

**MOVING BETWEEN LANGUISHING AND  
FLOURISHING DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF  
UNIVERSITY.**

by

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Please contact me should there be any queries.

Elmarie Viljoen

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## **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to investigate first-year students' experiences at university which are related to their movement between languishing and flourishing. Student mental health and well-being have become an important issue recently and are further emphasised by the fact that the period of emerging adulthood together with the transition into higher education have proven to be difficult for first-year students. The experiences were identified and conceptualised within the structure of mental health and well-being. Positive psychology literature and literature based on the development and dynamics of first-year students in university served as overarching framework. Keyes' mental health continuum, with the components of emotional, psychological and social well-being was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Two forms of sampling, namely purposive and snowball sampling, were used in this research study. The nominal group technique was utilised as data gathering technique. The data gathered in this study were also analysed by means of the thematic analysis method. From the analysis, five languishing themes were identified, namely (1) adjusting to and coping with the new environment and responsibilities, (2) being challenged with practical difficulties, (3) managing academic challenges, (4) experiencing social isolation, and (5) being a victim of crime. These themes emerged from those experiences which students perceived to have had a negative effect on them and causing them to languish in their first year of university life. In contrast, four themes related to flourishing came to the fore, namely (1) experiencing academic support and mastery, (2) experiencing personal growth and independence, (3) having social support, and (4) adapting to the university environment. It is evident from the study that participants had various languishing experiences at the beginning of their first year at university. Students stated that positive experiences assisted them in moving from languishing towards flourishing. As indicated in this study, people who are flourishing have adequate well-being and complete mental health.

## UITTREKSEL

Die doel van hierdie studie was om eerstejaar universiteit studente se ervarings te ondersoek wat gepaard gaan met hulle beweging tussen verkwyning en florerings. Studente se geestesgesondheid en welstand het onlangs 'n belangrike kwessie geword wat verder beklemtoon word deur die tydperk van voortkomende volwassenheid en die oorgang na hoër onderrig. Dit is bewys dat hierdie tydperk vir eerstejaar studente moeilik is. Hierdie ervarings is geïdentifiseer en gekonseptualiseer binne die raamwerk van geestesgesondheid en welstand. Positiewe sielkunde literatuur en literatuur wat gebaseer is op die ontwikkelende dinamika van eerstejaar studente in universiteit het as oorbruggende raamwerk gedien. Keyes se geestesgesondheid kontinuum met die komponente van emosionele, sielkundige en sosiale welstand is as die teoretiese raamwerk vir hierdie studie gebruik. Twee vorms van toetsing, naamlik doelbewuste toetsing en sneeubalsteekproeftrekking, is in hierdie navorsingstudie gebruik. Die nominale groeptegniek is as data insamelingtegniek gebruik. Die data in hierdie studie is ook volgens die tematiese analise metode geanaliseer. Die analise het vyf verkwynende temas geïdentifiseer, naamlik (1) aanpas by en hantering van dienuwe omgewing en verantwoordelikhede, (2) uitdagings van 'n praktiese aard, (3) hantering van akademiese uitdagings, (4) die ervaring van sosiale afsondering en (5) om die slagoffer van misdaad te wees. Hierdie temas het na vore gekom vanuit daardie ervarings wat studente waargeneem het as negatief en wat veroorsaak het dat hulle verkwyn in hul eerste jaar op universiteit. Vier teenoorgestelde temas van florerings het na vore gekom, naamlik (1) die ervaring van akademiese ondersteuning en bemeestering, (2) die ervaring van persoonlike groei en onafhanklikheid, (3) die teenwoordigheid van sosiale ondersteuning en (4) aanpassing tot die universiteitsomgewing. Hierdie studie bewys dat deelnemers verskeie verkwynende ervarings aan die begin van hul eerste universiteitsjaar gehad het. Studente het bevestig dat positiewe ervarings hulle gehelp het om van verkwyning na florerings te beweeg. Hierdie studie bewys dus dat mense wat floreer genoegsame welstand en volkome geestesgesondheid het.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction to the study**

The first year at university is a crucial time of transition and challenges. These new demands could influence students either negatively or positively and cause them to languish or flourish. The movement between languishing and flourishing has a significant impact on the mental health of first-year students and will be the main focus of this study. The chapter serves as an introduction to the research context, rationale and aim, theoretical framework, and research design and methods of the study. A delineation of the forthcoming chapters is also provided to orientate the reader with regard to main components of the study.

#### **1.1 Research context and rationale of the study**

The personal developmental journey of first-year students at university is known to be a dynamic and challenging time (Kantanis, 2000). Not only has the first-year student experience become increasingly important in recent years, but also students' mental health status, given the growing number of students who are enrolling in higher education in all developed countries (Adlaf, Gliksman, Demers, & Newton-Taylor, 2001).

When first-year students' lives change so dramatically, they tend to experience distress (D'Angelo & Wierzbicki, 2003). Fraser and Killen (2003) indicated a need to investigate experiences which have an influence on students' mental health and cause them to move between languishing and flourishing.

According to Kantanis (2000), first-year students are likely to feel excited and positive at the prospect of starting their university studies. Many students will be living separately from their parents for the first time and will be faced with making decisions independently of their families (Taub, 2008). Although their newly found freedom could be a wonderful experience and give them the opportunity to become more independent (Habibah, Noordin, & Mahyuddin, 2010), it is accompanied by a variety of new and unknown experiences (Verger et al., 2009). Some first-year students feel pressured and overwhelmed, while others are able to cope and deal with the challenges of higher education more constructively (Mudhovozi,

2012). Hicks and Heastie (2008) believe that life transitions have the ability to create opportunities for growth and change. A student's first-year experience is known to be one of the key predictors of student success and retention in higher education (Hillman, 2005; Stavrianopoulos, 2008). It is vital that students manage stressful experiences sufficiently to improve the quality of their lives and move from languishing to flourishing.

A variety of factors were considered for the motivation and rationale of this study. Studies (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2003; University of California Office of the President, 2006) report that the rates of mental illness symptoms are higher among students than among the general population and that students of all ages and backgrounds are experiencing a variety of complex health problems. Parker, Duffy, Wood, Bond and Hogan (2005) stated that first-year students face psychological, emotional and social problems, which might affect their ability to flourish in higher education and achieve optimal well-being. According to Fraser and Killen (2003), students' diverse life experiences, educational opportunities and wide range of expectations, needs and academic potential could cause them to either languish or flourish.

The aim of this study was to investigate first-year students' experiences at university which are related to their movement between languishing and flourishing. The experiences were identified and conceptualised within the structure of mental health and well-being. Positive psychology literature and literature based on the development and dynamics of first-year students in university were used.

From this need to explore first-year students' mental health, the current study attempted to answer the crucial question: What experiences do first-year students have at university that cause them to move between languishing and flourishing?

In the following section, the theoretical framework is discussed briefly to conceptualise the study.

## **1.2 Theoretical framework**

This study was approached from a positive psychological viewpoint. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined positive psychology as the focus on human strengths,

virtues, positive behaviour and pleasures that make life worth living instead of on psychopathology, psychological problems and weaknesses. One of the goals of positive psychology is to understand how some people are able to achieve such high levels of thriving and flourishing (Compton, 2005) amid change and adversity. Some individuals do not just change and adapt to life, they adapt extraordinarily well.

Positive psychology aims to promote mental health and to decrease the development of mental illness. Keyes (2002) stated that mental health includes aspects such as fulfilling relationships, productive activities and the ability to change. Mental health can be achieved by a person's state of well-being and optimal functioning (WHO, 2005). According to Keyes (2006), social and psychological scientists have been studying "something positive" in the domain of well-being and yielded 13 dimensions which reflect mental health. These dimensions are divided into three groups, better known as the essential components of positive mental health. These components are emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being. Each of the three components is further described as being multidimensional (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999).

The theoretical model that was followed in this study forms part of positive psychology and seeks to conceptualise mental health. Keyes (2002) developed the mental health continuum model, with languishing and flourishing on opposite ends. Keyes and Haidt (2003) defined languishing as a state in which people have no positive emotion towards life, are not functioning properly psychologically or socially, and are neither fulfilling their potential nor realising their goals or aspirations. Languishers are neither mentally ill nor mentally healthy; they can only be described as having low mental health. On the other hand, flourishing or completely mentally healthy individuals, according to Keyes and Lopez (2002), have low symptoms of mental illness and high symptoms of well-being. Flourishing individuals are free from mental illness, filled with emotional vibrancy and function positively in psychological and social areas of their lives. Keyes (2002) explicated that the mental health continuum comprises complete and incomplete mental health and that persons with complete mental health function much better than others. A person with complete mental health can be seen as flourishing in life with high levels of well-being and positive functioning. In contrast, someone with incomplete mental health would have low levels of well-being and would be languishing in life (Keyes, 2007). Complete mental health requires a combination of high

emotional well-being, high psychological well-being and high social well-being (Keyes & Lopez, 2002).

Fraser and Killen (2003) stated that students' diverse life experiences, educational opportunities and wide range of expectations, needs and academic potential could cause them to either languish or flourish. As mentioned previously, some first-year students could feel pressured and overwhelmed, while others are able to cope and deal with the challenges of higher education more constructively (Mudhovozi, 2012). The following section gives an overview of the research design.

### **1.3 Overview of the research design**

This study followed a qualitative research approach, because it required an in-depth and rich understanding of the experiences of first-year students at university through the "voices" of the participants. When a quality, in-depth study needs to be undertaken, a qualitative research design is useful due to its focus on exploring, describing and understanding human behaviour and its aim to understand phenomena in context-specific settings by using a naturalistic approach (Golafshani, 2003). According to Maree (2007), the experiences, insights, thoughts, stories and voices of the respondents are the media through which researchers are able to explore and understand their reality and obtain deeper understanding of the relevant phenomenon.

The research for this study was conducted among first-year students of the University of the Free State (UFS). Data were gathered by means of the nominal group technique. This technique is a structured brainstorming technique that encourages group members to generate ideas (Abdullah & Islam, 2011). In this way, information is gathered by asking individuals to think about and respond to questions posed to them in group sessions.

The data gathered in this study were analysed by means of the thematic analysis method. This method is a widely used qualitative analytic method within and beyond psychology (Roulston, 2001). Qualitative approaches to research are diverse (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thematic analysis should be seen as a foundational method for qualitative analysis. This method was best suited for this study, because data gathered from all the students needed to



be coded thematically and be more focused to gain knowledge and greater understanding of the phenomenon under question.

#### **1.4 Conceptualisation of key terms**

Below key terms are defined to assist the reader in understanding and conceptualising the way in which they were used in the study.

**Positive psychology:** Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) defined positive psychology as the focus on human strengths, virtues, positive behaviour and pleasures that make life worth living.

**Mental health:** Mental health, as defined by the WHO (2005), is a state of well-being in which individuals realise their potential, cope with ordinary life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their community.

**Emotional well-being:** Emotional well-being is defined as having superiority of positive affect over negative affect, as well as having overall satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1989).

**Psychological well-being:** Keyes and Lopez (2002) defined psychological well-being as the ability people have to evaluate their lives as being fulfilling and well lived.

**Social well-being:** Social well-being, according to Westerhof and Keyes (2010), refers to people's positive functioning in society in such a way that individuals are seen as being of social value.

**Flourishing:** Flourishing can be defined as functioning in an optimal state in which people feel positive emotions towards life, are fulfilling their potential, and are purposely pursuing their goals and aspirations (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007).

**Languishing:** Keyes and Haidt (2003) defined languishing as a state in which people have no positive emotion towards life, are not functioning properly psychologically or socially, and are not fulfilling their potential.

**Emerging adulthood:** Emerging adulthood is described as a distinct life stage, which ranges from age 18 to 25 years, during which young adults feeling-between, focus on the self, explore an identity, and experience both instability and possibilities (Arnett, 2000).

**Higher education:** Higher education can be understood as a preparation for life (Astin, Keup, & Linholm, 2002).

### **1.5 Delineation of chapters**

This research will be set out in six chapters. The current chapter provided an outline of the context within which the study was conducted and discussed the rationale of the study. The aim of the study was stated and a brief overview of the research design was given. Chapter 2 introduces the field of positive psychology, discusses mental health and well-being, and highlights the importance of the mental health continuum. Chapter 3 reviews the theory and research in the first-year student experience, where concepts such as “emerging adulthood,” “higher education,” “first-year student mental health” and “managing stressful first-year experiences” are explored. Chapter 4 describes the design and methodology employed in this study, after which the research findings are presented and discussed in Chapter 5. The study concludes with Chapter 6, in which the value of the findings are highlighted and the limitations and recommendations for future research are discussed.

### **1.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research context, rationale and aim of this study were addressed. This assisted in introducing the reader to the topic of first-year student experiences at university which cause them to move between languishing and flourishing. The theoretical framework was presented briefly, after which an overview of the research design was provided. This chapter provided the reader with an outline of the following chapters. In the next chapter, positive psychology, mental health and well-being, as well as the concepts of “languishing” and “flourishing” will be discussed.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Mental health**

The aim of this study was to explore first-year university students' experiences related to moving between languishing and flourishing. In this chapter, the literature on different concepts and theories pertinent to the study are explored. By reviewing perspectives in positive psychology, a theoretical background is provided. Furthermore, in this chapter, the concept of "mental health" and its three domains, namely psychological well-being, emotional well-being and social well-being are described. Keyes' mental health continuum, including the aspects of languishing, flourishing, floundering and struggling, is discussed in depth.

#### **2.1 Positive psychology**

Positive psychology can be described, on the one hand, as a scientific study of human strengths and virtues (Compton & Hoffman, 2012) and, on the other, a discipline that studies ordinary people (Sheldon & King, 2001). The definition by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), which states that positive psychology focuses on human strengths, virtues, positive behaviour and pleasures that make life worth living, points away from psychopathology, psychological problems and weaknesses. In the same vein, Keyes (2002) defined positive psychology as the study of optimal functioning (flourishing) that contributes to individuals' well-being.

Positive psychologists investigate individuals' abilities to thrive and achieve actualisation in their lives (Compton & Hoffman, 2012). Some people thrive and flourish in the face of change, that is, these individuals do not just change and adapt to life, they adapt extraordinarily well. One of the goals of positive psychology is to understand how some people are able to achieve such high levels of thriving and flourishing (Compton, 2005). According to Keyes and Lopez (2002), positive psychologists seek to develop strategies to prevent individuals from breaking down, rather than trying to help individuals once they have broken down.

As the essence of positive psychology is found in the elements and predictors that lead to the so-called good life, positive psychologists attempt to understand the nature of happiness and well-being (Compton & Hoffman, 2012). Seligman (2002) defined the good life as one that produces genuine happiness and abundant gratification by using distinctive strengths. Research by Ryff (1989) suggested that a good life is much more than experiencing more pleasure than pain; it is striving for the actualisation and fulfillment of one's true potential. Living the good life entails a great sense of well-being and life satisfaction. This good life can further be described as a combination of three elements, namely positive individual traits, positive connections to others, and life-regulating qualities (Compton, 2005). The latter refers to qualities that individuals use to regulate their daily behaviour in such a way that it enriches the people and institutions they come into contact with (Compton & Hoffman, 2012).

All the definitions and descriptions of the field of positive psychology are embedded in two approaches, namely hedonism and eudaimonism. A major theme found in positive psychology is the difference between the hedonic and eudaimonic conceptualisations of well-being (Compton, 2005). Hedonism refers to people's pleasurable moments as being the totality of their happiness and it emphasises subjective well-being, which is often described as happiness and satisfaction with life. In contrast, eudaimonism is the fulfilment and expression of a person's inner potential, which can be referred to broadly as human flourishing (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009). A eudaimonic conceptualisation of well-being incorporates the importance of human potential, optimal functioning and sustainable levels of well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Although both these perspectives relate to the current study, the tenets of eudaimonism are more relevant. According to Waterman (1993), eudaimonism pertains to individual striving and optimal functioning, as well as the realisation of one's own potential, which is the essential element of a good life.

Although not perfectly aligned, hedonism and eudaimonism relate to the concepts of "subjective well-being" and "psychological well-being". Both these concepts, although aimed at different aspects of well-being, are significant when establishing the meaning of well-being as a whole (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Subjective well-being entails a global evaluation of affect and life satisfaction (Ryff, 1995). It relates to how people perceive and evaluate their lives according to their emotive states and their psychological and social functioning (Keyes, 2002). People who experience high subjective well-being report that

they feel very happy and satisfied with life and that they have low levels of neuroticism (Diener & Lucas, 2000). In contrast, psychological well-being focuses more specifically on people's thriving amid life's challenges (Ryff, 1995). Psychological well-being, as described by Ryff (1989), is part of a eudaimonic approach where individuals who are living well are not experiencing more pleasure than pain (as subjective well-being suggests), but are striving towards fulfilment and realisation of their true potential instead. Thus, psychological well-being is defined according to people's private and personal criteria for evaluating their functioning (Keyes, 2002) and depends on a person having high levels of self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery and autonomy (Ryff, 1989).

The ideal good life contributes to a well-lived and fulfilling life (Compton & Hoffman, 2012) which, in turn, contributes to an individual's having high levels of well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The following section discusses the important impact that mental health and well-being have on individuals' daily lives.

## **2.2 Mental health and well-being**

Positive psychology seeks to promote mental health and to decrease the development of mental illness. Mental health, as defined by the WHO (2005), is a state of well-being in which individuals recognise their potential, cope with ordinary life stresses, work productively, and contribute to their community. Keyes sees mental health as "a syndrome that has symptoms of positive feelings and functioning in life" (2002, p. 208). These symptoms are also referred to as essential components of a person's mental health. According to Keyes (2002), mental health includes aspects such as having fulfilling relationships, productive activities and the ability to change. Satcher, in turn, described mental health as "a state of successful performance of mental functions, resulting in productive activities, fulfilling relationships with people, and the ability to adapt to change and cope with adversity" (University of California Office of the President, 2006, p.4). Mental health is also viewed as a positive phenomenon that is more than the absence of psychopathological illnesses such as anxiety and depression (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). In accordance, mental health can be achieved by a person's state of well-being and optimal functioning (WHO, 2005).

Well-being occurs when people have optimal human functioning, as observed from a holistic point of view (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009). According to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), well-being is an active process during which individuals live fulfilling lives. Deci and Ryan (2000) argued that well-being can also be described as a complex construct that refers to optimal functioning. Thus, well-being is focused on mental health aspects (Compton, 2005). Moreover, well-being is not a fixed state which individuals can reach or achieve, but a continuous process instead (Hefferon & Boniwell, 2011). Under difficult circumstances, some people would still have a sense of well-being, while others would view their lives as empty and unfulfilling even in circumstances which are seen as favourable (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

In 1961, Dunn referred to high-level wellness as being indicative of high physical and emotional well-being (Compton, 2005). Dunn believed that individuals exhibit a state of optimism towards life to enhance their potential, to have meaning and purpose, social responsibility and the ability to adapt to the challenges of a changing environment. Today, the term “wellness” denotes states of excellent mental, physical and emotional health. It includes the benefits of nutrition, exercise, stress management, emotional self-regulation, personal growth and social support (Compton, 2005).

“Well-being” can sometimes be confused with “wellness”. These two terms differ in three ways. First, wellness refers to individuals who are functioning well in the different domains of life, while well-being refers to the connection that individuals have between these domains over time and the cognitive evaluation individuals have, namely satisfaction with life (Hermon & Hazler, 1999). Because of its subjective evaluation of experiences, well-being is less measurable than wellness. Secondly, wellness is viewed as a multidimensional theory and pertains to human health within a person’s lifestyle. Well-being, on the other hand, is focused on subjective experiences of happiness, the evaluation of satisfaction with life, and optimal psychological functioning (Wissing & Van Eeden, 1997). Thirdly, Strümpfer (1995) argued that wellness, and not well-being, is perceived as having a holistic nature. Wellness can be referred to as living and promoting life at the highest functioning level possible (Schafer, 1996). In contrast, well-being is less concerned with the practical decisions that people make daily and more with their experiences and optimal functioning (Schafer, 1996) which, by referring to the current study, makes well-being more important in promoting mental health.

As mentioned before, social and psychological scientists have been studying “something positive” in the domain of well-being, and this research yielded 13 dimensions reflecting mental health (Keyes, 2006). These dimensions are divided into three groups, better known as the essential components of positive mental health. Each of the three components is described as being multidimensional (Diener et al., 1999). The components are emotional well-being (life satisfaction and positive and negative affect); psychological well-being (self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relations with others, environmental mastery, and autonomy); and social well-being (social integration, social contribution, social coherence, social actualisation, and social acceptance) (Keyes, 2005). These components play a part in determining mental health (Keyes & Haidt, 2003). To be seen as flourishing in life, individuals must display high levels of positive functioning in most of the dimensions in each of the three groups (Keyes, 2007).

In the following sections, the three well-being components of mental health are defined and discussed in more depth.

### **2.2.1 Emotional well-being**

Emotional well-being refers to superiority of positive affect over negative affect, together with overall satisfaction with life (Diener, 1984; Ryff, 1989). Emotional well-being fits under the umbrella of hedonic well-being, because it involves feelings of happiness and satisfaction with life (Keyes, 2007).

As stated by Diener et al. (1999), the dimensions of emotional well-being reflect the experiences that individuals have had in their lives, which contribute to these dimensions’ being independent and empirically distinct constructs. These dimensions are positive affect (being happy, cheerful, calm, full of life and interested in life) and satisfaction with life (mostly satisfied with domains of life or with life overall) (Diener, 2009; Keyes, 2007). In the following section, these dimensions will be discussed to gain more clarity on their importance.

### **2.2.1.1 Satisfaction with life**

Shin and Toohey (2003) defined satisfaction with life as a global estimation of individuals' quality of life, according to their own chosen standard. For this reason, satisfaction with life is a cognitive judging process. Individuals judge their level of satisfaction with their current situation according to a comparison between their satisfaction and the standards they have set for themselves (Diener, 2000).

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) argued that people's degree of satisfaction with life can be determined by the frequency of positive and negative experiences which lead to happiness of a greater extent. Many people have verified that happiness and prosperity consist largely or entirely of the feeling that one's life is satisfying (Haybron, 2005). Affective states and contextual factors might have an influence on satisfaction with life. However, with all these influences, individuals' level of perceived satisfaction with life is determined by their judgement of their own lives as a whole (Diener, Lucas, & Scollon, 2006).

### **2.2.1.2 Positive and negative affect**

Over time, people experience a variety of pleasant and unpleasant emotions in different contexts. These emotions influence them to express themselves in various positive and negative ways (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). The following sections discuss the presence of positive affect and the absence of negative affect.

#### **2.2.1.2.1 Presence of positive affect**

Positive affect, as defined by Chida and Steptoe (2008), is a state in which an individual has enjoyable engagement with the environment where feelings of happiness, joy, excitement, enthusiasm and contentment are experienced. According to Finch, Baranik, Liu and West (2012), positive affect is characterised by feelings of enthusiasm, high energy and alertness. Positivity and positive affect represent a pleasant outcome with feelings of gratefulness, appreciation and liking (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005).



#### **2.2.1.2.2 Absence of negative affect**

Negativity and negative affect contribute to an unpleasant outcome of feeling contemptuous, irritated and unhappy (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). The constant experience of negative emotions such as stress contributes to illness, for example, cardiovascular disease, cancer and various other health problems (Diener, Kesebir, & Lucas, 2008). Negative affect is characterised by feelings of guilt, fear, anger and nervousness (Finch et al., 2012).

Diener and Lucas (2000) stated that, when individuals feel that their lives are satisfying, they experience more regular positive affect than negative affect which, in turn, contributes to adequate levels of emotional well-being. According to Compton (2005), a person who experiences more positive than negative emotions can be viewed as happy. In accordance, happiness can be defined as the ratio of higher levels of positive emotion to lower levels of negative emotion (Compton, 2005).

These different affects can describe a person's life with regard to having a "positivity ratio," which is the ratio of pleasant feelings to negative feelings over time (Diener et al., 2008). Experiencing more positive emotions promotes health and longevity, and contributes to possible success in individuals' careers. Fredrickson and Losada (2005) hypothesised that positivity ratios that achieve or exceed a certain benchmark is characteristic of human flourishing.

#### **2.2.2 Psychological well-being**

The concept of "psychological well-being", according to Ryff (1989), originated in an attempt to move away from the hedonistic concept of subjective well-being and, in doing so, to distinguish between hedonism and eudaimonism in psychology. Psychological well-being is defined as striving for fulfillment and the realisation of one's true potential (Ryff, 1989). Keyes and Lopez (2002) viewed psychological well-being as the ability that people have to evaluate their lives as being fulfilling and well lived. Ryff (1995) stated that psychological well-being is the ability that individuals have to thrive in challenging life events, and to grow and develop, while building good relationships with others and pursuing meaningful goals.

Ryff (1989) suggested a multidimensional model of psychological well-being. The psychological well-being model was developed to view well-being as a result of a life well lived (Ryff & Singer, 2008). The dimensions of psychological well-being are self-acceptance (a positive attitude towards the self and one's personality), personal growth (insight into one's potential to challenge and develop the self), purpose in life (a feeling that one's life has meaning and purpose), positive relationships with others (the ability to form quality, trusting relationships with others), environmental mastery (the ability to choose, change and manage one's environmental circumstances) and autonomy (independence and guidance of the self according to internal values and standards) (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008). These six constructs define psychological well-being, both theoretically and operationally, and specify the factors that promote both emotional and physical health (Compton, 2005; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002). In the next section, these six theory-guided dimensions of psychological well-being will be discussed.

#### **2.2.2.1 Self-acceptance**

Self-acceptance points to having a positive attitude towards oneself in the present and in one's past (Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008). Self-acceptance is the ability to have an understanding of and insight into one's weaknesses and strengths (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007).

Gallagher and Lopez (2007) maintained that self-acceptance assists individuals to believe that they can thrive, pursue excellence and seek approval, based on their own desires and preferences, not on others' perceptions. When people exhibit low self-acceptance, it is often the result of perfectionism or external standards which influence them to have unrealistically high standards and expectations of themselves (MacInnes, 2006).

Chamberlain and Haaga (2001) found that self-acceptance relates positively with general well-being and happiness, and negatively with depression and anxiety, where as high levels of psychological problems relate to low levels of self-acceptance (Flett, Besser, Davis, & Hewitt, 2003).

### **2.2.2.2 Personal growth**

Personal growth, according to Ryff and Keyes (1995), relates to having a sense of openness to new experiences and to growing constantly. It is this continuous change and self-development that provide individuals with greater insight into their potential, which result in their improving themselves (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Personal growth, as described by Wright et al. (2006), occurs when individuals' feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and views of themselves change because of their newly found personal awareness. Ryff, Keyes and Hughes (2003) highlighted the importance of a person's openness to new experiences to achieve personal growth. Personal growth involves having a sense of knowledge of oneself, with regard to feelings, thoughts, prejudices and judgments, which influences one to act in a way that reflects values and beliefs (Levine et al., 2006).

Personal growth forms part of the self-fulfillment properties of eudaimonic well-being (Keyes et al., 2002). Good personal growth allows individuals to move towards and reach their own sense of fulfillment. Wright et al. (2006) state that experiences that are both challenging and meaningful lead to personal development and growth.

### **2.2.2.3 Purpose in life**

Ryff and Keyes (1995) described purpose in life as having a sense of direction to pursue personal goals, which leads to people having meaning in their life. Feeling that one's life has purpose and meaning essentially contributes to individuals being motivated and achieving optimal well-being (Keyes et al., 2002).

According to Mawere (2010), people who have a sense of high purpose in life are able to deal with hardships better and it is this ability that distinguishes between those who survive and those who struggle to survive. Studies by McKnight and Kashdan (2009) showed that people are psychologically healthier when they have purpose in life.

People are searching for a sense of meaning and purpose in life more than ever before (Seligman, 2002). When they have goals and direction in life, according to Ryff and Singer

(2008), individuals have meaning in their present and past life, which contributes to their living more purposefully.

#### **2.2.2.4 Positive relationships with others**

Ryff and Keyes (1995) stated that positive relationships with others imply quality relationships which are warm, trusting and satisfying. In these relationships, individuals express empathy and intimacy with one another. Ryff (1989) described positive relationships as entailing an understanding of the give-and-get principle within a relationship. Ryff and Singer (2008) purported that a person without positive relationships with others finds it difficult to have warm, close and trusting relationships – this will lead to isolation and frustration. Individuals who have a larger number of close relationships experience higher levels of well-being (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008).

Several studies indicate that social interactions with others relate positively to high levels of well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002; Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). Camaraderie, shared experiences and social support, according to Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade (2005), are beneficial gains that result from close relationships with others.

#### **2.2.2.5 Environmental mastery**

From a psychological well-being viewpoint, Fava and Ruini (2003) defined environmental mastery as the ability to change or improve a context that is believed to be unpleasant or undesirable. It is the ability to select and create contexts that suit one's needs, control external experiences and use one's environment effectively (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

Environmental mastery can be described as the capability of managing one's own complex surroundings and life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In a study on older adults, Knight, Davison, McCabe and Mellor (2011) found that environmental mastery is negatively related to depression. They also found that psychological health can be predicted and established by having a sense of control and mastery over environmental demands.

### **2.2.2.6 Autonomy**

Autonomy can be defined as individuals' ability to make decisions independently and manage their life tasks without being dependent on others (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). Autonomy, according to Ryff and Keyes (1995), is a sense of independence, self-determination and freedom. Gallagher and Lopez (2007) concur when stating that autonomy is a sense of self-direction and the ability to withstand social pressures. In the same vein, Keyes et al. (2002) claimed that autonomy is an attempt to create individuality in a larger social context and achieve a sense of personal authority over one's life.

Well-being is associated with individuals' ability to autonomously pursue personal goals which are important to them (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Deci and Ryan (2000) found that individuals who exhibit high autonomy are more effective and persistent, and show better physical and mental health. Zuckerman (2009) stated that persons with high levels of autonomy relate positively to having high levels of self-esteem, ego development and satisfaction with work, as well as being persistent in working towards goals and being less bored. In addition, Helwig (2006) believed that autonomy is associated with the development of a sense of self and thus plays an important role in the construction of a person's identity.

The above-mentioned psychological well-being dimensions led Keyes (2006) to believe that it is possible to indicate different challenges that individuals might experience while they aspire and strive towards living a fulfilling life. People experience psychological well-being differently in different stages of their lives. Ryff (1989) found that younger people experience psychological well-being more with regard to personal growth and less with environmental mastery, while environmental mastery and autonomy tend to bring about psychological well-being in older persons. Psychological well-being in younger individuals is a result of delightful activities (Ryff, 1989). In contrast, psychological well-being in middle-aged individuals indicate positive relationships with friends and family, and older individuals associate psychological well-being with positive past work experiences and present educational experiences (Ryff, 1989).

### **2.2.3 Social well-being**

Social well-being, according to Westerhof and Keyes (2010), refers to people's positive functioning in society in such a way that individuals are seen as being of social value. Compton (2005) argued that social well-being exists when individuals exhibit positive attitudes towards others in their social context, believe that social change in society is possible, make social contributions, believe that society is understandable, and feel part of the larger social community. Social well-being can be described as the extent to which people perceive themselves as flourishing in their social lives (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). Moreover, social well-being is the way in which people judge their own sense of well-being, and it is perceived as very important for overall mental health and well-being (Keyes, 2006). Joshanloo and Nosratabadi (2009) argued that, although people's emotional and psychological functioning are portrayed as being private, individuals are still part of a social community and encounter a variety of social challenges. Keyes (2006) pointed out the importance of studying individuals' optimal social functioning with regard to social engagement and social placement.

The work of Marx, Durkheim, Seeman and Merton inspired Keyes (1998) to conceptualise five dimensions of social well-being, namely high levels of social acceptance, social actualisation, social contribution, social coherence and social integration. These constructs form part of Keyes' multidimensional model of social well-being. Keyes (1998) found the dimensions of social well-being to relate positively to the measures of satisfaction with life, happiness, optimism, feelings of trust towards neighbours, feeling safe, as well as the sense of involvement in society. In contrast, the measures of depression, meaninglessness and life's perceived challenges and obstacles correlated negatively to the social dimensions. Keyes' multidimensional model of social well-being specify if and how well individuals are functioning in society (Joshanloo & Nosratabadi, 2009).

The five dimensions of social well-being are listed and discussed below to gain a better understanding of each one's role in Keyes' model.

### **2.2.3.1 Social acceptance**

Social acceptance, according to Keyes (1998), is having positive attitudes towards others and their differences. In general, social acceptance refers to the degree to which a person is liked or disliked by people in society (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2002). In order to survive and thrive, people long for the connection with individuals in their own group (Fiske, 2004). Social acceptance, as defined by Witvliet, Brendgen, Van Lier, Koot and Vitaro (2010), is the credibility and status of behaviour in groups. It is a form of action–reaction behaviour between people, which originated because of a particular occurrence.

Social acceptance is the way in which individuals are accepting of each other's qualities, characters and contributions in society (Keyes, 1998). It is the extent to which people have positive attitudes towards one another (Compton, 2005). Individuals who illustrate social acceptance believe that people are able to be kind, trustworthy and industrious (Keyes, 1998). The need for belonging and affiliation exists not only in communities, but also on a global scale (Lang, 1994). Lang (1994) argued that people have a need to receive approval and affection from other individuals. They long to experience feelings of belonging, relatedness and community.

According to Fiske (2004), a core motive, known as belonging, exists when people are accepted by others. Baumeister and Leary (1995) found that people are believed to be healthier when they do not experience social isolation and are accepted and part of society. A study by Zarei, Heydar and Adli (2013) showed that low social acceptance relates to loneliness and depressive symptoms.

### **2.2.3.2 Social actualisation**

Social actualisation, according to Keyes (1998), is the degree to which people believe that others individuals in society have the potential to grow into a positive and exceptional version of themselves. Keyes (1998) defined social actualisation as an evaluation of the possibilities and the direction in which people believe society is evolving. Social actualisation can be described as the evaluation of society's potential and attractiveness, as well as the potential that individuals, groups and society as a whole possess to develop positively (Keyes, 2005).

Keyes (1998) stated that social actualisation entails ideas of growth and development. People believe that society has the capacity to develop and evolve towards becoming a better place (Compton, 2005). Maslow (1987) emphasised that self-actualisation is the sense that society controls its destiny. Self-actualisation, according to Maslow (1987), is belonging and, according to Lang (1994), it is affiliation.

#### **2.2.3.3 Social contribution**

Social contribution is people's sense of believe that their daily activities are making a valuable contribution to society and others (Keyes, 1998). Social contribution is an evaluation of a person's unique value to society. This indicates that a person's daily activities contribute and play an important part in the community and are perceived to be of value to the world (Keyes, 1998; Compton, 2005). Social contribution, in Keyes' (2005) view, is seeing one's daily activities as being useful and of value to others and society.

Social contribution also embodies concepts of efficacy and responsibility (Keyes, 1998). This refers to personal obligations towards accomplishing tasks as a contribution to society. According to Ware, Hopper, Tugenberg, Dickey and Fisher (2008), responsibility reflects the ability to act in a manner that shows consideration and respect for other people in society. Social contribution is the extent to which individuals believe that their daily activities contribute to and are of value to society (Boskovic & Jengic, 2008).

#### **2.2.3.4 Social coherence**

Social coherence refers to being interested in society and finding life to be meaningful (Keyes, 1998). Social coherence can best be described as people finding their own meaningfulness in society. It is the perception that the social world is an understandable, organised, predictable and sensible, logical place (Compton, 2005; Keyes, 1998).

The term "coherence", as described by McCraty (2011), is a state of internal and external connectedness, where individuals feel connected not only to their deepest selves, but to others as well. According to Laszlo (2008), coherence refers to the structure, harmony, order and placement that exist within and between different systems, whether social, organisational or other kinds of systems. In contrast, social incoherence denotes not being self-regulated and



acting in one's best interests without taking those of others into consideration (Bradley, McCraty, Atkinson, & Tomasino, 2010).

McCraty (2011) believed that social coherence refers to individuals who share the same interests and objectives within friendships, families, groups and organisations, all of which form part of a network of relationships. As stated by McCraty (2011), social coherence is a result of the stability, harmony and structure of relationships, which also indicate optimal collective cohesion.

#### **2.2.3.5 Social integration**

Social integration is having a sense of support and belonging to society (Keyes, 1998). This concept is defined as a process through which individuals develop capacities for citizenship and interpersonal connectedness (Ware et al., 2008).

Furthermore, it refers to the evaluation of a person's quality of relationships in society. It is the extent to which individuals feel they share commonalities with others and belong to their community and society (Keyes, 1998), and to which they feel they have support in their community (Compton, 2005).

According to Salehi and Seif (2012), social interaction between people is an essential need. Loneliness, which is a universal experience, is believed to be on the same level as social isolation and brings forth behavioural problems such as sadness, anger and depression (Zarei et al., 2013). In this regard, Pedersen, Vitaro, Baker and Borge (2007) found that individuals who have no friends show more signs of depression than others.

The above-mentioned dimensions of emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being all contribute to positive mental health (Keyes, 2006). Mental health, according to Westerhof and Keyes (2010), is important for both optimal individual functioning and functioning in society. Mentally healthy people exhibit a combination of high emotional, psychological and social well-being (Keyes, 2002). These three components serve as indicators of mental health, and when low levels are obtained, it might indicate mental illness (Keyes, 2007).

In the following section, Keyes' multidimensional model will be discussed. This model is based on theory that suggests that mental health and mental illness form part of a continuum.

### **2.3 The mental health continuum**

Keyes and Lopez (2002) developed the mental health continuum model with languishing and flourishing on opposite ends of the continuum, with moderate mental health in the middle. The model suggests that mental health and mental illness are intertwined and related to each other, but that they are still distinct and separate dimensions (Keyes, 2002; Keyes, 2005; Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). The continuum was operationalised by means of self-descriptive scales on emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being. Mental health and illness do not yet have specific diagnostic tests and rely on a collection of symptoms and outward signs to identify the underlying state or condition (Keyes, 2007). Complete mental health requires a combination of high emotional well-being, high psychological well-being and high social well-being (Keyes & Lopez, 2002).

Mental health, as defined by the WHO (2005, p. 2), is “a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community”. In the past, mental health has been defined as an absence of psychopathologies such as anxiety and depression (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010). However, mental health cannot be perceived as the absence of mental illness nor can it be seen as the presence of high levels of subjective well-being. Instead, mental health can be described as a complete state consisting of two dimensions, namely the mental health continuum and the mental illness continuum (Keyes & Haidt, 2003). Each of these dimensions ranges from a high to a low level of symptoms of mental health and mental illness. Keyes and Haidt (2003) suggested that, when both of these dimensions are crossed together, three stages of mental health and two stages of mental illness emerge.

The symptoms of mental illness have been found to correlate both negatively and moderately with measures of subjective well-being (Keyes, 2002). Keyes and Lopez (2002) posited that mental illness is indicated by the presence of negative symptoms of functioning. According to the American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2000), individuals with mental illness have or are at high risk of behavioural or psychological symptoms that are associated with present

distress, pain, disability, or a loss of freedom, which influence their ability to function effectively. In this regard, mental illness can be referred to as conditions that affect emotion, cognition and behaviour (Manderscheid, Ryff, Freeman, McKnight, Dhingra, & Strine, 2010).

Keyes (2002) stated that the mental health continuum comprises complete and incomplete mental health, and persons with complete mental health function much better than others. According to Keyes (2002), individuals with complete mental health, in contrast with persons with incomplete mental health, experience fewer missed workdays, fewer diseases and health care utilisation, and higher psychosocial functioning. A person with complete mental health can be seen as flourishing in life with high levels of well-being and positive functioning. In contrast, someone with incomplete mental health will have low levels of well-being and will be languishing in life (Keyes, 2007). Keyes (2005) pointed out the importance of languishing and flourishing to mental illness and mental health:

In particular, is languishing a diathesis for, and is flourishing a protective factor against, the onset and recurrence of mental illness? Conceptually, one can think of mental health as the continuum at the top of the cliff where most individuals reside. Flourishing individuals are at the healthiest and therefore farthest distance from the edge of the cliff; languishing places individuals very near the edge of the cliff. Hence, languishing may act as a diathesis that is activated by stressors that push individuals off the cliff and into mental illness. (p. 547)

Keyes and Lopez (2002) identified the state of mental health or illness by distinguishing between a four-fold typology, namely flourishing, languishing, floundering and struggling (see figure 1). The mental health continuum suggests that, to promote mental health, people must move from poorer states of functioning (i.e., languishing, struggling or floundering) towards an optimal state of flourishing in life (Keyes, 2007). Mental illness, languishing and flourishing are not stable or permanent conditions, and individuals are able to move up and down along the continuum (Keyes & Lopez, 2002): Individuals who have been mentally healthy previously become mentally ill, and people recover from complete mental illness to an absence thereof. In addition, individuals could, theoretically, move from languishing to flourishing or vice versa (Keyes, 2005). In the following sections, these four terms will be discussed in depth.

		<b>Emotional or psychological or social well-being</b>	
		High	Low
<b>Mental illness</b>	High	Struggling	Floundering
	Low	Flourishing	Languishing

**Figure 1** Model of complete mental health according to Keyes and Lopez (2002)

### 2.3.1 Flourishing

Flourishing, as conceptualised within the mental health continuum (Keyes & Lopez, 2002), is the optimal state of functioning in which people feel positive emotions towards life, are fulfilling their potential and purposely pursuing their goals and aspirations (Grant & Cavanagh, 2007). Flourishing is characterised by creativity, exploration, establishing social connections, using intuition, being resilient and having environmental knowledge. It is best described as complete mental health with high levels of well-being and positive functioning (Keyes, 2002). Keyes and Haidt (2003) stated further that a flourishing person is mentally healthy and is truly living instead of merely existing. Flourishing or completely mentally healthy individuals, according to Keyes and Lopez (2002), have low symptoms of mental illness and high symptoms of well-being. These individuals are free from mental illness, they experience emotional vibrancy and they function positively in psychological and social areas of their lives. Grant and Cavanagh (2007) see individuals who are flourishing as feeling positive and fulfilling their aspirations and goals, and they exhibit more health-promoting and less health-risk behaviour (Keyes, 2013). Flourishing includes internalised beliefs and values, as well as partaking in less risk behaviours and more positive, prosocial behaviours (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013). Identifying individuals with flourishing in life, according to Grant and Cavanagh (2007), they have to experience high levels of subjective well-being and no symptoms of mental illness. The key predictor of flourishing is the ratio of positive affect to negative affect (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Fredrickson and Losada (2005) hypothesised that positivity ratios which achieve or exceed a certain benchmark characterise human flourishing.

### **2.3.2 Languishing**

Keyes and Haidt (2003) defined languishing as a state in which individuals have no positive emotion towards life, are not functioning properly socially or psychologically, and are neither fulfilling their potential nor realising their goals or aspirations. Languishers are neither mentally ill nor mentally healthy – they can be described as having low mental health. Individuals who are languishing or incompletely mentally healthy have low symptoms of mental illness and well-being (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). When a person's well-being is incomplete and seen as languishing, it is because they focus only on a part of what makes an individual mentally healthy. Grant and Cavanagh (2007) maintained that individuals who are languishing lack positive emotion and are not fulfilling their aspirations or goals. Languishing brings with it emotional distress, psychosocial difficulties, limitations to everyday activities and lost days of work, and languishing people can be characterised by feelings of hollowness and emptiness, stagnation, avoidance and quiet despair (Keyes, 2002). Languishing occurs when a person experiences negative emotions for too long (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). People who are languishing are very dissatisfied and unfulfilled in life (Compton & Hoffman, 2012).

### **2.3.3 Struggling**

Struggling or incomplete mentally ill individuals have high symptoms of mental illness and high symptoms of well-being (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). Such a person is doing well in life but, at that moment, is experiencing distress regarding some issue. According to Slade's complete state mode of mental health (2010), struggling is an indication of incomplete mental illness.

### **2.3.4 Floundering**

Floundering or completely mentally ill individuals, according to Keyes and Lopez (2002), have high symptoms of mental illness and low symptoms of well-being. In this sense, floundering involves a situation that is difficult and unpleasant (Keyes & Lopez, 2002). Slade's complete state mode of mental health (2010) suggested that floundering indicates complete mental illness and, according to Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2013), it is a sense of maladjustment. Individuals who are floundering in their lives exhibit more health-risk and

less health-promoting behaviour (Keyes, 2013). They externalise behaviour that might be socially unacceptable such as high alcohol and drug use, and internalise problems such as depression, anxiety and low self-perceptions (Nelson & Padilla-Walk, 2013).

Although complete mental health can be viewed as being free from mental illness and flourishing, flourishing can exist with an episode of mental illness. In addition, both moderate mental health and languishing can each exist with or without mental illness (Keyes, 2007). Strümpfer, Hardy, Villiers and Rigby (2009) stated that mental illness, languishing and flourishing are not permanent or stable conditions. Therefore, it could be assumed that external and subjective situations are able to cause individuals to move up and down the mental health continuum. Mentally healthy people can become mentally ill and, on the other hand, individuals who have been diagnosed with a mental illness can recover completely (Strümpfer et al. 2009).

With regard to the mental health continuum, a person can, in theory, move from languishing to flourishing, and from flourishing to languishing according to the personal and social conditions that the person is experiencing (Keyes, 2007). Individuals with complete mental health have high levels of well-being and are flourishing in life, while individuals with incomplete mental health have low levels of well-being and are languishing in life (Keyes, 2002). Moreover, individuals who are neither flourishing nor languishing in life are described as being moderately mentally healthy. As concluded by Keyes (2002), mental health is best viewed as being a syndrome with a combination of symptoms of emotional, psychological and social well-being.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to provide a positive psychological perspective on Keyes' mental health continuum. Mental health was discussed with regard to how it is more than just the absence of mental illness. Psychological well-being, social well-being and emotional well-being, together with all their components, were discussed to state their importance in contributing to individuals' exhibiting complete mental health. The chapter provided an explanation of flourishing and languishing, and of where floundering and struggling fit into the complete mental health model. The importance of human well-being and its significance to achieving a fulfilling life, better known as the "good life," were emphasised.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The first-year student experience**

The focus of this research was on first-year students at the UFS. The population group is contextualised in this chapter by means of a discussion of relevant literature. In an effort to better understand how students experience their first year at university, the chapter explores the challenges and experiences of students during this time.

The first year at university is filled with a variety of new life changes and is a critical time of transition and adjustment for emerging adult students. Students are not only commencing their higher education studies and experiencing challenges while transitioning from school to university, but they are also undergoing the transition from adolescence to adulthood. This chapter will specifically discuss emerging adulthood, higher education and the transition into higher education during the first year. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of first-year student mental health, the management of stressful first-year experiences and the positive and the negative outcomes of dealing with higher education challenges.

#### **3.1 Emerging adulthood**

Emerging adulthood has been identified as a distinct life stage ranging from age 18 to 25 years. According to Arnett (2000), individuals in this stage feel in-between, focus on the self, explore their identity, and experience both instability and possibilities. “Feeling in-between” is how individuals describe themselves as neither being adolescents any more nor being adults yet. Although emerging adults become more independent, they still have fewer obligations to others than adults; hence, the opportunity to focus on the self. Nelson, Larson, Neumark-Sztainer and Lytle (2008) believed that the development of an identity is a crucial characteristic of this period. Emerging adults are able to explore their identity in different areas related to love, work and world views. Emerging adulthood is a time when new ideologies and behaviours can be explored, which assists individuals in showing their individuality (Miller, Ogletree, & Welshimer, 2002). The development of individuality is accompanied with changes in relationships, education and residential status and results in feelings of both instability and possibility.

Emerging adulthood is known to be the stage of possibilities, because it provides young individuals with the opportunity to transform their lives and move into new directions (Arnett, 2000; Schulenberg, O'Malley, Backman, & Johnston, 2005). Arnett (2000) described this as a time when individuals can still choose from a wide range of possible directions, when not much about the future is planned or certain, and when exploring life's possibilities independently is greater for most individuals than it will be at any other period of their lives. The possibilities that emerging adults experience provide them with optimism in directing their lives in desired directions (Arnett, 2000).

Emerging adulthood, according to Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2013), can also be seen as a time of changing support systems and changing interpersonal influences. As emerging adults become more independent, the influence and role of family and social networks tend to change (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Arnett (2000) believed emerging adulthood to be a self-focused period in one's life. In the past, emerging adults have been labeled as being selfish, struggling and directionless (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013); however, since they don't have the social obligations, duties or commitments that older adults have, they have the autonomy to direct their own lives.

This is a fascinating period in that it is filled with changes and important decisions that have a profound impact on the direction that one's life will take (Arnett, 2000). Students in higher education are believed to be in this life stage. The dynamics of their development in higher education will be discussed next.

### **3.2 Higher education**

Higher education is described as a preparation for life (Astin et al., 2002). Each year, the demand for higher education is increasing globally (Mudhovozi, 2012). Macdonald (2000) stated that this increase in student numbers brings with it various backgrounds, abilities, and expectations from each student. Especially in South Africa, university students come from various social and cultural backgrounds (Fraser & Killen, 2003).

Higher education institutions, according to Hurtaclo et al. (2007), have the responsibility to develop and equip successive generations with the competence to satisfy individual and societal needs. Negovan (2010) adds that universities have a responsibility towards not only



students' education, but also their holistic development, well-being and quality of life. According to Slavich and Zimbardo's (2012) transformation teaching model, higher education should facilitate the acquisition and mastery of key academic concepts, enhance skills and strategies to promote learning and discovery, and promote positive learning attitudes, values, and beliefs. Higher education is challenged to develop students' abilities towards optimal improvement and support students in maintaining these abilities throughout their life at university (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012).

### **3.3 The first-year experience**

The first year at university can be an exciting and challenging experience for any student (Habibah et al., 2010). Krause and Coates (2008) emphasised the importance of understanding the first-year experience, as well as the role it plays in the transition from school to higher education in order to build students' educational foundations for future academic success. A student's first-year experience is known to be one of the key predictors related to student success and retention in higher education (Hillman, 2005; Stavrianopoulos, 2008). As a result of the changing culture from secondary school to university, students' success rates during the first year are lower than in any other year (Mehdinezhad, 2011).

The successful transition of students from previous educational institutions, such as high school, to higher education has been an area of concern for universities for a long time (Perry & Allard, 2003). Transition can be described as a form of change, where someone or something moves from one state, stage, form or activity to the next or, in this case, individuals moving from the known to the unknown (Perry & Allard, 2003). Transition is a period of adapting, coming to terms with expectations and reality, and facing the challenges to persist (Krause & Coates, 2008). Not only are students enrolled into a new programme and institution, they often leave home, friends and family behind to adapt to a new lifestyle (Clark, 2005). According to Bridges (2000), many first-year students, especially those who come to university directly after school, find their transition to academic life to be very challenging, which causes them to struggle in connecting to the university context.

Many first-year students report feeling unprepared for the transitions they need to make in order to be successful, whether academically, socially or emotionally (Clark, 2005). In addition, South African students experience the financial problems, demands of the university

environment and administration processes to be their most stressful events in their first year (Bonjuweoye, 2002).

According to Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton and Renn (2010), the perception that students have about their transition will significantly affect the way in which they manage and cope with new changes in their lives. Students' most common expectations of their first year are: to meet new and different people; to have fun; to enjoy the freedom of a learning environment that is not as structured as school; to be mentally stimulated by all the new experiences; and to be able to explore greater and more interesting subjects (Kantanis, 2000). However, the realisation of these expectations is affected by different factors such as difficulty in making new friends; disappointment when discovering that university is not as exciting and interesting as expected; unapproachable staff; heavy workload; and subjects that are more difficult than expected (Kantanis, 2000).

Krause and Coates (2008) explained that one of the reasons students find their transition from school to university to be so difficult is because it often challenges their existing view of themselves and their place in the world. First-year students come into contact with peers who are culturally, religiously and linguistically diverse; who are from different social-economic backgrounds; who have different political views; who indulge in substance abuse; who have alternative lifestyles; who have different academic achievement levels; who have returned to higher education after many years; and who have different sexual orientations (Kantanis, 2000). Thus, students experience many uncertainties which influence their sense of belonging. These uncertainties extend to issues regarding making friends, feeling alone and fitting in, finding their unique identity, and being treated fairly and equally (Hockings, Cooke, & Bowl, 2007).

In the absence of the school infrastructure that supported them before, students get distracted from their responsibilities when their newly found freedom of societies, activities on campus and the lack of auditing class attendance outweigh other priorities. This can later lead to students missing classes and dropping out of programmes after just a few weeks. Chambel and Curral (2005) explained that students experience difficulties with managing their academic workload which, in turn, have a negative influence on their academic adjustment to higher education. Students tend to believe that they have inadequate abilities to rise to

academic demands. This leads students to put an insufficient amount of effort into their academic work, which could lead to academic failure.

Transitioning from school to university is clearly a stressful experience. Clifton and Anderson (2002) argued that more students leave university because of disillusionment, discouragement and reduced motivation than because of inability or dismissal. Kantanis (2000) believed that first-year students are most in need of guidance, support and encouragement when making the transition from school. Bridges (2000) adds that it is vital to manage individuals' negative feelings about their experiences and to assist them in feeling more connected to their peers and the university.

“In order to achieve a quality first-year experience, higher education staff needs to meet students where they are, engage with them on their level, and support them in their efforts towards achieving success” (Duffy, 2007, p. 482). Universities have the responsibility to provide students with every possible opportunity for success and to assist them in earning their degree and be competitive in the labour market (Mayhew, Van der Linden, & Kim, 2010).

### **3.4 First-year student mental health**

Students' mental health status has become an important issue given the increasing number of students enrolling in higher education in all developed countries (Adlaf et al., 2001). Student mental health issues have been defined within the context of adjustment and developmental challenges (University of California Office of the President, 2006). According to Keyes (2002), mental health includes aspects such as fulfilling relationships, productive activities and the ability to change.

Cooke, Beewick, Barkham, Bradley and Audin (2006) indicated that much higher levels of mental health and well-being have been identified in first-year university students than across general populations. However, other studies (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2003; University of California Office of the President, 2006) have reported that rates of mental illness symptoms are higher among students than among the general population and that students of all ages and backgrounds are experiencing a variety of complex mental health problems.

Fraser and Killen (2003) mentioned that students' diverse life experiences, educational opportunities and wide range of expectations, needs and academic potential can cause them to either languish or flourish. Some first-year students can feel pressured and overwhelmed, while others are able to cope and deal with the challenges of higher education more constructively (Mudhovozi, 2012). Transitioning from school to higher education can lead to growth and development, but also to less positive outcomes (Evans et al., 2010). In the following two sections, the positive and negative outcomes of challenges in higher education will be discussed.

### **3.4.1 Positive outcomes of transitioning from school to university**

Perry and Allard (2003) viewed the transition from school to university as an exciting challenge. Kantanis (2000) concurs by stating that first-year students are likely to feel excited and positive at the prospect of starting their university studies. Being positive is the best indication of individuals' flourishing (Keyes, 2002). Flourishing individuals have internalised beliefs and values and they participate in less risk behaviours and more positive, prosocial behaviours (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013). The newly found freedom that students experience can be exciting and can give students the opportunity to become more independent (Habibah et al. 2010). Keyes and Haidt (2003) also stated that a flourishing person can be seen as truly living instead of merely existing.

Gurin, Dey, Hurtado and Gurin (2002) argued that universities are becoming more diverse, and students will be confronted with unfamiliar situations and different opinions. These situations bring forth the mental processes that positively contribute to students' cognitive growth and learning ability; thus, giving students more opportunities to engage in different experiences leads to greater potential for learning (Gurin et al., 2002). Moreover, positive cognitive and personal growth contributes to high levels of psychological well-being (Gurin et al., 2002).

Potts and Schultz (2008) stated that living on campus can have a positive influence not only on students' academic adjustment and integration, but also on student retention, because it increases the investment of the student, both physically and emotionally (Derby & Smith, 2004). Living in residences on campus is the main place where students start to learn and

develop skills such as responsibility and time management (Bozick, 2007). On-campus living, thus, provides the opportunity for more social integration and acceptance – two social well-being outcomes highlighted by Keyes (Bozick, 2007).

By partaking in diversity-related activities, students experience a variety of positive outcomes such as intergroup understanding, self-confidence, learning and democratic outcomes (Chang, Denson, Sáenz, & Misa, 2006; Denson & Chang, 2009). First-year students continuously learn and develop competencies that they will be able to use in the future, including knowledge in writing, speaking, thinking and problem solving, understanding, and knowledge of the economy, careers and life satisfaction (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007). Thus, experiencing environmental mastery and personal growth assists students in improving their psychological well-being (Kuh et al., 2007).

Hicks and Heastie (2008) found that life transitions have the ability to create opportunities for growth and change. However, these transitions can lead to self-doubt, disappointment and self-defeating habits. In the following section, these and more negative outcomes of transitioning from school to university are discussed.

### **3.4.2 Negative outcomes of transitioning from school to university**

The transition to university can be accompanied by stress and might have a substantial impact on students' mental health, which then contributes to academic problems (Wintre & Yaffe, 2000). Although Perry and Allard (2003) regarded the first year as an exciting transition, they also pointed to the fact that transitioning into university can be a daunting proposition. Hicks and Heastie (2008) claimed that, during this transition, first-year students most often experience emotional and personal problems, overall psychological distress, anxiety, inadequate self-esteem and a state of depression. Emotional distress, psychosocial difficulties and limitations to everyday activities are indications of languishing (Keyes, 2002). Students who are languishing are seen as being dissatisfied and feeling unfulfilled in life (Compton & Hoffman, 2012). Languishing students can also be characterised by feelings of hollowness and emptiness, stagnation, avoidance and quiet despair (Keyes, 2002).

Studies have found that the transition to university is an acute, short-term stressor that usually affects students upon entry to university (Gall, Evans & Bellerose, 2000). Gotlib and

Hammen (2010) posited that acute stress is consistent in predicting the onset of depression. A number of studies have recorded higher rates of psychological distress among first-year students at universities worldwide (Cooke et al., 2006). Parker et al. (2005) add that first-year students face psychological, emotional and social problems which might affect their ability to flourish in higher education and achieve optimal well-being.

According to Parker et al. (2005), more than one-third of first-year students report feeling homesick or lonely sometimes and being worried about meeting new people. Brannon and Feist (2000) indicated that psychological factors such as loneliness can have negative effects on a person's health and psychological well-being. Loneliness often occurs after sudden changes. It might influence everyday tasks and life functions and can lead to serious emotional, social and psychological consequences (Black, 2009). Loneliness can, in this case, be considered as being a threat to the mental health and psychological functioning of a person (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006).

The period between late adolescence and early adulthood is crucial in the aetiology of depression. During childhood and adolescence, depression levels are low but increase six times during late adolescence and remain stable through adulthood (Hankin, 2006). Taub (2008) argued that first-year university students often experience the highest levels of distress and anxiety of all university students. Students are overwhelmed and fail to meet transitioning challenges, which can negatively influence their ability to adjust to university life, achieve success and persevere during their first year (Parker et al., 2005). Anxiety is common among first-year students, especially when they believe that everyone else knows what to do and where to go. Most first-years tend to overlook the fact that there are others who share their anxieties (Kantanis, 2000).

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) believed that well-being is an active process in which individuals live fulfilling lives. It is vital for students to manage stressful experiences sufficiently to improve the quality of their lives and move from languishing to flourishing. In the following section, the importance of managing stressful first-year experiences will be discussed.

### **3.5 Managing stressful first-year experiences**

When first-year students' lives change so dramatically, they tend to experience distress (D'Angelo & Wierzbicki, 2003). According to Denton, Prus and Walters (2006), to protect themselves against distress, students have to possess both internal resources and external resources. Internal resources include mastery, that is regarding one's life chances as being under one's control, and external resources include social support, that is having people whom one can trust, who care and who value one as a person (Denton et al., 2006; Verger et al., 2009). Mastery and social support might protect students against negative mental health outcomes (Bovier, Chamot, & Perneger, 2004). The following sections discuss the emotional, psychological and social well-being resources that students can use to face the challenges of higher education.

#### **3.5.1 Emotional well-being in students**

“Students need to manage their emotions, which involves recognising emotions, accepting emotions and controlling emotions. It is important for them to act on their feelings in a sensible and responsible manner” (Evans et al., 2010, p. 67). The regulation of positive emotions correlates positively to resilience to the extent that it counteracts negative emotional experiences and leads to the enhancement of thoughts and action (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007). Students who have optimal self-regulatory capabilities and who are in control of their emotions, thoughts and behaviours during stressful times should experience greater resilience and positive outcomes (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007).

Students with the ability to maintain a positive perspective on their future are able to promote their resilience in difficult situations, guarding against the negative impact of stress and maintaining motivation to achieve their goals and aspirations (Tusaie, Pushkar, & Sereika, 2007).

A study by Simons, Aysan, Thompson, Hamarat and Steele (2002) investigated the impact of perceived stress and availability of coping resources on life satisfaction among 172 university students in Turkey. The authors determined that the level of life satisfaction could be predicted moderately by perceived stress and the availability of coping resources.

Significant correlations were found between life satisfaction, social support, perceived economic well-being, and the monitoring of stress.

### **3.5.2 Psychological well-being in students**

Various studies have been conducted related to psychological well-being components such as self-acceptance, personal growth, purpose in life, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery and autonomy.

Self-acceptance in this study involves a realistic awareness of students' weaknesses and strengths. This awareness creates a feeling of self-worth by which students can distinguish between growth potential and acceptance of their unchangeable characteristics (Gallagher & Lopez, 2007). As stated by Persinger (2009), self-assessment and getting to know one's strengths, weaknesses, ambitions, interests, goals, hurdles and strategies are helpful to accomplish a quality first-year experience. This process of self-assessment involves evaluating one's strategies in which an exploration of values, goals, motivators and confidence is undertaken.

The integration into both the academic and social university community is crucial in developing a sense of belonging and a sense of being a student (Hardy & Bryson, 2009). The ability to adjust to the university environment, according to Petersen, Louw and Dumont (2009), is seen as an extremely important factor when predicting university outcomes. First-year students are faced with multiple challenges and new adjustments, so students have to learn to adapt to a new academic environment that is very different from high school, build new relationships and modify existing relationships with family and friends, while learning to live as independent adults (Parker et al, 2005). A 2011 study by Knight et al. proved that environmental mastery enables individuals to manage health-related challenges effectively by using problem-focused coping skills in order to mobilise resources. Petersen et al. (2009) described adjustment as a multifaceted process of individuals interacting with their environment in an effort to bring about harmony between the requirements and needs of their new environment. Knight et al. (2011) found that a sense of self-efficacy or mastery over environmental demands is an important indicator of psychological health and a reflection of a sense of control.



Student engagement refers to the effort, time and energy that students invest in educational activities as well as the effort that institutions make in following effective educational practices (Kuh et al., 2008). Mehdinezhad (2011) posited that students' prior experiences of education, their expectations and perceptions of their first year, and their aspirations, influence their first-year engagement in university. In this regard, Krause and Coates (2008) identified various factors that have an influence on student engagement, namely student interactions with one another, socio-political factors, the role that institutional policies play, and non-institutional influences such as friends, family, health and employment. There are social benefits which emerge from establishing and maintaining close relationships and include camaraderie, shared experiences and social support, all of which can be seen as coping mechanisms (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe and Ryan (2000) stated that, when individuals experience feelings of relatedness daily, it can be perceived as indications of well-being.

### **3.5.3 Social well-being in students**

To ensure a successful transition to university, students need to build relationships with their new peer groups and their wider academic community (Perry & Allard, 2003). Kantanis (2000) claimed that making and having friends are imperative and provide students with helpful resources to assist them in their transition to university. Individuals establish their identity, which includes accepting sexual orientation and gender, ethnic and social backgrounds, self-esteem and security in oneself. Evans et al. (2010) claimed that this leads to the understanding of one's role in society and developing adequate self-esteem, acceptance, stability and security.

Students' social integration into university can be influenced by their interpersonal and intrapersonal development (Matanah, Hancock, & Brand, 2004). Those who have adequate intrapersonal skills are well prepared to undertake the demands of independent functioning which are necessary to effectively navigate the new social environment during their transition into university (Matanah et al., 2004).

Social interactions have consistently been correlated to high levels of well-being (Diener, 2009; Diener & Seligman, 2002). As mentioned previously, social well-being occurs when individuals exhibit positive attitudes towards others in their social context, believe that social

change in society is possible, make social contributions, believe society is understandable, and feel part of the larger social community (Compton, 2005). Social well-being, as expounded by Keyes (1998), consists of high levels of social acceptance, social actualisation, social contribution, social coherence, and social integration.

Research shows that students are less likely to withdraw or drop out of class when they report feeling a part of the class or a community of fellow students (Mehdinezhad, 2011). Social support, according to Compton (2005), has two ways of affecting a person's health. First, higher levels of social support might have a direct impact on health or, secondly, it might act as a "buffer" during stressful or difficult times, which can decrease the negative effects of stress and anxiety. Thus, social support has the potential to increase an individual's positive emotions such as confidence, hope, or a feeling of security.

By managing stressful first-year experiences at university, students might be able to change their negative experiences into positive experiences in their personal, social and academic lives, which would lead to a fulfilling and successful first educational year at university.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The first year of university is a critical and sometimes overwhelming and challenging time in the lives of new students. Emerging adulthood is a period of developing oneself, and a successful transition into higher education is crucial in assisting students in developing personally, socially and academically. This chapter outlined the first-year experience and drew attention to first-year student mental health, which includes both positive and negative outcomes. Students' first-year experiences have the ability to affect their mental health status positively or negatively and cause them to move between flourishing and languishing. Thus, students need to deal with stressful first-year experiences in their emotional, psychological and social well-being areas by means of self-acceptance, environmental mastery, social support, the ability to adjust, and managing emotions. By doing this, students are most likely to develop more positively in different areas in their lives which would lead them to complete their studies and graduate with a degree. The next chapter represents the research design and methodology of this study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Methodology**

In the previous chapters, the literature was explored to provide the context to the methodology section of the study. The aim of this chapter is to explain the processes of the study, which include decisions regarding the methodology and reasons for these decisions. The research approach, the data collection procedures, the data analysis, and the trustworthiness of the study, will be discussed in this chapter. Also, the relevant ethical considerations are included in the chapter. This chapter should be viewed with the main research objective in mind, namely to investigate the experiences of first-year university students which cause them to move between languishing and flourishing.

#### **4.1 Research problem and rationale of the study**

The first-year student experience has increasingly received attention in recent years. The first year at university is a vulnerable period in any student's life. Students' mental health status has become a critical issue (Adlaf et al., 2001), because the mental health and well-being status of students is paramount in ensuring the ability to learn and participate in university life. Therefore, the need has arisen to investigate those experiences that have an influence on students' mental health (Fraser & Killen, 2003).

The first-year student experience at university is known to be dynamic and challenging, and allowing for personal development and growth. According to Kantanis (2000), first-year students are likely to feel excited and positive at the prospect of starting their university studies, and they are faced with a variety of new and unknown experiences (Verger et al., 2009). Some first-year students might feel pressured and overwhelmed, while others are able to cope and be more constructive in their dealing with the challenges of higher education (Mudhovozi, 2012). Sometimes these uncertainties tend to influence students negatively and cause them to fail their first year or even drop out (Verger et al., 2009). For first-year students, the transition from school to higher education, the adjustment processes of this stage in their lives, their expectations of success, and personal, financial and cultural challenges are all a part of the unknown new environment. These experiences might have an impact on students' psychological, emotional and social well-being and cause them to move between

languishing and flourishing. This research into the first-year experience could assist in gaining a better understanding of how students move between languishing and flourishing.

The question that this research study aimed to explore was:

What experiences do first-year students have that cause them to move between languishing and flourishing at university?

## **4.2 Research approach**

In this study a qualitative research approach was used. According to Merriam (2009), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people experience and interpret their lives. Qualitative research can be defined as face-to-face meetings between the researcher and the participants which focus on gaining insight into the participants' views regarding their experiences as expressed in their own words. Qualitative research is primarily interested in exploring, describing and understanding human behaviour. It also aims to understand phenomena in context-specific settings by following a naturalistic approach (Golafshani, 2003).

Qualitative research is efficient in conducting quality in-depth research. An advantage of qualitative research is that, instead of using an experimental setting, the naturalistic approach focuses on the importance of the meanings, views and experiences of the respondents (Golafshani, 2003). Qualitative researchers believe that people have their own assumptions, intentions, attitudes, beliefs and values, and views human events in a holistic way. The way to know individuals' reality is to explore their experiences regarding a certain phenomenon by asking them about these experiences (Maree, 2007). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) claimed that qualitative research provides insight into people's behaviour and the reasons they do what they do to acquire what they need in order to change. Maree (2007) stated that the experiences, insights, thoughts, stories and voices of the respondents are the media through which researchers are able to explore and understand the phenomenon in context.

Qualitative research has some disadvantages. Maree (2007) viewed qualitative research as difficult, time consuming and expensive. In-depth interviews are time consuming and expensive, especially when researchers make use of recorders. Moreover, the researcher has

the difficult task of transcribing and coding large amounts of data. The unstructured nature of this method of research makes it difficult to direct and conduct (Maree, 2007). There is also the possibility of researcher bias. Gaining the trust of participants might prove to be a problem when doing in-depth interviews. It takes time to build trust with participants and this could have an effect on the honesty of their statements.

Qualitative research was relevant to this study because it proved to be most helpful in gathering more in-depth and focused data. Qualitative research assisted in gaining a better understanding and detailed picture of the students' first-year experiences of moving between languishing and flourishing at university.

### **4.3 Research participants and sampling procedures**

In the following sections, the population of interest, the sampling procedures, and the sample of participants selected for the study are discussed.

#### **4.3.1 Research population**

The target population of students eligible to participate in the study included all first-year students at the UFS. First-year students were rich sources of information and owners of valuable experiences relevant to this study.

When considering the inclusion criteria for the research, it was decided that any first-year student studying at the UFS was eligible to take part in the research. Senior students, as well as students from other universities, were excluded from the study. The sampling procedures are discussed below.

#### **4.3.2 Sampling procedures**

Two forms of sampling, namely purposive and snowball sampling, were used in this research study. Combined, these two sampling methods assisted in finding a rich sample of participants for the study.

#### **4.3.2.1 Purposive sampling**

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the researcher purposefully decides who will be included in the study (Maree, 2007). Purposive sampling ensures that the selected participants have the necessary experience and knowledge of the area that is researched (Golafshani, 2003). According to Given (2008), purposive sampling occurs when a researcher is making a range of strategic choices about with whom, where and how to do research. Therefore, to answer the research questions, the most valuable sources of information can be obtained by purposive sampling decisions (Maree, 2007).

Gledhill, Abbey and Schweitzer (2008) stated that a major advantage of purposive sampling is that it includes a wide range of sampling techniques. These techniques prove to be important when making theoretical, analytical and logical generalisations from information gathered from participants. However, a limitation of purposive sampling is that it is vulnerable to researcher bias, because the researcher is responsible for deciding which individuals are suitable for inclusion in the study (Given, 2008).

#### **4.3.2.2 Snowball sampling**

Apart from purposive sampling, this study also applied snowball sampling, also known as chain referral sampling. Snowball sampling aids the researcher in finding possible participants by using the already participating social networks to reach relevant participants (Golafshani, 2003). The series of referrals made by participants are based on the assumption that a bond exists among the target population (Noy, 2008). Atkinson and Flint (2001) indicated a variety of advantages of this method of sampling: It is often used to research participants and groups that are not easily accessible by means of other sampling strategies; individuals tend to participate in research after their friends had informed them to do so; and this method is efficient, economical and effective in various types of research studies.

Snowball sampling has shortcomings too. Problems of representativeness can occur where selection bias plays a role (Atkinson & Flint, 2001). Another problem is finding participants and initiating them to partake in chain referral in order to gain more participants for the study. Hidden populations are difficult to find and can be a very time-consuming process. Atkinson and Flint (2001) claimed that another limitation of snowball sampling is engaging

participants as informal research assistants. Hostility and suspicion might be encountered from the targeted population.

To counteract these difficulties, people in positions of authority, such as lecturers, could be approached to provide a route into the required population. The researcher must establish trust with the participants by assuring them of confidentiality and the protection of the information they provide.

First-year students at the UFS were approached on campus during lectures and tutor sessions and asked, if willing, to participate in the research study. The purpose of the study was explained to them, namely that it will assist in gaining a better understanding of the experiences of first-year students and how these experiences cause them to move between languishing and flourishing. The participating students used their social networks to refer the researcher to other potential participants to take part in or contribute to the research. The participants acted as valuable assistants in identifying and reaching other possible participants that were potentially hidden for this study.

#### **4.3.3 Research participants in this study**

Two separate nominal groups were conducted, with sample sizes of N=10 in the first group and N=12 in the second group.

In accordance with the gender ratio in the Faculty of the Humanities, the majority of participants were female. Black students were overrepresented, with white students and students from other races in the minority.

#### **4.4 Collection of data**

The nominal group technique was used to obtain data. This technique involves structured brainstorming that encourages group members to generate ideas (Abdullah & Islam, 2011). According to Potter, Gordon and Hamer (2004), the nominal group technique is an effective group decision-making procedure in researching social psychological issues and can be applied in fields such as health, industry, education, social sector, and government organisations. This technique gathers information by asking individuals to think about and

respond to questions posed to them in group sessions. These questions or problems presented to the participants require their views, thoughts and insights (Abdullah & Islam, 2011). Questions are semi-structured and form part of an informal interview schedule. Semi-structured questions are predetermined and allow for the clarification and probing of answers. By probing the participants' answers, elaboration, clarification and more detail regarding the phenomenon can be identified and explored.

The nominal group technique is a qualitative group method where the interaction between the group members can be more controlled than in focus groups. Social interaction between group members and with the researcher assists in gaining valuable information. This technique is a constructive, problem-solving approach where all the group members can equally participate by discussing their experiences, giving their insight and understanding of the phenomenon, and generating creative ideas (Dobbie, Rhodes, Tysinger, & Freeman, 2004). Abdullah and Islam (2011) stated that one of the most highlighted advantages of the nominal group technique is that it generates a large number of ideas. Moreover, it ensures the balanced participation of each group member and prevents particular members from dominating the discussion.

Potter et al. (2004) found that the disadvantages of nominal groups are based on the possible constraints that a group discussion could have on individuals' responses. Therefore, the researcher should be proficient in group session procedures and techniques in interviewing to ensure the participation of all the group members. The individuals list their experiences, views, ideals and thoughts regarding the question or issue on paper, without discussing them with the other participants, after which they share what they had written with the group. This process encourages all group members to participate in the group discussion and results in diverse viewpoints from all the individuals.

The nominal group technique was suitable for this study because it assisted in gathering quality data on the experiences of first-year students by having group discussions and generating ideas on which group members could elaborate. In-depth information was obtained by using this technique, which contributed to the quality of the research.

Individuals were divided into two groups of 10 members in the first group and 12 members in the second group. After informed consent had been gained, the terms "mental health"



and “languishing and flourishing” were explained to them. The importance of each of these terms were highlighted to ensure that students understood the issue at hand and what was expected of them in the group session. Participants were then asked to write down experiences that caused them to move towards languishing and experiences that caused them to move towards flourishing in their first-year at university. All the participants were given about 10 minutes to generate and write down a list of ideas individually. Then participants were asked to voice their ideas which were then written down on a flip chart. Each member (in round-robin format) received an opportunity to state aloud one idea at a time. This cyclical voicing of ideas continued until no new ideas emerged.

At this stage in the process, no discussion or qualification of ideas was allowed. This ensured that each student equally participated without some students dominating the discussion. Next, all the ideas were discussed and group members were given an opportunity to voice their thoughts and elaborate on each other’s opinions. After the discussion, the groups were asked to rank the ideas in order of importance and to vote for the 10 most important themes.

All the data gained from the nominal groups were transcribed verbatim. The assistance of a second interviewer was employed in the collection of the data.

#### **4.5 Ethical considerations**

Orb, Eisenhauer and Wynaden (2001) described research ethics as following certain guidelines to avoid doing harm to the participants in a research study. By applying the appropriate ethical principles in research, harm can be reduced or avoided.

The UFS Department of Psychology’s Research Committee granted the researcher permission to conduct the study on the first-year students at the UFS. Permission from the Dean of Students was obtained also.

Sin (2005) suggested that research should focus on freely given informed consent by research participants who have been equipped with sufficient information on what will be expected of them, the amount of time likely to be required from them, the limits to their participation, and any risks and benefits to be expected due to taking part in the research study. Researchers

should be aware of the consequences of the research and should attempt to predict the outcomes of the study to protect participants against possible harmful consequences (Sin, 2005). The researcher has the responsibility to explain in full the significance of the research study and how the findings will be used (Corti, Day, & Backhouse, 2000). As part of obtaining informed consent, the potential participants should be informed of their right to refuse participation in the research. Participants should also be informed that present and future anonymity and confidentiality will be guaranteed (Corti et al., 2000).

In this study, the participants were informed about the purpose of the research and what was expected of them as research participants. Participants were notified that the research is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions.

The confidentiality of the participants' information was protected. Assurance was given to participants that information gathered by means of group discussions, notetaking and recording, and the resulting data will be safeguarded. Participants were informed of the potential uses of the data collected for the study. The informed consent form was signed by both the researcher and participant and both received a copy of the agreement.

#### **4.6 Data analysis**

The data gathered in this study were analysed by means of the thematic analysis method, which is a widely used qualitative analytical method within and beyond psychology (Roulston, 2001). Qualitative approaches to research are diverse (Holloway & Todres, 2003), and thematic analysis is viewed as a foundational method for qualitative analysis.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), one of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility. Daly, Kellehear and Gliksman (1997) claimed that thematic analysis can be used to analyse social processes that explain individuals' behaviour in the context in which it occurs. This method involves the comparison of one piece of data with all the other pieces of data that might be different or the same in order to establish conceptualisations of the potential relations between the different pieces of data that were collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The method can be applied to compare and generate knowledge about patterns and themes within human experiences which, in turn, is crucial in the development of a more systematic and grounded understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The identification of

themes involves a process of carefully reading and re-reading the data (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). Important themes that emerge through this process become the categories for analysis. The thematic analysis method starts with the coding of data and moves on to categorising the data to reach the core idea which could explain the phenomenon at hand (Maree, 2007).

This type of analysis can be time consuming and frustrating, but it allows the researcher to become familiar with the data. It is a constant process of moving backward and forward between the entire set of data, the coded data that are being analysed and the analysis of data being produced (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

In the first phase of the thematic analysis process, the researcher needs to become familiar with the data collected with regard to the depth and breadth of the content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involves repeatedly reading the entire set of data to search for meanings and patterns before the coding of the data commences. This will enhance the generating of ideas for the coding process. Furthermore, this reviewing of data assists the researcher in bringing out patterns that could have been missed and cross-checking patterns which all add to generating theoretical ideas.

During phase 2, the initial codes are produced from the ideas that were generated through the raw data. Codes indicate a feature of the data that is most meaningful and relevant. The coding process forms part of analysis by which data are organised into meaningful groups (Tuckett, 2005).

Phase 3 involves searching for important themes after all the initial data have been coded. All the listed codes from the previous phase are sorted into potential themes. The relationships between codes, between themes and between different levels of themes are highlighted in this phase (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). At the end of this phase, initial themes and sub-themes will have been identified.

Phase 4 starts after a set of initial themes have been identified. These initial themes need to undergo a process of reviewing and refinement. Data within different themes should cohere together meaningfully, while still having clear and identifiable distinctions between themes. As stated by Braun and Clarke (2006), if initial themes form part of a coherent pattern, they

can be used further in the analysis process; if not, the researcher should consider whether these themes simply do not fit, and thus should not be used any further.

Phase 5 can be described as defining and refining the themes that will be presented. This entails identifying the essence of each theme and determining the aspect of data that captures each theme. The researcher should consider the themes themselves, and each theme in relation to the others. Some themes might have sub-themes which can be useful for giving structure to a particularly large and complex theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this phase, the researcher should have defined clearly what the themes are and what they are not.

The last phase, phase 6, involves the final analysis and writing-up of the report by using the set of fully worked-out themes. The task of the write-up of a thematic analysis is to present complicated data in a way that convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher should use vivid examples or extracts from the data to demonstrate the essence of the argument in relation to the research question.

In this study, the above-mentioned step-by-step procedure was followed meticulously. The procedure was also accompanied by an interactive and reflexive process applied throughout.

These different phases of the thematic method were all analysed by the researcher and re-analysed by the supervisor. This ensured the objectivity and trustworthiness in the research study.

#### **4.7 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). By implementing the principles of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, it is possible to demonstrate trustworthiness in research (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

According to Guba (1981), credibility refers to the accuracy with which the participants' reality is represented in the study. To achieve credibility, the researcher should ensure that the findings of the study are congruent with the participants' reality. According to Morse,

Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002), the credibility of a study can be compromised if participants responded with what they believed to be a social desirable response instead of real personal experiences. To prevent this from happening in this study, a trusting and open environment were created during the group discussions and students were encouraged to provide their unique responses, instead of constantly agreeing or disagreeing with questions. Furthermore, recordings of the nominal groups allowed access and the checking and re-checking of the data. By incorporating these techniques, the credibility of this research was enhanced.

Transferability is defined as the extent to which the results of a research study can be generalised or transferred to other contexts (Guba, 1981). Transferability occurs when other researchers find their situations to be similar to those described in the study, and decide to relate the findings to their own situation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Krefting (1991) posited that the transferability of data can be increased by the representativeness of the participants for that particular group. Thus, by using the snowball sampling technique, the researcher is able to acquire participants who are related to the unique situation of the problem being studied. Transferability is also ensured by providing in-depth background information of the participants' situation and context. This assists in determining the extent to which the data and findings of the study are transferable to others who want to research this phenomenon in the future. The results of the study were interpreted within the context of the particular characteristics of the area, namely the UFS, in which the fieldwork was conducted.

Dependability is equated with reliability in quantitative research in that it determines whether researchers will be able to replicate or repeat the research procedures and decisions in future research (Guba, 1981). Dependability is ensured by reporting the processes of the study in detail so that future researchers can repeat the study and obtain the same results. According to Guba (1981), dependability depends on the consistency of the study's findings. A description of the exact methods used in data gathering, analysis and interpretation is important to assist other researchers in repeating the study. An audit trail of the transcripts is kept. Guba (1981) used the term "auditable" to describe the extent to which other researchers can clearly follow the same trail used by the researcher in the study to draw comparable conclusions given the same population, data and research context. To ensure dependability in

this study, the research processes were described in depth and an audit trail (using transcriptions and filed notes) were kept.

Confirmability is the auditability of a research study which suggests that other researchers, given the same data and research context, would achieve comparable conclusions to the study (Guba, 1981). Confirmability ensures that the findings of the study are based on the experiences of the participants and not on the researcher's subjectivity or biases. Guba (1981) suggested that an audit strategy is critical to establishing confirmability. Guba viewed the neutrality of the researcher not as an aid to objectivity; but he saw data as an aid towards interpretational confirmability. Researchers need to be aware of their possible influences on the data. Documentation needs to be provided for the interpretation from two sources instead of from a single researcher to assure that the data support the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the findings (Guba, 1981). Thus, to ensure confirmability, the research process and research results should both be audited by the supervisor. In this study, the data from the nominal groups were transcribed immediately and analysed carefully to prevent selective reading and inaccuracy. Throughout the process, the participants' voices were placed on the foreground.

Triangulation is another significant group of strategies that are used to enhance trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003). This involves different ways in which to reduce the chance of systematic bias, for instance, data are collected from various sources. In this study, the data were collected by incorporating two nominal groups and the supervisor in this study was closely involved in the data analysis. The research process and results in this study were reviewed by both the researcher and supervisor in order to eliminate any researcher bias that could have emerged. By implementing these strategies, triangulation assisted in enhancing the study's trustworthiness.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This chapter stated the research problem and objectives. It provided an overview of the qualitative research approach and the procedures that were followed. Purposive and snowball sampling procedures were essential in finding participants with the relevant experiences and knowledge of the research problem. Data were collected by means of the nominal group technique in order to gain in-depth information. The ethical considerations applicable to the

study were highlighted and the active roles of the researcher and participants were acknowledged. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and to answer the research question. This chapter concluded with an in-depth discussion on the trustworthiness of the study. Against the background of the overview of the methods used to collect and analyse the data, as well as of the general approach implemented in this study, the findings are presented and discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Results and discussion**

The aim of this chapter is to present and discuss the research findings. In the first part of the chapter, the themes that emerged from the nominal group technique and thematic analysis will be presented. The second part of the chapter will analyse and interpret these results by using the overarching theoretical framework of the study and previous research in the field.

#### **5.1 Results**

In the following section, the themes that emerged from the nominal group technique and subsequent thematic analyses will be presented. Where appropriate, extracts were taken from the data and provided in the form of quotations to bring forth the participants' voice and to enhance and ensure trustworthiness. Quotations were used without making any changes to them in order to retain their originality. Quotations were selected to illustrate the students' experiences during their first year at university.

The results from the study showed that students from both groups highlighted similar languishing and flourishing experiences from their first year. Students also indicated how they moved between languishing and flourishing.

##### **5.1.1 First-year students' experiences related to languishing**

In the first part of the discussion, students listed, discussed and ranked the experiences during their first year of study that they related to languishing. The ranked lists of experiences that the two groups produced are presented in table 1. Themes are ranked in descending order, from 10 to 1, indicating their importance from high to low. Thus 10 being the most important theme and 1 being the least important theme.



**Table 1**

Ranked list of experiences during their first year related to languishing

<b>Group 1</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Finding accommodation	10
Struggling with electronic learning platforms	9
Finding food expensive	8
Not understanding lecturers	7
Experiencing financial problems	6
Not understanding work	5
Writing tests	4
Finding registration day difficult	3
Having a massive workload	2
Not receiving question papers back	1

<b>Group 2</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Being a victim of crime	10
Finding accommodation	9
Having a low semester mark	8
Managing new responsibilities	7
Experiencing a new environment	6
Having a massive workload	5
Experiencing financial problems	4
Finding it difficult to make new friends	3
Missing home	2
Feeling alone	1

Considering the above rankings, it is clear that certain themes were prominent in both group discussions. These themes included adjusting to and coping with a new environment and responsibilities, being challenged with practical difficulties, and managing academic challenges. In the second group discussion, two additional themes, namely experiencing

social isolation and being a victim of crime, became evident. These themes will now be presented as they emerged from the participants' discussion.

Adjusting to and coping with a new environment and responsibilities were highlighted in both group discussions as an overarching theme which related to experiences of languishing. Participants experienced the university environment very different from that of school. They also mentioned that the physical size of the campus, as well as all the new and unfamiliar faces, made them feel lost and alone. A participant reported, "... being lost. Like at first we didn't know what, we didn't know where to go..." Asking older students wasn't as helpful, "It was frustrating because if you ask someone that you can actually see is a third year or fourth year, they don't even know where the class is".

Two feelings that were highlighted were not knowing what to expect and being scared of the unknown. A specific example of this challenging new environment was the first day of registration. A participant pointed out, "It wasn't organised: we were standing in lines like forever". In addition to this experience of novelty, participants felt overwhelmed by the responsibilities that came with their new environment. As students pointed out, "Being responsible is something else". These experiences were not unique to students who completed school recently, as can be seen in the following comment, "For me it was a bit difficult coming to school after three years, having to study, it was difficult". Another participant mentioned experiencing difficulty with finding a church, "...not having a church to go to on Sundays. Ok, a church is a church depending on which church you go to, but it is not the same as the church at home," and yet another participant battled to find "a proper church".

The practical difficulties of first-year university life proved to be quite a struggle for most students. Many participants stated that finding accommodation was a tremendous challenge for them, especially in a hostel on campus. Financial problems stood out in both groups as being a challenge. Students also reported having transport problems to and from campus, "Especially for Friday when we have to come for only one class, for an hour." Many participants mentioned that they experienced financial problems when they enrolled in higher education. They were "broke" and things were too expensive. They experienced financial insecurity and gained control over their expenses only later in the year, as articulated in the following statements: "And like the first semester you didn't know exactly what amount of

money you are going to need and second semester you have more or less an idea” and “yes you have to plan your budget and how to spend it”. Participants mentioned that, “realising the cost of living” and “no longer buy[ing] the brand names” changed the way in which they managed their finances. One specific financial challenge related to the high cost of food: “We are from different backgrounds and maybe some don’t like afford student centre food. Can they maybe provide something like sandwiches, you know, like bread is cheap.”

Managing academic challenges was a theme that was mentioned repeatedly. Participants from both groups agreed that the workload was a big concern for them. This seemed to relate to managing work and time, as was clear from the following statements: “It is too much work for too little time” and “the tests and tasks are scheduled too close to each other”. Some participants mentioned that they have class the whole day and when they get to the hostel, they have to attend meetings or social events and do “telephone duty ...even if you don’t want to”. They also concurred that “having to wake up early for classes” and “having class till late” is terrible. All these factors decreased their studying time.

They mentioned that they struggled with electronic learning platforms at the beginning of the year. They elaborated that too many classes to attend and having to study for hours on end prevented them from socialising. They felt that they did not have enough time to do all the things they needed or wanted to and they experienced pressure from the workload: “Stressing about am I going to pass this module or not. Like you always stress.”

Furthermore, participants struggled to understand and appreciate the work and lectures. They commented that “you need to enjoy what you do; the lecture should make you enjoy what you are doing”. They said that lecturers use high, sophisticated academic language which contributed to their struggle to understand the work. Participants remarked that lecturers should not use “dictionary language”. They felt that some lecturers do not make an effort to help them understand the work; they read directly from the prescribed books and expect students to comprehend everything from the outset.

Participants considered writing tests and receiving marks to be stressful, because they never knew what to expect. They were discouraged by poor results after being under the impression that they had prepared sufficiently for a test: “You thought you were going to pass, and then the results come and you failed”. This meant that they either did not

understand how questions were posed or they answered them incorrectly which, in turn, made them move towards languishing. Furthermore, not receiving question papers back was a great source of distress for many participants as they believed they would not be able to correct the mistakes they had made for upcoming tests. They stated the problem as: “Not getting the question marks to see our mistakes for the exams. We have to go through our mistakes to study”. Some participants also referred to not having a semester mark that allowed them to participate in the examination as an experience related to languishing. A participant said, “Adjustment to the predicate thing. Like at school, there wasn’t that you needed 40 to write, you could get 20 and you could write. It’s something you have to live up to. It is an adjustment to something you didn’t know”.

Experiencing social isolation is a theme that was mentioned mostly in the second discussion. The majority of participants reported that they missed their family and friends. Some participants even reported losing some friends in the process. As one participant pointed out, “Having to break up with your boyfriend because you are moving, you are going somewhere else, having to break up with your boyfriend because of insecurities”. Many of the participants stated that making new friends was a challenge: “Being around older students is intimidating,” “some make you feel inferior” and “some of them make you feel like you are a first year”. One participant commented that “we are not babied anymore, nobody cares anymore ... whether you bring your stuff, whether you come to class or not. Sometimes you still need that push” and “nobody calls you when you are sick to check if you are alright and when you will be coming to class”.

Being a victim of crime emerged from the second discussion as having an important impact on students’ first-year experience. A student reported: “I got mugged ... my first day of school I lost my whole wallet ... my student card, my ID, everything”. Participants could relate to this and all agreed that being a victim of crime could cause students to languish in their first year at university.

### **5.1.2 First-year students’ experiences related to flourishing**

In the first part of the discussion, students listed, discussed and ranked the experiences during their first year of study that they related to flourishing. The ranked lists of experiences produced by the two groups are presented in table 2. Themes are ranked in descending order,

from 10 to 1, indicating their importance from high to low. Thus 10 being the most important theme and 1 being the least important theme.

**Table 2**

Ranked list of experiences during their first year related to flourishing

<b>Group 1</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Socialising with old and new friends	10
Enjoying subjects	9
Having more free time	8
Understanding study outcomes	7
Having Internet and computer access	6
Studying what one prefers	5
Having the freedom to make own choices	4
Attending tutorial classes	3
Receiving slides and notes	2
Getting accepted into university/hostel	1

<b>Group 2</b>	
<b>Theme</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
Enjoying modules	10
Experiencing freedom	9
Getting things for free on campus	8
Receiving an allowance at the end of the month	7
Having more free time	6
Making new friends	5
Being internally motivated	4
Spoiling oneself	3
Experiencing independence	2
Passing first semester	1

It is evident from table 2 that similar themes regarding flourishing emerged from the two group discussions. The themes pertained to experiencing academic support and mastery,

experiencing personal growth and independence, having social support and, lastly, adapting to the university environment.

Participants felt that experiencing academic support and mastery made them flourish in their first year of study. Feelings of academic mastery were mentioned. Participants reported that, after a while, they became familiar with the way in which lecturers asked questions in tests and what lecturers expected from them in future tests and tasks. Participants said that, by attending tutorial classes, they were able to understand modules and the outcomes of modules better. Everyone agreed when one participant said, “Sometimes in class you are wondering what they are talking about, but when you get to tutorials and AFS [academic facilitation session], then I get everything clearly”. The work is revised and explained thoroughly in tutorial classes, and students have the opportunity to ask questions when they do not understand. Internet and computer access, as well as slides and notes for subjects, assisted the students in mastering their academic challenges. Participants also indicated that taking personal responsibility, such as “involving your own study methods” and “studying earlier before time,” helped them to move towards flourishing in their studies. In addition, most participants remarked that enjoying their subjects was a flourishing experience. Furthermore, participants felt that studying what they enjoyed had a positive impact on their motivation.

One participant remarked: “Actually studying something that you want to study and not like in school what you have to study,” and another participant, “and having to do something that you are actually passionate about. Unlike having to go to class and having to do maths and things like that”. According to participants, “you have more motivation to study now, because you are working towards something that you actually want, not like maths that I hated” and “if you really want to get somewhere, you feel determined to work hard”. Participants in the second group stated that passing their first semester was a great achievement and motivated them to persist and work hard throughout the remainder of the year.

Experiencing personal growth and independence was a theme that both groups highlighted. Participants stated that learning to adapt to new situations and getting to know themselves better, helped them to move towards flourishing. Participants were clearly aware that, after high school, one needs to be more independent and make own decisions. They remarked that “wearing your own clothes,” and “rocking some hairstyles” and “to wear makeup and do

your nails” added to their experiencing a sense of freedom. Moreover, participants felt that internal motivation, self-discipline, determination, being goal driven and challenging oneself were important in making their first year a more positive experience. Growing as a person in all these areas helped participants develop themselves and become more confident in their ability to deal with challenges. They started believing in their ability to grow and thrive in their new environment. The majority of participants reported that making their own choices, as well as becoming motivated and independent during their first year, was significant. One participant pointed out: “I can do whatever I want, because in the high school that I went to we were basically told that if you weren’t born with it, it doesn’t belong in your hair”. The girls expressed their joy of now being able to do whatever they liked with their hair. They also enjoyed the free time they had and their new freedom. One student highlighted “not having to wake up in the morning every day. Like Monday to Friday, some days you have late classes”. Participants felt the need to spoil themselves sometimes, which made them happy and feel less stressed.

Being socially adjusted emerged as an important theme related to flourishing. Participants enjoyed meeting and making new friends and socialising with their old and new friends. It was said to be a flourishing experience “to be in a university where everybody can talk to everybody. There is nothing like, I am better than you or you are better. All can be friends”. However, not all the participants agreed. In the discussion on languishing experiences, some participants indicated that meeting and making new friends proved to be a challenging and a languishing experience for them. The diversity among students on campus is wide-ranging and quite interesting. As one participant pointed out, “I think getting to understand different personalities, because we meet a lot of people with different personalities, so you get to know how to work with different people”. Another student even went as far as saying that “some of us meet our life partners here”.

Having a support system from family and friends played an important role in the participants’ first-year experience and stood out from the discussion on flourishing. Making new friends and allowing people to be a part of their lives helped participants to adjust to the university environment. Participants living in hostels said that calling their parents when they were sad helped them feel better. Participants felt that having people to talk to who understand and are supportive, made it easier for them to thrive through difficult times and to move towards flourishing. A student remarked, “...having to meet people who care. Like there are those

people who care, like you feel when you are around them they care for you, they are willing to assist you”. Some participants reported that seeking professional help, such as going to a psychologist, assisted them in adjusting to their new situation and changing their negative perspectives into more positive perspectives.

Although related to all the previous themes, the theme of adapting to the university environment is significant. A student remarked that “I think you learn to adapt to every situation that you face, like every day ... I have to understand that it is not always that you going to find people that are willing to help, good people. I think it is more about understanding”. Participants stated that getting accepted into the university or hostel was already a major flourishing experience for them. After acceptance, they took personal responsibility to adapt to university. Prioritising and time management proved to be very helpful and crucial for students in assisting them in having a more balanced life, socially and academically.

Managing budgets was of grave importance to participants. A student reported that “controlling your budget” is essential in mastering one’s financial problems. Paying for one’s studies can be very expensive, but everyday expenses proved to be just as much. Food and necessities added up to large totals and students, at first, tended to use money for things such as socialising, shopping and other luxuries. When students started managing their budgets better, they could afford things they needed and moved towards flourishing. Getting things for free and receiving money at the end of each month for necessities, helped students to lighten their financial stress.

The results of this research study provide an in-depth view of the experiences of first-year university students. The main themes resulting from the data analysis were described. Languishing themes that emerged from participants’ first-year experiences were: adjusting to and coping with new environment and responsibilities, being challenged with practical difficulties, and managing academic challenges. However, in the second nominal group discussion participants added two languishing themes, namely experiencing social isolation, and being a victim of crime. Themes that emerged from participants’ flourishing first-year experiences were: experiencing academic support and mastery, experiencing personal growth and independence, having social support, and adapting to the university environment.



In the following section, the results will be discussed by interpreting the findings according to relevant positive psychology literature and literature based on previous research studies.

## **5.2 Discussion**

The themes that were presented in the previous section will now be discussed in relation to relevant literature and previous research findings – with specific focus on emotional, psychological and social well-being as components of mental health.

### **5.2.1 Emotional well-being**

Participants initially stated that adjusting to and coping with the new environment and responsibilities proved to be very difficult. Nevertheless, in this study, students reported that experiencing personal growth and independence by overcoming challenges led to a sense of satisfaction with life. Students all agreed that they moved from being negative and feeling overwhelmed to enjoying their first year and being happy and satisfied in their new environment. According to Diener et al. (2006), satisfaction with life can be influenced by affective states and contextual factors but, even with all these influences, judgement by individuals of their own lives as a whole is what determines their level of perceived satisfaction with life. Simons et al. (2002) investigated the impact of perceived stress and availability of coping resources on life satisfaction among 172 university students in Turkey. These researchers determined that the level of life satisfaction could be moderately predicted by perceived stress and coping resource availability. Significant correlations were found between satisfaction with life, social support, and the monitoring of stress.

Students reported feeling overwhelmed and discouraged at the beginning of the year. Participants reported falling victim to crime at the university, which made them feel very discouraged and unhappy. They gained a negative perception and experience of their first year and it made them weary of what their future at university would hold. As they developed throughout the year, students started progressing towards academic mastery and adapting to the university environment and growing positive about their life at university. Positivity and positive affect represent a pleasant outcome where feelings of gratefulness, appreciation and liking exist (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Regulating positive emotions correlates positively with resilience to the extent that it counteracts negative emotional

experiences and leads to the enhancement of thoughts and action (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2007). Tugade and Fredrickson (2007) support these findings by stating that students who have optimal self-regulatory capabilities and who are in control of their emotions, thoughts and behaviours during stressful times should be experiencing greater resilience and positive outcomes. The ability to maintain a positive perspective on their future helps to promote students' resilience in difficult situations, guarding them against the negative impact of stress and maintaining motivation to achieve their goals and aspirations (Tusaie et al., 2007).

### **5.2.2 Psychological well-being**

Students indicated that, by experiencing growth, they were able to get to know themselves better throughout the year which, in turn, made them recognise their strengths and weaknesses. They thrived when they focused on being internally motivated to work hard and not to give up when they were challenged, which developed their strengths even more. Gallagher and Lopez (2007) suggested that self-acceptance is having the ability to understand and have insight into one's weaknesses and strengths. It is the belief that one can thrive and pursue excellence and seek approval based on one's own desires and preferences, not on others' perceptions. Self-acceptance involves a realistic awareness of one's weaknesses and strengths. Gallagher and Lopez (2007) agree that this awareness, created by self-acceptance, generates a feeling of self-worth with which students can distinguish between growth potential and acceptance of their unchangeable characteristics.

At first, participants felt that coping with a new environment and responsibilities was overwhelming and, at times, too difficult. However, the new environment and people from different backgrounds proved to be quite interesting to the students and they reported that they enjoyed the learning experience very much. Participants strongly agreed that personal growth took place after they had managed to adapt to the new situations and by getting to know themselves and their strengths and weaknesses better as the year progressed. They realised that they do have the potential to be successful at university and in life. They adapted to becoming independent individuals.

Personal growth, according to Ryff and Keyes (1995), relates to having a sense of openness to new experiences and to be growing constantly. It is this continuous change and self-development that provide individuals with greater insight into their own potential, which

result in their improving themselves (Ryff & Singer, 2008). According to Hicks and Heastie (2008), life transitions have the ability to create opportunities for growth and change. These findings correspond to those by Persinger (2009), who stated that, by doing self-assessment and getting to know one's strengths, weaknesses, ambitions, interests, goals, hurdles, and strategies, one can accomplish a quality first-year experience. This process of self-assessment can be done by evaluating one's strategies, which involves an exploration of one's values, goals, motivators and confidence.

It appeared that the majority of participants felt internally motivated by having the opportunity to study what they wanted to in order to achieve their goals and pursue their future careers. It gave them purpose and determination to thrive regardless of their first-year challenges. Their purpose was to be successful at university to, someday, be successful in their chosen career path and live a fulfilling and happy life. Ryff and Keyes (1995) argued that purpose in life pertains to having a sense of direction to pursue personal goals which would lead to a person's having meaning in their life. Mawere's (2010) findings also prove that people who have a sense of high purpose in life are able to deal with hardships better –it is this ability that distinguishes between the survivors and those who struggle to survive.

Participants, initially, felt lost and alone and socially isolated. Some participants in the second discussion reported struggling to meet and make new friends and that they missed their home and families. It proved to be a difficult task to form positive relationships with others. However, the majority of participants indicated that having social support and socialising with old and new friends helped them to feel less worried and stressed about the challenges they were facing at university. Positive relationships with others whom they could talk to and who supported them in tough situations proved to be significant in the participants' first year. Ryff and Keyes (1995) believed that positive relationships with others implies having quality relationships which are warm, trusting and satisfying. In these relationships, individuals express empathy with one another and understand the give-and-get principle within a relationship. Krause and Coates (2008) identified various factors that they believe to have an influence on student engagement, namely student interactions, student interactions with one another, socio-political factors, the role that institutional policies play, as well as non-institutional influences such as friends, family, health and employment. A study by Krause and Coates (2008) showed that social benefits emerge from establishing and maintaining close relationships. These include camaraderie, shared experiences and social

support, all of which can be seen as coping mechanisms (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Theorists have stated that, when individuals experience feelings of relatedness daily, it can be perceived as an indication of well-being (Reis et al., 2000).

Participants described that they, at first, experienced difficulty in adjusting to and coping with a new environment and in managing practical and academic challenges. Students felt that they did not have enough time to do all the things they needed to do and this negatively affected them to lose focus on what is important. Students get distracted from their responsibilities when their newly found freedom of societies, campus activities and a lack of monitoring of class attendance outweigh other priorities (Ryff & Singer, 2008).

The participants emphasised academic support and mastery, as well as adapting to the university environment, as being crucial to their developmental process in their first year. Participants felt they were mastering their environment by attending tutorial classes, understanding outcomes, having Internet and computer access, receiving slides and notes, enjoying subjects, studying what they enjoy, and passing their first semester. In addition, they improved their time management and prioritising skills, which assisted them in sufficiently adapting to the university environment. The literature suggests that environmental mastery is the ability to select and create contexts which suit one's needs, control external experiences and use one's environment effectively (Ryff & Singer, 2008). Environmental mastery can be described as having the ability to manage one's own complex surroundings and life (Ryff & Keyes, 1995). The results of a 2011 study by Knight et al. proved that environmental mastery enables individuals to manage health-related challenges effectively by using problem-focused coping skills in order to mobilise resources. A sense of self-efficacy or mastery over environmental demands is a significant indicator of psychological health and reflects a sense of control.

It appeared that the majority of participants experienced autonomy through personal growth and independence. They found themselves in situations where they had to make decisions independent from their friends' and family's guidance. Students reported that independence and the freedom to make their own choices positively influenced them in becoming more autonomous. Autonomy, according to literature by Ryff and Keyes (1995), is having a sense of independence, self-determination and freedom. Gallagher and Lopez (2007) add a sense of self-direction and having the ability to withstand social pressures. Research indicates that

the newly found freedom that students experience can be wonderful and gives them the opportunity to increase their independence (Habibah et al., 2010).

### **5.2.3 Social well-being**

It was evident in this study that participants felt the need to be accepted and belong to a community. Many participants reported feeling alone and experiencing social isolation on campus. They found it difficult to meet and make new friends, and believed it to be because of different personalities and backgrounds. Some students had unpleasant experiences of senior students being mean to them and making them feel inferior. Regardless, many participants agreed that meeting new people, making friends, socialising and participating in activities in their hostels, made them feel part of the university community. They enjoyed getting to know new people. Feeling socially accepted proved to be significant to the students' social well-being. Social acceptance, in general, refers to the extent to which a person is liked or disliked by people in society (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2002). In order to survive and thrive, people long for the connection with individuals in their own group (Fiske, 2004). People have a need to receive approval and affection from other individuals, and they long to experience feelings of belonging, relatedness and community. A study by Kantanis (2000) found that making and having friends are imperative and provide students with helpful resources to assist them in their transition to university. Studies confirm the consistent correlation between social interactions and high levels of well-being (Diener, 2009; Diener & Seligman, 2002).

The participants reported experiencing personal growth throughout their first year which, in a sense, was encouraged by their social support system. Students made friends, and together they helped one another, unknowingly, to overcome challenges. In this way, personal growth was fostered and students moved closer to becoming better versions of themselves. Social actualisation, according to Keyes (1998), is the extent to which people believe that other individuals in society have the potential to grow into a positive and exceptional version of themselves.

In the study, participants did not specifically point out that they felt they contributed to the university community. Yet, when they made friends and helped them through challenging times, they indeed contributed to others' success by encouraging them to thrive and overcome

difficulties. Keyes (1998) argues that social contribution refers to the belief that one's daily activities are making a valuable contribution to society and others. In Keyes' 2005 study, social contribution was defined as viewing one's daily activities as being useful and of value to others and society. According to Evans et al. (2010), this leads to the understanding of one's role in society, developing an adequate self-esteem, acceptance, stability and security. Research shows that students are less likely to withdraw or drop out of class when they report feeling part of the class or of a community of fellow students (Mehdinezhad, 2011).

Participants stated that they, initially, thought they came to university to experience fun and excitement after school, but later realised that their enrolment into higher education has meaning and a bigger purpose. Students who strove towards succeeding in their social, personal and academic lives at university, especially their academic lives, utilised the purpose of the university. In doing so, participants experienced personal growth, independence and social adjustment. The reason that students attend university is to receive an education and prepare themselves for their future. Social coherence, according to Keyes (2002), pertains to being interested in society and finding life to be meaningful. It also refers to individuals who share the same interests and objectives within friendships, families, groups and organisations (McCraty, 2011).

Social integration came difficult for some students; they struggled to make new friends and connect with others which made them feel alone and socially isolated from other students. Participants suggested that only after meeting new people from different backgrounds and making new friends at university, did they socially adjust and were able to understand others better. They gained insight into where they fit in and with whom they can relate. The literature shows that social integration is having a sense of support and belonging to society (Keyes, 2002). Social integration also refers to the evaluation of a person's quality of relationships in society. It is the extent to which individuals feel they have things in common with others and belong to their community and society (Keyes, 2002). Research by Matanah et al. (2004) proved that students' social integration into university can be influenced by their interpersonal and intrapersonal development. Students who have adequate intrapersonal skills are well prepared to undertake the demands of independent functioning, which is a requirement for effectively navigating the new social environment during their transition to university (Matanah et al., 2004). By partaking in diversity-related activities, students experience a variety of positive outcomes such as intergroup attitudes, intergroup

understanding, self-confidence, learning and democratic outcomes (Chang et al., 2006; Denson & Chang, 2009).

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the themes which emerged from the data analysis were discussed in relation to the literature. The themes were presented according to Keyes' three well-being components. Participants' languishing and flourishing experiences that influenced their first year at university were also presented and discussed. The study concludes in the next chapter, focusing on the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Findings, limitations and recommendations**

In this chapter, a brief conclusion of the main findings from the study is presented. The chapter is concluded with a discussion of the limitation of this study and the recommendations for future research.

The purpose of this study was to explore students' first-year experiences related to languishing and flourishing. The use of the thematic analysis method allowed in-depth investigation of the participants' experiences.

#### **6.1 Findings**

The study was conducted with a positive psychological approach in mind. Positive psychology aims to study human strengths and virtues (Compton & Hoffman, 2012), which makes this approach significant to this research. Student mental health and well-being have become an important issue recently and are further emphasised by the fact that the period of emerging adulthood together with the transition into higher education have proven to be difficult for first-year students. The new and unknown experiences can be somewhat challenging and cause students to have lower well-being levels which, in turn, move students towards languishing.

The first-year students in this study were all confronted with new and unknown challenges at the beginning of their journey at university. They felt overwhelmed by all they had to do and what was expected of them. The first year at university is a fun, yet difficult time in life, as students are, for the first time, making important decisions independent of their families. The first year can be seen as the fundamental building block for student success at university. Dimensions of the three essential components of positive mental health were highlighted as being successful in initialising the movement from languishing to flourishing.

Several conclusions can be drawn from the study. From the analysis, five languishing themes were identified, namely (1) adjusting to and coping with the new environment and responsibilities, (2) being challenged with practical difficulties, (3) managing academic



challenges, (4) experiencing social isolation, and (5) being a victim of crime. These themes emerged from those experiences which students perceived to have had a negative effect on them and causing them to languish in their first year of university life. In contrast, four themes related to flourishing came to the fore, namely (1) experiencing academic support and mastery, (2) experiencing personal growth and independence, (3) having social support, and (4) adapting to the university environment. These themes included experiences that students believed to have caused them to flourish in their first year. The results were found to be mostly consistent with existing literature and previous research findings.

Keyes' mental health continuum was used as the theoretical framework for this study. He uses three mental health components to emphasise the importance of an individual's mental health status, namely emotional well-being, psychological well-being and social well-being. High levels of these three components would indicate that an individual is flourishing.

It is evident from the study that participants had various languishing experiences at the beginning of their first year at university. They struggled to adjust to their new environment and to cope with new responsibilities. They were challenged with practical difficulties such as accommodation, financial problems and expensive daily necessities. Managing academic challenges such as the massive workload, understanding the work and lecturers, writing tests, and using electronic learning platforms, proved to be very difficult. Most participants reported experiences of social isolation, from missing their home, family and friends, to battling to make new friends. One participant said that falling victim to crime was a discouraging and negative experience for her, with which the other participants agreed.

Participants stated that by experiencing academic support and mastery, they were able to experience flourishing. They reported that attending tutorial classes, understanding outcomes, having Internet and computer access, receiving slides and notes, enjoying their subjects, studying what they enjoy and passing their first semester, helped them to move towards flourishing. The theme of experiencing academic support and mastery provided insight into the psychological well-being component of mental health.

The theme of experiencing personal growth and independence emerged from participants' reports that adapting to new situations, getting to know themselves, experiencing independence, having freedom to make choices and having internal motivation assisted them

in moving towards flourishing. This theme highlighted components of emotional and psychological well-being.

Participants in the study experienced flourishing by having social support and being socially adjusted. According to most participants, making new friends and socialising with old and new friends were an encouraging and positive experience for them. However, the minority of students struggled to make new friends and regarded making new friends as a languishing experience. The components of psychological and social well-being were addressed in this theme.

Lastly, the theme of adapting to the university environment was an important flourishing experience for participants, because it contained components of emotional, psychological and social well-being. Students agreed that getting accepted into the university and prioritising and improving their time management enabled them to adapt to their environment and thrive towards flourishing in their first year.

Students stated that these positive experiences assisted them in moving from languishing towards flourishing. As previously indicated in this study, people who are flourishing have adequate well-being and complete mental health. Thus, it is possible to believe that first-year students' movement towards flourishing can improve their mental health status and, in doing so, the quality of their first-year experience.

In the next section the limitations of the study will be discussed, after which the recommendations of future research will be presented.

## **6.2 Limitations of the study**

The results of this study should be interpreted in the light of various limitations. The nominal groups were conducted in English because it is one of the official languages of the UFS. However, English was not the home language of the majority of the respondents, which could have led to misunderstandings in interpreting and responding to the questions. To counteract problems resulting from the language differences, researchers assisted students when any uncertainties arose. The researchers were also available to deal with questions from students.

Still, some students were shy and uncomfortable in participating in a second language and they gave short and concise answers, which did not provide rich, in-depth information.

Since the focus of this study was on students' experiences, the information was gathered by means of self-reporting, in other words, the students themselves reported on their own experiences of their first year at university. For some, this could have been an embarrassing or unhappy time in their lives. Thus, they could have given more favourable answers than what is really the case. No additional sources of information, such as friends, family members or lecturers, were consulted to enhance the richness and accuracy of the data. Additional information could have proven to be helpful were the aim of the study to obtain an objective estimation of students' mental health status.

This study was limited to two nominal groups consisting of first-year students from psychology programmes. This made it difficult to explore a variety of experiences from different first-year students on campus. In addition, female students are known to be in the majority in psychology programmes.

Well-planned and representative samples are a critical element in ensuring trustworthy research results. The groups in the study could have been more heterogeneous regarding race, language and socio-economic status. Only female and mostly black students participated in this study. Having students from different racial groups could have yielded different results. In addition, more male participants could have provided more nuanced data.

The study was conducted at one university, which limits the extent to which the results can be generalised to the entire population of first-year students. This was, however, not the purpose of this research.

### **6.3 Recommendations for future research**

Based on the above-mentioned limitations of this study, several recommendations can be made. Future research conducted in the first language of the participants could provide data with greater depth. Dividing the nominal groups according to the first language of students could ensure that students are able to fully understand the questions posed to them and be more comfortable and confident in their response to these questions. This might be more time consuming, but would be helpful in gathering even more rich and in-depth data from

students. Individual interviews could also enhance the depth of the research and data collected.

Future research in this field could incorporate the additional voices of the significant role players (e.g., friends, family members and lecturers) to gather more valuable and insightful information. These role players have different relationships with the first-year students and their unique viewpoints could prove valuable in providing honest and insightful information. Students themselves might be trying to give the most desirable opinions or ideas so as not to be embarrassed or seen as weak. More information than just from students' self-reports might contribute to the accuracy of the research.

Future studies could consider including first-year students from a greater variety of backgrounds and other universities to determine whether they experience mental health differently. More first-year students are needed from different educational programmes to ensure a wider range of opinions and experiences. In the future, research could also be conducted on students from different races, cultures and genders. By sampling students from a variety of educational programmes, different first-year experiences would come to light. In addition, the participation of different races, cultures and genders might provide more insightful data from different backgrounds and experiences, and increase the value of the study.

The present study could encourage future longitudinal studies, where researchers not only assess the mental health of first-year students, but also the long-term effects that languishing and flourishing in the university years have on an individual's life as an adult. Research studies on adjustment and coping could also contribute to our understanding of students' mental health and how to bring about the movement towards flourishing.

## **6.4 Conclusion**

In light of the above summary of the research findings, it is concluded that this study is valuable in determining those experiences of first-year students that cause them to move between languishing and flourishing. The study was an enriching experience in itself and will hopefully be useful in future research on the first-year experience. Further research will be beneficial in assisting first-year university students to improve their mental health.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **CONSENT FORM: PARTICIPANTS**

## **Dear Participant**

Thank you for considering taking part in this research study. The Department of Psychology's Research Committee and the Dean of Students gave permission to conduct the study on the first-year students at the University of the Free State. The purpose of this study is to explore first-year student experiences at university. Furthermore, this study aims to determine what experiences cause students to move between languishing and flourishing.

Languishing and flourishing can be seen as two emotional states of mental health. A person with incomplete mental health can be associated with languishing. Languishing can be described as having a void in your life and feeling negative emotions. Those individuals feel cast down, unhappy and lose interest in their lives. Languishing is not depression. It can rather be seen as the absence of complete mental health. In contrast a person with complete mental health can be seen as flourishing. Flourishing can be interpreted as being optimistic and to have a positive outlook on life. Flourishing individuals are investigative and resilient. They function positive in social, psychological and emotional areas in their lives.

The participation is voluntary and the anonymity of each participant will be assured. Information gathered by means of group discussions, note-taking, recording and resulting data will be safeguarded. Participating will include having to be part of a group discussion and will not take up too much of your time. Should you feel the need to withdraw from the study, you can do so at any time. The findings of this study can be used to assist future students in moving from languishing to flourishing in their first year at university, and in doing so, live the good life. Two signed copies, by both the researcher and participant, of this document will be given to each party to retain a copy of the agreement.

Kind regards,

**Ms Riané Knoesen**

**082 6944 921**

Please complete the following part if you are willing to participate in the research study.

---

**Signature of participant**

---

**Date**

---

**Cell phone number**

## **APPENDIX B**

### **TRANSCRIPTS OF GROUP 1 AND 2**

## **Languishing and Flourishing Nominal Group 1**

Date: 1 August 2013

Time: 11:30

Participants: 10

Interviewer 1: Welcome everyone. Will you please complete the section at the bottom of the consent form we just handed out to you? It is just to indicate that you willingly agreed to participate in the research and that you understand what is going to happen and what is expected from you.

*(Some silence while participants fill in the informed consent)*

Interviewer 2: Guys just so that you know we are recording this, but we won't play it back to anyone, it is just so that Riané can remember what you guys said. We don't want to miss something important. So just so that you know, when you sign the consent form, you also give permission that we are allowed to record you.

Interviewer 1: The research study you are partaking in, is moving between languishing and flourishing in you first year of university life. Now you are probably asking yourself what is languishing and flourishing?

Interviewer 2: They are supposed to know this because they learned it last semester in Positive Psychology.

*(Laughing)*

Interviewer 1: Ok, so being mentally healthy is very important. And in order to be mentally healthy, you have to have high levels of emotional, social, and psychological well-being. Now languishing and flourishing forms part of a mental health continuum. So according to the continuum, to be completely mentally healthy, you need to be flourishing; if you are languishing you are experiencing incomplete mental health. Languishing is having negative feelings, feeling down, unhappy, sometimes feeling lost or lonely, losing interest or withdrawing from everything and everyone. Flourishing on the other hand is positive feelings, being happy, optimistic, resilient, having a positive outlook

on things and functioning positively, seeing things in a better light; thinking, this is tough but I can do it, we will get through this. For this discussion of languishing and flourishing experiences, we will view languishing experiences as lows and flourishing experiences as highs.

Ok, so I am going to ask you two questions. You all have a piece of paper in front of you. I want you to divide the paper in two. Ok, on the one side of the paper I'd like you to list the experiences you felt were your highs. Highs in this case indicate flourishing experiences. And on the other side you can list your lows, which then indicate your languishing experiences.

*(Silence while they are given time to reflect and write)*

*(More students arrive at the door)*

Students: Can we come in?

Interviewer 1: Hi, yes you can come in.

Interviewer 2: Just grab a chair outside the door.

Just divide the paper and then on the one side you write all your highs from your first year and on the other side all the lows.

*(Silence while they complete highs and lows)*

Participant: *Wat is die woord "aanpassing" in Engels?*

Interviewer 1: Adjustment.

Interviewer 2: *Jy kan maar in Afrikaans ook skryf, ons sal dit verstaan en jou help as jy nie seker is oor iets nie.*

Participant: We don't have to write our names on this one right?

Interviewer 2: No, only on this one (hold up a white consent form), but we will keep it separate. So just on this one you can write your name so that we have an attendance list, but not on the yellow one.

*(Silence while completing highs and lows)*

Interviewer 2: Is everyone pretty much done?

Ok guys, Riané is going to go on now, but before we go on I just want you to please be as honest as possible in answering her questions. It is anonymous, so no-one will know it was your high or low, but we really need the information to be as accurate as possible otherwise the research will not be worth as much.

Interviewer 1: Ok, I am going to ask you now to look at the things you wrote down, I want you to name a few of them. Let's start with the lows, what do you think are languishing experiences from your first year?

Interviewer 2: What are the things that were difficult?

Participant: Working hard at the RAG farm.

Interviewer 2: Didn't you enjoy that?

Participant: No.

Interviewer 2: What work was it? Building the floats?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: What else was difficult for you this year?

Participant: Being away from my family.

Interviewer 1: Oh yes of course.

Interviewer 2: Where does your family live?

Participant: In Mpumalanga.

Interviewer 2: O ja, that is quite far.

And you? What did you want to say?

Participant: Uhm, to stay in the hostel for two weeks. It was a bit too long. One week is fine, but two weeks is too much.

Interviewer 2: So this was when you were not allowed to go home in between?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: What else?

Participant: Struggling to get accommodation.

Interviewer 2: Ok. Do you have hostel accommodation or private accommodation?

Participant: I didn't get a space in hostel, so I am staying outside of campus.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so it was difficult to get hostel and private accommodation. Yes?

Participant: For me it was a bit difficult coming to school after three years, having to study. It was difficult.

Interviewer 2: So after school you took a break?

Participant: Yes, I took three years and then came to study.

Interviewer 2: Oh ok, so getting back into studying.

Participant: Ja.

Interviewer 2: Yes, you?

Participant: Not acing a test that you thought you were gonna pass, and then the results came and you failed...joh...

Interviewer 2: So you write a test and you think you are going to do well, and then somehow you didn't write what they wanted you to write.

Tests...

Participant: Then the financial problems also.

Interviewer 2: Financial problems.

And you?

Participant: Not getting the question marks to see our mistakes for the exams. We have to go through our mistakes to study.

Interviewer 2: So is it the scripts?

Participant: No.

Participant: The question papers because they just give us the scripts.

Interviewer 2: Ah ok, so you don't have the questions.

Participant: Yes, and then you don't know where you went wrong.

Interviewer 2: Ok. so not getting the question papers.

What else were lows?

Participant: Having class on a Friday.

*(Everybody laughs)*

Participant: Workload also.

Interviewer 2: Workload.

Participant: And not understanding some of the work.

Interviewer 2: The workload and not understanding.

Participant: And being lost. Like, at first we didn't know what, we didn't know where to go, and how to use Blackboard.

Interviewer 2: So during the orientation period.

So, we have the workload, not understanding and then that initial period where Blackboard was a bit confusing. So you were a bit disorientated when you got here.

Anything else that was lows?

Participant: The first day of registration. *(Everyone agrees)*



It was very...it wasn't organised, we were standing in lines like forever.

Interviewer 1: Was this at the Callie Human building?

Participant: Yes.

I've been here in the morning from 8 o'clock in the morning till half past 4 and I wasn't finished.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so the whole registration period. What else didn't you enjoy for your first year?

Participants: UFS101. (*Whole group laughs*)

Interviewer 1: Say again?

Interviewer 2: UFS101.

That is a subject all the first-year students have to take.

The previous groups that I did also didn't enjoy it.

Participant: We don't like it because it is not very...how can I say...it is just one person's statement or view and then when we don't agree with that and give our views, he will just go back to his statement. And he will be like mine is right and yours is wrong.

Interviewer 2: And you didn't like that. What else?

Participant: VBL. You know the three hours of VBL. I think they could just make it an hour and a half or something. It wouldn't take that long.

Interviewer 2: So, not VBL in general, just how long the period was.

Interviewer 2: So, when did these low points occur in your first year?

Participant: The first day.

Participant: The first semester.

Interviewer 1: The being lost and not knowing where to go.

Interviewer 2: So, more towards the beginning of your first year?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: So, is it better now?

Participants: Yes.

Participant: No, now I have class on a Friday.

Interviewer 2: So, now it is not better?

*Participants laugh*

Participant: I didn't have class the first semester.

Interviewer 1: And not finding your classes? Was that a problem for any of you?

Participant: That was really hard.

Interviewer 1: So, it was difficult?

Participant: Yes, it was frustrating because if you ask someone that you can actually see are a third year or fourth year, they don't even know where the class is.

*Participants laugh*

Participant: And there is no like, like on the map that the university gave us, there is not an indication of where the class is. So, it is frustrating because it is not even on the map.

Interviewer 2: Is it because it just gives you the building and not the class?

Participant: No, no, it doesn't even exist on the map.

Participant: Like the Rindl building is not on the map, and SSB.

Participant: But in the diaries that we got, I think they should give everyone a diary because some of the people don't buy diaries and they don't get the classes or they get lost. The people who have diaries they can see, ok I have class here and there.

Interviewer 2: So that might be one solution.

Participant: Yes, give everybody a diary.

Participant: Or sell it at a lower price.

Interviewer 2: How much does it cost?

Participant: Now it is R25 but it used to be...R50.

Interviewer 2: Where those lows mostly around test or exam times, or was it all through the year? Or when was the lows the lowest?  
Yes?

Participant: After we got the results.

Interviewer 2: After getting test results back.

Participants: Yes.

Participant: Yes, that was bad.

Participant: Then reality kicked in.

Interviewer 2: Was this true for all of your subjects or only for certain subjects?

Participant: Only certain subjects.

Interviewer 2: Which ones made you feel the lowest?

Participant: The Sociology (everyone agrees).

Interviewer 2: Sociology.

Participant: But I can say one thing about that. The person that was giving us the subject, he taught in a very academic way, so we didn't understand what he was trying to say. *(Other participants agree with her)*

I don't know if you had the same person. But we didn't understand everything. Just talk to us in our...

Participant: Normal.

Participant: ...yes, normal and then we will understand.

Participant: Not dictionary language.

Interviewer 2: So, lecturers using too much academic language.

Does this only happen with sociology?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: So, it depends on the lecturer that you have?

Participant: But the person who gave us that he is now retired so...

*All participants laugh in agreement*

Interviewer 2: Anything else that is a problem for you guys? Anything else that was really difficult?

Participant: Psychology 124.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: 'Cause some of us didn't have biology at school.

Interviewer 2: So, is that the one you are doing now?

Participants: Yes.

Participants: Yes, it is very difficult.

Participant: It is too much work for very little time.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: Yes, especially if it is your first time that you are doing something like that.

Interviewer 1: Do you feel that way about most of your subjects? That you have too much work and too little time?

Participants: Yes.

Participant: And the tests and the tasks are scheduled to close to each other.

Interviewer 2: So, can we say that when you feel some of these lows are when the tests and tasks are too close to each other?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: Like we are writing psychology about three themes and we didn't even finish the first theme yet and there are like two weeks left.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: So do you guys feel a bit rushed with all that you have to do?

Participants: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Anything else that led to you guys' experiencing these lows, that is not on the list yet? Yes?

Participant: Like when we are staying in Res, you sometimes have to do a lot of things and that sometimes interferes with your academic marks.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so Res activities interfere with your academic activities and responsibilities?

Interviewer 2: So, things like building float and Kleinsêr.

Participant: Yes and the informal.

Participant: TD.

Participant: Telephone duty.

Interviewer 2: Oh, telephone duty. Ok, so all the things that are compulsory for the first years.

Participant: Yes, even if you don't want to.

Interviewer 2: Anything else you can think of?

Participant: *Vervoerprobleme*.

Interviewer 2: Transport problems.

Participants: Ah yes.

Participant: Especially for Friday when we have to come for only one class, for an hour.

Participant: And not finding parking on campus.

Interviewer 1: Oh yes.

Anything else that we haven't mentioned yet? Ok, let's go on.

Ok, so these are all the lows from your first year.

Participant: Can I say something?

Interviewer 2: Yes.

Participant: We are from different backgrounds and maybe some don't, some like don't like afford like student centre the food. Can they maybe provide something like sandwiches, you know, like bread is cheap. Maybe bake bread and provide it so that you can get something because some have back to back classes and they don't have money to buy food.

Interviewer 1: Ok yes, so more affordable food.

Participant: Or free.

*(Laughing)*

Participant: Like, especially Seven Eleven is very expensive.

Participant: Ja, they must bring Shoprite onto campus.

Interviewer 1: O, so now we are going to move from the lows to the highs. So, what are the things that were highs in your first year?

Interviewer 2: Yes, tell us about what was good about your first year? Or was it all negative?

Participant: Meeting new friends.*(Everyone agrees)*

Participant: Freedom. *(A lot of laughing)*

Interviewer 2: Freedom from what? Your parents?

Participants: Yes! *(Laughing)*

Participant: Not having class on Fridays.

Interviewer 2: This class on Fridays are really bothering you?

Participant: Yes, it is so bothering me.*(Laughing)*

Interviewer 1: Yes, what else...think a little more. What did you write down?

Participant: Having your own time to fit in classes and...

Participants: Ja.

Interviewer 1: Ok.

Participant: ...and having your own choices.

Interviewer 2: So, making your own choices and having your own time.

Participant: And the socialising.

Interviewer 2: The socialising. Ok. That is where living in Res is nice, hey?

Participant: Ja.

Participant: And access to the Internet and computer labs.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so computer and Internet access.

Participants: Yes.

Participant: Actually studying something that you want to study and not like in school what you have to study.

Participant: And making it to the varsity itself.

Participant: Yes, that was exciting.

Interviewer 2: The what?

Participants: Getting into varsity. *(A couple of them said this at the same time)*

Interviewer 2: Oh, getting accepted.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: Joh, it was exciting.

Participant: And not having a uniform, like dressing in a uniform.

Interviewer 2: So, dressing the way that you want to.

Participant: Your day ending early.

Interviewer 1: Do you have psychology?

*(Participants laugh)*

Participant: Not always having to wake up early.

Interviewer 2: So, classes starting a bit later.

Any other highs?

Participant: Having people to help. Like the tutor classes.

Interviewer 2: So tutor and AFS classes.

Participants: Yes.

Participants: Yes, because sometimes in class you are wondering what they are talking about, but when you get to tutorials and AFS, then I get everything clearly.

Interviewer 2: So, the tutorial and AFS classes help you to understand better and explain things better.

Interviewer 1: What else made this year easier? What made you feel that things are getting better and worth it?

Participant: Orientation, I think.

Interviewer 2: Orientation.

Participant: The gateway.

Interviewer 2: Gateway? Is that at the beginning of the year?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: So, it orientates you on what to do and where to go.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: Ok, what else?

Participant: To be in a university where everybody can talk to everybody. There is nothing like, I am better or you are better. All can be friends.

Interviewer 1: So, everybody on the same level.

Participants: Yes. *(Everyone agrees with this statement)*

Interviewer 2: What else were your highs? What was good this year?

Participant: Friendship.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so we have making new friends, but do you also mean old friends?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: New and old friends.

Participant: And the RAG, it was nice.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: The RAG, ok.

Participant: And this year, also starting to understand how they ask questions for the tests and exams.

Interviewer 1: Ok, so now you know.

Participant: So, now I at least know how they ask questions.

Interviewer 2: So, that is now a high. It used to be a low when you didn't understand, but now it is a high because you have written a couple of tests.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: And they give us exactly what to study for a test. Like the uhm...

Participant: The outcomes.

Participant: ...yes that. That is very nice.

Interviewer 2: So, the outcomes in the study guide or a breakdown by the lecturer.

Participant: No, no the outcomes, that is very nice.

Participant: And the slides.

Participant: Yes, then we know what to do.

Participant: And Blackboard is getting better.

Interviewer 1: So, it is not only a negative, but it is now also a positive?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: There is just something negative that I also want to say.

Interviewer 1: Yes.

Participant: The English books, it is sometimes difficult for our Afrikaans kids to translate and it takes a lot of time.

Participant: Yes, for instance Psychology AFS, it is the Afrikaans class, but we get the English stuff.

Interviewer 2: The study guides. So, that would be on the lows.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: So, what are the things that helped you to get to these highs?

What are the things that helped you to get from the lows that you see on this side to the highs that you see on that side?

Participant: Friends.

Participant: Yes, friends.

Interviewer 2: Friends, ok.

Participant: And tutorials.

Participant: And like the first semester you didn't know exactly what amount of money you are going to need, and second semester you have more or less an idea.

Interviewer 1: So better financial structuring.

Interviewer 2: So, first when you get here, you don't know what everything is going to cost.

Participant: Yes, like in the first semester, they say you must buy this book, and this book and this book. Then you buy all of these books and you don't even use all of them. So next semester you know, don't buy all the books. Just wait and listen and then you will know if you really need this book.

Participants: Yes.

Participant: Like BRS111, it is like R800 for the books you need and we didn't even use it. You can just go to class and make notes, it is not that necessary.

Participants: Yes.

Participant: And one thing there, you get to know the people who give classes.

Interviewer 2: So getting to know the lecturers and the facilitators.

Participant: Yes, that is nice.

Interviewer 2: Why does it help to get to know them better?

Participant: To ask them questions.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so you feel more comfortable asking them questions.

Participant: And then you sort of learn how they ask things in the exams and tests.

Interviewer 1: So, how they structure the questions.

Interviewer 2: So, you get an idea of how they think.

Participants: Yes.

Interviewer 2: What else helped with these highs?

Participant: The VBL module, because they gave us study methods.

Interviewer 2: Oh, so the study methods that you learned in VBL.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: A lot of students have told me that they benefitted from that although they complain that it is too long.

Do you guys all have VBL?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: No.

Participant: I did it last year.



Interviewer 2: Do you also feel that it helped?

Participant: Yes, it helped, but three hours, joh! I use to sleep in class.

Interviewer 1: Anything you can think of to add?

Participant: Vacation.

Interviewer 2: Vacation?

Participant: Yes, after all the studying...the high was that all the studying paid off because I have three weeks or a month or whatever off.

Interviewer 2: So, it was a bit of a reward.

Participant: Ja.

Participant: It is like, let's study hard for this test and then tomorrow you can sleep in or whatever.

Interviewer 2: So the vacation served as motivation.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Ok, anything else?

Interviewer 1: Now, out of all these things that we named and spoke about, I want you to look at the lows and then on your paper where you wrote the lows, I want you, to from 1 to 10, 1 being the lowest or the least important and 10 being the most important, list the 10 lows that you felt were the most important this year, that played the biggest part in your life this year.

Interviewer 2: So, from that list that we compiled as a group, you write from 1 to 10. 1 the one that was most influential and 10 the least influential in your life.

Interviewer 1: And you can do the same with the highs as well.

*(Silence while they compile their list)*

Interviewer 2: Ok, now the rest is going to be very democratic, you guys will be able to vote. So, Riané will ask you guys to vote and I will write down what you guys are saying.

*(Voting took place)*

## **Languishing and Flourishing Nominal Group 2**

Date: 2 August 2013

Time: 17:30

Participants: 9

Interviewer 1: Ok, I am going to give you consent forms that you just have to sign for me.

This is just to indicate that you willingly participated in the research study. This form also has a section which describes what the research is all about and it explains languishing and flourishing. Languishing and flourishing are terms we use to describe people's mental health status. When you experience complete mental health, you are flourishing and when you experience incomplete mental health, you are languishing. Flourishing is being happy, positive, resilient, outgoing and things like that. In contrast, languishing is being unhappy, sad, negative, feeling alone, feeling lost, etc. It is very important to be mentally healthy. That is why today's research is, moving between languishing and flourishing in the first year of university life.

Interviewer 2: Hopefully you still remember this from last semester's positive psych.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: No, we are going to see who paid attention in class.

*(Some laughing from participants)*

Interviewer 1: Now I am going to give you all a piece of paper and what I want you to do is to divide it in half. Then on the one side, the one half, just write down your lows that you experienced this year, things that bothered you, that made you sad, for instance, if you didn't find your way around campus or anything that made it difficult and unpleasant. These experiences are things that made you languish.

Interviewer 2: Yes, things that made it hard.

Interviewer 1: And then on the other side, the other half, just write down the positive things, the highs. The times when you thought, ok, this is not that bad, I can do this. Things that made you flourish.

Interviewer 2: So your highs and lows. On the one side all the things you struggled with and on the other side all the things that was good about this year. Being a first

year, what was difficult about being a first year and what made it worth it. These experiences made you flourish.

*(Silence while participants complete their highs and lows)*

*(Three more participants enter)*

Interviewer 1: Hi hello. Please come in.

Interviewer 2: Hi guys.

Interviewer 1: Thank you so much for coming. Ok, do you have something to write with?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Guys, after you finished writing, don't you just want to pull up your chairs over here so that we can all sit in a group.

Interviewer 1: This is the informed consent, you can read it through and sign at the bottom. And this paper you divide and on the one side you write your lows and on the other side your highs for this year.

Participant: But I didn't have any lows.

Interviewer 2: You don't have to write a lot of lows, if there were only two things, that is fine. If there is only one thing, that is also fine, if there is ten things, that is great. Just what you think was good or bad about this year.

*(Silence while they continue to write highs and lows)*

Interviewer 1: Or if you split up, then you can put it on the lows side. *(Participants laugh)*

*(Silence while they continue to write their highs and lows)*

Interviewer 2: Are you guys almost done there in the back?

Participants: Yes.

Interviewer 2: You guys can stay there if you don't want to move, but when you speak just speak loudly so that this little thing can hear you. Because it records you, but it is just so that we don't forget what you guys said. You don't have to worry, we won't play it over the radio. *(Laughing)*

Interviewer 1: Ok, did everybody write down their lows and highs from your first year? Things that made you languish and things that made you flourish?

Participants: Yes.

Interviewer 1: Alright, let's first look at the lows, what did you guys write down, what were your lows for this year? Your languishing experiences?

Participant: Having to come into a new environment and seeing so many faces.

Interviewer 1: The new environment, I like that you mentioned that.

Interviewer 2: Ok, new environment and new faces.

Interviewer 1: Ok, next one.

Participant: Missing home.

Interviewer 1: Ja, missing home is a good one.

Interviewer 2: Where do you live?

Participant: QwaQwa.

Interviewer 1: Next one?

Participant: I had to move to a totally new province.

Interviewer 2: New province, so also missing home and being far away from home.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: What else did you experience as being lows?

Participant: Being broke.

*(Everyone laughs)*

Interviewer 1: Yes, being broke, that is always a problem for all of us.

Participant: Making new friends.

Participant: Ja.

Participant: It was so hard.

Participant: Yes, that was a low.

Interviewer 2: Was it difficult to make new friends?

Participant: It was.

Interviewer 2: So, can I put here difficult to make new friends.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: But I'm your friend, don't worry.

Participant: Meeting the meanest people on campus.

*(Some participants laugh)*

Interviewer 1: Mean people? Do you stay in a hostel or something?

Participant: No just around campus.

Interviewer 1: Just around campus?

Participant: Ja.

Interviewer 2: What did you say meeting what people?

Interviewer 1: Mean people.

Interviewer 2: Mean people? Who treats you mean?

Participant: A lot of people, especially at the deli.

Interviewer 2: But is it university staff or students?

Participant: Students.

Participant: Both.

Participant: Students and staff.

Participant: Staff, oh shame man.

Participant: Staff, joh!

Interviewer 1: Ok guys. What else?

Participant: Being around older students are intimidating.

Interviewer 1: Older students.

Participant: Mmm.

Interviewer 2: Do you mean like, for example, fourth years or do you mean people who is a lot older?

Participant: Like fourth years, and second years.

Interviewer 2: So everyone that is older.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: Ah, not second years, nah!

Interviewer 2: Not the second years.

Participant: Some of them, they don't treat you...nah.

Interviewer 2: So you said it is intimidating.

Participant: Some they make you feel inferior.

Participant: Because some of them make you feel like you are a first year.

Participant: You guys are the babies, you guys are the babies of school...

*(Then everybody gives an opinion about this at the same time, it is difficult to make out what they are saying, but they all agree with older students not treating them well and making them feel out of place)*

Participant: And like sometimes when they answer questions in class, you are like, huh?

Participant: Oh, and finding classes.

Interviewer 2: Finding classes.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: And you are too scared to ask.

Interviewer 2: Because the people are mean.

Participant: Yes, because they don't know either.

Participant: Or they give you the wrong class on purpose.

Interviewer 1: Do they do that?

Participant: Ja.

Participant: Luckily, I never experienced that.

Interviewer 1: That is horrible.

Interviewer 2: Ok, what else? What do you guys in the back say?

Participant: I got mugged.

Interviewer 2: Sorry?

Participant: I got mugged.

Interviewer 1: Mugged!

Interviewer 2: Mugged!

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: What! On campus or off campus?

Participant: No, on my way home.

Interviewer 2: On your way home. So can I put crime?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: My first day of school I lost my whole wallet.

Participant: *(Gasps)*

Participant: First day of school.

Participant: That sucks.

Participant: Eish.

Participant: And it is your student card?

Participant: My student card, my ID, everything.

Participant: Shame.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so we have being a victim of crime, losing your wallet, what else?

Any other lows?

How 'bout you guys in the back?

Participant: Having to write long assignments.

Interviewer 2: Long assignments.

Participant: Finding group members.

*(Everybody laughs in understanding)*

Interviewer 2: Group members who work.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: And how about the work you do in class?

Participant: The workload. *(A lot of participants agree with her)*

Participant: The pressure.

Participant: Stressing about am I going to pass this module or not. Like, you always stress.

Interviewer 2: So, can I put here the pressure of passing.

Participant: And reassessments when you have to come back.

Interviewer 1: What else?

Participant: Here I wrote feeling alone.

Interviewer 1: Feeling alone.

Participant: Yes. *(Many agree with her)*

Participant: Adjustment to the predicate thing. Like at school, there wasn't that you needed 40 to write, you could get 20 and you could write.

Participant: True.

Participant: I am just saying.

Interviewer 2: So, you didn't need a predicate.

Participant: No. And it is not that I didn't like it, it was just like something new and you had to work harder. Because like, in high school people had like 5% and they could still write.

*(Everyone voices an opinion in agreement)*

Interviewer 2: But that was a low for you, finding out that you needed a predicate of 40%?

Participant: It is a low because it is an adjustment.

Participant: Yes, it is a low.

Participant: It is something that you have to live up to.

Participant: It is an adjustment to something that you didn't know.

Interviewer 2: Ok.

Interviewer 1: What else did you guys write down?

Participant: Having to break up with your boyfriend because you are moving, you are going somewhere else. Insecurities.

Interviewer 2: What are you saying, can you just repeat that?

Participant: Having to break up with your boyfriend because of insecurities.

Interviewer 2: Oh, because you are moving away.

Participant: And getting hurt in the process.

Interviewer 1: So losing relationships, and people and your supporters.

Participant: Ja, and also it is, it is also, you also lose friends.

Participant: That is true, that's true.

Participant: Some of them are just sitting back at home and you are here

Interviewer 1: So, then you are not on the same level when you go back? They don't understand your situation?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: No, you are not.

Participant: And having to wake up early for classes. We had a 7o'clock class last semester.

Participant: Joh! That class was terrible.

Participant: Or having class till late.

Interviewer 1: So early or late classes.

Participant: Ja, because at school you would wake up at 5:30 in the morning because you have a class that starts at 7.

Interviewer 1: And you there at the back, what do you have?

Participant: I said that not having to go to church, not having a church to go to on Sundays. Ok, a church is a church depending on which church you go to, but it is not the same as the church at home.

Participant: A proper church.

Interviewer 2: Was it difficult to find a church?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Ok.

Participant: I also experienced difficulty with that.

Participant: Stressing about what to wear.

*(Laughing)*

Participant: That's true.

Participant: Yes, at school. Like in high school, you had your uniform and now you have to wear something different every day.

Interviewer 2: So picking something different everyday.

Participant: Ja.

Participant: And you have to repeat your clothes and your hairstyle.

Interviewer 1: You think you have a lot of clothes until you start wearing them everyday.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: Ok.

Interviewer 2: Alright, anything else?

Participant: Looking at the Checkers papers, you never get those papers but now you look at prices...

Participant: Yes, you look at the prices of what to buy.

Participant: Yes, a grocery list.

Participant: Yes, you have to plan your budget and how to spend it.



Participant: Realising the cost of living.

Interviewer 2: When we look at the being broke and the financial problems, is it different from that or is it the same?

Participant: It is the same.

Participant: It is different.

Participant: Being responsible is something else.

Interviewer 2: Ooohh, responsibility.

Participant: Ja, ja.

Interviewer 2: So we will have pocket money, but also buying your own things like food.

Participant: You no longer buy the brand names.

Interviewer 2: Ok, and you said taking responsibility for yourself.

Participant: And disciplining yourself.

Participant: Ja.

Participant: Discipline and responsibility.

Interviewer 1: Because nobody is there to...

Participant: To tell you to do stuff.

Participant: And you buy at Pick n Pay.

Interviewer 2: What was that?

Participant: And like plans that don't work out. Like me and my best friend planned to go to the same university and then she didn't get accepted.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so plans that don't work out.

Participant: Joh!

Interviewer 1: Having expectations.

Participant: Ja.

Interviewer 1: Anything else you can think of?

Participant: Finding it difficult to understand the lecture.

Participants: Yes.

Participant: Talk about it, the psychology lecture.

Participant: Ja, the one we have now.

Participant: Tjo!

Participant: When we go there, we fall fast asleep.

Participant: It is better now because now they are changing the venue.

Participant: Maybe.

Participant: But despite the venue, you need to enjoy what you do, the lecture should make you enjoy what you are doing.

Participant: But today was fun, you should have came.

Participant: Ja, that was better.

Participant: I was thinking maybe we should get that lady so that...

Participant: No, she is just a tutor.

Participant: I was about to say that.

Participant: Can that be a low?

Interviewer 2: What?

Participant: Like not understanding...I don't want to say liking but understanding.

Participant: Ja.

Participant: It is written.

Interviewer 2: We have not understanding the lecture, but what else do you want to say? Because I am getting the sense that it is not just...it's not that you don't understand what she is saying, but you don't get along with her.

Participant: Both.

Participant: No, it's like, it's like...

Participant: It's like you don't hear her.

Participant: We can't hear her, she talks like this (*Participant speaks in soft mumbling voice*) and then today she wasn't here and then the tutor was giving the lecture and she was so bubbly and everybody was laughing. Because we were enjoying the lecture. So, today it was fine, but it was only for today because next week our lecturer will be back.

Participant: I think her method of lecturing is what we students have a problem with. Because, for instance, with one of our lecturers, she would talk to the guys, walk up and down, communicate with the students.

Participant: Yes, yes.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so it is the lecture method?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Ok.

Participant: And the slides, they are not simplified, guys.

Participant: Yes, straights from the textbook.

Participant: Yes, everything is straight from the textbook.

Participant: Nothing is simplified in those slides.

Interviewer 1: So, you don't really understand what they are trying to tell you.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Anything else that is a low.

Participant: It is a low that we are not being babied anymore, nobody cares anymore.

*(Laughing)*

Participant: Whether you bring your stuff, whether you come to class or not.

Participant: Sometimes you still need that push.

Participant: Nobody calls you when you are sick to check if you are alright and when you will be coming to class.

Interviewer 1: And you have these big classes as well.

Participant: Yes, like EBW is always full.

Participant: Ja, they won't miss you in that class.

*(Participants laugh)*

Interviewer 2: Ok, that is quite a list now. Anything you want to add?

Participant: Having to share a room.

Interviewer 2: In Res?

Participant: Ja.

Interviewer 2: Ok, sharing a room.

Participant: With a stranger.

Participant: And then the next thing the person has mood swings. Today she is happy then she is...oh no.

Participant: I love my roommate.

Interviewer 2: Ok, anything else?

Participants: No.

Interviewer 1: Ok, are we moving onto highs? The things that made you experience flourishing.

Participants: Yes.*(Everybody excited)*

Interviewer 1: Yes. Ok highs. What did you guys experience as highs?

Interviewer 2: I hope you have at least as many highs as you have lows here.

Participant: Independency.

Interviewer 2: Independence.

Participant: Oh yes, I wrote that too.

Interviewer 1: Another high?

Participant: New friends.

Participant: Yes, new friends.

Participant: Crazy friends.

Participant: Learning new languages and everything.

Participant: Reconnecting with an old boyfriend.

Interviewer 1: Reconnecting with an old boyfriend.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: What else.

Participant: Entertainment at the bridge.

Interviewer 2: Sorry?

Participant: Entertainment at the bridge.

Interviewer 1: The entertainment at the bridge.

Participant: The hairstyles.

Participant: Having different hairstyles.

Interviewer 1: What other highs did you write down?

Participant: Some of us meet our life partners here.

Participant: Aito!

Interviewer 1: Meeting life partners.

Participant: Getting money every month.

Participant: End of the month.

Interviewer 1: Getting money at the end of each month.

What else?

Participant: Having to meet people who care. Like there are those people who care, like you feel when you are around them they care for you, they are willing to assist you...

Participant: A stronger support group.

Interviewer 2: Is that friends or is it staff members, is it lectures, who is it?

Participant: It is friends, people that you meet around campus.

Participant: Tutors.

Participant: Tutors, yes.

Interviewer 2: Ok, tutors.

Participant: The freedom.

Interviewer 1: Experiencing freedom.

Participants: Yeah.

Participant: Wouldn't that fall under independence or something?

Participant: Yes, independence.

Interviewer 2: What else?

Participant: Wearing your own clothes, that was a high for me.

Participant: You have got issues.

Participant: Rocking some hairstyles.

Interviewer 2: What?

Participant: The hairstyles.

Participant: Oh yes, that is a high. I can do whatever I want, because in the high school that I went to we were basically told that if you weren't born with it, it doesn't belong in your hair.

Participant: Tjo!

Participant: So extensions were not allowed, so this is the first time in five years that I can do whatever I want to my hair.

Interviewer 2: Can you guys read that?

Participants: Yes.

Participant: I think to be allowed to wear makeup and do your nails.

Participant: And having to do something that you are actually passionate about. Unlike having to go to class and having to do maths and things like that.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: So, studying what you want.

Participant: Ja.

Interviewer 1: Is that a high?

Participants: Yes, it is.

Interviewer 1: Because at school you have to study everything.

Participant: Yes, you have to do Afrikaans and English and you have to do hours of this and that.

Interviewer 1: So, you like what you are doing this year.

Participant: Not having to wake up in the morning every day. Like Monday to Friday, some days you have late classes.

Participant: Some days you don't have class.

Participant: I don't have those days.

Participant: I have Fridays off.

Interviewer 1: What other highs do you have? Don't you have more highs than lows?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Can you guys read what I am writing because I am writing very fast to keep up with you guys.

Participants: Yes.

Participant: Having more time in the day. Because sometimes at 11 you are done.

Interviewer 2: So more free time.

Participant: Yes, more free time.

Participant: Getting to know yourself more.

Interviewer 2: Getting to know yourself, that is a good one.

Interviewer 1: Ok, what else?

Participant: Partying!

Interviewer 1: Partying? Socialising.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: Who else wants to add something?

Interviewer 2: What do you guys in the back have?

Participant: More motivation to study, because that is a high, because like you have more motivation to study now, because you are working towards something that you actually want, not like maths that I hated.

Interviewer 2: So, is it the same as this one that says doing what you want to?

Participant: Yes ok.

Interviewer 2: Is it the same, or is it different?

Participant: That is studying in general. What I mean is more like saying to yourself I have to go to study log and sit there and study. It is more motivation.

Interviewer 2: So internal motivation.

Participant: Self-motivation.

Interviewer 2: Self-motivation, ok.

Participant: I was about to say that.

Participant: Me too, eish, we think alike a lot.

Interviewer 1: What highs do you guys have there at the back?

Interviewer 2: Yes.

Participant: Passing my first semester modules.

Interviewer 2: Passing your first semester.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 1: So, was it a positive because you realised that you can actually do it?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: Passing a module without a textbook.

Participant: No, you a beast! If you did that, then you are a beast.

Participant: I passed without a textbook.

Participant: What module was that?

Participant: Positive psychology.

Participant: Sjoie, I don't know how you did that.

Interviewer 2: What did you say?

Participant: I enjoyed my positive psychology modules, actually all my psychology modules in the first semester, because I learned more about the behaviour of people and relationships and so.

Participants: The way you just sort of glowed when you said relationships, says everything.

Interviewer 2: Are you the one who said reconnecting with an old boyfriend?

*(Some laughing)*

Participant: No really.

Interviewer 2: Ok, so some of the modules, enjoying the modules.

Participant: I had it in my head and now it is gone.

Interviewer 2: What else?

Participant: Getting to continue with your passion, like hockey. You learn more about it than in high school even though you went to tournaments and stuff, but at university you get to learn more about the actual sport.

Participant: You get more exposure.

Participant: Yes, more exposure to great people in the sport.

Participant: Getting freebies at campus.

Interviewer 2: The freebies.

Participant: When it is free, it is not good.

*(Everybody laughs)*

Interviewer 2: Yes.

Participant: I think getting to understand different personalities, because we meet a lot of people with different personalities, so you get to know how to work with different people.

Interviewer 1: More highs.

Participant: Getting a Venda boyfriend.

Interviewer 2: What?

Interviewer 1: A Venda boyfriend.

Interviewer 2: Can we add that to meeting life partners?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: And we have reconnecting with an old boyfriend, let's put meeting a new boyfriend.

Participant: Helping with research.

Interviewer 1: Ah, thank you.

Participant: Choir, the UFS choir.

Participant: Do you sing? I auditioned for that.

Participant: I have been in choir in Grade 1 to my matric year.

Interviewer 2: Are you in the choir?

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Anything else?

Participant: I have a low.

Interviewer 2: You have a low to add.

Participant: Not being able to play netball.

Participant: Why?

Participant: Not being selected for the varsity team.

Interviewer 2: Why can't you play netball?

Participant: Because classes clash.

Interviewer 2: Ok, let's add not being able to play sport because of class clashes and then we put not being selected.

Interviewer 1: Do you have a high or a low?

Participant: No, it is a low. Finding accommodation.

Interviewer 2: Ah ok.

Anything else you would like to add? Highs or lows?

Interviewer 1: Do you guys have any other highs?

Participant: Having an awesome roommate.

Interviewer 1: Getting along with your roommate, if you are lucky.

Participant: I am.

Participant: Going to Wimpy for breakfast.

Participant: No more soft porridge.

*(Laughing from participants)*

Participant: And you get to spoil yourself whenever you want to.

Participant: And be broke.



Participant: Yes, sometimes.

Participant: You can go shopping whenever you want.

Participant: If you have the funds to.

Participant: Yes, some people they have. After every two weeks they go shopping for clothes.

Interviewer 2: Anything else?

Interviewer 1: Are you happy with the lists of highs and lows? Nothing that you would like to add?

Participant: No.

Interviewer 2: You can think so long about the question that Riané is going to ask you, but don't answer yet, I first want to put up the page.

Interviewer 1: How did you move from your lows to your highs? So from languishing to flourishing? What made it possible or easy for you to move from the one to the other?

Interviewer 2: Don't answer yet.

Interviewer 1: So, to move from languishing to flourishing. They were maybe the lows at the beginning of the year, but maybe they changed to highs.

Interviewer 2: When you experienced those lows and you were feeling bad, what did you do to make yourself feel better?

Participant: Called my parents.

Interviewer 2: Call your parents.

Interviewer 1: That is movement towards flourishing, that is good. So you realised that you wanted to talk to your mom or your dad.

Participant: Having a support thingy.

Interviewer 1: System.

Participant: System yes, from friends to family.

Interviewer 1: Yes.

Participant: I think you learn to adapt to every situation that you face, like everyday. Like, let's say I met a mean person, I tell myself, ok, if I met only one person who is mean every time I go to school I might meet 10 people who are mean. So I have to understand that it is not always that you are going to find people that are willing to help, good people. I think it is more about understanding.

Participant: Self-motivation.

Participant: You stole that from my head.

Interviewer 1: What did you have?

Participant: Same thing.

Interviewer 1: What else, what helped you to move from a low to a high?

Participant: Determination.

Interviewer 2: Where does this determination come from?

Participant: It comes from one self.

Interviewer 2: So why are you so determined? Is it a fear of failing?

Participant: Yes. Because if you really want to get somewhere, you feel determined to work hard.

Interviewer 2: So, you set goals for yourself and then you work towards those goals.

Participant: Yes.

Participant: Yeah! You can put goal driven there.

Interviewer 2: Do you also have something?

Participant: No.

Interviewer 2: Not.

Interviewer 1: What else helped you?

Participant: Going to a psychologist.

Interviewer 2: I am going to add to it any professional person that you can talk to that will help you.

Participant: Yes.

Interviewer 2: So, what else helped you from moving between when you felt those bad things to experiencing highs?

Participant: Uhm, letting people in. Then you go from not having friends to making new friends.

Interviewer 1: When you think about the class environment, what helped you to make that a little bit better? What helped you in that setting?

Participant: Personality.

Interviewer 2: Your own personality.

Are there things, because I think what Riané is asking...

Interviewer 1: Say, for instance, the lecturing method, we said that everybody has a different lecturing method, how did you adapt to that?

Interviewer 2: What are the things that helped you in the academic situation? Because there at the lows you said that the workload was too big and that you didn't always like the lecturers. But here on the highs you said that passing without a

textbook, passing the first semester. So what are the things that helped you to pass despite those difficulties?

Participant: Involving your own study methods.

Participant: Studying earlier before time.

Interviewer 2: Is it fine if I put time management for studying before time?

Participant: Yes.

Participant: Tutorials and AFSs.

Interviewer 1: Tutorials and what else?

Participant: Extra, extra academic help, like AFS and tutorials.

Interviewer 1: Ok.

Interviewer 2: Ja, anything else that helped you guys to survive first year.

Participant: Controlling your budget.

Interviewer 2: Your budget, ok.

Interviewer 1: What else helped you?

Participant: Prioritising.

Interviewer 1: Prioritising, that is a good one.

Participant: Self-discipline.

Interviewer 2: Self-discipline.

Participant: Challenging yourself.

Interviewer 1: Challenging. Now that you know you can do it, you will enjoy doing it again.

Interviewer 2: Ok. Anything else that helped you?

*(Silence from the participants)*

Interviewer 2: Ok, do you think that is about it?

Participants: Yes.

Interviewer 2: Ok, if you think of anything else, we can always add it. Now Riané is going to explain to you what we are going to do next.

Interviewer 1: Ok, the last thing that we are going to do, we are almost done, I want you to look at those two lists, the lows and the highs, I want you to, you can do it on the back of the paper. Number 1 to number 10 you write down the lows one, two, three, four till ten and then the highs, one, two, three, four till ten.

Interviewer 2: Can you guys read the red? Because I see it is not very clear from here.

Participants: Yes.

Interviewer 1: So I want you to choose 10 from this board the lows and from this board 10 the highs; 10 being the most important, the ultimate everything...

Interviewer 2: Last time we said 1 most important and 10 being less important.

Interviewer 1: 10 things from the lows that was most important.

Interviewer 2: So the 10 lowest lows and the 10 highest highs.

Interviewer 1: Yes, that is better.

*(Silence while they write their personal top 10)*

Interviewer 2: You guys got quite an impressive list there.

*(Silence as they continue with top 10)*

Interviewer 1: Ok, are you all done? Can we start with the list?

Participants: Yes.

Interviewer 1: Ok, what we are going to do now to make it easier because it is so many things, we are going to vote. So, I am going to read it to you and if you agree, you put up your hands.

*(Voting took place)*

## **APPENDIX C**

### **TURN IT IN REPORT**

# Languishing and flourishing

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