in the interpretation and discussion of individual cases.
Step 5: Interpretation of cross-case analysis	Creating a general meaning structure from the common events described in Step 4. Provide a full narrative description of the meaning-making processes across cases.

The process of conducting IPA is summarized in Table 3 and discussed below. First-order analysis takes place in the first step of IPA (*searching for themes in the individual cases*) and aims to summarize participants' experiences by using cumulative coding to generate patterns of meaning within an account (Smith & Osborne, 2008). The process began with the reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts. Within the first-order analysis, interview tapes were listened to and each transcript read through several times to obtain a general sense of what each participant was saying, and to begin to note themes (usually in one margin of the transcript). The richest data from themes were substantiated with direct quotes from the transcript. Quotes were

chosen on the basis of their ability to best illustrate the idea, illuminate the experience, capture emotions and/or provoke responses (Sandelowski, 1995). Through repeated re-reading and re-checking of the text, themes were grouped together and new themes emerged. Through this process the themes progressed to a higher level of abstraction and the process began to invoke the use of more psychological terminology. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis requires the researcher to make sense of the data by engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. The process of analyzing the text and identifying themes was carried out for each transcript and a list of themes and corresponding line and page reference numbers was collated for each participant. During the first-order analysis a computer software programme (ATLAS.ti)<sup>7</sup> was used as an additional tool to analyze the data. ATLAS.ti was developed in 1989 in Germany and is one of the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) packages often used to assist in storing, sorting, retrieving and coding qualitative data, which is regarded standard practice when dealing with huge amounts of verbatim data, and is also indicated for use within IPA studies (Merriam, 2009; Muhr, 1997; Seamark & Lings, 2004). Although the researcher primarily undertook the analysis, ATLAS.ti assisted with the organization and classification of data. A computer package such as ATLAS.ti may be a useful aid when gathering, organizing and reorganizing data and helping to find exceptions, but no package is capable of perceiving a link between theory and data or defining an appropriate structure for the analysis. Taking the analysis beyond the most basic descriptive and coding exercise, requires the researcher's analytical skills in moving towards hypotheses or propositions about the data (Muhr, 1997). ATLAS.ti, however, provided the researcher with a systematic method of data analysis in linking findings to the original data. It also displayed the data in easy visualizations by producing connection maps of in-case and cross-case themes.

Step 2 of the analysis refers to the *connections of themes*. Themes within a case are clustered to form subordinate themes, while other themes emerge as superordinate themes. The second-order analysis involved grouping the clustered themes for each participant into appropriate master themes pertinent to the entire research data and allows for further interpretation or

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.atlasti.com/>

conceptualization of the first-order analysis (Larkin et al., 2006). Themes are continuously cross-checked with the initial transcript to ensure they remain consistent with the actual words of the participant. By dividing the text into meaningful units the researcher is able to identify commonalities, differences and contradictions within a case (Smith & Osborne, 2008). Cases were bound (establishing the boundaries of the case by focussing on the research aim) to avoid what Yin (2009) convincingly claimed as a pitfall when researchers try to answer to a topic that is too broad, or having too many objectives. Binding a case simply implies the decision to focus on a specific dynamic within the case. Yin (2009) and Stake (1995) suggested setting boundaries in a case with regard to, for example, (a) time and place (Creswell, 1998); (b) time and activity (Stake, 1995); and (c) definition and context (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Binding factors in this study included (a) time (only the first year of master's training was considered); (b) activity (only the positive or growth experiences were used as data); and (c) by context (participants had to be master's students in psychology in an applied psychology programme in South Africa). This assisted the researcher to ensure that the study remained reasonable and directed.

With Step 3 *experiences were interpreted* and integrated within Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being domains. Although only one theoretical model was formally utilized in this study, general positive psychology literature as well as literature based on the development and dynamics of master's students in professional psychology training were employed in the interpretation and discussion of individual cases. Ryff's (1989) conceptualization of psychological well-being also incorporates many earlier psychological theories, as discussed in Chapter 3. After the close textual analysis, IPA systematically makes more formal connections and generates across-account patterns of meaning through integrative coding. As in any qualitative analysis, the researcher should remain open to material that does not fit the emerging picture from other accounts and can, after re-visiting the text to eliminate any possible misunderstandings, posit a contrasting theme. The description process follows the interpretation phase in which the central role of the analyst is recognized in particular. In this process the practice of bracketing ensures that the researcher's preconceived beliefs are identified and acknowledged (Smith & Osborne, 2003). Brocki and Waerden (2006) recommended that IPA researchers explicitly state their subjective position. In this regard the researcher was specifically aware that she personally related this experience within the context of the psychofortological

theory. In the descriptive phase the aim is to provide an overall structure by suggesting a hierarchical relationship between themes (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Brocki and Waerden (2006) emphasized that this process of analysis is much more than merely categorizing data, as the researcher should revisit the text constantly to search for deeper understanding.

Step 4 of the analysis refers to *cross-case analysis*. The researcher transformed all the meaning units across cases into a consistent statement of structure of the experiences of master's students in professional psychology programmes in South Africa. The following should be noted with regard to the interpretative analysis within this study. In this step each account was approached afresh and a list of themes for each participant was provided, as this is a hallmark of phenomenological research and widely advocated, instead of using the first account as a master list of themes. These themes were then compiled into a combined list. It should be noted that quantity was not considered a criterion for a theme or subtheme, but the richness of the data relating to a theme instead. Smith (2004) supported this way of working by stating that cross-case analysis can only be conducted after all cases have been examined individually. In her article on establishing rigour in qualitative research, Koch (1999) drew attention to the fact that themes emerging from the data will not always be the same for researchers and readers, as perfect agreement in working with the same material is not expected. Although the interpretation is not necessarily shared, she underlined that the way in which the researcher came to it, must be clear and able to be followed.

As discussed earlier, data interpretation was also conducted within a psychofortigenic approach and, more specifically, was informed by a theoretical model, namely psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989). Baxter and Jack (2008) stressed that a theoretical model serves as an anchor for a study and is referred to at the stage of data interpretation. The theoretical model used and the emerging data should inform each other, and there should be a constant movement between the two in the interactive development of the data analysis and the organization of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1984). The results of an IPA analysis can be placed within the context of relevant psychological literature and research and may illuminate, as well as constructively critique, previous findings (Smith, 2004). Although only one theoretical model was formally utilized in this study, general positive psychology literature as well as literature based on the development

and dynamics of master's students in professional psychology training were employed in the interpretation and discussion of individual cases. Larkin et al. (2006) also stressed that an aim of IPA is to, after the informed description in which the researcher tries to get as close as possible to the participant's view, follow a more overtly interpretative analysis in relation to a wider theoretical context.

Although IPA does not involve generating specific hypotheses based on the extant literature, it does generate broad research questions which lend themselves to the collection of expansive data. In this way IPA is referred to as data-driven instead of theory-driven. These positions were considered particularly salient in the context of the current study, as there was no set hypothesis prior to undertaking the research. To safeguard herself against becoming too deductive, the researcher used her reflective journal to constantly judge the extent to which her decisions were driven by the theoretical model.

However, the theoretical model of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) was found to be most useful in the presentation of the data especially. After the inductive process of the interpretation of individual case studies, the six domains of psychological well-being were used as domain parameters in which these experiences could easily be interpreted and presented. Thus, the theory influenced the initial interpretation of data only minimally but was instead operationalized later as psychological structure in which the interpretations could be discussed theoretically.

## **5.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The trustworthiness of research refers to the soundness thereof and is thus an important measure in conducting ethical research of high quality (Merriam, 2009). Some researchers argue that the same criteria can be applied to assess the trustworthiness of both quantitative and qualitative research. These researchers used similar terms in order to illustrate that qualitative research can be as rigorous as the "hard sciences" and to try to close the gap between the general view of trustworthiness in quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell & Clark, 2007). On the other hand, most qualitative researchers agree that it is impossible to judge the trustworthiness of qualitative research within the traditional framework used for quantitative research (Burns, 2000;

Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Howitt, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 1994). There has been some debate among researchers about the legitimacy of an alternative set of standards for qualitative research and it is clear that more work must be done to broaden “traditional” criteria so as to rightfully apply to all spectra of research approaches (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). To date, no definite single set of factors has been established as the final authority in evaluating qualitative research, although the suggestions of various authors (Burns, 2000; Howitt, 2010; Merriam, 2009; Wolcott, 1994) show a great amount of overlap. Others (Hill, et al., 2005; Koch, 2006) rejected the notion that there are fixed, measureable criteria and regard their data as situationally bound. In the end this debate reminds one of the nature of qualitative research and that it cannot be viewed as merely an extension of the quantitative school.

Many authors (Babbie & Mouton, 2004; Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1988) identified useful guidelines for trustworthiness within qualitative research. Most of these sets of guidelines overlap within the following four domains. Firstly, the direct and active role of the researcher should be accounted for and researchers must owe up to the role that their beliefs and perceptions may play in the research. Secondly, with regard to contextualizing the sample, a full description of the demographics of the sample was found to be crucial in order to allow the reader to be cautious about generalizing the findings. Thirdly, findings must be grounded in the “true” voices through the use of examples and quotes to allow the reader to “see” how the themes were formed and grouped. The data should be integrated in such comprehensive ways as to enable the reader to understand how categories have been organized, titled and subtitled (Golafshani, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lastly, the researcher should be willing to check and re-check the data with a variety of sources, most importantly, the original providers of the data. This implies that the analysis should remain as close as possible to the data (Braud & Anderson, 1998). In this study it was done through clarification during the interviews, follow-up questions after transcriptions and the reading and re-reading of transcripts.

Based on these principles the trustworthiness of this study will be outlined by utilizing the constructs of Lincoln and Guba (1988) (also elaborated by Golafshani, 2003), namely credibility, transferability, confirmability and dependability, which they proposed as an alternative to the more traditional quantitatively oriented criteria. Triangulation as method to maximize

trustworthiness was also considered. These principles were not employed in a rigid way, as this can impose restrictions on a rich and emerging research methodology. Apart from these principles, the researcher established personal parameters for which she wanted to be held responsible throughout the study in order to perform ethical research and provide true findings. These parameters concerned the research question (was it clearly defined?), the design (is it the best design to suit the research question?), data (were the data collected and managed systematically and analyzed correctly?), and the reporting (was enough detail provided to do the participants justice?).

Qualitative authors highlighted different pitfalls when it comes to rigour within qualitative research. Gearing (2004) stressed that researchers have the tendency to claim that research was conducted without providing a detailed description of the process; thus, undermining the concept of bracketing. Farmer, Robinson, Elliott and Eyles (2006) found that qualitative researchers tend to misjudge the significance of the richness of descriptions, also within their methodological descriptions. With special reference to case studies, Edwards (1998) highlighted that rigour is lacking when unreliable self-report data or unsubstantiated observations are used. Within the next five sections, much overlap will occur. The reason is that, in qualitative research, most of the actions aiming at the enhancement of trustworthiness have a positive effect, to a certain extent, not only on a single facet, but in most cases on all facets related to the trustworthiness of the study.

### **5.5.1 Credibility**

Credibility mirrors internal validity in the empiricist research tradition and refers to the accuracy with which the research reflects the participant's experience and reality (Babbie & Mouton, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; William, 2006) or, according to Braud and Anderson (1998), to an idea of being faithful to the phenomenon that one is studying. Considering the purpose of qualitative research, the participants are, in fact, the only ones who can rightfully judge the credibility of the results. Research, especially from a phenomenological approach, is and will always be conducted from a particular position or stance, rendering the idea of perfect neutrality highly impractical (Banister et al., 1994). However, from the researcher's side a few precautions



can be implemented in an attempt to enhance credibility, for example, the fact that the researcher was actively involved in the field, that all the data were collected by the researcher herself, and an ongoing reflective process was established. The researcher's self-awareness is crucial when considering the credibility of a study (Koch, 1999). Another plus in this regard would be the researcher's experience in working with master's students in professional psychology, which ensured some level of engagement with the population group. Interview recordings allowed the researcher immediate access to the data, and were checked and re-checked. There is an abundance of evidence within the qualitative research literature that encourages the practice of returning to the participants in order to verify the findings; thus, ensuring credibility. The longitudinal nature of the study (data were collected over a one-year span), as well as the prolonged engagement in the study, allowed for follow-up interviews and was also beneficial in the sense that it provided time for trust to develop between the researcher and the participants. It is therefore assumed that, if the researcher were to have been off track with any of her interpretations, the participants would have been comfortable in correcting the mistake (called member checking). This concurs with Kane and Trochim's (2007) arguing that the only real way of gaining credibility, as it was highlighted earlier, is to ask the participants to judge the results. Jootun et al. (2009) confirmed this by suggesting that, in situations where participants feel relaxed, the data are more likely to be credible.

### **5.5.2 Dependability**

In order to allow others to follow the process and logic behind the decisions made in qualitative research (i.e., being able to replicate or repeat them), dependability – commonly known as reliability in quantitative research – must be ensured (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; William, 2006). Merriam (2009) also referred to dependability as auditability. The flexible and ever-changing context of qualitative research affects this construct negatively. Yardley (2000) confirmed this by highlighting that the purpose of qualitative research is to produce just one of many possible interpretations, implying that reliability may be an unsuitable criterion for measuring qualitative research. However, dependability can best be ensured by keeping detailed records of the process and decisions made (Koch, 1999). In this study, an audit trail and filed notes provided step-by-step directions of how, when and where the study was conducted, of problems that arose and of

consequent decisions made. The interviews were all recorded to allow for re-checking if necessary. Through reflexivity the researcher became aware of her mental patterns forming from personal experiences and focused literature studies. To facilitate truthful reflexivity, the researcher continuously asked reflective questions such as: Can the voices be linked to their original text? Am I being challenged in my interpretations? Am I willing to show my analysis to anyone? What personal dreams do I have about the material presented? Miles and Huberman (1984) supported this reflective questioning by proposing that personal memos and personal reflections (see Appendix A and B) be made available for external inspection, while Koch (1999) highlighted that such self-scrutiny has the benefit of increasing the overall trustworthiness of a study.

### **5.5.3 Transferability**

Transferability represents what is known as external validity in conventional social sciences and refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized or transferred to other context descriptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Koch, 2006; Patton, 2002). The researcher can enhance transferability to some extent, but the person who wishes to “transfer” the results is mainly responsible for evaluating how sensible such a transfer will be (Merriam, 2009). Transferability is generally enhanced by providing in-depth and rich descriptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Patton, 2002). In this study it was not attempted to generalize the findings to a larger population but to provide a true reflection of four individual cases and providing a rich description of the participants instead. The thorough literature review and detailed description of the research context, however, contributed to the transferability in that they contextualized the cases well. According to Babbie and Mouton (2005), transferability depends further on similarities between the sending and receiving of the context. In this study verbatim quotations from the interviews formed the basis of describing an experience from the participants’ view and perspective, providing enough detail for the reader to evaluate transferability. The participants in this study were chosen based primarily on their ability to inform the study’s purpose, which is another method towards ensuring transferability (Nicholls, 2009). As mentioned earlier, data were collected from eight participants, after which four participants’ data were chosen to progress into the interpretation stage. The reasons for this decision are discussed in section 5.3.2.

#### **5.5.4 Confirmability**

Within a positivistic paradigm, objectivity is stressed as a warranty for trustworthiness, as it poses the question as to whether the results can be confirmed by another study of the same nature (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Confirmability is akin to the concept of objectivity. Qualitative researchers would, however, refrain from claiming that their work can be replicated perfectly. At best, it is possible to repeat the research processes, thereby establishing a reliable and thorough audit trail with the purpose of being able to trace the data as a means of establishing confirmability (Merriam, 2009). In addition, Guba and Lincoln (1989) urged the findings to be grounded in the voices of the participants by making use of direct quotations to facilitate confirmability. In this study all eight participants' interviews were immediately transcribed and the identified themes stemmed directly from this data in order to minimize any form of contamination or selective reading. Providing pure evidence of reflexivity was a high priority in this study with the aim to achieve the best possible confirmable results. In a broader sense, objectivity also refers to the ability to "stay on the outside", but in qualitative research the researcher is aware of the limits of objectivity and conceptualizes this term almost as a process to understand and work with subjectivity. It is, once again, critical to stress the importance of reflexivity and constant self-awareness from the researcher's side.

#### **5.5.5 Triangulation**

*Methodological triangulation* refers to the utilization of more than one method to collect and analyze data and is an important measure to increase quality (Banister et al., 1994; Golafshani, 2003; Krefting, 1991). The assumption is made that, by using combinations of methods, investigators and perspectives, the interpretations become richer and potentially more valid (Howitt, 2010). However, Barbour (2001) argued that it is very difficult to triangulate (in the stricter sense of the word) within qualitative research, as each data collection method yields its own type of data, and the aim should not be on yielding perfect similar findings, but on reassurance and substantiation instead. With this in mind, all eight of the initial participants in this study were interviewed on three different occasions and were also requested to engage in reflective writing. A further aim was to gain a holistic picture of the participants by gathering a

variety of data from them, which contributed to better understanding of their personal experience.

*Theory triangulation* involves using more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). This was done by a thorough literature review prior to and during the research process through the use of Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being domains. Although only one theoretical model was formally utilized in this study, general positive psychology literature as well as literature based on the development and dynamics of master's students in professional psychology training were employed in the interpretation and discussion of individual cases. Ryff's (1989) conceptualization of psychological well-being also incorporates many earlier psychological theories, as discussed in Chapter 3. One of the guidelines followed during this research was embracing multi-theories in order to allow for a variety of perspectives and knowledge on the part of the researcher. Ryff's model (1989) was primarily used as the theoretical model, but to allow for inductiveness and to create as much as possible context within each case, general positive psychology literature as well as literature based on the development and dynamics of master's students in professional psychology training were also employed. Furthermore, *investigator triangulation* (making use of more than one researcher) was applied, to a lesser extent, in the form of the promoter. At this point, it should be mentioned that the promoter was closely involved in the analysis of the data. During the interviews the researcher attempted to check her understanding of her accounts with him, with the intention of researcher triangulation.

## **5.6 BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Although the ethical considerations were interwoven in the different sections of this chapter, a brief synopsis is provided. De Vos (2000) reported that a number of unique ethical problems arise when human beings are the object of study. The ethicality of this study was a high priority as a number of ethical considerations applied. First and foremost the researcher positioned herself in the role as researcher and, through reflexivity, prepared herself for the study. She became aware of her own thinking about the topic and assured a strong theoretical knowledge

basis. During this process the decision was taken to exclude master's students in psychology from the University of the Free State to avoid a possible dual role situation.

Secondly, approval for this study was obtained from the departmental and faculty ethics committees of the University of the Free State. Thirdly, heads of departments and/or master's programme coordinators from different universities in South Africa were informed of the purpose of this study. Consent to contact their master's students in psychology was obtained from four departments of psychology (See Appendix J, p.314). Fourthly, participants were recruited from these departments and, after being fully informed of the nature of the study, gave individual consent. Participants were informed of their right, as voluntary participants, to withdraw at any point in time. The issue of confidentiality (of the participants as well as of the information shared regarding lecturers, supervisors and/or clients) was discussed in detail with the participants during the consent process. Fifth, ethical considerations pertaining to the storage of confidential data, the true presentation thereof and the dignity of the participants were taken into account throughout the duration of the study. The decision to only use four of the eight participants for the purpose of this study was discussed with all eight participants, who expressed their approval.

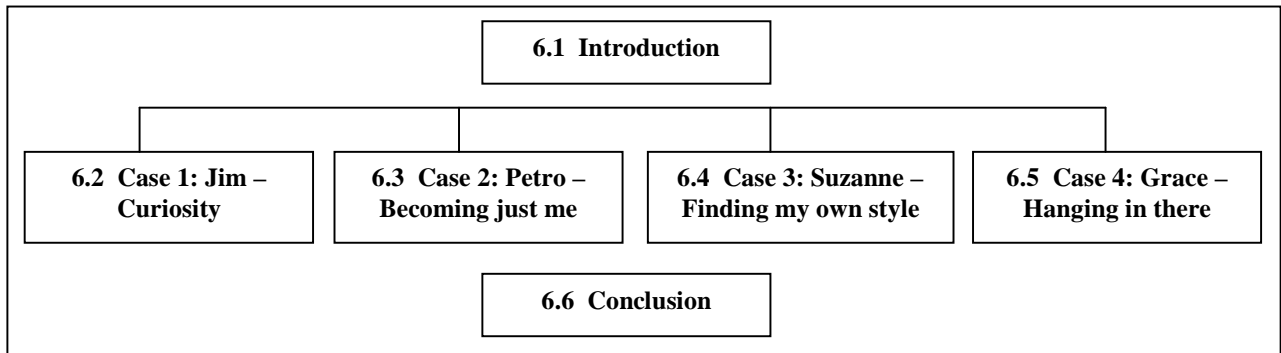
## **5.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter provided an overview of qualitative research and offered the reasons behind choosing this type of research for the current study. Furthermore, it incorporated a discussion of phenomenology and its relevancy to this study. The active role of the researcher was acknowledged as well as the contextualization of the participants of this study. In this chapter the reader was guided through the research process, with specific focus on the use of IPA in multiple case studies. Criticisms, limitations and ethical considerations pertaining to the design and methods were provided throughout in order to allow for a balanced view on the methodology of this study. This chapter concluded with an in-depth discussion on the trustworthiness of the study, as it is regarded as the scientific quality control measurement. Having provided an overview of the methods used to collect and analyze the data, as well as the general design implemented in this study, the findings are discussed in the following chapter.

# CHAPTER 6

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Figure 9. Visual display of the outline of Chapter 6.



### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in Chapter 5, the collected data were sorted by main themes and subthemes, after which an interpretation process followed, as prescribed by IPA. In this chapter each case is viewed as a separate entity and presented in full in accordance with the researcher's striving towards an inductive approach and an idiographic description. This is according to IPA guidelines and with the aim to do justice to each individual case. Figure 9 visually displays the presentation of the case studies in this chapter. Direct extracts from the original data are used in the form of quotations to enhance trustworthiness and to ground the data in the "true voices" of the participants. Quotations are given without modification so as to retain their originality. Afrikaans quotes are given for the same reason, with English translations as footnotes. Only the richest quotations are used in order to expand on the themes. Quotes were chosen on the basis of their ability to best illustrate the idea, illuminate the experience, capture emotions and/or provoke responses (Sandelowski, 1995). The quotations can be traced in the full interview transcription in Appendix C-F by using the appendix number, page number and paragraph number as indicated in brackets after each quotation. Cases are built upon the data from the interviews as well as from the participants' reflective writings.

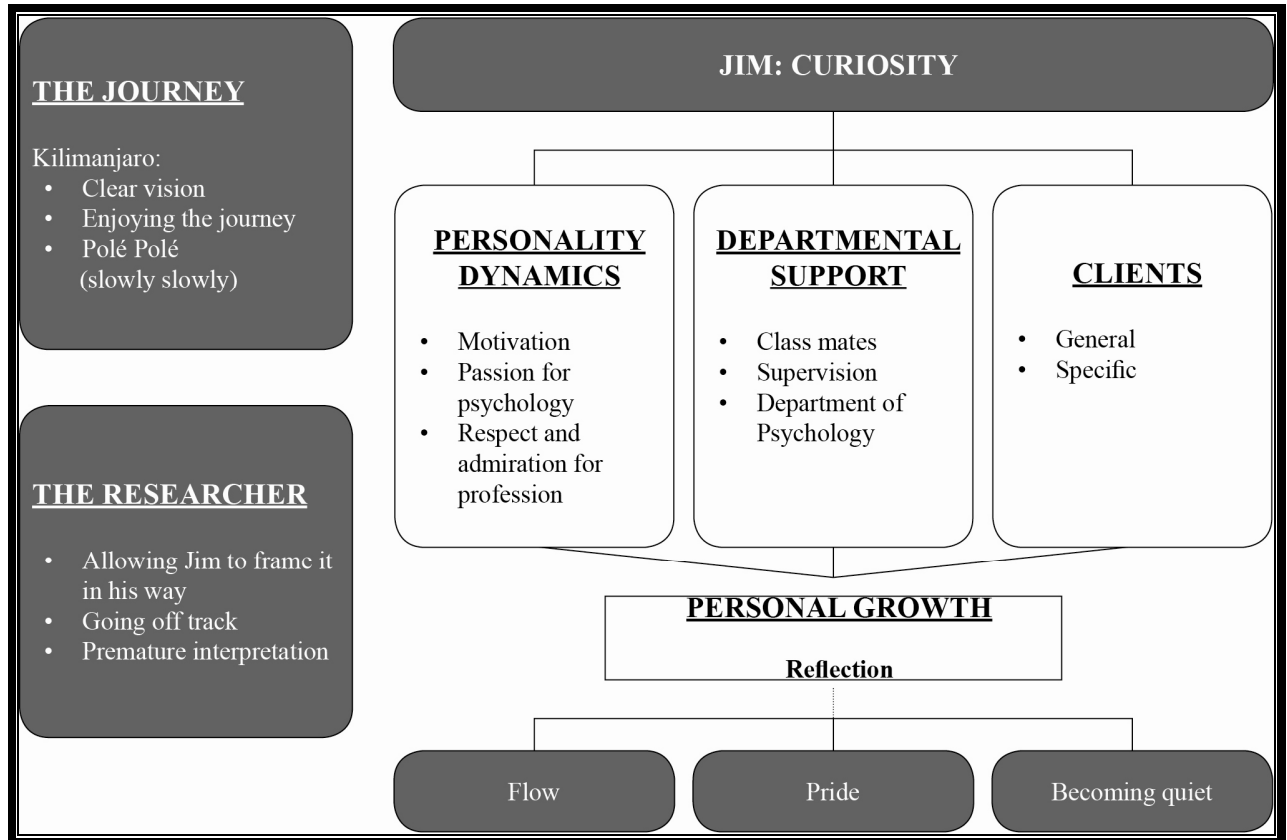
With each case study, a visual display in figure format provides a quick overview of the case and ensure easy reading. The master's year journey in professional psychology, as viewed by the participant, serves as the platform on which the themes are presented. The name given to each case study functions as an umbrella under which the categories were placed for purposes of coherence. Field notes are woven into the data analysis with the exception of a short introductory section focusing on the main characteristics of the participant's journey, followed by a reflection section in which the researcher's feelings related to the participant and the data are provided. The aim of this chapter is to present the data only, with very limited interpretation. In Chapter 7 the full interpretation and the themes across cases are discussed and highlighted, linking them to the relevant literature.

## **6.2 CASE 1: JIM – CURIOSITY**

Jim's case is built upon three in-depth interviews (beginning, middle and end of the year) and three reflective writings which he submitted in between the interviews. Jim's case is named "curiosity" for a number of reasons: curiosity was the word that Jim chose when asked to describe the year in one word; curiosity triggered his openness and passion for the discipline of psychology; and the researcher experienced Jim to be genuinely curious about his own personal growth; hence, his high level of self-reflection.

This case is presented through the three main aspects that have been identified as areas in which Jim's journey was experienced positively. They are personality dynamics brought into the year, departmental support offered to Jim, as well as his experience of working with clients. These areas all contributed to a sense of personal growth identified by Jim through constant reflection. The areas of growth that emerged were (a) experiencing flow; (b) pride in himself and his work; and (c) becoming quieter.

Figure 10. Visual display of Jim’s experience of being a master’s student in professional psychology.



### 6.2.1 Researcher’s reflection

Jim’s passion for psychology and his personal commitment towards the year were evident from the start. He was extremely successful with framing his experiences positively. Jim’s mature way of describing his journey was very different from the other participants and the researcher had to remind herself to allow Jim to *conceptualize it in his own way*. With a participant such as Jim, who elaborates and interprets as he speaks, the interview can easily go astray as he introduced topics of discussion as he went along. At times it felt as if the interview went *off track* due to his talkativeness. Part of allowing him to “scaffold” his journey in his own way, was to make way for distinctive, interesting stories to be told. Jim often used his experience with his clients to reflect upon his own growth. At first, it left the researcher uncomfortable due to the ethical



considerations involved in discussing clients, but the researcher realized very soon that Jim is best understood when sharing his personal path through his experience with clients. Another personal challenge was to avoid *premature interpretation* since Jim's discussions were already well thought through and presented.

### **6.2.2 Background information**

Jim was a 39 year old male who was involved in theatre prior to his master's studies in professional psychology. He decided to further his studies in psychology mainly because of his very positive experiences in his work with people. He was selected into more than one master's programme, but made his final decision (choice of university) based on his positive experience of the specific university's selection procedures. Jim was in an intimate relationship for close to 10 years and was well supported through his studies. One of the very significant events in Jim's life was climbing Kilimanjaro, which he did a few years ago. He used this experience as a metaphor in his discussions. His keenness to take part in this study was evident right through the research process as he used it as yet another opportunity to reflect on his personal growth. It should be mentioned that Jim was also undergoing psychotherapy during the year, which was not identified as an exclusion criteria for two reasons. Firstly, it was clear from the literature in Chapter 4 that master's students in psychology regularly use psychotherapy as a coping mechanism and resource (Gilroy et al., 2002; Holzman et al., 1996; Norcross & Guy, 2005; Rizq & Target, 2008) and, secondly, it was illustrated that personal psychotherapy is a means through which self-awareness can be achieved (Murphy, 2005; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003; Sheikh et al., 2007).

### **6.2.3 Jim's journey**

Jim was very much in tune with his own psychological processes throughout the year. Continuous reflection made him aware of how the master's year contributed towards a greater narrative.

"I learn huge life lessons every day. About my weaknesses – these come shining through, but my strengths build me up, they balance me. It really is gaining meaning in life, clarity and vision." [C][p.19:par: 4.3]

Confirming this notion was his awareness of how significant the year became in relation to finding meaning in his life.

“I also am intelligent and on a journey to create meaning of these huge shifts happening in my life.” [C][p.19:par: 4.2]

In his meaning-making process, Jim used his prior experience of climbing *Kilimanjaro* as a metaphor for this journey.

“So where do I begin? At the base of the mountain, I looked up at this mountain I had to climb. I had heard various stories of the adventure from those who had travelled this path before, but like any great adventure you have to experience it for yourself. If I had to look back and identify any great shifts, it would be hard to pinpoint any specific momentous event. Rather, it is those smaller qualitative moments, tiny events, which accumulate in reshaping my sense of who I am.” [C][p.28:par: 6.1]

Jim used this metaphor to describe the “beauty” as well as the more difficult times of his master’s year.

“I think it’s just amazing. We got to the top and saw the sun at its peak. But it’s not about getting to the top; it’s actually about the journey. There’s something so deeply satisfying about being able to walk for nine hours a day. And you can’t talk, the walking is really slow. Everything slows down so you become so introspective; you go through a lot of processes yourself. There’s something beautiful about that. I just wish this year would slow down; all these lecturers are coming with assignments and this research monster.” [C] [p.2&3:par: 1.9]

“Ja, the route is tougher than I thought. When I climbed Kilimanjaro I went up the easy route, I think this is more of an Everest. You get mountain sickness occasionally and then you have to take a step back or two. Just to chill and get your head around it. Yes I know what the pay-off is. And I think the other important lesson that I learnt there is that Swahili saying of Polé Polé, slowly slowly. And that comes back to me, slow down. Yes, and that keeps me going.” [C] [p.18:par: 3.43]

It became fairly evident that Jim wished for a *slower pace* to allow for a more intense experience.

“You get mountain sickness occasionally and then you have to take a step back or two. Just to chill and get your head around it. Yes I know what the pay-off is. And I think the other important lesson that I learnt there is that Swahili saying of Polé Polé, slowly slowly. And that comes back to me, slow down.” [C][p.18:par: 3.43]

“I like the metaphor of Kilimanjaro, it is a slowing down for me, it is a process of me of deep introspection. You know what, the weird thing is I’m not scared.” [C] [p.3:par: 1.12]

Due to his genuine respect for the profession, Jim often questioned his ability to work with clients. This resulted in another dynamic in Jim’s journey – that of trusting himself.

“The big challenge is learning to trust yourself and believe in what you have to offer. Like I had to trust myself starting Kilimanjaro. Yeah but there are some things you just believe you can do and then you do them.” [C][p.7:par: 1.29]

When asked to describe the year in one word, Jim said:

“The year in a word: *Curiosity*. Passion is also something that jumped out, but for me curiosity.” [C][p.27:par: 5.35]

#### 6.2.4 Personal growth experiences

Before looking into the individual factors that were identified as themes within Jim’s experience, it should be mentioned that Jim identified personal growth areas himself. The first is that of reflecting upon oneself as well as on the context. Through *reflection* Jim connected with his emotions and it allowed for the identification of character strengths and changes.

“Another important area I explored this year was the notion of reflection. Everything was about introspection and reflection.” [C][p.28:par: 6.3]

Another one of these aspects was discovering an optimal sense of being, what he experienced as *flow*.

“It’s a simple thing of flow with clients, for me it’s a real sense of flow.” [C][p.13:par: 3.20]

“Doing therapy is like being in a state of flow.” [C][p.8:par: 2.2]

Jim could also communicate how much *pride* he had initially, but his experiences during the year lead to a healthy sense of humility.

“I was cocky at first, I got into master’s and I’m going to be a psychologist, but now I won’t call myself a psychologist anymore. I’m a student psychologist and I’m proud of that. It’s important that language, for me. There’s a growth process I still need to go through. That’s what it says on my card. I’m a student psychologist. You know when you go to parties and events and people ask what you do, then I say I’m a student psychologist now. You know if people chose to walk away and snub their noses, that’s their problem. I’m very comfortable, I’m loving being a student, I’m loving this process.” [C][p.26:par: 5.31]

As a result of the master’s year experience, Jim commented on how much quieter he became. *Becoming quieter* led to his enhanced listening which benefitted him both as a person and as a therapist.

“I get quieter and quieter as the year progresses, I learn to listen more. To really listen and to engage with the other. Whether that other is a fellow student, a lecturer or a client, to truly engage is to listen.” [C][p.19:par: 4.1]

“I am quieter now, but I have a new found confidence. I feel more grounded and settled. I listen a lot more, not simply to what someone else says, but I try to listen to the whole person; what they are feeling, thinking, being.” [C][p.29:par: 6.7]

“I think I was perhaps a little naive, and a little too self-assured. Perhaps a little louder and bolder. I think these were fronts for a confidence I lacked, or an anxiety I had about being a psychologist.” [C][p.29:par: 6.6]

## 6.2.5 Personality dynamics

As a person, Jim strives towards positivity and finding meaning in occurrences. These personality characteristics were brought into the experience of a master's year in professional psychology and aided him in this journey. This was reflected in his high level of *motivation* entering the year. Jim wanted to truly engage in the process.

"I'm thirty nine, turning forty in August, and I thought to myself I'm coming back to university because I want to engage in the process. I want to absorb all the information, I want to read a lot, I want to engage in discussions and enjoy this. I don't want to just read a book quickly, write exams quickly and then become a psychologist." [C][p.24&25:par: 5.25]

"What you realize is that all your academic knowledge, what's important to you, who you are, your makeup as an individual suddenly infiltrates your whole being and becomes part of you." [C][p.26:par: 5.32]

Jim's pre-existing *passion for psychology as a discipline and profession* permeated his experience and was especially obvious in his discussions relating to his clients.

"Before I shut my eyes I'm so excited about waking up the next day. I just want the night to be over quickly so I can wake up as quickly as possible. I love it, it drives me completely. It's complex and challenges you on so many levels. A client is complex and that's the motivation." [C][p.13:par: 3.21]

"Then you wish they would read more and engage more so that we can have more passionate debates and discussions." [C][p.17:par: 3.39]

The second statement caused Jim to often question his merit to be in this position. It was, however, not initiated as a harmful self-analysis exercise, but rather out of *respect and admiration for the profession*.

"You kind of go 'what am I doing here?' At the same time you ask the question 'well what's my voice?' Because you're seeing clients the whole time. It's theory with all the stuff that you're learning, then you're sitting opposite someone." [C][p.9:par: 3.2]

"You know, there's a responsibility here, there's a huge responsibility here to be a psychologist. From a client perspective and self-perspective I think you have to introspect all the time." [C][p.10:par: 3.9]

"Every day I question my own abilities, who am I? Why am I doing this? Do I really have what it takes to become a psychologist?" [C][p.8:par: 2.1]

"Looking inward to explore my response, how do I understand this client? How do I understand myself in relationship to this client? And then, to reflect on the clients' journey; how far have they moved? Is this process working for them? Why is this client in therapy? Am I serving my client? How are my personal issues affecting the process?" [C][p.28:par: 6.3]

“I was articulating who I was, who I’m becoming, what is my journey? And I think it’s always going to be a process of ‘I am becoming’. I don’t think I am ever going to reach a process where I say I am this as a therapist, I think that is impossible. It should be impossible.” [C][p.22:par: 5.15]

### **6.2.6 Departmental support**

Departmental support had a significant impact on Jim’s experiential journey. Three different role players/contexts were identified in this regard, namely his classmates, supervision and the department of psychology.

In the first place, Jim’s fellow *classmates* and the atmosphere created by the group were flagged as a major positive. He often spoke about the positive influence of the class in general.

“My supervisor, my class. That was the most brilliant part of this year.” [C][p.23:par: 5.19]

Jim’s awareness of relationships and the importance of that in becoming a therapist were firstly reflected in his immediate environment, his class.

“Therapy is about relationships, and about me developing a relationship with somebody else. That starts in the process of your class. What is my relationship with this group? What are my individual relationships with these people? And that magical area of this relationship that exists between two people or a group is sacred almost, because that is the healing process.” [C][p.20:par: 5.3]

When a good friend of his was murdered towards the end of the year, Jim expressed the remarkable emotional support offered by his class members.

“You know, the class was amazing, they did little things like taking notes for me, and explaining things to me, and someone recorded a lecture for me. I think I only missed two half lectures, the class was so supportive. Even over the weeks they’d engage me and we’d talk about it, you know, all that stuff you do in formal therapy with clients, the class were doing for me, and that was remarkable.” [C][p.20:par: 5.5]

“Everyone was so sensitive and understanding and empathetic to me. I didn’t have to pretend. It was incredibly healing.” [C][p.20:par: 5.2]

“I suppose that is what you get when you’re surrounded by a group of psychologists. For me, what was so key, one of my big learnings, was the whole relational aspect.” [C][p.20:par: 5.3]

On another level, Jim also mentioned a specific class member with whom he had an interesting, albeit usually unconstructive relationship. Towards the end of the year, he was able to reflect upon this relationship and gained insight into the meaning of the relationship dynamics.

“There’s this one woman in particular in my class. I worked on an assignment with her now. She just pushes every single button I have on some level. There’s two things happening here. On the one hand, I’m reacting, on the other this is a huge learning curve. You know, this is part of my process. This is what I’m going to get in therapy. This is going to be a client of mine. So what journey can I go on? What’s happening within me?” [C][p.5:par: 1.22]

“And even in the class you can’t deny that there are dynamics and you just have to work that out. It’s a great platform to say, is this about me? What is it about? What is it about me that I’m reacting like this? [C][p.21:par: 5.10]

“There was this one member in my class that I just had an immediate personality clash with. L: I remember you had to work on an assignment together? J: Yes it was the worst academic experience. Do you know that throughout the year you kind of work on it. And I realized a lot of it had to do with my own insecurity. What am I being insecure about in the situation? You know it’s not about her, it’s about me.” [C][p.21&22:par: 5.11]

Secondly, Jim found *supervision* critical to his growth and development. Under supervision he became aware of his personal growth; he was often challenged during those sessions, with the outcome being self-confidence and a feeling of safety.

“And that was amazing to see my growth, to acknowledge my growth, and that was with my supervisor. That’s what the supervisor pinpoints. They look very carefully at where you can grow, what your weaknesses are and where your strengths lie as well.” [C][p.23:par: 5.19]

“My supervisor said to me in the middle of the year, ‘You need to work on ambivalence more’, like the campus. I love that. She said to me, ‘I find that you’re not really looking at ambivalence with your clients. You need to investigate that.’ But that wasn’t criticism, it was fantastic, let me explore that.” [C][p.27:par: 5.36]

“The supervisor was incredibly nurturing, pushing me in the right direction, to find my voice. With one of my clients I was doing a CBT approach and she said, ‘I don’t really see you as a CBT therapist. Having said that, I think it’s interesting to see how you can apply CBT.’ That has been a challenge.” [C][p.9:par: 3.3]

“It is scary. You’re questioning yourself the whole time. You don’t have anyone else giving you affirmation. That does happen in supervision though.” [C][p.6:par: 1.28]

“What is amazing about my supervisor is that by the end of the year I was sitting in a supervision session and thinking I feel so confident. It’s a real sense of flow that you can feel so open and discuss issues with confidence about your client. I love that.” [C][p.22:par: 5.15]

Although acknowledging the boundaries of supervision, it is evident that Jim utilized this opportunity as a personal resource in his journey of becoming.

“What was amazing with my supervisor was that I had her for supervision through the whole year for my therapy situation. It was incredible because it was a very contained space, a very bounded space. Initially it was a bit disconcerting because you kind of went, who am I here? And I said to her half way through the year I feel like I’ve

made a mistake with one of my clients. I went too quickly, too soon, too emotionally. I felt like I had lost confidence a little bit with the client. I said this to her and she didn't comment on it, you know." [C][p.22:par: 5.14].

"All she did was try and look at my strengths and it was amazing, you know, just discussing that. She would have qualitative feedback with us. I was articulating who I was, who I'm becoming, what is my journey?" [C][p.22:par 5.15]

Thirdly, Jim revealed the support from the *department of psychology* as a constant positive throughout his journey; from its selection procedure to its academic standards. He highlighted that this department focuses on motivating students to be unique and original in their thinking.

"But it was very empowering; they didn't try to break you down. They were trying to isolate and find your strengths. And you become very aware of that early on in the process." [C][p.4:par: 1.18]

"It is a very nurturing environment and I think the philosophy is that the 'department' really wants us to find our unique voice." [C][p.8:par: 2.1]

"I think it's a nurturing department. They are aware of these issues and these problems and they're very perceptive of individual students." [C][p.17:par: 3.42]

### **6.2.7 Clients**

It has been mentioned previously that Jim largely found meaning through his work with clients. His language use was strong and powerful when he spoke about *clients in general*.

"Why do I love this, why am I so passionate about it? It's a simple thing of flow with clients, for me it's a real sense of flow." [C][p.13:par: 3.20]

"Before I shut my eyes I'm so excited about waking up the next day. I just want the night to be over quickly so I can wake up as quickly as possible. I love it, it drives me completely. It's complex and challenges you on so many levels. A client is complex and that's the motivation." [C][p.13:par: 3.21]

"Another important learning I will take forward is to always look for client's resources. To seek their potential, to help access their potential. It is easy to be seduced by the 'problem', but to access individual resources is incredibly powerful." [C][p.29:par: 6.5]

Work with clients also encouraged Jim to look into himself and gain more self-insight.

"You start out with an impulse to do something, you go through this huge amount of learning and training and you're growing all the time and developing as an individual. But ultimately you come back to yourself. And that should be a safe place to get back to." [C][p.2:par: 1.6]

Moreover, Jim referred to *specific clients* as important agents in his process. As discussed earlier, I initially discouraged these referrals until I realized that Jim found the words and the context for his own reflection through his clients. He drew on personal strengths through his clients' narratives.

“Then I was also very lucky with a child I was working with, from an orphanage. That was an extraordinary experience, to go through his healing process while going through my own healing process. This was a friend, a close friend, it wasn’t a family member. This kid’s family members had been taken away from him. He’s ten and from a different country. And then what was amazing for me was to see the resilience, to see how people can climb and their strengths, to ignite their strengths are just magical.” [C][p.20&21:par: 5.6]

“He was very aggressive at school and in the orphanage, and to just work with him narratively and through positive psychology, working about how you cope with the world, and your threats, in his own language. For him to articulate that, to conquer his own mountains, it was just remarkable. To see that devastation this individual had lived through. He told me this story in the beginning of the lion king, it was quite sweet. In the beginning of the year the story was very aggressive, all the animals had been killed, blood was splattered against the wall, and there were brains everywhere. Then later on he told me the story again, a couple of weeks ago. His father had been killed and he told me the story of his father from his perspective. Then he told me the story of the lion king again and he told me from the perspective of the young cub Simba and the older father and that relationship. You could see how he was dealing with the loss of his father, it was quite beautiful. And so powerful for where I was at that stage.” [C][p.21:par: 5.7 & 5.8]

“The client that I’m working with has been through such a devastating life, from losing his father to being abandoned by his mother who’s HIV positive, to having a younger brother who’s on the verge of dying. He’s six. There’s this complete sense of loss. Your whole question around psychology, therapy, is how is this incredible child resilient and fine? I learnt a lot from that child.” [C][p.13&14:par: 3.22]

Jim was also confronted with his own personality dynamics in his work with clients. It is clear that he saw the opportunity to grow and develop as a therapist.

“My first week I had two clients. None of them came back, I was devastated. That becomes a measure of success. Then my semester was over and my one client was supposed to come back and he didn’t come back. Then the semester started again and he didn’t come back. Then he came back, which was fantastic. My supervisor kept saying he’ll come back. You can see she’s done that time and time again. And she said if he doesn’t come back then you’re going through stuff so you need to process this for you. It’s interesting because he came back for two sessions.” [C][p.9:par: 3.5]

“There was like five weeks of stuff that he had done. And I said to him that was amazing and I need to just take you back to three months ago to who you are now. And he said to me in the last session ‘I’m thinking I want four more sessions then I want to carry on by myself.’ On the one level I was terribly bruised by it because there’s this client that I’ve had an incredible connection with. And on the other level I’m thinking well, therapy’s worked for him.” [C][p.10:par: 3.6]

“One of my clients was incredibly frustrated. She went away for the holidays and we had set up a whole plan for her. We had looked at her strengths and then it really worked for her. And I read this fantastic article on intrinsic motivation and positive psychology. Her major issue was how to become motivated. She’s doing BCom subjects which are the most boring in the world, and she didn’t know why she was doing this. We worked on her values and



why she was doing this. She went away over the holidays and she came back and she looked like a million rand. She was motivated, excited and had done all of this. It was three weeks later and I'm thinking this is fantastic, we were doing gratitude letters, and she was going to write one to her mother." [C][p.12&13:par: 3.18]

"And I'm thinking upward spiral and this is all wonderful and suddenly it all crashed. She was supposed to arrive at a quarter past two; she arrived at quarter to three. Half an hour late, she hadn't done any of her homework; she hadn't been concerned during the week. The issues of dependency were there and I was so angry with her because I was thinking how must I respond here? But I remained quite neutral and said to her you must understand that I can't give you the full session because you're late. And it was incredibly frustrating for me that someone I worked so hard with, who had been acknowledging her strengths and she was living these and suddenly she just crashed. But I realized that if I was still in the rescuer role, I would not have been able to address the time issue." [C][p.12 & 13:par: 3.18 & 3.19]

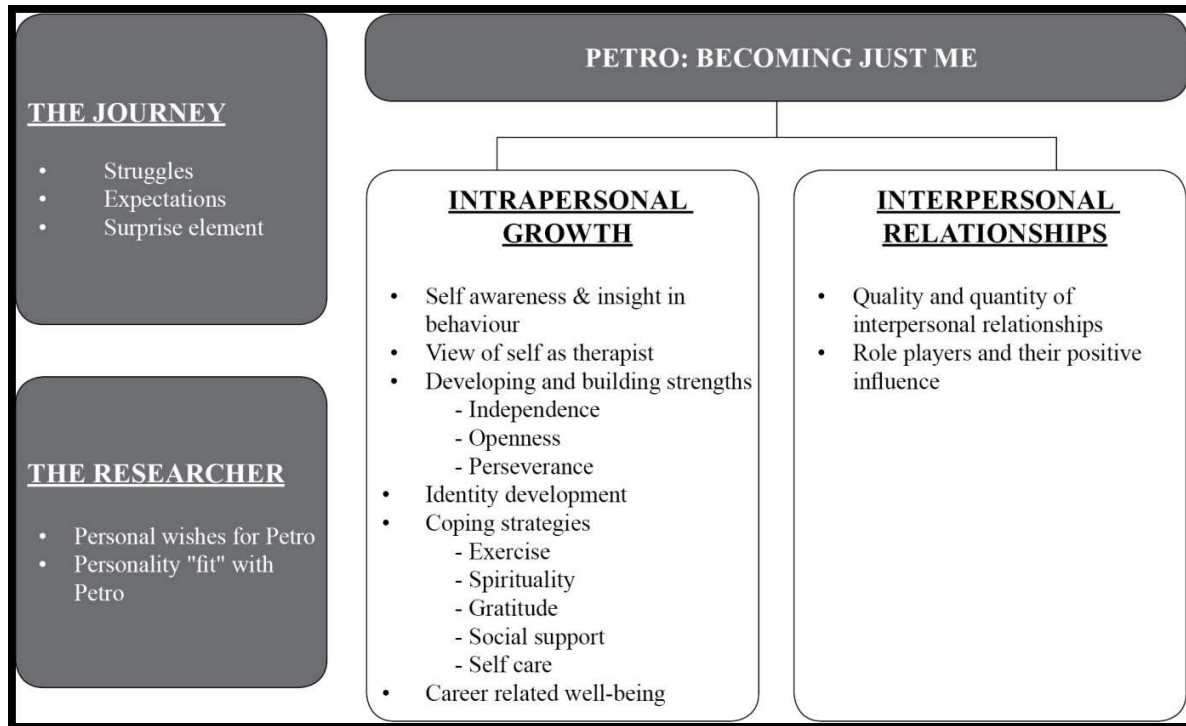
From the above it is clear that Jim's experience of his master's year was overwhelmingly positive. Jim climbed his Psychology Kilimanjaro with a positive attitude from the start and found meaning, especially in his work with clients.

### **6.3 CASE 2: PETRO – BECOMING JUST ME**

Petro's case is built upon three in-depth interviews (beginning, middle and end of the year) and two reflective writings which she submitted between the first and second interview and after the third interview. Our conversations were in Afrikaans, but Petro preferred to do her writings in English. Petro's case was named "becoming just me" for a number of reasons. Firstly, it refers to Petro's process of confirming her destiny and what she believed she was always meant to do. Secondly, it symbolizes Petro's journey of becoming more independent and relying on her own inner strength, especially after the break-up of an important romantic relationship. Lastly, Petro's journey, as experienced by the researcher, created the feeling of being comfortable with whom she is and letting go of unrealistic expectations.

From Petro's journey two main areas of growth became evident. Firstly, she experienced many positive changes on an intrapersonal level. In this area it was specifically her coping strategies that she identified as the main contributors to her journey. Secondly, Petro acknowledged interpersonal relationships as another area of change which made her become more secure in herself.

Figure 11. Visual display of Petro’s experience of being a master’s student in professional psychology.



### 6.3.1 Researcher’s reflection

The researcher was aware of how much she wanted this journey to be a positive and enjoyable one for Petro. The researcher experienced Petro to be a very open, honest and trusting person. Therefore, it can be assumed that this personal wish of wanting Petro to have a positive experience emerged as a result of these characteristics present in Petro. The researcher further related personally to many of the statements and observations made by Petro and thoroughly enjoyed meeting with her. The researcher thus experienced a good *personality fit* with Petro, which had to be acknowledged and reflected upon. The risks involved with such a personality fit and *personal wishes* for a participant were to read too much positive into the journey and to over-interpret her growth experiences. Retrospectively, she identified many areas of personal growth and accomplishment but, to give a balanced and realistic conceptualization of the case,

the researcher created context by including other, less positive statements made about her journey.

### 6.3.2 Background information

Petro was a 28 year old female. She worked overseas prior to her selection into the master's programme. She did different jobs, all related to the field of psychology and teaching. When entering the year she was in an intimate relationship, which was terminated later during the year. She was keen to be a part of this study as she expressed her interest in her own psychological processes.

“Dis nice want dan kan mens in die begin van die jaar sien in watter areas jy groei, dis 'n motivering om dit vol te hou vir die res van die jaar.” [D][p.4:par: 1.17]<sup>8</sup>

### 6.3.3 Petro's journey

Reflecting on her life after her master's year, she experienced a Petro “before” and a Petro “after”, which gave an indication of how significant she viewed her personal growth. She would use these terms many times during our discussions. In addition, she referred to the journey as “it's a challenge”, indicating the personal *struggle* involved in the demands of the year. Although able to identify many areas of growth, she contextualized these changes within academic and personal hardships. Her journey was characterized by her constant attempts to balance the positive and negative aspects, as illustrated so convincingly when she claimed:

“Alles raak nou net te veel ... almal sê jy moet na jouself kyk, jy moet persoonlike tyd vat, maar dit en dit en dit moet môre in wees, en julle moet vier boeke gelees het teen daai tyd. Finansieel is die jaar moeilik. Onthou, ek het al geld verdien. Dis tough.” [D][p.10:par: 3.1]<sup>9</sup>

“This is a time where you feel very proud of yourself for being able to achieve what most psychology students dream of, but it is also the time where you doubt yourself the most, where your frame of reference is challenged the most and where you

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<sup>8</sup> It's nice because then you can see, in the beginning of the year, in which areas you grow; it is a motivation to maintain this through the year.

<sup>9</sup> Everything just gets too much now, everyone says you must take care of yourself, you must take personal time, but this and this and this must be in tomorrow, and you must have read four books by that time. Financially, this year is difficult. Remember, I've earned money before. It's tough.

will grow the most to become the person (psychologist) you know (or didn't know) you could be. You become your best friend and worst enemy during this time, challenging yourself and enjoying the process." [D][p.9:par: 2.11]

Petro's year began with fixed *expectations*, both of herself and others. A way of making sense of the hardships was to re-evaluate these expectations and align them to fit her experience. On an interpretational level, it is clear that her emphasis kept shifting to the self and self-awareness. Apart from these expectations, she entered the year with confidence resulting from working overseas and being out of the academic world. Although confident, she later admitted that she had no idea what she had gotten herself into, especially on a personal level.

"When I started at the beginning of 2010, I could not have predicted all the changes that came about in my life due to going through this process of M1. In a way I feel like this has been a year of personal therapy for me as client." [D][p.21:par: 5.1]

"My ouers verwag van my om my studies klaar te maak, maar hulle verwag nie van my om persoonlik te groei nie. Dit is net vir myself. Dan moet ek seker ook daar wees vir ander. Help en so aan." [D][p.3&4:par: 1.16]<sup>10</sup>

"Ek sou wou sê dat ek definitief deur groei gegaan het, ek wil groei en ek wil op 'n punt kom waar ek kan sê kyk net wat het ek bereik hierdie jaar." [D][p.3&4:par: 1.16]<sup>11</sup>

"En rustiger raak en nie so hard op myself wees nie." [D][p.1:par: 1.7]<sup>12</sup>

This is further emphasized by the fact that Petro was, on more than one level, *surprised* by the outcome of the year, almost as if she underestimated or misjudged her capacities. In this regard the year contributed towards self-efficacy and self-esteem through a sense of accomplishment. During her first interview she commented:

"Weereens, ek is 'n mens wat bang is ek doen die verkeerde ding en dat ek nie gaan weet hoe om dit te hanteer nie. Ek voel net ek het nie op hierdie stadium genoeg vaardighede om dit te kan hanteer nie." [D][p.5:par: 1.25]<sup>13</sup>

"Dis iets waarvoor ek gedroom het, maar ek's nie gewoond my drome word waar nie." [D][p.14&15:par: 3.22]<sup>14</sup>

Towards the end of the year, Petro said:

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<sup>10</sup> My parents expect me to complete my studies, but they do not expect personal growth from me. That is only for myself. And then I must be there for others. Help and so forth.

<sup>11</sup> I'll say that I've definitely grown, I want to grow and reach a point where I can say, look at what I have achieved this year.

<sup>12</sup> And to become calmer, not be so hard on myself.

<sup>13</sup> Again, I am a person who is afraid of doing the wrong thing and that I would not know how to cope with it. I just feel that, at this stage, I do not have enough skills to cope with it.

<sup>14</sup> It is something that I dreamt of, but I am not used to my dreams coming true.

“Wel, na vandag moet ek sê ek het baie kennis opgebou, wat ek nooit gedink het ek sal kan doen nie, en as ek eintlik dink oor vroeë dan weet ek waar om daai inligting te kry en dit het my verbaas en gehelp, en ook persoonlik het ek meer na myself begin omsien as persoon in die sin van wat wil ek hê en wat is vir my belangrik voordat ek noodwendig na ander mense soos hulle behoeftes kyk, sense of self, meer mindful oor my eie behoeftes. Deur meer mindful te wees, is ek ’n beter vriendin, suster en dogter. Ek’s nie meer so demanding nie, maar ek stel ook beter grense vir ander. Ek ken myself soveel beter. Ek hou actually nou van myself. Reflektief sal ek sê dit is ’n uitdaging, jy kan dit hanteer, dis moeilik, maar jy kan. Ek kon.” [D][p.16:par: 4.3]<sup>15</sup>

She explained that her most significant experience during the year was that of becoming herself again. This was achieved mainly through renewed self-awareness and is illustrated through intrapersonal and interpersonal growth discussed below.

### 6.3.4 Intrapersonal growth

Petro’s reflective personality (“Ek is ’n reflective personality, as ek by huis kom in die aand dink ek oor wat die dag gebeur het en probeer dit uitsorteer.” [D][p.2&3:par: 1.11])<sup>16</sup> allowed for a great amount of *self-awareness and opportunities to gain insight into behaviour*. Through critical self-reflection she tracked and monitored her psychological well-being, resulting in awareness and attentiveness. During the year she wrote:

“I am learning a great deal about myself. What upsets me and why, how to deal with issues that I never thought to be an issue. Overall this year has been a very busy and difficult year, it has been a year of getting to know myself better. Growing as a therapist and discovering different theories and therapeutic interventions.” [D][p.8:par: 2.6]

“I am becoming more aware of my thoughts and actions. How my way of thinking influence the way that I am acting.” [D][p.8:par: 2.7]

“Personal reflection is a way for me to take a step back and look at myself, my thoughts and actions. Self-evaluation has started to play a big role in my life.” [D][p.8:par: 2.7]

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<sup>15</sup> Well, after today I must say that I’ve gained a lot of knowledge, which I never thought I would’ve gained, and if I think about the questions, I know where to look for the information, and that surprised me and helped me, and also personally I take care of myself in a better way, in the sense of knowing what I want and what is important for me before looking at others’ needs, I am more mindful about my own needs. Through being more mindful, I became a better friend, sister and daughter. I am not that demanding anymore, but I establish better boundaries for others. I know myself so much better. I actually like myself now. Reflectively I would say it is a challenge, you can handle it, it is difficult, but you can. I could.

<sup>16</sup> I have a reflective personality; if I get home in the evenings I think about what happened during the day and try to sort it out.

The *self-awareness* illustrated above was used to give meaning to the year at different levels. She applied constant self-monitoring to verify her progress, facilitate personal growth and enhance academic performance. This high level of awareness also assisted the rationalization of decisions, almost as if she knew that the understanding of her actions will allow for the rationalization of her decisions at that point in time.

Another important area of awareness raised by Petro was her *view of self as therapist*. She engaged in critical reflection practices concerning her competencies as a therapist, which added meaning and significance to her experience. Becoming aware of the developing therapist in her was found to be an exciting new discovery for her, which she used as motivation. Consistent with her personality style, she did it in both a positive way (almost rewarding) and a “negative” way (for motivation to be better).

“I sometimes feel as if I don’t know anything, especially when I am asked a question that I know I am suppose to be able to answer and then there is just nothing in my brain, which makes me feel very dumb and I start thinking, why don’t I know this, or why can’t I remember this?” [D][p.7:par: 2.2]

“Weereens, ek is ’n mens wat bang is ek doen die verkeerde ding en dat ek nie gaan weet hoe om dit te hanteer nie. Ek voel net ek het nie op hierdie stadium genoeg vaardighede om dit te kan hanteer nie.” [D][p.5:par:1.25]<sup>17</sup>

“Ek sukkel, ek luister na mense maar ek begin al klaar in my brein aannames maak wat ek weet ek nie moet doen nie. Ek is geneig om woorde in mense se mond te probeer plaas.” [D][p.3:par: 1.15]<sup>18</sup>

“Ek besef nou ek is ’n baie positiewe mens, so ek probeer dit [terapie] uit ’n positiewe oogpunt sien eerder as om op die probleem te fokus. So ek dink ek gaan dalk makliker mense help om vorentoe te beweeg as om heeltyd vasgevang te word in die patologie van hoekom is jy nou so.” [D][p.3:par: 1.14]<sup>19</sup>

“This year has showed me what I am capable of, and what I am not so good at doing.” [D][p.21:par: 5.1]

Part of what contributed to the discovery of being exciting and meaningful was Petro’s awareness of *developing and building on character strengths*. These strengths can be associated

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<sup>17</sup> Again, I am someone who is afraid of doing the wrong thing and that I would not know how to cope with it. I just feel that, at this stage, I do not have enough skills to cope with it.

<sup>18</sup> I struggle, I listen to people and then I start making assumptions in my brain which I should not do. I tend to put words in peoples’ mouths.

<sup>19</sup> I realize now that I’m a very positive person, so I try to view therapy from a positive perspective, instead of focusing on the problem. So I think it will be easier for me to help people to move forward instead of remaining trapped in the pathology of why am I like this?

with becoming a therapist, but also to personal growth, in general. Becoming aware of her growing need for *independence* was both stimulating and disconcerting. The break-up of her relationship facilitated this awareness and caused her to question the stability of her identity.

“Through the year I recognized how dependent I have become on my boyfriend, and tried to give myself and him space to focus on our own goals.” [D][p.9:par: 2.10]

“Dit was baie interessant toe ons die huweliksterapie behandel het, daai week, het ek besef ek moet eers my eie identiteit kan dra voordat jy regtig met iemand kan koppel. Toe het ek besef ek was nog nie rêrig my eie mens nie, en ek dink dit het my gedryf om te sê moenie dat hierdie jou onderkry nie, want jy gaan ’n sterker en beter persoon daaruit kom en ek moet vir jou sê, tot onlangs toe het ek nog nie regtig besef dat ek single is nie, maar nou eers in die laaste tyd. En dis OK, dis actually lekker.” [D][p.18:par: 4.13]<sup>20</sup>

“Hierdie afhanklike ding is nogal ’n groot ding wat ek geleer het.” [D][p.19:par: 4.15]<sup>21</sup>

“Ek link dit absoluut na hierdie jaar toe, as dit nie vir hierdie jaar was nie, sou ek nog steeds in dieselfde patrone gewees het.” [D][p.11&12:par: 3.9]<sup>22</sup>

Petro’s increasing level of independence was accompanied by her awareness of how much more open she became towards exposing herself to life in general. Becoming more independent entailed the disintegration of fixed patterns. *Openness* was further encouraged by the rewards resulting from being more honest about oneself.

“Ek het nooit regtig my opinies gegee nie, ek het maar net stilgebly, want dis maar hoe ek was en ek het toe besluit ek moet uitklim en dinge begin doen, anders gaan ek baie minder goed terugkry. So toe dink ek, sê net, wees net eerlik en oop, en leer om net bietjie te relax, net bietjie wyer te dink, en dit maak baie nuwe deure vir my oop. Veral in my denkwyses.” [D][p.4:par: 1.20]<sup>23</sup>

As highlighted earlier, Petro contextualized her positive experiences within the broader picture of a difficult and demanding year. In effect, this helped her to gain insight into the *perseverance* needed to successfully cope with these demands. In this regard she commented:

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<sup>20</sup> It was very interesting when we discussed marital therapy. That week I realized I must first be able to carry my own identity before I can connect with someone. I then realized I am not yet my own person, and I think that drove me to say, don’t let this get to you because you will become a stronger and better person from this, and I must tell you, I haven’t really realized that I am single, only until recently. And it is OK, it is actually nice.

<sup>21</sup> This dependency thing is quite a big thing that I have learnt.

<sup>22</sup> I absolutely link it to this year, if it wasn’t for this year, I would still have been in the same patterns.

<sup>23</sup> I’ve never really given my opinions. I used to keep quiet because that is how I am, but then I decided I must start doing things, otherwise I won’t get back as much. So then I just thought, be honest and open, learn to relax a bit, just think a bit wider, and that opened many new doors for me. Especially in my way of thinking.

“Some mornings I would wake up and just feel like I don’t want to continue to put myself through this stress and pressure; but this soon passed and I was able to convince myself that this is what I have worked for.” [D][p.7:par: 2.4]

“As ek vir iemand iets kan sê, sal dit wees om net van die begin af soveel as moontlik te doen, doen soveel as moontlik supervisie en moenie goed uitstel nie, doen jou opdragte so gou as jy kan, moenie tot op die einde wag nie, want dit het my gehelp en ek moet sê, aan die begin van die jaar was dit rof. Druk net deur elke dag.” [D][p.19:par: 4.18]<sup>24</sup>

“Anxiety levels rose at times, making me want to run away, but I stuck it out and even learned things about myself in those times.” [D][p.21:par: 5.4]

Another area of intrapersonal growth identified within Petro is that of *identity development*. When considering Petro’s increasing levels of independence, clearer identity formation is expected. Petro explained this by linking it to her experience of being single again:

“Weet jy, die jaar het my gehelp om my breakup te hanteer, om sterk genoeg te wees om te kan sê ek kan nie nou met dit deal nie, los dit eers daar dat ek nou met dit klaarmaak, maar ek het. Dit was baie interessant toe ons die huweliksterapie behandel het, daai week, het ek besef ek moet eers my eie identiteit kan dra voordat jy regtig met iemand kan koppel. Toe het ek besef ek was nog nie rêrig my eie mens nie, en ek dink dit het my gedryf om te sê, moenie dat hierdie jou onderkry nie, want jy gaan ’n sterker en beter persoon daaruit kom, en ek moet vir jou sê, tot onlangs toe het ek nog nie regtig besef dat ek single is nie, maar nou eers in die laaste tyd. En dis OK, dis actually lekker.” [D][p.18:par: 4.13]<sup>25</sup>

Besides independence, many other dynamics also contributed to this development of her identity.

*Self-awareness* and insight led to a clearer picture of who she is and wanted to be:

“Deur van al hierdie goed bewus te raak, sit ek gemakliker in my eie vel. Hoe meer ’n mens verstaan, hoe meer aanvaar of verander jy. Ek wil goed reg doen, moet rustiger raak, wil net meer en meer altyd bysit, soos navorsing,

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<sup>24</sup> If I can say something to someone, it would be to do as much as possible right from the start, do as much supervision and do not postpone things, do your assignments as soon as you can, do not wait until the end, because that helped me and I must say, at the beginning of the year it was tough. Just push through each day.

<sup>25</sup> You know, this year helped me to cope with my breakup, to be strong enough to say, I can’t deal with it now, leave it now so that I can finish it, but I have. When we discussed marital therapy, that week, I realized I must first be able to carry my own identity before I can connect with someone. I then realized I am not yet my own person, and I think that pushed me to say, don’t let this get to you because you will become a stronger and better person from this, and I must tell you, I haven’t really realized that I am single, only until recently. And it is OK, it is actually nice.



so ek praat en baklei baie met myself. Dis 'n veilige omgewing om die jaar met myself te baklei. Om weer my eie mens te word.” [D][p.2:par: 1.8]<sup>26</sup>

Petro was able to identify the *coping strategies* she employed from early on. *Exercise* became an important part of her daily routine, as opposed to before her master’s year. She also mentioned how this differed from her fellow classmates:

“Elke dag fietsry het baie gehelp, as die mure my vasdruk dan sal ek die fiets vat, so dit was nogal vir my 'n groot ding en selfs nou in die eksamentyd, snaaks genoeg, almal sê hulle is moeg, maar ek wil heelyd oefening doen, so ek was die teenoorgestelde as al die ander.” [D][p.17&18:par: 4.10]<sup>27</sup>

“Oefening, fietsry elke dag kampus toe en terug, en kerk toe gaan, ek voel al klaar baie beter, dis so lekker, ek slaap dan lekker in die aand.” [D][p.2&3:par: 1.11]<sup>28</sup>

In her search for meaning during the year, *spirituality* became an essential part of Petro’s daily living. Spirituality assisted on different levels. Firstly, on a practical level:

“Oefening, fietsry elke dag kampus toe en terug, en kerk toe gaan, ek voel al klaar baie beter, dis so lekker, slaap dan lekker in die aand.” [D][p.2&3:par: 1.11]<sup>29</sup>

“Gaan kerk toe, dis vir my rustig om 'n boodskap te hoor, ek probeer dit deel van my eie lewe maak. Spiritualiteit is definitief ook 'n sterkpunt vir die jaar.” [D][p.2&3:par: 1.11]<sup>30</sup>

In addition, spirituality added meaning to the difficult times and served as comfort.

“Deur die hele eksamen het dit het my gehelp, ek’t elke dag 'n bybelvrou se verhaal bestudeer.” [D][p.18:par: 4.11]<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Through becoming aware of all these things, I now feel more comfortable in my own skin. The more you understand, the more you accept or change. I want to do things right, be more calm, I always just want to do more and more, like research, so I talk to and fight with myself. It’s a safe environment to fight with myself this year. To become myself again.

<sup>27</sup> The daily cycling helped a lot, when the walls pushed in on me, I would just take my bike, so it was a big thing for me, and even now during the exams, weird enough, everyone says how tired they are, but I just want to do exercise, so I was the opposite from everyone else.

<sup>28</sup> Exercise, cycling to campus and back every day, and going to church, I already feel better, it is so nice, then I sleep well at night.

<sup>29</sup> Exercise, cycling to campus and back every day, and going to church, I already feel better, it is so nice, then I sleep well at night.

<sup>30</sup> Going to church, it is relaxing to hear the message, I try to make it part of my life. Spirituality is definitely a strength for the year.

<sup>31</sup> Throughout the exams it helped me, each day I studied a woman’s story from the Bible.

“Ek moet sê, ek het agtergekom hoe genadig die Here is, en dat hy gebede verhoor, want ek’t heelyd gedink Hy sal my nie toegelaat het om my M te doen as Hy my nie daardeur gaan help nie, want ek stres my dood, gaan ek dop? Gaan ek dop? Dan dink ek, maar dis nie in my hande nie, ek kan net hard leer en my beste doen, aan die groot geheel kan ek niks doen nie, my geloof het baie sterk geword.” [D][p.16&17:par: 4.5 & 4.6]<sup>32</sup>

“Selfs geestelik ook in my geloof. Die eerste semester was die klasse vir my moeilik en ek’t nie rêrig geweet waar wat nie, maar die tweede semester het ek nou begin toe dink ek ‘Okay, kom ek geniet dit net’, want ek het altyd gebid ‘Ag Here, help my net laat ek nou net by wees’ toe dink ek, ek gaan nou anders bid. Toe dink ek, laat ek dit net geniet, want dit is die belangrikste. Dit help nie ek jaag deur die jaar en ek kan die eksamen doen nie ... toe’t ek gedink ek bid nou anders.” [D][p.12:par: 3.11]<sup>33</sup>

When confronted with the personal and academic hardships highlighted above, Petro used *gratitude* as a means to add significance and meaningfulness to her experience. She openly expressed her appreciation for the opportunity and admitted that it brought perspective to the sometimes difficult part of this journey. During her first interview thankfulness was expressed, with the focus on the opportunity it provided.

“Ek is nou nog in skok dat ek nou regtig hier sit. Dis so groot voorreg wat ek ook nie elke dag besef nie, daar is soveel mense wat dit graag wil hê.” [D][p.4:par: 1.19]<sup>34</sup>

Gratitude was only used later as a coping strategy:

“Ek is so dankbaar. As ek dink aan wat ek het dan maak dit al die harde werk die moeite werd. Daar is 2 mense. Een is \*\* wat saam met my ’n kantoor gedeel het, en soos ons ma’s wat van dieselfde plek af kom, dit was net weer ’n bestiering, so ons het mekaar baie gehelp en gedra en as mens gefrustreerd is, dan kan ons praat, so dis lekker om iemand te hê om goed mee te deel. En dan moet ek sê \*\* ook, my tweede supervisor, hy het my rêrig gepush om my te laat dink oor hoe doen ek terapie en nie net oor my kliënt nie. Hoe stap jy ’n pad so sonder sy invloed? Ek sou

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<sup>32</sup> I must say, I have realized how gracious God is and that He answers prayers, because I always felt that He would not allow me to do my M if he would not help me, because I stress a lot, am I going to fail? Am I going to fail? And then I just think it is not in my hands, I can only study hard and do my best, I can’t do anything to the bigger picture, my faith has become very strong.

<sup>33</sup> Even also spiritually, in my faith. The first semester the classes were difficult, and I didn’t really know what was going on, but the second semester I just thought, Okay, just enjoy it know, because I used to pray, God, help me to understand, and then I thought, I am going to pray differently now. I then thought I’m just going to enjoy it, because that is the most important. It’s no use rushing through the year and I can do the exam. Then I thought, I will pray differently.

<sup>34</sup> Yes, I’m still in shock that I’m really sitting here. It is such a big privilege, which I do not realize every day, there are so many people who want this.

definitief ook nie gewees het waar ek is nie. Om te dink aan wat hulle gedoen het, het my vlerke gegee.” [D][p.17:par: 4.9]<sup>35</sup>

“Standing at the end of this year, I cannot believe that it is almost over and that I have made it so far. I definitely did not do it on my own, and I have my Father in Heaven to thank for that. I stand in disbelief, or rather amazement at what I have achieved this year.” [D][p.21:par: 5.3]

Petro increasingly made use of *social support* as a way of coping with the demands of the year. In this regard she referred specifically to her classmates and family members. The openness to ask for help when needed, is also illustrated:

“I have come to realize through this year that working as a team can have much more outcomes than trying to go at it alone the whole time.” [D][p.21:par: 5.2]

“Maar ek dink ons groepie wat saam swot, ek dink met hulle sal ek als maklik kan deel, gelukkig werk ons almal saam. Ons sit sommer saam in een kantoor, 4 of 5 mense, en dan doen ons die goed saam. En met my ma-hulle ook in ’n sin, maar ek wil nie te veel met hulle deel sodat hulle nou weer bekommerd raak nie, so daar staan ek bietjie terug. En natuurlik kan ek met \*\* enige iets deel, en my vriendin by die kerk ook.” [D][p.3:par: 1.12]<sup>36</sup>

“Vir ondersteuning sal ek sê definitief my ma’le en suster en broer. Om naweke te kon wegkom na hulle toe en te ontspan en my ma kook en ek hoef nie te was of te stryk nie en my pa help my met die finansiële las, so dit het definitief gehelp.” [D][p.17&18:par: 4.10]<sup>37</sup>

Petro’s comments further illustrate how she started to take better care of herself in order to facilitate coping. *Self-care* is evident in her remarks regarding dealing with, especially, the heavy workload. Implementing personal rules, such as fixed bedtimes, helped her to control her tendency to want to work too hard.

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<sup>35</sup> I am so grateful. If I think of what I have it makes all the hard work worth the while. There are two people. The first is \*\* who shared an office with me and like, our mothers who come from the same place, that was again predestined, we have really helped and carried each other, and when you are frustrated then we can talk, so it is nice to have someone to share it with, and then I must say \*\* as well, my second supervisor, he really pushed me to think about how I do therapy, and not only about my client. How do you walk this path without his influence? I would not have been where I am. To think about what they did, that gives me wings.

<sup>36</sup> But I think our group that studies together, I think I will share things with them easily, luckily we all work together. We sit together in one office, four or five people, and then we do the things together, and my mom and them in a sense, but I do not want to share too much with them because they worry, so with them I hold back a bit. And then I can share anything with \*\*, and my friend at church.

<sup>37</sup> For support I will say definitely my mom and them, my sister and brother. To go home over weekends and to relax, and my mother cooks and I don’t have to do washing or ironing and my dad helps with the financial burden, so it definitely helped.

“I am taking steps to protect myself from wanting to do too much, looking after myself as therapist. I am having a balanced life now. I am developing the strength to relax and take things a bit more easily.” [D][p.8:par: 2.9]

“I have started to take more ‘me’ time, just sitting in silence or taking a ride on my bicycle. I have become aware of different ways that I tend to escape for a while and can see how this has played a role during my year.” [D][p.8:par: 2.8]

“Ek weet nie, party aande huil ek en dan dink ek, ek is so moeg, ek wil nie meer nie. Ek dwing myself dan om nie later as 23:00 te werk of te gaan slaap nie.” [D][p.10:par: 3.3]<sup>38</sup>

“Persoonlik het ek meer na myself begin omsien as persoon in die sin van wat wil ek hê en wat is vir my belangrik voordat ek noodwendig na ander mense soos hulle behoeftes kyk, sense of self, ek’s meer mindful oor my eie behoeftes.” [D][p.16:par: 4.3]<sup>39</sup>

Many of Petro’s discussions regarding her experiences indicate *career-related well-being*. It is clear that she found herself getting increasingly disenchanted with her jobs in the past. This led to high levels of frustration and added more meaning to doing her master’s degree in professional psychology. In the beginning of the year Petro claimed her main aim to be establishing herself in a career.

“My doel is definitief om my doel te bereik om my loopbaan voort te sit, met BPsig kan ek absoluut niks doen nie, ek’s moeg om net ’n werk te hê, ek wil nou my passie uitleef. Soos ek sê, ek het al drie tot vier werke gehad, als raak dieselfde, ek doen dit net vir ’n salaris, maar ek’s nie gelukkig met dit nie.” [D][p.1&2:par: 1.7]<sup>40</sup>

Retrospectively, she later added:

“Ek dink ek was op ’n punt waar ek ’n loopbaan wou begin, ek het altyd gesê ek is nie gereed om aansoek te doen vir my M nie, maar omstandighede het so gedraai dat dit is of M of aansoek vir ’n werk wat ek nie wil doen nie, en ek het al hoeveel werke gedoen wat ek nie wil doen nie en ek het geweet hoe dit sal eindig. Ek moes die kans vat. Die jaar het vir my gewys dit is die loopbaan wat ek moet volg en ek vat my loopbaan meer ernstig op nou. Die ander drome het nie gerealiseer nie. En dis ’n groot stuk betekenis. En help my om te dink wat wil ek hê en waarnatoe ek oppad is.” [D][p.20: par: 4.23 & 4.24]<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> I don’t know, some evenings I just cry and think, I am so tired, I don’t want to anymore; then I force myself not to work or going to bed later than 23:00.

<sup>39</sup> Personally, I’ve started to take care of myself more as a person, in the sense of what I want, and what is important to me, before I look at other’s needs, sense of self, I am more mindful of my own needs.

<sup>40</sup> My goal is definitely to achieve my goal of continuing my career, with BPsych I can do absolutely nothing, I am tired of just having a job, I want to live my passion. As I said, I had three to four jobs, everything is the same, I only do it for the salary and I’m not happy with it.

<sup>41</sup> I think I was at a point where I wanted to start a career, I’ve always said I’m not ready to apply for my M, but circumstances turned out to be either an M or a job, which I do not want to do, and I’ve done so many jobs that I do

The year also served as a confirmation of what she wants to do career wise.

“So ek het baie meer in kontak gekom met myself en wat ek uit die lewe wil hê, want ek het maar baie rondgeval die afgelope tyd, dan werk ek hier en dan daar. Ek probeer ’n sukses maak, maar ek was nooit regtig gelukkig nie, so nou vir die eerste keer. Selfs soos wat ek geswot het, het ek gedink maar dit is regtig wat ek wil doen, ek geniet wat ek doen jy weet, so dit was nou nogal nice. Dit het my destiny bevestig, en dit was ’n lang pad.” [D][p.16:par: 4.4]<sup>42</sup>

### 6.3.5 Interpersonal relationships

For Petro, a definite change concerning the *quality and quantity of interpersonal relationships* occurred during the year. Interestingly, the number of her close friends increased. This is in contrast with what she expected. During our first interview, while discussing her expectations of the year, Petro said:

“Ek’t geleer om sonder vriende klaar te kom, ek’s nie afhanklik van vriende nie. Dis lekker om te gaan fliek of te kuier, maar ek hoef nie elke dag ’n vriendin te bel om te sê hoe my dag was nie. En stable vriende gaan moeilik wees die jaar, veral as mens nie lank op dieselfde plek bly nie.” [D][p.2:par: 1.10]<sup>43</sup>

During our last interview, however, she said:

“Ek’t meer by vriende uitgekom die jaar, al het ek minder tyd gehad, het ek meer tyd gemaak vir vriende so ja, ek’t ook baie nuwe vriende gemaak deur die jaar. Goeie vriende.” [D][p.18:par: 4.11]<sup>44</sup>

Petro further unpacked her interpersonal growth by referring to the changes in the relationships themselves:

“Deur meer mindful te wees, is ek ’n beter vriendin, suster en dogter. Ek’s nie meer so demanding nie, maar ek stel ook beter grense vir ander.” [D][p.16:par: 4.3]<sup>45</sup>

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not want to do, so I knew how it would end. I had to take the chance. The year showed me this is the career that I must follow, and I take my career more seriously now. The other dreams have not realized. And that has a big significance. And helped me to know what I want and where I am heading.

<sup>42</sup> So I became more in touch with myself and what I want from life because things were very shaky these past years, I worked here and then there and tried to make a success, but I was never really happy, so now for the first time, even while studying I thought this is really what I want to do, I enjoy what I do, you know, so that was quite nice. It confirmed my destiny and it was a long road.

<sup>43</sup> I learned to get along without friends; I am not dependent on friends. It is nice to go to the movies or spend time together, but I do not have to phone a friend every day to tell her how my day was. And stable friends will be difficult, especially if one does not stay at the same place for long.

<sup>44</sup> I got to see friends more this year, even though I had less time, I made more time for friends, so yes, I also made lots of new friends this year. Good friends.

“If there is one thing that I have learned this year, it was to think of my own needs, before trying to please others. Before this year, this statement would have sounded selfish to me, but knowing when to say no and tend to what is important for me at a specific time has lead me to be a more relaxed and peaceful person. When I spend time with someone now, it has more quality than when I tried to spend loads of time with people, working on relationships. I feel like I have a more relaxed demeanor, not worrying about what will happen if I don’t do what others expect from me.” [D][p.22:par: 5.5]

“Ek het maar altyd dit nog gedoen met familie ook, my behoeftes weggeskuif en sorteer hulle s’n uit en selfs met dit het ek als op een slag getackled en gesê ek sit nou my voet neer, en dis die een skuif wat ek moes gemaak het, dit het baie dinge verander.” [D][p.20:par: 4.22]<sup>46</sup>

“En selfs my een vriend sê vir my ek het hom baie geïntimideer toe ons saam gewerk het, blykbaar omdat ek so pligsgetrou was; en nou sê hy ek het baie verander, toe sê hy ek is nou gemaklik om mee te praat en dis lekker om saam met my te kuier en hy kan sien my ervaring het my gebou tot waar ek nou is, so rêrig, en dit was nice om dit van iemand anders te hoor, wat dit nie hoef te gesê het nie.” [D][p.17:par: 4.6]<sup>47</sup>

With regard to relationships, different *role players and their positive influence* were mentioned throughout the year. These role-players included lecturers, clients and especially her supervisor.

“Omdat ek dink ons die dosente geleer ken het, is dit nie meer daai ‘ons en hulle’ nie, dis nou ons almal. Dit laat mens veilig voel en gee jou hoop.” [D][p.14:par: 3.18]<sup>48</sup>

“I feel that I have learned the most from making use of co-therapists/colleagues and asking advice from supervisors.” [D][p.21:par: 5.2]

“Ek het darem baie gesprekke met my supervisor. Hy help my baie met my voorbereiding.” [D][p.16:par: 4.2]<sup>49</sup>

“Van my kliënte se aspekte en sterktes het my geïnspireer, en ander kere raak ek weer so gefrustreerd dat ek dink ‘maar die goed is voor jou, kan jy nie sien wat gaan aan nie?’ So ek dink daar het ek nog empatie nodig maar ek moet nog werk daaraan om sensitief te wees en nie te wil sê ‘maar kan jy nie sien nie?’” [D][p.17:par: 4.7]<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Through becoming more and more mindful, I am a better friend, sister and daughter. I am not that demanding anymore, but I put up boundaries for others.

<sup>46</sup> I have always done that, with my family too, put my needs aside and sorted out theirs, and even with that I tackled it all at once, and I put my foot down and that was the one move I had to make, and it changed many things.

<sup>47</sup> And even my one friend told me that I used to intimidate him a lot when we worked together, apparently because I was so conscientious, and now he says I’ve changed a lot, he says I am now comfortable to talk to, and it is nice to spend time with me, and he sees my experience and how it built me to where I am now, so it was nice to hear that from someone else, who did not have to say it.

<sup>48</sup> Because we got to know the lecturers, it is not that thing of ‘us’ and ‘them’ anymore, it is us all. That makes one feel safe and gives one hope.

<sup>49</sup> I have many discussions with my supervisor. He helps me with my preparation.

<sup>50</sup> Some of my clients’ aspects and strengths inspired me, and other times I got so frustrated and then I think, “but the things are in front of you, can’t you see?” So I think there I need more empathy but I must still work on sensitivity and not to say “but can’t you see?”

“And working with clients has empowered me to be a better therapist, and to want to be a good therapist.”  
[D][p.21:par: 5.1]

From the above discussion it is clear that Petro was searching for meaning in the master’s year. However, she endured many difficulties and frustrations to be able to gain it. Intrapersonal growth and positive changes within interpersonal relationships formed part of her meaning-making process.

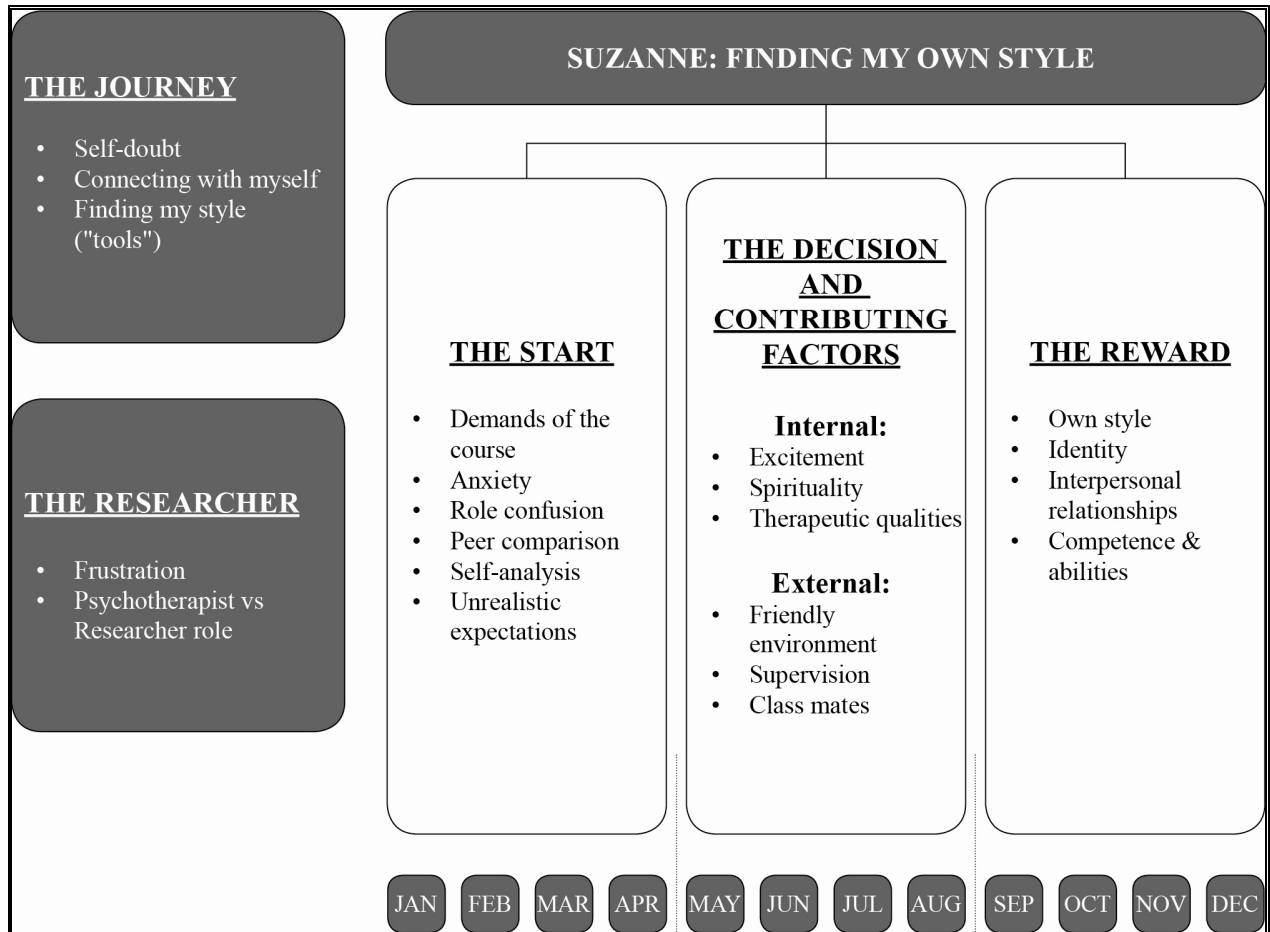
#### **6.4 CASE 3: SUZANNE – FINDING MY OWN STYLE**

Suzanne’s case is built upon three in-depth interviews (beginning, middle and end of the year) and two reflective writings which she submitted between the first and second interview and after the third interview. Suzanne’s case is named “finding my own style” as it provides a true picture of Suzanne’s journey. Suzanne emphasized the transition from being too dependent and trying to be “the perfect therapist who knows everything”, to finding her unique style, which she came to appreciate and value.

Although a pilot interview was conducted with Suzanne prior to entering the master’s course in professional psychology, this data do not form part of her case due to the fact that the other participants did not participate in an interview at this pre-journey point. To provide more information on the context to Suzanne’s case, these data are included in Appendix E.

Because so many changes occurred in Suzanne at specific times of the year, this case is best presented by means of a time-oriented approach. These do not imply that her case was seen as a linear and simple process, but was done with the intention to do justice to Suzanne’s journey. At the beginning of the year specific tendencies in her behaviour were evident. Towards the middle of the year Suzanne made an important decision which led to specific, direct rewards as result of the decision.

Figure 12. Visual display of Suzanne’s experience of being a master’s student in professional psychology.



### 6.4.1 Researcher’s reflection

Suzanne’s self-doubts were evident from the beginning of the “research relationship”. It left the researcher *frustrated* at times because she wanted to make Suzanne aware of her inner strengths. At times it was difficult not to interfere with her psychological processes in this regard. Refraining from doing this was a conscious decision the researcher had to take early on and had to remind herself of regularly. Although Suzanne was committed to sharing her experiences, the researcher found some of the interviews emotionally draining because of Suzanne’s negative scrutiny of her own competence. Suzanne’s shift in attitude, particularly after the June holidays, was, however, significant. The researcher was challenged in approaching Suzanne from a



*researcher's role* instead of a *psychotherapist role* because of the need she felt to help Suzanne to see and appreciate her unique qualities.

#### **6.4.2 Background information**

Suzanne was a 23 year old female. She was selected to do her master's degree in professional psychology at a different university to where she had previously studied. Her experience of her master's year was thus significantly influenced by the effect of relocation and adjustment. Suzanne entered her master's year without any official work experience, and she was not romantically involved. I made contact with Suzanne during the latter part of 2009, which resulted in us having one brief pilot interview and three in-depth interviews during 2010. She was excited about participating in the study and eager to share her psychological process with me. Our interviews and her writings for this study were in English.

#### **6.4.3 Suzanne's journey**

Even before her journey officially began, Suzanne was very excited about it. She felt grateful and fortunate to be in the position of a master's student in psychology. Although she occasionally found the journey arduous, this excitement remained right through the year. However, she exceedingly *doubted herself* and her abilities, which resulted in a destructive cycle of self-analysis. During the June recess, Suzanne made a distinct decision regarding her approach to the year. This implied less social comparison and unnecessary worrying. She implemented a few strategies to achieve this and was quite successful in implementing them. Towards the end of the year, she became more confident and, in effect, more competent. Suzanne reported being much more comfortable with and appreciative of her uniqueness and her improved *connectedness with herself*. Once she let go of the pressure to be "a perfect therapist" she experienced the freedom to value her unique qualities. She used the analogy of being in her "little workshop", having all the tools available for the task at hand. This was opposed to earlier in the year where she attempted to perfectly use all the tools at once.

"I think I saw myself as I must apply myself perfectly and act like I know it all. I've realized now it's a learning experience and the rest of my life is a learning experience. I think I've put up a front at the beginning with my colleagues, that's why I was so anxious. I thought I must be this perfect therapist and they must see me as that. But

with all the anxiety I realized this can't go on. So I've come more into myself, been more honest and it's amazing how people have noticed. People feel that they can relate to me more. I realized that I wanted to be too perfect and there's no way." [E] [p.20:par: 5.15]

#### 6.4.4 The start

Various factors led to Suzanne's experience of the year as overwhelming. The demands of the course, her anxiety, role confusion, negative peer comparison, destructive self-analysis, and her unrealistic expectations of herself contributed to this experience.

The factor that did not change during the course of the year was the *demands of the course*. Her attempts to know all, understand all and apply all became a difficult task for her.

"My lowest moment was when the workload was too much and then I hadn't slept, and I was battling to sleep, and then you realize you mustn't drive. I think that was the worst, psychologically I wasn't stable. I had to do it a couple of times this year and then I realized this is not a proper state to be in." [E][p.19:par: 5.11 ]

"I've experienced bouts of exhaustion, like I am currently. I feel drained, specifically emotionally. The large amounts of demands, the variety of tasks and the consistent new information has forced me to continuously adapt to my environment. This requires all three shifts, cognitive, emotional and behavioural, so this year has been extremely demanding on all three levels." [E][p.23:par: 6.3]

In addition to these course demands, her personality trait of tending to become *anxious* further provoked negative and overwhelming feelings.

"I can't stand being assessed. I cannot handle it. Other people cope much better than me. I'm too anxious and I'm very sensitive to everyone's facial expressions. I'm constantly trying to adjust to people's responses. Like this one's listening well, but that one looks like I don't know what I'm talking about. So I don't enjoy it at all." [E][p.17:par: 5.1]

"I was very anxious. I was feeling very unsure of myself when I got here. Quite a bit of uncertainty." [E][p.6:par: 2.23]

"I was too emotional and too much anxiety." [E][p.15:par: 4.22]

Suzanne also experienced *role confusion* with regard to the position she wanted to take in class. As a result she asked many questions and relied on her classmates to find some answers.

"I don't know, I'm still finding that out, I alternate between being quiet and listening one day and then talking and asking questions, but mostly more quiet for now. For now, I'm more reserved. I'm just trying to take it in and first find my place. And I've been asking my classmates lots of questions, like what's going on, what do they think? I was asking other people questions. But I'm slowing down with that. I'm slowly starting to go straight to the lecturer,

I'm glad about that because I was asking too much. Ja, being dependent on other people's opinions too much." [E][p.2:par: 2.3]

"So when I get more comfortable with my role and myself I hope that I'll be able to contribute that more because I tend to hold back quite a bit." [E] [p.6:par: 2.24]

Reflectively, Suzanne was able to identify these patterns and referred to it as a "*negative peer comparison process*".

"I think I am just becoming more comfortable in my own, like finding my own style, I feel that I can go into that phase now where I don't have to worry about other people, stop comparing myself to others. Because I did that a lot during the first six months. A lot. I constantly compare myself with others, my peers with what they know, and now I am starting to realize like, OK I need to come into my own." [E][p.12:par: 4.8]

"I'm feeling a lot more independent and capable than I was in the beginning. I used to ask my colleagues a lot of questions about the work which made me feel quite dependent on their opinions, but that has now reduced. Thank goodness, as I'm starting to trust in my own abilities more." [E][p.8&9:par: 3.4]

Towards the end of the year Suzanne became conscious of the degree to which she constantly evaluated herself using her classmates as yardstick.

"We're an M1 class of diverse personalities with each one expressing their own unique strengths and weaknesses. Some strengths are more observable than others which has me question my own while observing the visible strengths of others. That has dampened my self-esteem on many occasions." [E][p.24:par 6.5]

In the context of being anxious and unsure of herself, Suzanne undertook in-depth *self-analysis*. This contributed to her being even more doubtful, but it was beneficial in the sense that it facilitated the recognition of her inner strengths. She noticed the detrimental effect of this self-scrutiny, could thus limit it, and replace it with more constructive cognitive tasks.

"I analysed myself extensively during my previous years of studying psychology, so this time I am limiting the analysis for the sake of my well-being, and focusing rather on completing the tasks set out." [E][p.8:par: 3.2]

"Looking back at this year, I was over complicating things for myself, making the load heavier." [E][p.23:par: 6.4]

"I feel how a person should feel, normal, as I'm not engaging in as extensive self-reflection and scrutiny as I normally do. It's a relief because it get's tiring." [E][p.8par: 3.1]

"We've had a few exercises where we had to share and tell others who you are, and so on. That was difficult because I felt through my degree I analyze myself from every perspective and now I had to explain myself so simply. That was really challenging so I limited what I shared with others. And I picked up that the others felt that I wasn't being completely open." [E][p.4:par: 2.12]

Another factor that led to Suzanne's initial negative understanding of this master's experience proved to be her *unrealistic expectations* of herself. Retrospectively, she was able to identify those expectations as well as the destructive nature thereof.

"I am going to be much more specific about how much work I can actually handle, and will start putting my well-being needs before the demands of others such as my clients, my employer, colleagues and even my friends. I'm going to place less pressure on myself to perform, but rather encourage myself to enjoy the experience more while progressing forward at a comfortable, but steady pace." [E][p.24:par: 6.7]

"You try to adapt yourself to all these different ideas, to be this chameleon, but you can't do that – I think you'll go insane. So that's what I'm doing, to integrate it to where I'm going." [E][p.17&18:par: 5.5]

#### **6.4.5 The decision and contributing factors**

The scene created in section 6.4.4 illustrates how Suzanne's journey began. She was, however, able to recognize the downwards spiral it was taking and made a conscious decision during the mid-year break to change that.

"I think, like, for the first six months it was like gradually going through the process, but then, like, over the holidays, then I was forming my decision, my approach changed." [E][p.15:par: 4.19]

These factors leading to the change in approach can be divided into internal and external factors. Internally, the fact that Suzanne remained positive and excited about the year helped her to realize the importance of a change in plan. This *excitement* factor countered her negative emotions and she realized that, as long as she could be excited about the journey, the accompanying emotions should not be all negative.

"I'm really looking forward to beginning therapy and connecting deeply with others." [E][p.8:par: 3.3]

"And oh ja, big thing for me this semester, I don't know if I told you last semester but I never really spoke in class but now, like for the past month or so, I am really just so relaxed and I am giving my opinion or just commenting and ja, everyone has noticed, people tell me that they've picked up on it, and ja, I can also tell." [E] [p.12&13:par: 4.10]

The most identifiable internal factor that contributed to Suzanne's decision relates to her *spirituality*. Early on in the year Suzanne joined a group at church and entered a course that was offered. On many occasions Suzanne would comment on how helpful this was in her process of believing in herself.

"It is every Wednesday night, ah, it is so nice, it is just women, like ten of us. It is basically just going to the facilitator's house and then you watch like a DVD and it is basically teaching of the basics of Christianity and God's

plan for you as a woman, just the beauty and peace, it is almost like a therapy session because we share and learn from each other, it is just, I have been doing that and it has been absolutely wonderful and I've got one month left. It helped me. I experienced the peace come over my life and that confidence, especially compared to the first three months." [E][p.12:par: 4.6]

"I did know that God wanted to use me in psychology. But I realized this year that I really needed to search God for vision. So that I know that no matter what happens I'm going in that direction, at some pace." [E][p.18:par: 5.7]

Her spirituality further motivated her to persist with what had seemed to be almost too difficult at some point in the sense that it confirmed her vision and the field in which she thought she needed to contribute.

"I have a calling on my life and I need to be committed to God to make sure that I'm living out that calling." [E][p.18:par: 5.7]

Still with regard to internal factors impacting Suzanne's decision to change her approach, she developed *therapeutic qualities*.

"With CBT, I actually start doing the activities, scheduling them for myself, just so that I can get more conscious of what I am doing with my time and trying to be more productive." [E][p.11:par: 4.3]

"And from neuro, I feel like I've learnt to use the front part of my brain now. You know like your executive functioning, I feel like I'm getting it. I've learnt to have more control over my abilities now. I'm learning to channel my knowledge and insight." [E][p.17:par: 5.3]

"I'm learning to listen and listen, some more. From that I'm learning that there is never one way of looking at something and that we all have something to contribute." [E][p.9&10:par: 3.7]

External factors, such as support coming from friends and family, also played a role in Suzanne's decision to discover new ways of interpreting and experiencing the year. Suzanne commented on the *friendly environment* and how that facilitated her change in views. It can be said that the environment invited Suzanne to be more relaxed and less critical of herself.

"It's easy because the staff is friendly and the department is very open to talk to. Everyone has been friendly and welcoming, so it's made it easy." [E][p.2:par: 2.1]

"Everyone's really connected here. My department, I think a big thing is my attitude but also my environment, this department is very understanding." [E][p.6:par: 2.24]

"But it's very nice, everyone's friendly and interactive." [E][p.2:par: 2.3]

*Supervision* proved to be another external motivator for Suzanne. From supervision she did not necessarily only receive the answers that she became so dependent on earlier in the year.

“Supervision, I think it is just that relational experience, I can speak to someone who is an experienced psychologist but obviously it was like a step into the future, having a relationship with a professional, that is how I saw it.” [E][p.11:par: 4.5]

“I’d thank my supervisor for the past six months. He’s a clinical psychologist. He was really good, listening, questioning me, so I’m challenging my own thinking at the same time. He didn’t just give me the answers. It’s been a wonderful supervision experience with him.” [E][p.18:par: 5.8]

The role of Suzanne’s *classmates* was not limited to the discussion in 6.4.4. On another level, she was also challenged by them. At first, she used to compare herself to them, and later she used them in a more productive way – to focus on the support they offered instead of the threat she believed they posed.

“I think my high has been my connections with classmates, sharing sympathetic moments, or listen to this one moan. Just those little moments with my classmates.” [E][p.19:par: 5.10]

“First of all my class. I would thank them for being supportive, offering words of affirmation and reassurance. We challenge each other, but most of all I’d thank them for their support. That unconditional acceptance helps a lot.” [E][p.18:par: 5.8]

“You cannot separate your class from the M1 experience. We formed a M1 group on Facebook, it is like we want to be a group, which is nice, we have such a great group, which is nice.” [E][p.13:par: 4.12]

#### **6.4.6 The reward**

Suzanne’s decision paid off on many different levels. Towards the end of the year she was able to voice many of the changes she noticed within herself.

Firstly, and most evident, was her feeling of freedom to develop her *own style*. It was clear that the pressure she felt earlier, that of “being perfect” and “knowing it all”, made place for the careful selection of, as she put it, “her own tools”.

“I choose to be kinder to myself as well as wiser, by being more selective in how much information I expose myself to. I would like to be more sensitive in my selections. Saying this, I realize that I will be much more effective as a person and as a professional. I decide what I expose myself to and how much of that exposure I am exposed to. I will apply this in my personal life as well. A visual analogy could be described as standing in the middle of a little workshop and having all my useful tools in reach. Those tools that are not in need get pushed out of sight. They are only ever put in reach again if they are needed.” [E][p.24:par: 6.6]

“I would say for me it is about tools, like show me all the tools, surround me with it, and obviously digesting all of it; but now it is, like, I can step away from it and also just realizing that you can still be your own person, what is given to you or shown to you, you can still paste it for yourself, even if you are thrown into a group setting, just like the tools, it is more applied tools.” [E][p.14&15:par: 4.18]

“I am looking forward to come up with my own style, like, that all these tools are out there now and I can pick and choose my own, I am looking forward to integrate it all next year. I am going to figure things out on my own. One thing I’ve learnt is that I must integrate it into my own understanding.” [E][p.15:par: 4.23]

Secondly, Suzanne discovered she had become more comfortable with her unique *identity*, in stark contrast to earlier in the year when she constantly compared herself with others.

“If I have to compare myself with me in February, I think maybe I’d just like accept myself maybe. For who I am. And moving forward now, it took some time but eventually it happens. It is a process.” [E][p.15:par: 4.19]

“As an individual I’m focusing more on being an individual and not being so easily influenced by others, especially in a group setting. I think I’ve become stronger in my individuality, but it is a process.” [E][p.18:par: 5.6]

“Yeah, that’s what I’m learning, to use myself instead of others. One thing I’ve learnt from TA is to be my own nurturing parent. I was always looking for others to nurture me, like my classmates. From that I realized I can start nurturing myself.” [E][p.19&20:par: 5.12]

Within *interpersonal relationships*, Suzanne mentioned her renewed appreciation of loved ones, but also the application of personal boundaries in these relationships.

“I miss my loved ones and have especially become aware in the past month of how important they are to me and how significant in my life. I have a desire to spend more quality time with them and show my appreciation for them more. I would like to accept each individual for who he/she is more and limit the amount of analysis I do. I’ve found that it takes the simple joy out of subjectively knowing the individual as it objectifies him/her.” [E][p.8:par: 3.3]

“People feel that they can relate to me more.” [E][p.20:par: 5.15]

“They also realized they need to let me go a bit, like I must come home now as soon as I’m done, but I said no, middle of December. I think they must just respect my own space and where I’m going.” [E][p.21:par: 5.18]

Lastly, and very significant within the context of this case, Suzanne’s opinion of her *competence and abilities* became more positive.

“After the first session with the client I really thought, wow, you know it is almost like a gift, it is like, wow, I know not many people who can do this. And definitely I realize this is very unique, I just walked out of there feeling like, wow, and this is very special to be part of. Like being allowed to and being able to.” [E][p.15:par: 4.20]

“This is what this year has been about, to learn what I can do, just me.” [E][p.21:par: 5.19]

“I’m learning to trust in myself, my knowledge and my judgment more.” [E][p.9&10:par: 3.7]

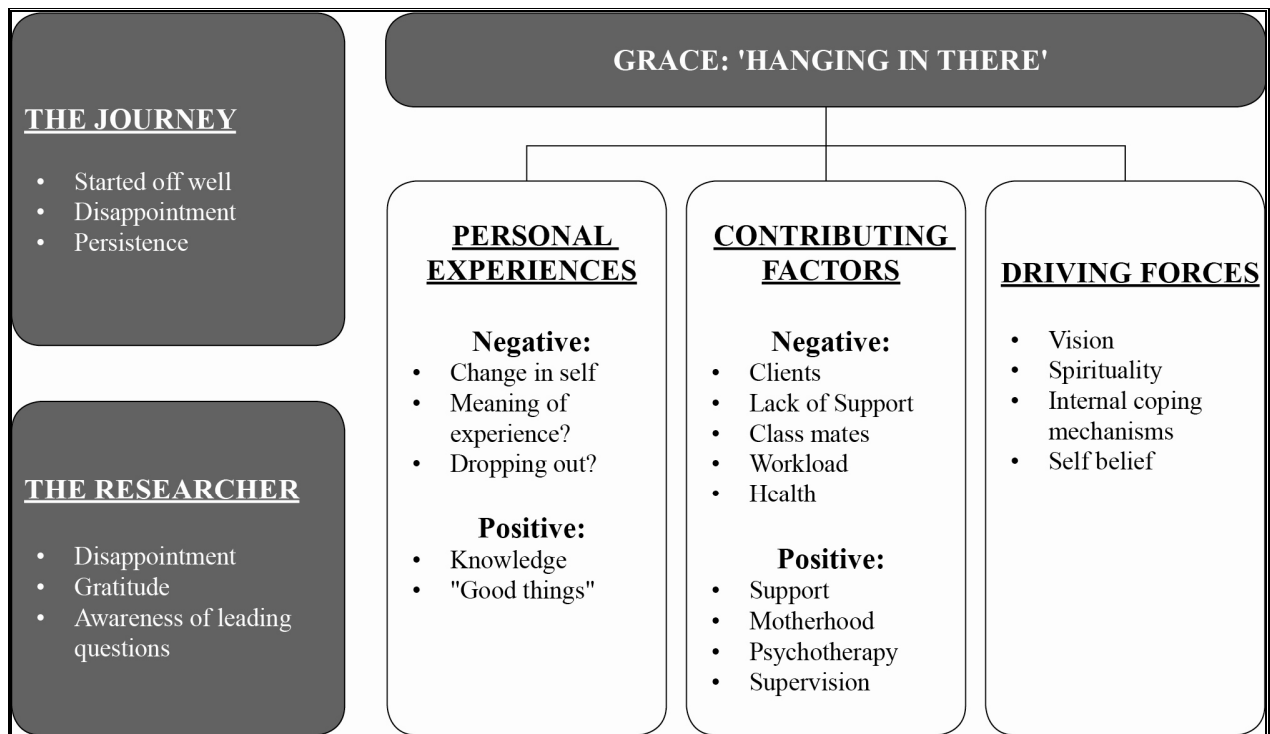
From the above discussion it is clear that Suzanne’s journey changed from being only overwhelming to meaningful in many ways. These include, most significantly, finding her own style and consequent fewer demands to be “the perfect therapist”. Suzanne had the courage to make an important decision, which brought about this change.

## 6.5 CASE 4: GRACE – HANGING IN THERE

Grace’s case is built upon three in-depth interviews (beginning, middle and end of the year) and three reflective writings which she submitted in between the interviews. Grace’s case was named “hanging in there” because that was what she was doing. As the year progressed, Grace experienced more difficulties and less positive experiences.

Grace’s case is presented through three main points. Firstly, her personal experiences, both positive and negative, are presented. The positive and negative contributing factors to these experiences are then identified and discussed. Lastly, the driving forces behind her “hanging in there” are identified and discussed.

Figure 13. Visual display of Grace’s experience of being a master’s student in professional psychology.





### **6.5.1 Researcher's reflection**

Because Grace's journey differed from those of the other participants – with more personal challenges and difficulties – it should be mentioned that the researcher greatly valued her input and honesty. She realized that it could not have been easy for Grace to share her struggles and disappointments and was therefore especially *appreciative* of Grace's participation in the study. The researcher admits to often being emotionally drained by Grace's more negative approach towards the journey but could, however, appreciate her willingness to share her “not so good” journey. Grace was not very talkative during interviews; hence, the researcher was inclined to ask numerous leading questions. After the transcription of the first interview the researcher became aware of how she “pushed” for data that would fit in with the positive nature of this study. This *awareness* led to more sensitivity during the other interviews. Occasionally, the researcher would become *disappointed* in the outcome of Grace's journey and wished to make it better for her. The researcher's reflective discussions with the promoter helped in this regard, particularly in repositioning herself in the role of researcher.

### **6.5.2 Background information**

Grace was a 27 year old female student. She has a seven year old son who was living with her mother (the boy's grandmother) in another province while she did her master's year. Grace had to relocate after being selected by a university far from home. She completed her undergraduate and honours studies at two other universities. During her master's year she was romantically involved in a long distance relationship. Although being a reserved person, Grace was keen to take part in the study and share her exceptionally challenging journey.

### **6.5.3 Grace's journey**

Grace's journey had a *more optimistic start than end*. Although being new in town and not knowing anyone, she was initially looking forward to what the year might have brought. She felt that her selection into the programme served as an indication that psychology was the right career choice for her and she was determined to fully engage in the year. However, as the year

progressed Grace became *disappointed* by the experience. She struggled to find meaning in the suffering and was negatively surprised by the changes she detected within herself. Nevertheless, Grace did not allow these negative experiences to triumph over her will to successfully finish the year. She *persisted* and completed the master's course.

#### 6.5.4 Personal experiences

Negative personal experiences were largely related to two main areas. Firstly, Grace was aware of the fact that there would be some *change in herself*, but was not expecting that she would become even more analytic about life.

“Still nervous for a change, wish I knew how I am going to change.” [F][p.5:par: 2.1]

“Everybody's saying that at the end you'll be different; you won't be the person who came as you were. I'm expecting to gain a lot. At the moment I don't think anything is going to change on a personal level. Probably in the middle of the year something will change, I don't know. Except that now you start to analyse people more than you used to before. Every time that a person talks I analyse the statement.” [F][p.1:par: 1.5]

“I changed. In thinking, in analysing each statement that people are saying, even with family, I will look at the other side, my mom would say don't look in psychological ways, just talk. So ja at the moment, sometimes I do feel like I just want to be the old Grace, which I can't and it goes back to when we came here they said there will be that change and now I started to realize that change they were talking about.” [F][p.9&10:par: 3.20]

“Lots of things have changed, some days, I just wanted to give up. Sometimes I wish I can just go back and take out the psychology out of me and just come back and become the person I was before. I want to detox myself from it.” [F][p.12:par: 5.2]

“All these theories it makes me to analyse him, analyse myself.” [F][p.9:par: 3.18]

Secondly, Grace struggled to find *meaning* through all her hardships.

“I am not sure that there is a meaning. It is just a suffering. Next year will be pay back time. I am not sure of the meaning.” [F][p.8:par: 3.11]

Consequently, she seriously considered *dropping out* of the course at different times of the year.

“Sometimes I ask myself is this really what I want for the rest of my life, or is it too late for me to change, but even if I decide to change to do something else, it will always be there, it will always be there, not that I say I want to do something else but in future if I want to further my career, it will always be there.” [F][p.12:par: 5.2]

“There was a moment I thought if I had money I will just pack my bags, and then they said, no tomorrow you will be fine and then cried and said this is enough it must stop.” [F][p.13:par: 5.7]

Thinking about reapplying seemed to be the only motivation not to drop out at a desperate stage of the year.

“And it was too much of the work already and too much of anxiety; I thought at least I am going home for the holidays I can’t quit now. And when we came back, the first day, everything just went up, I felt like I didn’t go home for almost four weeks and it was like ja, just bad. But ja, I just said I can’t quit now, you know how it is difficult to reapply to go through the tortures of the interviews.” [F][p.6:par: 3.2]

This line of thinking was furthermore accompanied by thoughts of changing her career plan from psychology to medicine.

“Sometimes I think maybe I should still do my medicine and then specialise in children you know, like and ja, because last term the work was very, very difficult.” [F][p.9:par: 3.17]

Positive experiences were limited to the *gaining of knowledge* and some other – as she could not define or pinpoint them – “*good things*”.

“But I won’t say it is only the bad things, the good thing is that it provided the good psychological training. But at the moment I look more at the bad things than the good things, but there are good things. There is a lot that is good, especially in the academics.” [F][p.14&15:par: 5.16]

“But then when I came here I saw that this is what psychology is. It’s different from the undergrad, because here it’s the foundation of your life, of what you’re going to do.” [F][p.1:par: 1.2]

“I do miss my old self you know... but I am still looking forward, to good things, so it is difficult to say either. It is good in the way that, to be aware, you know what you know, so it is easy to just click that, that is what is happening. The knowledge, yes.” [F][p.10:par: 3.21]

Later on Grace could appreciate the fact that this knowledge could be applied personally, resulting in her being a better mother and having a positive influence on her family.

“So far the only thing for the better is the knowledge and thinking about my family and what we went through from 2006, and psychology gave me that background to see why, and it also helped me to see how I can raise my son. So it helped me to see how I can be a better mother, to bring some change in the family and to look at things the other way around and sometimes I think I can introduce some aspects to the family.” [F][p.12:par: 5.3]

Towards the end of the year Grace voiced her need to end the year and move on to a new place with new people.

“Ja, part of me is looking forward just to be done with everything.” [F][p.12:par: 5.1]

“I think it was difficult for me, I have just realized now later how stressful I am being here, and I am looking forward to just leave here.” [F][p.12:par: 5.4]

### 6.5.5 Contributing factors

Different factors contributed to the experiences mentioned above. Grace's experiences with *clients* were not as rewarding as she had hoped for. Understandably, she had doubts about her abilities to be a good therapist.

"When I see my clients I ask myself, what question am I going to ask this person? Am I going to say something that they want to hear, or am I going to just destroy her totally?" [F][p.3:par: 1.11]

"That's difficult. Yesterday I had a session, I was so tired, I thought we will just work on what we have, but it's like every week there is new information that is overwhelming for me, I think like, I am taking that on me. Uhm, I am not sure why because my supervisor also mentioned that my clients are difficult, it is like complicated things." [F][p.6:par: 3.4]

She happened to work with challenging clients, which resulted in her initial experiences being more unpleasant than is common for a novice therapist.

"I felt like I just need to see my therapist, because there are some more issues that my client is having that have also happened to me. There are emotional things, she cried a lot and I felt like crying too but I couldn't cry. I had to be strong for her." [F][p.3:par: 1.12]

"The clients. The problems. I had difficulties with my clients. But later I had two most tense and heavy clients and that is where I started to think, really? Now I am complaining about two and I thought what about next year where I will have fifteen or whatever." [F][p.12:par: 5.3]

Grace felt a *lack of support* to be having an effect on her experiences. Although she had a partner and loving family members she voiced this lack of support as her frustration of their being so far away; they were not able to fully grasp what she was going through.

"My relationship is doing good, he knows that we are in a long distance relationship from my undergrad, it is just sometimes you think you need more support from him, if he can understand, but at least if he is around he can see how busy I am, and it turns out to be not a good thing. Because you do not have time for that person, that special person you know." [F][p.9:par: 3.18]

"If I was closer to home I could have gotten more support, I would have gone to another university close to my home." [F][p.14:par: 5.14]

"And the people at home, it is quite difficult because you have to call them. Every day I feel like I need my family to call me, and sometimes I get angry when they don't call. People they don't see that I need more support from them but ja, it feels lonely." [F][p.6&7:par: 3.5]

"But you still feel lonely, I still feel lonely. They don't know about the master's course, how heavy it is; they haven't been through that one, so ja I will say, because all of them are done with their degrees so they don't have a clue when you say you have a lot of work. Like today I was telling my mom and my sister I'm still going to class

and they were surprise, Saturday! They do give support, it is just like probably you expect more and then you don't get that one." [F][p.6&7:par: 3.5]

Grace struggled to find time to socially engage with others and was consequently deprived of social support.

"Firstly, I do not have time for social, every time I am thinking about my school work." [F][p.11:par: 4.1]

"I'll socialise like once in a month, and I am the one that always call, so maybe there is no need, I am just thinking around those lines, maybe it is not good to have that one. Here there is only one person (friend) that I know. The motivation doesn't come from the friends." [F][p.9:par: 3.19]

Grace's experience of the *class* as a group was positive at the outset. However, as the year progressed she found this group to have become a destructive factor as she identified underlying competition and the undermining of individuals.

"The group is amazing, there's no racism, and we're just a group. You don't feel like you don't belong here." [F][p.1:par: 1.4]

"It is not like everybody for himself, we do support each other but you never understand people, so it is like you mustn't put that much trust in the people; but I also pick up that there is a competition you know, if you always come to class and see the competition, so I was talking to someone who said, have you noticed that if you come here on a Saturday people would ask what are you doing here, what are you up to and I even said, why do I have to tell you what I am doing? It is like a competition, you mustn't do extra work." [F][p.7&8:par: 3.9]

"But for the class, some have more experience and it seems like they know more than lecturers, but for them it was, like, I am better." [F][p.14:par: 5.11]

"Last time I told you about their comments and yeah, it is irritating me and just leaving is good, I am looking forward just to leave everyone. It feels like there is undermining, although he don't say it loudly you can see it from their comments, it was just too much for me, although I was expecting it." [F][p.12:par: 5.4]

The severe *workload* became a familiar topic during interviews with Grace. Initially, the workload was agreeable, but later it took its toll on Grace.

"It's a lot of work, a lot of writing; everything is just a huge thing. But I'm enjoying it and I'm looking forward." [F][p.1:par: 1.2]

"And the stress of the academic work alone that was too much, so that was the adding things on top of the class mates." [F][p.14:par: 5.11]

"Before June holidays, that last week we had orals, and it was too much of the work already and too much of anxiety." [F][p.6:par: 3.2]

"At least I am still breathing, it is a bit different from the first semester, so now, the workload is too much, it's hectic, it is so too much; but I only have to get my own strategy to work, for that of work." [F][p.6:par: 3.1]

"A lot of things happened. I didn't expect class to finish at five. You go home and you're so tired. I cannot study at five after class. I have to take a nap and relax and study at night. It's quite heavy." [F][p.2:par: 1.7]

“With the stress of the thesis and the academic work on top of it made me to just be irritable. More lows than highs I guess.” [F][p.12:par: 5.4]

Another contributing factor towards Grace’s experience of her journey was her *health*. Grace reported a health problem which she had discovered prior to her master’s studies. The condition was, however, sensitive to her stress and anxiety levels. Even though she took good care of the condition, she had concerns regarding her health, which again alluded to higher stress levels.

“I had high blood pressure so sometimes from then my blood pressure goes high. I think it is a health problem because I was admitted for it twice after delivering my baby. So some of the things they said I shouldn’t take, and I mustn’t get more stressed because that will affect it.” [F][p.4:par: 1.17]

“There are changes in my eating and sleeping. Maybe it is because of the weather. What was working for me was to wake up in the morning at 03:00, but from April/May I couldn’t, it was very, very difficult, it was cold. So I was learning a strategy to go and sleep late and wake up at 05:30, so I just changed from what I was used to. I was having this terrible headache and then I went for some tests and I had to take some other medication. Then again, I felt so dizzy and I went back to the medication.” [F][p.8&9:par: 3.14]

Four factors that contributed positively towards Grace’s experience were identified. Firstly, the *support* that she received from her family members and boyfriend helped her to cope with the demands of the year.

“He was supposed to leave last month but I couldn’t let him go because I’m still struggling to settle down. It’s nice to have someone you can talk to and who understands you, we talk the same language.” [F][p.6:par: 3.2]

“There was a moment that I felt that this weekend I just want to go home, see my parents and tell them how I feel now. But at least that is coming up now. I am looking forward to it.” [F][p.2&3:par: 1.10]

“We talk to each other during weekends; I make sure I talk to everyone at home. During the week I don’t have time. Even if I had time there’s the money issue that I cannot talk to everyone during the week. It’s true that cell phone communication helps.” [F][p.2&3:par: 1.10]

Secondly, *motherhood* facilitated a greater connection between herself and psychology as she found the knowledge of psychology to assist her in being a mother. Her responsibility towards her son was another contributing factor towards her decision to stay in the course.

“Being a mother is a huge achievement. Everything I’m doing, I know that I’m responsible for someone who is depending on me. As much as it’s hard, it’s part of life. I can’t run away from it and I’m enjoying it. And I miss him.” [F][p.1:par: 1.1]

“But this week we did child psycho diagnostic evaluation so I think I related more because I have a baby. And most of the disorders are more with the boys, it might happen that my boy might still have that disorder. You always think

about what might be. Hopefully he is not going to meet the criteria, you have always hope, you always take whatever she is saying and puts it on your son, you know.” [F][p.6:par: 3.3]

Thirdly, Grace mentioned that she was entering her own psychological process with a psychotherapist. *Psychotherapy* served as the soundboard she needed and also created a safe place to discuss her concerns regarding the year.

“At first they said each person needs to have a therapist. And I was asking myself, what for? But after seeing our clients I’ve realized that it’s very important to have your own therapist. To have a shoulder to cry on because some of the things your clients say is too much for you. So you need to talk to somebody. So I’m seeing my therapist and it’s really helping.” [F][p.1:par: 1.3]

“But for my personal things, I don’t, I talk to my own therapist.” [F][p.8:par: 3.10]

“Uhm, I go for therapy also. Because, uhm, last term there was a client, I could not take it and since that client, my cousin called me that he lost his baby and I was still in pain, and then I went for a session.” [F][p.6&7:par: 3.5]

*Supervision* was identified as the fourth positive contributing factor. Grace felt comfortable sharing her personal struggles with her supervisor, who seems to have known what kind of support to provide.

“My supervisor is very supportive. She is so very, very supportive, even with my personal stuff she would say okay, what is better.” [F][p.8:par: 3.10]

“My gratitude goes to my individual supervisor, she contained me, I felt like she was my mother, you know. Giving me motivational words and comforting me, even when I had ups and downs in my family and I lost my cousin, and my supervisor could read me and say, what is wrong?” [F][p.13:par: 5.6]

“My supervisor is very good. Before I see the client I meet her first and discuss some things, and she said if I need support after seeing the client, I can see her.” [F][p.3:par: 1.12]

### **6.5.6 Driving forces**

From the data presented above it is clear that Grace had a difficult year filled with personal and professional challenges. Despite the difficulties she experienced she did not leave the programme, although she considered it at times. The driving forces behind her were identified as having (a) a clear *vision*; (b) *spirituality*; (c) *internal coping mechanisms*; and (d) *self-belief*. Initially, Grace’s father did not approve of her decision to study psychology. She respected his wishes and embarked on another course, which she did not enjoy at all. She went back to her original plan and began her studies in psychology. It is thus clear that Grace had a lucid *vision* of where she wants to go with her life. It is also evident that she was proud of the fact that she will be a psychologist and she played the role even before it became a reality.

“It was my dad’s choice. He pushed me to do \*\*. In high school I wanted to do IT, it was all that was in my mind. And my dad didn’t allow me to do IT. I want to achieve this, even if I go on and do something else then. But now my dad is very supportive, even last year after I didn’t get a space he said to keep on applying.” [F][p.3:par: 1.13 & 1.14]

“I used to say to my mother I’m a psychologist, even when I was doing my honours.” [F][p.1:par: 1.2]

“Screaming. I was so happy. I said God just opened a new way for me, this is the beginning of a new start.” [F][p.3:par: 1.15]

When life became demanding during her master’s year the vision of being an intern psychologist and receiving remuneration kept her going.

“Nothing is really enjoyable, there isn’t anything that is enjoyable, ja, but there is too, just have the knowledge, like, in a few months’ time I will be an intern psychologist. I think that boost myself, that means I am capable, you feel like almost you are there already. Thinking about that helps me to go through the days at the moment.” [F][p.6:par: 3.3]

“So every time I found myself not doing that, I think OK, but next year I will find some time to do that, it is just now that I don’t have much time.” [F][p.9:par: 3.16]

“I am so tired but, ja, next year it would be a new beginning because there will also be the financial support and, ja, there will be no, not as much class, so it will be different comparing this year, some of the things I was not expecting.” [F][p.14:par: 5.14]

“As a class we always look for the future, we will be earning next year.” [F][p.9:par: 3.19]

“So my first payment I’ll have to spoil myself. I must celebrate.” [F][p.15:par: 5.17]

“I’ll be much more appreciative of next year.” [F][p.15:par: 5.17]

When Grace was asked how she is coping, she always mentioned her faith as one of the driving forces behind her. *Spirituality* is an important part of her life and helped her, in particular with persevering and staying positive.

“I’m from the Christian family, I just believe God. When I cry I ask God what is happening. When something is changing right I say, ‘Thank you, Lord, you heard my prayers.’ I believe in Him.” [F][p.4:par: 1.18]

“My prayers, my family support and their prayers.” [F][p.13:par: 5.7]

“I just believe in my God, since I left standard ten I have been through a lot and through my prayers I can say believing in impossible things that can be possible, so I know my God and I have testimonies of everything so, I said everything, everything that I have been through I know I can make it. Some people believe in their ancestors and things happen for them. I also believe in my God so my faith also helped me through this.” [F][p.13:par: 5.7]

“I pray. I believe in prayer. For me it works. In my context it worked. So maybe not for another person. But I know most people believe in prayer so I do not argue or oppose what the lecturer is saying. Ja, and I always, usually look back on the thing that I have been through and apart from that I believe my family, they are family, so I have grown up with that religious family. God just helps me.” [F][p.7:par: 3.7]



Grace employed *internal coping mechanisms* that helped her to survive the heavy workload. Focusing on only one day at a time seemed to prevent her from being overwhelmed by the work to be done.

“It is like you have lots of work to read and you know you are not going to finish reading, but you still think, I still need to read, even if I read two out of four articles it is still better than doing nothing at all.” [F][p.9:par: 3.16]

“But I only have to get my own strategy to work, for that of work. I cope with one at a time, finish it and then go on to the next one.” [F][p.6:par: 3.1]

“I’m going to take each day as it comes.” [F][p.2:par: 1.7]

Grace used the positive feedback that she received as an indication that she is doing well. This helped her to *believe in her own abilities*, which can therefore be seen as another driving force behind her.

“It is a difficult year but I am coping. Yes, I am still in, when we had feedback from the oral, after the holidays, it came back and I had that positive [results]. I will make it, so I had that positive [results]. It boosts the self-esteem, but it is rough, I don’t sleep.” [F][p.8:par: 3.13]

Although most of the above-mentioned feedback was received later in the year Grace viewed her being selected as another indication that she is capable of finishing the year.

“When you talk to people they sound like they have more experience than you and they are working. But after I got a place, I thought I am capable. I can pass this. I can make it through M1.” [F][p.3:par: 1.14]

Reflectively, she could also appreciate the fact that she had come so far, which reinforced her willpower to continue.

“It is amazing to just look back, and looking at the timetable, and now we are at the last week, it is like, wow, amazing. Like, during the first week I was, like, does this all have to be done by the end of the year? All this? And I did it.” [F][p.14:par: 5.13]

“Ja, I am proud of myself, I managed to do it, because when we had the interviews, the M1 interviews, for next year, I was looking at myself and I thought, you know I have been there, look at this fifty people. I was one of them, last time, I made it this far. I managed to be one of ten, it’s like, wow, even from the encouragement from my other friends that would say, wow, you managed to do it, so it is kind of like, you know what, ‘I have made it.’” [F][p.15:par: 5.17]

From the above discussion the case of Grace is an atypical one. She had to face tremendous challenges and did not always find the meaning in the suffering, as the other participants could. As indicated in Chapter 5, an atypical case provides additional viewpoints to the phenomena under study and, in effect, adds rigour to the study.

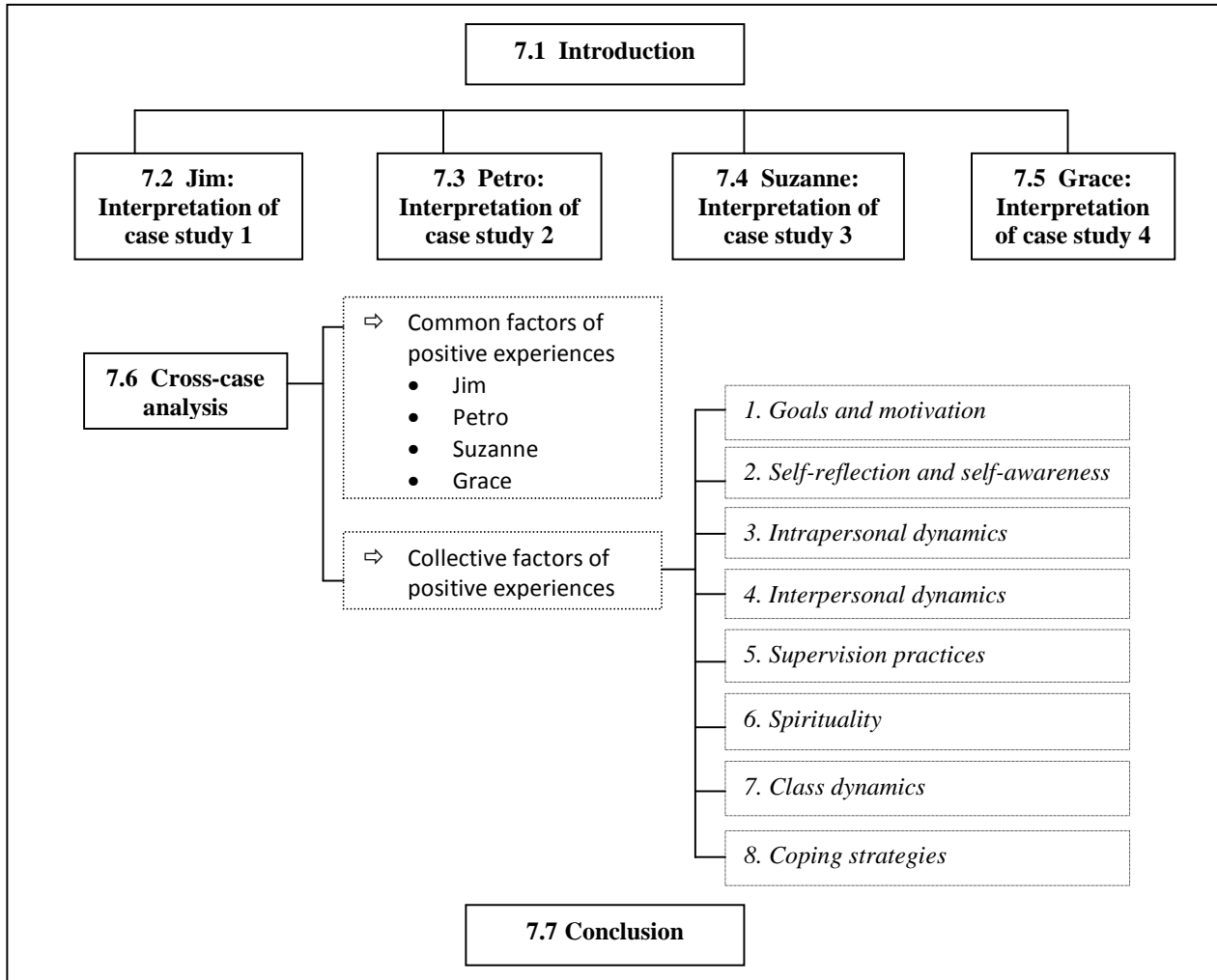
## **6.6 CONCLUSION**

This chapter outlined the results of this research in the form of four case studies. Each case study was treated as a single unit with the intention to do justice to each participant as a unique individual with a journey of her/his own. The results indicated that each participant, with Grace to a lesser extent, found meaning in being a master's student in psychology. These meaning-making processes and their cross-case similarities and/or differences are discussed in the next chapter by interpreting the findings mainly according to Ryff's (1989) theoretical model of psychological well-being, but also according to relevant positive psychology literature as well as literature on master's students in professional psychology training.

# CHAPTER 7

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Figure 14. Visual display of the outline of Chapter 7.



### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the findings that were presented in Chapter 6 are discussed on different levels of interpretation. The structure of the chapter is visually displayed in Figure 14. This chapter represents Steps 3, 4 and 5 of IPA analysis as described in section 5.4.2. These steps are in accordance with IPA guidelines (Smith & Osborne, 2003). Step 3 consists of examining each

individual participant's findings and creating each participant's meaning structure (discussed and displayed in sections 7.2-7.5). Derived meanings were, in essence, tested against the raw interview data in order to determine whether they were actually supported by the data. According to IPA, the focus in this stage of the discussion of the data should shift back and forth from the key claims of the participant to the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of those claims (Smith & Osborne, 2003). The researcher therefore attempted to interpret the participant's attempts to make sense of their experiences.

Recurrent themes within each case are described with insightful interpretation and with reference to relevant literature from Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Thus, participant responses were examined with the aim to understand the expressed and implied meanings. These meanings were translated into terminology that expressed the meanings in direct psychological language. These discussions signify a close focus on meaning instead of causal relations, as recommended by Smith and Osborne (2003). These sections are not subdivided according to themes due to the interconnectedness between the themes identified in Chapter 6. Baxter and Jack (2008) highlighted that the goal of this step is to provide the reader with an integrated story in a format that is readily understood.

Step 4 forms the first part of the cross-case analysis and consists of commonalities and differences between cases. This section describes shared events of positive experiences of four master's degree students in professional psychology and their contribution to well-being. This procedure allowed general findings to emerge regarding their experiences and yielded eight cross-case themes represented in Table 4. The relevance of each case to the cross-case themes is briefly highlighted in this section. The identified themes across cases were integrated within (a) Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being domains; (b) general positive psychology theories; and (c) relevant literature regarding the context of master's students in psychology. As indicated in Chapter 4, Ryff (1989) developed a psychological well-being model based on existing psychology literature. This model serves primarily as the theoretical model for this study, but it should be mentioned that, due to the nature of this model (being based on many other psychology concepts), a variety of theories and concepts are included in the discussion of the findings. They all, however, can be related to the development and foundation of Ryff's model

(see Chapter 3). The inductive nature of this study is further adhered to by including other relevant literature described in Chapters 2 and 4. Ryff's model (1989) therefore created a structure for the interpretations, but was by no means used in a prescriptive manner.

Step 5 entails a general meaning structure for the psychofortigenic experiences of four master's students in professional psychology programmes. Those events that were identified in Step 4 were used to generate a full narrative description with the focus on the participants' meaning-making processes. Themes constituting psychofortigenic experiences were linked within Ryff's psychological well-being domains and were used to generate a basic model that represents the final level of analysis of this study. In this step, the same principles applied for the use of Ryff's model and relevant literature from Chapters 2 and 4 whereby the researcher attempted to work inductively rather than deductively, as recommended in IPA literature (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Smith, 2004). Finally, the researcher synthesized all of the meaning units (themes) into a consistent statement of the structure of the participants' experience of being master's students in professional psychology programmes. This conceptual process model is presented in Chapter 8.

Throughout this chapter the use of direct quotations are minimized except where their use has been found to be crucial to the illustration of the point of discussion. Where direct quotations are used the tracking appendix, page and paragraph number are indicated in brackets. The idiographic emphasis and commitment of IPA to the case study approach allows for an enriched understanding of the psychofortigenic experiences discussed in this chapter and brings to the fore the complexity of human meaning making. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the main points of discussion throughout the above-mentioned steps of analysis.

## **7.2. JIM: INTERPRETATION OF CASE STUDY 1**

As indicated in Chapter 6, Jim had a very positive experience of being a master's student in psychology. He was successful in framing a variety of experiences in such a way as to contribute positively to his psychological well-being. Sheikh et al. (2007) indicated that some students, in contrast with the majority of findings on this topic, do report powerful positive experiences related to master's programmes in psychology.

Through constant personal reflection, Jim was very much aware of his journey. Personal reflection enabled him to continuously look for the meaning in both the pleasant (e.g., working with clients) and less pleasant (e.g., studying for examinations) activities. This notion is encouraged by Coster and Schwebel (1998) who highlighted the necessity of including skills of self-reflection above the pure gaining of knowledge, as it is an essential aspect of any psychologist's developmental journey and a prerequisite for optimal development (Kaslow, et al., 2008; Neufeldt et al., 1996; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Woodcock et al., 2008). Through self-reflection Jim identified becoming “quieter” and, as a result, reported being a better listener [C][p.19:par: 4.1].

Awareness of personal significance early in the year led Jim to use the metaphor of “climbing his personal Kilimanjaro” [C][p.3:par: 1.12] – something which he has personally experienced. The use of this metaphor can be interpreted in different phenomenological ways. Firstly, Jim used the base of the mountain as his starting point. Although having ample experience of working with people in his earlier career, he acknowledged that he knew very little of the master's journey ahead. This acknowledgement can create meaning in that it triggers curiosity and a sense of excitement. When Jim was asked to reflectively capture the full experience in one word, he chose “curiosity” [C][p.27:par: 5.35]. This can be interpreted as indicating his overall philosophy of openness towards experiences. He wanted to know more and to draw as much as possible from each exercise, activity, lecture and therapeutic process. This is an illustration of openness with an orientation towards change and *personal growth* and is identified as one of the constructs that fit within a eudaimonic approach (Kopperud & Vittersø, 2008; Vittersø, 2003, 2004). It further links to the domain of *purpose in life*, since curious exploration leads to the formation of interest which forms the proactive stage of purpose development. The recognition and capitalization of situations and opportunities have been posed as the second important ingredient in the formation of purpose in life (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009).

This openness fostered a healthy sense of humility in that Jim realized how much there is to be curious about. All these factors have been proposed to broaden the thought-action repertoire by promoting interest in novel and/or challenging situations and to incrementally build knowledge

and well-being in a manner consistent with the broaden and build theory (Fredrickson, 1998; Gallagher & Lopez, 2007). It has also been discussed that an attitude of openness to learning and acceptance of the complexities of the profession are crucial for students in these training programmes (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Jones, 2008; Neufeldt et al., 1996).

Conquering Kilimanjaro is further symbolized by a slow and systematic process of perseverance. His regular comments of wanting the pace throughout the year to slow down were prominent. Jim explained that a slower pace would allow for better personal integration with the work. This illustrated that Jim found meaning in the year as a whole and not only in the differentiated parts (single experiences). Kilimanjaro symbolized a journey for Jim, not an end result. Although his meaning was to be found in the whole process, he did, however, capitalize on the individual experiences that comprised a master's year in professional psychology. *Personal growth* is obtained through a progressive process and involves being conscious of one's thoughts as part of the progressive process (Bauer & McAdams, 2010). This is beneficial, as purpose generates approach-oriented, motivated behaviours (Deci & Ryan, 2001), such as in the case of Jim.

*Personal growth* often occurs as a result of difficulties and hardships (Taubman-Ben-Ari, et al., 2011; Park, 1998; Shaefer & Moos, 1992; Wright et al., 2006). Through openness Rogers (1961) claimed that both pleasant and unpleasant experiences are allowed equal access to the consciousness and will result in personal growth (Compton, 2005). Due to his awareness of unexplored avenues, Jim began to question his ability to be a good psychologist. This can also be interpreted as a result of the respect and admiration Jim showed for the profession of psychology. In reflecting on his whole experience, it can be said that he reached a comfortable point of accepting the fact that he does not know it all and that he used this knowledge as motivation. Furthermore, this acceptance created a sense of calmness and meaning in his learning process. A variety of definitions of *self-acceptance* indicated that they include the acceptance of good and bad qualities (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007; Keyes, et al., 2002; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Jim's process of climbing his Kilimanjaro was not a solo attempt. He was able to identify support systems throughout the experience and in different contexts relevant to being a master's

student in professional psychology. These experiences relate to Ryff's (1989) domain of *positive relationships with others*. As seen from the literature, relationships with significant others are ranked as an important aspect regarding the well-functioning of psychologists (Schwebel & Coster, 2001) and when an experience is shared the joys and sorrows become more significant and less daunting (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). In this regard Jim's romantic partner was often mentioned as being supportive and encouraging of Jim's journey. Throughout Jim's case his classmates were mentioned as another source of support. These ties served a bigger purpose than merely practical and emotional support. Jim mentioned how the formation of these relationships made him aware of therapy being all about relationships and of his interaction styles with people. Rosenberg et al. (2005) and Volet and Mansfield (2006) commented on these close bonds that form due to the expectation of students to work in teams and do group assignments. Among other benefits, these group activities assist students in analyzing different perspectives and prove to be a major source of support for students in professional psychology programmes (Lee et al., 2001; Truell, 2001). In Jim's case, these relationships were, however, not all positively experienced. Encounters with one class mate, which was associated with strong negative emotions, formed part of Jim's experience. Jim used this relationship in the end to create better self-awareness and understanding of individual personality types. Jim's ability to reflect on negative experiences and to learn from it is a classic example of Shaefer and Moos' (1992) theory which indicated personal hardships to be one of the factors that contribute to personal growth.

Another significant source of support was supervision, which Jim found to be critical to his growth and professional development as a psychologist. Jim's case serves as evidence for clinical supervision being pivotal in the developmental journey of a master's student in professional psychology (Bernard, 2005) and that formal case supervision is regarded as the most salient influence on career development (Orlinsky et al., 2001; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Jim interpreted the role of supervision in different ways. Firstly, it served a confirmatory purpose in that Jim's supervisor acknowledged his growth as a psychologist:

“The supervisor was incredibly nurturing, pushing me in the right direction, to find my voice”. [C][p.9;par: 3.3]



In light of his questioning his self-worth and ability, as discussed earlier, this was meaningful in Jim's case as it reassured him of his capabilities as a psychologist.

Secondly, supervision fostered growth and development in that Jim's supervisor made him aware of the need to work more on his ambivalence. Supervision promotes self-reflection and raises awareness towards students' own unresolved issues. This can, in turn, impact on the psychotherapeutic process with a client (Hollingsworth & Fassinger, 2002; Holzman et al., 1996). Again Jim responded, to what could have easily been perceived as criticism, with openness towards growth and development and referred to the experience as "fantastic". Being more accepting of himself, created a feeling of unique worth whereby he could distinguish between growth potential and the acceptance of unchangeable characteristics (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007). This confirms the results from studies that aimed at identifying the sources of positive influence on professional development, which consistently found formal case supervision to be one of the top three sources (Orlinsky, et al., 1999; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). Supervision thus positively influenced the psychological well-being domain of *self-acceptance*.

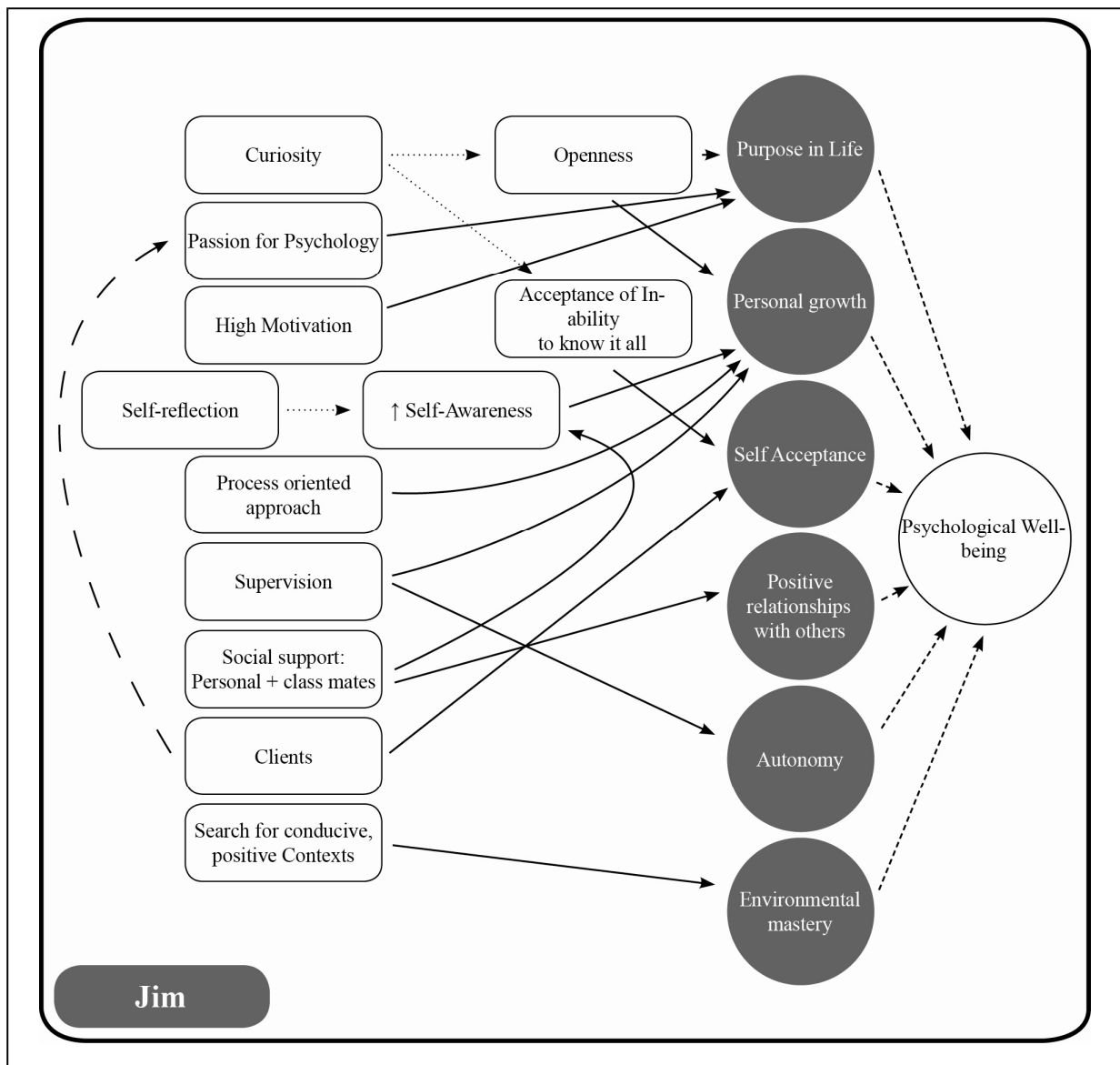
Jim searched for opportunities and contexts that could facilitate his growth. He made his final choice of university (since he was selected by more than one university) based on his interpretation of the department's philosophy of finding each student's unique voice. The academic environment had been identified as one of the contextual components that can have an impact on students' experiences (Dunn et al., 2007; Neufeldt, et al., 1996). Ryff and Singer (2008) described "the ability to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values" (p. 1071) as a clear indication of a person's ability to control complex external activities. Jim's ability to identify growth-supporting contexts as part of the shaping of his environment in a desirable way is an example of environmental mastery, as posed by Ryff (1989) and Gallagher and Lopez (2007). Although Ryff and Singer (2008) acknowledged that the dimension of *environmental mastery* overlaps with other psychological constructs, such as a sense of control and self-efficacy, they posed that the distinction lies in finding or creating a context that suits one's needs and desires. This is what Jim revealed in different situations throughout his journey as a master's student in a professional psychology programme.

Jim's experience became specifically meaningful through his processes with clients. In his words, he experienced "a real sense of flow" [C][p.13:par: 3.20] when engaging in a therapeutic process with a client. This contributed to meaningfulness in that it confirmed his passion for psychology and his belief of his *purpose in life*. On another level Jim's clients brought him closer to *self-acceptance*, as he commented that, although learning and practising so many techniques, he relied on himself in the end. Jim found himself to "be a safe place to get back to" [C][p.2:par: 1.6], which indicates that he became more satisfied with himself and more trusting of his competence. Jim's descriptions of his processes with specific clients proved his attitude of humbleness and openness to learn from clients. These processes were undoubtedly the biggest contribution in making sense of the experience of being a master's student in professional psychology. When he identified a personal strength within one of his clients, he felt challenged to discover and broaden that strength within himself. Self-awareness being described as moments in which a student becomes aware of an internal reaction towards a client (Howard et al., 2006) was evident when Jim's client did not return to psychotherapy. Because students directly link the client's failure to return to their competence and skill (Lee et al., 2001), it is normal for them to be disappointed in such a case. Jim, however, explored his emotion of disappointment, which lead to self-insight – a more sophisticated level of awareness – in that he could see how this reaction towards the client has affected him. In summary, the following positive experiences that contributed to Jim's psychological well-being were derived from his case (see Figure 15).

His sense of *curiosity* stimulated *openness towards experience*, which positively influenced the well-being domain of purpose in life and fostered personal growth. Curiosity further led to the discovery of *not knowing it all* of which the acceptance is related to general self-acceptance. A sincere *passion for psychology* (which was further stimulated by his positive experience of working with clients) contributed to purpose in life, as it confirmed his personal vision. Jim's goals and personal vision (related to the domain of purpose in life) were maintained through *high motivational levels*. *Self-reflection* resulted in more *self-awareness* which, together with *his process-oriented approach*, fostered personal growth. Powerful *supervision* experiences further encouraged personal growth and cultivated higher levels of autonomy. *Social support* from both his partner and his classmates was beneficial with regard to the quality of interpersonal

relationships domain. In Jim's case social interactions were also used to promote self-awareness. Jim's experience of *clients* produced an improved level of self-acceptance. Finally, Jim's *search for conducive and positive contexts* serves as an example of effective environmental mastery.

Figure 15. Visual display of the effect of Jim's journey on his psychological well-being domains (Ryff, 1989).



### 7.3 PETRO: INTERPRETATION OF CASE STUDY 2

The main findings from Petro's case yielded two major areas of development, namely intra- and interpersonal growth. Firstly, intrapersonal growth areas were identified, especially with regard to developing new and more effective coping strategies. Petro needed these coping strategies to manage this experience, which she often described as difficult and challenging. For psychologists, effective coping skills can be beneficial in many ways, but especially to ensure a high quality of work and optimal health (Jordaan et al., 2007). The difficulties Petro experienced were in some cases directly linked with being a master's student in professional psychology (e.g., academic related problems) and in other, indirectly (e.g., personal relationship problems). Petro was, however, able to continuously balance these hardships with the positive aspects involved in her journey. This in itself served as an effective coping strategy in that it created a feeling of *environmental mastery*.

An important factor in Petro's journey was her clear defined goal of wanting to become a psychologist as indicated in the theme of career-related well-being.

“Definitief om my doel te bereik om my loopbaan voort te sit, met B.Psig. kan ek absoluut niks daarmee doen nie, ek's moeg om net 'n werk te hê, ek wil nou my passie uitleef”<sup>51</sup> [D][p.1&2;par: 1.7]. This goal formed part of her personal vision of who she wants to be and where she does not want to work (gained from prior work experiences). Petro's clear defined goal served as a constant motivator throughout her journey as it resulted in more aims and objectives for living.

“Ook om in myself te groei, ek't weereens hierdie twee dae gesien ek doen dinge wat ek nie weet ek doen nie of nie agterkom nie, en om meer effektief met mense te kan omgaan, en tevrede te voel met hoe ek ontwikkel, ek hou nie van stagneer nie en wil nie op een plek bly nie. En rustiger raak en nie so hard op myself wees nie.”<sup>52</sup> [D][p.1&2;par: 1.7]

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<sup>51</sup> Definitely to reach my goal, to continue my career, I can do absolutely nothing with BPsych, I am tired of just having a job, I now want to live out my passion.

<sup>52</sup> Also to grow in myself, during these two days, I once again realized that I do things that I do not know I am doing or that I am not aware of, and to engage with people more effectively, and to feel satisfied with my development, I do not like stagnation and don't want to remain in one place. And to become more calm and not be so hard on myself.

This serves as an example of having a *purpose in life* as metaconstruct, which involves having goals and a sense of directedness, creating meaning in the present life (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Unrealistic self-expectations on a personal and academic level confirmed her underestimation of how tough the year would be. Although it was necessary to re-evaluate her expectations of herself throughout the year, it never changed the goal she has set. This re-evaluation was beneficial since purpose fosters efficient resource allocation and leads to more productive cognitive, behavioural and psychological activity (Kashdan & McKnight, 2009).

The findings indicated that Petro was often surprised with her ability to perform well. Being surprised resulted from an initial self-doubting stance as she indicated numerous times that she did not have managing skills, which led to a sense of insecurity. This can be interpreted within Skovholt and Rønnestad's (1992a) first two stages of counsellor development in which doubting one's competence was found to be a common factor. Unrealistic standards and expectations driven by perfectionist attitudes can result in a lack of *self-acceptance* (Ryff & Singer, 2008). However, when she became aware of her general performance, it drew her closer to self-acceptance as it made her recognize her personal strengths. Her tendency to reflect critically on her psychological processes further encouraged the identification of strengths and increased her self-awareness.

"I am becoming more aware of my thoughts and actions. How my way of thinking influence the way that I am acting. Personal reflection is a way for me to take a step back and look at myself, my thoughts and actions. Self-evaluation has started to play a big role in my life." [D][p.8;par: 2.7]

Self-awareness proved to be one of the main reasons for psychologists' choice of career (Rizq & Target, 2008). Her self-awareness was specifically centred on the way in which her thinking influences her actions. This awareness also assisted in the rationalization of decisions, almost as if she knew that, when one knows why one acts in a certain way, it can be used to justify that behaviour. In Petro's case self-awareness thus led to self-monitoring. This allowed her to improve her management of daily demands. Self-monitoring has been identified as one of the six coping strategies that psychologists use (Medeiros & Prochaska, 1988). Awareness of cognitions further holds the advantage of changing destructive behaviour that flows from these cognitions (Murphy, 2005).

Petro's experience of being a master's student in professional psychology brought to the fore another dimension of her identity – that of being a psychologist. Petro found this “discovery” to be exciting and motivating. Although, once again, this made her aware of weaknesses and areas to develop, it also served as a stepping stone towards achieving her goal. The development of a professional identity to fit one's professional role has been found to be challenging (Dahlgren, et al., 2006) and includes engagement in a variety of often difficult practices that are beyond the limits of a professional-client transaction (Barnett, 2007). Worthen and McNeill (1996) added that the formation of a professional counsellor identity is one of the most important functions of graduate training in counselling psychology. Integrating this dimension in her total identity, contributed to Ryff's psychological well-being domain of *personal growth*.

Independence was one of the themes from Petro's case and was illustrated in her personal life (drawn from her comments on the relationship break-up) as well as within her journey of becoming a psychologist. In Truell's (2001) study students reported a process of re-examining their relationships with others, which can lead to the appreciation of renewed independence. Independence strongly relates to *autonomy*, which is associated with a variety of well-being concepts (Carr, 2011; Helwig, 2006; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989). Becoming less dependent on the opinion of others enabled Petro to determine who she wants to be, on a personal and professional level, based on her own conceptualizations. This was a significant experience, since it allowed Petro to feel more comfortable with herself. In this regard Petro allowed herself to be more flexible in and open towards experiences. An attitude of openness to learning and acceptance of the complexities of the profession are crucial for students' well-being, as seen in the literature (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Jones, 2008; Neufeldt et al., 1996). Openness has been related to many psychological well-being theories including Rogers' (1961) fully functioning person and Maslow's (1954) self-actualized person.

To manage difficult times Petro employed problem-focused coping skills such as exercise, self-care and healthy sleeping patterns. These skills were beneficial in more than just the obvious physical way in that Petro felt less overwhelmed and more in control. These practical coping skills form part of Kramen-Kahn and Hansen's (1998) “positive career sustaining behaviours”

(p. 132). Being able to identify stressors and finding ways to minimize them further contributed to her overall sense of competence and *environmental mastery*. In her attempt to find meaning in this journey, Petro utilized her spirituality. Engaging in spiritual practices resulted in a variety of positive outcomes. On a spiritual level Petro felt reassured in her goal of becoming a psychologist, which provided motivation to persevere through difficult times.

“Ek het agtergekom hoe genadig die Here is en dat hy gebede verhoor want ek’t heeltyd gedink hy sal my nie toegelaat het om my M te doen as Hy my nie daardeur gaan help nie.”<sup>53</sup> [D][p.17:par: 4.6]

Apart from the motivational function, Petro found her spirituality to be a source of comfort throughout the year. It created meaningfulness, as spirituality is strongly associated with purpose in life (Adams et al., 2000; Byron & Miller-Perrin, 2009; Leondari & Gialamas, 2009; Lyons, et al., 2010). Petro experienced major shifts on an *interpersonal level* throughout her journey. Once again an increased level of *autonomy* was evident within her social relationships in the sense that she did not need external recognition to the extent that she used to do. On a more affective level she could use social relationships as a support system. Warm, open and supportive relationships with classmates (one in particular) and family members were formed during this year.

“[Ek is so dankbaar vir] \*\* wat saam my ’n kantoor gedeel het, en soos ons ma’s wat van dieselfde plek af kom, dit was net weer ’n bestiering, so ons het mekaar baie gehelp en gedra en as mens gefrustreerd is dan kan ons praat, so dis lekker om iemand te hê om goed mee te deel.”<sup>54</sup> [D][p.17:par: 4.9]

Interpersonal connections contribute towards human flourishing and coping, as identified in the literature (Diener, 2009; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008; Diener & Seligman, 2002; Dunn & Brody, 2008; Kahneman & Krueger, 2006; Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Myers, 1999; Ryff, 1989). Petro treasured these quality relationships to such an extent that she mentioned the year would have been worthwhile for that aspect only. These relationships can help reduce the negative effects of learning psychology, as students’ awareness of their peers struggling with similar

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<sup>53</sup> I realized how graceful God is and that He answers prayers, because I constantly thought He would not have allowed me to do my M if He wasn’t going to help me through it.

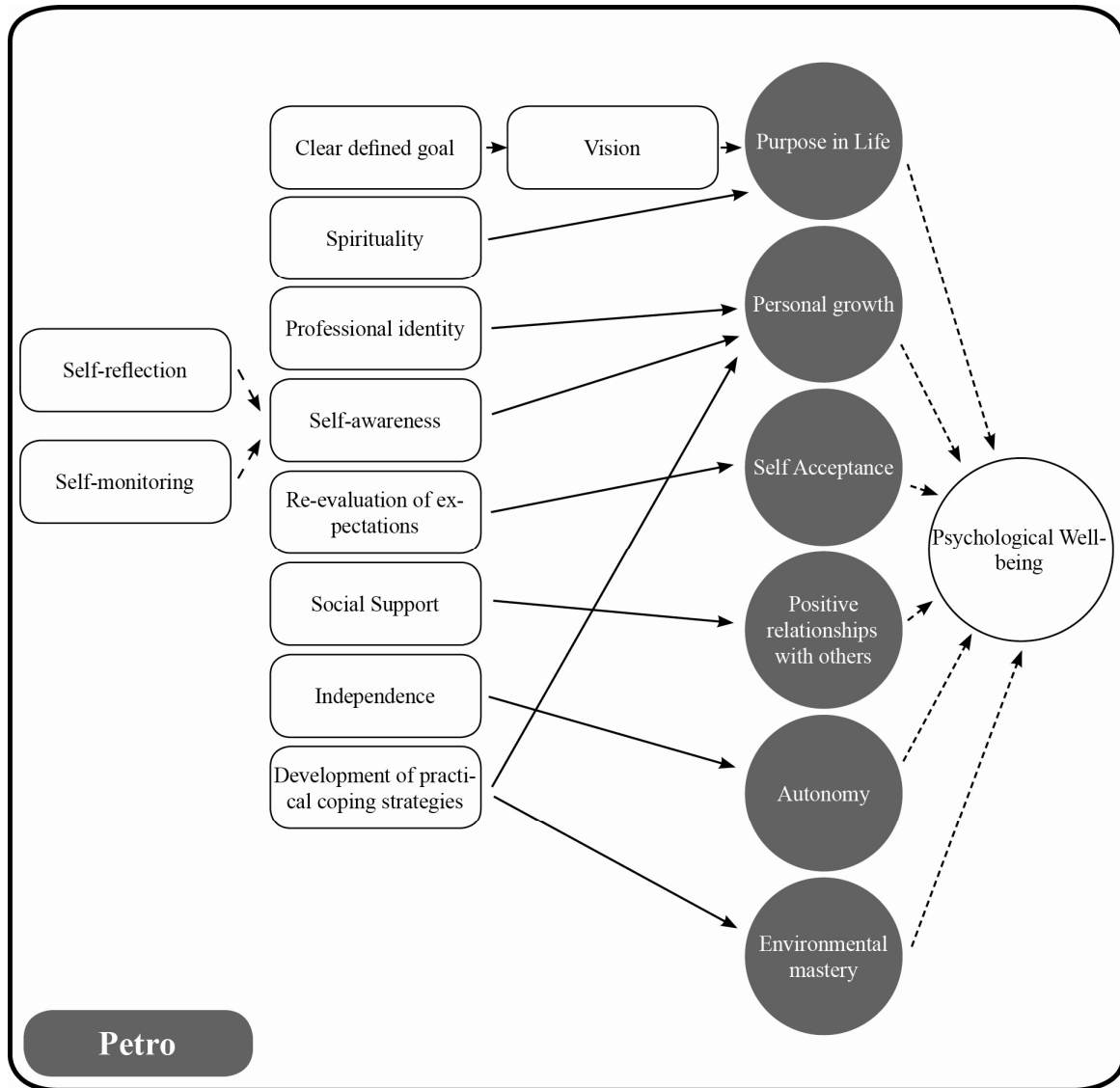
<sup>54</sup> [I am so grateful for] \*\* who shared an office with me, and like our mothers who came from the same place, it was just another act of providence, so we helped each other a lot and carried each other and if you get frustrated then we can talk, it is so nice to have someone to share things with.

issues can help them to make better sense of their current experiences (Lee et al., 2001; Truell, 2001). Guse (2010) confirmed that positive group relationships in training can be conducive to students' well-being. In another way Petro's ability to recognize changes in her relationships (especially setting healthy boundaries) contributed to a sense of personal growth. Powerful supervision experiences further contributed to Petro's growth on an interpersonal level.

In summary, the following positive experiences that contributed to Petro's psychological well-being were derived from her case (see Figure 16). Her *clearly defined goal* supported her personal *vision*, which forms part of the well-being domain of purpose in life. This domain was further stimulated through *spirituality*. The establishment of a *professional identity* promoted personal growth. *Self-reflection* and *self-monitoring* resulted in more *self-awareness*, which was identified as another contributing factor towards personal growth. The *re-evaluations of self-expectations* stimulated a higher sense of self-acceptance. The *social support* that she received heightened her experience of quality interpersonal relationships. The *independence* theme from Petro's case can be positively related to the domain of autonomy. *Practical coping strategies* which were developed and employed by Petro proved beneficial towards her ability to master the environment.



Figure 16. Visual display of the effect of Petro's journey on her psychological well-being domains (Ryff, 1989).



#### 7.4 SUZANNE: INTERPRETATION OF CASE STUDY 3

The phenomenological interpretation of Suzanne's case is approached differently since she started her journey with a more insecure stance than the other participants. Woodcock et al. (2008) stated that stepping up to professional practice in psychology can be an exciting but uncertain time. Suzanne's meaning-making process was not displayed in individual experiences related to being a master's student in a professional psychology programme, but in a reflective, process-oriented way. The reason for this approach is twofold. Firstly, it gives a true

representation of Suzanne's journey since the nature of her experience changed after a conscious decision that she made in the middle of the year. Secondly, her awareness of *personal growth* (or the lack thereof) only occurred closer to the end of the year and not as continuously as the other participants.

"Looking back at this year, I was over complicating things for myself, making the load heavier." [E][p.23:par: 6.4]

Ryff and Singer (2008) explained this by saying that personal growth is operationalized in changed behaviour over time, resulting in greater self-knowledge and effectiveness, which is viewed as an improvement in the self. The results indicated that Suzanne's biggest asset in her journey was the fact that she remained excited and grateful despite her feelings of insecurity, self-doubt and anxiety (which she was only able to identify later in the year). Enthusiasm has been indicated as one of the contributing factors towards perseverance in studies (Lee et al., 2001). It also serves as evidence of Frederickson's (1998) undoing hypothesis, according to which positive emotions can undo the effect of negative emotions.

*Self-acceptance* was identified as the overall growth domain in which Suzanne found meaning in her journey. As indicated in the results, Suzanne experienced numerous difficulties at the start of her journey. These difficulties were characterized by uneasiness with herself, which resulted in self-doubt and constant comparisons with classmates. In effect, this caused confusion with regard to her role and led her to seriously question her competence. The journey of becoming a psychologist has been associated with experiences of confusion and with a shift in identity as students need to integrate an understanding of themselves in relation to being a psychologist into their overall understanding of themselves as individuals (Howard et al., 2006; Kottler & Schwarz, 2004). However, Suzanne reflected over the first semester and decided to change her overall approach to the journey.

"So it was almost like a conscious decision, like, great, I'm finished with my anxiety for the year, now I can start enjoying myself, be in the moment." [E][p.13:par: 4.11]

Triggers or catalysts for personal growth have been identified in Levine's study (2006) on personal growth during medical internship. These triggers are often experiences characterized by intense, evoking emotions that pose a challenge to students' values or sense of self. In Suzanne's case the trigger was the realization that she cannot and should not attempt be the "perfect therapist" [E][p.20:par: 5.15], but that she must instead trust the process to find her own distinct

style, concurring with Cain (2007), who suggested that psychologists function best once they have found their distinctive voice.

Towards the end of the year Suzanne trusted herself more and was more accepting of her unique contribution within the class. This conscious cognitive decision in the middle of the year contributed to her meaning-making processes. This decision can be interpreted in two ways. Firstly, it gives an indication of her awareness of destructive patterns (e.g., unhealthy peer comparisons accompanied with an undifferentiated sense of self, high anxiety levels and unrealistic self-expectations) which needed to change. This is in agreement with Coster and Schwebel (1997) who identified that self-awareness is one of the main factors contributing to well-functioning in professional psychologists. Secondly, it forced Suzanne to utilize her existing coping skills and support systems, or develop new effective coping skills and support systems, in order to allow for a more positive experience of her journey. Self-awareness within psychologists is regarded to be a prelude to self-regulation which would enable them to acknowledge the need for assistance (Coster & Schwebel, 1997).

It was indicated that spirituality played a major role in Suzanne's decision. Through religious activities Suzanne met new people and maintained a more balanced life. Diener (2009) reported that the social networks and systems created by churches and other institutions of organized religion serve, among others, the purpose of valued social support. Through her spiritual life, meaning and purpose were reconfirmed. Suzanne experienced it to such an extent that she phrased becoming a psychologist as "my calling" [E][p.18:par: 5.7]. The recognition of one's "calling" is strongly related with the well-being domains of *purpose and meaning in life* (McKnight & Kashdan, 2009; Ryff et al., 2003; Steger et al., 2008).

Suzanne's above-mentioned self-critical stance was maintained through excessive self-analysis. Self-analysis is triggered by "learning" psychotherapy and psychology students have indicated that they did not expect the amount of self-analysis which occurred as part of the training (Stratton et al., 2007). Although self-reflection has been identified as conducive towards personal growth, over-analyzes of behaviour can lead to unnecessary and unrealistic self-criticism (Furr & Caroll, 2003).

Supervision contributed to Suzanne's process of becoming more *autonomous*. At first, supervision was used to confirm, to reassure and to direct her. This fit the picture sketched by Fleming in 1953 that, at first, the trainee imitates the supervisor. Later in the year Suzanne used supervision as a soundboard for her own ideas and insights. Worthington (1987) described this process and indicated that, over the course of a year, the supervision needs of the student change. He showed that, at first, there is a greater need for the acquisition of skills and, later, the need changes towards developing self-awareness and insight.

"He was really good, listening, questioning me, so I'm challenging my own thinking at the same time. He didn't just give me the answers. It's been a wonderful supervision experience with him." [E][p.18:par: 5.8]

The same shift was evident in her relationships with classmates. At first, Suzanne constantly compared her competency with what she perceived her classmates' competencies to be. This gives an example of what Ryff (1989) described as an over-concern about the expectations and evaluations of others, which is indicative of a low level of quality interpersonal relationships. Later in the year her relationships with her classmates were used in a supportive, motivating way and she felt safe to share her ideas. Lyubomirsky and Ross (1997) explained sociality as coping mechanism by means of social comparison processes and posed that people who report higher levels of well-being tend to use downward social comparisons more than upward comparisons. Larsen and Prizmic (2008) concurred by adding that downward comparisons are used to regulate emotional well-being.

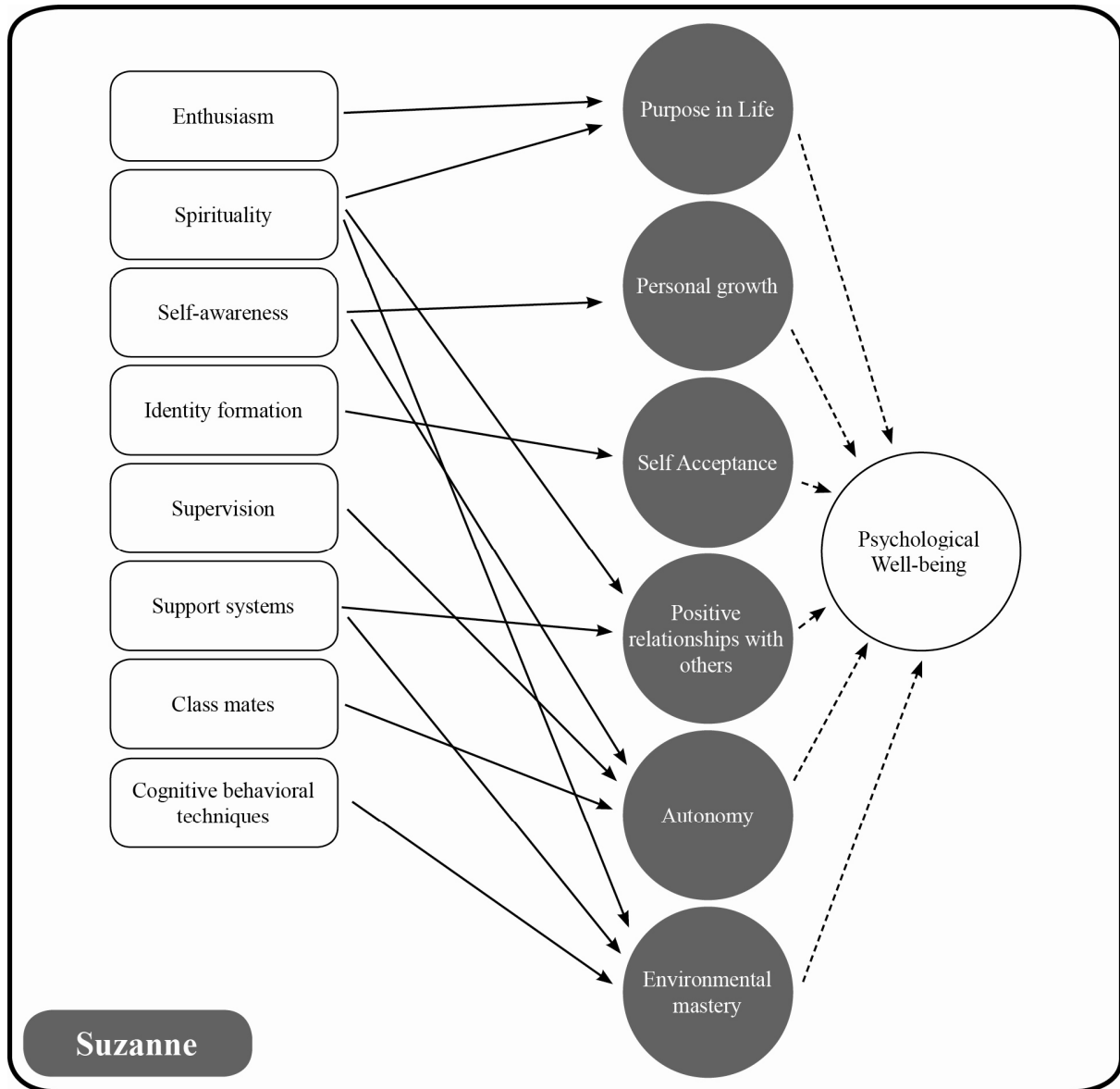
Other aspects of *positive relationships with others* that contributed to Suzanne's meaning-making process during the year included her ability to set personal boundaries. Visits and telephone conversations with family members were, although highly appreciated, limited to times that suited her best. On a phenomenological level this can be interpreted as a significant step towards feeling more comfortable in her skin. This fits the overall picture of Suzanne becoming herself, holding more realistic expectations and believing in her competence as a psychologist. Suzanne commented that the meaning of being a master's student in professional psychology lies in the fact that one is shown so many "tools", but that one can still be one's own person. This statement gives a clear indication of the shift from trying to be like everyone else to the comfort in and valuing of her unique style. When Suzanne was asked to summarize her

journey in one word, she chose “application” and added “but application also in a personal way” [E][p.22:par: 5.21]. This was evident on a practical level when she applied behavioural techniques from class in her personal life (e.g., time schedule diary and positive self-talk), but also in her decision to allow herself the time and space to be herself. These served as attempts towards *environmental mastery* in Suzanne’s life and proved to be beneficial to her overall coping.

In summary, the following positive experiences that contributed to Suzanne’s psychological well-being were derived from her case (see Figure 17).

A high level of *enthusiasm* throughout the year helped Suzanne to stay motivated towards her purpose of fulfilling her calling. *Spirituality* was identified as a contributing factor towards this focus. Increased levels of *self-awareness* fostered personal growth and encouraged her to achieve a greater sense of autonomy. Enhanced levels of self-acceptance were the outcome of Suzanne’s clearer *formation of identity*. *Supervision* was especially beneficial in Suzanne’s process of becoming more autonomous. The establishment of new *social support systems* indicated her sense of environmental mastery and advanced levels of quality in interpersonal relationships. The role of *classmates* was identified as a separate theme due to their significant role in achieving a higher level of autonomy, but also contributed positively to the psychological well-being domain of positive relationships with others. From a process-oriented approach Suzanne’s case can be associated with Perron’s (2006) concept of environmental mastery, namely as an instinct that progresses through five stages: isolation, dependency, autonomy, cooperation and independence. Through these five stages individuals slowly gain a sense of mastery up to a point where independent actions can determine their personal vision of what life should be. Reflectively, Suzanne progressed through all these stages as a master’s student in a professional psychology programme and obtained a higher level of environmental mastery from the application of *cognitive behavioural techniques* including positive self-talk and daily time scheduling.

Figure 17. Visual display of the effect of Suzanne’s journey on her psychological well-being domains (Ryff, 1989).



### 7.5 GRACE: INTERPRETATION OF CASE STUDY 4

The findings of Grace’s case indicated that she was not convinced that psychology is the right career for her and that she was not fully prepared for what the year entailed. In effect, disappointment became a recurrent theme in Grace’s case. Students who are not prepared for the identity transformation brought about by such a programme, may begin to question the self and

the world (Kottler & Schwarz, 2004), as was the case with Grace. Therefore, her goal of becoming a psychologist was, in fact, not clear and fixed. This is associated with lower levels of *purpose in life* (Ryff, 1989). As a result Grace had difficulty in finding meaning and purpose in the experience of being a master's student in professional psychology. Despite a variety of practical difficulties Grace wanted to finish the year and prove to herself that she can succeed. This served as a personal vision and, even with the lack of passion and fixed goals at times, her long-term vision was identified as one of the driving forces that kept Grace in the programme.

“I will finish, even if I don't use it”. [F][p.1:par: 1.2]

It is thus clear that Grace had a lucid vision for her life, even in the absence of well-defined personal goals related to the journey of becoming a psychologist. This serves as an example of Kashdan and McKnight's (2009) theoretical model of purpose development. They proposed that purpose in life is characterized by a central, self-organizing aim. This description implies that purpose reflects a predominant theme of an individual's identity and that it provides a framework for systematic daily behaviour (i.e., self-organization). These authors view goals and projects as the result of a life aim which, in turn, is viewed as a process and not something that can be fully achieved. They added that goals provide a sense of meaning and purpose in life, although simply having a personal vision will not necessarily indicate a purpose.

Findings demonstrated a shift away from *self-acceptance*, as Grace was negatively surprised by the personal changes she depicted in herself. In this regard Grace wished for not being so much aware of her own psychological processes and those of others. Being capable of deeper analysis of human behaviour was not regarded as a positive attribute, as Grace longed for the days when everything was simpler.

“Sometimes I wish I can just go back and take out the psychology out of me and just come back and become the person I was before. I want to detox myself from it.” [F][p.12:par: 5.2]

It was only at the end of the year that Grace could identify positive outcomes of her experience as a master's student in a professional psychology programme.

“But through this year later, I've managed to develop that personal growth and also attending therapy had an impact in discovering my strength and alleviates my own anxiety. I have learned to develop a strong sense of responsibility, to work within a team as well as cross-team and the ability to work in a pressure environment.” [F][p.16:par: 6.4]

Meaningfulness was further achieved practically through knowledge gained, as Grace was able to relate psychological theories to motherhood and child development. This was found to be significant since she felt she could positively apply this knowledge in her own life. Grace's journey of becoming a psychologist was intensified through motherhood since she felt greater responsibility towards her son. On the other hand, however, being more knowledgeable of psychological disorders had its downside too, especially with regard to worries concerning her son.

"But this week we did child psycho diagnostic evaluation so I think I related more because I have a baby. And most of the disorders are more with the boy. It might happen that my boy might still have that disorder. You always think about what might be. Hopefully he is not going to meet the criteria and even if not, like you have always hope, you always take whatever she is saying and puts it on your son you know." [F][p.6:par: 3.3]

Working with clients proved an anxiety-provoking experience for Grace at times, as she described most of her clients as challenging cases. Disturbing and dysfunctional clients and environments can lead to emotional exhaustion and professional burnout, as seen in the literature (O'Connor, 2001; Sherman & Thelen, 1998), and students often experience unique stressors when being assigned their first client (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2003). In this regard she was able to identify supervision and personal psychotherapy as coping mechanisms. Both these strategies were found to be beneficial to Grace's meaning-making processes, as indicated in the literature (Bernard, 2005; Coster & Schwebel, 1997; Rizq & Target, 2008; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Worthen & McNeill, 1996). Personal psychotherapy as coping strategy provided Grace with reflection opportunities – specifically on her emotional reaction towards clients' problems. Awareness of these aspects of transference helped Grace to better understand her own psychological processes. Rothery (1992), Truell (2001) and Murphy (2005) provided evidence for the value of psychotherapy during training and identified personal psychotherapy as a useful method for reducing the negative effect of intense training in psychology. Medeiros and Prochaska (1988) identified seeking social support, of which psychotherapy can be a form, as one of the six coping strategies that psychologists use to deal with difficult clients. Grace thus illustrated that she attempted to *master her environment* through specific coping strategies.

Supervision was found to be the other contributing factor in Grace's search for meaning in her journey. Supervision was described as motivating, comforting and supportive.



“My supervisor is very supportive. She is so very very supportive even with my personal stuff she would say okay, what is better” [F][p.8:par: 3.10].

In the literature, supervision is acknowledged as a helpful tool for students as it provides a “safe” platform to apply their knowledge (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Neufeldt et al., 1996; Tod et al., 2007). Ahmed and Pillay (2004) underscored that supervision is central to the transformation of the new professional identity.

To gain some sense of meaning from this challenging journey, Grace depended largely on her spirituality. This was achieved successfully, as Grace reflected on the positive affect of prayer and the strength gained from her belief in God.

“I pray. I believe in prayer. For me it works.” [F][p.7:par: 3.7]

Case and McMinn (2001) found spiritual practices to be among the most popular mechanisms in the prevention of distress for religious psychologists and are considered to play an important role in the well-functioning of professionals. Religious beliefs are especially helpful in that they usually allow suffering to be viewed as growth opportunities, providing the sufferer with a sense of purpose and meaning (Adams, et al., 2000).

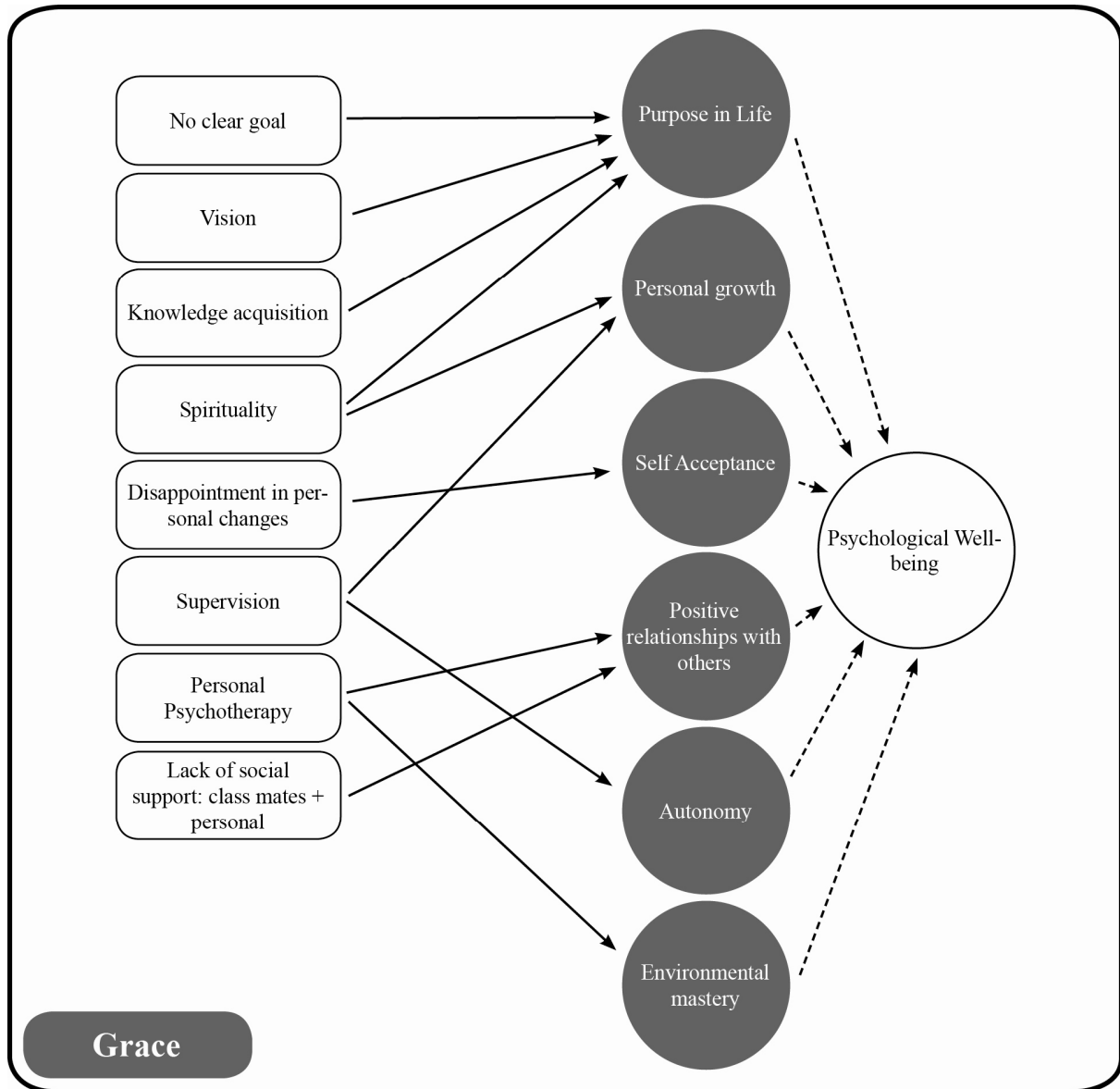
There are several important points to be noted about Grace’s experience with regard to *positive relationships with others*. Although she mentioned her family’s love and support as a constant positive she focused on their physical absence, which made her feel lonely. The same feeling was experienced with her boyfriend who was only able to visit a few times. Grace mentioned that she found herself to be the only “active” member within most of her friendships and questioned the value thereof. This lack of support was associated with feelings of isolation and hindered Grace’s meaning-making and benefit-finding processes. Stressors outside of academic training, for example, students who juggle other roles such as parenting, often struggle to cope (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Dearing et al., 2005; Stryker & Burke, 2000) as they find themselves torn between the demands of their professional development and personal lives (Lee et al., 2001). Feelings of isolation can also contribute to higher levels of anxiety and disappointment (Kottler & Schwartz, 2004). Ambivalence is experienced with regard to classmates, as illustrated in the findings of Grace’s case. The discomfort created by this experience added to her feelings of disappointment and isolation. Throughout the literature, loneliness and social isolation are

negatively correlated with positive affect and well-being (Anderson & Arnoult, 1985; Ryff, 1989; Ryff, 1995) and patterns of happiness (Myers, 1999). Although the results predominantly indicated a lack of meaning in Grace's journey, several personal strengths, which she developed during the year, were identified. Grace persevered through difficult times despite very little social support. She was able to stay focused on her personal vision even though the immediate effects were unpleasant. She asked for help when she needed it and was accepting of the help that was offered. It can thus be interpreted that Grace did identify *personal growth* areas and took the necessary steps towards the mastering of her environment.

In summary, the following experiences that contributed to Grace's psychological well-being were derived from her case (see Figure 18).

The lack of a clearly defined *goal* negatively influenced Grace's psychological well-being domain of purpose in life. Despite this, her *vision* of finishing the year and the *acquisition of knowledge* added to a sense of meaning and purpose. *Spirituality* became the most significant aspect contributing towards purpose in life and personal growth. Disappointed with the *personal changes* she experienced within herself negatively influenced her level of self-acceptance. *Supervision* contributed towards higher levels of autonomy and fostered personal growth. *Personal psychotherapy* advanced her well-being domain of interpersonal relationships and served as an attempt to manage her environment better. The lack of *social support* that she experienced within the class as well as in other personal contexts negatively influenced the quality of her interpersonal relationships.

Figure 18. Visual display of the effect of Grace’s journey on her psychological well-being domains (Ryff, 1989).



In the sections above each individual case study was interpreted and contextualized within (a) Ryff’s (1989) psychological well-being domains; (b) general positive psychology theories; and (c) relevant literature regarding the context of master’s students in psychology. The next step of IPA follows, in which common events that contributed to the participants’ psychological well-being across the cases are identified and discussed.

## 7.6 CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

### 7.6.1 Common factors of positive experiences and their contribution to well-being

Based on the four individual case interpretations, the following eight themes were identified as common factors of their psychofortological experiences. These themes were chosen based on their representability within cases as well as on the strength with which they manifested in a case.

Table 4

*Common factors of positive experiences across the cases and their contribution to psychological well-being domains (Ryff, 1989)*

Theme number and name	Description of theme	Related domain of psychological well-being
1. Goals and motivation	This theme refers to motivational levels related to the vision of becoming a psychologist and includes participants' short- and long-term goals.	Purpose in life Personal growth
2. Self-reflection and self-awareness	This theme refers to the ability to critically reflect on personal psychological processes which resulted in increased levels of self-awareness.	Personal growth Autonomy
3. Intrapersonal dynamics	This theme relates to the development of character strength and professional identity formation.	Personal growth Self-acceptance
4. Interpersonal dynamics	This theme relates to participants' experiences of interpersonal relationships with family and friends (including romantic relationships). This theme excludes relationships with classmates as these have been identified as a distinct and separate cross-case analysis theme.	Positive relationships with others Environmental mastery
5. Supervision practices	This theme refers to participants' experiences of supervisors, the supervision process and the supervisor-student relationship.	Autonomy Personal growth
6. Spirituality	This theme refers to spirituality (including religiosity) as well-being aspect and coping mechanism.	Purpose in life Positive relationships with others
7. Master's class and group dynamics	This theme refers to participants' experience of the dynamics involved with classmates.	Positive relationships with others Autonomy
8. Practical coping strategies	This theme refers to any other emotion- or problem-focused practical coping strategy employed by the participants.	Environmental mastery

After the close examination and interpretation of each individual case, eight cross-case themes were identified. With the integration of the findings within Ryff's (1989) psychological well-

being model (sections 7.2-7.5), the relation of these eight themes and the six psychological well-being domains became evident. Based on the overlap found across cases, these themes were linked with the domains of psychological well-being and are presented in Table 4.

#### 7.6.1.1 Case 1 – Jim: Interpreted within the identified cross-case analysis themes

Table 5

*Interpretation of Jim’s case within the identified cross-case themes*

<b>Theme 1</b> Goals and motivation	It was documented that very high levels of motivation (flowing from his curiosity), accompanied with a strong passion for psychology, enabled Jim to frame experiences positively throughout the year.
<b>Theme 2</b> Self-reflection and self-awareness	Jim’s tendency to continuously reflect on himself caused greater self-awareness in him. His metaphor of climbing Kilimanjaro was used as a yardstick to measure his personal growth and progress within the journey.
<b>Theme 3</b> Intrapersonal dynamics	On an intrapersonal level, Jim became “quieter” and, as a result, reported becoming a better listener.
<b>Theme 4</b> Interpersonal dynamics	Social support systems were in place throughout the year. More specifically, Jim reported the encouragement and support received from his romantic partner to be a constant positive during his journey.
<b>Theme 5</b> Supervision practices	Supervision practices were experienced as a major positive contributor towards Jim’s journey. Not only did he report guidance and support, but also being personally challenged within supervision.
<b>Theme 6</b> Spirituality	None/Limited
<b>Theme 7</b> Master’s class and group dynamics	The role of classmates within Jim’s journey was twofold. Firstly, they were found to be extremely supportive and, secondly, he was forced to reflect on his own frustration within one specific relationship. He was able to frame this experience positively in that he became aware of his own interaction style.
<b>Theme 8</b> Practical coping strategies	Within this theme Jim’s ability to search for conducive and positive environments towards his personal growth was identified as a coping skill that fostered environmental mastery.

Jim’s case yielded results within all the identified themes, except within spirituality (see Table 5). The strongest themes within his case proved to be self-reflection, motivation and supervision. The identification of the strongest themes was not based on any quantitative measures, but on their contribution towards and influence on Jim’s meaning-making processes and psychological well-being. The contributions were either identified by the participant or interpreted as such by the researcher.

### 7.6.1.2 Case 2 – Petro: Interpreted within the identified cross-case analysis themes

Table 6

*Interpretation of Petro’s case within the identified cross-case themes*

<b>Theme 1</b> Goals and motivation	Even before the master’s in psychology became a reality for Petro, her vision of becoming a psychologist was clear. Within this vision she clearly defined personal and career-related goals, which helped her to stay focused and motivated during her journey.
<b>Theme 2</b> Self-reflection and self-awareness	Petro admitted to “having a reflective personality”. Similar to the other participants, self-reflection resulted in self-awareness, which caused Petro to identify strengths within herself (as opposed to only focusing on her weaknesses).
<b>Theme 3</b> Intrapersonal dynamics	Intrapersonally, Petro became less critical of herself and adjusted her expectations to be more realistic and achievable. She was consciously aware of the formation of her professional identity.
<b>Theme 4</b> Interpersonal dynamics	Petro experienced significant changes in her relationships with family members. The re-examination of her romantic relationship led to the termination thereof. She became more assertive and aware of her own needs within these relationships.
<b>Theme 5</b> Supervision practices	Similar to the other participants, supervision practices positively influenced Petro’s journey towards autonomous functioning.
<b>Theme 6</b> Spirituality	Petro reported spiritual well-being as one of the major positive contributors towards her journey. It was beneficial on a coping level, but also strengthened her vision of becoming a psychologist.
<b>Theme 7</b> Master’s class and group dynamics	None/Limited
<b>Theme 8</b> Practical coping strategies	The development and use of practical coping skills, such as regular exercise, healthy eating and sleeping patterns formed a major part of Petro’s journey and contributed towards the more effective management of the journey.

Petro’s case yielded results within all the identified themes, except class dynamics (see Table 6). The strongest themes within her case proved to be interpersonal relationships and practical coping skills. The identification of the strongest themes was not based on any quantitative measures, but on their contribution towards and influence on Petro’s meaning-making processes and psychological well-being. The contributions were either identified by the participant or interpreted as such by the researcher.

### 7.6.1.3 Case 3 – Suzanne: Interpreted within the identified cross-case analysis themes

Table 7

*Interpretation of Suzanne’s case within the identified cross-case themes*

<b>Theme 1</b> Goals and motivation	Suzanne’s journey was characterized by a difficult first half. Her enthusiasm was, however, a major contributing factor towards her perseverance. Even in very challenging tasks she was able to still be excited about the outcome possibilities. This fits into the theme of motivation and vision since her high levels of enthusiasm served to strengthen her motivation.
<b>Theme 2</b> Self-reflection and self-awareness	Self-awareness of destructive patterns led to an important decision for Suzanne to focus on her unique strengths.
<b>Theme 3</b> Intrapersonal dynamics	Intrapersonal development included a high level of self-acceptance reached, lower levels of anxiety, the lowering of unrealistically high self-expectations and personal identity formation.
<b>Theme 4</b> Interpersonal dynamics	It was illustrated that Suzanne set clearer boundaries with others throughout her journey and became more appreciative of the close relationships in her life.
<b>Theme 5</b> Supervision practices	Supervision served as a coping source, which Suzanne used as assurance in her process of finding her unique style.
<b>Theme 6</b> Spirituality	Spirituality as well-being domain was specifically expanded on during Suzanne’s journey. Not only did it create opportunities for social contact, it also helped Suzanne to clearly form her vision of what she believed to be her “calling” in life.
<b>Theme 7</b> Master’s class and group dynamics	At first, the class dynamics negatively influenced Suzanne’s journey in that it increased her anxiety levels due to her constant comparison processes. Later in the year, however, Suzanne formed supportive relationships with classmates, which contributed towards independence and autonomy.
<b>Theme 8</b> Practical coping strategies	Cognitive behavioural techniques (e.g., positive self-talk and daily time scheduling) discussed in class were practically applied in an attempt towards environmental mastery.

Suzanne’s case yielded results within all the identified themes. The strongest themes within this case proved to be intrapersonal development and spirituality. The identification of the strongest themes was not based on any quantitative measures, but on their contribution towards and influence on Suzanne’s meaning-making processes and psychological well-being. The contributions were either identified by the participant or interpreted as such by the researcher.

#### 7.6.1.4 Case 4 – Grace: Interpreted within the identified cross-case analysis themes

Table 8

*Interpretation of Grace’s case within the identified cross-case themes*

<b>Theme 1</b> Goals and motivation	Drawn from her career uncertainty, Grace did not present with clearly defined personal goals regarding her journey. She, however, cherished the idea of being successful and able to move on from this journey.
<b>Theme 2</b> Self-reflection and self-awareness	None/Limited
<b>Theme 3</b> Intrapersonal dynamics	On an intrapersonal level Grace reported the application benefits of being equipped with psychological theory and knowledge. Motherhood created the practical context for the application of some of these theories. Grace articulated the disappointment she felt with the personal changes she experienced, specifically that of becoming more analytic of herself, others and events.
<b>Theme 4</b> Interpersonal dynamics	Interpersonally, she described how the lack of supportive relationships (especially within her direct environment) negatively influenced her journey. She often felt lonely and isolated. The therapeutic relationship that she established with her psychotherapist was described as useful and supportive in this sense.
<b>Theme 5</b> Supervision practices	Supervision became a useful tool towards autonomy and personal growth during Grace’s journey.
<b>Theme 6</b> Spirituality	Spirituality played a major part in Grace’s meaning-making process. In this regard she found prayer to be especially valuable for providing purpose to her suffering and for fostering personal growth.
<b>Theme 7</b> Master’s class and group dynamics	Grace did not experience the same supportive environment within class, as the other participants did. On the contrary, she experienced the class members to be too competitive and skeptical of one another.
<b>Theme 8</b> Practical coping strategies	Personal psychotherapy was one of the practical coping strategies that Grace identified and utilized. It served as a supportive and warm interpersonal relationship as well as a means towards overall improved coping.

Grace’s case yielded results within all the identified themes, except within self-reflection and self-awareness (see Table 8). The strongest themes within her case proved to be spirituality and the quality of interpersonal relationships (negatively). The identification of the strongest themes was not based on any quantitative measures, but on their contribution towards and influence on Jim’s meaning-making processes and psychological well-being. The contributions were either identified by the participant or interpreted as such by the researcher.



## **7.6.2 Collective factors of positive experiences and their contribution to psychological well-being**

This section presents Step 5 of the IPA analysis and entails a general meaning structure for the psychofortigenic experiences of master's students in professional psychology programmes. The eight themes that were identified in Step 4 are further interpreted and integrated within (a) Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being domains; (b) general positive psychology theories and; (c) relevant literature regarding the context of master's students in psychology. As mentioned earlier, the nature of Ryff's model allows for the use of multiple theories from which the model was developed and based upon.

### *7.6.2.1 Goals and motivation as contributors to the creation of purpose in life and personal growth of master's students in professional psychology programmes*

Several theories have been posed in Chapters 2 and 3 which are applicable to the role of goals and motivation in the creation of *purpose* and *meaning* in general. In Chapter 4 the role of goals and motivation in the journey of becoming a psychologist was highlighted as well as the importance of finding meaning in the process.

Eudaimonic well-being, from which the construct of psychological well-being was developed, suggests that well-being is based on a life in the pursuit of meaningful goals and purpose in life (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Vittersø, 2004; Waterman, 1993). Eudaimonia definitions all involve some aspect in relation to meaning in life, prosocial growth and intrinsic motivation, and agree that well-being is associated with the perceived ability to autonomously pursue goals held to be important (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Within this study, all four participants, although on different levels of differentiation and specification, entered the year with goals, aims, objectives and/or a vision of what they wanted to achieve during their journey. These goals were identified as motivating factors that contributed towards perseverance and created a sense of meaning and overall purpose. This is explained by Ryff's (1989) formulation of *purpose in life* in that a sense of directedness and intentionality are listed as "ingredients" of purpose in life. It was also discussed that, according to Antonovsky's (1987) sense of coherence, personal goals establish a

sense of purpose, which contribute to meaningfulness and overall well-being (Steger, et al., 2008). The participants' accounts of finding meaning in their work with clients (with specific focus on Jim's case) support Russell's (1958) opinion that work is important in providing continuity of purpose in that it also prevents a sense of meaninglessness.

Authors Wissing and Van Eeden (2002) drew on the same point, namely that *purpose in life* is the awareness of goals, but added that understanding of how these goals fit together is essential to create meaning and direction. Jim, Petro and Suzanne (and Grace to a lesser extent) were able to identify this fit at different stages of their journey. The overall aim of wanting to be a psychologist, be it a personal vision, goal or viewed as a personal calling in life, provided them with the ability to endure hardships and challenges. Grace's journey is a classic example of Kashdan and McKnight's (2009) statement that the awareness of a larger mission in the background results in increased persistence and willingness to confront difficult challenges.

In Strümpfer's (2005) words, the meaning to be found is, however, a very personal affair and can only be satisfied by the individuals' direction of their life towards the specific important goal. The overall aim, being voluntary and self-motivated in all the participants, further contributed towards *purpose in life* and meaningfulness (Damon, Menon, & Bronk, 2003). As discussed in Chapter 4, the construct of finding meaning has been subdivided into "sense making" and "benefit finding" (Davis, et al., 1998). Sense making was evident in all the participants as they related finding a reason for events that occurred and integrating them into existing schemata, such as religion, self-knowledge and relationships. Benefit finding was especially evident in the cases of Jim and Suzanne, who both were able to find positive outcomes of a negative event which occurred during their respective journeys.

The self-determination theory of Deci and Ryan (2000) was often referred to in earlier chapters, as it posed the factors that influence intrinsic motivation. The three basic needs identified as the basis for self-motivation are competence, relatedness and autonomy (Compton, 2005; Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011) and are all three represented in the findings of this study. All the participants mentioned that they, at some time during the year, felt more competent after initially feeling unsure of their ability. In effect, this led to *personal growth*, as the participants became closer to

who they wanted to be, with special reference to the case of Suzanne, where finding her own style and voice was the major growth area in her journey. Another theory found to be relevant to this theme of discussion is Frederickson's (2001) broaden and build model, posing that positive emotions broaden awareness and, in effect, build towards emotional and intellectual resources. Jim's curiosity and openness, Petro's gratitude and Suzanne's enthusiasm proved to be beneficial towards their *personal growth* and to broaden their sensitivity of finding meaning in their journeys.

#### 7.6.2.2 Self-reflection and self-awareness as contributors to the *personal growth* and *autonomy* of master's students in professional psychology programmes

"I've definitely experienced a lot of personal inadequacies in master's so far because we're a small class and we share a small space every day, so I tend to compare myself a lot with my fellow colleagues. As I became extremely aware of their inadequacies I became extremely aware of my own inadequacies and my self-esteem declined. I eventually became aware of their inadequacies as well which made me feel critical. However, recently I've started to accept myself more as well as the others and it feels so right. I'm feeling less tense." [E][p.8:par: 3.1]

The importance of self-reflection manifested in the case of Jim, Petro and Suzanne. Although Grace mentioned personal changes that she became aware of (i.e., being more analytical), her level of continuous self-reflection was not as evident as with the other three participants. This self-reflection was triggered by internal factors such as personal characteristics, as well as external factors such as supervision. Self-reflection resulted in greater self-awareness, which allowed these participants to identify *personal growth* and develop strengths. This finding is congruent with research from Bennett-Levy et al. (2001) and Furr and Carroll (2003), in which personal awareness was reported as powerful in the acquisition of therapeutic skills in an academic context. The finding also reflects that knowledge is arrived at through an inductive process, leading from specific observations to the identification of general patterns (Patton, 1990). In the case of Suzanne self-reflection was especially vital in that it led to her decision to focus on finding her own style and grow to be comfortable with herself in the journey of becoming a psychologist. This concurs with Blöser et al. (2010) who stated that one has to be able to reflect on situations to decide to either distance from them or to identify with them.

On another level self-reflection not only promoted self-awareness but encouraged higher levels of *autonomy*. It was evident from the above-mentioned three cases that, once the participants identified their own strengths through self-reflection, they felt comfortable with the idea of functioning more independently in their journey. Nearly all notions of autonomy reveal the central aspect of the capacity for critical reflection (Blöser et al., 2010). The accurate perception of their own actions, motivation and feelings results from a process of self-reflection and is indicated as being important on graduate level in order to allow students to develop understanding of their competencies (Toohey, 2002). In this study it proved a buffer for self-doubt and encouraged the participants to view their growth areas in a different light. In the beginning of their journeys their weak points were perceived as personal limitations which, later, through a thorough process of self-reflection, were regarded as growth areas.

The identification of the tendency to self-reflect within these participants is regarded to be one of the most satisfying findings of this study since professional psychologists expressed their belief that self-awareness gained during training develops into a deep change in one's capacity to create meaning (Bennett-Levy et al., 2001; Neufeldt, et al., 1996). Participation within this research study further encouraged self-reflection by means of three interviews and reflective writing exercises.

“Soms is die effek daarvan [deelname aan die studie] meer langtermyn, dis hoekom ek graag in die begin, middel en einde van die jaar sou wou praat. Mens sal dan die proses begin sien. Dis nice want dan kan mens in die begin van die jaar sien in watter areas jy wil groei. Dis motivering om dit vol te hou vir die res van die jaar.”<sup>55</sup> [D][p.4:par: 1.17]

### 7.6.2.3 Intrapersonal dynamics as contributor to *personal growth and self-acceptance* of master's students in professional psychology programmes

Intrapersonal growth is one of the requirements of professional training in psychology as determined by the HPCSA (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Human, 2006). Guse (2010) also found that

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<sup>55</sup> Sometimes the effect is more long term, that is why I would have liked to talk in the beginning, the middle and the end of the year. One would then be able to see the process. It's nice because then you can see in which areas you want to grow, it is motivating to maintain it for the rest of the year.

students should be provided with opportunities to identify and enhance their psychological strengths and well-being within psychology training programmes. Furthermore, Coster and Schwebel (1998) and Rosenberg et al. (2005) highlighted the necessity of including methods of enhancing personal growth and insight into master's students in professional psychology programmes. Vivian (2009) supported this idea in stating that the continuous pursuit of self-understanding and personal growth is one of the most important concerns for any person who wants to become a competent health worker.

“Deur meer mindful te wees, is ek ’n beter vriendin, suster en dogter. Ek’s nie meer so demanding nie maar ek stel ook beter grense vir ander. Ek ken myself soveel beter. Ek hou actually nou van myself.”<sup>56</sup> [D][p.16:par: 4.3]

This aspect of personal moulding stands in contrast with other forms of professional training in which the focus is predominantly on academic and practical skills development instead of on the personal processes of becoming, and might therefore be experienced as strange and even frightening (Kottler & Swartz, 2004). This may come as a surprise to master's students in professional psychology programmes (as in the case of Grace). Radeke and Mahoney (2000) suggested that psychology students be better prepared for the impact their choice of career might have on their personal lives. However, personal growth is and should be regarded as a major positive outcome in any experience and implies, in essence, the development of strengths or the discarding of non-beneficial beliefs or actions. This reminds of the good life, according to Seligman (2002a), as the experience when signature strengths and virtues are enacted and used. Seligman (2002a) also coined the term “authentic happiness” with reference to the frequent exercise of inherent signature strengths. Personal growth and development is also frequently used in attempts to define and describe eudaimonia (Deci & Ryan, 2001).

In this study two main areas of *personal growth* can be identified. Firstly, higher levels of *self-acceptance* were depicted in the cases of Jim, Suzanne and Petro. The benefits of self-acceptance (see section 3.6.3) indicate towards the regulation of behaviour from within and the evaluation of the self according to personal standards and not according to internalized absolutes or others’

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<sup>56</sup> By being more mindful, I became a better friend, sister and daughter. I am less demanding, but I also set better boundaries for others. I know myself so much better. I actually like myself now.

perceptions (Ellis, 1996; Ryff & Singer, 2008). A lack of self-acceptance is often due to unrealistically high standards and expectations of the self (Macinnes, 2006), as evident at the beginning of the journeys of Petro and Suzanne. Grace's discomfort with becoming more analytic resulted in lower levels of self-acceptance. *Self-acceptance* was derived from Jim's desire to become "quieter" within himself, Petro's less critical stance towards herself and especially in Suzanne's healthier peer comparisons. Rogers (1959) would have described their processes as the result of a higher correlation between the actual self and the ideal self.

Secondly, professional identity formation was obvious from the interpretation of the participants' journeys and contributed towards overall personal growth. Howard et al. (2006) explained this shift as the students' need to integrate understanding of themselves in relation to being a psychologist with their overall understanding of themselves as individuals. Dahlgren et al. (2006) also investigated the transition from lay to professional helper and highlighted the necessity of the establishment of a newly integrated identity. Jim's case yielded results in this area as he became comfortable in introducing himself as a student psychologist. Petro and Suzanne both commented on their processes towards becoming more content with their role of being psychologists. Kottler and Swartz (2004) discussed the need to recognize the identity transformation of those involved in the process and stressed that training should be utilized as a transformational opportunity.

#### 7.6.2.4 Interpersonal dynamics as contributor to *positive relationships with others* and *environmental mastery* of master's students in professional psychology programmes

The findings of this study showed the interpersonal domain to be relevant within all the participants' journeys. The domain of interpersonal well-being is relevant within the formulation of positive psychology (e.g., positive individual traits as the second pillar of positive psychology; formulations of the good life and social well-being), is identified as one of the domains of psychological well-being (Ryff, 1989) and is a much discussed topic within the literature of master's students in professional psychology programmes (Truell, 2001). All the wellness models discussed in Chapter 2 include an aspect of interpersonal relationships (Ardell, 1988;

Eberst, 1984; Hettler, 1984; Myers, 2005; Seeman, 1989; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992), which give an indication of the relevance of quality relationships within optimal functioning. This domain also forms part of Maslow's (1954) self-actualized person and Rogers' (1959) fully functioning person. In addition, the third element of the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) is relatedness, posing that all people have a basic need to belong and only if this need is fulfilled, can intrinsic motivation be possible. Furthermore, the belongingness hypothesis poses that individuals have a pervasive drive to form and maintain lasting, positive and significant interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

With reference to master's students in professional psychology programmes, it has been indicated that selection criteria usually include personality traits such as well-developed interpersonal skills (Mander, 2004; Mayekiso et al., 2004). It can thus be assumed that students already possess a high-quality skill in this area when they enter these training programmes, as this domain of well-being includes a general sense of welfare of others and the ability of empathy, affection and intimacy. On a coping level seeking social support was identified as one of the strategies that psychologists readily use with reference to work-related difficulties, as social support has been found to be a moderator between work stressors and psychological dysfunction (Frese, 1999; Kramen-Kahn & Hansen, 1998; Medeiros & Prochaska, 1988; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001; Schwebel & Coster, 2001). In this regard social support proved to increase an individual's level of work satisfaction (Frese, 1999). In this study all the participants shared changes within the domain of *positive relationships with others*. Jim, Petro and Suzanne all reported how much more significant and valuable they regarded these relationships now, while Grace reported the negative effect of not feeling well supported and being lonely.

It has been discussed that social benefits gained from establishing and maintaining close relationships further include the provision of camaraderie, the creation of shared experience, direct practical aid and buffering life stressors – all of which can be useful coping mechanisms for master's students in professional psychology programmes (Lyumbomirsky et al., 2005; Myers, 1999). Again, this was illustrated by Jim, Petro and Suzanne who all communicated the benefits of friendships during their experience. Most of these friendships included an aspect of support, which contributed (as a coping mechanism) towards the psychological well-being

domain of *environmental mastery*. However, research also confirmed that master's students in professional psychology programmes can experience significant disruptions in their relationships with family and friends (Owen 1993; Truell, 2001). In this regard students reported a process of re-examining their relationships with others, as was the case with Petro and Suzanne. In Petro's case the re-examination led to the termination of a romantic relationship, as she became more independent. Findings also indicate the change in her interpersonal relationships due to higher levels of assertiveness and stronger personal boundaries.

"If there is one thing that I have learned this year, it was to think of my own needs, before trying to please others. Before this year, this statement would have sounded selfish to me, but knowing when to say no and tend to what is important for me at a specific time has lead me to a more relaxed and peaceful person." [D][p.22:par: 5.5]

Suzanne, on the other hand, reported changes in how she perceived peer relationships with classmates and of feeling less threatened by their competence.

"First of all my class. I would thank them for being supportive, offering words of affirmation and reassurance. We challenge each other, but most of all I'd thank them for their support. That unconditional acceptance helps a lot. I'm not saying it was completely wonderful, but that helps a lot. It just helps you believe in yourself more." [E][p.18:par: 5.8]

It has been indicated that students become aware of the different roles they play in the group while engaging in class activities and discussions (Lee et al., 2001). These students often see one another so frequently that it is not uncommon for close bonds to be formed (Kottler & Swartz, 2004; Rosenberg et al., 2005; Volet & Mansfield, 2006). Guse (2010) indicated that positive group experiences in training can be conducive to students' well-being. The findings of this study authenticate the major role that this type of dynamic plays within students' journeys. Jim experienced the class to have an overwhelmingly positive impact on his journey to the degree that they as class could relate their relationships with one another to therapeutic relationships. Petro established a very close relationship with one of her classmates, which also served a supportive function, and Suzanne utilized this dynamic as a trigger towards her intrapersonal growth. In Grace's case the opposite effect was portrayed in that the lack of positive class dynamics resulted in her journey being experienced as more lonely and isolated. This theme represents the psychological well-being domain of *positive relationships with others* and confirms what Ryff (1995) described as a universal need as people everywhere, and in almost all



contexts, do have the abiding need for positive connections with others. In the case of contributing towards the more effective coping with daily struggles, this theme also represents the psychological well-being domain of *environmental mastery*.

#### 7.6.2.5 Supervision practices as contributor to *autonomy* and *personal growth* of master's students in professional psychology programmes

The HPCSA requires training programmes in professional psychology to include clinical supervision (Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Human, 2006). Worthen and McNeill (1996) explained that supervision plays a central role in the acquisition of counselling skills and the formation of a professional counsellor identity. The findings of this study proved supervision to serve an essential purpose, as it was identified as one of the main, exclusively positive, contributors towards the journey of all four the master's students participating in this study. Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2001) recommended that supervisors take the developmental stage of the student into account and supervise accordingly. This proved to have been the case in this study, as the participants indicated a shift towards more *autonomy* in their supervision processes.

More specifically, all the participants referred to the role that supervisors played in their transition from uncertainty to independent, self-confident functioning. This contributed to a bigger purpose, concurring with the earlier discussion of higher levels of autonomy which cause individuals to persist, be more effective and show better physical and mental health (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The most fundamental component of good supervision experiences that was clearly evident in every case studied was the quality of the supervisory relationship. Supervisory relationships were, among others, described as “nurturing” (Jim), “safe”, (Petro), “open” (Suzanne) and “comforting” (Grace). The quality of this relationship has been indicated as crucial, and many authors (Hutt, et al., 1983; Peake et al., 2002; Worthen & McNeill, 1996) have confirmed that such a relationship must consist of warmth, acceptance, respect, understanding and trust.

The participants described their supervisors as conveying an attitude that challenged them (Jim and Suzanne), encouraged uniqueness (Jim and Suzanne), provided affirmation and validation

(Jim), provided practical help with clients (Petro and Grace), provided motivation (Grace), and encouragement to explore (Jim and Suzanne). All of these contributed towards the participants' *personal growth* as individuals. Worthen and McNeill (1996) indicated that, without a positive supervisory relationship that invites openness to learning, it is likely that learning would be minimized. In Grace's case supervision was especially beneficial in that it helped to normalize her "struggle". She described her supervision experience as extremely comforting, as her supervisor was able to pick up on personal emotional difficulties and almost served a psychotherapeutic function. It can thus be reasoned that a good supervisor should be aware of the stage in which the student is and should promote professional and personal growth in each developmental stage. In the literature Orlinsky and Rønnestad (2001) recommended that attention be paid to providing students with supervision experiences that promote growth. From the discussion of this theme, it became evident that supervision practices directly influence the psychological well-being domains of *autonomy* and *personal growth*.

#### 7.6.2.6 Spirituality as contributor to *purpose in life* and *positive relationships with others* of master's students in professional psychology programmes

In the cases of Petro, Suzanne and Grace, spirituality was identified as one of the core themes in their individual journeys. It was applicable within two settings. Firstly, it served as a very effective coping mechanism, as it created a sense of meaning during difficult times and, secondly, spiritual growth was identified as an unexpected positive outcome of their journeys. Spirituality is described within positive psychology, and many of the wellness models (Ardell, 1988; Eberst, 1984; Hettler, 1984; Sweeney & Witmer, 1991) include a spiritual dimension. Spirituality was also found to be a subdivision of the psychological well-being domain of *purpose in life*, according to Ryff (1989) (see section 3.7.3.1). The interconnectedness between spirituality and meaningfulness is further illustrated in the definition of spiritual well-being, as it has been defined as a belief in a unifying force, resulting in a positive perception of purpose in life (Adams, et al., 1997). The components of meaning and purpose in life, as described in Ryff's (1989) model of psychological well-being, include, by implication, aspects of spirituality. In addition, Pargament's (2002) definition of spirituality also captures "a search for meaning". From the above-mentioned case interpretations, it can be said that this search has been triggered

by their journey of becoming a psychologist. The above-mentioned spiritual growth was clearly beneficial to them, as prayer and a relationship with God have been associated with higher levels of well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Ferriss, 2002; Helliwell, 2007; Paloutzian & Park, 2005).

On a more practical coping level, the participation in religious activities (in the case of Suzanne and Petro) fostered new quality relationships which, once again, created social networks; thus, contributing towards Ryff's psychological domain of *positive relationships with others*. It was also within this realm that Suzanne and Petro found their purpose of becoming psychologists as they viewed it as a spiritually driven goal ("calling") for their lives. With reference to spiritual coping, Case and McMinn (2001) and Mahoney (1997) found spiritual practices to be among the most popular mechanisms in the prevention of distress for religious psychologists and to play an important role in the well-functioning of professionals. This theme was, however, not identified within Jim's case. As discussed in his case, he found meaning and purpose mainly in his work with clients. Although not openly expressed, and due to the fact that spirituality can take on many different forms (George et al., 2000; George et al., 2002), spirituality might have been interwoven in other aspects of his case such as gratitude, compassion for clients and "becoming quiet" [C][p.19:par: 4.1].

#### 7.6.2.7 The master's class group dynamics as contributor to *positive relationships with others* and *autonomy* of master's students in professional psychology programmes

All the participants mentioned their classmates and the role that they played during their journey. This theme was, however, strongly identified in the cases of Jim and Suzanne only and to a lesser degree in the case of Grace. Grace did not experience the same level of support and camaraderie within the class as these two participants. In fact, she mentioned notions of jealousy and competition, which negatively influenced the psychological well-being domain of *positive relationships with others*.

"But I also pick up that there is a competition you know if you always come to class and see the competition, so I was talking to someone who said have you noticed that if you come here on a Saturday people would ask what are you doing here, what are you up to and I even said why do I have to tell you what I am doing? It is like a competition, you mustn't do extra work." [F][p.7&8:par: 3.9]

In Petro's case a specific class member, with whom she shared an office, was identified as a source of support. Although not contributing negatively to any well-being domain, class dynamics was not identified as a strong theme that influenced her experience. Instead, she discussed the role of this one significant individual friendship in her experience. However, this theme presented strongly in the cases of Jim and Suzanne. For Jim the class environment contributed greatly towards feelings of support and safety. He compared the class relationships with therapeutic relationships and continuously expressed his gratitude towards his classmates. This concurs with the literature which indicated that, within the class setting of master's students in psychology, close bonds are formed, as students are expected to work in teams and do group assignments (Rosenberg et al., 2005; Volet & Mansfield, 2006). Jim further utilized the class dynamics to contribute positively towards the well-being domain of *positive relationships with others*. At the end of the year he could reflect on a negative relationship between him and a fellow class member and was able to learn and grow from it.

The group also contributed towards Suzanne's decision to let go of unrealistic self-expectation and to find her own voice. Being surrounded with other master's students, led to unhealthy peer comparisons and attempts to be like them. Suzanne could, however, identify this destructive tendency and started to value her uniqueness more. It can thus be said that the class dynamics served as a trigger towards *autonomy*. On another level Suzanne often mentioned how helpful and supportive the class members are. They created a safe place within which she could grow and develop as a therapist. Walker et al. (2001) mentioned that, ideally, these students should support one another by sharing material and providing encouragement, as was illustrated in the case of Suzanne. Although this theme was strongly identified within two of the four case studies only, it was found to be influential in such a way that it can be justified as an important factor that contributed towards the psychological well-being domain of *positive relationships with others* and *autonomy*.

#### 7.6.2.8 Practical coping strategies as contributor to *environmental mastery* of master's students in professional psychology programmes

This theme is included in this section not based on its representation across cases, but based on the significance of the impact of these individual coping strategies on the participants' journeys. In the cases practical coping strategies are regarded as a means towards *environmental mastery* where the environment represents all the dynamics included in their experience of being a master's student in a professional psychology programme. Fava and Ruini's (2003) conceptualization of environmental mastery as the ability to change or improve undesirable contexts, as well as Ryff's (1989) description of managing the everyday environment, fit well with what these coping strategies enabled the participants to achieve. As indicated in Chapter 4, psychologists are faced with a variety of stressors and demands (Barnett et al., 2007; Case & McMinn, 2001; Green & Hawley, 2009; Jordaan et al., 2007; O'Connor, 2001; Schwebel & Coster, 1998; Sherman & Thelen, 1998) and it has been demonstrated that effective coping can be beneficial in many ways, especially to ensure high-quality work and optimal health (Jordaan et al., 2007). In this regard Jim's ability to choose positive environments conducive to his personal growth has been identified and serves as an example of what Kramen-Kahn and Hansen (1998) reported as helpful actions, termed "positive career sustaining behaviours" (p. 132).

Petro employed daily practical activities such as exercise and healthy lifestyle routines (e.g., healthy sleeping and eating habits) to minimize the effect of the stress brought along by academic and personal demands. She could identify how these small daily activities benefitted her above her classmates. It resulted in higher levels of energy, which contributed to her overall physical and emotional well-being. Taking regular breaks, ensuring adequate rest and exercise, and healthy eating have all been identified as useful coping strategies for psychologists (Jordaan et al., 2007; Mahoney, 2007; Schwebel & Coster, 2001). Suzanne practically applied some of the cognitive behavioural techniques discussed in class which she found to be helpful during the difficult times in her journey. For her, these techniques included positive self-talk and daily time scheduling. Grace identified personal psychotherapy as one of the most effective coping strategies within her journey. It served the functions of social support and comfort. Personal psychotherapy has been identified as a useful coping mechanism for psychologists (Jordaan et

al., 2006; Jordaan et al., 2007; Norcross & Guy, 2005; Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2001) and is, for this reason, a requirement for professional training in some of the existing programmes.

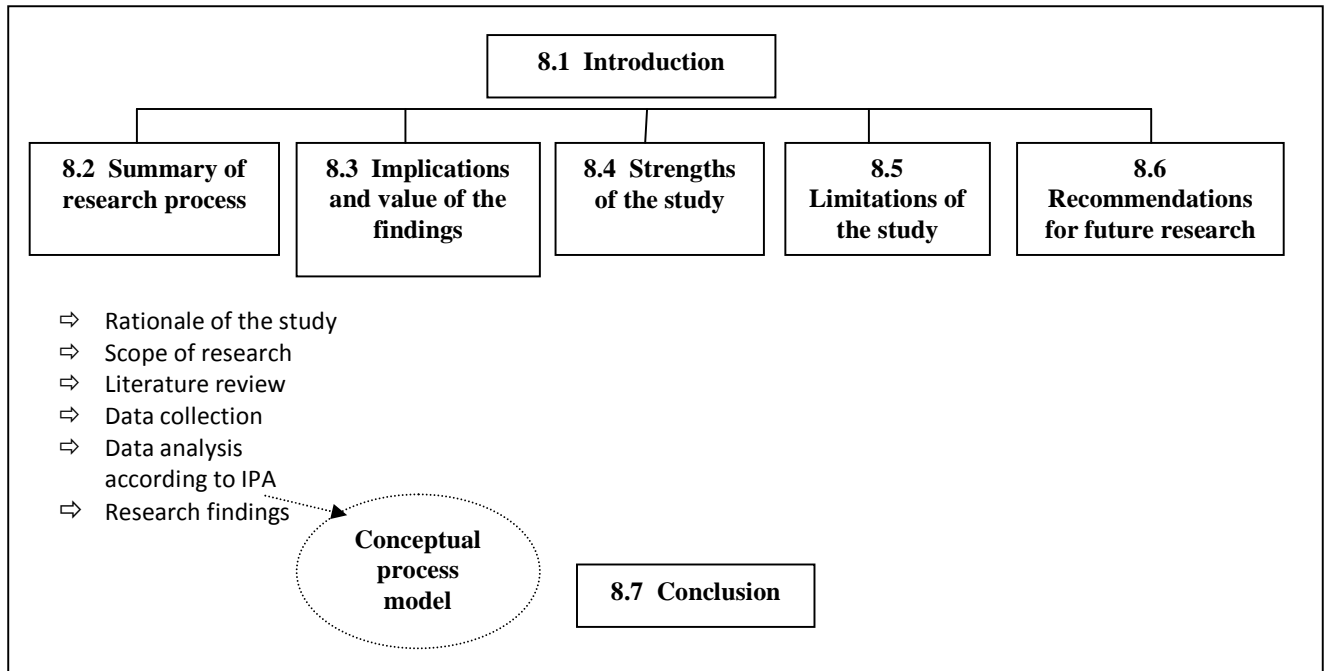
## **7.7 CONCLUSION**

The results of this phenomenological investigation provide an in-depth, detailed and intricate picture of the experience of four master's students in professional psychology programmes. Each case yielded unique components and processes related to psychological well-being. All the participants could identify psychological growth and engagement in meaning-making processes. From the cross-case analysis eight themes were identified, namely (a) motivation and goals; (b) self-reflection and self-awareness; (c) intrapersonal dynamics; (d) interpersonal dynamics; (e) supervision practices; (f) spirituality; (g) master's class group dynamics; and (h) practical coping mechanisms. These themes were discussed within the context of psychological well-being and master's degree psychology students. Collective events were drawn from these themes and resulted in eight important factors that entailed the psychofortigenic experiences of these master's students in professional psychology programmes. A general sense of growth and well-being for participants prevailed throughout most of their experiences. In reflection, participants generally mentioned the personal fulfilment they have experienced and the growth emerging from the process, in spite of the many challenges. Parallel with these challenges, students reported gains in personally applying therapeutic skills, becoming more self-accepting, acquiring the ability to connect with others, improving their self-understanding and increasing their confidence in their competence. This study is concluded in the next chapter, with specific focus on the limitations and strengths of the study, but also on recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER 8

## CONCLUSION, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Figure 19. Visual display of the outline of Chapter 8.



### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1 the question was asked as to what the psychofortigenic experiences of four master's students in professional psychology programmes are. This chapter focuses on the course of action that was taken in an attempt to answer this question. Figure 19 provides a visual display of the structure of this chapter. Firstly, the research process is reviewed, including the discussion of a conceptual process model, which emerged from the findings of this study. This review also allows for the identification of the strengths and limitations of the study, which are subsequently discussed. Finally, this chapter provides the reader with some future recommendations for further research within this field.

## **8.2 SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

### **8.2.1 Rationale of the study**

This study investigated the phenomenon of being a master's student in a professional psychology programme. The significance of this research lies, firstly, in the limited amount of research on this topic. Although the developmental journey of a psychologist is not an unknown research field, limited data are available with specific emphasis on the experiences of master's students, specifically in South Africa. Thus, despite some theoretical and empirical literature on the personal development of psychologists, the current state of this knowledge base in South Africa warranted an exploratory and rigorous investigation of the psychofortigenic experiences of master's students in psychology. Since most international research tends to focus on the negative effects of psychological training (Lee et al., 2001), this study provided an alternative psychofortigenic and phenomenological outlook on these experiences.

Secondly, because the findings of most research in this field underscore the hardships and struggles that many students endure on this journey (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Dearing et al., 2005; Holzman et al., 1996; Howard et al., 2006; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007; Stratton et al., 2007, Stryker & Burke, 2000; Truell, 2001), the researcher deemed it critical to identify and discuss the other end of the spectrum in an attempt to revisit the components of these journeys from an academic viewpoint (see training implications in section 8.3). The psychofortigenic experiences also place the negative aspects in context. Ultimately, this research also stems from the necessity to prioritize students' psychological well-being because of the ripple effect that it may have on the community they serve.

### **8.2.2 The scope of the research**

In accordance with the aim of the study, a psychofortigenic approach demarcated this research. Within this paradigm, psychological well-being as conceptualized by Ryff (1989), served as the theoretical model. Ryff's (1989) model was found to be useful, as most of the participants' psychofortigenic experiences manifested within the six domains of this framework. Apart from Ryff's model, relevant positive psychology literature as well as literature on master's students in



professional psychology training was also used in the interpretation phase to provide as much context as possible.

### **8.2.3 Literature review**

A literature review was presented in Chapters 2 and 3 to obtain a clear theoretical understanding of positive psychology, specifically in relation to psychological well-being. This review assisted the researcher to conceptualize the students' experiences in a scientific and theoretical manner. The existing literature in the field of the development of psychologists was reviewed in Chapter 4, and indicated that a number of critical incidents have lasting influences on master's students' perceptions of themselves and the profession (Howard et al., 2006). These incidents include the students' own psychological issues, which may be uncovered by learning to practice psychotherapy, excessive self-analysis, balancing student roles with professional roles, heavy workload, family responsibilities, integrating the professional identity with the self, becoming psychologically minded, and challenging peer and lecturer relationships (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Dearing et al., 2005; Holzman et al., 1996; Howard et al., 2006; Pillay & Kritzinger, 2007; Stratton et al., 2007; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Truell, 2001). On the other hand, the literature indicated that positive experiences relate mainly to client contact, supervision practices and enhanced self-awareness (Bischoff et al., 2002). The literature review therefore assisted the researcher to align the findings of this study, which either supported or stood in contrast with general themes.

### **8.2.4 Data collection**

Semi-structured interviews and reflective writings were used to gather data for this study. These two data collection methods proved to be useful and are regarded as strengths of this study (see section 8.4). Over the course of one year, the researcher conducted three interviews with each of the four participants (see interview schedule: Appendix H). The participants further submitted reflective writings in the periods between the interviews. This resulted in a thorough and in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences as master's students in professional psychology programmes. During the interviews the researcher allowed the participants to share any information related to their experiences, and probed the topics that referred to their positive

and/or growth experiences. The reflective writing provided the participants with the opportunity to express their experiences in an additional format which, in most cases, yielded rich and interpretative data.

### **8.2.5 Data analysis according to IPA**

The data that were collected were transcribed and analyzed according to IPA procedures. Although Smith and Osborne (2004) provided steps for conducting IPA (see section 5.4.2), they encouraged researchers to be flexible in their use of this method. In this study the researcher, firstly, treated each case as a unit and respected the participant as the author of the case. Themes were identified within each case and presented in Chapter 6. These cases were subjected to different levels of interpretation and then contextualized within the literature. Although various psychofortigenic perspectives were applied in the contextualization of the cases, psychological well-being as described by (Ryff, 1989) provided the overarching structure for this step. Finally, cross-case analysis was performed, from which eight collective themes were identified. Throughout the process ethical considerations were strictly adhered to.

### **8.2.6 Research findings**

The researcher found that many aspects, which were identified from international research as being influential in the personal development of psychology students (Dahlgren et al., 2006; Sheikh et al., 2007; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992b; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987), were equally pertinent in the current cases. As mentioned above, the research findings yielded eight collective themes that were associated with the psychological well-being of four master's students in professional psychology programmes. The first refers to the personal goals and motivation that created purpose and meaning for these students. The findings suggested that specific goals and high motivation levels with regard to becoming a psychologist contributed to personal growth and helped the students to persevere through the hardships and create a strong sense of meaning. Secondly, self-reflection as a trigger for self-awareness was found to be a powerful element that can contribute to personal growth and autonomy during this journey. The findings further indicated that personal growth is a positive outcome of the experience, as all of the participants mentioned aspects in which they grew as a person. Intrapersonal dynamics also aided students

towards more self-acceptance. The study showed that students experienced interpersonal growth as a positive outcome of the journey and that positive relationships with others were found to be a useful coping mechanism throughout the year; thus, contributing to the psychological well-being domain of environmental mastery.

Another important finding, which supports the literature discussed in section 4.6.1, indicated that supervision practices positively influenced the psychological well-being domain of autonomy and were also proven to contribute towards personal growth. Furthermore, spiritual deepening resulted from the experience of being a master's student in psychology, as three of the four participants strongly commented on how their spirituality aligned with their goals of becoming a psychologist (therefore creating purpose). Spirituality was employed as an effective coping mechanism in that it stimulated positive relationships with others through participation in religious activities. The group dynamics of the master's class and the relationships with class colleagues were found to be crucial factors that positively contributed to the participants' psychological well-being, specifically within the domain of autonomy and positive interpersonal relationships. Lastly, the findings indicated that the participants identified and applied individual coping strategies throughout their journey, which contributed to the domain of environmental mastery. These coping strategies include choosing conducive environments and contexts for personal growth, healthy lifestyle practices, individual psychotherapy and time management. Overall, the important finding was that, while the experience of becoming a psychologist is known to be a long and difficult journey, it can also be rewarding and holds the potential to enhance psychological well-being.

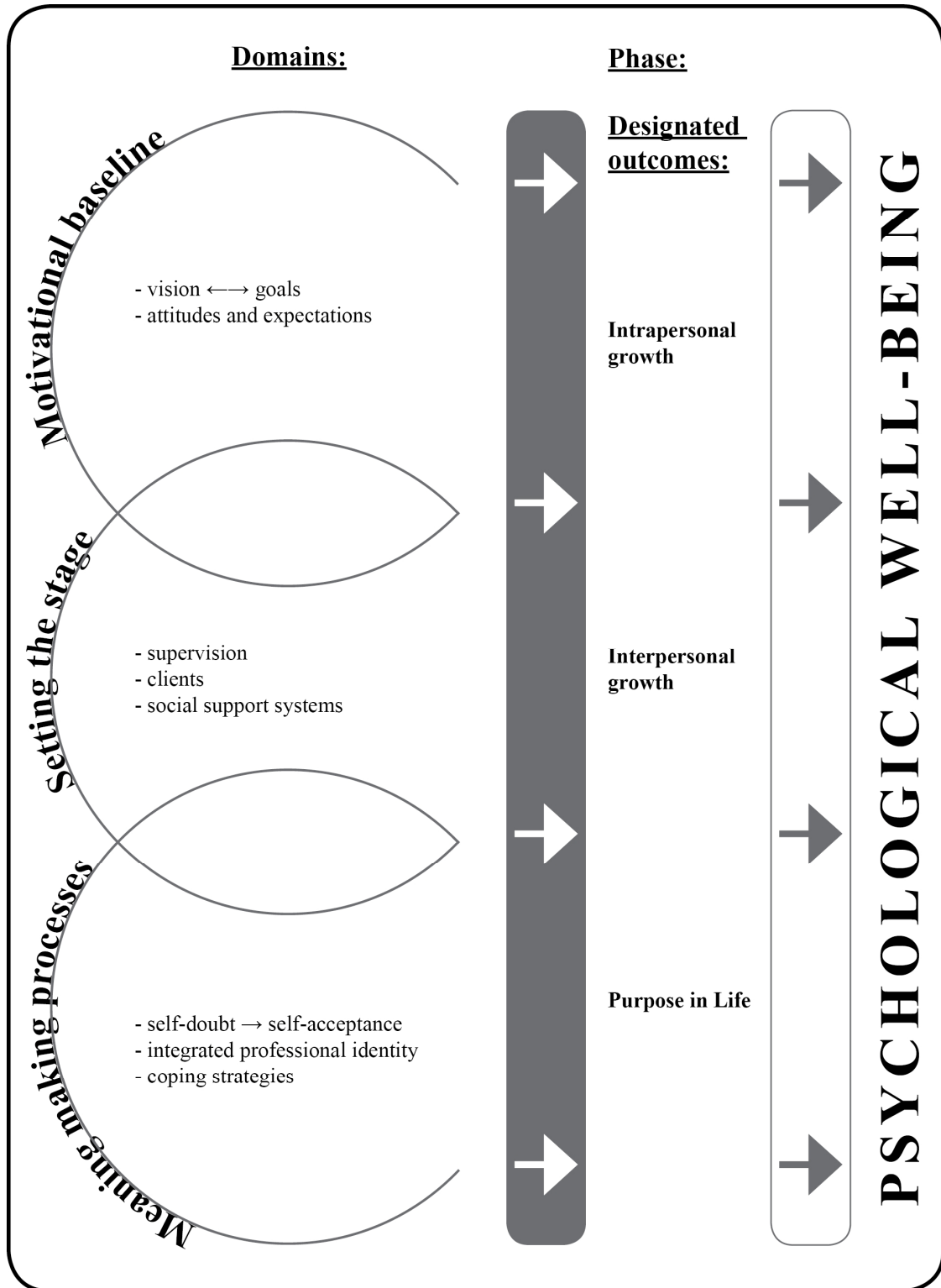
#### 8.2.6.1 The psychofortigenic experiences and meaning-making processes of four master's students in professional psychology programmes: A conceptual process model

Although this study did not aim to develop a specific conceptual or process model, the research findings resulted in a general meaning structure of the psychofortigenic experiences of four master's students in professional psychology programmes. The researcher synthesized all of the meaning units (themes) discussed in 7.6.2 into a consistent structure of the participants' experiences of being master's students in professional psychology programmes. This structure is presented as a conceptual process model and was derived from the cross-case analysis in order to

illustrate and explain the way in which these students found personal meaning in their experiences. The model is regarded as a conceptual process model due to the non-linear, cycle-oriented way in which it is presented as well as its process-oriented view. A process model can be defined as a model in which different processes or cycles are clustered to indicate a specific outcome or end result (Schrepfer, Wolf, Mendling, & Reijers, 2009). This conceptual process model describes the interconnectedness between, and impact of, the attitudes and expectations with which the participants entered the journey, the general dynamics involved in a professional psychology programme, and the individual meaning-making processes on the participants' levels of psychological well-being.

This informal model should be viewed as an additional contribution of this study which can be used as a potential baseline for further studies. However, the researcher stresses that, due to the phenomenological nature of this study, this model does not generalize findings to a bigger population or claim universal truths. It is therefore recommended that this model be applied for possible relevance in follow-up studies. In working with the data at an interpretative level, the question arose as to whether there are any central factors that should preferably be present for psychofortigenic experiences to occur within the journey of a master's student in a professional psychology programme. The researcher aimed to answer this question on the basis of the cross-case analysis and her attempt resulted in the general meaning structure presented in the form of a conceptual process model. All of the participants' psychofortigenic experiences were viewed conceptually as involving three connected domains and one phase that have an impact on psychological well-being. The three domains are all interconnected and culminate in a phase of specific designated outcomes, which contribute towards psychological well-being. The first domain is the *motivational baseline* from which the psychofortigenic experiences emerged. *Setting the stage* refers to the context in which the psychofortigenic experiences emerged. The third domain is labelled *the meaning-making processes* and refers to the participants' attempts to make sense of their journey. The phase, *designated outcomes*, pertains to the manifested effects of these three domains in relation to psychological well-being. These three domains and one phase are discussed below.

Figure 20. Conceptual process model of the psychofortigenic experiences of four master's students in professional psychology programmes.



#### 8.2.6.1.1 Motivational baseline

The first factors that became evident in answering the question posed in 8.2.6.1 manifested in a motivational realm. The *motivational baseline* comprises overall general attitudes, expectations, goals and visions that the participants from this study held and possessed when they entered this journey. These attitudes were mainly formed based on their personal *goals* and the larger *vision* that they embraced for this journey. It was discussed that *goals* are powerful mechanisms in perseverance and are beneficial towards any meaning-making process (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Wissing & Van Eeden, 2002). The belief that becoming a psychologist lies within a greater personal *vision* for life benefitted the participants with regard to purpose, meaningfulness and personal growth. If the motivational baseline were to include specific, well-motivated, realistic and practical goals (both personally and professionally) towards this greater vision, it would contribute to the enhancement of psychological well-being to an even greater extent. The cognitive evaluation theory concurs by stating that intrinsic motivation is found to be much higher in cases where the goal is freely chosen and forms part of a bigger personal vision in life (Deci & Ryan, 2001). Therefore, if a lifelong dream is realized through this experience, openness towards personal growth and intrinsic motivational levels increases. Setting personal goals and being open to experiences can also result from specific *expectations* and *attitudes* held when entering an experience.

An attitude of openness and willingness to self-reflect were identified as being a part of the motivational baseline. An attitude of wanting to learn and being curious not only stimulated openness to experience, but also towards growth. Self-reflection was found to have a major positive effect on the experience of being a master's student in a professional psychology programme (Furr & Carroll, 2003; Hill et al., 2007; Stratton et al., 2007). As indicated in the existential theories, life only becomes meaningful through self-reflection and self-awareness, resulting in personal growth (Frankl, 1959). Ultimately, self-awareness was either directly or indirectly linked with all the areas of psychological well-being, but with special reference to purpose in life, self-acceptance and personal growth. All of the participants displayed a sense of gratitude and appreciation for the opportunity that this experience granted them. In some cases it was more overtly discussed and for others it manifested within other themes. Being thankful and

appreciative did trigger openness towards psychofortigenic experiences and, ultimately, influenced levels of psychological well-being, since positive emotions broaden and build personal resources and capacity (Frederickson, 1998). Expectations of a positive experience, often visible from one's goal and efforts in life, provide the baseline for hard work and perseverance (Deci & Ryan, 1995), which was, once again, found to be crucial in this journey.

#### 8.2.6.1.2 Setting the stage

The second factor regarding psychofortigenic experiences of master's students in professional psychology programmes, which also contributed towards the phase of designated outcomes, refers to the external dynamics applicable in the four cases in the present study. This domain is referred to as *setting the stage*. Individually, a variety of contextual factors had a positive influence on the participants' journeys, as displayed in the individual case interpretations. These factors ranged from financial situations to unique roles such as motherhood. Although the individual contexts shaped the journeys differently, three external factors were found to set the stage for the psychofortigenic experiences of master's students in professional psychology programmes. These factors are discussed below.

*Supervision* was identified as the first of the major contributors towards psychological well-being in the journeys of all four the participants. It was mostly effective in the areas of personal growth and autonomy. This finding concurs with the literature on supervision practices as discussed in sections 4.6.1 and 7.6.2.5. The interplay between supervision, clients and support systems forms the basis of the current section. Individual aspects of supervisors were mentioned throughout, although the most value was to be found in the process of supervision. From the meaning-making processes of the participants, it became evident that supervision practices progressively led them towards greater autonomy within professional functions while providing the safety net for experimentation and the platform to discuss problems. Supervision was, however, beneficial on both a professional and personal level and, in effect, contributed towards psychological well-being. More specifically, personal strengths and weaknesses were identified in supervision, which cultivated personal growth.

Experiences with *clients* were identified as the second external factor that influenced a variety of psychological well-being areas of the participants. Specific aspects of clients were incorporated

in their own meaning-making processes, especially in the domain of identifying and even learning from clients' strengths. On another level clients provided the opportunity for the participants to formulate a professional identity and identify their own professional strengths and weaknesses. It can thus be argued that, without these experiences with clients, the participants would have had little on which to base their self-awareness. In the cases where becoming a psychologist formed a part of a purpose in life, clients indirectly enabled the participants to work towards this domain of psychological well-being and to finally experience the anticipated role of being a psychologist. Thus, clients served a major function in the participants' journeys. The psychotherapeutic process also allowed for introspection and reflection opportunities.

*Support systems*, be it friends, family, partners, or academic staff, were identified as the third group of influential external factors. Where a lack of social support was experienced, the influence on overall psychological well-being was just as evident. The different roles of social support providers determined which domain of psychological well-being was affected. In most cases it was linked to the domain of quality relationships with others, which was discussed as being pivotal in psychological well-being and identified as one of the best buffers against stressors, both in this study and in the literature (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005; Mikulincer & Florian, 2001; Myers, 1999). The theme of classmates emerged so strongly within two cases that it warrants specific mention. The dynamics within the group of people placed together on this journey was, as described in the literature (Coster & Schwebel, 1998; Volet & Mansfield, 2006), found to be extremely significant. In this study the dynamics was described as supportive, healthy, valuable and essential for personal growth. It led to the creation of shared meaning and provided the journey with a sense of camaraderie, which was found to benefit the psychological well-being area of quality ties with others. With regards to interpersonal relationships, a general improvement in this area was noted, including the establishment of healthy personal boundaries and new and meaningful friendships, the break-off of unhealthy relationships, as well as the development of useful interpersonal skills.



### 8.2.6.1.3 Meaning-making processes

The components discussed as a part of the motivational baseline, combined with the factors from setting the stage, resulted in the participants' meaning-making processes of their journeys. Challenges experienced in this journey inevitably demanded some sense of benefit finding and meaning making from these participants. Each individual's meaning-making process differed, although some points of convergence can be drawn. To fully grasp these processes, it is necessary to revisit the main challenges experienced by the participants in their journey as master's students in professional psychology programmes. Four main topics of challenge were found across cases.

Firstly, it became evident that all the participants, at some point during their journey, questioned their ability, which manifested in *self-doubt* and resulted in their frame of reference suddenly being challenged. This self-doubt was caused mostly by unrealistic self-expectations, skewed ideas of being the perfect therapist and peer comparisons. Meaning was to be found within these challenges, since they imposed, yet again, processes of self-reflection and re-evaluation. The findings of the study also indicated that spirituality played a major role in self-acceptance in this journey. Progress towards self-acceptance was accompanied by a general sense of relief and freedom to function more authentically and independently. Once the participants felt more comfortable with their own limitations they were free to experiment and act spontaneously.

Secondly, it became clear that students were challenged by the *integration of a professional psychologist identity* and the true authentic self. This challenge manifested in uneasiness regarding boundaries with the self and with others, analysis of random situations and ethical aspects with clients. In most cases their motivational baseline favoured this transition, since the required integration formed part of a greater personal vision of becoming a psychologist. The purposefulness of this transition thus brought meaning to the struggles because the students could see how they fit into their greater vision of becoming psychologists.

The third challenge refers to daily practical hassles such as workload, research, sleeping and eating habits, tiredness and time constraints. New *coping strategies* were developed in an attempt to achieve environmental mastery. An intrapersonal process of the identification of stressors and

effective management approaches was a constant factor in the participants' journeys. Reflectively, these processes can be regarded as meaningful, as it increased self-awareness and empowered the participants with lifelong tools. In the end the effective management of daily demands had a positive impact on psychological well-being, with specific focus on the domain of environmental mastery. Within the domain of meaning making the following two questions arose: How did these participants understand and integrate this variety of interpersonal processes, shifts, transitions and development? How did they make sense of their attempts to find meaning in this journey? These questions will be best answered once the participants stand in a more reflective position towards their master's year in a professional psychology programme. Revisiting their comments allowed for a preliminary peak of the answer.

"And I think it's always going to be a process of I am becoming. I don't think I am ever going to reach a process where I say I am this as a therapist, I think that is impossible. It should be impossible." [Jim] [C][p.22:par: 5.15]

"That was amazing to see my growth, to acknowledge my growth." [Jim] [C][p.23:par: 5.19]

"Die jaar het vir my gewys dit is die loopbaan wat ek moet volg en ek vat my loopbaan meer ernstig op nou. En dis 'n groot stuk betekenis. En om my te help om te dink wat wil ek hê en waarnatoe is ek op pad."<sup>57</sup> [Petro] [D][p.20:par: 4.24]

"Looking back I'd say that this year had been a bit of a wake up call to reality." [Suzanne] [E][p.23:par: 6.1]

"Through the course I've learned or discovered my competence and strength." [Grace] [F][p.16:par: 6.4]

From the researcher's viewpoint the outcome of these processes are all strongly related to psychological well-being, which is discussed in the next section. The researcher experienced the positive changes firsthand as she interviewed the participants at different points of their journeys and found the most visible change to be a sense of calmness and comfort within themselves.

#### 8.2.6.1.4 Designated outcomes: The bridge towards psychological well-being

This section presents an integrated view of the participants' understanding of the outcomes of their journey, as well as the researcher's subjective account of the designated effects. Three domains of psychological well-being were found to be most affected by the experience of being

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<sup>57</sup> This year showed me that this is the career that I must follow and I take my career more serious now. And this has great meaning. And to help me to think what I want and where I am going.

a master's student in a professional psychology programme. The designated outcomes are viewed as a phase instead of a domain since they are seen as a stage of development that forms a "bridge" between the domains and psychological well-being. Psychological well-being forms the basis of this discussion.

*Intrapersonal growth* was not only identified and discussed from the participants' viewpoint, but was also observable from the researcher's viewpoint. The content of participants' interviews and writings progressively shifted from academic-related performances, expressed worries and anxiety-provoking topics, to increased self-awareness and an overall sense of acceptance. The researcher observed the constructive, instead of destructive, application of self-analysis in the participants' lives. In this regard participants valued these processes in a sense, which facilitated both personal growth and self-acceptance.

Based on the results of the study, a shift within the *quality of interpersonal relationships* proved to be a given outcome of these master's students. The nature of these changes differed between the participants, but was mostly a positive experience from their frames of reference; thus, an indication towards interpersonal growth. These changes pertained to the appreciation of others, the identification of support within these relationships, quality time spent with significant others and the establishment of healthy interpersonal boundaries. From the cases investigated, the increased quality of interpersonal relationships was much more visible than the isolated evidence of the opposite.

As discussed in different contexts in this study, *purpose in life* was rejuvenated in the participants. Participants who could clearly visualize this journey within a bigger purpose or personal mission had a solid internal buffer against daily stressors. The researcher observed this in the passion with which the participants spoke about their future in the discipline of psychology – although not with the same naivety and unrealistic expectations as in the beginning of the journey. This stronger sense of purpose was further closely related to finding more spiritual meaning in their lives. A sound sense of purpose facilitated their overall meaning-making processes, as it shifted their focus away from their daily struggles.

### 8.3 IMPLICATIONS AND VALUE OF THE FINDINGS

The value of this study lies in it being a thorough investigation into the journey of four master's students, the implications of which can be described on three levels. The first level refers to knowledge in the discipline of psychology, with specific focus on the personal development of master's students. Although theories of supervision and counsellor development have incorporated a developmental perspective (Loganbill, Hardy, & Delworth, 1982; Skovholt & Rønnestad, 1992a; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987), there has been minimal differentiation between novice trainees in the first year of master's training and trainees with more experience (i.e., second year of master's training through internship). The findings of the current study fills the research gap that has been identified and can fit into current theories of counsellor development. This contributes to the existing knowledge base, but with the additional focus on master's students. The study not only concurs with the findings of relevant literature, but also contributes to greater insight into the positive end of the spectrum, and directs attention to a possible psychofortigenic framework of development.

The second level of implication pertain to the practical implications for *training*, both for lecturers and students. Raising awareness of the experiences of students can give lecturers and course coordinators an increased sense of the critical incidents that have an impact on students' development, either positively or negatively. Although training programmes aim to provide students with critical content and practicum opportunities, it may also be helpful to share information about what students might experience in their early training. For example, a course designed for master's students might include content on counselling theory and case conceptualization, as well as prominent critical issues for novice psychologists, such as competence and professional identity. Regular discussion about students' experiences could facilitate awareness of the impact of these experiences on the training and psychotherapy process, ultimately helping students to become better equipped to manage and benefit from their journeys. This study illustrated that there are indeed a number of forums where these findings can be presented, for example, in supervision, in academic planning sessions and among the students. Perhaps the ideal situation would be for a training programme to include a component

entitled “becoming a psychologist” or similar. This component could include education on the stressors involved in becoming a psychologist and on the necessity of reflecting on personal growth and other positive experiences. To a lesser extent, coping strategies for master’s students in professional psychology can be drawn from the findings of this study.

The third level of implications is that of the *psychological well-being of master’s students* in professional psychology programmes. This study has highlighted the protective factors involved in being a master’s student in psychology, namely constant self-reflection, supervision practices, specific coping mechanisms and support resources. Students can use these coping mechanisms to understand and maximize the protective factors in this journey. Furthermore, the information provided by this study is useful in creating a deeper awareness of how to optimize the experience and enhance psychological well-being. Awareness of both the stressors and the positive experiences may serve as reassurance and can validate thoughts, feelings and behaviours that coincide with the students’ training experiences. Reaching this awareness and being able to perform this validation may, together with the realization that the process of training itself can facilitate meaningful growth, bring about turning points in their professional development. Although a master’s programme in professional psychology is commonly recognized as a stressful experience, this research provides preliminary evidence of students’ personal growth, which may present a “new” approach to this experience. The understanding gained from this research can thus provide new input into ideas and theory, practical considerations for professional psychology programmes as well as another framework of thinking for master’s students planning to enter this journey.

#### **8.4 STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY**

Several strengths of this study can be identified. The choice of a phenomenological approach was found to be suitable as it allowed the researcher to gain the in-depth information desired and to identify the meaning-making processes of the participants. As this approach is interested in the lived world of the participant, it was most appropriate to apply in exploring the experience of being a master’s student in professional psychology. The combination of semi-structured interviews and participants’ reflective writings as data collection methods further strengthened

the study as they created opportunities for additional contact times during the year and for more comprehensive data to emerge. The flexible nature of the interviews, combined with the reflective writings, allowed for spontaneous information to come to the fore. Although topics of discussion were raised, participants were not restricted to specific areas.

Another strength of the study is the fact that the participants were selected from four different universities. In this way a more generalized view of the issue could be obtained and the possibility of presenting students' experiences of one specific training programme was counteracted. The researcher assumed that, should the participants have been involved in the same department as the researcher, they would not have had the frankness to share their frustrations and discontent with lecturers, supervisors and class colleagues. The longitudinal nature of the study is also identified as a strength. The fact that students were interviewed at the beginning, middle and end of the academic year, together with their reflective written accounts in between, allowed the researcher to obtain a continuous image of their journeys. This contributed towards gaining a more realistic picture of their experiences as opposed to the picture that a once-off investigation would have provided. The use of IPA strengthened this study, as IPA is known for its accessibility, flexibility and applicability within unexplored experiences (Larkin et al., 2006). IPA is described as "powerful" (p. 103) in exploring, understanding and communicating the experiences and viewpoints offered by participants (Larkin et al., 2006).

Lastly, the fact that the researcher has personal experience of the journey is regarded to be another strength of the study since she entered the process with understanding of most concepts and terminology used by the participants. It also strengthened the data interpretation as she could personally relate to aspects of the participants' journeys. Thorough reflexivity on the part of the researcher counteracted the risk of becoming too familiar with the participants and projecting her own ideas onto the data. The conceptual process model based on the findings and posed in this chapter should not be viewed primarily as part of the data analysis but only as a secondary spinoff of the study.

## **8.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

The researcher acknowledges that there are limitations inherent to the study's scope, methodological aspects and practical realities which need to be discussed. The small sample size used in this study limits the generalizability of its findings. The nature of this study, however, was exploratory as it aimed to gain deeper understanding of the psychofortigenic experiences of master's students in professional psychology. The size of the participant group was deliberately kept small to obtain in-depth information and to focus on quality information instead of quantity. Because of this limitation the findings of this study can be described as indications only. Consequently, the conceptual process model posed in section 8.2.6.1 is only presented as a conceptual meaning structure and is, at this stage, not empirically validated and should be treated as such.

Given the nearly all-female sample, male and female master's students may have different kinds of psychofortigenic experiences. However, the current study cannot accurately draw this conclusion. In addition, even though a strength of the study was its inclusion of students from various psychology programmes, it was not possible to rigorously compare the gender group differences across their experiences. Although the researcher does not claim that the final outcomes of this study can be generalized for all master's students in professional psychology programmes, the findings do have the potential to be useful in further research.

This research focused specifically on the students' voices regarding their psychofortigenic experiences and did not capture the independent voices of their significant others or supervisors. This limitation was partly overcome by including questions in interviews which probed the students to comment on how they think other role players experience their personal growth. The researcher, however, acknowledges that even deeper understanding would have been gained if these additional role players were involved in the research. With an expanded scope, such as the inclusion of pre-graduate training or the internship year, a broader and more longitudinal approach would have been possible. With regard to this limitation it is once again stressed that it was not the aim of the study to provide a full developmental picture, but only to explore and

describe the psychofortigenic experiences of first-year master's students in professional psychology programmes.

Although constantly aware of this limitation and asking students to provide the full experience, the psychofortigenic nature of the study may have skewed their desire to select information that fit the overall scope of the study. The more negative views were, however, not avoided but acknowledged and incorporated in the case study accounts, where relevant. Care was taken to not over-interpret positive experiences and under-interpret negative experiences. Although the researcher remained constantly aware of this possible limitation, it was a fortunate occurrence that most of the participants' psychofortigenic experiences were embedded in, closely related to, or resulted from their hardships and struggles. This limitation could also apply to participants' reflective writings, as they were asked to reflect on specific topics only, which may have narrowed their reflection on all incidents critical to their growth. It must, however, be mentioned that the topics presented to them were kept as broad and open as possible (see appendix H).

## **8.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the above-mentioned limitations of this study, several recommendations can be made. Future research in this field could incorporate the independent voices of the significant role players (e.g., spouses, romantic partners, friends and family members) in order to strengthen the data. In addition, as the participants in this study gave voice to the vital role of supervision practices, future research could explore these practices in more detail, which would provide insight from the supervisor's perspective and focus on how these psychofortigenic experiences influence the nature of the supervisory relationship, and vice versa.

To make the findings more generalizable, a bigger sample size is recommended. A bigger sample size can also be used to informally test the relevance of the conceptual process model which was derived from this study. The other area of potential research could be the expansion of the scope to include the concepts of personal growth and development as they are experienced during the internship year in order to move closer to generating a developmental model. It is the researcher's opinion that this idea of including a personal developmental component in training



is currently under-utilized and the current research findings highlight the importance of such a component in formal training. A longitudinal approach from a psychofortigenic perspective would allow further knowledge of the psychological well-being not only of master's students, but also of registered psychologists. This can be achieved by keeping the participants involved in the research process and having continuous meetings with the participants, as they continue to reflect on their narratives of becoming (and being) a psychologist. Previous empirical research has identified professional development, competency, personal issues, self-awareness, and supervisory support and respect as critical incidents within the journey of becoming a psychologist. Qualitative studies, in particular, have also identified themes pertaining to peer interactions, graduate programme concerns, personal life stress, client contact and supervision in general. Although the findings of this study support some of these themes (e.g., peer interactions, supervision and role identity), the emergence of a relatively new theme (i.e., spiritual growth) suggests that this is a potentially fruitful area of continued exploration. Another parallel area of research would be that of current notions in the selection procedures of master's students in professional psychology in South Africa. There are also still areas on selection procedures to be explored and because of the importance of selecting suitable students for the profession this area is highlighted as a priority. Not only would this be useful in improving selection procedures, but also in considering the important role that these students may later play in serving the larger South African community.

There are, however, always new research questions to explore, with a plethora of options. For example, does the type of training programme (e.g., counselling, clinical, educational psychology) have an impact on the types of psychofortigenic experiences of master's students? What specific life events lead to the psychofortigenic experiences during this journey? What specific personality characteristics of master's students contribute to the particular significance of that incident? Are students more likely to have positive experiences throughout their careers if they had them as students? Do supervisors and lecturers observe the same types of psychofortigenic experiences throughout the training of these students? To enhance the profession of psychology in South Africa, there is an identified need for more research on these students' personal journeys and several angles branch out from the current study, from which future research can follow.

## **8.7 CONCLUSION**

In light of the above conclusions of the research findings, including the literature review, it is clear that this study contributed to filling the gap in the research on the topic of the psychological well-being of psychology students. The researcher is of the opinion that, even with the limitations of the study, the implications and value of the study will, hopefully, reach far beyond the mere documentation thereof. The study was an extensive and enriching exercise, and the hope is expressed that the outcome will be useful in, and beneficial to, the training of master's students in professional psychology. The researcher would further like to see future research building upon these findings in order to optimize master's students psychological well-being and also, although indirectly, benefit the clients of psychologists who have been trained in South Africa.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **PRE- AND POST-REFLECTION: THE RESEARCHER**

In this appendix I provide a pre- and post-reflection on myself as the researcher, contextualizing my relationship with this research prior to, and after, the completion of the study.

### **Pre-reflection as a researcher**

With regard to my previous research experience, I have conducted a variety of qualitative studies. As part of my master's degree I explored the effect of audio-psycho-phonology (the Tomatis method) on the social intelligence of a 13-year-old boy diagnosed with Asperger's disorder. Other projects included the evaluation of the first-year orientation programme of the University of the Free State; an investigation of the racial dynamics at Hopetown High School; risk and resilience among adolescents in the Free State; and stress and burnout among third- and fourth-year physiotherapy students at the University of the Free State. Throughout all of these studies my preference for qualitative research came to the fore and I experienced how the different steps of a research journey guide the overall outcome while remaining flexible and open during the process. I further learned the importance of presenting data in a way that it is grounded in the participants' voices. This contributed to my interest in IPA whereby a theoretical framework may be followed but not necessarily used to pre-determine the structure of the study. Although being comfortable with the research process, a doctoral study personally challenged my evaluation of myself as researcher.

### **Pre-reflection as a person**

It is important to reflect on myself as ex master's student, psychologist and lecturer, since I realized that I am an active participant in the dynamics of the research process. This kind of reflexivity will allow me to understand what the topic means to me personally, and how this may affect the way in which I conduct the interviews and data analysis. As a master's student in clinical psychology (2002) I became cognizant of personal developmental processes. At the time I was curious about the triggers for these growth processes and I closely observed my classmates. This sparked my interest in whether or not others experience the journey of becoming a psychologist as pleasing and intense as I did. I became aware of personal frustration when I did not observe the same response from others in the journey. My personal awareness of growth

centred mainly on the integration of my professional identity. I realized that this strengthened my view of myself as a psychologist which, in retrospect, had a lasting positive effect on my work-related self-esteem.

Some years later I found myself in the position of a psychology lecturer and have, since then, speculated about the personal effect of psychology training on my students. Where relevant, I included reflection questions in psychology courses and was always astonished with the outcome. Interestingly, the more curious I became, the more students shared their experiences with me, providing the foundation from which my readings started. From students' accounts and from the literature, I recognized that psychology training stretches far beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge. As a clinical supervisor for master's students in psychology, the topic gained more depth and substance in my mind. The dynamics of working with clients and the practical application of psychological theories are important additional factors that play a role within these specific population groups. As an "outsider" I experienced students' personal growth as they became more comfortable with their roles as student psychologists. Furthermore, I observed that most of these growth processes flowed from the difficulties and personal challenges which they experienced.

I acknowledge that my experience of being a master's student in psychology and being a supervisor of master's students jointly influenced this research study. Areas of heightened awareness are identified as (a) personal expectations that I cherish for the participants; (b) the projection of my own experience as a master's student in psychology on the participants; (c) over-interpreting positive experiences; and (d) the desire to contribute to the pleasantness of the journey/their well-being. In this regard I had to strongly keep in mind that these students are in different programmes, enter the journey with their own set of personality characteristics and attitudes, and are most probably exposed to some other, new components than those to which I was. Another area of awareness is that of being in the role of lecturer and how that may affect the researcher/participant relationship. For this reason I decided to deliberately refrain from any topic that may be regarded as performance or evaluation related.

Revisiting specific selected memories and re-telling them, assisted me to create enhanced understanding of myself but, more importantly, of my position in relation to this research. It was vital for me to be aware of any preconceptions or expectations, which can be conquered through awareness and understanding.

### **Post-reflection as a researcher**

The process of this research study has been a very positive experience. It enhanced my research skills and I gained knowledge that I foresee to be beneficial to me in future. I especially became aware of my personal opinions regarding positivistic paradigms, and my preference for qualitative research was confirmed. In addition, I learned firsthand about the multifaceted aspects associated with phenomenological research as I interviewed the participants and constantly reflected upon my own experience of, and influence on, this research. I found doing transcriptions and analysis on my own to be valuable in becoming as familiar as possible with the data. I became highly aware of how easily a pre-determined theoretical framework can contaminate the data. My personal experiences also brought the importance of reflexivity to the fore. I discovered that meaning is constructed through interaction and subjective interpretation in a much more powerful way than through personal intention. Constant self-reflection was found to be valuable in that it brought awareness of my influence on the co-creation of the participants' realities, since the joint understanding of the telling and reading of the case studies was crucial. Although ethics was prioritized already from the planning phase of this study, I again learned about the significance of research ethics in all spheres of research. This research study further created a vital link between me as a researcher and me as a lecturer. I learned about the boundary that separates these roles, but also how these roles are alike.

On a personal level, two aspects of this research stand out. In the first place, the interaction with the participants should be mentioned. This interaction did not only serve the purpose of data collection, but also helped me to improve my listening skills, to further spark my curiosity and to enhance a non-judgmental stance. The willingness and enthusiasm of all eight participants who took part in the data collection phase surprised me. In the second place, the creation of meaning

and knowledge construction, which may prove to have future continuity, was experienced as a personal reward after the completion of the study.

### **Post-reflection as a person**

On a personal level, I experienced this research study to be beneficial. Not only did I learn more about myself in the researcher role, but I also took the opportunity to reflect upon my personal growth during the process. It further triggered the revisit of myself as master's student, which forced me to consider my personal and professional development since the completion of my degree.

My appreciation of the unique qualities within people increased, since I deliberately refrained from specific expectations or outcomes of the study. By doing so I felt less pressurized to produce a specific type of research document and I enjoyed the freedom of allowing data to present freely. I also became appreciative of my openness towards experiences and my high level of curiosity, since I experienced how these qualities positively contributed to this study.

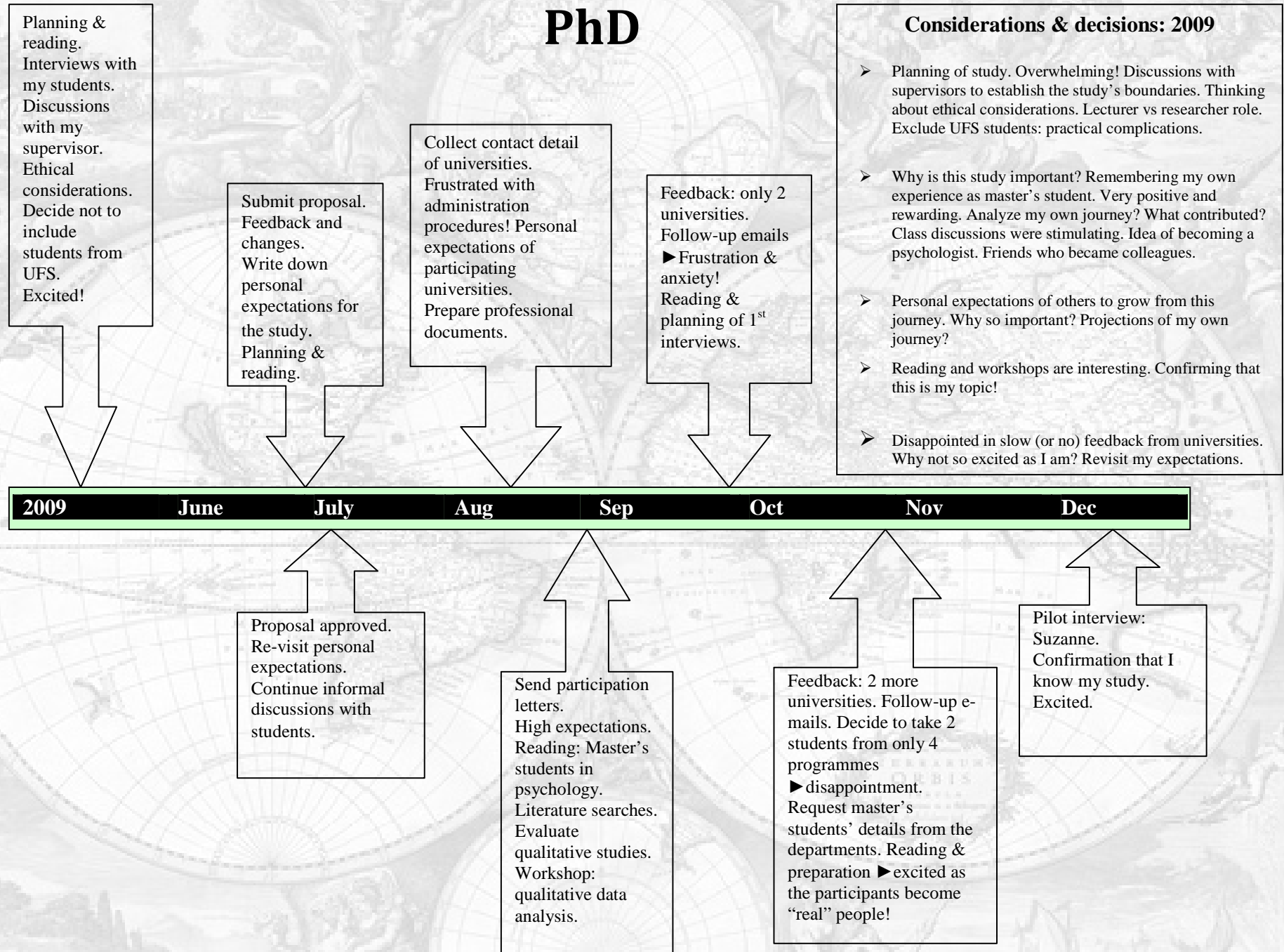
My perception of the personal growth of psychology students changed from being simplistic to acknowledging all the different factors and dynamics that play a part in this process. In essence, I experienced that answers create more questions, as I am already curious about related aspects flowing from the results of this study. I further believe that this study will assist me to become a better psychology lecturer and clinical supervisor.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **REFLEXIVE JOURNAL: THE RESEARCHER**



# PhD



# PhD

Contact master's students. Surprised by their willingness to take part. Aware of confidentiality issues. Plan 1<sup>st</sup> trip. Excited! Apply for funding.

Eight participants agreed to meet me. Practical arrangements with trips. Aware of personal opinion of the participants. Be careful of leading questions with Grace. Surprised with all the data that spontaneously arose. Analyze 3 interviews. Mindful of "positive" framework & pushing for positive data. Excited!

2<sup>nd</sup> round of interviews: Allow students to share freely! Mindful of discussing Jim's clients. Become aware of personal expectations for the participants journeys (set aside!). Enjoy Petro's company. Remember researcher boundaries! Frustrated with Suzanne and Grace. Want them to enjoy and value the journey more! Mindful of allowing their own process to unfold.

2<sup>nd</sup> round of reflective writings. Exciting new data! Appreciation for participants' efforts to reflect and respond. Decide not to "push" 3 participants who did not send their writings.

- Personal reflections: 2010**
- The high level of appreciation of the participants' willingness to take part in the study influenced my personal expectations for them. I had to become aware of how this position might lead me to cherish positive expectations for them.
  - Frustration when the journey was not described in a positive, growth-filled way. Set aside my own experience and value unique (other) data that arose.
  - Positive relationship with all the participants. Be careful not to be too informal and friend-like.
  - Transcriptions of interviews valuable to better prepare for the next round. Be especially careful of leading questions and pre-determined topics.

2010 Jan Feb May July/Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec

Reflective writings are coming in! The data excite me. Surprised with participants' efforts to reflect and write. Appreciative. Critically reflect on my expectations of the data.

Transcriptions of interviews. Become familiar with the data. Reading! More literature searches. Allow data to unfold freely. Be careful of probing for pre-determined themes.

3<sup>rd</sup> and last round of interviews. Thank participants! Sad to say goodbye! Be careful of "pushing" for positive "closing" data! Remind participants of their last writings. Become aware of how the case studies will form a comprehensive and meaningful unit.

Last reflective writings. Surprised with the participants' high level of insight in how the year contributed to their personal growth. Transcribe the interviews. Satisfying to experience how the elements of the journey came together.

# PhD

Transcribe the interviews.  
Become aware of huge amount of data. Need to find a way to consolidate the data more.  
Decide to use the four “richest” cases. Work on one case study at a time. Mindful not to “mix” the data. Follow up on any data that is not clear.  
Ethical considerations: very aware!  
Excited to start analyzing the data.

Literature reviews & methodology chapter.  
Ground the case studies in the participants’ “voices”.

Writing! Do the case justice.  
Awareness of how the case studies overlap and differ.  
Re-read the transcriptions and double check their meaning.  
Do not over-interpret positive experiences due to own experience.

Writing! Be open to “new” data to arise at this late stage.  
Challenged to “limit” quotes.  
Myself as academic writer ▶ exciting!

## Considerations & decisions & personal reflections: 2011

- Decision to only use four case studies. Personal disappointment and feelings of “rejecting” other data. Revisit the reasons for the decision and realize the interpretation would be more comprehensive and true.
- The biggest challenge was that of integrating the data with literature versus the authentic presentation of a case.
- The “correct” application of Ryff’s model caused frustration. Re-visiting IPA guidelines and studying of other IPA studies helped to bring clarity.
- Loyalty and commitment to study counteracted for exhaustion and frustration.

2011 Jan Feb/March April/May June/July Sep Oct Nov Dec

Aware of own expectations of data to “fit” the model.  
Challenge myself to use the framework secondarily.  
Follow-up questions with two participants.

Cross-case analysis: challenging!  
Be careful not to “push” for similarities in cases.  
Enjoy the interplay between data, literature, theoretical model and myself!

Preparation for submission.  
Bring study to a closure: ambivalence!  
Appreciation for role players!

## **APPENDIX C**

### **TRANSCRIPT CASE 1: JIM**

## 1. Jim: First Interview. February 2010

Introduction and orientation of the study.

- 1.1 Why masters in Psychology for you? We have to do Children and Adolescent psychology this year, it's part of the course. And it's one of the reasons why I wanted to go into psychology because I had done Takalani Sesame and we developed that HIV positive puppet. I had done about a year and 6 months research on that. And that's the reason why I got into psychology. There were bigger issues I thought that needed to be dealt with in South Africa.
- 1.2 However, when I had made the decision to do Child and Adolescent Psychology, then you realize there's the difficult thing of the parents. Parents are difficult. Suddenly you realize that a child's issues are not theirs alone. It's part of the system's. And if you don't work with the system your work with the child is very limited.
- 1.3 But we're going to do it this year and I'm really excited. I think that as part of our training we have to have one child. We start in March. I'm getting very anxious about that. Anxious and confident. Yes, I think because they've set it up so strongly, they've given all the lectures and said when you start in March, it's the big turning point. And I've always felt very confident about that, it's going to be absolutely fine. If someone feels that you are curious, then you have them. And how difficult is that? I am very curious. That's exactly it. You abandon all of this learning, because that's what's making you anxious.
- 1.4 We were doing counselling skills this year, practical counselling skills, and it's everything you've learnt. They talk about the concept of having your own private gallery. It's everything that you've learnt and held on to and believe. It kind of becomes a part of yourself. The therapist-self that you're developing. They talk about the concept of the private gallery and then they talk about the relationship that you have with the client. And the difficulty there is that you've got this private gallery sitting on your shoulder the whole time and it all becomes more powerful than you are.
- 1.5 We were doing these practical counselling skills and I found myself being more and more studied in my approach, thinking am I saying the right thing, am I following the right structure? And what did that do? Well I felt the sessions became quite stagnant, there was no life in it. But the minute I forgot about the private gallery, because it is there, it exists in

you. The minute I went OK, I'm just going to see this person and engage, like I said, become curious. Yes, and sometimes you'll find yourself at a point where you think OK I'm chatting, nothing more than that. But that's OK.

- 1.6 They talk about this concept and we know about this concept of the therapist-self. It's not the parent, it's not the friend, it's this new thing, a new relationship called the therapist and I suppose theoretically one understands it, moving into that persona there's this shift that one has to make. You start out with an impulse to do something, you go through this huge amount of learning and training and you're growing all the time and developing as an individual. But ultimately you come back to yourself. And that should be a safe place to get back to.
- 1.7 I can be completely honest here, one of the anxieties around clinical is that one has to go and do a community year. Which I don't mind, I feel very strongly about putting back and I've done a lot of that in my life. In terms of working for NGO's and that sort of stuff. I'm in a relationship and I've been in one for 10 years. I'm not married. And does that mean I'm going to be put in some small town? You don't have that sort of stuff and then one has to get married. So it does make it a little complicated. And I love, which is the thing that most of the students hate ironically, the discipline of being able to say OK this is my studying time now. Every day I would give myself two or three hours.
- 1.8 And I was travelling a lot, I was doing corporate theatre around the world and it was quite interesting. I even climbed Kilimanjaro. It was in my first year and I had all my little notebooks with me, sitting at base camp the night before we were climbing hardly being able to breathe, going over my notes. Is it hard? It's fantastic, psychologically it's a challenge. We did the four days up, two days down, which I think is the best route to go. I would highly recommend it to anyone. I would really like to do it, and I actually got a quote about two years ago. It's expensive. I think it was R27 000 for the whole package, not physically strenuous, you walk a lot obviously. The climb at night is to reach the summit. It's a tough one. You have to push yourself, it is freezing cold, the conditions are just hellish.
- 1.9 And psychologically? J: I think it's just amazing. We got to the top and saw the sun at its peak. But it's not about getting to the top, it's actually about the journey. There's something so deeply satisfying about being able to walk for nine hours a day. And you

can't talk, the walking is really slow. Everything slows down so you become so introspective, you go through a lot of processes yourself. There's something beautiful about that. I just wish this year would slow down; all these lecturers are coming with assignments and this research monster.

- 1.10 If I ask about life experience, what would you say? Takalani Sesame was huge, developing the HIV positive muppet was huge for us. The first ten years of my professional career as an actor/director I worked at the market theatre laboratory. That was a huge, profound experience, just to see what theatre can do as a kind of a healing process for South Africans. The stories that they told reflected the times, what people were thinking and feeling.
- 1.11 Would you like to combine that? J: I would like to, but the supervisors say that's a doctorate or just too big, think small, think small.
- 1.12 What are your expectations in terms of this year? I like the metaphor of Kilimanjaro, it is a slowing down for me, it is a process of me of deep introspection. You know what, the weird thing is I'm not scared. I was very lucky, very fortunate in the process last year, the application process. It was a horrible process. After my first interview I felt like I had wasted the last four years of my life. I felt completely destroyed by it. I think they try to break you down. They look for the buttons to push, and they push them. So I was angry as well. I was angry because I thought it was a bad social experiment.
- 1.13 I know we're going to work in an institution one day, even in private practice, with people who are going to push your buttons. Yeah, I thought I'm older so I was devastated. I mean some of these younger kids who are 21, 22 who are not necessarily going to get in their first year because they don't have any life experience, are scarred. And they're still scarred and they're still angry and carrying this around with them. Those group dynamics do come into play. It's interesting because they've chosen a fascinating mix of people for my masters, not at all what I expected.
- 1.14 Even the group that they've chosen at \*\* as well that I met. I was quite taken aback. There were people in the selection process that for me were obvious natural healers and psychologists, they got through to the final days and... I was sitting in the selection at \*\* on the last day. There were eight of us in this group workshop and we were surrounded by all the lecturers which were very intimidating. They all sitting there with \*\* on, and every

five minutes they'd ask us to move around a chair so they can observe you so you do feel like you're being watched the whole time.

- 1.15 I remember looking at this and going I get this, I get this. They've got one guy my age, a girl, two women who were very similar, and they were going this one or that one, this one or that one. I just thought it was the cruellest thing ever. I looked at this other guy and I thought he's so wise and articulate. You know you beat yourself up. L: Yes. J: I was convinced that I didn't get in after that.
- 1.16 At \*\* I found out that I got in, and then they get all possessive over you and don't want you to go apply anywhere else. I really like the lecturers at \*\*, really respect them. What's fascinated me about \*\* is that since it's changed its name from \*\* to \*\*, it's gone on this process of identity, this journey of identity, so it's really questioning what does the \*\* mean, and I think that's specific to the psychology department. That infiltrates into all of its teaching practices and it makes it very contemporary in terms of where psychology is at in South Africa. It does connect it for me to what I know and what I experience in South Africa.
- 1.17 And after \*\* you went to \*\*? J: It was very different. I was feeling quite confident because I knew that I was going to do a master's, so I had that added benefit. It's one of those things that just felt so right. They also had interviews. Also some of the lecturers were really trying to be intimidating, questioning and pushing buttons. Some of the others were warm and engaging. I thought the process was very fair. I thought more students were given the opportunity to really show themselves, that you weren't given only one or two brief platforms. Little things happened that I was quite touched by. \*\* gave tea and coffee. It's not a very big gesture, but it's a gesture you know.
- 1.18 And then what they would do, they wouldn't give a list of who's in or not like other universities do. They actually write a personalized letter to each and every student. People are naturally devastated, dreams are shattered. But it was very empowering; they didn't try to break you down. They were trying to isolate and find your strengths. And you become very aware of that early on in the process.
- 1.19 What did you become aware of if you say strengths? J: We had a counselling session with one of the Master's students at the time. I had to be the therapist. I just didn't think it went well at all. Then afterwards we had to reflect on it. They don't just dismiss you like some



other universities. Then they ask how you thought it went. I said it didn't go well. Then one of the professors said, "No, but look at what you did right. You were incredibly warm, you were unbelievably confident. You weren't aggressive or cocky. You created this environment that you could engage in." You walk out with this huge compliment you know.

- 1.20 Do you agree with that? Warm and confident? J: Yes, but it is a process. You will question yourself, especially this year through learning about counselling skills. Question is when you start thinking well, what is that, where does it come from? It has to come naturally. It's like empathy, you can read hundreds of books about empathy and empathic awareness... L: Formulas and... J: Emotional intelligence. I don't think you can plan something like that. Either you are or aren't. It's a core personality approach.
- 1.21 There's only nine of us in our group. They said they would chose fourteen, and they only chose nine. In that sense you really feel quite special. You enter with confidence. You do get knocked down by reality very soon though. The Honours year academically is quite intense. You just work non-stop. It was great to have a holiday but you do come in on a high into the master's course.
- 1.22 And the group? Started off everyone being in love with each other, we're all brilliant together, and then you do start seeing. There's this one woman in particular in my class. I worked on an assignment with her now. She just pushes every single button I have on some level. There's two things happening here. On the one hand I'm reacting, on the other this is a huge learning curve. You know this is part of my process. This is what I'm going to get in therapy. This is going to be a client of mine. So what journey can I go on? What's happening within me?
- 1.23 And with her, have you identified what it is? J: Yeah I've been thinking about it. We have this assignment to do, the first one for the year, and we're together on it. She's very anxious about getting it right, very ambitious. She said to me "I want to get 95%, nothing less" and I said, "For masters that's very ambitious". My feeling is with masters you have to hit a different plateau. It's not necessarily about getting a high mark. It's about understanding the subject matter so you can use it. Sometimes it's abstract, sometimes it's practical.

- 1.24 I had a very nice idea, I'm very creative in my approach. It's a paper that is combined with a seminar. She was excited about it then two days later came to me and said it's not going to work, it doesn't make any sense, doesn't fit into the APA style. I had to take a step back and think OK, this is not about just me, I am working with someone else here. But at the same time, I have to let my ideas go. So what I did was I went and sat down with her so we could go through the details very carefully of the paper.
- 1.25 What do you do in terms of coping? I've got my partner. I've got my therapist. It's a therapist I've been with for a number of years, really outstanding woman so I'm going to go back to her. I haven't started with her yet. I'm waiting for the year to normalize, get into a routine. It's been difficult to get a regular time. I didn't realize it would be as academically intense. You do a lot of practical work and have to reflect always. But it's academically intense.
- 1.26 And other types of support? J: Friends, I have lots of friends. I think as you get older you have a smaller group of friends but you're a lot closer: Yes, I gym. And I'm really fortunate that my partner has a game farm in Mpumalanga. It's so nice to get out, to get into the bush. We go there every couple of weeks. It's a big five game reserve. And then we have a house in Sedgefield, Knysna, on the beach. We go there July and December. It's really very nurturing.
- 1.27 What are the areas you think you will be challenged in this year? This actually came up when we were doing trauma therapy the other day – men who are very heterosexual and who are HIV positive in denial would be an issue for me. Understanding the whole notion of masculinity in South Africa – I think that will be complicated. We were doing some case studies yesterday when we were doing therapy, previous student's case studies. I don't know if that's ethical. The names were scratched out though. We had to develop a treatment plan. What was quite interesting was to see how far student's had got with the client, and they hadn't got particularly far.
- 1.28 So I think that will be a challenge, one wants to help the client find some sort of solution or shift or change or be able to deal with an anxiety or a crisis. But you realize the process is not going to be that fast. It's going to be a very slow, client-centred process. You have to move with the client. That's going to be a challenge. It is scary. You're questioning

yourself the whole time. You don't have anyone else giving you affirmation. That does happen in supervision though.

- 1.29 The big challenge is learning to trust yourself and believe in what you have to offer. Like I had to trust myself starting Kilimanjaro. Yeah but there are some things you just believe you can do and then you do them. I suppose the worst case scenario with not climbing Kilimanjaro is it's bad and a personal disappointment. Worst case scenario in therapy is that you are really making a mess. Or you're client leaves after the third or fourth session. You blame yourself and then ask why did they leave?

## **2. Jim: First reflective writing. April 2010**

### **2.1 What's happening? / Personal experience ► Master's student in professional**

**psychology:** What a rollercoaster! Every day I question my own abilities, who am I? Why am I doing this? Do I really have what it takes to become a psychologist! It is a very nurturing environment and I think the philosophy is that the 'department' really wants us to find our unique voice.

2.2 We are exposed to a number of theoretical orientations and perspectives, every week is different. On one hand it's a bit crazy, but on the other, that's like life, no structure, like therapy I suppose. Empathy – one can understand it theoretically, but to live it one has to be it. Doing therapy is like being in a state of flow.

### **3. Jim: Second interview. July 2010**

- 3.1 Where did you go? We stayed here for two weeks. We have a house in Sedgefield which is near Knysna. It's fantastic. L: And necessary? J: Yeah, catch up, read, write proposal for thesis, catch up on papers for this semester. It was quite nice to have time to write. It's just crazy.
- 3.2 How are you? It's going incredibly well. It's hard work. At \*\* you do a lot of different types of things. We do a lot of paradigms. We've done everything from psychodynamics to CBT to systemic therapy to positive psychology, you know on one level you feel a jack of all trades but a master of none, you know? You kind of go "what am I doing here?" At the same time you ask the question "well what's my voice?" Because you're seeing clients the whole time. It's theory with all the stuff that you're learning, then you're sitting opposite someone.
- 3.3 The supervisor was incredibly nurturing, pushing me in the right direction, to find my voice. With one of my clients I was doing a CBT approach and she said, I don't really see you as a CBT therapist. Having said that, I think it's interesting to see how you can apply CBT. That has been a challenge. It's very difficult when you have to do a case conceptualisation. Because you think, well what have I been doing, who is this person? To push all this theory in together you know. You feel forced and dishonest in a way to your client. You've gone through this intimate process with this one person, and to suddenly have to tell other people. There's this element of trust that you've developed. It's really a little disloyal.
- 3.4 Because what's your first priority here? Is it the client or is it to get this thing right? And also to turn ten sessions into a 20 minute presentation was very different. First you have to conceptualise this individual, then you have to tell them about your process, then you have to say where you're moving towards. There's not much time to talk about ten hours of work.
- 3.5 I've had three clients and they've all come back. My first week I had two clients. None of them came back, I was devastated. That becomes a measure of success. Then my semester was over and my one client was supposed to come back and he didn't come back. Then the semester started again and he didn't come back. Then he came back,

which was fantastic. My supervisor kept saying he'll come back. You can see she's done that time and time again. And she said if he doesn't come back then you're going through stuff so you need to process this for you. It's interesting because he came back for two sessions.

3.6 He worked incredibly hard and we had a great therapeutic alliance, great connection. I was working kind of object relations with him, just create this beautiful holding environment. Then over the holidays he had made these huge shifts by himself. There was like five weeks of stuff that he had done. And I said to him that was amazing and I need to just take you back to three months ago to who you are now. And he said to me in the last session "I'm thinking I want four more sessions then I want to carry on by myself". On the one level I was terribly bruised by it because there's this client that I've had an incredible connection with. And on the other level I'm thinking well, therapy's worked for him. But you know, what's very helpful is being in therapy yourself.

3.7 Are you? Still? J: Yes, I think personally for me it's one of the most helpful, because a lot of stuff comes up, stuff with supervisors, lecturers, classmates, the dynamics with the classmates. It's a very important aspect that makes a difference. It's just great to have a platform where you can be completely vulnerable. Because you're working so hard on so many levels.

3.8 And the supervisor is very clear to say this is not a therapy session, it's supervision, I know you're touching a lot on personal stuff, but there's boundaries. And then you come to the group dynamics in class. Some people don't pick them up. It's very subtle. I began to sense them almost immediately. Other people can't. I would rather live in this ignorant bliss to just be arrogant or narcissistic. What makes it difficult, especially with a class of nine.

3.9 You know there's a responsibility here, there's a huge responsibility here to be a psychologist. From a client perspective and self-perspective I think you have to introspect all the time. In the first couple of weeks they keep on saying reflect, reflect, I think some people just don't. I understand why they generally don't chose younger students in the Masters group. There's a certain amount of lived experience. But in the younger students there are students who have been through experiences in their lives that give them the authenticity to really connect with people.

- 3.10 But I think in one or two cases in my class certainly, and it creates a rupture in the group, with the younger students. I feel sorry for the students who came in first year, others didn't really know what to do so they took a year or two to find themselves.
- 3.11 And now because of their marks they're never going to get in. It's sad that they miss out. What happens is the result I think is you get a group of high functioning academic individuals who have done incredibly well for the most part. And for me what was very important was that I wasn't going to go into this wanting to get a cum laude. I'm very lucky, I've done incredibly well academically this year. I've been very fortunate, I've been blown over by my results, but I haven't ever gone out and said I'm going to get a distinction for this paper. And I'll get a result back and it'll be 95% which is extraordinary. It's just assignments, papers and presentations. We do exams at the end of the year.
- 3.12 Yes and the whole concept of exams just terrifies me. The class dynamics – I had to write a paper with someone else, and I've often worked with groups before but I got the sign immediately that OK, I'm dealing with a weird person here. It was immediate and on so many levels it was completely suggestion and no, no, my way, my way. So much of that I just ended up compromising; it was the worst academic experience of my life. I said to one of the lecturers I understand what this process is about, the delivering of a paper as academic work and the emphasis on application and the other aspect with writing together is working in a group. And I am going to work with difficult people and to negotiate, that's what it's about.
- 3.13 With this particular student it was incredibly complicated and this is what I am saying about academia, she was incredibly ambitious, wanting to get distinctions and come first in the class. And it became quite nasty because she colluded with other people in the class, saying things like you know normally I would've come first but I worked with Jim on the paper so I hope we pass. So unnecessary. So I said we deserve to fail for that, I hope we fail just so we can learn the lesson. There's other people in the class who are pleasure.
- 3.14 Where do you think you are making the most progress? We've done a lot of group work and what came out very strongly was that I'm the rescuer in the class. I come and save the group the whole time. If things are sinking I'm the one to jump in. L: Did you know that before? J: I think I've always had the impulse but it wasn't articulated to me. L: And now you're more aware of that? J: Yeah, very aware of it. And it's a negative thing and it's a

positive thing. Because you feel the level of responsibility for other people and it means to dismiss and deny yourself.

- 3.15 We had a systemic intervention once where I said to someone I kind of look after all the time in the class. I said to him we'll go into this group together. And the class was watching, it was a two-way mirror. And I wanted him to do well so I said to him, "You lead and I'll follow, we'll play that dynamic." He didn't lead so I took over the lead. And the lecturer made a comment, she said, "So what did you think of Jim's double? And it was quite devastating, it was quite a shock to think that I had done that. On some levels I can see how being a rescuer is a huge thing, because that is why I am in this profession, why I've been drawn to it.
- 3.16 At the same time I can see how it's a problem as well. You know we've done a lot of positive psychology which I'm really enjoying. I'm using it a lot on my clients, one in particular who lacks motivation. We've been doing a lot of upwards spiralling. I had a different perception of it. I thought it was going to be something which was a bit polyanna like you know?
- 3.17 The notion of psychology where we're not dealing with people but problems. We're dealing with potential; it's certainly influenced all of my clients that I'm working with. I'm reading a wonderful text, I think it's by Frank Summers, it's a psychodynamic text and it's interesting to see how the influence of positive psychology has come into that. It's called "The Art of the Possibility" and it works in an object relations way. You allow the potential, the possible future potential of the client to emerge, and that's what you take forward. That's kind of how I'm seeing myself working. It's also very post-modern in a sense. You become very client-centred. The client determines the paradigm.
- 3.18 One of my clients was incredibly frustrated. She went away for the holidays and we had set up a whole plan for her. I was doing CBT with her. We had looked at her strengths and then it really worked for her. And I read this fantastic article on intrinsic motivation and positive psychology. Her major issue was how to become motivated. She's doing B.Com subjects which are the most boring in the world, and she didn't know why she was doing this. We worked on her values and why she was doing this. She went away over the holidays and she came back and she looked like a million rand. She was motivated, excited



- and had done all of this. It was three weeks later and I'm thinking this is fantastic, we were doing gratitude letters, and she was going to write one to her mother.
- 3.19 And I'm thinking upward spiral and this is all wonderful and suddenly it all crashed. She was supposed to arrive at a quarter past two, she arrived at quarter to three. Half an hour late, she hadn't done any of her homework, she hadn't been concerned during the week. The issues of dependency were there and I was so angry with her because I was thinking how must I respond here? But I remained quite neutral and said to her you must understand that I can't give you the full session because you're late.. And it was incredibly frustrating for me that someone I worked so hard with, who had been acknowledging her strengths and she was living these and suddenly she just crashed. But I realised that I was still stuck in that rescuer role I would not have been able to address the time issue.
- 3.20 How do you cope if it gets tough? It does get tough. There've been some moments where I've gone home and just wept on my bed. It's just so devastating. Sometimes it's just little dynamics in the class which will completely destroy me. And own dynamics, personal stuff. You kind of go through, what am I doing here, becoming a psychologist. Am I worthy of this career? You need to be superhuman on some levels you know. Do I have that awareness and that insight? Question that stuff all the time. It's quite devastating; I go through these moments where I feel just gutted. It's important to go well, why am I here? Why do I love this, why am I so passionate about it? It's a simple thing of flow with clients, for me it's a real sense of flow.
- 3.21 Before I shut my eyes I'm so excited about waking up the next day. I just want the night to be over quickly so I can wake up as quickly as possible. I love it, it drives me completely. It's complex and challenges you on so many levels. A client is complex and that's the motivation. I like read up and discuss it and debate it and come into a session and the client has no idea of this entire week and then she arrives half an hour late. So I've got to get out of the rescuer mode.
- 3.22 Because you didn't sleep last night? J: And I've got this whole plan in action. Then we've been working with the HIV orphans and it takes you to a whole other level. I think student psychologists need to do some sort of work with orphans in South Africa. You can't help but to ? as an individual. It moves you. The client that I'm working with has been through such a devastating life, from losing his father to being abandoned by his mother who's HIV

positive, to having a younger brother who's on the verge of dying. He's six. There's this complete sense of loss. Your whole question around psychology, therapy is how is this incredible child resilient and fine? I learnt a lot from that child.

- 3.23 The wonderful thing about child psychology is it's slow. You have to wait four to five weeks before patterns start forming and then you think OK, he should play this out. You know and you devise around that. You realise what a place of privilege you come from. I'm so grateful for my life despite the problems along the way. And you think how can I help, what can I offer because there's huge need, desperate need. L: And this year is opening up that opportunity as well? J: I think I will do it whenever this mammoth of community years, and internships, and thesis years are over.
- 3.24 In terms of coping you've referred to lots of personal strengths. I'm very lucky. I often feel very guilty on Saturdays and Sundays when I'm writing an assignment and \*\*\* is hanging outside doing nothing. I tell \*\*\*go cycling with friends or go do something with friends. Even this holiday I was working and \*\* was sitting on the beach or sitting on the deck reading. But incredibly supportive. Engage in discussions. I'm very fortunate. I've noticed, especially with the younger people in my class, one of the guys is going through a divorce now. It puts strains on a relationship. I'm very lucky with the strengths that I've got and the very supportive relationship.
- 3.25 In terms of coping you have referred to many personal strengths? Yes, and in my relationship. I think it is even getting stronger. Yeah I think so. Quite an interesting comment, last week we were sitting and drinking coffee with breakfast and \*\* just said "you know I just think it's amazing that you've made this decision in your life to go back to university. And what really gives me pleasure is to see that you're so motivated and driven and excited about what you're doing." I remember five years ago, before I made this decision thinking, I'm so depressed in the job that I'm doing. I hated it. There must be more. Something more soulful. And \*\* said "go for it."
- 3.26 And I gym. I've put myself into a forced routine where after varsity I'll go gym. Swimming or running. Unfortunately a couple of years ago I hurt my back so I can't do that much. I wish I could meditate and do yoga, but it feels like one is on a treadmill the whole time so I don't find the time for that. I used to love to read novels and now I can't.

I'm just reading psychology, 24/7. I understand when they say you read for a degree, you know that British thing? I've never read so much.

- 3.27 As far as relaxing goes we have a game farm and we're going there next weekend. One of my lecturers played a song at the beginning of the year "Gone fishing". At the time I thought that's a brilliant song. We were told to bring a song that makes us happy. I took something from hairspray, completely over the top. I sing when I go to work, university in the morning at the top of my voice.
- 3.28 Does it help? J: Yeah it helps, I put a CD on or my Ipod on. I love it, it's a bit eccentric but I love it. But when he played that Chris Ria song "Gone fishing" he said it's important to take time out. And it helps, just going to Sedgefield and walking on the beach for two hours and this weekend going to the game farm. Just some quiet time, away from the noise and buzz of the city.
- 3.29 I was very lucky, my brother got married in April in London and I was the best man. That was fantastic! Completely away, total break. My supervisor said to me even "don't study, don't even look at a text." You work incredibly hard, just go and take a break. I'm a bit obsessive compulsive, I read all the time so it was difficult to take a break. You know it was so stimulating to go to exhibitions and to go to theatre and to just walk around London and have no responsibility.
- 3.30 I remember coming back and looking at the rest of the class and they looked grey, they looked tired. It really gave me a boost for the second part of that semester. I'm very lucky, I'm turning forty in a month. There's a holiday. My birthday's on the Friday and I'm having a little party with friends and the Saturday we're flying off to Namibia. Mars is for the first time in this lifetime going to be as bright as the moon on that day. It's going to be completely visible.
- 3.31 At this stage I like positive psychology. It's a very interesting paradigm. My therapist that I'm seeing is very old-school or a subjective new old-school and kind of disdainful of Positive Psychology. I think the notion that positive psychology threatens the established social construction, because the way we construct Psychology is to deal with problems, we don't see the potential.
- 3.32 I once did the strengths thing with a client, he's had a tough life and I thought well let's just focus on your strengths. He looked at it and went through it and said, "So what, I have

all of this other stuff that I need to deal with". So you abandon it and see where the client wants to go. I think it's something that can work in groupwork. Find a group, interview a group and announce it, advertise Positive Psychology. It overlaps with coaching a lot. Coaching drives me mad.

- 3.33 Future? Definitely, one has a focus. I think the split over two years is a good thing. I got into \*\* and \*\* and it was a difficult decision because I really respect some of the academics at \*\*. But I know the academics at \*\*. I was doing the pros and cons and that did come up. I must say the two year thing for me was a pro. One girl in our class is doing it in one year and she doesn't have a life. She looks haggard. I love academia, I love writing, I love the process.
- 3.34 I want to give my thesis a chance to breathe instead of rushing it, I don't want to go into it with procrastination. That's the right way to think about research. To integrate it on some level and to go back and to think about it again. But we are all so rushed to get this degree. That's why I spent my holiday focused on mainly research and writing my proposal.
- 3.35 Yeah, seeing clients and being supervised is the best. Next year too. I think what we'll do is workshops and some reading groups. What I realised about my thesis early on was that there has to be a relationship with your supervisor, because it's going to be a two year relationship and if you're not connecting on your topic and your methodology then there's a problem.
- 3.36 But having said that, now I have a supervisor that I really connect with. He'll sit with me and look at my proposal and say "but what about this, and what about that." He challenges me, will send me home and send me readings to do. I'm going to start with the methodology first, because it's very important, gives you the language for when I go out to give the data. It's just going to be four interviews with people, so at least I'll be within the framework of my methodology. I've written huge amounts of quotes as I've been reading. I've been working with that dragon software which is excellent. So that's coming together.
- 3.37 I've got a paper I'm working on now this weekend which I've got to present in a week's time. On schizoid personality disorder. It's a psychopathology course. We do three huge papers on abnormal psychopathology and they only count 8% of the mark for the year. So you do this huge amount of work for a very small mark. It's all rather odd. Yes because my question is must I learn the DSM off by heart? Well tell me then I'll learn it off by

- heart. Because I see some of them go OK is that schizoid, is that dependant, is that avoidant? You can roughly see and then go back to the text so it's a bit frustrating.
- 3.38 That's what I love about this process. You know I said to one of my colleagues my decision to do Master's was to become a better psychologist, be in the moment, really absorbing as much as I can. It's hard, you get so much thrown at you.
- 3.39 Do you succeed in that? J: For the most part. There are those times when the group dynamics are trying; you feel that people are not committed. Then you wish they would read more and engage more so that we can have more passionate debates and discussions. Maybe that's the problem with students in general. They just want to pass. Especially the younger ones. I remember in my honours class last year one of the students asked the lecturer "Please can you tell us exactly which chapters to learn, I have so much to learn for my other subjects". And I thought well learn everything, apply everything.
- 3.40 One of the Master's students from last year said to me, and she gave me a great piece of advice, she said to me "I loved this year. I wish I could do the whole thing over again but without the anxiety". The anxiety destroys it for you, you worry about backwards, forwards, tomorrow, yesterday.
- 3.41 \*\* did an interesting systemic workshop with us. She told us what to read then she made the whole thing practical. Whole week long systemic workshop. We just did it behind two-way mirrors, with student volunteers from third year and honours who came to be the families, with huge problems. We watched it and we became a team. It was a great working thing for the group. I wish everyone did that because it takes theory off the page. Because suddenly you imagine something, or you think something, or you've read something, but when you're doing it it becomes alive and that is when that learning shift comes in.
- 3.42 I think it's a nurturing department. They are aware of these issues and these problems and they're very perceptive of individual students. There was a problem with one student and they've been really helping him through supervision and sending him into therapy. I remember a lecturer said to me last year, "It's very hard this process of selecting students because you try as hard as you can to get a group that's going to work together. 80% of the time you get it right. 20% of the time you get it wrong. But every single year there are personality disorders that slip through, they manipulate the system."

3.43 What else is happening this year? Ja, the route is tougher than I thought. When I climbed Kilimanjaro I went up the easy route, I think this is more of an Everest. You get mountain sickness occasionally and then you have to take a step back or two. Just to chill and get your head around it. Yes I know what the pay-off is. And I think the other important lesson that I learnt there is that Swahili saying of Polé Polé, slowly slowly. And that comes back to me, slow down. Yes, and that keeps me going.

#### **4. Jim: Second reflective writing. September 2010**

**4.1 Growth: What's happening to me?** I get quieter and quieter as the year progresses, I learn to listen more. To really listen and to engage with the other. Whether that other is a fellow student, a lecturer or a client, to truly engage is to listen.

**4.2 Building and Developing strengths: Professional and Personal:** I know I am building strengths, slowly. Through the process of therapy I am beginning to articulate these. I think I am a generous person, warm and inviting – comforting. I also am intelligent and on a journey to create meaning of these huge shifts happening in my life.

**4.3 What I'm getting from it:** I learn huge life lessons every day. About my weaknesses – these come shining through, but my strengths build me up, they balance me. It really is gaining meaning in life, clarity and vision.

## 5. Jim: Third Interview. November 2010

- 5.1 How are you? J: Good. I'm good. The whole process wasn't about exams. It wasn't about sitting down and writing up something. It was all about the experience of something. It was about the practical application of theory. This last semester was probably the hardest.
- 5.2 I had a terrible thing that happened. A friend of mine was killed. He was murdered. He was at home with his wife and their one year old baby boy. These men broke into their house and they shot him. That knocked me for a bit. But you know that's the important thing about selecting your group. I could come to university everyday and just know that I would be supported emotionally. Everyone was so sensitive and understanding and empathetic to me. I didn't have to pretend. It was incredibly healing.
- 5.3 I suppose that it what you get when you're surrounded by a group of psychologists. For me what was so key, one of my big learnings, was the whole relational aspect. Therapy is about relationships, and about me developing a relationship with somebody else. That starts in the process of your class. What is my relationship with this group? What are my individual relationships with these people? And that magical area of this relationship that exists between two people or a group is sacred almost, because that is the healing process.
- 5.4 And regardless of whether you're working cognitively or psychoanalytically or using positive psychology... That was drummed into us that is the key point of therapy is the therapeutic alliance, regardless of what your modality you're working from. Especially when my friend was killed...
- 5.5 How did you cope with that? J: He was Jewish, so it was very quick in terms of the funeral and all that. I was actually on the farm, having a working weekend. A friend of mine phoned me and said that he had been killed. I came back and class was on Tuesday again. The funeral was also on that Tuesday. You know the class was amazing, they did little things like taking notes for me, and explaining things to me, and someone recorded a lecture for me. I think I only missed two half lectures, the class was so supportive. Even over the weeks they'd engage me and we'd talk about it, you know all that stuff you do in formal therapy with clients the class were doing for me, and that was remarkable.
- 5.6 Then I was also very lucky with a child I was working with, from an orphanage. That was an extraordinary experience, to go through his healing process while going through my own healing process. This was a friend, a close friend, it wasn't a family member. This



kid's family members had been taken away from him. He's ten and from a different country. And then what was amazing for me was to see the resilience, to see how people can climb and their strengths, to ignite their strengths are just magical.

- 5.7 And you got that from that child? J: He was very aggressive at school and in the orphanage, and to just work with him narratively and through positive psychology, working about how you cope with the world, and your threats, in his own language. For him to articulate that, to conquer his own mountains, it was just remarkable. To see that devastation this individual had lived through. He told me this story in the beginning of the lion king, it was quite sweet. In the beginning of the year the story was very aggressive, all the animals had been killed, blood was splattered against the wall, and there were brains everywhere. Then later on he told me the story again, a couple of weeks ago.
- 5.8 His father had been killed and he told me the story of his father from his perspective. Then he told me the story of the lion king again and he told me from the perspective of the young cub Simba and the older father and that relationship. You could see how he was dealing with the loss of his father, it was quite beautiful. And so powerful for where I was at that stage.
- 5.9 Do you think you would have dealt with the death of your friend differently had it happened last year? J: Yes, firstly my class was there. It's interesting how when there's death around you, you become heartsick at situations. I noticed when I'd go out with his family that no one wanted to talk about it, whereas in the class I was encouraged to talk about it so that I can really live it. I don't really have a process toward something like that, whereas in that context...
- 5.10 The context was created for you. J: Yeah and being in therapy at the same time. Yeah, I think it's important because there's a lot of things that happen throughout supervision, frustration at lecturers, pre-exam anxiety, post-exam anxiety. And even in the class you can't deny that there are dynamics and you just have to work that out. It's a great platform to say is this about me? What is it about? What is it about me that I'm reacting like this.
- 5.11 There was this one member in my class that I just had an immediate personality clash with. L: I remember you had to work on an assignment together? J: Yes it was the worst academic experience. Do you know that throughout the year you kind of work on it. And I

realised a lot of it had to do with my own insecurity. What am I being insecure about in the situation? You know it's not about her, it's about me.

- 5.12 And? J: Well you know I had done incredibly well throughout the year. Exceptionally well. My exam results were good. Look I got five distinctions and they're good marks. Thank goodness for my year marks. I am pleased. But no, I can't believe this year is finished. I am tired. It's not a cognitive tired or an intellectual tired, not like my brain is tired and needs a rest, but emotionally I'm gutted, I'm exhausted. That's the difference with this kind of work. On the one level you can sit passively in a lecture, write notes, but on this level of master's psychology, you're actively engaging with the text, the work, the lecture, the whole time. It's all about the experiential process.
- 5.13 And now? J: Yes it's been a week now. I have my last session with one of my clients tomorrow which is going to be devastating because we've built a beautiful bond. It will be very difficult I think. It's an unusual situation. He's a child who lives in an orphanage. I go into this internal debate today and I think, "what has my ? taught me to deal with this debate", and I don't know what to do. My supervisor has been amazing, and I thought about that during therapy.
- 5.14 What was amazing with my supervisor was that I had her for supervision through the whole year for my therapy situation. It was incredible because it was a very contained space, a very bounded space. Initially it was a bit disconcerting because you kind of went, "who am I here?" And I said to her half way through the year I feel like I've made a mistake with one of my clients. I went too quickly, too soon, too emotionally. I felt like I had lost confidence a little bit with the client. I said this to her and she didn't comment on it you know.
- 5.15 All she did was try and look at my strengths and it was amazing you know just discussing that. She would have qualitative feedback with us. I was articulating who I was, who I'm becoming, what is my journey? And I think it's always going to be a process of I am becoming. I don't think I am ever going to reach a process where I say I am this as a therapist, I think that is impossible. It should be impossible. What is amazing about my supervisor is that by the end of the year I was sitting in a supervision session and thinking I feel so confident. It's a real sense of flow, that you can feel so open and discuss issues with confidence about your client. I love that.

- 5.16 That is very different from what you felt in the beginning of the year. J: Very different yeah, because you expect this stuff about power and knowledge. And you expect this all powerful therapist to place on a pedestal and tell you what to do. And it's not about that, it's about who you are in a relationship.
- 5.17 Would you say that she made a difference in your experience? Yeah I think so. Last year \*\* was my supervisor for my thesis. She was very in the head, although I can't really comment because she hadn't been a therapy supervisor. Maybe that process would have been different. But yeah I do think that, who my supervisor was very specific and worked well for me.
- 5.18 I was reading Karen ? last night and she says – and it's quite a controversial statement – it's very important when you meet a client, from the moment you meet them, if you have a negative response to that person you should say I can't work with you because the relationship is not going to get better. And that is a intuitive response I have to my supervisor, I have a connection at some level.
- 5.19 Looking back at this process? My supervisor, my class. That was the most brilliant part of this year, where exams are brutal and distant and cold whereas what was amazing and we did it twice this year, was the qualitative feedback that my supervisor had with us. Very specifically they give you a mark out of five so you can have a mark. They're based on issues that we can discuss to see where we can grow. And that was amazing to see my growth, to acknowledge my growth, and that was with my supervisor. That's what the supervisor pinpoints. They look very carefully at where you can grow, what your weaknesses are and where your strengths lie as well. And I think that's because of her positive psychology background. She was able to illicit my strengths and just build on that.
- 5.20 And it becomes a very good cycle. J: I'm doing a paper with her next year on one of my clients this year. She's going to do the theoretical part and I'm going to do the process. She said what she found fascinating with me with this particular client was my journey in becoming a therapist. And then the clients changed. It was using positive psychology because I tried CBT with her, I tried a bit of psychodynamics, narrative didn't work...the minute I tried that ? questionnaire suddenly created a language that she could understand, it was accessible to her. This woman who couldn't get out of bed suddenly arrived two

weeks later with beautiful hair that she had done, she had braided it and it was a big thing for her.

- 5.21 We had this very powerful feedback session at the last lecture. They didn't tell us, they just said you'll see. We had this vuvuzela that came out, it was the talking stick. Throughout the year it played an important part. And then \*\* said the idea of this class is just to acknowledge someone in the class or someone outside who has played an important role to you this year. We thought it would last an hour, it was four hours long. Everyone just wept, tears of gratitude about how much they had changed.
- 5.22 The class acknowledged the supervisors, acknowledging each other and then being acknowledged time and time again. It was incredibly powerful. And that was hard for me at the beginning of the year. I find it difficult to stand up and say "Look at me, aren't I fantastic?". In a way I had to do that. I had to say 'WOW I've done great work here.' On some level it's uncomfortable but it's becoming more comfortable, and I don't ever want to be arrogant or narcissistic.
- 5.23 It's interesting because two of my class members' relationships ended, one in divorce and the other just moving apart. I think being an older student, and being involved in a ten year relationship, if anything it was strengthened. Exams are testing, but they are on any relationship, I'm constantly in a bad mood during exams, it's just drama. Because you suddenly realise the intensity and you have a week and you don't have time. You know the time is such an issue.
- 5.24 I hate exams with a passion. I think if anything it was wonderful. Last weekend I finished exams and it was the first weekend that \*\* and I were like WOW we live in the same house together, let's go do things together like movies and dinner. This last weekend as well we went to the Kruger. I think \*\* has grown like I have. I've noticed in my conversations with him – because psychology is a wonderful thing, you know the most brilliant things about human nature and who we are, the most brilliant questions and the most phenomenal debates. And he's just a naturally curious individual, highly intelligent in a different field of work who gets highly engaged in my passion. L: Because of wanting to. J: Exactly.
- 5.25 Next year? Next year we carry on, next year I do my thesis. Yes we do the two year thing. It's the thesis next year. I know from my Honours thesis, which is nothing compared to a

masters thesis it's timing. And this was a very important factor for me, I'm 39 turning 40 in August and I thought to myself I'm coming back to University because I want to engage in the process. I want to absorb all the information, I want to read a lot, I want to engage in discussions and enjoy this. I don't want to just read a book quickly, write exams quickly and then become a psychologist.

- 5.26 Because what is that qualitatively? It's just superficial for me. I'm slow as well, some of these younger students are a lot faster. The one girl in the class did it all in one year, and when we did our class presentations it was quite startling to see that her level was way lower, her growth was way lower than the rest of the class because she didn't have that time. And it was quick, rushed, thrown together. And also she wasn't concerned about her marks, she just wanted to pass. She was exhausted, even during seminars she didn't contribute because she was just working non-stop.
- 5.27 No, next year is going to be more intense, we're working on an externship one day a week at a community centre. It's going to be a lot more intense than what we've done this year. And we have one day a week where we have supervision, group supervision. And then, which I'm really excited about is in the afternoon, Tuesday afternoon we'll have a group reading session, so we can dictate as students what we want to learn. That's a professional reading course, getting us into that.
- 5.28 One thing we've all felt is that we've just dipped our toes in things this year. Some of us have liked the temperature of it, others feel we need to know more to take it on board. I've really loved this, we're going to read all of Michael White instead of just two to three lectures on it.
- 5.29 My research has been approved and that's as far as I wanted to get this year. And my proposal has been approved, now I'm in the process of getting participants. I put it out on facebook and I had 60 responses within an hour. Unbelievable. It's amazing, I thought I'd really have to battle. And suddenly I've got my participants. I've done a lot of reading, so I'll write my methodology and literature review in January, so have those two chapters out.
- 5.30 Then do the research in February, and transcribe it and do my analysis after that. I'm hoping to have the first draft at least by June. It's a bit ambitious, I think, but I think it's possible. I've got time, I've got three days a week, to just work on my research. It's my

favourite thing in the whole world to sit and write. Research something, engage in it, rewrite it, restructure it, you know what I mean? I love that, I find it fascinating. I'm very pleased with my supervisor. He's very rigorous. I've never written a proposal so many times in my life before, over and over again, and it was accepted.

- 5.31 Would you say that you were well-prepared for this year? I was a little bit naive. It's been a week since we've finished, and I wrote that thing briefly for you and I think what I wrote in that form, I listen more now. I was cocky at first, I got into master's and I'm going to be a psychologist, but now I won't call myself a psychologist anymore. I'm a student psychologist and I'm proud of that. It's important that language for me. There's a growth process I still need to go through. That's what it says on my card. I'm a student psychologist. You know when you go to parties and events and people ask what you do, then I say I'm a student psychologist now. You know if people chose to walk away and snub their noses that are their problem. I'm very comfortable, I'm loving being a student, I'm loving this process.
- 5.32 What do you say if you think about this year? You study this all the time and look at all this knowledge, but to sit opposite someone in a room and to think of all these theories is just wrong you know? \*\* brought it up, how do you do what you do? And \*\* said it's intuitive, but where does this intuition come from? We think we have this magical spark, but then why study you know? L: If it is only a personality thing. J: What you realise is that all your academic knowledge, what's important to you, who you are, your makeup as an individual suddenly infiltrates your whole being and becomes part of you. That's where you speak from. So I might never be a great CBT therapist, but on some level I'm always going to create this ? environment, understand the notions of warmth and empathy, they're not simply terms anymore.
- 5.33 They're simply terms which I can feel, understand, they're experiential. One of the things about my child client which I said you read about this thing called the unconscious, what is this thing, you can be quite cynical about it, how does this concept work. Then you do symbolic play on children and you see a child playing out their aggressive behaviour and you see the unconscious in action in front of your eyes. These abstract concepts become tangible, and you take what's important to you, what you understand.

- 5.34 Can you summarise the year in a word? That's a difficult one. I shouldn't think too hard, I should just say it.
- 5.35 The year in a word: Curiosity. Passion is also something that jumped out, but for me curiosity. A friend of mine who is in supervision with me did not have a good year. She had huge growth. She's a lot younger than me, but you can see those moments when the car shifted gear. She came from a very conservative background and she really had to open up and expand her horizons. And she had those qualitative supervision sessions, her experience of those, which was not different to mine, was very negative for her.
- 5.36 She felt she was being pulled apart. But I think it's an age thing as well. My supervisor said to me in the middle of the year, "You need to work on ambivalence more", like the campus. I love that. She said to me, "I find that you're not really looking at ambivalence with your clients. You need to investigate that". But that wasn't criticism, it was fantastic, let me explore that.

## **6. Jim: Third reflective writing. November 2010**

6.1 **Looking Back:** So where do I begin? At the base of the mountain, I looked up at this mountain I had to climb. I had heard various stories of the adventure from those who had travelled this path before, but like any great adventure you had to experience it for yourself. If I had to look back and identify any great shifts, it would be hard to pinpoint any specific momentous event. Rather, it is those smaller qualitative moments, tiny events, which accumulate in reshaping my sense of who I am.

6.2 Reflecting back on this year I suppose the key differentiator has been the application of theory into practice. Often in the study of theory the world appears through an abstract and often ideal lens. Theoretical application is not always an easy fit, the client does not always respond according to what one has learnt. But, sometimes the fit appears to be perfect, a technique or a theoretical observation seemed perfect in gaining insight into the client. Every client was different and every relationship unique, and somewhere in this intermingling of relationships, I began to find my way, my journey, my voice. Certain theories, orientations would work for me while others seemed foreign and uncomfortable.

6.3 Another important area I explored this year was the notion of reflection. Everything was about introspection and reflection. Looking inward to explore my response, how do I understand this client? How do I understand myself in relationship to this client? And then, to reflect on the clients journey; how far have they moved? Is this process working for them? Why is this client in therapy? Am I serving my client? How are my personal issues affecting the process? I suppose the important lesson here was to never take anything for granted, to continually explore and question.

6.4 **Looking Forward:** There are so many lessons I have learnt this year, and I suppose I will only really begin to grasp their true meaning in the years to come. But there are a couple of things I do understand about the way forward. I know that being a psychologist in South Africa, I have to work integratively. Individual context has such a vital and dramatic impact on how one deals with psychological problems, and the client always has to be seen as unique. Every session has to be regarded as unique.



- 6.5 Another important learning I will take forward is to always look for a clients resources. To seek their potential to help access their potential. It is easy to be seduced by the 'problem', but to access individual resources is incredibly powerful. I realise that I have embarked on an important and challenging journey. This will be a journey of continual learning, of seeking theory and finding answers and always asking questions.
- 6.6 **Jim before M in professional psychology** I think I was perhaps a little naive, and a little too self-assured. Perhaps a little louder and bolder. I think these were fronts for a confidence I lacked or an anxiety I had about being a psychologist.
- 6.7 **Jim now** I am quieter now, but I have a new found confidence. I feel more grounded and settled. I listen a lot more, not simply to what someone else says but I try to listen to the whole person; what they are feeling, thinking, being...

## **APPENDIX D**

### **TRANSCRIPT CASE 2: PETRO**

## 1. Petro: First Interview. February 2010

Introduction and orientation of the study

- 1.1 Waar dink jy lê jou sterktes / groeiareas vir die jaar? Ek was 'n rukkie uit die akademie, ek het die lewe al gesien, myself leer ken, ek weet nie 100 % nie, maar meer as vyf jaar terug. Ek het bietjie meer ervaring in daai kant en ek dink dis 'n goeie ding. Ek het myself in die diepkant ingegooi. Soos Engeland – waar ek begin en waar ek geëindig het was nie beplan nie.
- 1.2 Engeland was lekker gewees, ek het dit op my eie gedoen, \*\* op sy eie en ek op my eie, ek moes vir weke lank alleen gaan, dit was nogal 'n aanpassing gewees, die sterkpunt is dat ek hou van verandering, ek's nie 'n roetine persoon nie, ek hoef nou nie vir ses jaar op dieselfde plek te wees nie, dis hoekom ek gedink het die counseling gaan lekker wees omdat ek op maatskappye en skole fokus, gaan ek redelik baie travel, ek sien daarna uit.
- 1.3 Ek ken baie mense, dis 'n bekende omgewing, ek ken \*\*, ek weet waar alles is. Dit sou moeilik gewees het om te fokus as ek eers nog die plek moes leer ken, ek ken die dosente en mede-studente, ons het 'n volle week gehad om mekaar te leer ken.
- 1.4 Hoe was dit? Nogal intens gewees. Dis lekker om te sien mens kan iemand konfronteer sonder om ongeskik te wees, ek begin sommer te huil gewoonlik in konflik so dit was regtig 'n eye-opener om die reaksie te sien wat ek op mense uitlok, wat ek nie eers besef het nie.
- 1.5 Ons klas gun mekaar ons spasie, ons het nog geen issues gehad nie, dit wat ons gehad het, het ons onmiddellik uitgesorteer. Dis lekker en ek verkies dit ook so, dis klomp nice mense, nie een dieselfde nie en niemand probeer die leier wees nie, elkeen het sy rol.
- 1.6 Wat was die doel van die week? Dit gaan oor ons as groep saam. Om issues te kan uitsorteer, hoe jou gedrag ander mense beïnvloed, dit gaan oor mindfulness. Veral die reaksie wat jy op mense het. En veral omdat ons met kliënte gaan werk, as 'n kliënt 'n reaksie by jou uitlok dat jy jou nie opruk nie, ja dis wat ek voel, maar nie daarop sal reageer nie, dan gaan die kliënt sê hierdie een judge my, en dis prakties, nie net teorie nie.
- 1.7 Wat dink jy is die persoonlike betekenis van die jaar? Definitief om my doel te bereik om my loopbaan voort te sit, met BPsig kan ek absoluut niks doen nie, eks moeg om net 'n

werk te hê, ek wil nou my passie uitleef. Soos ek sê ek het al drie tot vier werke gehad, als raak dieselfde, ek doen dit net vir 'n salaris, maar eks nie gelukkig met dit nie. Ook om in myself te groei, ekt weereens hierdie twee dae gesien ek doen dinge wat ek nie weet ek doen nie, of nie agterkom nie, en om meer effektief met mense te kan omgaan, en tevrede te voel met hoe ek ontwikkel, ek hou nie van stagneer nie en wil nie op een plek bly nie. En rustiger raak en nie so hard op myself wees nie.

- 1.8 Deur van al hierdie goed bewus te raak, sit ek gemakliker in my eie vel. Hoe meer 'n mens verstaan, hoe meer aanvaar of verander jy. Ek wil goed reg doen, ek moet rustiger raak, ek wil net meer en meer altyd bysit, soos navorsing, so ek praat en baklei baie met myself. Dis 'n veilige omgewing om die jaar met myself te baklei. Om weer my eie mens te word.
- 1.9 Ondersteuning? Ja, my pa help met studies, groot pluspunt, geld, ma help met kos, uit elke oord uit hulp. \*\* ook so bietjie, net gaan fliék of gesels, sy sussie en kinders ook, so lekker om net met hulle te speel, dis klaar terapie op sy eie. Sy ma ook, sê ek kan net vra, uit alle oorde uit is daar hulp, ek het nou so gestres oor my lening wat nie deurgegaan het nie, ek moet goed begin betaal maar gelukkig het my pa dit uitgesorteer. So ek kan fokus op my studies, my pa verwag net 2 dinge van my, om my studies klaar te maak en om my geld oordeelkundig te gebruik. Dis lekker om te weet daar is 'n doelstelling om te bereik, ander mense verwag dit van my, ek wil hulle nie teleurstel nie.
- 1.10 Ander belangrike “interpersonal relationships?” Ekt geleer om sonder vriende klaar te kom, eks nie afhanklik van vriende nie. Dis lekker om te gaan fliék of te kuier, maar ek hoef nie elke dag 'n vriendin te bel om te sê hoe my dag was nie. En stable vriende gaan moeilik wees veral as mens nie lank op dieselfde plek bly nie. Ja, en het nou nog my vriende van skool, ek praat dalk net een keer in ses maande met hulle maar ons is nogsteeds goeie vriende.
- 1.11 Eise wat jy die jaar gaan stel, hoe gaan jy dit bemeester? Hulle het voorgestel ons moet 'n sielkundige gaan sien so een keer 'n maand, sal nog kyk om iemand te kry, dis finansieel moeilik om te betaal daarvoor. Ek is 'n reflective personality, as ek by huis kom in aand dink ek oor wat die dag gebeur het en probeer dit uitsorteer, kyk 'n DVD, ek luister musiek. Ek gaan kerk toe, dis vir my rustig om 'n boodskap te hoor, ek probeer dit deel van my eie lewe maak. Spiritualiteit is ook definitief 'n sterkpunt vir die jaar. Ja,

en oefening, fietsry elke dag kampus toe en terug, en kerk toe gaan, ek voel alklaar baie beter, dis so lekker, ek slaap dan lekker in die aand. Ek sukkel nie met chroniese probleme nie. Ek probeer gebalanseerd wees.

- 1.12 Maar mense mag moontlik nie weet wat aangaan nie, as ek hulle nie deel daarmee nie. Maar ek dink ons groepie wat saam swot, ek dink met hulle sal ek als maklik kan deel, gelukkig werk ons almal saam. Ons sit sommer saam in een kantoor, of 5 mense, dan doen ons die goed saam. En met my ma-hulle ook in 'n sin, maar ek wil nie te veel met hulle deel sodat hulle nou weer bekommerd raak nie, so daar staan ek bietjie terug. En natuurlik kan ek met \*\* enige iets deel, en my vriendin by die kerk ook. Die mense wie ek wil hê moet weet, sal weet. Maar ander sal nie sommer weet nie.
- 1.13 En dink jy daar is 'n area wat vir jou in besonder moeilik sal wees? Ja, ek is nie mal daaroor om mense te sien wat bloei nie. Ons het 'n konferensie by Sun City gehad en ons het oor self-mutilation 'n seminaar gehad. Hulle het vir ons foto's gewys oor hoe mense hulself sny en ek is nie mal daaroor nie, ek skram weg van dit af. Ja, en die neurosielkunde gedeelte, \*\* het gesê ek hoop nie julle is queezy oor goed nie, en ek is nogal, so dit gaan my bietjie pla. Maar ek sal sê as ek nie so lekker voel oor iets nie. Ek weet nie of sy vir ons foto's gaan wys oor hoe die brein "starve" nie, dit voel asof ek daai pyn aan my lyf voel.
- 1.14 Wat dink jy gaan die jaar vir jou as mens beteken? Ek is 'n baie positiewe mens so ek probeer dit uit 'n positiewe oogpunt sien eerder as om op die probleem te fokus. So ek dink dit, en ek gaan dalk makliker mense help om vorentoe te beweeg as om heeltyd vasgevang te word in die patologie van hoekom is jy nou so. Jy gaan niks nou daaraan kan verander nie, dit het nou gebeur en jy moet vorentoe beweeg.
- 1.15 Ek sukkel, ek luister na mense maar ek begin alklaar in my brein aannames maak wat ek weet ek nie moet doen nie. Ek is geneig om woorde in mense se mond te probeer plaas. Jy moet 100% in daai persoon se skoene klim en dis moeilik, as mens dink iemand jok of iemand is simpel. Ja, veral as jy kan sien hierdie ou praat nou 'n klomp nonsens, om hom te glo en te gaan met wat hy sê en nie te dink jy moes eintlik dit gesê het nie.
- 1.16 Wat sou jy op 'n persoonlike vlak wou sê oor die jaar, oor jouself? Ek sou wou sê dat ek definitief deur groei gegaan het, ek wil groei en ek wil op 'n punt kom waar ek kan sê kyk net wat het ek bereik hierdie jaar. En dan gaan dit nou nie oor jou teoretiese kennis

nie. Dit inkluis, maar dit gaan oor wat ek kan doen as persoon, my potensiaal wat beter is as waar ek was in die begin. Is daar iemand spesifiek aan wie jy dit wil bewys? Aan myself. En daai druk kom nie van 'n ander plek af nie. Nee glad nie. My ouers verwag van my om my studies klaar te maak, maar hulle verwag nie van my om persoonlik te groei nie. Dit is net vir myself. Dan moet e kook seker daar wees vir ander. Help en so aan.

- 1.17 Soms is die effek daarvan meer langtermyn, dis hoekom ek graag in die begin, middel en einde van die jaar sou wou praat. Mens sal dan die proses begin sien. Dis nice want dan kan mens in die begin van die jaar sien in watter areas, dis motivering om dit vol te hou vir die res van die jaar. Dit kan motiverend wees, maar dit kan ook sleg wees as mens met baie verwagtinge ingaan en deur die jaar kom jy agter ek sukkel.
- 1.18 Dis hoekom mens aan die begin van die jaar van al jou wellbeing areas moet stock-take en sê dis waar ek is, kom ek werk 'n bietjie aan goed en kom ek kyk wat gebeur nou dat ek my M in sielkunde doen.
- 1.19 Ek is nou nog in skok dat ek nou regtig hier sit. Dis so groot voorreg wat ek ook nie elke dag besef, daar is soveel mense wat dit graag wil hê. Mens is vasgevang in die hier en die nou.
- 1.20 Hoekom dink jy is jy hier? Ek weet nie, as ek moet kyk hoe ek was toe ek my graad gedoen het en hoe ek was toe ek vir keuring gegaan het, ek het baie meer uit myself uitgeklim en ek dink hulle het my baie meer raakgesien as voorheen. Ons klas was klein gewees maar ek het nooit regtig my opinies gelig nie, ek het maar net stilgebly want dis maar hoe ek was en ek het toe besluit ek moet uitklim en dinge begin doen, anders gaan ek baie minder goed terugkry. So toe dink ek, sê net, wees net eerlik en oop, en leer om net bietjie te relax, net bietjie wyer te dink, en dit maak baie nuwe deure vir my oop. Veral in my denkwyses.
- 1.21 Ek weet nie, as almal so stil raak en sê OK wat dink jy, ek weet nie regtig wat ek dink nie. Ek moet eintlik dan maar net sê ek weet regtig nie wat ek dink nie. Ek is bang ek gaan stupid lyk. Of dalk so bietjie van 'n pleaser.
- 1.22 Humor speel 'n groot rol vir my, ek lag maklik. As ek aan ons huis dink, dan dink ek ons het altyd baie maklik gelag. Iets was baie maklik baie snaaks. Ons het deur 'n baie traumatiese ding gegaan, ons was in 'n armed robbery, almal behalwe \*\*. En ons lag nou

- daaroor want dis vir ons 'n manier om dit te verwerk. Ons het selfs die aand daarna al begin lag.
- 1.23 Ekt besef ek, net ek, kan nie met my lewe aangaan soos ek aangegaan het nie en dit het regtig 'n verskil ook gemaak. Bedoelende? P: Soos gaan maar net werk toe, eet, slaap, kom terug werk toe, so 'n roetine. En ek is nie 'n roetine mens nie, ek het dit besef en ek het maar net aangegaan om dit te doen. Toe besluit ek die lewe is te kort om net te doen wat jy dink jy moet doen.
- 1.24 Het hierdie hele ding purpose gebring? Ja, ons as familie het baie nader aanmekaar gegroei. Ja, definitief. Jy kan nie ander mense se lewensprobleme oplos nie, jy kan net help dat hulle daardeur gaan. Ja, ek wil nie fokus op hoekom dit gebeur het nie, en hoekom nou ons gesin. Dit maak nie saak nie want dit het nou gebeur en jy kan dit nie verander nie. En jy kan redeneer dat dit ook baie anders kon uitgedraai het. Ek dink dis die grootste skok wat my op daai stadium getref het, is dat ons nog leef.
- 1.25 'n Laaste ietsie wat jy wil sê oor jou jaar? Ek sien baie uit, ek is baie bang en gestres oor wat nog moet kom. Maar ek sien baie uit daarna. Wat laat jou stress? P: Ek dink soos om met mense te begin werk en die eerste kliënt. Weereens, ek is 'n mens wat bang is ek doen die verkeerde ding en dat ek nie gaan weet hoe om dit te hanteer nie. Ek voel net ek het nie op hierdie stadium genoeg vaardighede om dit te kan hanteer nie. Maar ek weet jy gaan baie min in jou lewe voel dat jy dit 100% het, so ek moet gewoon raak aan die gevoel dat ek eintlik nie 'n clue het nie, en tog doen ek wat ek moet doen.
- 1.26 Ons is nog net twee weke op die kursus maar wat ek oplet van elke sielkundige nou is dat as daar 'n probleem kom gaan doen hulle eers navorsing en gaan praat met ander daarvoor oor hoe om dit te hanteer. Want ek het altyd die idee gehad ek gaan daar sit en dan gaan ek alles moet weet. Maar dit is nie so nie en dit maak dit al klaar vir my makliker om te weet jy doen eers jou research oor die onderwerp, en dan praat jy met ander oor hoe om dit te hanteer. En dis nou as dit 'n baie spesifieke onderwerp is. Maar wat my baie gehelp het aan die begin is 'n kliënt wil tot 'n groot mate net voel jy is in hulle wêreld.
- 1.27 So soms sal iemand sê OK moet ek nou dit doen? Of dis 'n baie praktiese vraag, iets wat jy nou na verwys as gaan doen jou navorsing, en dan is dit duisend keer belangriker om die idee te gee dat jy dit 100% wil verstaan eerder as om die regte antwoord te gee. En dis nie moeilik nie. Om te vra "Is dit?" en "Hoe is dit?" en "Wat presies bedoel jy

daarmee?” Eintlik op daai manier is hierdie ou self besig om hierdie ding heeltemal te analiseer. So ek het ook vir te lank gedink dis vraag-antwoord, vraag-antwoord, en vir jou om die antwoorde te gee moet jy die kennis hê. En eintlik glad nie. Ek dink dis so min dat ek vir iemand letterlik moet sê dit of ja of nee of 10 of 50, wat jy ‘n antwoord amper moet gee. Dit gaan baie meer oor jou ervaring van dit en hoe jy jouself daardeur sal sit.

- 1.28 En dit vat baie stres van ‘n mens af as jy dink jy hoef geen antwoorde te gee nie. Jy moet hulle maar net lei. Net nuuskierig wees basies. Ja, en dis nie moeilik om nuuskierig te wees nie. So kry daai stres van jou af, want dan gaan jy dink met elke geval is daar hierdie manier en as jy nie daai manier vind nie gaan jy die heelyd jouself doubt. En jou navorsing sê dalk stap een tot tien, en jy doen dalk stap een tot tien en dit het geen effek nie. So ‘n mens moet baie meer grounded raak, wat kan ek in elk geval vir jou doen. Ek is nie jy nie.



**2. PETRO: First reflective writing. April 2010:**

- 2.1 **What's happening? / Personal experience ► Master student in professional psychology:** Looking back at the past three months of the M1 programme, it definitely does not feel like I have only been here for that amount of time. The pace of the programme is starting to increase as well as the amount of work to be done. I do feel a bit guilty that I have not been able to spend time with my friends and family, but also feel that if I do not spend a lot of time working that I would not be able to get everything done.
- 2.2 I have been feeling overwhelmed with all the information and assignments, but also enjoy learning in a practical atmosphere (different from previous studies). Seeing clients and discussing their cases with my mentor has increased my knowledge in specific areas. I sometimes feel as if I don't know anything, especially when I am asked a question that I know I am suppose to be able to answer and then there is just nothing in my brain, which makes me feel very dumb and I start thinking why don't I know this, or why can't I remember this?
- 2.3 I am aware of the fact that I am more anxious during class situations than when working with the clients. I think I tend to feel intimidated by the other students as they have just finished their Honours degree and the theory is still fresh in their memory. Sometimes I feel like there is something wrong with my memory as I cannot remember if a specific topic was covered during my studies, and then I think it was 5 years ago. I have come to realize that I have to work very hard to get my knowledge of pathology up to date.
- 2.4 Some mornings I would wake up and just feel like I don't want to continue to put myself through this stress and pressure, but this soon pass and I am able to convince myself that this is what I have worked for. I really enjoy the structure of the classes and the relevancy of the lectures with regards to the work we are doing.
- 2.5 I do feel that feedback from the professors could be more positive. I had to present a case today and I felt like they were focusing a lot on the negative feedback, which I understand is necessary for growth, but I feel that good positive feedback should be included, and not just say well done. Specific examples could be useful. I must say that in class we as students get a lot of opportunity to give feedback to each other which surprisingly are negative and positive. I have a better sense of achievement after class

due to this feedback, negative and positive than after the presentation today. Maybe I am taking the feedback of today too personally, as the main critique was not on my case, but on my use of English and Afrikaans during the presentation, which upset me. It might be because I know that it is something that I have to work on, to use more correct scientific terminology.

2.6 I am learning a great deal about myself. What upsets me and why, how to deal with issues that I never thought to be an issue. Overall this year has been a very busy and difficult year, it has been a year of getting to know myself better, growing as a therapist and discovering different theories and therapeutic interventions.

2.7 I am becoming more aware of my thoughts and actions. How my way of thinking influence the way that I am acting. I realize that I enjoy working with people and my fellow students, but when I need some time to myself, it is important that I take it. Personal reflection is a way for me to take a step back and look at myself, my thoughts and actions. Self evaluation has started to play a big role in my life.

2.8 I have started to take more “me” time, just sitting in silence or taking a ride on my bicycle. I have become aware of different ways that I tend to escape for a while and can see how this has played a role during my year. I have always thought myself to be a person with a high internal locus of control, but recently discovered that external validation also has a big role. From this discovery, I realized that I have been using others to regulate my emotions. I am practicing to be mindful of this, as well as self regulation.

2.9 **Building and Developing strengths: Professional and Personal:**

Professional – Developing a person centered approach to therapy, active listening and reflecting on the client’s perspective of his/her life.

- Understanding a client not just by seeing the problem, but seeing the full person as having a problem.
- Taking steps to protect myself from wanting to do too much, looking after myself as therapist. Having a balanced life. I am developing the strength to relax and take things a bit more easily.

- 2.10 Personal – Building new friendships, new support systems and making time for myself. I am developing the strength to relax and take things a bit more easy.
- Through the year I recognized how dependent I have become on my boyfriend and trying to give myself and him space to focus on our own goals, while still supporting each other.
  - Talking about fears and worries
- 2.11 **Try to explain this to someone:** This is a time where you feel very proud of yourself for being able to achieve what most psychology students dream of, but it is also the time where you doubt yourself the most, where your frame of reference is challenged the most and where you will grow the most to become the person (psychologists) you know (or didn't know) you could be. You become your best friend and worst enemy during this time, challenging yourself and enjoying the process.
- 2.12 **What I'm getting from it:** At the moment I am getting experience and knowledge, intrapersonal growth, and interpersonal growth.

### 3. Petro: Second interview. July 2010

- 3.1 Wat gaan aan, wat voel jy? Alles raak nou net te veel, , almal sê jy moet na jouself kyk, jy moet persoonlike tyd vat, maar dit en dit en dit moet more in wees en julle moet vier boeke gelees het teen daai tyd. Finansiël is die jaar moeilik. Onthou ek het al geld verdien. Dis tough. Dis sulke dubbel-boodskappe wat jy die heelyd kry. Met ons eerste opdrag was dit ook chaos gewees want hulle het vir ons tyd gegee maar ons het nie regtig besef wat dit alles entail nie. En ons het daai aand tot omtrent 12:00 of 01:00 toe gesit om daai goed klaar te maak. En ons moes dit die volgende dag nog gaan print en ingee.
- 3.2 Maar dit het goed gegaan, gelukkig werk ons almal saam. Ons sit sommer saam in een kantoor, vier of vyf mense, en dan doen ons die goed saam. Soos \*\* het ons verslae laat tik oor kliënte wat hulle laat toets het vir een of ander ding. So dit vat nogal aan 'n mens en dis goed wat ons nie gedink het ons hoof tyd voor te maak nie, maar nou moet ons tyd maak daarvoor tussen al die ander goed. Ek probeer om nie te ver vooruit te dink nie, ek vat dit maar soos dit kom.
- 3.3 Hoe cope jy? Ek weet nie, party aande huil ek en dan dink ek, ek is so moeg, ek wil nie meer nie. Ek dwing myself dan om nie later as 23:00 te werk of te gaan slaap nie.. Ek sukkel om te slaap deesdae. Ek worry oor my gevallevoordrag, die tweede een, want ek het nog nie 'n video-opname van my kliënt gemaak nie, ek het getermineer met die een wie ek wou gebruik het, so ek het nie 'n video-opname van haar nie en Woensdag begin ek om 'n nuwe kliënt te sien wie ek wil probeer gebruik vir dit.
- 3.4 En dis sulke klein goedjies, jy moet dit hê maar jy moet op jou eie aangaan. Dis al hierdie logistieke goed wat jy moet uitwerk en dit vat tyd. En navorsing en dan het ons nog klas van 8 tot 5.
- 3.5 En die klas? Die eerste semester was nogal rof, want in elke tweede klas begin jy jou persoonlike issues uit te sorteer en almal is in trane. Met die ? workshop was dit nou weer my beurt. Elkeen het iets gekry om te doen om aan te bied en ek dink dit was \*\* gewees wat toe sê jy moet jou eie auto-biography skryf, wat jy wil hê mense moet op jou begrafnis sê. En daar huil ek, toe is dit die hele ding van die robbery wat toe uitkom, en van skuldgevoelens, en van kwaadgevoelens wat ek toe oor sekere familieledede gehad het en so aan. Maar dit was wonderlik, dit het gewerk.

- 3.6 Dis lekker dat ons almal oor die weg kom, daar is issues, mens hou nie altyd van wat 'n persoon doen nie, maar ons hanteer dit. Maar ek dink ons is redelik gemaklik met mekaar. Ons is verby daai punt om om te gee. Elkeen kry nou maar sy dag om te huil in die klas en deur issues te werk. En die eerste semester het ek nie regtig die klasse geniet nie. Ek hou van die inligting wat mens kry maar ek het nie geweet wat om met dit te maak nie. Dit het nie vir my mooi bymekaar uitgekom nie. Of dalk is dit net ek wat dit nie kon sien nie. Nou doen jy 'n workshop in ? en more doen jy 'n workshop in ? . En elkeen sê hoe wonderlik dit is en dit het nooit regtig bymekaar uitgekom nie tot ons \*\* se workshop gehad het van \*\*.
- 3.7 Ek het 'n kliënt wat 'n terrible ma en pa het, en toe skryf sy vir my 'n storie, sy is nou al 40, van haar kinderlewe. En toe verstaan ek nie want toe het sy, haar kinders toe hulle nog klein was, gaan aflaai by haar ma en pa om te gaan kuier. En toe sê ek vir haar ek verstaan dit nie, en nie op 'n veroordelende manier nie, jy het dan nou hierdie slegte kinderjare gehad, en tog het jy jou eie kinders daar gaan aflaai. En toe het sy 'n baie logiese verduideliking daarvoor van hoe sy gevoel het, sy wou nie haar kinders van hulle ouma af weggehou het nie en hoe sy eintlik vir haar ma-hulle weer 'n kans wou gee om die foute wat hulle met haar gemaak het reg te maak met haar kinders, wat toe in 'n baie terapeutiese gesprek ontwikkel het, maar ek kon sien hoe baie sy daarvan gehou het dat ek wonder oor iets, toe ek dit optel.
- 3.8 Wat kom jy in supervisie agter van jouself, as jy nou die klient eenkant sit? Ek kom agter in my verhouding met ander mense ook en hoe ek in patrone in val is dieselfde as enige iemand anders dink ek, want jy't jou eie sienswyse van okay, dit is hoe dinge moet wees, maar dis nie te se dit moet so wees nie, dis maar net ek wat dit so wil he. Ek en \*\* het baie gesukkel hierdie jaar, en 'n groot ding wat in die supervisie uitgekom het is ek sit baie verantwoordelikheid op myself wat ek dink ander mense op my sit, maar dit is nie, dis ek wat dit op myself sit. As ek klaar is met klas dan dink ek ek moet net vinnig by hom omgaan dat hy nie dink ek skeep hom af nie, dat ons ook aan ons verhouding werk, maar ek dink dit het meer skade gedoen as iets anders. Ek het te veel goed begin aanpyl.
- 3.9 Ek moes net 'n bietjie laat gaan het. Ek was te betrokke by dit gewees en ek voel soveel ligter dat ek 'n besluit kon geneem. Ek link dit absoluut na hierdie jaar toe, as dit nie vir hierdie jaar was nie sou ek nogsteeds in dieselfde patrone gewees het. En ek dink dit is

nie lekker om met mense te fight nie, die fight gaan weer oor en eintlik die skill of die les amper wat jy met dit vat is nie... Ja dit is en ek kan wees wie ek wil wees, ek hoef nie skuldig te voel of die healtyd hoef te verduidelik hoekom ek nie meer sekere goeters doen nie.

- 3.10 Dit is rerig wat ek begin doen het, bv. as ek nou koffie gaan drink met iemand dan moet ek nou eers verduidelik en nou hoef ek nie. Ek se nie ek is heeltemal oor dit nie, dit vat nog aan my baie keer. Dit voel vir my of ek lelik was, al het ek dit op 'n mooi manier gese. Soos met my ma ook. Die vakansie was ek ses weke by die huis dan vra sy vir my, "Wil jy nie gou apteek toe gaan nie?" Dan voel ek nie rerig nie, in plaas van "Ja, okay" en moes nou maar my goed opsy gesit het.
- 3.11 En interpersoonlik? Selfs geestelik ook in my geloof. Die eerste semester was die klasse vir my moeilik en ek't nie rerig geweet waar wat nie, maar die tweede semester het ek nou begin toe dink ek "Okay, kom ek geniet dit net," want ek het altyd gebid "Ag Here, help my net laat ek nou net by wees" toe dink ek, ek gaan nou anders bid. Toe dink ek laat ek dit net geniet, want dit is die belangrikste. Dit help nie ek jaag deur die jaar en ek kan die eksamen...toe't ek gedink ek bid nou anders. En die eerste week toe ons terugkom toe het ek rerig. Ek kom nie eers meer agter as dit teetyd is nie, want toe het ek rerig probeer focus en luister. Be in the moment.
- 3.12 Ek moes net nie dat ander goeters my aandag aftrek terwyl ek daar is en moet luister nie. My kop ios baie besig, ek dink aan ander goeters terwyl ek moet luister. Nou's ek rustiger in die oomblik waar ek is, en ek moet sê dit help my stresvlakke baie. En dis 'n groot lewenskill. Hoe sê daai quote "Wherever you are, be there totally". Dis hoe ek op skool ook was, ek was presies dieselfde, dit het nogal beïnvloed die tipe verhoudings wat ek met vriende op skool gehad het. Ek dink dit was die rede hoekom ek nie so goed kon bind nie omdat ek so besig was met goeters healtyd en ek het nooit rerig my aandag honderd persent gegee rerig nie.
- 3.13 Beteken dit wat jy leer op persoonlike vlak iets? Dit is maar dit, en soos met die kinders die theraplay, ek's van dis nie vir my nie. Sy reflect net die healtyd en herhaal net wat die kinders se. Ek hou van die Gestalt, om proaktief te wees en huiswerk te gee en ek hou daarvan om huiswerk vir myself te gee om te doen. Ek hou van dit en die narratief.

Die psigoanalities is nie, ek kan sien hoe dit belangrik kan wees, hoe dit 'n rol kan speel, maar ek weet nie of ek dit sal gebruik nie.

- 3.14 En jou overall ontwikkeling as terapeut? Noudat jy kliente begin sien, hoe is dit? Ek onthou alles van my eerste kliënt, presies wat die persoon aangetrek het en alles, maar nou is ek al by my negende kliënt. Ek hou van die eerste onderhoud, dit voel vir my daar gebeur meer. Dit is vir my so goed as iemand in hulle self besef wat hulle nie geweet het nie, ek love daai oomblik. Dis soos dieselfde oomblik wat ek het as hulle dit ook het. Die tussenin goed werk ek nog aan. Soos wat pla jou en... Ja, ja maar ek is so gefokus met wat moet ek nou hier gebruik, watter raamwerk moet ek nou hier gebruik?
- 3.15 Toe se hy wat hy dink ek doen, ek sit die teorie tussen my en die klient en om eerder net aan die klient te luister en net nuuskierig te wees en haar storie net te luister dink ek heeltyd aan teorie en watter tegniek moet ek volgende gebruik? Ek dink veral as dit jou eerste keer is wat jy dit begin doen. Ja dan moet jy nou 'n bietjie wetenskaplik wees, jy kan nie net sit en chat nie. Dit is juis die ding omdat die klasse so is waar jy moet wetenskaplik wees. Dan moet jy wys wat het jy gedoen. Maar ek dink dit gaan maar kom met tyd. Ek dink volgende jaar gaan juis die jaar wees waar ek nou met daai goeters gaan moet vorder.
- 3.16 Jou kliënte tot dusver, watter rol speel hulle? Moeiliker ja, want ek het drie kinders by my gemeenskapsdiens. Die een is verstandelik gestremd en die ander twee kom uit slegte omstandighede. Dan het ek 'n seuntjie wat ek sien, 'n sesjarige seuntjie, wat ook maar leerprobleme het so ek het kon 'n volle evaluasie saam met \*\* doen met hom wat goed was. Ek love dit. Ek hou nogal van die adolessente ook want ek het twee hoërskool dogters evalueer en ook 'n hoërskool seun van sestien.
- 3.17 So, die hele scope is vir my okay. Ja en toe het ek nou twee volwasse kliënte wat nou studente is, en dan het ek nou nog 'n werkende een wat ek nou gaan begin sien. So dit is regtig 'n groot verskeidenheid. So ek kan nie se dat ek verkies een bo die ander een nie. Elkeen is vir my nog nuut. Maar daar was nie goed wat jou ontstel het nie? Nee, glad nie, wat ek nogal bekommerd oor is wat ek dink my gaan ontstel is as dit oor ? moet gaan, na die neuro-afdeling toe, want ek is nie een vir snye of bloed nie. Ek wil nie net wegbly nie, maar as ek voel ek kan dit nie hanteer nie gaan ek dit maar net los. Ek gaan myself nie daardeur dwing nie. Praat jy van die rehab? Nee, dis glad nie bloed en snye

- nie. Dalk het dit nou meer akuut geraak, maar my ondervinding was meer soos fisio, mense wat nie kan loop nie, nie meer akuut soos honde of bloed nie.
- 3.18 As jy moet nou terug dink aan ‘n jaar terug na keuring en jy kyk nou na jouself? Ek was baie angstig. Ek het eintlik met die keuring ingegaan sonder om te veel te verwag en omdat ek gedink het “Ag wat, ek gaan nou maar kyk wat gebeur” en ek dink ek het bietjie van daai houding nou weer terug gekry van ek gaan nou nie myself te veel opstress nie, dinge sal okay wees, ek gaan hier deur kom. Omdat ek dink ons die dosente geleer ken het is dit nie meer daai “ons en hulle”, dis nou ons almal. Dit laat mens veilig voel en gee mens hoop.
- 3.19 En die klas? Ons kom almal goed oor die weg. Ons is sewe so elke keer se nou maar as ons in groepe moet werk dan’s dit twee-twee en drie. Dis interessant hoe ek dit uitgewerk het, ons en twee ander se kantore is lanks mekaar en dan is daar ‘n meisietjie oorkant. Sy’s alleen, die oudste een, en dan die ander twee is heel aan die ander kant van die gang. Ons werk goed saam. Daar’s niks soos daai bonding 23:00 die nag as julle almal nie iets verstaan nie en iemand gaan kry die koffie. Ons lag saam en ons gel.
- 3.20 Relax jy? Ek doen hoor, ek het nou die aand het ek my gym bal gevat en toe lê ek op die bal, net om niks te doen nie, want ek is die tipe persoon wat dan moet ek dit doen, en dan moet ek dat doen. Ek leer myself niksdoen.
- 3.21 Jou coping? Ek dink aan wat ek in die week gaan doen, maar ek fokus nie so daarop dat as ek besig is met iets anders mee dan dink ek dat ek dit en dit moet doen. Maar ja dit is nogal om te dink “volgende jaar is ek klaar”, “die einde van die jaar is ek klaar”, want een van my vriendinne kom ook vir my kuier van Engeland af die einde van die jaar so ek en sy het ons vakansie geboek. So die inspirasie is vir my om net deur die jaar te kom en om dit saam met haar te geniet, maar rerig ek dink my coping is om elke ding te probeer geniet die oomblik as ek dit doen. Dit werk vir my sodat ek nie so angstig is nie, want hoe meer dinge ek het om te doen hoe angstiger word ek, want gaan daar tyd wees om alles te doen te kry? Ek ry fiets, eet en slaap reg. Dit help my baie.
- 3.22 Die droom van sielkundige word is nog nie vir my ‘n realiteit nie, dit het nog nie vir my ingesink nie. Dis iets waaroor ek gedroom het, maar ek’s nie gewoond my drome word waar nie. Ek dink ek sal daaraan dink as ek by Desember vakansie is. Ek gaan volgende jaar vir die internskap by \*\* wees. En volgende jaar gaan ons ‘n salaris verdien, maar



baie min, ek sal kan uitkom. And it will just get better. Ja toe dink ek dis te goed om waar te wees. So ek dink as ek daar is en dit is nou so dan sal ek dit glo want ek dink nou op hierdie stadium is ek nog bietjie skepties.

#### 4. Petro: Third Interview. October 2010

- 4.1 Wat gebeur? Jis Lindi ek het gesukkel om te slaap, hierdie afgelope twee weke ek dink ek het insomnia, drie uur in die oggende dan le ek nog wakker dan is dit nie eks moeg of rol net rond nie, ek le wawydwakker. Ek het gestres, en my een been se spier het begin spring, al in die middel van die jaar, dan weet ek dis verseker stress, ek weet dit, en dan net soos ek myself opcharge dan begin die spier te spring. Weird nê?
- 4.2 Ag verder gaan dit goed onder omstandighede ek dink, ek is so bly jy het nou gekom ek het nodig om te praat om perspektief te kry. Ek het darem baie gesprekke met my supervisor. Hy help my baie met my voorbereiding. Maar nou ken jy my ook Lindi, ekt altyd 'n backup plan, so ek sal sommer se wel dit kan dit ook wees, of dit ook wees, so die mondelinge freak my uit.
- 4.3 Reflekteer oor die jaar? Wel na vandag moet ek sê ek het baie kennis opgebou, wat ek nooit gedink het ek sal kan doen nie, en as ek eintlik dink oor vrae dan weet ek waar om daai inligting te kry en dit het my verbaas en gehelp, en ook persoonlik het ek meer na myself begin omsien as persoon in die sin van wat wil ek hê, en wat is vir my belangrik voordat ek noodwendig by ander mense soos hulle behoeftes kyk, sense of self, eks meer mindful oor my eie behoeftes. Deur meer mindful te wees, is ek 'n beter vriendin, suster en dogter. Eks nie meer so demanding nie, maar ek stel ook beter grense vir ander. Ek ken myself soveel beter. Ek hou actually nou van myself. Reflektief sal ek sê dit is 'n uitdaging, jy kan die hanteer, dis moeilik, maar jy kan. Ek kon.
- 4.4 En hoe ek voel soos ek vir jou gese het toe my been begin spring, so ek het baie meer in kontak gekom met myself en wat ek uit die lewe wil he want ek het maar baie rondgeval die afgelope tyd, dan werk ek hier en dan daar. Ek probeer 'n sukses maak maar ek was nooit regtig gelukkig nie so nou vir die eerste keer. Selfs soos wat ek geswot het het ek gedink maar dit is regtig wat ek wil doen ek geniet wat ek doen jy weet, so dit was nou nogal nice. Dit het my destiny bevestig, en dit was 'n lang pad.
- 4.5 Want selfs deur hierdie eksamen dan kyk ek terug na die pad wat ek gestap het tot waar ek nou is dan dink ek sjoe dit was maar verskillende draaie om te kom tot waar ek nou is, tot by wat ek wou gehad het maar ek moet se my gebede is verhoor dit is wat ek wou gedoen het en ek moet sê ek het agtergekom hoe genadig die Here is, en dat hy gebede verhoor, want ekt heelyd gedink Hy sal my nie toegelaat het om my M te doen as Hy my

- nie daardeur gaan help nie, want ek stres my dood gaan ek dop? Gaan ek dop? Dan dink ek maar dis nie in my hande nie, ek kan net hard leer en my beste doen. Aan die groot geheel kan ek niks doen nie, my geloof het baie sterk geword.
- 4.6 En selfs my een vriend sê vir my ek het hom baie geïntimideer toe ons saam gewerk het, blykbaar omdat ek so pligsgetrou was, en nou sê hy ek het baie verander, toe se hy ek is nou gemaklik om mee te praat en dis lekker om saam met my te kuier en hy kan sien my ervaring het my gebou tot waar ek nou is, so rereg, en dit was nice om dit van iemand anders te hoor, wat dit nie hoef te gese het nie.
- 4.7 En die rol van kliente? Van my kliënte se aspekte en sterktes het my geïnspireer, en ander kere raak ek weer so gefrustreerd dat ek dink maar die goed is voor jou kan jy nie sien wat gaan aan nie? So ek dink daar het ek nog empatie nodig, maar ek moet nog werk daaraan om sensitief te wees en nie te wil sê maar kan jy nie sien nie? Word net wakker.
- 4.8 Veral ook hoe ander mense hulle eie seerkry hanteer, en ek hou mos van kreatief wees, teken en verf en ek het ook baie met kinders gewerk, en dit was vir my so lekker om te speel, ek hou nie van heeltyd ernstig wees nie so dit was lekker om saam om die mat te sit en skoene uit te trek en rond te hardloop en te spring. Daar is net een kleint wat ek vir die hele jaar gesien het, sy het actually teruggekom na terminasie, en dit was nogal goed vir my.
- 4.9 Ek is so dankbaar vir hierdie jaar Lindi. En veral vir twee mense. Een is \*\* wat saam my 'n kantoor gedeel het, en soos ons ma's wat van dieselfde plek af kom dit was net weer 'n besturing, so ons het mekaar baie gehelp en gedra en as mens gefrustreerd is, dan kan ons praat, so dis lekker om iemand te hê om goed mee te deel, en dan moet ek sê \*\* ook, my supervisor, hy het my rereg gepush om my te laat dink oor hoe doen ek terpaie, en nie net oor my kliënt het nie. Hoe stap jy 'n pad, so sonder sy invloed? Ek definitief ook nie gewees het waar ek is nie. Om te dink aan wat hulle gedoen het, het my vlerke gegee. Want hy het maar basies terapie gedoen, okay waarmee sukkel jy? Kom ons kyk na verskillende opsies en dan los hy my om die opsies te gee, hy het so nou en dan sy opinie gegee ja en stories vertel en dan het ek net opgevolg? Ekt al hoe meer my eie ding begin doen. Myself vertrou.
- 4.10 En jou coping? Oefening definitief. Elke dag se fietsry het baie gehelp, as die mure my vasdruk dan sal ek die fiets vat so dit was nogal vir my 'n groot ding en selfs nou in die

eksamentyd snaaks genoeg, almal se hul is moeg, maar ek wil heelyd oefening doen, so ek was die teenoorgestelde as al die ander, so dit definitief en dan my ma'le en suster en broer. Om naweke te kon wegkom na hulle toe en te ontspan en my ma kook en ek hoef nie te was of te stryk nie en my pa help my met die finansiële las so dit het definitief gehelp en myself, ek het baie meer begin lees, soos stories, Bybelverhale ensovoorts.

- 4.11 Deur die hele eksamen het dit het my gehelp, ekt elke dag 'n Bybelvrou se verhaal bestudeer en ek sal dit nogal aanbeveel, maar defnitetf ook kerk, en meer by vriende uitgekome die jaar, al het ek minder tyd gehad het ek meer tyd gemaak vir vriende, so ja. Ek het ook baie vriende gemaak die jaar. Goeie vriende. Die jaar was eintlik die moeite werd al was dit net vir dit. Dis maar dit. Maar veral my geloof. En rêrig as ek gevoel het ek is nie lus nie dan kyk ek sommer so nege episodes van Vampire Diaries of ander stories wat ek niks hoef te dink nie.
- 4.12 Ek het darem ook my navorsing ingegee, eks die enigste een. Maar ek is baie dankbaar dat myne deur is, ek wag vir my uitslae. Ek begin die derde Januarie werk. Enige iets wat ek kan leer sal my help, ek stel rerig belang in enige iets waar ek kan leer en wat my kan help. So enige iets gaan wonderlik wees. Ek is bly dis nie weer n heel nuwe aanpassing nie, so toe hulle ook aan die begin van die jaar se hulle wil graag he ek moet internskap hier doen, toe dink ek great ek hoef nie voor te berei vir n onderhoud nie
- 4.13 Weet jy, die jaar het my gehelp om my breakup te hanteer, om sterk genoeg te wees om te kan sê ek kan nie nou met dit deal nie, los dit eers daar dat ek nou met dit klaarmaak, maar ek het, dit was baie interessant toe ons die huweliksterapie behandel het , daai week, het ek besef ek moet eers my eie identiteit kan dra voordat jy regtig met iemand kan koppel; toe het ek besef ek was nog nie rêrig my eie mens nie, en ek dink dit het my gedryf om te sê, moenie dat hierdie jou onderkry nie, want jy gaan 'n sterker en beter persoon daaruit kom, en ek moet vir jou sê tot onlangs toe het ek nog nie rêgtig besef dat ek single is nie, maar nou eers in die laaste tyd. En dis OK, dis actually lekker.
- 4.14 Ek probeer hom ook te ondersteun maar ek laat hom nie toe om my lewe te oorheers en my in daai ding te laat intrek nie, jy moet nou als vir my doen wat jy kan nie, maar dit het baie verander hoe ek verhoudings sien. Dit is as jy dink julle gaan uit, julle moet nou alles saam doen, dis nie eintlik waar nie dit maak jou absoluut desperaat en afhanklik, en

- ek dink elke verhouding het maar sy afhanklike fase in die begin, maar ek dink ek het daaruit geleer om nie te afhanklik te wees nie.
- 4.15 Hierdie afhanklike ding is nogal 'n groot ding wat ek geleer het. So ek het begin grense stel en weet jy wat ek kan nou vir jou duidelik sê ek weet beter wat ek in n man soek en wat ek eendag sal wil hê, so dis nogal iets waarvan ek bewus geword het. Ek weet beter wat ek nie sal opoffer vir 'n verhouding nie.
- 4.16 Het jou persepsies verander? Ek het definitief 'n baie vermydende beeld gehad en nie oor dinge gedink nie, wat ek was bang dit oorweldig my as ek dink oor wat die jaar gaan gebeur, so ek dink nie ekt realisties gedink nie, mar ek het geweet dit sal nie maklik wees nie, en ek kan nie glo as ek nou terugdink dat 'n jaar terug het ek nog nie eers begin nie. Nou die dag toe dink ek dit was so maklik, dis nou verby en toe dink ek mar dit was nie so maklik toe ek deur dit gegaan het nie maar nou dink ek ja, ek het dit hanteer en ek is daardeur, so ja ek was definitief baie naiief in die sin van wat om te verwag en hoe baie werk dit is.
- 4.17 Maar ek was ook gewoon aan harde werk, dis nie dat ek afgeskeep het ek het soms tot in die aande 22:00 gewerk om goed klaar te kry so die dink ek het my 'n voordeel gegee, ek was klaar in daai roetine, ek kon klaar hard werk.
- 4.18 As ek vir iemand iets kan sê sal dit wees om net van die begin af so veel as moontlik, doen soveel as moontlik supervisie en moenie goed uitstel nie, doen jou opdragte so gou as jy kan, moenie tot op die einde wag nie want dit het my gehelp en ek moet sê aan die begin van die jaar was dit rof. Druk net deur elke dag. Maar al die klasse was goed. Wees net jousef, moenie perfek wil wees en alles regkry nie.
- 4.19 Weet jy die klas ook, ek weet nie ek dink tog ons was goed, geen ruptions maar wel 'n paar frustrasies met mekaar se manier van dinge doen. Ons het maar groepe gehad, maar ons is 4 wat close is, ons het goed saamgedoen en saamgepraat, en afsluiting gehou, so die dinamika was nie so dat jy nie jousef kan wees nie maar ons het nie rêrig almal mekaar gebruik om deur die jaar te kom nie. Almal het goed oor die weggekom. Elkeen het mos hul eie persoonlikheid.
- 4.20 Ons wil nie die groepsdinamika afsluiting he nie, ons wil net lekker saamkuier Vrydag en se hoor hier geluk, kyk hoe goed het die jaar gegaan. Maar met die navorsing meet almal

mekaar en selfs met die eksamen wie het wat geleer en wie is verder geleer as die ander een. Maar ek het maar net daaruit gebly.

- 4.21 Die jaar in een woord? Ek sal se uitdaging. Jy kan dit hanteer, dit is moeilik maar jy kan dit hanteer. Die inwin van kennis het gehelp met my persoonlike groei maar definitief my tegnieke het verbeter. My high was my eerste gevalvoordrag, want ek wou verduidelik hoe het ek gegroei as terapeut en as mens. Ek kon sien hoe die twee bymekaarkom. Aan die begin het ek gedink ek sal heeltemaal moet verander, en toe was dit eintlik nie so nie. Ek moes net n deel van myself ontdek en ontwikkel.
- 4.22 Laagtepunt? Ek dink nie rêrig, maar natuurlik my persoonlike lewe. Als rondom my verhouding wat ek heeltyd moes uitsorteer. Die grense wat ek moes stel. Dit was sleg want ek wou ondersteun maar ek het nie geweet hoe nie, ek wou nie selfsugtig wees nie maar in hierdie geval moes ek wees. My supervisor het ook baie in die geval gehelp. Ek het maar altyd dit nog gedoen met familie ook, my behoeftes weggeskuif en sorteer hulle s'n uit en selfs met dit het als op een slag getackle, en gesê ek sit nou my voet neer, en dis die een skuif wat ek moes gemaak het, en dit het baie dinge verander. Daar was nie tyd vir nog verder reflekteer nie. Dit het eintlik so goed vir my uitgedraai.
- 4.23 Die betekenis van die jaar? Ek dink ek was op 'n punt waar ek 'n loopbaan wou begin, ek het altyd gesê ek is nie gereed om aansoek te doen vir my M nie, maar omstandighede het so gedraai dat dit is of M of aansoek vir 'n werk wat ek nie wil doen nie, en ek het al hoeveel werke gedoen wat ek nie wil doen nie en ek het geweet hoe dit sal eindig. Ek moes die kans vat. Toe word my droom waar.
- 4.24 Die jaar het vir my gewys dit is die loopbaan wat ek moet volg en ek vat my loopbaan meer ernstig op nou. Die ander drome het nie gerealiseer nie. En dis 'n groot stuk betekenis. En om my te help om te dink wat wil ek hê en waarnatoe is ek oppad.

## 5. Petro: Second reflective writing. November 2010

- 5.1 **Looking back and Looking forward:** Looking back at this year that went by so fast, I found that I have grown on a personal and professional level. When I started at the beginning of 2010, I could not have predicted all the changes that came about in my life due to going through this process of M1. In a way I feel like this has been a year of personal therapy for me as client. What I mean with this is that my learning about therapeutic techniques, theories, and working with clients has empowered me to be a better therapist, and to want to be a good therapist. This year has showed me what I am capable of and what I am not so good at doing. It has also made me aware of things I would like to be doing in future, and what I would rather not do.
- 5.2 I have come to realize through this year, that working as a team can have much more outcomes than trying to go at it alone the whole time. I feel that I have learned the most from making use of co therapists / colleagues and asking advice from supervisors. Although this was a very busy and difficult year, I am glad for the things I can take away with me. I feel prepared for the next step, which is my internship year. At the moment I feel that this M1 programme has definitely equipped me for what comes next, it has given me an idea of what to expect and what to look forward to.
- 5.3 Standing at the end of this year, I cannot believe that it is almost over and that I have made it so far. I definitely did not do it on my own, and I have my Father in Heaven to thank for that. I stand in disbelief, or rather amazement at what I have achieve this year.
- 5.4 **Petro before M in professional psychology:** Before I started my M1 year, I did not really know what to expect from it, and basically just went into it, kind of blindly. I knew that I had to do my best, as I was coming in from the outside, working for about 5 years and not really up to date with psychology, making me want to work even harder to show my lecturers that they have not made a mistake to select me for this programme. Anxiety levels rose at times, making me want to run away, but I stuck it out and even learned things about myself in those times. I felt so guilty if I could not attend a family function or visit my friends and spend time with my boyfriend. At times it all just seemed too much to deal with. I was trying to keep everyone happy, but exhausted myself in the process.

- 5.5 **Petro now:** If there is one thing that I have learned this year, it was to think of my own needs, before trying to please others. Before this year, this statement would have sounded selfish to me, but knowing when to say no and tend to what is important for me at a specific time has lead me to a more relaxed and peaceful person. When I spend time with someone now, it has more quality than when I tried to spend loads of time with people, working on relationships. I feel like I have a more relaxed demeanor, not worrying about what will happen if I don't do what others expect from me. Even with my work this year, I have started to work to a point where I can say I did what I could under the circumstances, and not feel guilty because I could not do more.
- 5.6 I also found that I can forgive people more easily, because I can see why they do things they way they do. My empathy levels have definitely increased, not only towards others but towards myself as well. Again giving me peace and acceptance where I feel I lacked before this year.



## **APPENDIX E**

### **TRANSCRIPT CASE 3: SUZANNE**

## 1. Suzanne: Pilot Interview. November 2009

Introduction and orientation of the study.

- 1.1 How do you feel about the year? I'm very excited, I was going over my course this morning, I thought I would just have a look and it's so exciting. It's very compact and there's a range, you're doing your research on this side and then there's practical and then your theory and then supervision. It seems like a variety. I've applied for post-graduate campus so I'll find out next week if I'm in. So I'm hoping for that, that'll be nice to be on campus. My cousin was staying there this year but she's moving and I've got my dad's cousin. So at least there's someone for Sunday afternoon lunch. I want to be successful in this, very badly.
- 1.2 What do you expect to experience in terms of personal experiences? I see a lot of growth happening and a lot of understanding of people. I see myself learning a lot especially with other people, it's not just myself anymore. With undergraduate and honours you spend a lot of time with yourself with all the work so it's going to be nice to interact with others and sharing ideas and just learning more about human behavior.
- 1.3 I think I'll just gain more and more insight and understanding and I think it gives you more of an objective view, that understanding help a lot. My biggest mission when I get there is to set up a social network, like get involved in the church, just get myself connected fast and befriend my classmates. But mostly I just want to get connected in the church, with Christians. It's a friendly environment where I'll have friends. And I'll keep in contact with my family, my mom will come visit. I'll just keep myself connected, I know that is important and I'll work on that a lot. Yes, just take a little bit of time-out. I'm also, I also took two years off after school.
- 1.4 L: Thank you so much, I appreciate your participation. I'll call you in January and we'll set up the date for our first interview in February.

## 2. Suzanne: First interview. February 2010

- 2.1 How are you doing, what's happening? I'm good, I'm getting into it, you could say I'm into it now, the whole process. It's fine, I can definitely feel it starting to build up now. L:Was it difficult? S: What? L: Starting here. Yes and no. No, it wasn't. It's easy because the staff is friendly and the department is very open to talk to. Everyone has been friendly and welcoming, so it's made it easy. And yes the normal stuff of relocation.
- 2.2 I love it. It's a great environment. I've joined a church, I'm meeting people and there's a lot to do, it's a very social, family city. Actually a pastor phoned me from one church and then I went and visited it. I went there for about three weeks and visited the home cell. Then I was invited by someone else to go to another church, so I visited that one and now I'm happy in the second one. And now I'm in the cell and it's nice. I'm getting connected first.
- 2.3 Class is a different mixture, more dominant characters and more quiet characters. But it's very nice, everyone's friendly and interactive. L:Where do you fit in? I don't know, I'm still finding that out, I alternate between being quiet and listening one day, and then talking and asking questions, but mostly more quiet for now. For now, I'm more reserved. For a specific reason or just because that is who you are? I'm just trying to take it in and first find my place. And I've been asking my classmates lots of questions, like what's going on, what do they think? But I'm slowing down with that. I'm slowly starting to go straight to the lecturer, I'm glad about that because I was asking too much. Ja, being dependent on other people's opinions too much L:You think? Yes, just getting the feeling of everything for the first month. That's also a good strategy because that way you also get to know who is more helpful. .
- 2.4 And being an M-student in Psychology, what's it like? For now it's fine, but I can definitely feel I'm under pressure to do my proposal now because I need to get it in by April. At the moment I don't feel like I've learnt a lot, I feel like I'm learning bit by bit. But I'm just at the beginning of the process, that's how it feels. I feel like I'm in the process now.
- 2.5 And what happens here, with yourself? I'm focusing more on ethics now, like my responsibility to others. I can feel, even though it's only March, I'm becoming a bit more

sensitive to my influence on others, as I have in the past. And I want to become very sensitive to that. To who I am, how they see me and my effect on them. L:So you like that? Yes, I like that. I'm hoping for it to develop fully. I'm also searching for more guidance from more experienced people. I don't want to do this on my own. That's why there are people to do that. But that's important because some students don't want the guidance, they see it as threatening. Yes, I want to ask and hear their opinion but I don't want to feel that I'm forced to take the opinion. I want to hear their opinion and then be able to feel free to apply it to myself. I don't want to feel forced at all, I don't like that.

2.6 Openness? Yes that's what I'm finding here. The lecturers and staff will specifically say: Well, I would do this, they would question me on how I would do it, then I tell them and then they would maybe suggest something else. So it's very indirective, my supervisor is indirective. Openness, you like to get that in, but in the end still be able to do what you want. To find your own feet. I want to hear about the information but in the end take it in my own way.

2.7 Do you miss\*\*? I miss the University, I love the University, it's a lovely campus. I am enjoying this campus, I just think it's a really great University and very committed staff, and the process and the structure is really good. It's of a very high standard. I'm talking about the Psychology department. My experience of it, specifically Honours, I was very impressed with that. It was very structured, very ordered. And obviously there are some people that I miss from \*\*, but that's it. I would say the University and some friends.

2.8 What would you say are your coping skills at the moment? Social support, I've picked that up. I think also withdrawing, I just close the door and get it together by myself, or even go lie down. Not that there has been any stress, but if I'm trying to work on something or just in general. In the beginning, when I was stressed I was asking other people questions, but I'm finding that, because I'm more comfortable now, I want to rather just close the door and find out on my own. Try to explore things and find the answer first, and if not, then go ask others. I'm feeling an adjustment there. Definitely a bit less dependent. Trusting my own abilities.

2.9 And the spiritual component help. That's very important to me. My relationship with God is very important to me and also that connection with other Christians to strengthen my faith. That's the main reason, to be connected with other Christians. And from that

relationship one also gets hope. If it's tough, there's a bigger purpose and a bigger force over all of it.

- 2.10 Coping wise I think I've put on weight, I think I've put on a few kilo's this past month so I'm going to try and lose it. Comfort food. When I go home I eat more than I should and before I go to sleep I'll have something, I don't even care. Definitely been eating more. But I feel like I'm changing from that as well. It was maybe just a coping-mechanism in the beginning, when I settled in.
- 2.11 I battled quite a lot with sleeping in the beginning, I was very tired during the day. But now I'm fine, got my biological clock going.
- 2.12 I've had a couple of days, I was going through a lot of uncertainty at some stage, in the beginning, with sharing myself with others. We've had a few exercises where we had to share and tell others who you are, and so on. That was difficult because I felt through my degree I analyze myself from every perspective and now I had to explain myself so simply. That was really challenging so I limited what I shared with others. And I picked up that the others felt that I wasn't being completely open. I felt that I needed to improve on that. But I feel that I'm getting to that place where I'm becoming my comfortable self again. But there must be some level of trust, I won't just do it. So maybe you just needed to establish that level of trust.
- 2.13 And yourself as a therapist? We haven't started the new therapy yet, but we've started with assessments like intake interviews and then assessing children. So far it's good, I'm glad that I feel compassion for my clients, I really care about them. And I'm learning slowly to get into the boundaries, that are something that is challenging me at the moment. I'm looking forward to starting therapy, but for now it's just assessments and scoring, and we'll start writing reports now. I am nervous though. Will I say the right things and so.
- 2.14 I feel fine, I know that there's a lot of knowledge I still need to gain with regards to an intake, covering all that, gaining a good understanding of the context. I'm still learning and I know I have a lot to learn, but I'm fine with getting what I need to do my job. I feel comfortable with the tests I've been using, I'm feeling fine with what's being expected of me now.
- 2.15 Your expectations of the rest of the year? I asked you this last year, can you remember your answer? I think I said I wanted to grow a lot as a person and a professional. But I

want to grow more into myself as a person and then integrate that into my profession. But this is very important for me, I want my self-concept to be integrated with both. I don't want to be a different person, I want to be one in both, I don't want to have to change roles too dramatically. I'm trying to find that person-profession, obviously I understand there are going to be differences. I just want to grow into both this year.

- 2.16 Do you think you'll know when you reach that stage? I think I will, the way I'll relate to people specifically with my family, and then with my colleagues, and then with my supervisors. I'll know this is me and this is the person and professional I'm going to be. To a huge extent I also think that it is an ongoing thing. I can imagine, but I just wanted to narrow it down a bit, I'm not considering too many alternative persons I should be. I'm feeling much more comfortable these last couple of weeks, now that I've gone through that stage I went through. What would you call that stage? I think lots of contemplation, a lot of psychological contemplation about my roles.
- 2.16 To divert all my energy into my work, especially this year is part of the plan. I think it's going to be useful. What I want to do this year is say I've got a lot of writing to do and scoring and reading, I want to be able to, if I'm feeling really tired, not take the rest of the afternoon off, just divert that to scoring. To alternate between the activities, to keep me going through the year. To try and keep it interesting. Yes, to get through all the work.
- 2.18 What is the meaning of being here in your life? Interesting question. This is one step closer to finding what my calling is. I haven't found my calling and I believe we each have a calling. I feel like I'm searching and searching for that calling. I believe it's going to come one day. I don't know when, hopefully it's soon. And this year can help me. One thing I do know is that it's definitely in the field of psychology and I think going through the process is so important. I feel that I'm going to be molded. My outlook on life and people is going to become much clearer. It's already happening.
- 2.19 Once in a while I feel like talking to someone very close to me. About deep things, like say specifically about seeing the world and life and that. I haven't found that person here yet. But I'm liking it that I'm fine with keeping it to myself, because I feel like I was doing it too much in the past, speak to other people too much. L: That comes up quite often, that things of speaking too much, or sharing too much, or asking too much. Ja,

being dependant on other people's opinions too much. I do that all the time. Seek approval constantly.

- 2.20 Are you seeing a therapist? No we don't have to. But they have given us a number of a person to call if we need to. I've considered it once already, but then I decided to see if I can go through this by myself.
- 2.21 Do you think you'll be able to recognize your own strengths and growth? Yes, definitely. One thing that's also really important to me is that they've been telling us a lot about the power that we're going to experience as therapists over other people's lives. Hearing about that, it's really important to me that I stay humble. I want to be human and modest. I want to be aware of my growths but in a way that I accept it and acknowledge it, but I don't abuse it.
- 2.22 Next year we've got our internships here, they've based us already. But that's nice, I'm really glad it's here for two years and they set everything up. After that, I think I might head back to Gauteng. Hospital, I can see myself in a hospital setting, working with other types of professionals.
- 2.23 What are you experiencing so far? I am proud, but I know that life's continuous improvement, I've been aware of my shortcomings and what I need to improve on. But I'm feeling that I'm at a place of contentment now where I'm fine with myself. I'm feeling confident. I was very anxious. I was feeling very unsure of myself when I got here. Quite a bit of uncertainty. You need those first 2 weeks to get to a bit more comfortable place. And to analyze everyone else and the whole setting, taking everything in.
- 2.24 I think I know enough to be comfortable in my environment now. Everyone's just really nice here, it's really great. I feel I can talk to so many people. Yes, and the lecturers want to be a part of us this year. Everyone's really connected here. My department, I think a big thing is my attitude but also my environment, this department is very understanding. At the moment it doesn't feel like I am contributing much, but I feel like I'm getting into that place where I'll be able to contribute. I have a slightly different perspective of looking at things. A unique perspective. So when I get more comfortable with my role and myself I hope that I'll be able to contribute that more because I tend to hold back quite a bit. So I'm looking forward to that, especially when I'm gaining more knowledge.

- 2.25 So far, if you think about yourself being a therapist? Yes, I mentioned boundaries. Sympathy, but not so much sympathy where I'm actually experiencing what you're going through, too much where it's influencing my thinking. Yes, I think I need to be more assertive, be more objective. Sometimes I try to climb into your head.
- 2.26 I do have a bit of objectivity going on, I tend to look at the bigger picture. I definitely have my moments where I can judge a person. You're very much more aware of the downside than the upside. I've definitely experienced things in my past where it's gone to my head too much, compliments and that. Or where I realize a strength where it got to my head, and I became egotistical or superior. So I'm also trying to learn from the past. And you want to, whatever you identify then, to really integrate it rather than to make it an ego-thing.
- 2.27 Anything else, the experiences of being a master's student? One thing I've really become aware of being a student in the class, is that you have to have friends outside the master's class. That's one thing I'm trying to work on now. Once in a blue moon I'll go out, but I don't want to make it a habit, getting too comfortable with everyone. Because I would like everyone to be my colleagues in the future. I don't want to get too personal. A neighbor of mine is a psychology student, so we've actually become closer, but I've become aware that we have different approaches in how we see things. So I think we must limit the amount of time we spend together socially. One can get annoyed and irritated when you spend too much time together. So I want to get more comfortable with people outside the Psychology Department.
- 2.28 That also helps you to stay balanced, because I think if your friends are your colleagues, are your classmates of course it will just become psychology. If it was biology I think it would be safer, but psychology can be very defeating in a way. There must also be a time where you just don't think about how you think about what you think about. Definitely, it can get tiring. Just someone you can talk to about the weather and the sea and watch some TV. And just express the way you see things and not be challenged by a fellow student because they see it in a different way. I'm looking forward to that, I'm slowly making friends outside.



### 3. Suzanne: First reflective writing. April 2010

- 3.1 **What's happening? / Personal experience ► Master's student in professional psychology:** Currently, I'm feeling at ease and comfortable with how things are progressing. I feel like I've gone through a few changes but today I'm feeling stable and secure with who I am. I feel how a person should feel, normal, as I'm not engaging in as extensive self-reflection and scrutiny as I normally do. It's a relief because it gets tiring. I've definitely experienced a lot of personal inadequacies in masters so far because we're a small class and we share a small space everyday, so I tend to compare myself a lot with my fellow colleagues. As I became extremely aware of their adequacies I became extremely aware of my own inadequacies and my self-esteem declined. I eventually became aware of their inadequacies as well which made me feel critical. However, recently I've started to accept myself more as well as the others and it feels so right. I'm feeling less tense.
- 3.2 I analyzed myself extensively during my previous years of studying psychology so this time I am limiting the analysis for the sake of my well-being, and focusing rather on completing the tasks set out. At this moment, I honestly have no desires to analyze myself. I'm happier to analyze others. The hypotheses I've formed about myself and my personality (positive, negative and neutral) in the past are however subtly evoked by the different approaches we are introduced to and I leave simply them at that, unless prompted to explore further. I try not to dwell on them as I use to.
- 3.3 I miss my loved ones and have especially become aware in the past month of how important they are to me and how significant in my life. I have a desire to spend more quality time with them and show my appreciation for them more. I would like to accept each individual for who he/she is more and limit the amount of analysis I do. I've found that it takes the simple joy out of subjectively knowing the individual as it objectifies him/her. I'm really looking forward to beginning therapy and connecting deeply with others as we have been busy with scholastic assessment which I find lacks the deep connection. I'm finding report writing very logical and structured which is quite challenging, especially when I have limited time.
- 3.4 I'm feeling a lot more independent and capable than I was in the beginning. I use to ask my colleagues a lot of questions about the work which made me feel quite dependent on

their opinions, but that has now reduced. Thank goodness, as I'm starting to trust in my own abilities more. I'm also not feeling as obligated as I use to, to contribute to class discussions and feel now that I can simply listen and form hypotheses in my mind and don't have to feel obligated to voice them. I've been sensitive about my colleague's opinions which I believe definitely contributed to me speaking less. However, that seems to be passing.

- 3.5 I respect all my colleagues and am aware of their unique qualities, and am enjoying the time I get to spend with each one. I have decided for the purpose of this year to not favor any over the others and spend significant more time with but to rather try disperse my time with all relatively equally so as to get to know each one relatively well. I don't want get too personal with any of my colleagues as feel that it could complicate things. Instead, I'm trying to make more Christian friends in my church, as well as spend more time with them. This is slowly happening.
- 3.6 Lastly, I miss more time for myself and for creative thinking. Demands can become pressurizing and assignments etc can tend to then just be about getting the work done and not about making it "my own" which is very important for me. When I'm not at the clinic I'm mostly spending time with myself in privacy which is centered mainly around my work. As I don't really have obligations toward family and close friends here because they don't live here, I find it fairly easy to spend my free time with myself. This helps me get through the work at a more comfortable pace and have alone time.
- 3.7 **Personal Growth: What's happening to me?** I am learning to think and act responsibility for the sake of others. I'm learning how my opinion can significantly affect the life course of another. I'm learning to be accountable for every decision I make, legally and ethically. I'm learning to value the wellbeing of others more than my own. I'm learning to listen and listen some more. I'm learning that there is never one way of looking at something and that we all have something to contribute. I'm learning to trust in myself, my knowledge and my judgment more. I'm learning to work harmoniously with others, on higher, equal and lower levels. I'm learning that it's not about the title you acquire but the positive difference you make in the lives of others. The title simply puts you in the position to make these differences. I'm learning that of all the multiple perspectives we adopt in order to understand the individual intricately, that there is always

room for more. I'm learning that every individual is incredibly unique and that we (humans) will never be able to fully understand ourselves. I'm trusting that eventually my time will come, after undergoing all the changes I've needed to undergo.

#### 4. Suzanne: Second interview. August 2010

- 4.1 So, what's been happening? Oh its fine, it's really busy now, we've been three to four weeks into the term now. Ja, so it's quite busy. Like assignments coming up, presentations. I've got one on Monday. Ja, and like I'm into the whole thing of a new workshop every week. You must quickly adapt to the next thing. But I'm getting the hang of it. I think I see it as a lot of, almost like lots of different tools but like , at the end of it I'll choose wants going to work for me, ja, so some of them I'll won't use, most of them I will use.
- 4.2 Coping? Uhm, I'm fine I find that I work better around deadlines, so even though I have this long list of things to do, I'll just start getting into it, like 3-4 days before. And then I might fall short of sleep but that's how I get through it. I'm not really good with pacing, so I tend to like leave things around deadlines. When it's at that deadline, I hate myself for doing that.
- 4.3 I am better with time management, with CBT, I actually start doing the activities, scheduling them for myself, just so that I can get more conscious of what I am doing with my time and trying to be more productive. Because we had to do it for homework and I felt it made a difference in my productivity so I started to use it now. It is just like a Table and then from every hour, you just say like I set my alarm for every 3 hours, then I just record what I did, and at this state if it was pleasure or mastery, so like some things are for pleasure and others for mastery so it is just for becoming aware. It is really helping, so it is great.
- 4.4 Uhm, I would say I am starting to feel more competent and capable because there is such a variety, like psychologists must do so much, and in the beginning it was a bit overwhelming but now I am like ok, bring it on. I think just competence now.
- 4.5 Clients? Uhm, obviously nervous in the beginning but when you meet with the client and then I am fine and I felt relax. Ja so it is only the report writing that's tough because now I am having a different supervisor and he wants it in a different format. Supervision, I think it is just that relational experience, I can speak to someone who is an experienced psychologist but obviously it was like a step into the future, having a relationship with a professional, that is how I saw it. Yes, and now my new one, I haven't have a proper session yet. I am looking forward to it. I think I will have more space, like just figuring things out for myself.

- 4.6 I have adapted well, I have like a few new friends and my church it is every Wednesday night, aah it is so nice it is just women, like ten of us, it is basically just going to the facilitators house and then you watch like a DVD and it is basically teaching of the basics of Christianity and God's plan for you as a woman, just the beauty and peace, it is almost like a therapy session because we share and learn from each other it is just, I have been doing that and it has been absolutely wonderful and I've got one month left. It helped me. I experienced the peace come over my life and that confidence, especially compared to the first three months. Ja, I can feel, the comfort and that. And my parents were visiting last weekend, that was so great, and they come October, and I have been home for the holidays. That was wonderful.
- 4.7 Uhm, I try to share a bit of what I am doing but then surely they can't really understand or relate and I just found that I don't really want to talk about it anymore so it is actually fine now, I need that outside of psychology also with my friends, I don't want to bring it in there, I found also that even I want to share something I do not want to be asked questions about it.
- 4.8 And your relationships? I think just, I think I am just becoming more comfortable in my own, like finding my own style, I feel that I can go into that phase now where I don't have to worry about other people, stop comparing myself to others. Because I did that a lot during the first six months. A lot. I constantly compare myself with others, my peers with what they know, and now I am starting to realize like, ok, I need to become into my own. So I think that, my individuality, I am getting into that now. I am looking forward to get into my own office next year and living on my own, not constantly being in a group setting.
- 4.9 Currently I am just giving feedback to clients; my toughest client was a little boy. I used it for my neuro case. That was a tough case to wrap my head around. I am just glad it is over. I think I did fine. That was tough.
- 4.10 I think I have grown in my relationships with my colleagues, I was a bit nervous, a bit anxious, and now I am relating more to them on a mature basis, and oh ja, big thing for me this semester, I don't know if I told you last semester but I never really spoke in class but now, like for the past month or so, I am really just so relax and I am giving my opinion or

just commenting and ja, everyone has notice, people tell me that they pick up on it , and ja I can also tell.

- 4.11 What made the difference? Uhm, I think I started to believe in myself, and also this course that I went on at church, where I just heard the truth about myself and just the holiday where I have gone back to my family and saw an old friend, and ja, I just started to make a decision like I wrote in my diary a few times like believe in yourself , believe in yourself believe in yourself. So it was almost like a conscious decision like great I'm finished with my anxiety for the year, now I can start enjoying myself, be in the moment. Uhm I think the first semester I was escaping a lot into my own mind almost like pulling away from it but now I am in the present, much more, more aware. My friend just said aah you are starting to motivate me know to like wake up in class, ja, so I am more in the present now. Living more in it, which is great because you want to be in it.
- 4.12 Other role players? You cannot separate your class from the M1 experience. We formed a M1 group on facebook, it is like we want to be a group which is nice, we have such a great group which is nice, we just did group therapy skills last week and we did like a lot of reflection on our group process and dynamics and a lot of people actually said that their expectations was great, let's get along but I am here as an individual and others differ. Like for me I wanted to form relations, it was not so much about the group but I wanted to form relationships, but no one expected it is going to be this tight group now, so it is really working without us being best friends. What we realized is that first day when we had our task given, one girl said OK, I'll get it and then I will email it to all of you.
- 4.13 It was like this one person just set the trend, she just took on that responsibility and from that she just set the norm. It was like we are going to get through this together; like the one lady was like, I don't care what the hell you are going through but we are all going through it. Like one girl's mom died and one went for an operation and then we just all get through it and very supportive.
- 4.14 If I have a bad day, I'll go home and sleep and cry. But that's only if I am very tired. I'll go home and the worst that I am experiencing is when I am too tired to sleep, that is like the worst, that was end of May, June. There was a two to three week period, it was bad, I still remember saying to myself, you will never, never do this to yourself again. Next year is like

a reward, I feel like in the past week I was thinking a lot about where I wanted to be placed. So uhm, I am thinking about it a lot. I think of where I want to be placed and work. What I will enjoy. I see myself in a psychiatric hospital, I will like to. I will like to work in the public sector. So I have been thinking about the future. It is just the research. But my proposal is through. That was hectic.

- 4.15 I can already feel my research influencing me, in a positive way. I am really looking forward to it. I just don't want to feel too much pressure because you have to free your mind for that. So I want to do that like in November. I don't want to put too much pressure on myself and I want to produce a good document. My well-being comes first. And also I am passionate about this and the possibility of it being published. I want to really produce a good document so that it can go somewhere.
- 4.16 What helps? My department, I think a big thing is my attitude, but also my environment. This department is very understanding like there is a couple of students that got extensions on assignments and it is fine, so ja they are quite understanding and supportive and they don't really pressurizes us so much, we do have our deadlines but most of the time we can discuss it with them, so we work it out with them, they are very responsive to that, and also just like how we are, everyone is just really great.
- 4.17 I have thought of what if I went to another university, and I have realized it doesn't really matter, like at the time, it just felt like I could stay here or I can go, so you know, I could have been at another place, but no regrets. The change of scenery was necessary, like for being on my own, I never like lived on my own, ja so I think it was just coming out here and doing it on my own and I think another big thing was to make this decision. I know there was less obligations living on my own, you know not going to family stuff or visiting this person it was more like, being in the M1 environment and living it and then out of that I can just see what's been fitting into that, otherwise it would have been too many demands.
- 4.18 Meaning of being a master's student? I would say for me it is about tools, like show me all the tools, surround me with it, and obviously digesting all of it, but know it is like I can step away from it and also just realizing that you can still be your own person, what is given to you or shown to you, you can still paste it for yourself, even if you are thrown into a group setting, just like the tools, it is more applied tools. I feel I am still the same person even

though I have grown and obviously you go through so much emotions. I feel like it is very much applied what I have learned this year and I consciously apply what they show me. It is good, it is great, you are making the decision “what you are going to make with all of this?”

- 4.19 If I have to compare myself with me in February, I think maybe just like accepting myself maybe. For who I am. And moving forward now, it took some time but eventually it happened. It is a process. I think like for the first six months it was like gradually going through the process, but then like over the holidays, then I was forming my decision, my approach changed.
- 4.20 I am currently open to experience, I feel very confident. And organismic trust like being able to trust my own inner conscious like no, don't do that or react like this. And also a very good thing of this year is like going to a psychiatric hospital and spending that time with a person with psychosis and the realization that wow not many people can do this. And like feeling fine with it, after the first session with the client I really thought wow, you know it is almost like a gift it is like wow, I know not many people who can do this. And definitely I realize this is very unique, I just walked out of there feeling like wow, and this is very special to be part of. Like being allowed to and being able to.
- 4.21 And I never realize like how unusual this is before I went to Joburg and I spoke to old friends and they are like, this is overwhelming, they are like I can't even imagine this, it is like a whole different world to them, they just think I have a lot of guts.
- 4.22 I am more aware of all the emotions, it is different emotions that I feel, it is more level headed emotions, I was too emotional and too much anxiety and now it is more like focused. Focused now.
- 4.23 I think in November, I will be saying I love life, especially if I am busy with my research. I think I will be feeling a lot of relief and uhm, I think very confident and positive and very grateful for making it. Very positive. The next three months are just going to be hectic. Class till 4pm, and Friday up to 12 or one, that is crazy, and still assignments and presentations. It is crazy. I like the classes, it is really interactive, lots of sharing and reflection. I am looking forward to come up with my own style, like that all these tools are out here now and I can pick and choose my own, I am looking forward to integrate it all next year. I am going to



figure things out on my own. One thing I've learnt is that I must integrate it into my own understanding

4.24 I am really passionate about my research. That's why I want to do it properly. I was very anxious for the oral exam, oh my word, I really like messed up. I really messed it up. I was very nervous. The feedback was very comforting, they said I must like defrost, and I have a lot of potential and that I must just get more involved in class and that. I took it to heart.

4.25 Anything else? I am actually just looking forward to getting through and I am looking forward to the process, I am enjoying it. We do not have that much studying. It is more of your own personal readings and presenting what you have got. So that is really nice.

## 5. Suzanne: Third interview. November 2010

- 5.1 I can't stand being assessed. I cannot handle it. Other people cope much better than me. I'm too anxious and I'm very sensitive to everyone's facial expressions. I'm constantly trying to adjust to people's responses. Like this one's listening well, but that one looks like I don't know what I'm talking about. So I don't enjoy it at all. L: Ah but it's over now. So what's still left? S: We just have to close our files now, so I still have one therapy session left and a feedback session for neuro. Last week we wrote two, that was quite hectic. L: How does that feel? S: It feels good. I feel like I'm in a process now. That part of the process is finished now but I still have my thesis to do. I think what I'm glad about is the constant group thing. I'm ready to be on my own now.
- 5.2 Did it become more hectic towards the end? Yeah, it did. You could pick up everyone was tired and just wanting to finish now. We celebrated it on Monday. We've formed quite a few friendships in the group. L: You told me last time that your group has been really supportive. S: Yeah, they really have. It's been a really good group.
- 5.3 If you have to reflect on the year, what happened with you? I really feel like I've learnt to empower myself now. I just want to be in there now, working with people directly. My knowledge must work through... And from Neuro, I feel like I've learnt to use the front part of my brain now. You know like your executive functioning, I feel like I'm getting it. I've learnt to have more control over my abilities now. I'm learning to channel my knowledge and insight. I want to spend the holiday thinking about the direction I want to channel it. I want to keep my feet on the ground this holiday.
- 5.4 Will you rest a bit? I will. I'll be watching movies non-stop. But I just want to make sure I don't get sidetracked from my direction I want to go in. During the holiday I want to read books that will take me in the direction I want to go in, that will enrich me. Before it would be a romantic novel, but now I want to be more sensitive.
- 5.5 What else? The amazing thing from this year is just the exposure from a variety of disciplines within psychology and just ideas and theories and ways of doing things – that has been amazing. It's that exposure now, don't limit yourself, constantly refresh your memory and be open to new ideas, and make sure you know what direction you're going in. One thing I've learnt is that I must integrate it into my own understanding. You try to

adapt yourself to all these different ideas, to be this chameleon, but you can't do that – I think you'll go insane. So that's what I'm doing, to integrate it to where I'm going.

5.6 And personally, you as a person? Not psychology? I totally got more relaxed and comfortable. I moved my position in the class, to the centre, between two people so that I could learn more from others. As an individual I'm focusing more on being an individual and not being so easily influenced by others, especially in a group setting. I think I've become stronger in my individuality, but it is a process. That's a big thing for me, starting now in the holidays I want to get more involved in church. I think I told you I was doing that course? It really strengthens you and it tells you the truth, the honest truth. It fills you with hope and really challenges you as a person. I want to do that again next year. I want to get involved with some Christian Psychologists – they have a group that meets now and then. I also want to get involved in woman homecells. I was involved in a guy and girl homecell at the beginning of the year, but I learnt that I don't want to listen to those discussions. I want to learn what women have gone through before me.

5.7 You mentioned this side of you before? I have a calling on my life and I need to be committed to God to make sure that I'm living out that calling. I've realised that I need to be a part of the church, but I need to be selective of what I want to take from the church. One can be completely overwhelmed and taken over by a church and you lose what your own unique purpose is. But now I know this is what I want to go to the church for and then I can still contribute my worth. L: Do you think this year played a role in that? S: I did know that God wanted to use me in psychology. But I realised this year that I really needed to search God for vision. So that I know that no matter what happens I'm going in that direction, at some pace.

5.8 Anything else? First of all my class. I would thank them for being supportive, offering words of affirmation and reassurance. We challenge each other, but most of all I'd thank them for their support. That unconditional acceptance helps a lot. I'm not saying it was completely wonderful, but that helps a lot. It just helps you believe in yourself more. I'd thank my supervisor for the past six months. He's a clinical psychologist. He was really good, listening, questioning me, so I'm challenging my own thinking at the same time. He didn't just give me the answers. It's been a wonderful supervision experience with him.

- 5.9 My parents have been very supportive. My mom would compliment me and tell me how proud they are of me. They visited a few times in the year. Obviously they want to spend more time with me, but I'm going to go home mid-December. I just want some time to enjoy it here, relax. I'm going to go for a week away with a friend, then I'll be here. My supervisor wants me to go to the hospital first. He says I'm very intuitive and a holistic thinker and I need to be challenged by evidence. It'll get me more on a thinking level and then I can come here and integrate that.
- 5.10 Your overall experience of the year? I think my high has been my connections with classmates, sharing sympathetic moments, or listen to this one moan. Just those little moments with my classmates. Also, in one of my community psychology workshops we had an activity as a class where everyone had to write something positive about everyone else in the class. You know after this long year to get all these complements from people who have known you for a long time...
- 5.11 And what did you get? Some very nice things; someone said I have a pure heart, they wrote about my nature, just little things, so that was nice. My lowest moment was when the workload was too much and then I hadn't slept, and I was battling to sleep, and then you realise you mustn't drive. I think that was the worst, psychologically I wasn't stable. I had to do it a couple of times this year and then I realised this is not a proper state to be in. Because I lived by myself this year and I am single I've learnt to use my strengths and build on them by myself. Everything I'm learning, like say I learn something in therapy like TA, I would identify where my weaknesses are and apply it to myself, so I've applied therapy to myself as I progressed.
- 5.12 There were a couple of times where I thought of seeing a therapist, but I applied the therapy to myself 'till I didn't feel like I needed one. L: Self-therapy? Yeah that's what I'm learning, to use myself instead of others. One thing I've learnt from TA is to be my own nurturing parent. I was always looking for others to nurture me, like my classmates. From that I realized I can start nurturing myself. And then a really nice thing that we did was two of our lecturers that had us at the beginning of the year for integrated psychotherapy had us at the end of the year again at a colleague's house. We had to design from clay the ideal therapist that we see ourselves as. We were given an hour and

then we could go outside. It was so symbolic, and we presented it afterwards to each other.

- 5.13 What did yours look like? Mine was a person that was moving to show I want to be an active therapist, then I had a heart to show that I want to be lead by my heart and always in tune with my internal world. I had all these things sticking out my head to show I want to use my head but still be in tune with what's going on in the external world. Then I had really big eyes to really see, and ears to really hear. And I put flowers in my mouth because I want what comes out of my mouth to taste like honey, to be enriching for others.
- 5.14 And I put flowers in my hand to show that one hand is free, and the flowers resembles knowledge, techniques and theory, and experience, and all of that to be given to people as you go on. It was really nice to have a little image of yourself to know where you want to go. We really had some lovely closure sessions in group therapy with the interns and the M1's. In one session everyone had to bring something to show the beauty you see in therapy and what would motivate you to go on. We ended off with a presentation by looking at the creativity of psychological disorders, trying to link it to opportunities, trying to think out of the box. There were a lot of closure sessions.
- 5.15 If you look back over the year? I think my perception was a bit distorted because I had this image that I have to be this perfect professional because this was the beginning of my professional career. I think I saw myself as I must apply myself perfectly and act like I know it all. I've realized now it's a learning experience and the rest of my life is a learning experience. I think I had a front at the beginning with my colleagues that's why I was so anxious. I thought I must be this perfect therapist and they must see me as that. But with all the anxiety I realized this can't go on. So I've come more into myself, been more honest and it's amazing how people have noticed. People feel that they can relate to me more. I realized that I wanted to be too perfect and there's no way.
- 5.16 What was the significance of the year for you? The intensity of the master's course can help you relate to the intensity of some of your client's experiences. In a good way traumatize you as well. S: You just keep filling in your diary and it's almost like that's how you'll fill in your clients. S: The diversity of the knowledge signifies the diversity of problems and explanations you can come up with. It's endless. I learnt to listen, and

not influence them where I want them to go or what I think is right. It's a process. The biggest thing psychology can't provide is the client's explanations and that has relevance. There is truth in that but sometimes it may not be that accurate. I learnt to listen more before throwing psychology at it. I think I preferred working with adults to children. I had a client who had anger problems and problems with anger outbursts. That was nice, especially for CBT.

- 5.17 It was intensive because you're going into the emotions. I also had a client with anxiety and panic problems and there was a lot to work on there. I had this long treatment plan and then I realized all the client wanted was to just get it all of their chest, and then not feel a need for me anymore. Also, say we had one new lecturer per week, they share all they've learnt but you can only take so much. It's endless, one can never be perfect. You must just listen to your clients.
- 5.18 Do you think you changed in any way? I think more differentiated, to still be like me but more individual. L: More you? S: I had a few times where I think it was getting to my head. Like yes mom, okay, you know you can identify from these situations what they need to do. And then I realized I don't want to be like that, just give my mom solutions. That's terrible, I still need to listen still. I think my mom picked up on that. They also realized they need to let me go a bit, like I must come home now as soon as I'm done, but I said no, middle of December. I think they must just respect my own space and where I'm going.
- 5.19 Independence? Yes definitely, I'm glad for the single thing. I'm sure there are a lot of advantages to having someone through such a hectic year. But thinking about being an individual and becoming stronger and finding yourself, I think it might not have been such a journey if you had someone entering this year with you. This is what this year has been about, to learn what can I do, just me. I'm really glad I kept the single thing going. I have to be sure of who I am and that I'm a complete person. I'm reading a book now called "The woman in waiting" where you have to be living your complete life by yourself, and then when you get married you're just going to complement your husband and he's going to complement you. It is about becoming one but is based on the multiple that  $1 \times 1 = 1$ . It is about becoming complete and living your life and make your plans.

- 5.20 Are you confident for next year? Just finances. I'm going to find out tomorrow what I'm going to be paid. I don't want to be dependent on my parents anymore. I want to be free now. I want to take responsibility for all my things, pay my insurance and so on. But I know it'll work out. I suppose other fears are challenges at the new workplace and adjusting. It has crossed my mind but they have prepared us for it. Next week is a full week of job shadowing, linked with an intern and they take you through everything, so we are prepared at the most basic level.
- 5.21 One word to describe the year? I think for the year would be application, and next year I'm predicting will be integration. But application also in a personal way.

## **6. Suzanne: Second reflective writing. November 2010**

- 6.1 Looking back and looking ahead: Looking back I'd say that this year had been a bit of a wake up call to reality. Comparing my previous years of study to now, it feels like my head has been in the clouds. All the demands that have been placed on me has forced me to focus more on the tasks at hand and getting them done rather than understanding and integrating all the theory that we are meant to apply. Looking back at this year I think I wasted a bit of time trying to understand and integrate all the information that was conveyed whereas I should have rather simply accepted it as it was and left the processing and integration of all of it for next year. I think that would have made my M1 easier.
- 6.2 It feels like I've had to be part human and part machine this year, like a robotic human, in order to complete the amount of work that is expected to get done. There's not enough time given to reflect on things. Even when I've been busy the whole day I look back at the day and I try figure out what I actually did and it's often minimal. I realized that the time in between completing tasks is filled with me thinking about and processing the information related to the tasks. And then I find that I have to "just do it" so that it's done.
- 6.3 I've experienced bouts of exhaustion, like I am currently. I feel drained, specifically emotionally. The large amounts of demands, the variety of tasks and the consistent new information has forced me to continuously adapt to my environment. This requires all three shifts, cognitive, emotional and behavioral. So this year has been extremely demanding on all three levels. What I think has drained me the most is the continuous trying to understand things. My brain is continuously processing information, interpreting it, organizing it, linking it with other information and then still trying to integrate it.
- 6.4 This is getting exhausting. I think I'm feeling over stimulated. I feel that I have enough to reflect on and think about for the next year so I am now trying to be very selective with any new information. Before, I would want to hear more and enquire further so as to gain a more complex and in-depth understanding whereas now I just want to gain a basic understanding of any new information so as to make my processing job lighter. Looking back at this year, I was over complicating things for myself, making the load heavier.



- 6.5 This year has been plain and simple ‘stressful’. A main concern for me throughout the year is whether my professional development is meeting the standards of the department. We’re a M1 class of diverse personalities with each one expressing their own unique strengths and weaknesses. Some strengths are more observable than others which has me question my own while observing the visible strengths of others. That has dampened my self-esteem on many occasions so I have consciously made the effort to replace these negative thoughts with more self-affirming thoughts such as “believe in yourself” and “there are various strengths and we all don’t have the same so some may have strengths that I don’t have and I may have strengths that some others don’t have”. This has helped reduce my anxiety levels with regards to comparing myself with my colleagues.
- 6.6 Looking ahead, I choose to be kinder to myself as well as wiser, by being more selective in how much information I expose myself to. I would like to be more sensitive in my selections. Saying this, I realize that I will be much more effective as a person and as a professional. I decide what I expose myself to and how much of that exposure I am exposed to. I will apply this in my personal life as well. A visual analogy could be described as standing in the middle of a little workshop and having all my useful tools in reach. Those tools that are not in need get pushed out of sight. They are only ever put in reach again if they are needed.
- 6.7 Looking ahead, I place my wellbeing above everything else. I need to get away and clear my head after our last exam. I am going to be much more specific about how much work I can actually handle, and will start putting my well-being needs before the demands of others such as my clients, my employer, colleagues and even my friends. I’m going place less pressure on myself to perform, but rather encourage myself to enjoy the experience more while progressing forward at a comfortable, but steady pace. This pace will be determined by me. I say this very assertively because I value my ability to know what is best for myself more than anyone else.
- 6.8 I want to continue getting to know myself in an intimate way as I have been doing so this year. I want to put more time and effort in understanding my own abilities and how they can best be used to make significant contributions to others. I want to continue engaging in

critical self-analysis as I have been doing so, however, I want to apply it in my work so that it can start making differences in the world around me.

- 6.9 I want to read more and gain more insight into as many theories as I can. I choose to take an eclectic approach to therapy while I am a young professional and hopefully as I gain more insight and experience into the different therapies, my approach will become more integrated. Looking ahead, I want to have my own space but be surrounded by others, such as having an office in a hospital or clinic. I am looking extremely forward to my career but most importantly I am looking forward to the knowledge I will gain from my readings, interactions with colleagues, workshop and conferences, as well as directly from my clients. I look forward to continuously growing as a professional and crystallizing my knowledge with experience and insight.
- 6.10 I look forward to the understanding I will gain about how we as humans work. I am also looking forward to being planted in a workplace, which means stability and predictability. That will help me plant my roots deep (for a while) so I can bloom into the plant that I am meant to bloom into.

## **APPENDIX F**

### **TRANSCRIPT CASE 4: GRACE**

## 1. Grace: First interview. February 2010

Introduction and orientation of the study.

- 1.1 What brought you here? I don't have much life experience, because I'm not an outgoing person, I'm a reserved person who prefers my own space. So apart from academically... I don't know. Being a mother is a huge achievement. Everything I'm doing, I know that I'm responsible for someone who is depending on me. As much as it's hard, it's part of life. I can't run away from it and I'm enjoying it. And I miss him. Maybe that is why I am here.
- 1.2 How is this year, how are you experiencing it? Compared to the honours it's like a new chapter. I used to say to my mother I'm a psychologist, even when I was doing my honours. But then when I came here I saw that this is what psychology is. It's different from the undergrad, because here it's the foundation of your life, of what you're going to do. There is a lot of information and already it seems like I've been here for the whole eight months. It's a lot of work, a lot of writing; everything is just a huge thing. But I'm enjoying it and I'm looking forward. I will finish, even if I don't use it.
- 1.3 And your ways of coping with this hectic workload and coming to \*\*? At first they said each person needs to have a therapist. And I was asking myself what for? But after seeing our clients I've realized that it's very important to have your own therapist. To have a shoulder to cry on because some of the things your clients say is too much for you. So you need to talk to somebody. So I'm seeing my therapist and it's really helping.
- 1.4 The group is amazing, there's no racism, and we're just a group. You don't feel like you don't belong here.
- 1.5 And your expectations of the year, what do you think is going to happen to you as a person? Everybody's saying that at the end you'll be different; you won't be the person who came as you were. I'm expecting to gain a lot. At the moment I don't think anything is going to change on a personal level. Probably in the middle of the year something will change, I don't know. Except that now you start to analyze people more than you used to before. Every time that a person talks I analyze the statement.
- 1.6 And also myself. I do, there's that part where if I'm struggling with something I also tell myself I can make it. It's like I'm using therapy on myself. Applying the skills that I have to myself. I don't know whether it's going to work or not. It is scary, before I

didn't think I would do that to myself, but it is sometimes scary. There is that thought that maybe I was not supposed to do it but it is automatic.

- 1.7 I started the first of February. L: And if you look back at this month and a half or so, what had happened? G: A lot of things happened. I didn't expect class to finish at five. You go home and you're so tired. I cannot study at five after class. I have to take a nap and relax and study at night. It's quite heavy. We have the whole year program, we are going forward. I'm going to take each day as it comes.
- 1.8 I am that type of person, taking it one day at a time. I don't think too much because I am going to stress myself and have a nervous breakdown. Relaxing after work and after class, it's one of my coping mechanisms. Last week we had an individual meeting with the course coordinator and the director of the clinic, and they were emphasizing the skills of coping, you know you have to go out, watch a movie, have a friend, talk to somebody. Don't just from class go to your house and sleep and think of the books. You have to have your own time. I'm trying to do that. I don't know if I am, because if I go to a movie I'm thinking I am wasting my time, I could have done something much better with my school work and everything.
- 1.9 Where would you like to be at the end of the year? With \*\* you have to do the internship here. L: And in terms of how you want to feel by then? G: I just want to bring change to people, to help people with what they taught me to do. Sometimes I thought I have problems, but seeing other people I realize my problems are minor, so I want to bring that change in that person. I want to see a person being happy from changing from the state that he was in to another state. I think that's all. I don't know if I have any strength. I'm not sure. Listening, listening to the person. My mother used to say if there's conflict, she'll say let's wait for Grace, we'll hear her voice and she'll say something. I just like to listen to people.
- 1.10 How do you cope with missing your son and missing your family? G: We talk to each other during weekends; I make sure I talk to everyone at home. During the week I don't have time. Even if I had time there's the money issue that I cannot talk to everyone during the week. It's true that cell phone communication helps. I don't think I have a choice. There was a moment that I felt that this weekend I just want to go home, see my

parents and tell them how I feel now. But at least that is coming up now. I am looking forward to it.

- 1.11 And other experiences that you've had so far? No, there's nothing that we've done. When I see my clients I ask myself, what question am I going to ask this person? Am I going to say something that they want to hear, or am I going to just destroy her totally? Yeah sometimes I just go to class and go out without saying a word. There are those days. As much as I don't want to have those days because I think they will destroy me.
- 1.12 Yesterday with my client I felt like I just need to see my therapist, because there are some more issues that my client is having that has also happened to me. There are emotional things, she cried a lot and I felt like crying too but I couldn't cry. I had to be strong for her. My supervisor is very good. Before I see the client I meet her first and discuss some things, and she said if I need support after seeing the client, I can see her.
- 1.13 The part of me that chose the psychology was because of the event that happened in my house. Before that I did \*\* and then I dropped that and started doing psychology. I did \*\* at \*\*. L: So there was something that happened that made you change to psychology? G: Yes there was something that happened at my house and then we went to see the psychologist. After seeing the psychologist I decided that that was what I wanted to do. I also think doing \*\* wasn't my priority. It was my dad's choice. He pushed me to do \*\*. In high school I wanted to do IT, it was all that was in my mind. And my dad didn't allow me to do IT. I want to achieve this, even if I go on and do something else then.
- 1.14 But now my dad is very supportive, even last year after I didn't get a space he said to keep on applying. L: And your decision to then apply at \*\*? G: I applied here and \*\* and at \*\* University. Selection was torture. The panel. The roleplays. It was overwhelming because we were so many and I thought am I going to make it through all these people? When you talk to people they sound like they have more experience than you and they are working. But after I got a place I thought I am capable. I can pass this, I can make it through M1.
- 1.15 And then when you heard you were in? Screaming. I was so happy. I said God just opened a new way for me, this is the beginning of a new start.
- 1.16 And support? I met a woman last year who was doing her M1, she is doing her internship now and is my friend. We do have a peer group here in class. We started to meet last

week. But I think I need more friends, other than the people I'm just in class with. No psychology talk, because even in that peer group it feels like I am still in class. But I'm thinking of going again because it was just a first meeting. I didn't enjoy it and I thought why did I sign up for this? But the reason I say more friends is because I think some of the things I just need to get out of the psychology topic. Some of the things I just want to tell someone that I don't go to class with, not even the therapist.

- 1.17 I'm not smoking, I'm not drinking. But the time when I was delivering my baby I had high blood pressure so sometimes from then my blood pressure goes high. I think it is a health problem because I was admitted for it twice after delivering my baby. So some of the things they said I shouldn't take, and I mustn't get more stressed because that will affect it. L: Do you worry about that? G: I am. First thing I did when I got here I went to look for a doctor and I told him I have high blood pressure sometimes, so I just want to see if you check me now if I'm OK. He said I'm OK. I wanted security.
- 1.18 I'm from the Christian family, I just believe God. When I cry I ask God what is happening. When something is changing right I say "Thank you, Lord, you heard my prayers." I believe in him. It helps me so much.
- 1.19 Your experience on a personal level of yourself so far in this programme? I do feel weak sometimes. I do feel like I'm growing, I'm learning and there's more to this, I'm strong in those parts. Yes I am looking forward to that. I think it is linked to the academics and to the person that I am.

## **2. Grace: First reflective writing. April 2010**

**2.1 What's happening? / Personal experience ► Master's student in professional psychology** Still nervous for a change, wish I knew how I am going to change. I realize time flies and well my personal experience is that I have been in the class for all most two months but the knowledge seems as if I have been here for the whole year. There is a lot to learn and time is not enough.



### 3. Grace: Second interview. August 2010.

- 3.1 How are you? At least I am still breathing, it is a bit different from the first semester so now, the workload is too much, its hectic, it is so too much; but I only have to get my own strategy to work, for that of work. I cope with one at a time, finish it and then go on to the next one.
- 3.2 Before June holidays, that last week we had orals, and it was too much of the work already and too much of anxiety; I thought at least I am going home for the holidays I can't quit now. And when we came back, the first day, everything just went up, I felt like I didn't go home for almost four weeks and it was like ja, just bad. But ja I just said I can't quit now, you know how it is difficult to reapply to go through the tortures of the interviews. My boyfriend was supposed to leave last month but I couldn't let him go because I'm still struggling to settle down. It's nice to have someone you can talk to and who understands you, we talk the same language.
- 3.3 At this stage nothing is really enjoyable, there isn't anything that is enjoyable, ja but there is too, just have the knowledge like in a few months time I will be an intern psychologist. I think that boost myself, that means I am capable, you feel like almost you are there already. Thinking about that helps me to go through the days at the moment. Academic work, uhm I cannot really remember. But this week we did child psycho diagnostic evaluation so I think I related more because I have a baby. And most of the disorders are more with the boys, it might happen that my boy might still have that disorder. You always think about what might be. Hopefully he is not going to meet the criteria, you have always hope, you always take whatever she is saying and puts it on your son you know.
- 3.4 And your work with clients? That's difficult. Yesterday I had a session, I was so tired, I thought we will just work on what we have, but it's like every week there is new information that is overwhelming for me, I think like, I am taking that on me. Uhm, I am not sure why because my supervisor also mentioned that my clients are difficult, it is like complicated things.
- 3.5 Are you changed in any way? Uhm, uhm, it is just difficult to get information from clients without asking them directly, the skills it is difficult. You know you cannot just talk about things, the confidentiality is like the most important thing. So there I changed. Uhm, I go for therapy also. Because uhm last term there was a client, I could not take it

and since that client my cousin called me that he lost his baby and I was still in pain, and then I went for a session. And the people at home, it is quite difficult because you have to call them. Every day I feel like I need my family to call me, and sometimes I get angry when they don't call. People they don't see that I need more support from them but ja, it feels lonely. It is too much work that is keeping you busy but you still feel lonely, I still feel lonely.

- 3.6 They don't know about the master's course, how heavy it is; they haven't been through that one, so ja I will say, because all of them are done with their degrees so they don't have a clue when you say as much as you tell them it is a lot of work. Like today I was telling my mom and my sister I'm still going to class and they were surprise, Saturday! They do give support it is just like probably you expect more and then you don't get that one.
- 3.7 So how else do you cope? I pray. I believe in prayer. For me it works. In my context it worked. So maybe not for another person. But I know most people believe in prayer so I do not argue or oppose what the lecturer is saying. Ja and I always , usually look back on the thing that I have been through and apart from that I believe my family, they are family so I have grown up with that religious family. God just helps me.
- 3.8 My son is good. It's quite difficult because the child always ask when are you coming back; they do not understand the days, the weeks or so, they don't understand the longness, but I call him during the weekends only, I make sure that I do not call during the weekdays because, uhm, I felt like then probably I'll sort of puts something ahead for him. Like my mother is not looking after me you know, so I respect the relationship over there I don't want to give that impression that you are not good enough for my son so I have to call every day and found out what is going on.
- 3.9 And otherwise? Ahg, Uhm, if I must be honest, when I hear stories from last year M1's they say their group the conflict was hectic, but for ours I am quite not sure. Sometimes I take a statement and when you look at it on the other side, you see that is not good. It is not something that you have to say to sometimes. So sometimes I do pick up the racism, it is just like it is still underground. But maybe it is not there, I am not sure. It is not like everybody for himself, we do support each other but you never understand people, so it is like you mustn't put that much trust in the people. But I also pick up that there is a

competition you know if you always come to class and see the competition, so I was talking to someone who said have you noticed that if you come here on a Saturday people would ask what are you doing here, what are you up to and I even said why do I have to tell you what I am doing? It is like a competition, you mustn't do extra work.

- 3.10 My supervisor is very supportive. She is so very, very supportive even with my personal stuff she would say okay, what is better. And also the course coordinator, very supportive. I would say almost all of them, they are very supportive and you can approach them if you have some problems, that really helps. It is not easy to ask for help. Sometimes I, I am not saying that I have always ask for help but if there is something I need help for, I'll sit back and think about it before I approach someone. And then after I'll just say, I'm just asking for some advice this is what is happening. But for my personal things, I don't, I talk to my own therapist.
- 3.11 Is there sense in this? I am not sure that there is a meaning. It is just a suffering. Next year will be pay back time. I am not sure of the meaning. I think it goes back to, you cannot explain what's going on in the process; we had interviews last week for selection and they were asking me but I think I was just wasting my time but I think they will only understand if they are in this.
- 3.12 And my research, I haven't started. Uhm, I was suppose to meet with my supervisor, do have a plan. I am worried; I still have to ask for advice. There are lots of ethical things I need to consider.
- 3.13 It is a difficult year but I am coping. Yes I am still in, when we had feedback from the oral, after the holidays, it came back and I had that positive. I will make it so I had that positive. It boosts the self esteem, but it is rough, I don't sleep.”
- 3.14 Any changes you have picked up? I am not sure of any personal growth at this stage. We did evaluate us so it was still the learning curve but the overall was good and it was positive. There are changes in my eating and sleeping. Maybe it is because of the weather. What was working for me was to wake up in the morning at 03:00, but from April/May I couldn't, it was very, very difficult, it was cold. So I was learning a strategy to go and sleep late and wake up at 05:30, so I just changed from what I was used to. I was having this terrible headache and then I went for some tests and I had to take some other medication. Then again, I felt so dizzy and I went back to the medication. I was not

- going to the gym, but with other things I don't know, like in class sometimes you can open up.
- 3.15 There is always these ladies who would say, I didn't have time to do my washing, to do my bed, so I thought I am not the only one! So I feel better if I don't do it. You don't get that time of doing your bed, cleaning your house and I don't think that is a good thing, it make you feel less guilty. I wouldn't like to continue like that.
- 3.16 So every time I found myself not doing that, I think ok, but next year I will find some time to do that, it is just now that I don't have much time. It is like you have lots of work to read and you know you are not going to finish reading, but you still think I still need to read, even if I read two out of four articles it is still better than doing nothing at all.
- 3.17 Sometimes I think maybe I should still do my medicine and then specialize in children you know, like and ja, because last term the work was very very difficult. Now I see okay this is how it is linked together. Ja it makes sense a lot, and it is quite bad because the workload start to increase after second semester you know, first term you are still a bit free.
- 3.18 My relationship is doing good, he knows that we are in a long distance relationship from my undergrad, it is just sometimes you think you need more support from him, if he can understand, but at least if he is around he can see how busy I am, and it turns out to be not a good thing. Because you do not have time for that person, that special person you know. All these theories it makes me to analyze him, analyze myself.
- 3.19 I'll socialize like once in a month, and I am the one that always call, so maybe there is no need, I am just thinking around those lines, maybe it is not good to have that one. Here there is only one person (friend) that I know. The motivation doesn't come from the friends. As a class we always look for the future, we will be earning next year. There is that counselling/ clinical thing that is a major division; those at the hospital will be earning more and counselling is half, but at the end we motivate each other. The money helps. I am not comfortable in sharing my emotions but I do acknowledge them.
- 3.20 If you reflect over the year? I changed. L:In what way? G:In thinking, in analyzing each statement that people are saying, even with family, I will look at the other side, my mom would say don't look in psychological ways, just talk. So ja at the moment, sometimes I do feel like I just want to be the old Grace, which I can't and it goes back to when we

came here, they said there will be that change and now I started to realize that change they were talking about.

3.21 A good or a bad change? It is difficult to say. It is both. Because I do miss my old self you know. But I am still looking forward, to good things, so it is difficult to say either. It is good in the way that to be aware, you know what you know, so it is easy to just click that, that is what is happening. The knowledge yes.

3.22 And now? Well, there is no weekend! I am suppose to finish reports and I can see that I am tired, I cannot do anything now. I will just do it tomorrow and ask her if I can hand it in on Monday. I was so frustrated with the tests because of the norms. Someone had to explain it for three times. So I just ask him please explain it early in the morning when I am fresh and it has worked for me. It is quite difficult. This client, I had my own anger towards her. I don't know.

#### **4. Grace: Second reflective writing. September 2010**

- 4.1 Firstly, I do not have time for social, every time I am thinking about my school work. Personal, I wish someone can tell me how I am going to change, they always says we will change we won't be the same people we came as. But I guess there is change on my talk and listen. Looking things in the triangle ways before doing it, analyze it thoroughly.
- 4.2 Being in the multicultural group has taught me the people's different views, both in the context of profession and personal. I can say to the other person you will never understand this until you are in, this is when you will see what I have been trying to tell you. One word I can describe it, strenuous. I always think about my life journey and compare it now with the knowledge of psychology I have, and that keep me saying am I going to bring change to the other person.

## 5. Grace: Third interview. November 2010

- 5.1 So, almost end of the year? Ja I was writing yesterday, ja, part of me is looking forward just to be done with everything but then also I am scared; what if I don't make it, there is that uncertainty. It is only the oral next week. I don't know how I feel about that. I am thinking is it real, it is the last one. For me the result dates, you have your slots, that is the one that worries me most.
- 5.2 If you reflect over the year? Lots of things have changed, some days, I just wanted to give up. Sometimes I wish I can just go back and take out the psychology out of me and just come back and become the person I was before. I want to detox myself from it. Sometimes I ask myself is this really what I want for the rest of my life, or is it too late for me to change, but even if I decide to change to do something else, it will always be there, it will always be there. Not that I say I want to do something else but in future if I want to further my career, it will always be there. From my standard ten I wanted to do IT, so now I think, what if I want to do that later and see the other side of the world?
- 5.3 What happened? The clients. The problems. I had difficulties with my clients. But later I had two most tense and heavy clients and that is where I started to think, really? Now I am complaining about two and I thought what about next year where I will have 15 or whatever. What then? At the same time I have my own problems and when I compare it I think I don't really have problems you know. So far the only thing for the better is the knowledge and thinking about my family and what we went through from 2006 and psychology gave me that background to see why, and it also helped me to see how can I raise my son. So it helped me to see how can I be a better mother, to bring some change in the family and to look at things the other way around and sometimes I think I can introduce some aspects to the family.
- 5.4 I think it was difficult for me, I have just realized now later how stressful I am being here, and I am looking forward to just leave here. Even the people surrounding me. Last time I told you about their comments and yeah, it is irritating me and just leaving is good, I am looking forward just to leave everyone. It feels like there is undermining, although he don't say it loudly you can see it from their comments it was just too much for me. Although I was expecting it, not like this, with the stress of the thesis and the academic work on top of it made me to just be irritable. More lows than highs I guess.

- 5.5 And? You know I was so scared to talk in front of people, but going into the seminar room, doing the case presentations, it boosted my anxiety and when we did the orals in June it was so nerve wrecking you know that fear but now I have managed to overcome it I am OK, I am not even nervous about the oral exam next week, I am now more worried of not being worried you know, but now I am like cool I will just talk.
- 5.6 My gratitude goes to my individual supervisor, she contained me. I felt like she was my mother you know. Giving me motivational words and comforting me, even when I had ups and downs in my family and I lost my cousin, and my supervisor could read me and say, what is wrong? When I had the uncertainty for next year she said things will be OK, she was more than a supervisor. And for my therapist, she just said I know somebody who can help me, she really kind of knew my personality and what will work.
- 5.7 How did you manage? My prayers, my family support and their prayers; there was a moment I thought if I had money I will just pack my bags, and then they said no tomorrow you will be fine. And then I cried and said this is enough it must stop. Especially at the end of September. I just believe in my God, since I left std 10 I have been through a lot and through my prayers I can say believing in impossible things that can be possible, so I know my God and I have testimonies of everything. So I said everything, everything that I have been through I know I can make it. Some people believe in their ancestors and things happen for them. I also believe in my God so my faith also helped me through this.
- 5.8 Clients? Just the relationships and the trust. There was the client that said you look so young how can you say that, and I was like shoe, there was the client with fantasizing from the client and I had to deal with it. And my supervisor said you must deal with it and I was just like I cannot do this, I cannot do this, and I was able to.
- 5.9 Your experience of the year? I didn't thought it will be this way, I thought life will be nice I will be doing my masters, not knowing what will be happening. And I don't know but it seems so weird so funny because I know people that did master's before, but they never told me what will happen. There will be times that you won't take it there was like times where they said you will enjoy it you will enjoy your class mates and I just thought. It is a process that you have to go through.
- 5.10 What would you say to someone entering the year? I told him I just need to let you know this is how I felt, and probably for you it would not be the same and it was a moment



where I thought I just need to leave this thing. I cannot do it, and then I called him and he said you will make it and I told him, no you don't understand. This must be in and I don't have a proof reader and my supervisor added more work and I thought I am not going to make it, and the pressure of the other colleagues. I thought for next year I am coming back for my thesis but then I managed and I said you know what just save more money for the things you didn't prepare for like a proof reader and I had to pay for that extra.

- 5.11 I am happy for my thesis, the supervisor just give me encouraging words he was giving me more options and alternative ways to do my things so ja, I am happy; anyway what I need is just to pass so 50% is enough for me. But for the class, some have more experience and it seems like they know more than lecturers, but for them it was like I am better. And the other thing, just the settling down, it was difficult for me, because of my family I don't have friends and the stress of the academic work alone that was too much, so that was the adding things on top of the class mates.
- 5.12 I didn't really make friends, just people to talk to. Just to share the things.
- 5.13 One word for the year? No life. Ja it was hectic and I am just so tired, it is amazing to just look back, and looking at the timetable, and know we are at the last week, it is like wow amazing. Like during the first week I was like does this all have to be done by the end of the year? All this? And I did it.
- 5.14 Like I said earlier, in terms of the stress, I am so tired but ja, next year it would be a new beginning because there will also be the financial support and ja, there will be no, not as much class. So it will be different comparing this year, some of the things I was not expecting. If I was closer to home I could have get more support. I would have gone to another university close to my home.
- 5.15 Meaning of this? That's difficult. It is to gain more experience, to learn more. Staying away from home, sometimes it doesn't make sense even for me because I have been away from home I have been all over, but coming here it was kind of different, it doesn't make any sense. There is this thing I don't know how to describe it of this year, it is not a positive thing, I am trying to figure out why, but I can't. Maybe in the future I will know.
- 5.16 From class I just went straight to my house, I enjoy my TV it is like the only thing that kept me busy, and it is so funny, I am not the only one, they do the same thing. Just go home, TV, sleep and doing the work. That is the only thing. But I won't say it is only the

bad things, the good thing is about it provided the good psychological training. But at the moment I look more at the bad things than the good things, but there is good things. There is a lot that is good especially in the academics.

- 5.17 Ja, I am proud of myself, I managed to do it, because when we had the interviews, the M1 interviews, for next year I was looking at myself and I thought, you know I have been there, look at this 50 people I was one of them, last time, I made it this far. I managed to be one of ten, it's like wow, even from the encouragement from my other friends that would say wow, you managed to do it so it is kind of like, you know what, "I have made it." So my first payment I'll have to spoil myself. I must celebrate. I'll be much more appreciative of next year.

## 6. **Grace: Third reflective writing. November 2010**

- 6.1 Studying in \*\* and \*\*, and now \*\* has greatly expanded my knowledge of different cultures and languages. Experience has taught me how to build relationships with other people. Growing up in an unprivileged community has not only offered financial and academic challenges, but it has more importantly made me realize the value of education. Throughout my educational career, I have worked hard to prove myself as a responsible and dedicated student.
- 6.2 Looking ahead I see the start of the great things. I am excited knowing that now I will be independent though I have reserved the space of dependent because life is unpredictable. Also I am occupied with wondering thoughts of 'is this what I will be doing for the rest of my life, do I have a choice? This is perpetuated by the nature of the two clients that I recently received.
- 6.3 **Grace before M in professional psychology:** I was so scared to talk in front of people say maybe 4 people, I will feel like everyone is looking at me and it will appear to me as an attention seeker. I had my own extremely anxiety. Also, in the family I was treated like everybody, but now things changed because even in the extended family they view me as an 'expert'. I found an image of this whole situation link to the celebrity's lifestyle. I wish it can change to normal life as it was before.
- 6.4 **Grace now:** I would say things have changed for me, and I observed myself as a new person. Through the course I've learned or discovered my competence and strength. There were times where I was faced with challenges in session with my client such as in my culture you have to respect an adult, you can not give advice to an adult because that symbolizes disrespect. But through this year later, I've managed to develop that personal growth and also attending therapist had an impact in discovering my strength and alleviates my own anxiety. I have learned to develop a strong sense of responsibility, to work within a team as well as cross-team, and the ability to work in a pressure environment.

## **APPENDIX G**

### **EXAMPLE OF JOURNAL WRITINGS**

**Jim**

## **MEMO**

To: Lindi Nel  
nelly@ufs.ac.za  
From: Jim  
Date:  
Re: My journey  
Message:

### **Brief Topic: What's happening? / Personal experience ► Master's student in Psychology**

What a rollercoaster! Every day I question my own abilities, who am I? Why am I doing this? Do I really have what it takes to become a psychologist!

This is a very nurturing environment, and I think the philosophy is that the 'department' really wants us to find our unique voice.

We are exposed to a number of theoretical orientations and perspectives, every week is different. On one hand it's a bit crazy, but on the other, that's like life, no structure, like therapy I suppose.

Empathy – one can understand it theoretically, but to live it one has to be it.  
Doing therapy is like being in a state of flow.

**Suzanne**

## **MEMO**

**To:** Lindi Nel

**From:** Suzanne

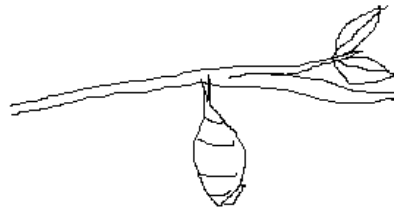
**Date:**

**Re:** My 2010 journey

### **Brief topic: Personal Creative Writing: Personal Growth: What's happening to me?**



I am learning to think and act responsibly for the sake of others. I'm learning how my opinion can significantly affect the life course of another. I'm learning to be accountable for every decision I make, legally and ethically. I'm learning to value the wellbeing of others more than my own. I'm learning to listen and listen some more. I'm learning that there is never one way of looking at something and that we all have something to contribute. I'm learning to trust in myself, my knowledge and my judgment more. I'm learning to work harmoniously with others, on higher, equal and lower levels. I'm learning that it's not about the title you acquire but the positive difference you make in the lives of others. The title simply puts you in the position to make these differences.. I'm learning that of all the multiple perspectives we adopt in order to understand the individual intricately that there is always room for more. I'm learning that every individual is incredibly unique and that we (humans) will never be able to fully understand ourselves. I'm trusting that eventually my time will come, after undergoing all the changes I've needed to undergo.



## **October 2010**

**To:** Lindi  
**From:** Petro  
**Date:** 4 Nov 2010  
**Re:** Master's Journey

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### **Brief topic: Looking back & Looking ahead:**

Looking back at this year that went by so fast, I found that I have grown on a personal and professional level. When I started at the beginning of 2010, I could not have predicted all the changes that came about in my life due to going through this process of M1. In a way I feel like this has been a year of personal therapy for me as client. What I mean with this is that my learning about therapeutic techniques, theories, and working with clients has empowered me to be a better therapist, and to want to be a good therapist. This year has showed me what I am capable of and what I am not so good at doing. It has also made me aware of things I would like to be doing in future and what I would rather not do.

I have come to realize through this year, that working as a team can have much more outcomes than trying to go at it alone the whole time. I feel that I have learned the most from making use of co therapists / colleagues and asking advice from supervisors. Although this was a very busy and difficult year, I am glad for the things I can take away with me. I feel prepared for the next step, which is my internship year. At the moment I feel that this M1 programme has definitely equipped me for what comes next, it has given me an idea of what to expect and what to look forward to.

Standing at the end of this year, I cannot believe that it is almost over and that I have made it so far. I definitely did not do it on my own, and I have my Father in Heaven to thank for that. I stand in disbelief, or rather amazement at what I have achieved this year.

## **October 2010**

**To:** Lindi  
**From:** Grace  
**Date:** 4/11/2010  
**Re:** Master's Journey

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### **Grace before M in Psychology**

I was so scared to talk in front of people say maybe 4 people, I will feel like everyone is looking at me and it will appear to me as an attention seeker. I had my own extremely anxiety. Also, in the family I was treated like everybody but now things changed because even in the extended family they view me as an 'expert'. I found an image of this whole situation link to the celebrity's lifestyle. I wish it can change to normal life as it was before.

### **Grace now**

I would say things have changed for me, and I observed myself as a new person. Through the course I've learned or discovered my competence and strength. There were times where I was faced with challenges in session with my client such as in my culture you have to respect an adult, you can not give advice to an adult because that symbolizes disrespect. But through this year later, I've managed to develop that personal growth and also attending therapist had an impact in discovering my strength and alleviates my own anxiety. I have learned to develop a strong sense of responsibility, to work within a team as well as cross-team and the ability to work in a pressure environment.



## **APPENDIX H**

### **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

**Interview 1:****Explanation of the study.****General opening question:**

“What is your experience of being a master’s student in a professional psychology programme like?”

**Follow-up funnelling questions:**

Decision to do a master’s in psychology? What brought you here?

Prior experiences that influenced the decision?

Experiences of selection procedures?

Expectations of the year?

Experiences so far this year? Positive and negative?

Important role players identified? Expectations of them?

General coping strategies?

Specific hurdles/difficulties/disappointments identified so far? How dealt with?

Personal meaning attach to being here?

Any changes in yourself so far?

**Interview 2:****General opening question:**

“What is your experience at this stage of being a master’s student in a professional psychology programme like?”

**Follow-up funnelling questions:**

How the situation differs from previous interview/any changes?

Positive/negative experiences you want to share?

The outcomes of these experiences/their contribution to your understanding of your journey?

Expectations fulfilled/disappointed?

Coping strategies employed?

Other important role players identified? Their influence?

Therapeutic work/Clients?

Other specific hurdles/difficulties/disappointments identified so far? How dealt with?

Personal meaning attached to being here?

Any changes in yourself so far?

### **Interview 3:**

#### **General opening question:**

“What is your experience at this stage of being a master’s student in a professional psychology programme like?”

#### **Follow-up funnelling questions:**

How the situation differs from previous interview/changes?

Positive/negative experiences you want to share?

The outcomes of these experiences/their contribution to your understanding of your journey?

Influence of important role players?

Were the expectations met?

What did you learn about yourself?

What helped you to cope?

Reflect upon the year. What happened with you?

Highs and lows?

Personal meaning of being here?

Summarize the year in one word.

Gratitude towards?

Did you change in any way?

Future plans?

## **APPENDIX I**

### **CONSENT FORM: PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENTS**



January 2010

For the Attention of:  
The Head of the Department of Psychology/The Co-ordinator of the Master's Degree Programme

Dear Prof/Dr

**RE: Permission to interview Master's students.**

**Title: The psychofortigenic experiences of master's students in professional psychology programmes: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

The aim of the study is to gather the experiences of students in their first year of master's training within professional clinical, counselling and/or educational psychology. This study will be valuable in that it will generate insight into the personal experiences of master's students from a psychofortological point of view. Research within this field will help supervisors, trainers and mentors to have a better understanding of the experiences of their students.

I plan to interview students from different applied master's psychology programmes (clinical/counselling and/or educational) throughout the country. The study is by no means an evaluation of a specific programme – it is focused on the individual's experience. Three interviews will be scheduled during the first year of master's training (2010). Only two students from each university's programme will be asked to voluntarily participate, and it will have no financial implication for the department or the participant. Please take note that if permission is granted to approach students for participation in the study, the interviews will not take place during lecture time or infringe on the academic programme.

Please complete the attached consent form and return it via fax to 051 401 3556 or e-mail [neli@ufs.ac.za](mailto:neli@ufs.ac.za) (Attention: Ms Lindi Nel). Please feel free to contact me in the case of any queries at 051 401 2732.

Co-operation in this regard will be much appreciated!

Kind regards,

Ms Lindi Nel  
PhD candidate

Prof Paul Fouché  
Promoter

UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT  
UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE  
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA



Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe / Faculty of the Humanities  
Departement Sielkunde / Department of Psychology

I ..... (title and name) from  
..... University hereby give permission for Ms L Nel  
(University of the Free State) to approach students from our 2010 master's class to voluntarily  
take part in the planned research project.

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	



## **APPENDIX J**

### **CONSENT FORM: PARTICIPANTS**



26 October 2009

Dear M1 student

Congratulations with your successful admission into the applied master's psychology programme for 2010.

I would like to invite you to be a participant in a research project during 2010. The aim of the study is to gather the experiences of students in their first year of master's training in professional clinical, counselling and/or educational psychology. Research within this field will help supervisors, trainers and mentors to have a better understanding of the experiences of their students.

I plan to interview students from different applied master's psychology programmes throughout the country. Three interviews will be scheduled during the first year of your master's training (2010). You will also need to keep a reflective journal (diary) of your experiences. Please note that it will have no financial implication for you personally and that the interviews will not take place during lecture time or infringe on your academic programme. All information will be treated as highly confidential and anonymity is assured. Please complete the attached consent form and feel free to contact me in the case of any queries (051-4012732).

Your co-operation in this regard would be much appreciated!

Kind regards,

Ms Lindi Nel  
PhD candidate

Prof Paul Fouché  
Promoter

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Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe / Faculty of the Humanities  
Departement Sielkunde / Department of Psychology

I .....  
(name and surname ) from ..... University would  
voluntarily take part in the planned research project.

<b>Name</b>	
<b>Signature</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>Contact number</b>	
<b>E-mail address</b>	