

Postgraduate psychology students' experiences of spiritual identity development

by

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Abstract

In this study, the experiences of spiritual identity development of postgraduate psychology students were explored. Emerging adulthood is a distinctive developmental stage during which individuals can explore different domains of their identities. After completing high school, emerging adults frequently enrol at higher education institutions. The university context offers unique opportunities and challenges to all domains of identity development. Spiritual identity, a unique domain of identity, develops during late adolescence and continues throughout the life span. A strong sense of spiritual identity provides individuals with a sense of congruence across multiple contexts and enables individuals to derive meaning from various life experiences.

The participants of interest in this study were postgraduate psychology students. These students experienced immense personal growth, while attaining psychological knowledge and skills as they prepared for the health care profession. In the psychology profession, intrapersonal and interpersonal maturity is important. Spiritual identity is of essence to the intrapersonal development of students and enables students to derive meaning from their own experiences and of the experiences of others.

A life span development perspective formed the theoretical framework for the study. Theorists differ in how to conceptualise spiritual identity across the life span. Stage theorists propose that spiritual identity parallels cognitive and psychosocial development, while narrative theorists propose that identity develops through the process of storytelling and meaning making. System theorists propose that spiritual identity development takes place in context and that the effect of various role players in the environment should be considered. All of these perspectives were considered in this study.

This research study followed a qualitative research design, utilising interpretive phenomenological analysis. Through purposive sampling, six postgraduate psychology students enrolled at the University of the Free State were selected to participate. The final sample consisted of six female students: one black, and five white students. Data were collected through reflective writing exercises and semi-structured interviews. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was utilised to analyse the data.

After describing each case individually, a cross-case analysis was conducted. The following themes were identified: 1) A journey across the life span; 2) The role of significant others; 3) Trigger events along the journey and meaning-making; 4) Finding one's voice among others; 5) Values and characteristics inherent to spiritual identity; and 6) Spirituality and becoming a psychologist.

This study contributes to the body of literature pertaining to spiritual identity development across the life span. All facets of human development take place in context; therefore, spiritual identity development cannot be investigated without considering the unique context of South Africa. This study provides rich contextual information regarding spiritual identity development of postgraduate psychology students.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, meaning making, postgraduate psychology students, South African psychology students, spiritual identity development

Opsomming

In hierdie studie is die ervarings van nagraadse sielkunde studente ten opsigte van hulle spirituele ontwikkeling ondersoek. Die fase van ontluikende volwassenheid is 'n kenmerkende ontwikkelingsstadium waartydens individue verskillende aspekte van hulle identiteite verken. Ná voltooiing van matriek skryf ontluikende volwassenes dikwels by 'n universiteit of ander tersiêre instelling in en word sodoende studente. Die universiteitsomgewing bied unieke geleenthede en uitdagings in die ontwikkeling van alle aspekte van identiteit. Spirituele identiteit, 'n unieke domein van identiteit, ontwikkel gedurende laat adolessensie en hou aan deur die res van die persoon se lewe. 'n Sterk begrip van spirituele identiteit gee individue 'n gevoel van kongruensie oor veelvoudige kontekste heen en stel hulle in staat om betekenis uit hulle verskillende lewensondervindings te put.

Die betrokke deelnemers aan hierdie studie was nagraadse sielkunde studente. Hierdie studente beleef geweldige persoonlike groei terwyl hulle sielkundige kennis en vaardighede opdoen tydens hulle voorbereiding vir die gesondheidsorgprofessie. Interpersoonlike en intrapersoonlike volwassenheid is belangrik in die sielkunde professie. Spirituele identiteit is dus essensieel in die intrapersoonlike ontwikkeling van studente en behoort hulle in staat te stel om betekenis uit hulle eie ondervindings en ook in dié van ander te put.

'n Lewensduur-ontwikkelingsperspektief het die teoretiese raamwerk van die studie gevorm. Teoretici verskil in hulle konseptualisering van spirituele ontwikkeling tydens die lewensduur. Stadium teoretici stel dit dat spirituele identiteitsontwikkeling parallel met kognitiewe en psigososiale ontwikkeling plaasvind, terwyl verhaal teoretici dit stel dat spirituele identiteit tydens die storievertelling- en betekenisverkrygingsprosesse ontwikkel. Stelselteoretici stel dit dat spirituele identiteitsontwikkeling in konteks gebeur en dat die effek van verskillende rolspelers in die omgewing oorweeg moet word. Al hierdie perspektiewe is tydens die studie oorweeg.

Die navorsingstudie het 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsontwerp gevolg, deur van interpretatiewe fenomenologiese ontleding gebruik te maak. Deur middel van doelgerigte steekproeftrekking, is ses nagraadse sielkunde studente wat by die Universiteit van die Vrystaat ingeskryf was, gekies om deel te neem. Die finale steekproef het gevolglik bestaan uit ses vroulike studente, waarvan een swart en vyf wit was. Data is deur middel van reflektiewe

geskrewe oefeninge en semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude versamel. Interpretatiewe fenomenologiese ontleding is gebruik om die data te ontleed.

Nadat elke geval individueel beskryf is, is al die gevalle ontleed. Die volgende oorkoepelende temas is geïdentifiseer: 1) 'n Reis oor die lewensduur; 2) Die rol van beduidende ander persone; 3) Sleutelgebeure tydens die reis en betekenisvorming; 4) Ontdek jou stem tussen al die ander; 5) Inherente waardes en eienskappe van spirituele identiteit; en 6) Spiritualiteit en die wording van 'n sielkundige.

Die studie dra by tot die literatuurversameling ten opsigte van spirituele ontwikkeling oor die lewensduur. Alle fasette van menslike ontwikkeling gebeur in konteks; daarom kan spirituele ontwikkeling nie ondersoek word sonder om die unieke Suid-Afrikaanse konteks in ag te neem nie. Hierdie studie verskaf belangrike kontekstuele inligting ten opsigte van die spirituele identiteitsontwikkeling van nagraadse sielkunde studente.

Sleutelwoorde: betekenisvorming, nagraadse sielkunde student, ontluikende volwassenheid, Suid-Afrikaanse sielkunde studente, spirituele identiteitsontwikkeling

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Chapter 1 – Context of the Study

“Challenging the meaning of life is the truest expression of the state of being human” (Frankl, 1985)

Establishing meaning and purpose in life is vital to all people. The psychology profession requires continuous reflection regarding own morals and values while attempting to alleviate emotional problems of clients. Psychologists should be able to make and maintain meaning in their own lives before they can attempt to help others on their meaning-making journeys. Postgraduate psychology students aspire to enter a profession where they inevitably will be challenged on social and personal levels. They will be confronted with difficult and ambiguous ethical and moral questions. Spiritual identity encompasses values, morals, and meaning in life and is therefore essential in postgraduate psychology students’ journeys of becoming psychologists. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore and describe postgraduate psychology students’ experiences of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of this qualitative research study. In the chapter, the context and rationale of the study are discussed, followed by an overview of the theoretical perspectives underpinning the study. Thereafter, the research design and methodology are addressed. Finally, the chapters in this study are delineated, giving a clear outline of what to expect in the following chapters.

1.1 Context and Rationale of the Research Study

South African youths are part of a rainbow nation, and their contexts involve extreme social and economic change (Brittian, Lewin, & Norris, 2013). South African youths are exposed to an environment where they are confronted frequently with different world views, beliefs, and faiths. The psychology profession is relational, academic, and contextual in nature (Castro, Whiteley, & Boyle, 2013). Therefore, it is expected of psychologists to empathise with diverse perceptions, experiences, feelings, and world views of clients.

Postgraduate psychology studies are challenging academically and emotionally. Students have to engage in making meaning of selection processes, their values, world views, and diversity. Postgraduate psychology students, who are in the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, are encouraged to review their own values and norms and engage in continuous reflection regarding their belief systems. During training, they should learn how to balance

their personal and professional values (Handelsman, Cottlieb, & Knapp, 2005). They are preparing for a career in which it is paramount to understand the various aspects of their own identities. These students should have a clear sense of personal identity and should be comfortable in a diverse cultural context. The nature of the psychology profession requires students to have sophisticated meaning-making processes and established value systems. Meaning-making, values, and spiritual identity are strongly related (Fowler, 1981; Frankl, 1985; McAdams & McLean, 2013; Oser, 1991; Wong, 2013). Therefore, this study aimed to explore and describe postgraduate psychology students' experiences of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood.

This research study provides valuable information and contributes to the body of research related to spiritual identity development of postgraduate psychology students during the emerging adulthood years. The study also improves our understanding of psychology students' inner experiences and their developmental journeys of becoming professionals. This knowledge might be utilised in psychology practice and/or in the training of postgraduate students.

1.2 Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning the Study

Various theoretical perspectives were incorporated to provide a theoretical framework for this study. These perspectives included life span development theory, identity theory, spiritual and spiritual identity theory, and student development theory.

The developmental stage of emerging adulthood informed this study. Proposed by Arnett (2000), emerging adulthood focuses on individuals aged from 18 to 25. Arnett (2000) describes the following five pillars that represent emerging adulthood: instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, possibilities, and identity exploration. During this developmental stage, emerging adults explore various facets of identity, for example gender/sexuality, ethnicity, and religion/spirituality.

Identity is a multifaceted concept and consists of various domains. The identity development process begins in adolescence but continues and deepens during the emerging adulthood years (Arnett, 2000). The identity status model and the narrative perspective model are the two best-known approaches in conceptualising identity development (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Both of these models provide important insights regarding all domains of identity development across the life span. The works of Erikson (1968), Marcia (1980), Crocetti, Rubini

and Meeus, (2008), and Luyckx, Goossens, Soenens, and Beyers (2008) are reviewed. This is followed by the narrative perspective proposed by McAdams (1990) and McLean and Pratt (2006).

Spirituality, like identity, is a multidimensional construct (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Rude, 2003; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2014). The concepts of religion, spirituality, and faith are used interchangeably in the literature (Newman, 2004). Spirituality can be described as a grounded sense of connection with the transcendent and provides meaning in people's lives (Kiesling & Sorell, 2009; MacDonald, 2009). Spirituality involves existential questioning, finding one's inner potential, relationships with others, and a personal relationship with God (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2014). People can identify with being religious and spiritual simultaneously or identify with either (Roeser, Isaac, Abo-Zena, Brittan & Peck, 2008). For some people, religion forms the basis of their spirituality. Considering this notion, the work of Oser and Gmunder's (1991) religious judgement proved influential in conceptualising spiritual development across the life span. Religion and spirituality provide meaning in people's lives (Frankl, 1985; Wong, 2013). The narrative perspective proposed by McAdams (2008) and McLean and Pratt (2006) integrate spiritual development with meaning-making. Therefore, the narrative perspective was applicable to the discussion of spiritual development. Furthermore, spirituality does not develop apart from one's context; therefore, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) systems theory was also considered. Lastly, Fowler (1981) provides an integrative picture of spiritual development across the life span.

Spiritual identity develops across the life span (Kiesling & Sorell, 2009; Poll & Smith, 2003). Theorists tend to neglect the importance of spiritual identity development during the emerging adulthood years (Kiesling & Sorell, 2009; Poll & Smith, 2003). Spiritual identity can be defined as a chosen personal and individualised identity that reflects the role of spirituality in a person's life (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). Spiritual identity influences a person's behaviour, values, and meaning-making processes. Various psychological perspectives are considered in conceptualising spiritual identity. These include stage theories, narrative theories, and system theories. Poll and Smith (2003) propose the following stages of spiritual identity development: pre-awareness, awakening, recognition, and integration. These stages provide a comprehensive and integrative theoretical perspective regarding spiritual identity development and are therefore regarded as essential for the theoretical framework of this study. The reason for including various psychological perspectives was to provide a comprehensive

theoretical framework for spiritual identity development. No psychological theory would adequately explain the complex and multidimensional concept of spiritual identity development.

1.3 Overview of Research Design and Methods

A qualitative interpretive phenomenological approach was utilised in this study. The phenomenological approach focuses on descriptions of individuals' lived, subjective experiences (Creswell, 2013). This study utilised this approach to understand the experiences of spiritual identity development from the perspectives of the participants.

Hermeneutic phenomenology underlined this study. Hermeneutic phenomenology is based on the premise that people are self-interpretive and that their subjective worlds are filled with meaning (Van Manen, 2014). From this perspective, interpretation always forms part of description, and context should always be considered when interpreting results (Kafle, 2013; Lavery, 2003). Researcher reflectivity is considered essential in this approach, and researchers should be cognisant of their own biases and assumptions during the research process (Willig, 2013).

Non-probability, purposive sampling (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012) was utilised to recruit participants. Purposive sampling is utilised when the researcher aims to obtain in-depth and descriptive information from a specific group of participants (Patton, 2002). Participants had to be registered as postgraduate psychology students (Honours programme) at the University of the Free State. They had to be in the emerging adulthood developmental stage, between the ages of 18 and 25. All gender and ethnic groups were invited. The final sample consisted of six female students, five of whom were white and one was black.

The data- collection procedures involved reflective writing exercises (Jasper, 2005) and semi-structured interviews. The participants were required to complete the reflective writing exercise before the semi-structured interviews were conducted. Utilising two data- collection tools enabled the researcher to obtain in-depth information regarding the experiences of spiritual identity development of postgraduate psychology students.

The data were analysed using interpretive phenomenological analysis (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2013). All cases were considered

individually, and themes and subthemes were identified. Thereafter, a cross-case analysis was conducted to identify salient themes across cases.

Authorisation to conduct this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State. The ethical principles proposed by Christensen, Burke-Johnson, and Turner (2014) and Willig (2013) underlined this study. The ethical principles pertaining to informed consent, no coercion, freedom to withdraw, confidentiality, anonymity, and deception were strictly adhered to during the study.

Lastly, the issues of rigour in qualitative research were considered. Trustworthiness was promoted in this study by enhancing credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and researcher reflexivity. The researcher employed various strategies including triangulation, researcher reflectivity, and an audit trail. Furthermore, the researcher also utilised an established research method and attempted to provide as much contextual information as possible.

1.4 Delineation of Chapters

The structure of this research study is as follows:

Chapter 2: In this chapter, an overview of the existing literature pertaining to spiritual identity development during the emerging adulthood developmental stage is provided. Firstly, the emerging adulthood developmental stage is explored to provide a context in which spiritual identity of postgraduate psychology students takes place. Secondly, identity development is addressed by investigating status theories and narrative theories of identity development. Thirdly, spirituality is investigated by providing definitions and various psychological frameworks to conceptualise spiritual development. Fourthly, spiritual identity is explored by investigating various definitions and psychological theories. Lastly, spiritual identity is investigated in the postgraduate psychology student population.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive discussion of the methodology of the study. Firstly, the research rationale, aim, and questions are explored. This is followed by a discussion of the research design and approach. Research participants and sampling procedures are investigated next, followed by an examination of the procedures of data collection and data analysis. Lastly, ethical considerations and issues of trustworthiness are addressed.

Chapter 4: In this chapter, the results of the study are presented. Firstly, all cases are discussed individually. In each case, a brief description of the participant is provided. Each description is followed by a reflection of the researcher. Next, the themes and subthemes identified are mentioned, and a diagram representing the themes and subthemes is included. The chapter concludes with a cross-case analysis, presenting salient themes across the cases.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5 provides a discussion on the themes identified in Chapter 4 by referring to existing literature. Previous literature based on spiritual identity development are utilised to interpret and understand the findings of the study.

Chapter 6: Chapter 6 consists of the most significant findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research. The focus is on the value, effect, and contribution of this study.

1.5 Chapter Summary

The aim of this chapter was to provide a brief and general introduction to this research study. The context of the study, rationale, and aim were addressed. The importance of this study was motivated. The theoretical approach underpinning this study was mentioned, and the most applicable theories/theorists were highlighted. An overview of the research design and methods that were utilised was provided. The chapter concluded with an outline of the chapters in this paper. In the next chapter, the literature relevant to this study is discussed.

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature pertaining to spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. To provide a contextual framework for the study, the core pillars of emerging adulthood are explored, followed by a discussion of stage theories and the narrative perspective of identity development. The concept of spirituality and theories pertaining to spiritual, religious, and faith development is addressed next. Spiritual identity development is explored by incorporating identity and spirituality. The final section focuses on the application of the concept of spiritual identity development to postgraduate psychology students in South Africa.

2.1 Emerging Adulthood

Emerging adulthood can be described as the developmental period from late adolescence throughout the twenties, but focusing on ages from 18 to 25 (Arnett, 2000). Previously, compared to the present, the transition from adolescence to adulthood occurred sooner. Nowadays, assuming adult roles such as finding a partner, getting married, becoming a parent, gaining economic independence, and finding a full-time job is generally postponed until the mid 20s, or to the fourth decade of life (Arnett, Žukauskienė, & Sugimura, 2014; Hill, Lalji, Van Rossum, Van der Geest, & Blokland, 2015; Shulman & Connolly, 2013). Thus, Arnett (2007) suggests that the transition between adolescence and adulthood is long enough to represent a separate and unique period of the life cycle.

Arnett (2000, 2014) describes five pillars that are distinctive to this developmental stage, namely age of instability, age of self-focus, age of feeling in between, age of possibilities, and age of identity exploration. Although these features typify this period, some variation exists in the extent to which these features manifest in emerging adults (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013).

2.1.1 Age of instability. Arnett (2014) proposes that the developmental period of emerging adulthood is the most unstable time in a person's life. It is directed largely by frequent changes that occur during this life stage (Arnett, 2014). This stage of life is characterised by instability and uncertainty regarding romantic relationships, residence, career, and educational choices (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013). Most emerging adults make their first residential change at the age of about 18-19 years by either moving out of their parents' home, by going

to university, or by entering the job market (Arnett, 2006). During emerging adulthood, individuals often experience a variety of romantic relationships and numerous job changes before making permanent decisions (Arnett et al., 2014). The reason for the numerous changes might reflect exploration of possibilities with regard to love, work, and education (Arnett, 2006).

Instability in this life stage could make emerging adults feel overwhelmed, unsettled, and uncertain about their abilities to succeed (Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2007). According to Arnett et al. (2014), the instability in work and love is partly because of identity exploration that takes place during this stage of life.

2.1.2 Age of self-focus. Emerging adulthood is a self-focused stage (Arnett, 2014; Arnett et al., 2014). As emerging adults explore the possibilities presented during this life stage, they gradually take on more independence and responsibilities (Reifman et al., 2007). Emerging adults have a sense of considerable freedom, despite the fact that they have somewhat more responsibilities than adolescents and children have (Arnett et al., 2014; Reifman et al., 2007). They are still attached to their parents; but their parents have less authority over their life decisions. Moreover, they might be in romantic relationships, but the relationships might not be categorised as long-term, committed relationships (Arnett et al., 2014). Arnett (2014) postulates that focusing on the self is a temporary and unselfish stage in which emerging adults prioritise tasks related to their personal development. During this life stage, individuals lack obligations towards others (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013). The opportunity to focus on the self is unlikely to return later in life, as most emerging adults enter stable commitments by the age of 30 (Arnett, 2014).

2.1.3 Age of feeling in between. Emerging adulthood can be described as a gradual process of becoming an adult. This process has been described as a long and winding road (Arnett, 2004). Becoming an adult encompasses accepting self-responsibility, becoming financially independent, and engaging in independent decision making (Arnett, 2014; Arnett et al., 2014; Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013). Often, emerging adults experience themselves somewhere in between adolescence and adulthood but do not identify with either group (Arnett et al., 2014). Across the globe, individuals in this life stage experience the feeling that they have reached adulthood in some ways, but not completely (Arnett 2014).

Nelson and Padilla-Walker (2013) assert that some variation exists in the extent to which emerging adults feel in between. Some individuals feel that they have already reached adulthood, while others do not experience this feeling at all. Usually, relational maturity is regarded as the most important set of criteria needed to attain adult status. Frequently, the reason for feeling in between is the continuous partial reliance on parents, which inhibits the emerging adult's attainment of complete self-sufficiency (Arnett, 2014). Only when emerging adults have taken on a number of adult responsibilities will they escape the feeling of being in between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett, 2014). Becoming an adult is not achieved through a single life event but rather takes place gradually over time (Arnett et al., 2014). Arnett (2000) and Mitchell and Syed (2015) identified the following fundamental tasks for emerging adulthood: finding a satisfying career, choosing a life partner for starting a family, and financial independence.

2.1.4 Age of possibilities and optimism. The life stage of emerging adulthood is a time in life that is filled with possibilities and the opportunity for choosing different life directions (Arnett, 2004). This stage of life offers the prospect of radically changing one's life course. Although emerging adulthood is considered a challenging time in life, most individuals in this stage feel confident and hopeful about the future (Arnett, 2014; Mitchell & Syed, 2015).

Emerging adulthood is an optimistic time in life during which life provides the opportunity to explore a variety of potential partners and career opportunities (Reifman et al., 2007). During this life stage, emerging adults have high and somewhat unrealistic expectations and aspirations for their futures (Arnett, 2004; Mitchell & Syed, 2015). They dream of a future with a satisfying, well-paying job, a loving marriage, and children. Emerging adults typically experiment with various job possibilities in search of a job that fits their personality and their goals in life (Mitchell & Syed, 2015). For most emerging adults, finding a life-changing and enjoyable career is more important than finding a profitable career.

2.1.5 Age of identity exploration. Often, identity development is associated with the developmental stage of adolescence, as proposed in Erikson's (1968) life span development theory (Arnett et al., 2014). Only during the emerging adulthood years, identity issues become prominent, even though identity exploration processes already begin in adolescence. During emerging adulthood, individuals have to make important life decisions regarding love, work, and ideology (Arnett, 2014). Exploration of identity involves trying out different alternatives regarding what type of life to live and what type of person to become (Arnett et al., 2014).

Furthermore, it involves exploration of love, work, and world views (Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2013). According to Schwartz, Côté, and Arnett (2005), emerging adults should individualise their identities and take the initiative for forming working and personal relationships, gaining educational credentials, and gaining experience in their career fields. Emerging adults who address these issues proactively are most likely to develop coherent identities. Conversely, emerging adults who are passive and procrastinate with regard to forming identities would lack identity coherence and not be able to take advantage of opportunities presented during emerging adulthood (Schwartz et al., 2005).

During emerging adulthood, individuals contemplate decisions and commitments and internalise beliefs and values that would constitute the structure of their lives as adults. Mitchell and Syed (2013) state that trying out different alternatives and exploring one's identity during this developmental stage is the critical pillar of emerging adulthood. During this time, emerging adults investigate and question their world views in search of a coherent adult identity (Gutierrez & Park, 2015).

2.2 Identity Development

Identity is a multifaceted concept and encompasses political preference, religious/spiritual orientation, gender/sexuality, and ethnicity (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyckx, Meca, & Ritchie, 2013). Asking questions regarding one's identity ("Who am I?", "What kind of work do I want to do?" and "What are my beliefs?") is part of a vital psychosocial task that begins in early adolescence and continues into emerging adulthood (Schwartz et al., 2013, p. 96).

Adolescence and emerging adulthood can be considered as the most important developmental stages during the life cycle with regard to identity development (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Personal identity can be described as the subjective experience of congruence or sameness across multiple contexts (Kroger, 2007). Developing a stable sense of self is considered one of the essential tasks during adolescence and emerging adulthood – influencing thoughts, actions, and commitments (Davis & Weinstein, 2017).

Identity status models and the narrative life story perspective are the two prominent approaches concerning identity development (McLean & Pratt, 2006). Status theorists postulate that identity development is determined by moving progressively through linear stages (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009). Status theorists typically investigate exploration and

commitment during identity development, while narrative theorists believe that identity consists of a life story (McLean & Pratt, 2006).

2.2.1 Status theories of identity development. According to Sokol (2009), Erikson transformed developmental psychology and influenced numerous researchers. Although Erikson (1968) primarily focused on identity development during adolescence, traces of his theory can be found in almost all theories of identity development (Sokol, 2009).

Erikson's (1968) seminal work delineates psychosocial development across the life span. He describes life stage development as a sequence of challenges or crises that need to be resolved at certain ages during life.

Erikson developed eight stages across the life span, with key psychosocial tasks specific to each stage. Erikson stressed socio-cultural factors and believed that these had a great influence on identity development (Sokol, 2009). Each stage represents a crisis that results from a social demand, and growth depends on resolving this crisis (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). Unresolved crisis resolution might lead to stagnation at that particular stage. Conflicts experienced earlier in life serve as the foundation for conflict resolution in adulthood (Kroger, 2007).

The eight stages of psychosocial development developed by Erikson are represented in Table 1

Table 1

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development (Erikson, 1968; Louw & Louw, 2009)

Psychosocial Stage	Age	Challenge
Basic Trust vs. mistrust (Hope)	Birth to 1 year	Develop feeling that world is safe. Trust in others is based on caregiver's responsiveness to needs
Autonomy vs. shame and doubt (Will)	1 to 3 years	Develop feeling that one is independent. Toddlers learn to engage in autonomous behaviour.
Initiative vs. guilt (Purpose)	3 to 6 years	Develop a willingness to try new things and handle failure. Children take initiative in their behaviour.
Industry vs. inferiority (Competence)	6- 12 years	Learn basic skills and work with others. During this stage children developed mastery.
Identity vs. identity confusion (Fidelity)	12-18 years	Develop integrated sense of self.
Intimacy vs. isolation (Love)	Young adulthood (18-40 years)	Commit to a loving relationship.
Generatively vs. stagnation (Care)	Middle Adulthood (40-60 years)	Contribute to the younger generation meaningfully.
Integrity vs. despair (Wisdom)	Later life (60+)	Review, reflect, and accept the past. Pass knowledge and wisdom on to next generation.

Identity is formed during adolescence and consists of the interplay between synthesis and confusion. Kroger (2007) asserts that the processes of commitment and crisis underlie identity formation. From this perspective, the term *crisis* refers to “turning point” or “crucial period”

(Sokol, 2009, p. 1). The process of identity development takes place consciously and unconsciously (Kroger, 2007).

Congruence and stability in identity often coexist with high levels of self-esteem, as well as a strong sense of purpose in life during adolescence. Conversely, a flexible sense of identity increases feelings of anxiety (Hatano, Sugimura, & Crocetti, 2016).

Marcia (1966) expanded on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. His work has been vital to the expansion of research about identity (Kroger, 2007). Marcia's (1966) work centred on adolescent identity development. He focused on resolution of identity crisis and identity-defining decision-making processes of adolescents. He investigated decision making by focusing on two dimensions: exploration and commitment (Hatano et al., 2016; Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010).

Exploration is active questioning and the consideration of different identity alternatives prior to making decisions regarding values, beliefs, and goals (Crocetti et al., 2008). Commitment is concerned with making choices about an identity domain and participating in activities to implement the choice (Crocetti et al., 2008). The depth of exploration or commitment contributes to identity development. Marcia differentiates between four identity statuses or means of resolving identity crisis during adolescence (Hatano et al., 2016). The four statuses (Kroger, 2007; Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Kroger, et al., 2010; Marcia, 1966) are described as identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. Marcia's (1980) model is represented in Table 2.

Table 2

Identity Status Model (Kroger & Marcia, 2011; Marcia, 1980)

	Commitment		
			Present
Exploration/crisis	Absent	Identity diffusion	Identity Foreclosure
	Present	Identity Moratorium	Identity Achievement

Early in life, identity development might begin with either identity diffusion (no commitment) or foreclosure. Tentative identifications might be the result of parental influence or the influence of significant others. Tentative identifications are followed by a time of

moratorium (exploration) that lead to the ability to make identity- defining commitments by integrating one's personal interests with the opportunities of one's environment.

Crocetti et al. (2008) expanded on Marcia's theory by suggesting a process identity model. They are of the opinion that adolescents might have made commitments, but that they might continue to reflect and/or gather information regarding these commitments (Crocetti et al., 2008). They emphasise the significance of validating commitments by further exploration.

Their model consists of three identity dimensions, namely *commitment*, *in-depth exploration*, and *reconsideration of commitment* (Crocetti et al., 2008; Hatano et al., 2016). *Commitment* refers to firm decision making and active participation in various developmental domains. Firm, participatory decision-making might lead to higher self-confidence and self-esteem (Crocetti et al., 2008). *In-depth exploration* refers to dealing actively with commitments; for example, reflecting on choices, obtaining more information, and communicating about commitments (Crocetti et al., 2008). Lastly, *reconsideration of commitment* refers to investigating alternative commitments as the individuals are no longer satisfied with their current commitments (Crocetti et al., 2008).

Luyckx et al. (2006) attempted to create a model of identity formation by integrating Marcia and Meeus' models. They argue that the extent to which adolescents identify with and the way in which they internalise their choices also matter in identity formation (Luyckx et al., 2008). Adolescents are regarded as active agents in their own developmental processes.

Luyckx's model of identity formation consists of four structural dimensions, namely *commitment making*, *identification with commitment*, *exploration in depth*, and *exploration in breadth* (Luyckx et al., 2006; Luyckx et al., 2008). *Commitment making* refers to the degree to which adolescents make decisions regarding their identity. *Identification with commitment* is the process whereby existing commitments are re-evaluated and continuously revised (Luyckx et al., 2008). *Exploration in depth* involves the exploration of existing commitment, and *exploration in breadth* explores different options with regard to goals, values, and beliefs (Luyckx et al., 2006; Luyckx et al., 2008).

2.2.2 Narrative perspective. The narrative approach holds merit in the study of identity because people possess narrative thought (McLean & Pratt, 2006). This mode of thought enables individuals to capture the self and life experiences into culturally acceptable

narratives. Narrative stories provide an integrative perspective of the self, integrating psychodynamic, cognitive, and systems theory into a holistic perspective (Klenke, 2007).

Storytelling constructs identity as people naturally tell, share, and construct stories about themselves, others, and specific experiences in their lives (Syed & Azmitia, 2008). Furthermore, storytelling enables individuals to express who they are and who they believe they can become (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Mclean, Pasupathi, and Pals (2007) propose that interpersonal storytelling is vital to a person's sense of self and results in narrative identity. Story telling as means of self-explanation strengthens and confirms insights about the self. Life stories have contrasts: highs and lows, positives and negatives, good emotions and bad emotions (McAdams, 2008). Storytelling and cognitive processing of events lead to insight and can have a positive influence on people's psychological well-being and health.

Erikson (1968) originally proposed that identity development processes become more complex with age. McAdams (2013) elaborates on this premise and states that individuals develop the ability to form narrative identities during late adolescence and emerging adulthood. However, individuals gather material for their stories from childhood (McAdams, 2013). Potentially, temperament, patterns of attachment, peer relationships, etc. can influence the story that will be told. Internalising a life story answers identity questions and is essential to a person's life. Narrative identity stems from societal expectations and formal operational thinking that occur during adolescence and emerging adulthood as individuals mature cognitively and emotionally (McAdams & McLean, 2013).

Narrative identity involves the reorganisation and integration of experiences to envision the future in a way that would provide meaning, purpose, or unity for that individual (McAdams & McLean, 2013; Syed & Azmitia, 2008). The process concerned with meaning and purpose is called *autobiographical reasoning*. This type of reasoning involves the reconstruction and internalisation of life experiences (McAdams & McLean, 2013). It also enables individuals to derive meaning and insights from good and bad experiences and helps people to draw conclusions about themselves (McAdams, 2013). During negative life experiences, suffering and hardships, people prefer to derive lessons and insights from these experiences.

Developmentally, autobiographical reasoning skills surface between late childhood and early adolescence and continue during the emerging adulthood years. Emerging adults show the ability to organise themes in their lives. They sequence personal episodes to explain their

developmental process, thus illustrating individual growth over time. They can identify clear beginnings and endings in narrative accounts, thereby supporting the processes of foreshadowing and retrospective reflection (McAdams, 2013). The ability to engage in meaning-making increases with age. McLean and Pratt (2006) found that meaning-making was more sophisticated in emerging adults than in younger individuals.

Narrative and status theorists differ in how they conceptualise identity development during the life span but mutually acknowledge the important role that context and life experiences play in identity development.

2.3 Spirituality

Throughout human history, religion and spirituality have been essential parts of the human experience (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2014). Collectively and separately, spirituality and religion have been subjects and objects of art, music, poetry, warfare, and the reason for conflict between people. It inspired contemplation, devotion, and sacrifice (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2014). Relationship with a supernatural force (e.g., God, nature, spirit, etc.) is an important factor in the pursuit of day-to-day goals and provides meaning in life (Corrigan, McCorkle, Schell, & Kidder, 2003). Although the concepts of spirituality and religion are often used interchangeably, they have different meanings (Newman, 2004).

2.3.1 Defining spirituality, religion, and faith. Theorists describe religiousness and spirituality as multidimensional constructs (Benson et al., 2003; Hage, 2006; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2014). Religion and spirituality might be interchangeable terms for most but are theoretically different concepts (Benson et al., 2003; Dyson, Cobb, & Forman, 1997; Smith & Richards, 2002; Wink & Dillon, 2002). People might express their spirituality through their religious practices (Dyson et al., 1997; Wink & Dillon, 2002), while others describe themselves as being spiritual, but not religious (Roehlkepartain, King, Wagener, & Benson, 2006). People can identify with being religious and spiritual simultaneously, or identify with neither (Roeser et al., 2008)

Spirituality can be described as the grounded sense of connection with the “sacred” or “transcendent”, which provides meaning in life (Kiesling & Sorell, 2009; MacDonald, 2009, p. 87). *Transcendent* means that which cannot be observed physically but is present and universal nonetheless (Smith & Richards, 2002). Roeser et al. (2008) define spirituality as either a state of consciousness or as a domain of development. The experience of spirituality

enables a person to transcend the limitations of ego-consciousness. These experiences are often described as mystical or transcendental and are frequently associated with strong and powerful emotions (e.g., awe, wonder, ecstasy, joy, delight, and unconditional love). Developmentally, spirituality is a unique domain of development with its own crucial structures, psychological features, and stages. Spirituality is considered the highest stage of human development and symbolises the culmination of social, moral, and ethical development (Roeser et al., 2008).

According to Zinnbauer and Pargament (2014), spirituality concerns existential ambitions that include finding meaning, experiencing wholeness, finding one's inner potential, and connecting with other human beings. Moreover, spirituality might include a deeply personal relationship with a higher being. In essence, spirituality is the experience of wholeness and of being part of the universe (Roeser et al., 2008)

Religion concerns formal structure and includes institutional, organised rules or beliefs and membership of a formal group (MacDonald, 2009; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2014). Religion involves strict commitments to specific beliefs and religious practices that enhance spirituality (Smith & Richards, 2002). Religiosity refers to the degree to which an individual adheres to the practices, rules and beliefs of a certain religion (Smith & Richards, 2002). According to Hage (2006), the search for the sacred underlies both spirituality and religiosity. Individuals' spiritual lives grow from relationships with the self, other humans, a supernatural being, and other biological objects (Nelson-Becker, 2011). Prayer, meditation, and other spiritual/religious practices help people to express their spirituality, thus providing meaning and purpose to people's lives.

The concept of faith is associated frequently with religion and spirituality. Newman (2004) describes faith as the foundation of both spirituality and religion. In addition, he discusses faith as the guiding principle that determines a person's spirituality. People live their lives directed by their faith. According to Knoetze (2014), all humans possess spirituality, as it encompasses the values people live by and ultimately gives people's lives purpose and meaning.

Since these concepts are used interchangeably in the literature, faith development and/or religious development theories are discussed in the following section where relevant to the discussion of spirituality.

2.3.2 Psychological theories pertaining to spirituality. Cartwright (2001) writes that the earlier spiritual development theorists focused on similarities between spiritual development and other aspects of human development. Researchers have diverse ways to conceptualise spiritual development. Some theorists focus on ego development and autonomy, while others focus on moral understanding and cognitive development (Cartwright, 2001). Because of the universal nature of spirituality, various researchers and academics from different disciplines have put forth theories grounded in existing literature (Scott, 2009). Numerous, diverse theories of religious, spiritual, and faith development are mentioned in the literature, especially in theology, philosophy, sociology, and psychology. Irrespective of the underlying philosophical foundation, most theorists conceptualise spiritual identity development as a path, a journey, or a developmental process; they also refer to connectedness, transcendence, meaning, and purpose (Klenke, 2007).

2.3.2.1 Stage theories about spiritual development. Cognitive and moral reasoning is related to spiritual and religious development (Day, 2011). Piaget's stages of cognitive development laid the groundwork for current stage theories of religious development (Reich, 2009). Piaget's (1952) cognitive stages describe normal intellectual development of children by describing the progressive reorganisation of mental processes due to physical maturation and experience obtained from the environment. He developed four stages of cognitive development, which he called sensorimotor, preoperational thought, concrete operational thought, and formal operational thought (Piaget, 1952).

Based on Piaget's (1952) theory of cognitive development, Perry (1970) developed a model explaining cognitive development of university students. He investigated how students moved from a simplistic view of the world to a more complex and subjective understanding. He developed a scheme with four successive stages, namely dualism (knowledge received, not questioned), multiplicity (considering that there might be more than one answer to a problem), relativism (knowledge is contextual), and commitment within relativism (integration of own knowledge with knowledge of others).

Kohlberg (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977) was interested in the form of thought and the reasoning behind moral development. He developed three levels and six stages of moral development and asserted that people moved through these stages sequentially over time. The levels are called the pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional / autonomous / principled levels (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977). Stages 5 and 6 are most relevant to emerging

adults. During these stages, there is an increase in awareness of the subjectivity and abstract nature of personal values and opinions, and emphasis is placed upon establishing social mutuality. During the last and final stage of moral development, individuals define rightness by their conscience and by utilising their own ethical principles (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977).

Various researchers applied Piaget's theory on religious and spiritual development (Elkind & Elkind, 1962; Oser, 1991; Reich, 2009). Elkind (1997, 2014) based his theory on Piaget's theory of cognitive development (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). Elkind (2014) suggests that religious development is a natural result of intellectual/cognitive development and that religious understanding is a result of cognitive sophistication. Elkind (1997) explores four elements of cognition, namely conservation, search for representation, search for relations, and search for comprehension. Elkind (1997) found that children's religious thought showed stage-like changes from concrete and egocentric to abstract and sociocentric thought (Boyatzis, 2005). The structure of children's thought about religion was parallel to their thinking about nonreligious concepts.

Oser and Gmunder's theory of religious judgement (Oser & Gmunder, 1991; Reich, 2009) deals with the relationship between an individual and an ultimate being. The relationship is discovered or revealed through reasoning about life events during times of crises, ascribing such events to something higher or an ultimate being (Reich, 2009). Religious judgement is the way people reconstruct personal experience from the point of view of a personal relationship with the sacred (Oser & Gmunder, 1991). The relationship and experience with an ultimate being occurs in diverse and subjective ways over the life span. Through the relationship with the sacred, people resolve conflicts and contradictions found between faith and reality. From this perspective, cognition plays an important role in religious understanding, but other forms of thoughts (other than cognitive development and moral development) are also involved.

Oser and Gmunder developed five stages of religious judgement to encapsulate overall development (Oser, Fetz, Reich, & Valentin, 2003; Oser & Gmunder, 1991). Oser and Gmunder's (1991) stages are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Stages of Religious Judgement (Oser, 1991; Oser et al., 2003)

Stage	Characteristics
Deus ex Machine	Ultimate being acts and human being reacts
Du ut	Ultimate being can be influenced by prayers and religious practices
Deism	Person assumes self-responsibility apart from the ultimate being. Own decision making is linked to freedom, meaning and hope.
Divine Plan	Indirect, mediated relationship with ultimate being. Ultimate being becomes a requirement for the prospect of freedom and independence.
Universal Solidarity	Ultimate being is present in all human commitments but transcends these simultaneously.

The divine plan stage is relevant to the stage of emerging adulthood, and the existence of the relationship with God provides meaning in emerging adults' lives.

It is theorised that formal operational thought can transcend and reorganise – giving rise to higher levels of complexity and reflectivity (Roeser et al., 2008). Conventional forms of moral, cognitive, social, and ethical development can be transcended beyond ego and worldly ambitions.

2.3.2.2 Narrative perspective on spiritual development. Stories assign meaning to human experiences and are influenced by religious and cultural context (Reimer & Dueck, 2012). According to Randall (2009), spirituality is a narrative process because it involves the process of meaning making. The narrative process involves purpose, truth, meaning, and values and can be described as a spiritual activity (Baldwin, Carty, & Estey, 2015). The narrative perspective is a constructivist perspective concerning humans striving to make meaning and narrative out of life experiences (McNamara Barry, Nelson, Davarya, & Urry, 2010).

According to McAdams (2008), people in modern societies construct stories to provide unity and purpose to their lives. Modern society is complex, ever-changing, and contradictory. This type of reality gives people no guidance on what the purpose of life is or a guidebook on

how to live. McAdams (2008) believes that stories help people to integrate life experiences leading to self-understanding and meaning-making of self, events, and the world.

The process of memory telling is essential to the process of meaning-making and helps individuals to find resolution during challenging events (McLean, 2005). People who can engage in memory- telling and meaning-making are more resilient. They do this by exploring and elaborating on the influence of the experience and constructing a positive meaning out of the events.

Meaning-making is closely related to concepts of spirituality, religion, and faith and contributes positively to people's well-being and coping mechanisms (Hoverd & Sibley, 2013; Mattis, 2002; Park, 2005). Meaning- making is considered to be vital to human experience and has been the focus of recent psychological research (Emmons, 2005; Sorensen, Lien, Landheim, & Danbolt, 2015; Wong, 2013). People use different sources of meaning-making to meet their needs and find answers to existential questions (Sorensen et al., 2015). Frankl's (1985) seminal work on meaning is based on the premise that a person's ultimate meaning in life could be found in the spiritual realm (Wong, 2013). Humans are self-determined and are able to rise above and transcend their environment by using meaningfulness (Frankl, 1985). Frankl (1985) describes three ways in which people can find meaning: by doing something valuable, by taking from the world, and through suffering (Frankl, 1985; Wong, 2013). Other writers have also investigated the role of religion and spirituality in the human search for meaning (Emmons, 2005; Wong, 2013). The search for meaning and purpose might result in personal self-transcendence and ultimately spiritual identity development (Templeton & Eccles, 2006).

Spirituality is framed within layers of narrative and involves transcending personal stories (Baldwin et al., 2015; Randall, 2009). Baldwin et al. (2015) use Christianity as an illustration to explain the role of narrative in our understanding of spirituality. They assert that only through understanding the story of God (e.g. Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection) can people accept the relevance of these stories to their own experience, become Christians, and understand themselves as Christian beings.

2.3.2.3 Developmental system theories related to spiritual development. The system perspective is a world view regarding the nature of reality in which the world is composed of interlinked systems and is understood in terms of connectedness (Kamppinen & Jakonen,

2015). From the developmental system perspective, the role of culture and context is emphasised. Spiritual development occurs and manifests in communities, cultures, and families (King & Roeser, 2009; Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005). The system perspective is a holistic perspective assuming that an individual develops and functions psychologically as an integrated organism and not in isolation (Tinajero & Paramo, 2012).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) emphasises the relationship between individuals and their contexts. Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) developed the ecological systems theory and labelled the different levels that influence development as the: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Darling, 2007). From this perspective, the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their environments is accentuated. Therefore, spiritual development does not occur in isolation but is affected by different role players.

During childhood and adolescence, parents take on the role of socialising agents; teaching religious and spiritual practices to their children (McNamara Barry et al., 2010). However, during emerging adulthood, individuals begin to utilise autonomy in their decision-making processes. A change in cognitive understanding occurs as emerging adults detach from their parents and move into a new social environment. This transition from adolescence to emerging adulthood might lead to religious decline, but spirituality remains an important part of emerging adults' lives (Uecker, Regnerus, & Vaaler, 2007). Arnett (2004) found that religious socialisation in childhood did not in any way influence religiousness or spirituality in emerging adults. Beyond the adolescence years, the importance and strength of family socialisation decreases, while the influence of socialisation sources outside of the family system greatly increases (Arnett & Jensen, 2002). Emerging adults use different cultural sources other than their parents to construct their spiritual beliefs. They are adamant about deciding on their own beliefs independently from their parents or religious denominations (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Levenson, Aldwin, & D'Mello, 2005). Emerging adults experience a strong responsibility to form beliefs and values that are uniquely their own.

According to McNamara Barry et al. (2010), peers, specifically friends and intimate partners, tend to be more influential in the development of spiritual beliefs than any other adults are. In addition, peer religiosity predicts emerging adults' religiosity more than parental religiosity does. Therefore, peers are regarded as important role players and socialising agents with regard to spiritual development during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Desrosiers, Kelley, & Miller, 2011). It was found that openness in conversation regarding spirituality and

religion in the context of one's peer group was a strong facilitator of interpersonal connection, and spiritual development in adolescence and emerging adulthood (Desrosiers et al., 2011).

Culture and community greatly influence the differences in emerging adults' religious and spiritual development. Mattis, Ahluwalia, Cowie, and Kirkland-Harris (2006) note that spirituality and religiousness are cultural phenomena. Culture and community influence the specific socialisation practices, the behaviour of individuals in that culture, and the extent to which religious and spiritual beliefs are developed. Furthermore, culture and community influence the meaning and importance of beliefs (McNamara Barry et al., 2010). Faith communities and culture might influence an emerging adults' spirituality, beliefs, and practices directly through socialising methods (McNamara Barry et al., 2010). Spirituality and religiosity might originate in culture or ethnicity, and political, economic, and other social forces (e.g., media) might influence spiritual development throughout the life span. In the 21st century, media are becoming an important 'socialising agent' to emerging adults, and individuals can choose to which information they are exposed (McNamara Barry et al., 2010).

In conclusion, spiritual development of emerging adults cannot be objectified. It is undeniably an interplay between individual and environment, continuing throughout life.

2.3.2.4 James Fowler's theory of faith development. Fowler (1981) is well known for his work on faith development. Fowler is of the opinion that faith and religion are different and that it is a mistake to view them synonymously (Andrade, 2014). Faith, he believes, is a universal feature of humans searching to find and maintain meaning. Fowler (1981) believes that faith involves the ultimate values and ideals to which a person subscribes in life. It is the human journey towards transcendence (Fowler, 1981; Roeser et al., 2008).

Fowler postulates that meaning is not necessarily discovered in religion but that people have different ways of creating meaning and purpose in their lives (Andrade, 2014). Fowler (1981) attempts to explain the underlying workings of knowing, valuing, and committing to faith (Fowler, 2001). He claims that meaning-making processes are essential in faith development. People are searching for ways to understand their realities, establish values, and commit to these values (Cartwright, 2001).

Fowler developed his life span theory by considering the works of Kohlberg, Erikson, and Piaget (Andrade, 2014; Fowler, 1981). He discusses six structured, sequential stages and includes one pre-stage (Fowler, 1981). These stages demonstrate meaning making during

certain life stages by focusing on ways of knowing and ways of valuing (Fowler, 1981; Hart, Limke, & Budd, 2010). Various developmental components (e.g. cognition, social perception, moral reasoning, and cosmological coherence) influence how these stages unfold. Faith development only moves forward, no regression is possible (Hart et al., 2010). According to Fowler (1981) faith development necessitates time and physical and emotional maturity.

Fowler's (1981) stages, known as infancy and undifferentiated faith, intuitive-projective faith, mythic-literal faith, synthetic-conventional faith, individuating-reflective faith, conjunctive faith, and universalising faith, are represented in Figure 1.

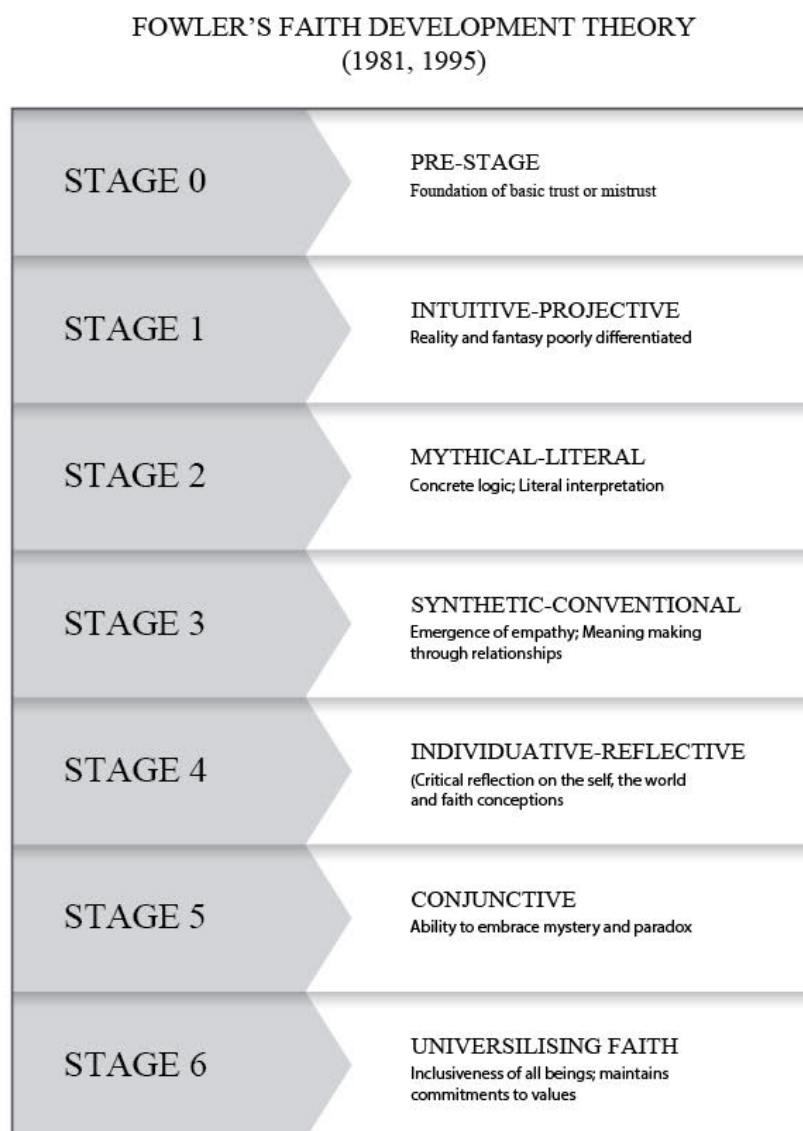


Figure 1. Stages of Faith Development (Fowler, 1981, 1995).

The pre-stage is called *infancy and undifferentiated faith* and occurs during infancy (Andrade, 2014; Fowler, 1981, 2001). During this time, infants rely on their mutual relationship with significant others. Elementary faith helps infants deal with separation anxiety that develops from complete dependency on caregivers (Andrade, 2014; Fowler, 2001). Infants develop a sense of trust and elementary faith lays the groundwork for faith development later in life (Fowler, 2001).

In Erikson's (1968) framework of development, establishing a sense of basic trust is essential during this period (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Recent research has shown the existence of a relationship between attachment to primary caregivers and attachment to God, and between attachment and faith development (Cassibba, Granqvist, Costantini, & Gatto, 2008; Granqvist, Ivarsson, Broberg, & Hagekull, 2007; Hart et al., 2010). Hart et al. (2010) found that attachment anxiety predicts faith development; therefore, individuals must see their attachment figure (e.g., God) with no fear of abandonment, and they must experience themselves as worthy of acceptance and unconditional love.

The first stage, known as *intuitive-projective faith* occurs in early childhood (ages 2-7). The child is not yet reliant on logical thinking but has developed language abilities (Andrade, 2014; Fowler & Dell, 2006). The child can make sense of faith through imagination (e.g., drawings and images) and storytelling. During this stage, God is regarded as mystical and magical (Fowler, 1981). According to Parker (2009), faith is similar to life during this life stage – full of influential images from stories and significant relationships. Cause and effect are not fully understood, and fantasy and reality often are confused. The *intuitive-projective faith* stage gives birth to imagination but also holds the potential for terrifying images and nightmares (Parker, 2009).

During the *mythic-literal faith* stage, children (ages 7-10) are able to make use of rationality and logical thinking. They are able to organise their world, to appreciate diverse perspectives, and to create meaning subjectively (Fowler, 2001). They can narrate stories and understand them concretely and literally (Andrade, 2014). Children's description of God during this stage depend on exposure to images of Him, and religious text generally is interpreted literally (Carlozzi et al., 2010). Right and wrong is of extreme importance during this period (Andrade, 2014). This stage corresponds with Piaget's (1952) concrete operational stage. Because of the very concrete and literal thinking present during this stage, motivation, intent, and situational subjectivity are often ignored (Carlozzi et al., 2010)

The third stage, known as *synthetic-conventional faith*, is established during adolescence (Andrade, 2014; Fowler, 2001). Adolescents experience physical and emotional changes due to puberty (Andrade, 2014) and possess greater cognitive abilities. This enables them to integrate diverse perspectives and self-images into a holistic identity. During this stage, individuals base their beliefs and values on trusted others and rely on them to guide them in moral and religious decision-making (Carlozzi et al., 2010). This stage is typically described as conforming and noncritical (Leonard, Cook, Boyatzis, Kimball, & Flanagan, 2013). Various role players (e.g., parents, peers, and religious institutions) have influenced faith development until this point, but active personal reflection is still largely absent (Andrade, 2014; Leonard et al., 2013).

The fourth stage, known as the *individuative-reflective faith* stage, is established by emerging adulthood (Andrade, 2014). Unlike adolescents, emerging adults engage in critical reflection on values and beliefs. Critical reflection and/or revision regarding identity and world view give rise to “owned” faith (Leonard et al., 2013). Adolescents become conscious that the self is part of a larger social context, become critical about the self and take responsibility for decision making (Fowler, 2001). In research conducted by Smith and Snell (2009), emerging adults showed greater individualisation in their beliefs than adolescents did. Furthermore, they were more sceptic of organised religion and had less affiliation with religious institutions. The reason for greater individualisation might be due to the decrease in parental contact and the increase in opportunities for critical reflection (Leonard et al., 2013). During the stage of emerging adulthood, individuals are exposed to a variety of world views and they might embrace a completely new value system (Andrade, 2014).

The *conjunctive faith* stage occurs during adulthood. Adults in midlife become aware and make sense of the polarities and paradoxes in their lives (Fowler, 2001; Fowler & Dell, 2006). This stage is characterised by reflection, and the search for truth is characterised by incorporating and balancing multiple perspectives (Fowler & Dell, 2006). They begin to appreciate the various interpretations of reality and return to symbols, story metaphors, and myths (Fowler, 2001). People in this stage are open to different cultures and religions. They believe that understanding and conversing with diverse individuals would lead to a deeper understanding and new insights in their own beliefs (Fowler & Dell, 2006). Adults explore different world views in such a way that their personal views can be reinforced, modified, or discarded (Andrade, 2014).

The final stage occurs in mid-life and beyond. This stage of faith development is called *universalising faith*. During this stage, adults experience unity with their mortality, with being, or with God (Fowler, 2001). People in this stage participate as equals in fellowship of a loving holy being (Kwilecki, 2012). They generally live their lives lovingly in the service of others (Fowler, 1991, 2001). During this stage, individuals are concerned about all of creation, regardless of nationality, gender, age, race, political affiliation, or religious beliefs. Individuals in the universalising faith stage believe that everyone is deserving of unconditional love (Fowler & Dell, 2006). People rarely reach this stage of faith development, and most people remain in Stage 5 of faith development throughout their lives (Piper, 2002). Examples of people who have reached this stage of faith development are Lincoln, Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Martin Luther King (Andrade, 2014; Fowler, 1981; Piper, 2002).

In conclusion, Fowler (2001) recognises the multi-faceted nature of faith development and acknowledges moral, affective, cognitive and relational aspects. Faith is not concerned with specific beliefs, but rather with a way of knowing and meaning-making (Parker, 2009). Therefore, faith is universal and attainable by all human beings (Andrade, 2014).

2.4 Spiritual Identity Development

In the previous sections, identity development, spirituality, and spiritual development were discussed. As mentioned before, various theorists have investigated spirituality and spiritual development; however, less focus has been on the concept of spiritual identity (Love, Bock, Jannarone, & Richardson, 2005). In this section, the intention is to narrow the focus by focusing on a specific facet of identity development that is relevant to this study, namely spiritual identity. The emphasis shifts to theories concerning spiritual identity development.

2.4.1 Defining spiritual identity. According to MacDonald (2009), spirituality, identity, and the sense of self have been closely linked in literature. Various writers have written about the relationship between spirituality and identity. These writers date back to James (1890), Erikson (1958) and Jung (1960). Spirituality is a distinctive domain of identity development and addresses issues of meaning, values, and purpose in life (Roeser et al., 2008).

Spiritual identity at its core gives context to people's lives. It provides a way to integrate all facets of identity, unify the various aspects of our lives, and strive towards an overall identity (Pecchenino, 2009). Spiritual identity is "one's sense of self, definition, and experience as a spiritual person" (Love et al., 2005, p. 196). It refers to people's belief that they are eternal

beings who are connected to God (Kiesling & Sorell, 2009; Smith & Richards, 2002). Templeton and Eccles (2006) define spiritual identity as a chosen, individualised identity that reflects the role of spirituality in a person's life. Therefore, the content of spiritual identity might be subjective. Spiritual identity is rooted in behaviour and values regarding the transcendent; it is the integrated core that people use to make meaning of their lives (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). Ultimate existential questions (e.g., about life and death), and identity are central to spiritual identity.

Psychodynamic theorists frequently consider spiritual identity as part of a person's ego identity, and the concept is typically defined in egoistic terms (Kiesling & Sorell, 2009; MacDonald, 2009). In the psychodynamic school, spiritual identity is defined as to how individuals integrate spirituality and their relationship with the sacred with their egoistic or personal sense of self (MacDonald, 2009). Spiritual identity is the existential search of the self for purpose and meaning through a subjective/individualised understanding of the holy (Kiesling, Sorell, Montgomery, & Colwell, 2006; Wink & Dillon, 2002). Through spiritual identity, individuals attempt to answer existential questions through their relationship with God. A strong sense of spiritual identity results in behaviour that is congruent with a person's core values (Kiesling et al., 2006).

Spiritual identity, like other forms of identity, is multifaceted and includes emotional, behavioural, and cognitive elements (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). Spiritual identity describes the belief and feeling that one is part of something greater than the self while simultaneously processing the desire for commitment, transcendence and a connection with the sacred (Templeton & Eccles, 2006).

Roeser et al. (2008) explored the content of spiritual identity by defining five characteristics distinctive to spiritual identity namely (a) self-identification as a spiritual person, (b) a spiritual ideal and main life purpose, (c) a spiritual world view, (d) a spiritual life story, and (e) engagement in spiritual practices.

Roeser et al. (2008) suggest self-identification as a spiritual person is essentially intentional and reflective. Gaining life experience and reflection allow individuals to turn inwards. By internalising and transforming beliefs, individuals surpass personal concerns and focus on 'ultimate' concerns. These concerns include sources from beyond one's own traditions and beliefs. Behaviours congruent with the individual's new- found beliefs develop and

organise an individual's spiritual identity and spiritual life stories. People tell spiritual life stories.

The content of spiritual identity development is concerned with the ultimate, the ideal, and the sacred (Roeser et al., 2008). Spiritual ideals are associated with either theistic or contemplative spirituality (Roeser et al., 2008). People are generally either God-centred or consciousness-centred. People either have the spiritual ideal of an ultimate being (e.g., God or Allah) or the spiritual ideal of an ultimate state of being (e.g., enlightenment). Spiritual ideals facilitate the development of fundamental life purpose and life values such as devotion, love, service, wisdom, and compassion. Fundamental life purpose and values drive behaviour that influences development of spiritual identity. These behaviours include but are not limited to spiritual practices (e.g., devotional / contemplative practices, service to others, worship, and meditation). These practices enrich people's spiritual lives, lead to exploration, and become an essential component of a person's spiritual identity.

A spiritual world view is another essential characteristic of spiritual identity. The spiritual world view includes beliefs about the sacred, human nature, creation, meaning, salvation, purpose, truth, life, death, and other existential questions (Roeser et al., 2008). World view shapes identity and gives direction to people's sense of purpose.

Roeser et al. (2008) provide great insight into the content that contributes to spiritual identity development but does not focus on how spiritual identity develops over the life span. In the next section, the focus is on how spiritual identity develops by referring to different psychological theories.

In summary, there are various ways of defining spiritual identity. Because of the differences in conceptualising identity and spirituality, theorists also have different ways of describing how spiritual identity develops.

2.4.2 Psychological theories related to development of spiritual identity. Spiritual identity develops continuously throughout life. There is no specific critical period during which spiritual identity forms, and it does not develop in a predictable, linear pattern (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). However, various theorists have attempted to make sense of spiritual identity development using various theoretical frameworks (Klenke, 2007; Poll & Smith, 2003). Developmentally, spiritual identity development is a lifelong process but is more prominent during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Templeton & Eccles, 2006).

In the following section, status and stage theories, narrative theories, and system theories are discussed. The section concludes with Poll and Smith's (2003) integrative theory.

2.4.2.1 Status and stage theories. New cognitive resources available to adolescents and emerging adults result in increased empathy, better social skills, and self-reflection (Piaget, 1952; Templeton & Eccles, 2006). Cognitive and maturational changes allow emerging adults to reflect deeply about the world around them and to introspect more about their inner lives. According to Templeton and Eccles (2006, p. 258), cognitive maturational changes bring new meanings to the question "who am I?" and may trigger questions regarding current religious / spiritual identity. Emerging adults utilise and challenge spiritual schemas (learnt previously) to make meaning of the existential world and to understand their relationship with God (Poll & Smith, 2003).

In literature, Erikson's (1968) life span psychosocial theory and Marcia's (1966) model of identity status are the two most dominant theories related to identity and spirituality (MacDonald, 2011). According to Erikson (1968) adolescence is a time of increased vulnerability and heightened potential for identity exploration and identity re-negotiation. During this period, individuals are more susceptible to inner conflict regarding spiritual identity or lack of spiritual identity (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). According to Marcia (1966), individuals who are in the moratorium status demonstrate philosophical thinking. Maturing cognitively results in philosophical and existential questioning, which leads to spiritual identity development. Kiesling et al. (2006) adapted Marcia's model and studied role salience and role flexibility. The former referred to the importance of spirituality to one's sense of identity and the latter to the extent that individuals have considered changing their sense of identity (MacDonald, 2011). The participants were categorised as spiritually foreclosed, spiritually achieved, or spiritually in moratorium (Kiesling et al., 2006). Participants in different identity statuses differed significantly with regard to spiritual salience and role flexibility.

Spiritual identity development is triggered by the internal cognitive need for permanence in life (Elkind, 1997). Children want to believe that they are eternal and have eternal identities; they also have the need to understand the sacred (Elkind, 1997; Poll & Smith, 2003). Striving for eternal identity initiates spiritual identity development.

In short, maturing psychologically and cognitively increases the ability to become introspective about one's inner life, and also brings new meaning to questions regarding one's identity and spirituality (Templeton & Eccles, 2006).

2.4.2.2 Narrative theories. According to Klenke (2007), people develop a sense of spiritual self by recognising the divine in themselves in relation to the sacred. Self-stories include self-symbols, self-schemas, and self-other scripts (McAdams, 1993, 2008). People achieve a healthy identity once they can integrate various self-stories into a holistic whole. Like other forms of identity, spiritual identity also includes spiritual self-stories, comprising of symbols, schemas and scripts (McAdams, 1993). Through spiritual self-stories individuals develop narrative identity that portray the 'whys' in their lives (Sparrowe, 2005)

Development is driven generally by a period of crisis. When people feel uncomfortable with their life story, they change the story to create a meaningful and coherent narrative that unifies life experiences (Poll & Smith, 2003). Similar to the aforementioned concept, the spiritual life story is also adapted and changed to produce a meaningful spiritual identity that unifies spiritual experiences (McAdams, 1993). An individual's storied spiritual identity might develop through his or her unconscious and conscious interactions with God and by linking his or her life story to the narratives of a religious community (Poll & Smith, 2003).

According to Klenke (2007), the spiritual identity system is built on three pillars, namely self-disclosure, self-transcendence, and self-sacrifice. People might gain self-acceptance through the process of self-disclosure by revealing the truth of their inner feelings to self or to others. In turn, interpersonal acceptance leads to an increase in self-esteem and forms an important pillar of spiritual identity (Klenke, 2007). Self-transcendence involves realising the limitations of mortality, transcending self-stories, and developing a holistic and interconnected vision of life. Lastly, self-sacrifice occurs when an individual abandons or postpones personal rewards, power, or privileges and puts others and their spirituality above these needs. Different systems of identity are unified by the spiritual identity system and influence people's moral compass, motivation, and emotion, and motivate people to nurture the human spirit (Klenke, 2007).

2.4.2.3 Developmental system theories. From the system perspective, one's interpersonal context influences all facets of identity development, including spiritual identity development (King & Roeser, 2009). People attempt to differentiate from their families and

gain autonomy outside their microsystems (Bowen, 1978; Brown, 1999; Poll & Smith, 2003). Spiritual identity progression is prompted by stressors that challenge relationships in the system (Poll & Smith, 2003). When there is a lack of conflict in the system, fusion or lack of differentiation occurs. The physical and emotional maturational changes that occur during adolescence and emerging adulthood trigger conflict between the individual and his or her social context, thereby encouraging spiritual identity development.

Spiritual identity is achieved by systematically detaching from fused or enmeshed family relationships. By detaching from family of origin, individuals can develop healthy and objective spiritual identities outside of their family relationships. Healthy spiritual development occurs once individuals differentiate from their families and turn to and connect to the sacred / transcendental / god. Genuine religious and spiritual experiences result in spiritual health, while social and inauthentic religious practices hinder spiritual growth (Poll & Smith, 2003). It is important that the individual maintains a sense of objective identity in the relationship with God and creates an intimate “person-to-God” relationship (Poll & Smith, 2003, p. 132).

2.4.3 Poll and Smith’s theory. Poll and Smith (2003) propose a tentative model of spiritual identity development. They use different psychological schools (psychodynamic, cognitive, system, and narrative theories) in constructing their integrative model. They concluded that there is generally a developmental sequence in spiritual identity development. Their model is based on the premise that people develop a spiritual self by interaction with God, and by the recognition of the godly in self and others (Poll & Smith, 2003). They found the content of spiritual identity to be highly idiosyncratic – it depended largely on religious orientation, personality traits, and previous spiritual experiences.

By integrating the work from psychodynamic, cognitive, system, and narrative theories, these researchers propose the stages of spiritual identity development. Their stages consist of pre-awareness, awakening, recognition, and integration. Poll and Smith’s (2003) stages of spiritual identity development are depicted in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2. Stages of Spiritual Identity Development (Poll & Smith, 2003).

The stage of pre-awareness is regarded as a time when individuals do not consciously consider themselves as spiritual/eternal beings (MacDonald, 2011; Poll & Smith, 2003). The reason for this is that individuals have not had spiritual experiences, or the importance of earlier spiritual experiences has been forgotten (Poll & Smith, 2003).

The stage of awakening is characterised by an increased awareness of the self in relationship with God (Poll & Smith, 2003). Usually, spiritual learning or spiritual conflict is prompted through a series of awareness-raising events, e.g. crisis, conflict, and/or learning (MacDonald, 2011; Poll & Smith, 2003). However, sometimes a single key crisis arises that increases awareness significantly. People in this stage begin to understand events spiritually. However, this awareness and understanding might be fragmented, inconsistent, or specifically related to a crisis situation (MacDonald, 2011; Poll & Smith, 2003).

During the recognition of spiritual experiences stage, people experience an increase in spiritual consciousness and understanding of spiritual experiences in different settings and interactions (Poll & Smith, 2003). Individuals begin to establish a coherent spiritual identity through spiritual experiences and reflection of experiences in the past. During this stage, people have developed basic trust in the sacred or transcendent, and emotional and cognitive spiritual themes emerge (MacDonald, 2011; Smith & Richards, 2002; Wink, Adler, & Dillon, 2012). However, the salience of the emerging spiritual sense is not realised or expressed completely.

The final stage in this model is referred to as the integration stage. During this stage, spiritual experiences merge with the self-concept (MacDonald, 2011; Poll & Smith, 2003; Smith & Richards, 2002). Spiritual experiences become internalised, and spiritual relationships become more salient. People recognise themselves spiritually and behave and interact with the world in ways consistent with their spiritual self (Poll & Smith, 2003; Smith & Richards, 2002). During this stage, individuals attempt to act in a way that is congruent with their deep sense of spirituality (Wink, et al., 2012). They acknowledge that people differ in how they describe and experience their spirituality. This variation is largely dependent on religious orientation, personality characteristics, and previous spiritual experiences of the person (Poll & Smith, 2003). Furthermore, the developmental sequence of spiritual identity development is not linear (Smith & Richards, 2002). For example, a non-spiritual emerging adult might feel supported by a higher power during the months of exams (awakening), begin praying, meditating, or

attending church (recognition), but in time loses all interest as new life concerns arise or spiritual growth opportunities are presented (pre-awareness).

Although Poll and Smith (2003) provide an integrated theory on the topic of spiritual identity development; there seems to be a universal gap in the research regarding spiritual identity development in adulthood (Kiesling & Sorell, 2006; Poll & Smith, 2003).

2.5 The Development of Spiritual Identity in Postgraduate Psychology Students in South Africa

In this section, spiritual identity development is discussed in relation to three contexts that are of importance in this study, namely the university environment, the South African setting, and the psychology profession.

2.5.1 Spiritual identity development in the university context. The current job markets require higher- education qualifications (Mitchell & Syed, 2015). Usually, students enter university to improve their opportunities for employability (Arnett, 2016). The university environment exposes emerging adults to a variety of courses, friendships, role models, and extracurricular activities (Arnett, 2016; Mitchell & Syed, 2015). New social connections with lecturers and friends lead to inspiration and new ideas (Arnett 2016). Therefore, university proves to be the ideal environment for identify exploration regarding world views, career and / or relationship possibilities (Arnett, 2016; Mitchell & Syed, 2015). According to Blimling (2013), university provides a socially complex, diverse, and intellectually stimulating environment that facilitates psychosocial growth. Furthermore, the academic challenges presented at university provide excellent opportunities for cognitive growth. As university students are exposed to a new and dynamic learning environment, they are challenged frequently with complex and new ideas.

Arnett's pillars (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2014) are relevant to the student population. According to Schwartz (2016, p. 310), students spend most of their time in isolation from the "real world". In this context, emerging adults are exposed to diversity (e.g., relationships and career paths) without the responsibility to make permanent decisions. University students have multiple opportunities to explore identity and to dream optimistically about the future (Schwartz, 2016). When compared to employed emerging adults, students spend much time thinking about the self and investigating and exploring various facets of their identities (Schwartz, 2016).

Perry (1970) proposes a theory of cognitive and ethical development. He believes maturity brings about changes in students' thinking and belief systems. Students evolve in the ways they see the world, knowledge, education, values, and themselves (Perry, 1970). Perry developed steps, explaining how students move from a simplistic view of the world to a more complex, and subjective understanding. He developed a scheme with four successive stages, namely dualism (knowledge received, not questioned), multiplicity (considering that there might be more than one answer to a problem), relativism (knowledge is contextual), and commitment within relativism (integration of own knowledge with knowledge of others). Peers, professors, class discussion, and academic challenges all contribute to the change from dualism to relativism. Relativism enables students to think abstractly about the world and consider philosophical and existential questions.

Peer group, diversity, and other aspects of the university environment can contribute to the psychosocial growth of students. Chickering and Reisser (1993) developed his theory based on Erikson's stage of identity vs. identity confusion. Chickering and Reisser (1993) explain seven vectors or tasks that contribute to the development of identity as a student. These vectors are concerned with feeling, thoughts, beliefs, and relationships with others, and the focus is on resolving specific developmental tasks in each vector (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Torres et al., 2009). The vectors vary in stages – although they overlap, they are not mutually exclusive. The vectors are developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). From Chickering, Perry, and Erikson's perspective, identity can be considered an outcome of college student development (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012).

Higher education stimulates self-conscious reflection on the meaning of life (Parks, 1986; Evans et al., 2010). Parks (1986, 2000) explored the effect that higher education had on the faith development of students. She based her theory on the work of Fowler, Erikson, Piaget, and Perry in conceptualising faith development of students. She believes that Fowler excluded this very important stage from his model of faith development (Parks, 2000; Evans et al., 2010).

During the early stages of adulthood, individuals assume self-responsibility for their faith development. They are preoccupied with existential questions regarding purpose, career, and belonging. They desire to create a better world but worry about their abilities to do so. Parks (1986, 2000) states that cognition, dependence, and community contribute to faith development

throughout adulthood. She created a model of faith development that consists of four increasingly complex stages in an attempt to provide a comprehensive model of faith development (Parks 1986; Evans et al., 2010).

Parks (2000) highlights the importance of emotions in the development of faith during young adulthood. During the student years, there is a change with regard to students' dependency on others. In the Westernised world, emphasis is placed on autonomy at the expense of connections and relationships. Inner dependence is attained once the individual can balance personal views with the views of others.

Emerging adulthood is a vulnerable stage during which students need support and guidance in reinforcing their identities (Parks, 2000; Evans et al., 2010). The higher education community provides students with the opportunity to benefit greatly from mentoring relationships. Mentoring relationships provide opportunities for recognition, support, and inspiration. A mentoring community can be explained as a network of belonging where students can ask existential questions regarding purpose, meaning, and faith. These communities provide opportunities to interact with diverse people, which in turn lead to awareness and willingness to consider diverse perspectives (Parks, 2000; Evans et al., 2010). As students mature, they begin to seek out communities where individuals share their beliefs and engage in similar meaning-making processes. Parks' model is not fixed but rather a dynamic model providing insight into the faith development of students in higher education (Evans et al., 2010).

Pursuing postgraduate studies is a popular choice among students after completing an undergraduate degree (Arnett, 2000). Psychology students in South Africa are required to obtain postgraduate qualifications if they wish to enter the psychology profession.

Pursuing postgraduate studies allows students time to re-evaluate their chosen occupation and change direction if they wish to. Emerging adulthood and all that is associated with emerging adulthood is extended, allowing the individual to explore their identities further.

Ongoing experience and changing contextual circumstances can lead to revising one's identity at any point in life (Kiesling et al., 2006). Furthermore, postgraduate psychology students experience additional challenges with regard to psychosocial and cognitive development due to the nature of their courses. According to Kottler and Swartz (2004), these

students have to maintain a balance between their personal development and their professional development.

In conclusion, university provides various opportunities for psychosocial, cognitive, and faith development. Identity develops due to the interaction of individual characteristics, experiences, and opportunities (Erikson, 1950; Kiesling et al., 2006). University is an experience and an unforgettable opportunity that can and will influence the different identity domains of emerging adults.

2.5.2 Spirituality and religion in South Africa. The history of spirituality and religion in South Africa is complicated and controversial (Brittian et al., 2013; Knoetze, 2014). Since the advent of the new democracy, South Africans are searching for deeper life meaning. Masango (2006) asserts that globalisation and modernism present South Africans with unique challenges that pressure them to reorganise their faith and lifestyle. South African emerging adults are living in a transitional political, economic, and social period. This requires them to make sense of the past, integrate experiences of the present, and create a new future for South Africa. These macro-economic factors might add pressure with regard to meaning-making among the South African youth.

The South African youth live in a time of extreme social and economic changes (Brittian et al., 2013). South Africans are currently living in a “rainbow nation” context (Apostolides, 2016, p. 1). Their context involves living in a multicultural and multi-faith society. According to Apostolides (2016), the South African youth (children, adolescents, and young adults) are exposed to a multicultural society every day. As children and adolescents form identities, they integrate social experiences and discourses to which they are exposed in their everyday environment. The Constitution of 1996 created a social context that is multicultural and multireligious with the intention to create acceptance of different cultures and religions in communities. However, spiritual needs are not addressed socially (e.g., in schools or higher education settings); therefore, many South African adults are dealing with fractured identities and spiritualities (Apostolides, 2016).

Emerging adults in South Africa live in a society where they need to explore their identity among individuals who are vastly different from themselves. Most South Africans attend schools and universities that are diverse with regard to religion, ethnicity, social class, culture, spirituality, etc. Parents of South African students come from a segregated political system;

therefore, students cannot ask advice from their parents on how to exist in a multicultural university setting.

Students in the current South Africa might have infinitely different experiences of emerging adulthood. They might explore relationships and experiences that their parents never did. These experiences might influence further identity exploration and might result in students moving away from the beliefs of their families of origin. Spiritual issues should be addressed in social settings and should be discussed against the background of a new South Africa.

According to Brittian et al. (2013), there seems to be an increase in research regarding religion and spirituality and the correlation with positive youth development. In multicultural societies, like South Africa, religious participation gives the youth the opportunity to become reflective about their beliefs, values, world views, and cultures. Furthermore, religious participation encourages identity development (Brittian et al., 2013).

According to the Bill of Rights (1996), all South Africans have the freedom of religion and beliefs. In the light of this Act, South Africa provides various opportunities for the youth to become affiliated with a variety of religious institutions. This provides South African youth with the opportunity to explore different faiths and religions and commit to what they feel comfortable with.

Although the majority of South Africans identify themselves as Christians, it is generally accepted that native Africans are strongly influenced by the spiritual realm (Brittian, 2013; Knoetze, 2014). South Africans have always acknowledged the essential role that spirituality plays in all areas of life (Edward & Thwala, 2010). Traditional African beliefs describe the concept of harmony between the natural and supernatural world (Brittian et al., 2013). Ancestors are respected and there are beliefs involving witchcraft, traditional medicine, and protective forces. The introduction of Christianity and rise of the native African churches amplified the holistic function of spirituality in South Africa (Edward & Thwala, 2010). Black emerging adults might have additional challenges with regard to their spiritual development if they have a strong traditionally African heritage, as the aforementioned university life will present these students with a new and diverse environment. Sometimes this environment might also introduce Westernised concepts. Integrating these new experiences into their sense of self might be challenging.

Brittian et al. (2013) conducted research concerning religious experiences of black South African youths. They found that religion and spirituality were associated with an increase in emotional and social support. The writers wrongly assumed that South African youth would belong to one, singular faith, religion, or spirituality. Conversely, they found that youth and religious societies were combining beliefs across denominations (Brittian et al., 2013). Smith and Snell (2009) found that South Africans, currently in the stage of emerging adulthood, combined and integrated beliefs from different sources into their world views. The prospect that South African youth are integrating different beliefs into their world view will give rise to a unique emerging adult population. These individuals are able to integrate the past and the future in their identities, which could possibly change the future of South Africa.

South Africans live in a unique cultural society, which may greatly influence their spiritual development in relation to other societies. Emerging adults in South Africa might face additional changes with regard to spiritual identity development because of their multi-cultural daily experiences. The social experiences of South Africans might be especially salient during the adolescent and emerging adulthood years, as these years are important for identity development. It might be assumed that emerging adults in South Africa have a very different concept of identity exploration than generations before them had.

2.5.3 Spirituality and its importance in psychology. Becoming a psychologist in South Africa is a long process (Manganyi, 2013). In accordance with the rules of the Health Professions Council of South Africa, students have to complete an undergraduate, honours, and master's degree in psychology before they can register for an internship and community service. Thereafter, students are expected to complete the national examination of the HPCSA in the relevant registration category. According to Ahmed and Pillay (2004), South African psychologists experience additional challenges in becoming psychologists, as they are required to work in a diverse and disadvantaged context. In the next section, the importance of spirituality in the psychology profession is discussed.

There is a place for spirituality in the psychology profession, but this area of research is largely neglected (Manganyi, 2013; Miller, Korinek, & Ivey, 2006; Walker, Gorsuch, & Tan, 2004). Integrating spirituality and religion as a competency area into clinical work has generated interest among researchers (Parker, 2011). Therapists have their own values and spiritual and religious views. These subjective views might influence the therapist unknowingly. According to Walker et al. (2004), therapists frequently make use of their own

value systems and world views in psychotherapy. Therefore, it is essential for counsellors to understand their own beliefs and values when working with diverse clients in psychotherapy (Andrade, 2014). Formal training aimed at enhancing the therapist's knowledge regarding spirituality and religion would decrease the risk of imposing own values and beliefs on clients unknowingly and unconsciously (Walker et al., 2005). Psychologists in training would benefit greatly from discussions about spirituality on interpersonal and intrapersonal levels.

According to Miller et al. (2007), therapists find it challenging to address spirituality in the therapeutic relationship, because this topic is personal and subjective. People experience spirituality in various ways. It is also subtly expected from psychologists to maintain respect and openness to individual differences in the therapeutic setting (Miller et al., 2007). For some therapists, this leads to avoiding the topic completely, fearing that they might offend or hurt their clients. Therefore, spiritual problems of clients have been neglected in the psychology profession (Richards, 2005).

Writers like Richards (2005) are of the opinion that therapy could be more successful and helpful to clients if spiritual problems are also addressed in therapy (Richards, 2005). Parker (2011) describes the use of clients' faith development theory in the therapeutic process. He and others (Andrade, 2014) posit that understanding clients' faith development is just as important as their beliefs. Parker (2011) describes the use of Fowler's faith development in counselling, saying that counsellors could utilise Fowler's theory to determine where clients are with regard to faith development. This knowledge will aid counsellors to utilise strengths associated with each stage. Most frequently, people consult counsellors when they experience some sort of conflict in their lives. Frequently, the experienced conflict might be the result of a life crisis. Often, it might also result from disequilibrium experienced during typical faith stage transitions (Parker, 2011). The experienced conflict or problem might result in changes in people's belief systems, which should also be addressed in counselling. Furthermore, counsellors can also draw upon this theory when people experience a life crisis and a faith stage transition simultaneously (Parker, 2011).

The reason for the lack of spiritual competency in the psychology profession might be due to the lack of coursework related to spirituality and religion in the training of psychologists. Overall, it seems that there is little to no formal coursework on spirituality and religion (Miller et al., 2006; Walker et al., 2004). Consequently, most psychologists have not been trained sufficiently to deal efficiently with spiritual issues, although spirituality is an essential part of

people's lives (Miller et al., 2007; Richards, 2005). In a study Schulte, Skinner, and Claiborn (2002) it was found that psychology students acknowledged spirituality as an important element of diversity. However, the results indicated that knowledge regarding spirituality was not regarded as significant to the expertise of supervisors or other faculty members. In another research study by Schafer, Handal, Brawer, and Ubringer (2011), a follow-up study on a previous study of Brawer, Handal, Fabricatore, Roberts, and Wajda-Johnston (2002), they investigated education and training in spirituality and religion. They found that there was an increase in coverage of topics related to spirituality and religion in areas such as coursework and supervision, and that most programmes incorporated spirituality and religion to some extent but not completely. The reason for the exclusion of spirituality and religion in psychology might be that psychology is a science and spirituality relegated to the 'supernatural'.

Klerk-Luttig (2008) claims that spirituality helps individuals with existential meaning-making processes regarding their own lives, as well as in the lives of others. Furthermore, spirituality enables people to act with integrity. In a number of ways, knowledge regarding personal spirituality and the spirituality of others helps counsellors make sense of their client's experiences.

2.6 Chapter Summary

The aim of this chapter was to review the literature related to spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. Spiritual identity development is a lifelong and personal journey for all people. It is essential to people's well-being and meaning-making processes. Spiritual identity is a multifaceted construct that can be investigated through a variety of psychological lenses. The aim of this study was not to focus on one psychological lens but rather to integrate the various lenses to create a holistic picture of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. In the following chapter, the methodology of this study is discussed before addressing the results of the study.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the methodology of this study. In this chapter, the processes involved in the study are explained, as well as the reasons for choosing the processes. The research design and approach, data- collection procedures and data- analysis procedures are described. Furthermore, the chapter concludes with a discussion on trustworthiness and relevant ethical considerations.

3.1 Research Rationale, Aim and Questions

In the previous chapters, it was argued that emerging adults are confronted with a variety of questions regarding their identity. Often, these questions involve spiritual aspects of the self. Spiritual identity as a specific domain of identity development during adolescence has been investigated (Good & Willoughby, 2008; King, 2003; Benson, King, Wagener, & Roehlkepartain 2005). However, theorists tend to neglect the importance of spiritual identity exploration during the emerging adulthood years (Kiesling & Sorell, 2009; Poll & Smith, 2003). Higher education provides a unique context for cognitive, psychosocial, and spiritual development (Arnett, 2000; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Parks, 2000; Perry, 1970). Personal growth, reflection, establishing personal values, and meaning-making are essential in the process of becoming a psychologist (Handelsman et al., 2005; Hughes & Youngson, 2009). Spiritual identity development is concerned with all these aspects. Exploring postgraduate psychology students' processes of spiritual identity development would provide insight into how spiritual identity influences the journey of becoming a professional and ethical psychologist.

Considering the gap in research regarding spiritual identity development in emerging adults, and specifically in postgraduate psychology students, the aim of this study was to explore and describe postgraduate psychology students' experiences of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood.

An understanding of how a South African sample of postgraduate psychology students explore and understand spiritual identity during emerging adulthood may contribute to a context-specific understanding of spiritual identity development during this developmental stage.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

In this research study, a qualitative research design using an interpretive phenomenological approach was followed. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), qualitative research entails exploration, discovery, and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon from the perspective of research participants. The qualitative researcher makes use of naturalistic data and is concerned with meaning and participants' experiences and their understanding of the world (Nassaji, 2015; Willig, 2013). Qualitative research is relevant to the aim of this study, as the focus is on the subjective experiences and meaning-making processes of postgraduate psychology students. More specifically, the study is concerned with how participants make sense of their experiences related to spiritual identity development. According to Nykiel (2007), one of the major advantages of qualitative research is the direct interaction with research participants, which produces detailed data and allows in-depth exploration of issues. Furthermore, qualitative research allows the exploration of sensitive topics and considers participants' social context (Griffin, 2004). Some of the major disadvantages of qualitative research are the inability to establish reliability of research findings, the time-consuming nature of conducting qualitative research, and the often questionable accuracy of the researcher's interpretation (Choy, 2014; Nykiel, 2007).

One of the paradigms that are supported in qualitative research is the interpretive paradigm. The phenomenological approach is most prominent in this paradigm and underlies many qualitative methods (Davidsen, 2013; Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). Interpretive phenomenology is a respected philosophical approach and research method (Wojnar & Swanson, 2007). When using the phenomenology approach, one focuses on descriptions of the essence of peoples' "lived experiences" without attempting to explain these experiences (Creswell, 2013, p. 77). This philosophy encompasses approaches ranging from pure description to interpretation (Davidsen, 2013). Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research approach (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), where the goal is to conduct an in depth and detailed exploration of how participants make sense of their personal and social experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2003). The aim is to investigate the "life-world" of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). In IPA, researchers assume that their research participants are self-interpretive (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The purpose of an IPA study is to focus on how people perceive events and experiences, instead of describing phenomena from a predetermined scientific or

conceptual framework (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA researchers attempt to understand the world from the perspective of their participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researchers strive to put themselves in the shoes of their participants, but acknowledge that this is not entirely possible. The research exercise is explained as a dynamic procedure and acknowledges the role of the researcher throughout the research process (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Hermeneutic phenomenology underlined this phenomenological study. The basic principle of hermeneutic phenomenology is that an individual's most fundamental experience of the world is filled with meaning (Van Manen, 2014). Hermeneutic phenomenology is the study of meaning of subjective experience (Kafle, 2013; Willig, 2013). The emphasis is on uncovering meaning and enhancing understanding by elucidating seemingly unimportant, "taken for granted" aspects of experience (Lavery, 2003). Some form of interpretation always forms part of description (Kafle, 2013; Lavery, 2003). From this perspective a phenomenon is understood within context (Lavery, 2003; Sloan & Bowe, 2014). From this approach, interpretation is essential for understanding; it also acknowledges a person's culture and life history in their experiences (Lavery, 2003). Moreover, preliminary assumptions that researchers bring are considered as essential in hermeneutic phenomenology (Willig, 2013). Therefore, reflectivity, being critical about one's biases and predispositions (Christensen et al., 2014) becomes paramount in hermeneutic phenomenology. Thus, the data generated by interpretative phenomenology are a combination of the raw data and the researcher's interpretation thereof (Willig, 2013).

The design of this study was explorative and descriptive in nature. Explorative research is employed when the researcher's aim is to investigate relatively unfamiliar areas of research (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006). Explorative researchers use an open and flexible research approach and intend to explore the research question, and to look for new insights to broaden understanding of phenomena (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). This type of research is not intended to give conclusive information about a problem (Saunders et al., 2012). It is essential for the researcher to be willing to change the initial direction of the research because of new insights developed or findings made during the research process. This research study is also descriptive in the sense that it aims to describe each phenomenon and its characteristics as it exists naturally (Terre Blanche et al., 2006; Nassaji, 2015). Explorative and descriptive research is relevant to this study, as research regarding spiritual identity development in emerging adulthood is a relatively unfamiliar area

of research. The aim of this study was not to explain phenomena but to describe, explore and enrich the existing information base to provide new insights regarding spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood.

3.3 Research Participants and Sampling Procedures

The population of interest in this study was postgraduate psychology students at the University of the Free State in South Africa. At the time of recruitment, these students were in the emerging adulthood developmental stage. In this section, the criteria and reasons for selecting this specific population are explained, followed by a discussion of the sampling procedures involved in the study.

The emerging adulthood developmental stage (age 18-25), proposed by Arnett (2000) is a period characterised by exploration of all spheres of identity (Arnett, 2000). During this stage, emerging adults are self-focused, relatively independent and tend to explore various life directions and world views (Arnett, 2000). According to Arnett and Jensen (2002), emerging adults give significant thought to their religious beliefs but, when compared to other age groups, have relatively low levels of religious participation (Padilla-Walker, Barry, Carroll, Madsen, & Nelson, 2008). In contrast, emerging adults are concerned with other dimensions of religiosity, namely their faith, their spirituality, and their beliefs about religion (Padilla-Walker et al., 2008).

Considering the abstract nature of the topic, it was appropriate to select participants who were diverse, introspective, and critical in their thinking. Owing to the nature of their training (and future profession), postgraduate psychology students are encouraged to question their own values and norms and to engage in continuous reflection regarding their belief systems (Allan, 2011). These students are also exposed to a learning environment where they are frequently confronted with different world views, beliefs, and faiths. They are preparing for a career where it is paramount to understand the various aspects of their identity. Furthermore, South African youth are currently experiencing major social and economic changes and therefore might experience additional challenges regarding spiritual development (Brittian et al., 2013).

In IPA research, the main goal is to acknowledge each participant's experience fully (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Therefore, the IPA researcher prefers to use a small number of participants. According to Turpin et al. (cited in Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), six to eight participants are sufficient when conducting an IPA study, as this allows the researcher to

examine similarities and differences between accounts without the data becoming overwhelming. IPA researchers' intent is to analyse the similarities and differences between a homogeneous group of individuals. Therefore, participants are chosen purposively, allowing the researcher to choose individuals for whom the research question has relevance (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Participants were recruited by employing non-probability, purposive sampling (Gravetter & Forzano, 2012). When using non-probability sampling, every member of the population does not have an equal probability to be selected for the sample (Adler & Clark, 2014; Daniel, 2011; Hall, 2008). Purposive sampling was considered most applicable in this study, as the intended population group was a very specific group of individuals. In purposive sampling, researchers may select exactly which individuals they wish to study based on their judgement of whether participants would facilitate the investigation of phenomena or not (Adler & Clark, 2014; Vogt, Gardner, & Haeffele, 2012). It is used to select information-rich cases and allows the researcher to obtain in-depth information regarding a small number of participants (Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling can be criticised for the researcher bias involved in the process and should thus be conducted with clear criteria in mind (Palinkas et al., 2015). Purposive sampling is justified and used frequently in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Furthermore, it is appropriate to use when the aim is to describe, understand, and gain insight into phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

For inclusion in this research study, the individual had to be a registered postgraduate (Honours) psychology student of the University of the Free State. Individuals had to be in the emerging adulthood developmental stage, between the ages of 18 and 25. Individuals were excluded from the study if they were not between the ages of 18-25. Participants of all gender and ethnic groups were invited to participate in the study.

To recruit participants, the proposed study was announced during an honours class and the students were asked to provide their e-mail addresses should they be interested. Postgraduate students communicated their willingness to participate in the study via e-mail. Thereafter, an informed consent form (see Appendix A) and a reflective writing exercise (Jasper, 2005) were e-mailed to participants. Once these had been completed and e-mailed back to the researcher, interviews were scheduled. In Table 4, participants are summarised by giving each participants' pseudonym, gender, age, and ethnicity.

Table 4

Summary of Participants

Pseudo name	Age	Gender	Ethnic Group
Mpho	22	Female	Black
Michelle	21	Female	White
Elsa	21	Female	White
Leana	21	Female	White
Mary	21	Female	White
Tammy	21	Female	White

Six individuals participated in this research study. All the participants were between the ages of 18-25. The sample consisted of five white and one black female.

3.4 Procedures of Data Collection

Data were collected by means of reflective writing exercises and semi-structured individual interviews. Every participant completed one writing exercise and one individual interview. The self-reflective writing exercises were administered before the individual interviews were conducted.

3.4.1 Self-reflective writing exercise. Self-reflective writing exercises can be described as subjective, first- person written accounts of experiences and perceptions (Jasper, 2005). Reflective exercises are considered well-established data sources in qualitative research (Jasper, 2005).

Reflective exercises allow researchers to explore information gained through experience (Scanlon, Care, & Udod, 2002). According to Jasper (2005), the cognitive processes involved in reflective writing involve critical thinking skills. The core of critical thinking is the ability to make connections and to move from the specific to the general or holistic. Rolfe (as cited in Jasper, 2005) claims that an individual's unique experience could be accessed only through writing. Subjective writing gives individuals the opportunity to own their thoughts and feelings, and simultaneously cultivate self-awareness (Jasper, 2005).

The purpose of reflective writing is learning, which takes place when new insights are gained during honest and courageous reflective writing (Bolton, 2010; Jasper, 2005). Individuals always write purposively, which allows them to concentrate on which information

to include and which not. Lastly, writing also provides an opportunity to structure thoughts, which possibly leads to gaining different or new perspectives (Jasper, 2005).

The purpose of the self-reflective writing exercise in this study was to document participants' experiences with regard to spiritual identity development. The topic of this study is abstract in nature, and spiritual identity is not necessarily a topic people frequently consider deliberately. The reflective writing exercise provided participants with the opportunity to structure their thoughts and feelings regarding the topic before conducting the interview.

The exercise encouraged participants to consider their individual processes of spiritual development as postgraduate psychology students critically. The self-reflective writing exercise also provided the participants with the opportunity to become comfortable with the topic and with the nature of the study.

The researcher developed broad questions regarding spiritual identity development (see Appendix B), and space was provided for the participants to record their experiences. The questions were open-ended, and the participants were requested to answer the questions honestly and in their own words. The questions were e-mailed to each participant. They were expected to return the exercise via e-mail once they had completed the exercise. Semi-structured interviews were then scheduled to discuss insights further.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews. After receiving the reflective writing exercise from each participant, the researcher scheduled an individual interview.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature. During semi-structured interviews, the researcher uses a guide instead of a script. The interview guide was based on the research aim (see Appendix C). An interview guide allows more flexibility and some deviation when interviewing participants (Mann, 2016). Semi-structured interviews have the advantage of providing enough structure to address specific topics while providing the opportunity for research participants to offer new perspectives (Galletta, 2013). It offers the possibility to attend to the complexity of the research question by allowing the researcher to probe responses for clarification or meaning (Galletta, 2013). Administrating semi-structured interviews is time-consuming and requires clinical expertise (Hersen, 2004). Furthermore, researchers should be cognisant of the possibility of bias, as questions might be worded or sequenced differently for each interview participant (Myers & Shaw, 2004).

The topic of spirituality and religion can be considered a sensitive or even a taboo subject in research (Ver Beek, 2010). Therefore, people might be reluctant to discuss these matters. For these reasons, semi-structured interviews were appropriate to use, as the structure of the questions allowed participants to relate subjective accounts of their experiences of the world (Quo & Dumay, 2011).

In addition to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the funnelling technique, frequently used in IPA, was utilised (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Smith and Osborn (2003) describe funnelling as a technique that allows the researcher to elicit general and more specific responses. The interviewer usually moves from general questions regarding a topic to more specific questions (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The first step of the interviewing process was to read the participants' reflective writing exercises thoroughly, to gain background on each participant. Since the research topic was personal and existential in nature, it was essential for the researcher to establish rapport with participants – to be kind, and to reduce tension before the beginning of the interview (Pietkiewich & Smith, 2014). At the beginning of each interview, the participants were welcomed, thanked for their participation, and aspects regarding informed consent (e.g., that the interviews would be recorded) were covered. The participants could choose whether to conduct the interview in Afrikaans or English.

The same questions asked during the reflective writing exercise were posed to participants, giving participants the opportunity to explain their ideas in more depth. Follow-up questions were asked, and participants were probed for more specific responses regarding their personal journeys (e.g., thoughts and feelings) of spiritual identity development. The researcher made use of paraphrasing and reflection during the interviewing process to ensure that the participants had sufficient opportunity to explain themselves. The researcher diverted from the interviewing script when a participant did not understand a question, or did not answer sufficiently. When the interview concluded, the interviewer thanked the participants for their participation.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data generated were analysed using IPA (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2013). The use of IPA in this study was applicable, as the aim of this study was the exploration and understanding of spiritual identity during emerging adulthood

rather than the explanation thereof. IPA was considered the best approach to follow, as the focus of this study was on subjective, personal experiences.

Broadly speaking, IPA consists of a thorough analysis of subjective accounts and the identification, discussion, and interpretation of themes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2013). IPA is referred to as a “double hermeneutic or dual interpretation process” and involves participants’ meaning-making processes and the decoding of these meaning-making processes (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p.8; Smith & Osborn, 2008). Thus, the researcher attempts to understand experience from the participant’s perspective, while at the same time formulating critical questions regarding their experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

IPA relies on ideography, while most other psychological research relies on nomothetic approaches (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). While nomothetic approaches focus on groups and generalisations, the idiographic approach refers to an in-depth analysis of individual cases, and the examination of individual perspectives in unique contexts. The core principle behind this approach is to examine and explore every case individually before generating any general statements (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

According to Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008), the IPA researcher transcribes recorded interviews verbatim. To be authentic to the participants’ voices, even pauses and mistakes are indicated (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Although general guidelines for IPA exists, these guidelines should be applied with flexibility, and modified where needed (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The process begins by diligently and deliberately considering and examining each case individually (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The researcher attempts to step into the world of the participants by absorbing themselves in the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The aim is to give proof of participants’ meaning-making phenomena and simultaneously document sense-making (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). During the first step, the researcher engages with the data, attempting to remember the atmosphere and setting of the interviews (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This can be done by listening to recordings or reading the transcripts multiple times (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig 2013). Multiple readings or listening of recordings might often lead to new insights on every occasion. During this stage, the researcher makes notes regarding own reflections, observations, thoughts, and

feelings. The focus should be on content, language, and emotional responses of participants (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

During the second step, researcher notes are transformed, and emerging themes that capture the essence of participants' experiences are identified (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Willig, 2013). At this stage of the analysis, researchers should work more with their personal notes than from the transcript. These notes should reflect the source material (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). The researcher intends to formulate precise phrases at a somewhat higher level than participants, which may refer to psychological conceptualisation. However, it is important to remain grounded in the detail of each participant's subjective experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

During the third step of analysis, the researcher attempts to find connections or relationships between the themes and cluster such themes together (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Willig, 2013). The purpose of this stage of analysis is to identify groups of themes and determine categories that suggest a connection between them (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). The emergent themes should be grouped together based on conceptual connections, and the naming of the emergent themes should be descriptive (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). During the last stage of analysis, the researcher creates a 'master' list or table of themes. The themes identified in the final table are used to write a narrative account of the study. The researcher elaborates on each theme and describes it individually by using extracts from the interviews and the researcher's interpretative comments (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

In this study, themes related to spiritual development were identified and assimilated. The first step was to transcribe data obtained from the semi-structured interviews verbatim. Non-specific notes were made regarding thoughts, emotions, and language use. After reading and rereading the transcripts, themes were identified that related to the subjective experiences of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. Once all the texts of individual participants had been considered and analysed, the researcher conducted a cross-case analysis. Lastly, a master table of themes focusing on spiritual identity development was created.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Authorisation to conduct this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities of the University of the Free State (see Appendix D). The ethical

principles of informed consent, no coercion, freedom to withdraw, confidentiality, anonymity, and deception were strictly adhered to during the study (Christensen et al., 2014; Willig, 2013).

According to Hammersley and Traianou (2012), participants should take part in research willingly and free from coercion or force. Moreover, participants should receive adequate information regarding a study to make an informed decision before agreeing to participate (Miller, Birch, Mauthner, & Jessop, 2012; Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013). In this study, participants were recruited on a voluntary basis, and were provided with an informed consent form, which provided adequate information pertaining to the study. The informed consent form provided information regarding the voluntary nature of the study, explained expectations from the participants during the data- gathering process, benefits of participating in the study, and aspects of confidentiality. The participants could ask questions about the study. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time without punishment or retribution.

Allan (2011) asserts that individuals should be respected for who they are, despite their backgrounds or their beliefs. In the psychology profession, people's uniqueness and integrity should be valued and respected, and the practitioner should convey this respect in interaction with people (Allan, 2011). Participants were approached respectfully. The researcher maintained a professional demeanour throughout the research process, despite individual differences (e.g., ethnicity, religion, spirituality, and age). The researcher maintained the role of a curious investigator, and did not in any way portray shock or judgement regarding information obtained.

All questions asked during the process were answered truthfully. Indirect and direct deception was avoided for the duration of the study. Indirect deception happens when the true goal or purpose of the study is not conveyed to participants, while direct deception refers to providing participants with deliberate misinformation of essential parts of the procedures of the study (Boynton, Portnoy, & Johnson, 2013).

The ethical principle of justice was adhered to throughout this study. In psychology, this principle pertains to treating individuals fairly, equally, and without favouritism (Allan, 2011). In this study, participants were recruited on a voluntary basis; therefore, no one was excluded from the study based on race, gender, ethnicity, or religious / spiritual beliefs. The purpose of this study was not to investigate a specific religion but to focus on individualised and unique

experiences. The researcher treated all the participants similarly, and no one was favoured. All individuals were expected to answer the same questions, and were asked to elaborate when the researcher deemed it necessary. The researcher did not engage in discussion about personal beliefs and maintained a professional relationship throughout the research process.

Participants were protected from harm for the duration of the study by maintaining anonymity and confidentiality throughout the study. Confidentiality refers to protecting the identity of participants when using obtained information (Flick, 2009). In this study, confidentiality was explained to participants, and pseudonyms were used to ensure that the identities of participants were protected. The information obtained from participants was in no way shared with lecturers or other staff at the Department of Psychology (with the exception of the supervisor of this study). Any information pertaining to participants is stored securely, and no unauthorised person has access to the information.

It was important to consider the sensitivity of the topic under consideration when participants were recruited. All the participants were in the process of master's selection procedures at the University of the Free State, and some of the participants were not successful. This might have affected their emotional well-being. According to McCosker, Barnard, and Gerber (2001), some research studies may affect an individual's feelings, views, attitudes, and values during the research process. An important focus point in this study was meaning-making processes during challenging events. It was important to consider that some of the participants might have found these questions extremely sensitive. Participants were referred for counselling when it was clear to the researcher that a participant became distressed about the questions or because of the outcome of selection procedures. The researcher ensured that the participants received the correct contact information of counsellors on campus, and followed up on their attendance. The researcher attempted to maintain the role of researcher throughout the process. However, it was important to show empathy when participants became distressed.

3.7 Issues of Trustworthiness

To establish the trustworthiness of a qualitative study and ensure rigour, researchers apply the principles of credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Gunawan, 2015; Willig, 2013). In addition to this, self-reflectivity is considered an important practice in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). In the following section, the criteria of trustworthiness pertaining to this study are discussed.

3.7.1 Credibility. Credibility of the process refers to the trustworthiness of research results (Christensen et al., 2014; Shenton, 2004). Having credibility demonstrates that the findings obtained and interpretations of the participants' experiences represent the information that was initially collected from participants (Anney, 2014). In essence, having credibility shows that research findings are accurately reflected and properly understood (Ritchie et al., 2013). Credibility can be achieved by the use of triangulation, and by using established research methods (Anney, 2014; Willig, 2013).

Triangulation of sources involves the use of several qualitative methods of data collection (Ritchie et al., 2013; Shenton, 2004). This process provides a variety of perspectives regarding the same phenomenon and strengthens the researcher's confidence about conclusions drawn (Ritchie et al., 2013). In this study, triangulation was achieved by using both semi-structured interviews and reflective writing exercises to obtain data. Using triangulation provided the researcher with diverse perspectives regarding the same phenomenon, and provided confidence in conclusions drawn. The researcher also used an established research method (IPA).

3.7.2 Transferability. Transferability refers to the degree to which research results obtained in one setting/context can be transferred or applied to another context (Shenton, 2004). According to Tracy (2010), transferability is reached when research findings overlap subjective realities. Shenton (2004) argues that it is almost impossible to conclude that the findings in qualitative studies are applicable to other contexts. Fortunately, researchers can "invite transferability" by including rich descriptions of phenomena, and by writing accessibly (Tracy, 2010, p. 845). In this study, the reader was provided with rich contextual information in order to establish whether the findings could be transferred to the readers' individualised contexts.

3.7.3 Dependability. In qualitative research, dependability is parallel to the concept of reliability in quantitative research (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2014). Dependability refers to the consistency or stability of results over time in different contexts (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004). When dependability is achieved, one can demonstrate that the research process was carried out consistently within the rules of the chosen qualitative methodology (Guest et al., 2014). Dependability can be ensured by using an audit trail, and through the process of triangulation (Anney, 2014). An audit trail requires inclusion of all information regarding decisions and actions related to the research. The aim is to show processes of data collection, data recording, and data analyses (Anney 2014). In this study, care was taken to ensure that the

context and research process were explained adequately. Furthermore, the researcher included interview transcripts in Appendix F of this document.

3.7.4 Confirmability. Confirmability refers to an acknowledgement that data obtained in qualitative research are never truly objective (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2003). According to Morrow (2005), qualitative researchers should attempt to represent findings as objectively as possible. This is only possible if research findings are presented as the true experiences and ideas of research participants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Morrow, 2005; Shenton, 2003). Confirmability can be achieved by including an audit trail, researcher reflective journal, and triangulation (Anney, 2014). Ongoing reflection, as well as a systematic methodological description, was included to ensure confirmability in this study.

3.7.5 Researcher reflectivity. Reflectivity refers to the subjective and critical awareness that the researcher influences the interpretation of results (Willig, 2013). According to Watt (2007), the researcher is the most important instrument in conducting qualitative research. The researcher is responsible for collecting and analysing the data. Although IPA researchers attempt to understand, appreciate, and recognise subjective realities, they acknowledge their own role in interpretation and meaning-making of participants' experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2004). Therefore, reflectivity is considered critical in IPA, and could possibly facilitate a greater understanding of the phenomenon (Watt, 2007).

In this study, it was essential for the researcher to acknowledge her own values, norms, and epistemological framework. These might have influenced the results significantly. The researcher had to be aware of her own assumptions regarding participants, and had to reflect on own preconceived ideas regarding the topic under investigation. The researcher also had to be cognisant that these students were applying for master's selection, and that it was a time of great uncertainty and stress. These circumstances might have influenced how they felt about the topic of meaning-making.

The researcher had to be aware of maintaining the role of researcher and not that of a therapist. At times, this was especially difficult because the topic under investigation brought about strong emotions in participants.

Lastly, the researcher had to reflect on her own journey of spiritual identity development, including her personal context, family, and other factors that might have influenced the analysis of results. The researcher included a reflective journal in Appendix E.

3.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the qualitative research approach, relevant to this study, was discussed. Reasons were provided why this approach was chosen for this specific study. The process of participant selection and the data-collection methods were explained. The analytic process of IPA was discussed. Throughout the chapter, strengths and weaknesses of the chosen method were addressed. Ethics and issues of trustworthiness were addressed last. In the following chapter, the research results are presented and discussed.

Chapter 4 – Results

In this chapter, the research results regarding the experiences of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood among postgraduate psychology students are presented. In the first section of the chapter, the individual experiences of each of the six participants are presented. Each case begins with a short introduction, which sketches the background of the participant. The various themes that emerged from the participant's interview and reflective writing exercise are introduced by means of a diagram, followed by an in-depth description of the themes. The chapter is concluded with a cross- case analysis presenting the overarching themes.

To remain true to the participants' voices, and to ensure confirmability and credibility, verbatim quotations are included in italics. The quotations are marked either with RW (reflective writing exercise) or II (individual interview), followed by the case and paragraph number (e. g., 1.2; Case 1, Paragraph 2), indicating where the quote can be found in the transcripts (see Appendix F). Words omitted from the quote are indicated with ellipsis (...), and additional information added by the researcher for the sake of clarity is indicated within square brackets [].

4.1 Tammy: Exploration of the Self

Tammy was a 21-year-old white female. She came from a loving, Christian home. She had one older sister, and her parents were still married. Tammy was not originally from Bloemfontein but moved there with her family when she began with higher education.

During the interviewing process, I experienced Tammy as an open-minded and insightful individual. Although Tammy was Afrikaans- speaking, she requested that the interview be conducted in English. She felt that she expressed herself better in English. Tammy gave rich answers and engaged in reflection during the interviewing process. It was quite clear to me that she was very mature for her age.

In the next section, Tammy's personal experiences are explored by referring to the most prominent themes of her story. The main theme that emerged from Tammy's reflections related to her spiritual identity development can be summarised as "exploration of the self". Tammy's experiences are presented through four themes, namely 1) development as a process, 2) sources

of information, 3) triggers towards spiritual identity development, and 4) values supporting a spiritual identity (as depicted in Figure 3).

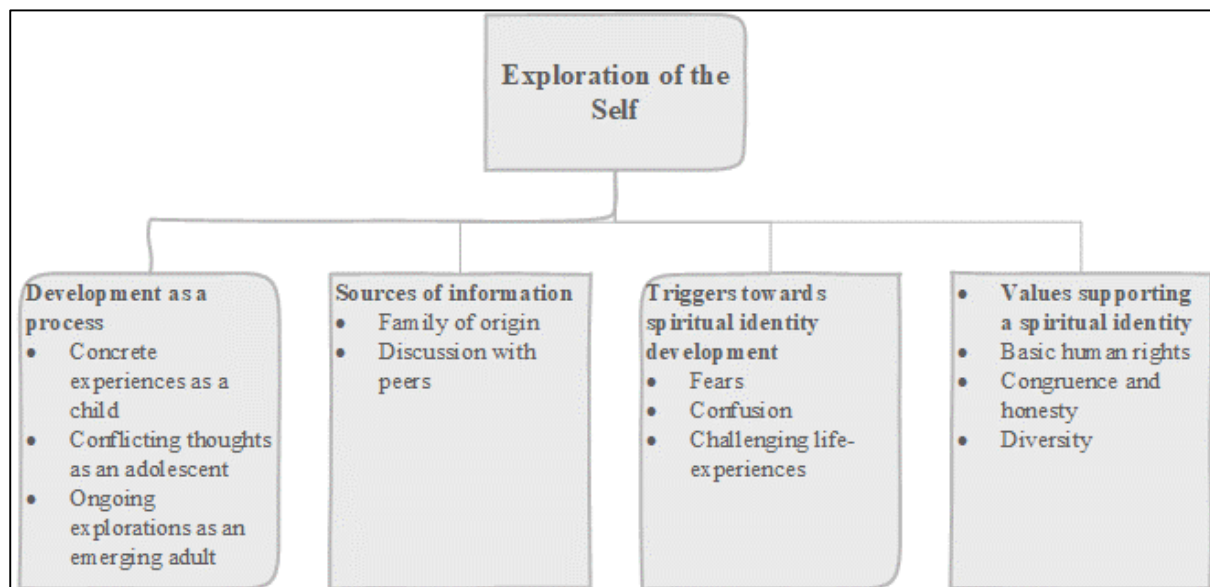


Figure 3. Visual representation of Tammy's journey.

4.1.1 Development as a process. Tammy's reflections portrayed her spiritual identity development as a continuous and lifelong process. This process in Tammy's life is typified by 1) concrete experiences as a child, 2) conflicting thoughts as an adolescent, and 3) ongoing exploration as an emerging adult.

Concrete experiences as a child

From Tammy's perspective, her spiritual identity development started during her childhood, in her family of origin. Tammy grew up in a Christian household that participated in religious activities, for example going to church regularly. Tammy thought that going to church was the right thing to do in a Christian household. However, she mentioned that there was a time during her childhood when her family stopped going to church. She did not understand this sudden shift away from the church, but did not ask reflective questions regarding the reasons for religious activities: "... *didn't understand and I also didn't question it*" (II 1.71). Tammy's spirituality during childhood was nothing more than participation in activities that her parents prescribed for her and possible child-like benefits that she could gain from participating or not participating in religious activities: "*I have no idea why do we stop going to church, I mean, I'm a little child and you are not really thinking why do we stop going*

to church. It was just like, yay, I can sleep late on a Sunday (laugh) that was one aspect...” (II 1.69).

Tammy thought about the event more abstractly during the interview. She acknowledged her childlike thinking and laughed to hide her embarrassment and discomfort. This event was not significant to Tammy as a child but seemed to grow in significance and importance as she grew older. Although she did not ask questions about this event as a child, she started asking these questions as an adolescent. It appeared that this was the event during Tammy’s childhood that led her to a lifelong process of spiritual questioning.

Conflicting thoughts as an adolescent

Tammy’s adolescence was a period of continued confusion and questioning regarding her family’s religious and spiritual activities. Tammy was an adolescent who asked many questions. During this developmental, her parents decided to participate in religious activities again. Because of Tammy’s increased abstract reasoning abilities, she realised the ambiguity in her parents’ behaviour regarding going to church. This was immensely confusing for her; therefore, she challenged her parents’ perspective: “... *I was thinking, but you are saying this then but I know it’s not necessarily like this. So for me it was difficult to reconcile ...*” (II 1.18). She realised that her perspective might differ from those of her parents and from Christian doctrines and that she could question whether she should be going to church or not. Tammy mentioned that during this stage she was confronted with information that changed her perspective regarding religion, and increased uncertainty and doubt: “... *some information about religion and the way that it was used in uhm society that really made me doubt, you know, religion and if there is a Higher Being... the use of religion to control people*” (II 1.2). The fact that Tammy considered the different ways in which religion was utilised proves her abstract reasoning regarding the concept of religion during adolescence. This abstract reasoning led to an important turning point in Tammy’s spiritual development. She started intellectualising religion and spirituality.

Ongoing explorations as an emerging adult

Tammy’s spirituality changed during her higher education. During this time, she discovered the difference between religion and spirituality and realised her “... *mistake of associating religion with spirituality*” (RW 1.2). She became aware of her unique spiritual identity and also discovered the differences between people with regard to values and beliefs:

“... University has been a good place to kind of realise that there are different people with different values, and maybe, now and then had discussion about religion and, uhm, I’ve noticed that some people are very narrow in their focus” (II 1.2). Tammy also conveyed that she thought that her peers would hold different beliefs because of the: *“... multi-cultural ...”(II 1.100)* nature of the group. However, she said that all religions were similar and all came down to basic principles such as *“... doing good to others, and respecting their rights” (II 1.102).*

As an emerging adult, Tammy sees herself as *“more open” (II 1.108)* and she attempts *“... to understand the person’s point of view” (II 1.106)* when it comes to different religious/spiritual beliefs. Although Tammy has been on a spiritual journey from childhood, this process was far from completed. As an emerging adult, she was in the process of finding her voice and forming her perspective regarding spiritual identity.

Tammy acknowledged her developmental age and realised the effect it might have on her thinking, and her confusion: *“... I think that’s also something that is still a process of discovery because you are in emerging adulthood and you are confronted with new information and uhm such as these experiences again that kind of make you wondering what am I doing, why am I doing this. I know it’s difficult for me” (II 1.46).* Tammy was still in the process of exploration, and meaning-making was still cognitively challenging.

4.1.2 Sources of information. Tammy acknowledged that spiritual identity development was a personal journey but she preferred to: *“... look at other people’s views as well” (II 1.50).*

Tammy’s reflections illustrated that various sources of information had played a role in her journey of spiritual identity development. Tammy experienced a *“split with formal religion” (RW 1.2)* due to the information she obtained during adolescence regarding the historical role of the church: *“Well, it was mostly a discussion on the church and the way religion was used. I think it was way back when, medieval times, it was used as a way to exploit people and to control them ...” (II 1.65).* This information was in contrast with what she knew about Christianity and made her question and doubt her parents’ beliefs. Since obtaining this information, Tammy has been curious about her own spirituality. She started considering this topic and searched for information through observation and discussion with her 1) family of origin and 2) discussions with peers.

Family of origin

Tammy had the desire to discuss spirituality in the household but said that this never happened: *“No, no that’s the thing, uhm, not at all”* (II 1.69). The family was very tolerant of diverse perspectives and seemed unbiased: *“... very open-minded ...”* (II 1.85). Still, they did not often discuss these issues: *“... I think my dad is spiritual, but we don’t have discussions about it ...”* (II 1.67). Tammy tried to obtain information from various family members to make sense of her own spiritual identity, for example: *“... like my sister said with enlightenment ... it was like zodiac stuff ... she discussed enlightenment and how it changed people’s views on religion and spirituality ...”* (II 1.73).

It seemed like Tammy’s family was diverse in their spiritual beliefs but that they seldom talked about it. Tammy primarily learned from observation.

Discussions with peers

A major source of information that was influential in Tammy’s process of spiritual identity development was her peer group, which became especially important during emerging adulthood. She referred to other individuals’ experiences when making sense of her own spirituality and the spirituality/religion of others. She had collaborative and challenging discussions with peers regarding spiritual identity development.

As an emerging adult, Tammy attempted a conversation about spirituality with one of her friends. This event proved influential with regard to Tammy’s thoughts about the sensitivity and subjectivity of spirituality: *“I had a discussion with a friend of mine about Christianity, you know, I told her that I read somewhere that it is a cult and immediately she closed up ... she got very angry at me ...”* (II 1.56). Tammy experienced this reaction as confusing and aggressive: *“... I was never confronted with someone who immediately closes up and becomes defensive before, uhm, so that was a new experience for me ... ‘cause I was thinking, oooh we are going to have a discussion now and then immediately she was like, no, I don’t believe you ... we are not friends anymore (she is not a nice person) ...”* (II 1.85). Although Tammy was affronted, she never addressed her friend’s reaction, because she wanted to avoid conflict: *“... I saw her reaction and didn’t address it, I think that was perhaps wrong, I shouldn’t have done that ... I didn’t try to convince her that I am right and she is wrong ...”* (II 1.63). While Tammy found conversations about spirituality essential, she realised that some people regard spirituality as a forbidden topic.

In discussions with peers, Tammy tried to make logical sense of spirituality: *“uhm someone else I spoke to said it’s like a, it’s not necessarily a learned behaviour, but it is instinctual. So I think you are conditioned with certain values and stuff and then it becomes more instinctual”* (II 1.32). She also found different world views important in discussions: *“... if you could have someone to help you to get a different perspective that could also help and I mean if they say something you agree with then I think that kind of means that it’s in line with what you believe about yourself and your general uhm outlook in life”* (II 1.50). Tammy also preferred open-minded friends, and people that she could have these type of discussions with, for example: *“... I think my other friends ... but they are more open and I’ve noticed that if I do discuss things with them, they are open to other avenues of looking at things, uhm, and ja, they are just more open, it’s not, they are not, uhm, with blinkers on...”* (II 1.85). However, her friends held similar beliefs to hers that there were some differences: *“To an extent yes. Because I think we are all different, I might approach something differently from them, but I think, you know, the basic beliefs are the same”* (II 1.89). It appears that similarity in beliefs were not that important to Tammy, but that openness to diverse beliefs was essential.

4.1.3 Triggers towards spiritual identity development. Tammy’s process of spiritual identity development was filled with 1) fears, 2) confusion, and 3) challenging life experiences. These triggers facilitated her process of spiritual identity development.

Fears

Fears about the consequences of behaviour and the unknown resulted in critical self-evaluation regarding Tammy’s spirituality.

Tammy made reference to fears of consequences when deviating from organised religion: *“I’ve read somewhere this man said in an interview that he was never really religious, but then he became I think Catholic, if I remember correctly, because he started wondering what if there is an afterlife and then he started having some fears about what would happen to him ... it’s like planning for a future you are unsure of”* (II 1.8). Tammy believed that the majority of people feel unsure about the future and therefore practice religion because of the fear of what is going to happen in the afterlife: *“I think that most people grew up with the idea of a powerful being that could smite you when you do things wrong/challenge the ideas, or has a final say in what happens to you in the afterlife (if such a place exists), perhaps developed a subconscious*

fear of deviating from these beliefs ...” (RW 1.4). She recognised that these fears might occur at an unconscious level and might be related to religious upbringing.

A major fear that served as a driving force for spiritual development for Tammy was her fear of the unknown: “... *I think it’s difficult for me because and in a sense there’s almost like a fear, uhm, of the unknown, so that’s not really, you are kind of caught in the middle to either just blindly following something or trying to do more and then I think I experience a fear of the unknown... trying to redefine yourself in your spirituality cause I’ve really been struggling with that... you know you are safe in your previous definitions or slightly altered definitions...* (II 1.18). Tammy experienced inner conflict regarding moving away from her previous definitions of spirituality and exploring a new spiritual identity. This was threatening to her sense of self.

Confusion

Tammy struggled to put her confusion into words. She was self-conscious and aware of these feelings in her interview: “... *Hmmm goodness, I’m not good at this ... expressing myself*” (II 1.27). She found the topic of spiritual identity development confusing due to its lack of a framework. Tammy postulated that religion had a clear structure, which made it easier to comprehend than spirituality: “*Sometimes I do find it difficult to arrive at conclusions... I think this could be the challenge of spirituality in the process of sense-making – it does not offer a framework to explain events/challenges as religion does, but is more concerned about one’s own interpretations, meanings, beliefs and way of sense-making*” (RW 1.4). Tammy was still confused about her own interpretation, meaning, and beliefs, and she did not find it easy to arrive at absolute conclusions.

Challenging life experiences

Challenging life experiences prompted a process of questioning, reflection, and self-evaluation, which led to meaning-making.

Tammy clearly experienced strong polarities in how she handled and thought about challenging events. She engaged in critical evaluation regarding the possible meaning behind distressing events. She usually evaluated an event by considering two opposing views and integrating the viewpoints to come to an understanding. She generally questioned her own responsibility for the outcomes of events but not without also questioning the role of fate or the sacred: “*I have this view of either it is fate or it’s just I could have done something, so I think*

I have some difficulty integrating these two perspectives ... ” (II 1.38). Tammy had substantial difficulty making sense of not being selected for the master’s programme in psychology: “... In a sense I turned to the viewpoint that there must be some higher power or fate that might play some role in the course of events. At the same time, I know there are more things I might have done differently ... ” (RW 1.4). Polarities in meaning-making processes were also evident in the way Tammy tried to make sense of existential questions: “Regarding the death of a loved one ... mostly thinking that it must be due to the illness, as well as a power that saved the people from further suffering” (RW 1.4). On the one hand, she took a scientific approach, and on the other, she incorporated spiritual ideas, looking for some consolation and meaning from a higher perspective.

Even though Tammy looked for consolation and meaning from the sacred, she still had questions and concerns regarding suffering in the world: *“If there is a god who gave us religion, how could he sit back and allow someone or some institution to misuse it? How could there not be some kind of intervention and then, again, thinking there is already so much suffering and terrible things in the world, how is there not anything that intervenes?” (II 1.65). The expectation that Tammy had about God and the sacred had its origin in Tammy’s religious background.*

4.1.4 Values supporting a spiritual identity. Through Tammy’s developmental process, her interaction with others and her life experiences, she arrived at a tentative value system. Her value system is a reflection of her current spiritual identity. Tammy connects her spiritual identity to her values, to intrinsic qualities, and behaviour towards others: *“My spiritual identity is connected more to the rights of others and respecting these rights and principles, as could be done by the values and principles one practices in their daily life and interactions with others ... ” (RW 1.2). Values relating to being a good person and a respectable citizen underlined her behaviours more than spirituality does: “... the right of others, not inflicting harm, and trying to do good ... being tolerant and accepting...” (RW 1.2). For her, spirituality was “... basically doing good to others and respecting their rights and not stealing and not murdering people ... it’s just basically kindness and love and, uhm, just trying to be a good person.”*

Tammy postulated that “*values a person adheres to*” (RW 1.2) were related directly to spiritual identity. This theme is discussed by referring to three core values, namely 1) respecting basic human rights, 2) congruence and honesty, and 3) diversity.

Respecting basic human rights

During Tammy's reflective process, she discussed respecting the rights and principles of others as one of the most important values related to her spiritual identity. Tammy experienced her value system as rudimentary and simple. Tammy regarded doctrines as more confusing and complex than simply adhering to her personal value system.

She saw the value of respecting human rights as intrinsically important to religion: "... religions adopted basic human rights and incorporated it, and proceeded to socialize people with these values and viewpoints" (II 1.2). Religion was regarded as a socialising agent, influencing people's behaviour to a great extent.

Tammy did not like the idea of religion and therefore rather "... concentrate more on the rights of individuals than religious dogmas. I think all people should receive similar treatment ... what justifies a hierarchy of persons? Essentially we are the same and thus should be treated similarly" (II 1.2). Tammy inferred that religion frequently result in inequality between people. This led to some anger and further questioning. Religion, from her point of view, results in segregation between people.

Diversity

University led Tammy to realise the importance of appreciating the diversity in people: "... university has been a good place to kind of realise that there are different people with different values ..." (II 1.2). Even though university did not explicitly teach her about spirituality and religion, it made her realise the effect that cultural differences had on spirituality and religion: "I think that there could be differences because we are a multi-cultural group, so immediately, ja, some people might follow a different religion. But I think from the little bit I do know about different religions, it all comes down to the basic features or principles that you have to follow" (II 1.100). Even though Tammy studied psychology, she mentioned that it was uncommon to have discussions regarding religion in class. However, she mentioned one specific discussion: "There hasn't been a discussion on religion in class per se, uhm all we did discuss was uhm practices in funerals that was it" (II 1.102). This discussion was valuable, as she realised "it's a strange thing to do in our society as it stands today, but then you realise it's a different approach to for that person to the same event and if it helps them who am I to come and say it's wrong" (II 1.106). It confirmed that Tammy was an open-minded

individual who was always willing to look at events and experiences from different perspectives.

Tammy's university friends also played a crucial role in raising her awareness regarding spirituality. She became mindful about the fact that everyone's belief system was different and that one should "*define their own values – break away from those learned from others, and define a new set of values*" (RW 1.8).

Congruence and honesty

Tammy was determined to incorporate values into her relationships with others: "*I don't know say if I say that I do not inflict harm on other people, then I think you really have to make a point of it in your interactions with others ...*" (II 1.24) and "*If you are doing something it might become more a part of you*" (II 1.22). She realised that practicing certain values would eventually determine her identity.

Values became internalised to such an extent that it governed her behaviour: "*It's just more like a feeling that you get in certain contexts ... I think it is like a feeling that kind of directs you ...*" (II 1.2) and "*... basic values that I think one should define the way you want to live. And in a sense you can start, uhm, integrating yourself by saying ja, I'm kind to other people or, uhm, I do not inflict harm, or whatever the case might be*" (II 1.18). Honesty towards herself and towards others were essential to who she wanted to be as a person. Her values defined her.

During Tammy's process, there has been a continuous evaluation of beliefs. She reported that she did not always do this consciously: "*There are doubts, and I kind of question a lot... because you have to rely on what you believe in a way, it doesn't have to be strictit you are doing something and you know it's not really in line with what you believe in, uhm it raises some questions. Even if it's at the back of your mind ...*" (II 1.26). She acknowledged the importance of beliefs in navigating behaviour. Being dishonest and incongruent with regard to one's beliefs leads to inner conflict.

Tammy was strong in character and congruence and honesty remained important across situations – even under pressure. When we were discussing the outcome of her master's selection, she said, "*I wasn't false, I wasn't, you know, denying any aspect of myself ... I really didn't put on any ... mask to say that this who I am, but in reality it's not me ... I think if I have*

to connect spiritual identity is this intrinsic feeling if you're doing something right or wrong ...” (II 1.48). The intrinsic feeling of being congruent with a personalised set of values was essential in the way that Tammy chose to present herself to the outside world.

It seemed clear that Tammy did not think that one should necessarily pursue learned behaviour, but that one should establish one's own unique set of values. Individuality, being true to the self, and intrinsic congruence were very important to Tammy: *“There is a more individualistic approach vs. “one size fits all”, and as a result the person could be more true to themselves and free from expectations that could cause guilt or a feeling of being incongruent with themselves” (RW 1.8).* Tammy believed that a person could become free, congruent, and enlightened if he or she follows his or her own, unique and personalised value system.

4.1.5 In conclusion. Tammy's process of spiritual development was characterised by continued exploration of the self, from childhood, through adolescence, and into emerging adulthood. She found it difficult to arrive at a conclusion regarding her spiritual identity and was still exploring various facets of her identity. Tammy was searching for answers, utilising different sources in her environment to get answers. This search was influenced by fear, confusion, and challenge. Although she was clear about certain values in the spiritual domain of her identity (such as respect and congruence), she recognised that she was still in a period of self-exploration in the hope to commit to a spiritual identity in the future.

4.2 Elsa: To Lead by Example

Elsa was a 21-year-old female. Elsa's family was not from Bloemfontein, and she resided in residence for the duration of her studies. Elsa's peer group and her boyfriend were very important to her. She initially applied for her psychology undergraduate degree at Potchefstroom University but saw it as God's plan for her and her brother to come to Bloemfontein. She had a strong support structure in Bloemfontein, although her parents were not residing here.

Elsa came across as a warm, loving, and empathetic individual. She spoke fast and passionately about her religion and her relationship with God.

In the next section, Elsa's reflections are discussed, focusing on themes that emerged from her experiences. The main theme in Elsa's journey can be encapsulated as “to lead by

example”. Elsa’s experiences are presented through three themes, namely 1) childhood religion as foundation, 2) development of a unique spiritual identity, and 3) appreciating the spiritual experiences of others. The themes and subthemes are presented visually in Figure 4.

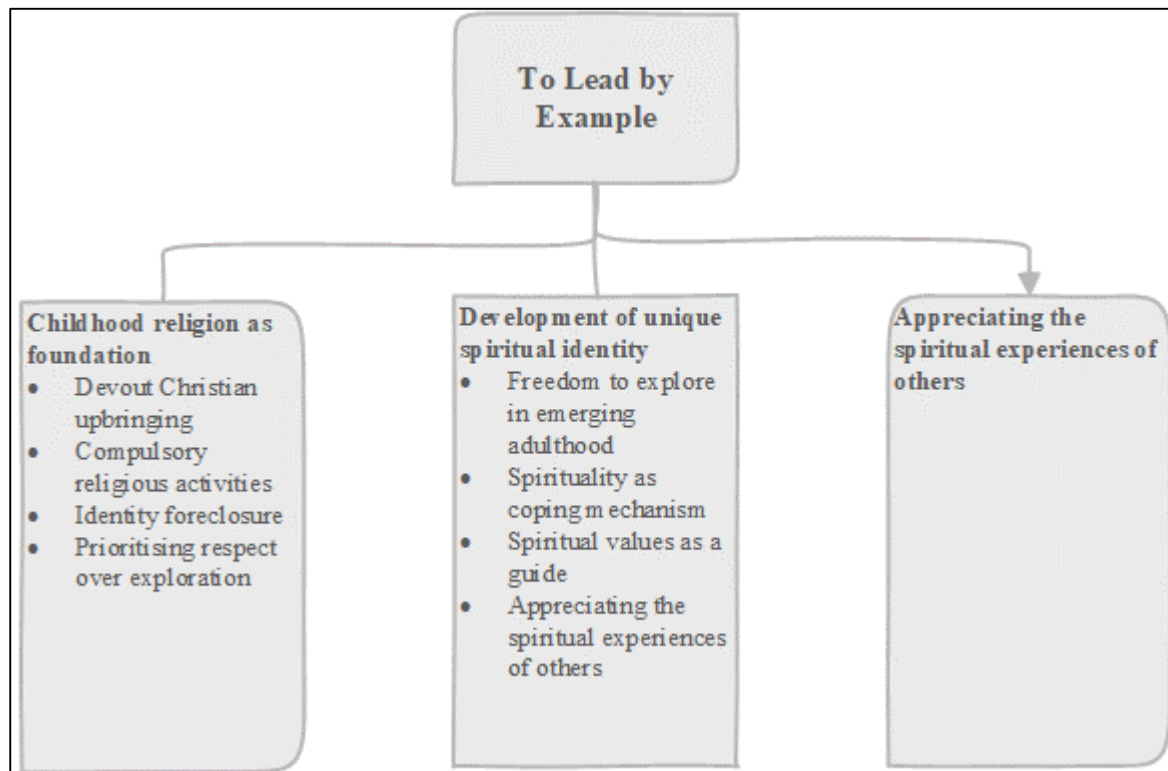


Figure 4. Visual display of Elsa's journey.

4.2.1 Childhood religion as foundation. Elsa was raised in a Christian household, which formed a foundation for her spiritual identity as an emerging adult. Parental norms and expectations were of the essence during her childhood and adolescence. The following subthemes are related to the household in which Elsa grew up: 1) devout Christian upbringing, 2) compulsory religious activities, 3) identity foreclosure, and 4) prioritising respect over exploration.

Devout Christian upbringing

Elsa was born into a very religious household, and she believed that this greatly shaped her spiritual identity. She mentioned, “ *My spirituele identiteit is vroeg reeds gevestig en daarom glo ek dit sal moeilik wees om nou ’n ander denkwysse rakende spiritualiteit te vorm*” (RW 2.8).¹ Elsa believed that her religious upbringing facilitated and simplified her spiritual identity development: “ *Ek het nog altyd in ’n Christelike huis grootgeword so dit het dit aan die een kant ’n bietjie makliker gemaak*” (II 2.6).² She could easily make tentative conclusions about her spiritual sense of self because of her parents’ strong influence.

As a child, Elsa did not feel the need to make choices regarding her religion, as it was passed on and learned from her interaction with her micro-system: “*Uhm so ek nooit regtig besluit watter geloof wil ek nou eksperimenteer of wil indelf nie*” (II 2.6).³ She also mentioned, “*Christenskap self was nog altyd daar en ek het nog nooit betwyfel nie...*” (II 2.6).⁴ Religion has been part of Elsa’s life for as long as she can remember, and nothing significant has happened to make her challenge or question Christianity.

Compulsory religious activities

Elsa explained that her parents were members of a very conservative church, and that she did not have a choice whether to attend this church or not: “*Ons was nog altyd in my ma-hulle se kerk, hulle wou nie dat ons sommer na ander kerke toe gaan nie*” (II 2.6).⁵ She was not allowed to either make decisions regarding beliefs or choose among different Christian denominations.

Elsa’s parents were in control of spiritual and religious activities of the household, and the children of the household were expected to engage in religious activities with their parents:

¹ “ My spiritual identity was established when I was young and I therefore believe that it would be difficult to shape a new opinion regarding spirituality.”

² “I grew up in a Christian household – it made it a bit easier on the one hand ...”

³ “Uhm ... So I never really decided which religion I wanted to explore or get absorbed in.”

⁴ “Christianity has always been there and I have never doubted it.”

⁵ “We have always been in my parent’s church; they didn’t want us to go to other churches.”

“ *Ons kon nie sê ons gaan nou na hierdie kerk toe en julle na 'n ander kerk toe nie* ” (II 2.6).⁶ Religious activities were a family activity and Elsa was not allowed to deviate from the traditions of the family system.

Because of her parents' strong convictions and impenetrable boundaries, Elsa experienced a sense of powerlessness during adolescence. However, she never challenged her parents and respected their wishes until she left their household.

Identity foreclosure

Identifying with Christianity was comfortable for Elsa, and she never experienced the need to explore her spirituality further. Elsa showed insight into the critical spiritual evaluation of others: “ *Ek verstaan hoekom mense sê dat sielkunde en geloof nie regtig langs mekaar loop nie en mense dan dinge wil uitredeneer. Ek het dit nie self probeer uitredeneer nie, maar ek verstaan hoe mense op daai punt kom* ” (II 2.47).⁷ However, Elsa never questioned her own beliefs: “ *Ek het glad nie krities geëvalueer wat ek self glo nie* ” (II 2.47).⁸ It seemed as if Elsa was scared of questioning and not arriving at answers; therefore, she rather accepted the beliefs that she took from her family of origin.

Elsa did not want to engage in spiritual discussions that could lead to conflict or disagreement. She preferred that others approached her only if they were interested in learning more about her ways: “ *As jy al 'n pad met iemand gestap het en uit hulle eie uit begin hulle meer vrae vra en jy kan sien hulle is nuuskierig en hulle wil graag meer weet oor hoe jy goed doen, dan deel ek maklik ... maar ek sal nooit my manier van doen op hulle afdwing nie* ” (II 2.52).⁹ This adversity to conversations that could challenge her spirituality was also observed

⁶ “ We couldn't say that we were going to this church and you were going to a different church.”

⁷ “ I understand why people say that psychology and religion doesn't go hand in hand and that people want to utilise logical reasoning. I have never utilised logical reasoning, but I can understand that others could get to this point.”

⁸ “I did not critically evaluate what I personally believe.”

⁹ “ When you have walked a path with someone and they initiate conversation and start asking questions and you can see that they are curious and want to know more about how you do things, then I will share ... but I will never force my way onto others.”

in her relationships with friends: “... ook ’n Christen is sal een van my vriendinne – maar ons het verskillende maniere van doen ... ons kan ure lank ’n rustige gesprek voer oor hoekom ek se nou maar klein gedoop is of groot gedoop is ... ek kan maklik met ander mense daaroor gesels. En as hulle my vra sal ek sê hoe ek dit doen sonder dat daar nou n geveg of oordeling betrokke is” (II 2.52).¹⁰ It can be assumed that Elsa would have discussions about her religion if others were to listen but she did not like discussions when people disagreed with her or when her beliefs were challenged.

Prioritising respect over exploration

Elsa was a respectful child and adolescent. Although Elsa was comfortable with the concept of religion, she experienced some internal conflict regarding the pressure to conform to her parent’s doctrines. She did not disagree overtly with her parents regarding their decisions, and prioritised respect for her parents over exploration.

Elsa mentioned that it was forbidden to explore other spiritual or religious avenues during adolescence: “My pa het altyd gesê ons mag nie na ander kerke se kerkkampe toe gaan nie, want hy weet nie wat daar gebeur nie” (II 2.6).¹¹ The fact that her parents did not know what happened in other churches was the main concern, and they tried to protect her. Her parents wanted to know and control to which socialising agents Elsa was exposed.

The internal conflict that Elsa experienced was about the conservative nature of her parents’ church. As an adolescent, Elsa became cognisant of how she was different from her parents’ spirituality identity. She felt powerless in her pursuit of independence: “Dit was op hoërskool vir my nogal moeilik want my ma-hulle is in ’n verskriklike konserwatiewe gemeente – dis soos die orrel en die mense dra hoedens – en ek is ’n klein bietjie meer liberaal so ek’s

¹⁰ “... also a Christian one of my girlfriends – but we have different ways of doing ... we can have a peaceful conversation for hours about why I for example was baptised as a child or baptised as an adult ... I can easily talk to others about this. And if they ask me, I would tell them without fighting or judgement.”

¹¹ “My dad always said that we were not allowed to go to other churches’ camps, because he didn’t know what was going on there ...”

*rustig daarmee, mense kan aantrek wat hulle wil en sulke tipe goed – daar het ek bietjie gesukkel maar ek kon niks daaraan doen nie” (II 2.6).*¹²

Elsa’s peer group greatly influenced her feelings regarding her need for spiritual exploration. She wanted to go to another church to socialise with her friends: *“Ek wil graag gaan, want al my maaitjies gaan en ek mag nie gaan nie” (II 2.6).*¹³ Although there was an increase in awareness of the difference between Elsa’s thinking and her parents’ thinking, her reasoning for wanting to differentiate from her parents was still tentative.

4.2.2 Development of a unique spiritual identity. When Elsa moved from her parental home, she began to develop a spiritual identity apart from that of her parents. This process was characterised by 1) freedom to explore in emerging adulthood, 2) using religion as a coping mechanism, 3) spiritual values as guide, and 4) appreciating the spiritual experiences of others.

Freedom to explore in emerging adulthood

During emerging adulthood, Elsa physically distanced herself from her family of origin by moving to Bloemfontein. The new environment enabled Elsa to make her own decisions. The new-found autonomy and opportunity to focus on herself included spiritual/religious decisions: *“... maar op universiteit kon ek nou natuurlik meer na ’n kerk toe gaan waarna ek wil gaan en op die kamp gaan waarop ek wil gaan” (II 2.6).*¹⁴ For the first time in Elsa’s life, she had the opportunity to discover her own spiritual identity without the strong influence of her parents.

Nonetheless, Elsa acknowledged her roots and did not completely move away from her childhood religion: *“Die identiteit is nog steeds dieselfde, ek dink en glo nog steeds dieselfde, maar die manier van doen is dalk net ’n bietjie meer liberaal. Soos my ma’le is in ’n streng*

¹² “It was difficult for me in high school because my parents are in a very conservative church – it’s like the organ and the people wear hats – and I am a bit more liberal I’m relaxed about such things, people can wear what they want and things like that – I struggled a bit but I couldn’t do anything about it.”

¹³ “I really want to go, all my friends are going and I am not allowed to go.”

¹⁴ “... but at University I could obviously go to the church and camp that I wanted to go to.”

gereformeerde kerk en hier kon ek h bietjie sê nou maar meer Baptistekerk toe gaan of so maar ... ek glo nie enigsins anders of so nie” (II 2.8).¹⁵ As an emerging adult, Elsa still respected and appreciated what her parents taught her, but was much more independent in her behaviour. She found a unique way to practice her spirituality with people with whom she could connect developmentally.

Elsa placed great emphasis on the importance of childhood religion in understanding the spirituality of others: “*Ek sal glad nie dink ‘oh jy gaan duivel toe’ of ‘you’re doomed nie’ nie (lag). Ek weet nie wat is hulle agtergrond, wat het hulle ma hulle geleer, of wat het in hulle lewe gebeur nie. Dalk het die kerk hulle kwaad gemaak en toe besluit hulle om nooit weer kerk toe te gaan nie*” (II 2.52).¹⁶ She realised during emerging adulthood that one’s upbringing was essential in the journey of spiritual identity development. She attributed her strong religion to her parents and what her parents taught her and not to anything else.

Lastly, as an emerging adult, Elsa’s interpretation of the Bible changed. She realised the Bible could not be interpreted literally and that abstract reasoning was essential: “*Voor hulle dan antwoorde wil hê, moet hulle dan maar eers in my skoene kom staan, eers bietjie in dit in delf voor hulle net antwoorde wil hê en dan sal hulle dalk sien dit is nie moontlik om alles uit te redeneer nie (... byvoorbeeld vrae het oor Noag se ark ... of hoe Jona deur die vis ingesluk). Mens kan nie alles uitredeneer nie en alles word ook mos nie letterlik in die Bybel bedoel nie ...*” (II 2.30).¹⁷ Elsa felt defensive about questions regarding the Bible, stating that the Bible is metaphoric and should be interpreted as such. She believed in “*glo soos h kind*” (II 2.30)¹⁸

¹⁵ “The identity is still the same, I think and believe the same, but my way of doing is slightly more liberal. Like my parents is in a strict reformed church and here I could attend a Baptist church if I wanted ... I don’t believe any different or something”

¹⁶ “I will not think ‘you are going to Satan’ or ‘you’re doomed’ (laugh). I don’t know their background, what their parents taught them, or what happened in their lives. Maybe the church angered them and they decided that they would never attend church again”

¹⁷ “Before they want answers, they should stand in my shoes, first explore my perspective before they want answers and then they will see that you could not use rationality for everything (... for example questions about Noah’s ark ... or how Jonah was swallowed by a fish). You cannot explain everything in the Bible and everything is not meant to be interpreted literally.”

¹⁸ “believing like a child”

but also acknowledged the illogical, subjective, and abstract nature was essentially what spiritual identity was all about.

Spirituality as coping mechanism

Elsa used her spirituality as a coping mechanism and as a meaning-making system: *“In mens se daaglikse bestaan maak mens ook maar baie besluite gebaseer daarop – of as jy deur ’n moeilike tyd gaan, kry jy ook maar jou krag daarvan af of so” (II 2.4).*¹⁹ She leaned on her religion when she experienced difficulties and used religion to make difficult decisions: *“Ek dink dit help om jouself bietjie ‘sane’ te hou soos as dinge moeilik gaan – dan weet jy waar om jou krag vandaan te kry ...” (II 2.26).*²⁰ She experienced her religion as a consolation and a means to make meaning of suffering in the world: *“Ek dink definitief dit kan help om bietjie meer rustigheid oor dinge te kry ... soos as daar by byvoorbeeld kindertjies na jou toe kom wat gemolesteer is en jy maak nie regtig sin daarvan nie” (II 2.26).*²¹

Elsa did not question during adverse life experiences but rather saw it as her destiny/fate. *“Met ’n sterk spirituele identiteit glo ek dat mens uitdagings en moeilike dae beter kan verwerk ... Mens verstaan dat sekere dinge maar slegs die Here se plan is en daar nie noodwendig ’n logiese verduideliking is nie” (RW 2.6).*²² Elsa did not experience distress during stressful life events because she did not ask questions, and in a sense did not need answers. She believed that certain things were meant to be, part of her life, and questioning/critical thinking was not always a necessity.

She experienced a strong sense of self-compassion through her spirituality and religion and described her failures and challenges as part of God’s plan for her life. *“Dit help dat ek*

¹⁹ “In your daily life you make many decisions based on it – of if you are going through a difficult time, you will also derive your strength from there.”

²⁰ “I think it helps you to keep your sanity during difficult times – then you know where to get your strength from.”

²¹ “I definitely think that it could help to gain calmness about things ... if molested children come to you and you cannot make sense of it, for example,”

²² “I believe that you can deal better with challenges and difficult days through a strong spiritual identity ... you understand that certain things are only God’s plan and that there are not always logical reasons for it.”

teleurstellings beter hanteer – om te weet wat ook al gebeur die Here se wil is, maak my rustig en help dat ek makliker aanvaar wat oor my pad kom” (RW 2.4)²³ and “... en as iets sleg met jou gebeur, sal jy nie die fout intern soek en vra ‘is ek swak? Wat is fout met my?’ of so nie. Ek skryf baie eerder goed daaraan toe dat dit nou maar die pad is wat ek moet stap ...” (II 2.20).²⁴ Self-compassion obtained from her spiritual beliefs served as a coping mechanism when she was in situations that challenged her sense of self. It gave her a sense of contentment to believe that it was God’s plan.

Elsa did not experience higher education or master’s selection as stressful: “*Daar was nie regtig iets wat my uitmekaar geskeur het of platgeslaan het in die jaar nie, dit was eintlik ’n heel okay jaar sover ...*” (II 2.24).²⁵ When enquired about a recent challenging life experience, she mentioned matric: “*Toe ek matriek was wou ek graag Potch toe gegaan het omdat my ouers en my pa, ma en ouma en oupa ... my ma was ook in die koshuis daar. Ek het gedink ek het ’n goeie CV, want ek was baie gebalanseerd op skool, toe stuur ek al my goedjies daar in, toe kry ek nie by een koshuis plek nie ...*” (II 2.22).²⁶ The reason for her good experience of university life might be that everything worked out well: “*Die afgelope vier jaar was regtig vir my ’n geseënde tyd, ek het ongelooflike vriendinne gemaak, ’n oulike kêrel ontmoet en toe kom my boetie ...*” (II 2.22).²⁷ It can be hypothesised that Elsa did not experience much challenge or a crisis period during her higher education career and therefore did not need to engage critically in meaning-making. This scenario might have been much different if Elsa had not established a new social system in Bloemfontein.

²³ “It helps me to deal better with disappointments – to know that whatever happens is God’s will, it makes me calm and helps me to accept what crosses my path.”

²⁴ “... and if something bad happens to you, you wouldn’t look for the fault internally and ask questions like ‘Am I weak?’ or ‘What is wrong with me?’ I rather attribute things to the path that I have to take ...”

²⁵ “There wasn’t really something that destroyed me this year, it was actually an okay year so far ...”

²⁶ “During my matric year, I really wanted to go to Potch because my parents and my dad, mom and grandmother and grandfather ... my mom was in the residences there. I thought that I had a good CV because I was very balanced in school, I sent everything in and didn’t get place at any residence ...”

²⁷ “The past four years have been a blessed time, I’ve made amazing girlfriends, I met a nice boyfriend and then my brother came ...”

Spiritual values as guide

Elsa believed that spirituality and religion were synonymous. Her spirituality/religion influenced her value system and influenced her behaviour: “... so dan ‘cover’ mens redelik alles as jy vrede en liefde uitstraal dan gaan jy in elk geval meeste van die tyd respek hê vir mense, mense mooi hanteer en jy gaan nie sommer skree al voel jy jy wil skree nie of so” (II 2.17).²⁸ Elsa believed that an individual’s spiritual identity influences other spheres of identity and how a person behaves: “Dit is als ingeweef met mekaar soos byvoorbeeld met die akademiese deel ook weet ek, ek doen my deel, wat ook al daarna gebeur is in die Here se hande ... met die sosiale lewe ook (lag) – mens doen seker nie sekere dinge nie omdat jy voel dis nie wie jy is nie” (II 2.18)²⁹ and “... maar ag ek dink dit is maar ingeweef in jou manier van doen soos ek skree nie op mense as ek kwaad is nie want ek weet dit is nou nie regtig die manier van doen nie of dit in nie wie ek is nie” (II 2.12).³⁰ Elsa’s religion and spirituality influenced her to engage in socially appropriate behaviour, and encouraged her to avoid activities that were not in line with her spirituality. Although Elsa was in emerging adulthood and possibly wanted to engage in exploratory behaviour, her spiritual identity and spiritual values influenced her behaviour to such an extent that she repressed these impulses.

4.2.3 Appreciating the spiritual experiences of others. Elsa acknowledged the influence that residence had on her spiritual world view. When inquired about dealing with religious/spiritual diversity, she commented, “Ek het al met dit gedoen gekry omdat ek in die koshuis was, so dis nie vir my verskriklik vreemd nie. Natuurlik het ek my eie manier van doen, maar eks glad nie ten gunste daarvan om jou manier op ander af te dwing nie. Ek weet partykeer sê hulle mens moet ander probeer oortuig, maar ja ek voel net dis nie my plek nie”

²⁸ “...so then you cover everything if you radiate peace and love, then you will have respect for people and treat people well and you won’t scream when you feel like screaming.”

²⁹ “Everything is connected; for example, I know with the academic part, if I bring my part, then whatever happens after will be in God’s hands ... with the social life as well (laugh) – you don’t do certain things because you feel that it is not congruent with who you are.”

³⁰ “... but I think it is connected to your way of doing things. I don’t shout at people when I am angry because I know it’s not really my way of doing and it’s not who I am”

(II 2.28).³¹ Living with diverse individuals broadened Elsa's world view and resulted in respect and acceptance towards others. It might be assumed that she was taught by her parents/church that she should convince others to become Christians., However, her exposure to diversity lead to her own conclusion about these matters.

Elsa spoke passionately about her religion and spirituality but was adamant not to judge others based on their beliefs. She realised that one's spiritual beliefs would influence one's behaviour: "*Ag ek dink in 'n mate beïnvloed dit ons definitief, ek dink mens moet maar net sover moontlik probeer om dit intern te hou*" (II 2.34).³² These matters were considered to be private and subjective: "*Mens moet egter versigtig wees om nie jou spirituele identiteit en geloofsoortuigings op ander af te dwing nie*" (RW 2.6).³³ Elsa believed that it was important to influence others by being a role model rather than through convincing conversations: "... *lead by example ... dit help nie jy probeer mense heeltyd oortuig van jou spirituele identiteit nie, leef dit eerder en dit word so oorgedra ja ...*" (II 2.14).³⁴ From Elsa's perspective, behaviour (as an expression of spiritual identity) rather than preaching of religion is able to convince others to change.

Elsa thought that she would not coerce her clients in a therapeutic setting: "... *maar ek dink dis baie belangrik om nie jou spirituele identiteit op jou kliënte af te dwing nie, soos byvoorbeeld as hulle sê hulle is nie 'n Christen nie, moenie eers daar gaan nie ...*" (II 2.26).³⁵ She argued that one should not judge others based on their beliefs before you have contextual information: "*Jy kan nie regtig iets van iemand sê as jy nie regtig 'n myl in hulle skoene geloop*

³¹ "I have experienced it because I was in a residence; therefore, it's not that strange for me. I obviously have my own way of doing things, but I am not an advocate for forcing my ways onto others. I know sometimes people say that you should convince others, but I don't feel that it is my place to do this."

³² "To a certain extent, it does influence us definitely, I think you should just try to keep it internal as far as possible."

³³ "You should be careful, however, not to force your spiritual identity or religious convictions onto others."

³⁴ "It doesn't help to attempt to convince others of your spiritual identity; live it and it will be transferred yes ..."

³⁵ "... but I think it is really important not to force your spiritual identity onto your clients for example if they tell you that they are not Christians, don't even go there ..."

*het nie ... ” (II 2.52).*³⁶ She acknowledged that she had her own way of behaving and believing but realised that others did not necessarily have to behave or believe similarly: *“Ek wil nie sê mens moet in hulle spirituele identiteit inklim nie, glad nie, want dis tog maar jou eie, mens moet maar net probeer agterkom wat is hulle spirituele identiteit en hoe hulle sin maak van dinge” (II2.34).*³⁷ Elsa realised the importance of acknowledging how others made sense of experiences, and that this might be different from one’s personal way of making meaning.

Elsa showed insight into people’s confusion regarding spirituality: *“ In plaas daarvan om hulle te oordeel het ek eerder verstaan waardeur hulle gaan en gesien dit kan moontlik wees as mens nou met al hierdie inligting gebombardeer word en dalk onseker is oor sekere dinge in jou lewe dat jy kan vrae vra ” (II 2.48).*³⁸ She thought that the confusion might be due to exposure to too much information, and that this information might overwhelm a person.

Lastly, Elsa asserted that difference in spirituality/religion involved differences in meaning-making: *“Hulle gaan nie noodwendig sin maak van situasies soos wat ek sin maak van situasies nie ... mens moet maar net probeer agterkom wat is hulle spirituele identiteit en hoe hulle sin maak van dinge ... vra eerder waar het dinge in hulle lewe al sleg gegaan en wat het toe gehelp ... ” (II 2.34).*³⁹ She acknowledged diversity and subjectivity in making meaning and saw this as the most essential part of a person’s spiritual identity.

4.2.4 In conclusion. *“Lead by example” (II 2.14)* was explained as the core of spiritual identity development in Elsa’s story. Elsa’s process of spiritual identity development led her to become an emerging adult who was determined to live her spirituality through her behaviour

³⁶ “... you cannot really say something about someone if you haven’t walked a mile in their shoes”

³⁷ “I don’t want to say you have to climb into their spiritual identity, not at all, because it is your own. You have to realise what their spiritual identity is and how they make sense of things”

³⁸ “.... instead of judging them I tried to understand what they were going through and saw that it was possible that a person could become unsure about certain things and have questions when they are bombarded with information”

³⁹ “They will not necessarily make sense of situations like I make sense of situations ... you have to discover what their spiritual identity is and how they make meaning of things ... rather ask where things went wrong in their life and what helped back then ...”

and not through preaching. Elsa's parents had an important role to play in Elsa's spiritual identity development, but their influence diminished as she differentiated from her family and had the opportunity to explore her spiritual identity privately. Elsa did not question or challenge her spiritual identity critically. She explored this domain of her identity minimally and cautiously.

4.3 Michelle: Relationship with Christian God

Michelle was a 21-year-old white female. Initially, Michelle answered the reflective writing exercise in English but asked to do the interview in Afrikaans. Michelle's biggest dream was to become a clinical psychologist. She was a first-time applicant and applied at Pretoria, Potchefstroom, and the University of the Free State (UFS) for admission to master's in clinical psychology. Michelle was shy during our interview and seemed a little uncomfortable with the questions. It became clear during the interview that she was immensely private and did not find the interviewing process easy.

The main theme that emerged from Michelle's reflection was the relationship that she had with God. In the next section, Michelle's relationship with the Christian God is presented by means of three subthemes, namely 1) relationship with God, 2) balancing spirituality and psychology, and 3) exposure to culturally diverse thought processes. See the themes and subthemes presented in Figure 5.

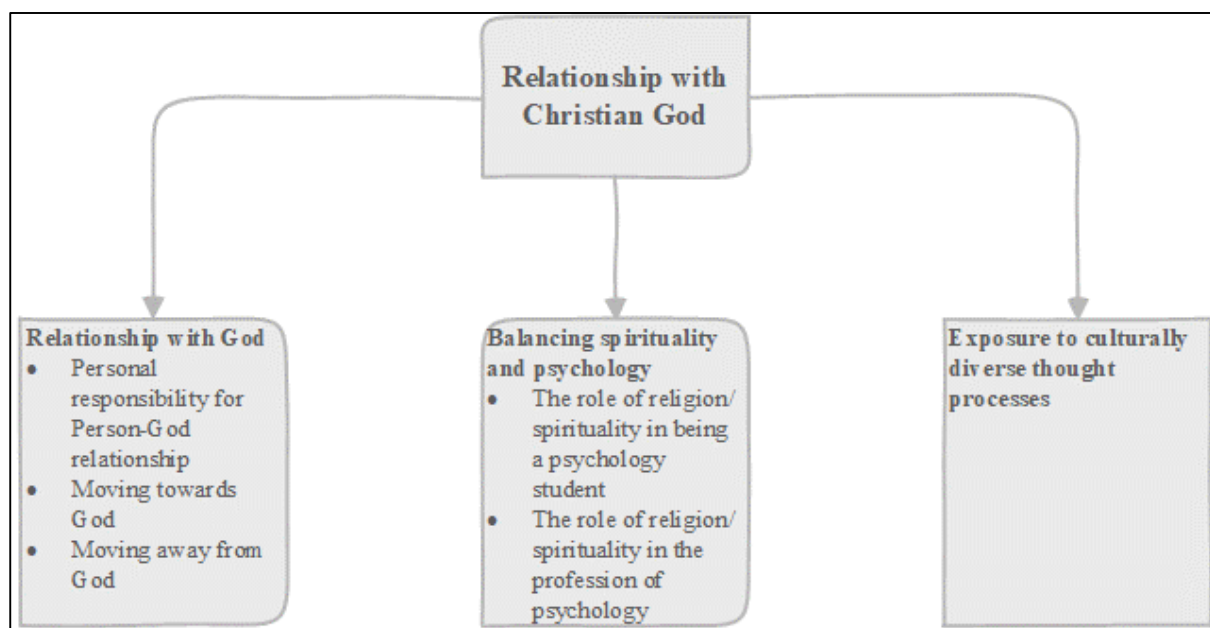


Figure 5. Visual display of Michelle's journey.

4.3.1 Relationship with God. Michelle's journey of spiritual development was a non-linear process: "*Ek dink almal het maar hulle op en af. Ek is 'n Christin en so dis maar, partykeer raak mens te besig en vergeet mens daarvan, dit gebeur baie*" (II 3.4).⁴⁰ Michelle frequently found herself moving away from God, and after a time of reflection, found herself moving closer to God. A relationship with God was essential to Michelle's spiritual sense of self.

Michelle's relationship with God is discussed by referring to three themes, namely 1) personal responsibility for person-God Relationship, 2) moving towards God, and 3) moving away from God.

Personal responsibility for person-God relationship

As an emerging adult, Michelle assumed personal responsibility for her relationship with God. Fulfilling this obligation involved tangible tasks in which she frequently had to engage. These tasks were doctrine orientated and involved prayer and church attendance.

Michelle experienced postgraduate education as emotionally and physically demanding. Therefore, she found it difficult at times to engage in religious activities and maintain her relationship with God. Michelle confessed that she was the only one that could build and maintain the person-God relationship. This awareness indicated that Michelle became aware of the personal and subjective nature of religion / spirituality– no other person could establish and maintain the spiritual relationship for you.

Michelle made her own rules regarding what was important in maintaining a relationship with God. Although Michelle moved towards and away from God, she always came to the realisation that the person-God relationship was the most essential relationship in her life: "*Ek het maar soos net op 'n punt gekom wat ek beseef het dit is so 'n belangrike deel van mens se*

⁴⁰ "I think everyone has their ups and downs. I am a Christian but sometimes you get busy and forget about it, it happens a lot."

*lewe, en uhm ek moet tyd insit (pause) ek is die enigste een wat my verhouding kan opbou so ek moet dit probeer doen ...” (II 3.46).*⁴¹

Michelle came from a Christian home – religion and spirituality were strongly related. Therefore, religious practices formed part of Michelle’s own defined spiritual responsibilities. Michelle believed these activities to be the most essential part of life and vital to the relationship with God: “*Ek het nooit tyd gemaak om kerk toe te gaan of aan my verhouding of aan my geloof te werk nie. Ek het maar net die ‘bare minimum’ gedoen maar ja ek het maar soos net op ’n punt gekom wat ek besef het dit is so belangrike deel van mens se lewe, en uhm ek moet tyd in sit...*” (II 3.46).⁴² Inconsistent church attendance led to feelings of anxiety, abandonment, and guilt. Michelle realised the importance of religious activities when she had time to reflect on the past and how it had influenced her.

Moving towards God

During relatively stress-free times, Michelle found it easier to connect to her spirituality. Holiday time was mentioned as the crucial time for spiritual reflection, and during this time, Michelle realised the essence of spirituality: “*Die oplettendste ding vir my was in eerste semester waar ons so min tyd het en dit dan gevoel het of ek, van laas jaar af my verhouding verloor het met die Here en daai deel van my lewe, en my uhm (pause) spirituele lewe. Ja, mens moet maar net fokus daarop en ek het dit besef die vakansie, dat ek dit nie sal deur maak sonder dit nie ...*” (II 3.4).⁴³ Holiday time was a time where she had the time and energy to reflect on her spiritual life. When life was relaxed, Michelle realised how important spirituality was and how beneficial it was to her well-being. Furthermore, during holidays, Michelle had the time to engage in religious practices. She had the time to do more than the “*bare minimum*” (II

⁴¹ “I got to a point where I just realised that it is the most important part of your life, and uhm you have to invest time (pause) I am the only one that can build my relationship and I must therefore try to do it ...”

⁴² “I never made time to go to church, to work on my relationship or religion. I just did the bare minimum but I just got to a point where I realised it is such an important part of life, and uhm you have to invest time ...”

⁴³ “The most obvious example was during first semester when we had so little time and it felt like I lost my relationship with God and that part of my life, and my uhm (pause) spiritual life. Yes, you just have to focus on it, and I realised during the holidays that I wouldn’t survive without it ...”

3.46), to go to church and work on her relationship with God. In turn, this led to a closer connection with her spirituality.

Michelle also mentioned that she used her spirituality and religion to make sense of “*algemene klein goed*” (II 3.25).⁴⁴ She mentioned conflict in her peer group as a trigger: “*Aan die begin van die semester het ek met twee van my beste vriendinne so baklei en as sulke goetertjies gebeur dan wil mens maar net terugdraai daarna en kan staatmaak op mens se geloof en op die verhouding wat jy het*” (II 3.26).⁴⁵ Conflict in Michelle’s personal relationships resulted in a turn towards her relationship with God. This might have given her consolation and stability when she experienced instability in human relationships.

Moving away from God

Michelle realised that she had lost the connection with God when she was under severe academic stress. Emotionally taxing times put strain on this relationship, and Michelle confessed that it was due to time pressure: “*At the beginning of my honours course I was overwhelmed by stress and anxiety and had no time to have the relationship the way I used to ...*” (RW 3.8). Sometimes in her life, Michelle experienced a sense of security and connection in her relationship with God, but during stressful times, she felt that she lost this feeling of security and connection.

Michelle was aware of the importance she placed on other aspects of her life to be more important, but emotionally, the lack of connection led to feelings of abandonment and loneliness: “*I considered other things more important and felt alone when I had to face hard times*” (RW 3.8). “*I also sometimes get frustrated and feel that I’m faced with too many challenges and that He has forgotten about me and that I cannot face whatever is in front me ... I have also experienced with these feelings comes validation and reassurance*” (RW 3.4). Michelle found it difficult to maintain a balance in her life as a postgraduate student. The lack

⁴⁴ “overall small things”

⁴⁵ “At the beginning of the semester, two of my best friends and I had a fight; when things like that happen, you just want to turn back and rely on your religion and relationship that you have.”

of balance led to feelings of abandonment but opened a pathway to spiritual questioning, and essentially, spiritual growth.

In the interview, I observed that Michelle felt confused regarding her feelings about God in difficult times. On the one hand, Michelle felt that she had lost connection with God during times because she did not have time to engage in religious practices: *“Ek het nooit tyd gemaak het om kerk toe te gaan of aan my verhouding of geloof te werk nie. Ek het maar net die ‘bare minimum’ gedoen”* (II 3.46).⁴⁶ However, on the other hand, Michelle relied and focused on her faith during difficult times: *“... so as slegte of moeilike tye kom dan (pause) is mens meer geneig om te fokus op jou geloof want jy wil hulp hê”* (II 3.16).⁴⁷ It can be hypothesised that Michelle desired help from God during difficult times but that she did not have the time to engage in religious activities. These activities were essential for Michelle in terms of spiritual connection. Michelle focused on her spirituality in difficult times but did not know how to utilise it.

In summary, periods of crisis resulted in reflection, and Michelle usually became aware of the change in her relationship with God.

4.3.2 Balancing spirituality and psychology. Master’s selection and the journey of becoming a psychologist were on Michelle’s foreground during the interviewing process. She was anxious about the selection procedures and utilised her spirituality in coping with the process.

The journey of becoming a psychologist is discussed by referring to 1) the role of religion/spirituality in being a psychology student, and 2) the role of religion spirituality in the profession of psychology.

The role of religion / spirituality in being a psychology student

⁴⁶ “ I never made time to attend church, work on my relationship, or religion. I only did the bare minimum.”

⁴⁷ “... so when you encounter bad or difficult times (pause), you are more inclined to focus on your religion because you want help.”

Postgraduate studies provided Michelle with a platform for questioning and critical evaluation of her beliefs: *“This year, especially, I have tried to look at the challenges I am faced with, as something that God has deliberately put into my path to make me trust Him more and rely on Him more ...”* (RW 3.4). Michelle could not think of a specific situation that led to critical evaluation but rather mentioned postgraduate studies in general: *“Dit was maar net meestal alles saamgevat, al die stres en al die werk wat so baie was en so overwelming was en soos maar net omdat dit so goed gegaan het en so sleg gegaan het, dat mens daarop fokus en besef jy moet n goeie verhouding hê deur die goeie tye en die slegte tye”* (II 3.44).⁴⁸ In essence, postgraduate studies provided academic and personal challenges. These challenges provided opportunities for meaning-making and re-evaluation of her relationship with God.

Master’s selection was the most challenging event that Michelle could think of during the interview. She leaned heavily on her spirituality during this experience: *“Dit is h ‘challenging’ ding en ek rely baie op my geloof in hierdie situasie”* (II 3.20).⁴⁹ The master’s selection process led to difficult questioning, inner confusion, and ambivalence regarding spirituality.

Michelle utilised spiritual resources from the beginning of the process: *“Dit is waarvoor ek gebid het”* (II 3.18).⁵⁰ Michelle did not want to choose between institutions and therefore prayed that she would be invited only for the selection process at one university. Her engagement in prayer and relationship with God resulted in serenity regarding the outcomes (she was invited to only one university for interviews): *“... rus in my hart gegee want dit is waarvoor ek gebid het en dit is wat ek gekry het. So ek kan dit nie ‘question’ regtig nie”* (II 3.18).⁵¹ Michelle believed that God was in control over experiences in her life. She also

⁴⁸ “It was mostly everything put together, all the stress, the overload of work and everything was so overwhelming, everything went well and then it did not go well, then you focus and realise that you need a good relationship during good and bad times.”

⁴⁹ “It is challenging, and I rely on my religion a lot in this situation.”

⁵⁰ “It is what I prayed for.”

⁵¹ “... gave me peace in my heart because it is what I prayed for and it is what I got. So I cannot really question it.”

believed that she could influence Him through prayers; therefore, she was not allowed to question the outcomes.

Religious practices and relying on religion in times of stress resulted in contentment. It also helped Michelle to cope with self-depreciation beliefs: *“Ek sou redelik kwaad gewees het en gedink het was jou punte nie goed genoeg nie of jou ‘autobiography’ nie genoeg nie en jy’t nie regtig vrede in jou hart oor dat jy nie in gekom het nie, maar as mens nou daarop gaan ‘rely’ om te bid daaroor voel mens maar net meer gerus. Maar as mens dit nie het nie dan weet mens nie regtig waar om antwoorde te soek nie” (II 3.24).*⁵² Spirituality facilitated meaning-making and was especially important in situations where the ego was threatened.

The role of religion /spirituality in the profession of psychology

Michelle reflected on her spirituality and was aware of the dangers of religious or spiritual opinions in the therapeutic relationship: *“Mens sal dit nou nie op mense afdwing nie of vra wat die Here sou doen of so iets nie maar dit sal altyd aan die agterkant van my kop wees en (pause) al moet mens soos eties wees ... jy nog steeds jou waardes as ‘n Christen of wat ook al geloof jy het. Ons sal nog steeds moet respekteer die van jou kliënt watter geloof hulle het en so aan. Ek sal dit nie altyd opbring nie maar ek dink dit sal mens affekteer in die besluite wat jy neem” (II 3.30).*⁵³ Although Michelle was aware of the ethical guidelines of the profession, she realised that spiritual beliefs and values might inadvertently influence decision making. From her perspective, using spirituality in the therapeutic relationship, especially one’s inner values, was inevitable. According to her, it was more important not to force others into your subjective framework.

In Michelle’s reflections, it also became apparent that her spirituality would provide confidence when starting her career as a psychologist: *“Soos as ek nou ‘n sielkundige is eendag*

⁵² “I would have been relatively angry and I would have thought wasn’t my marks good enough or wasn’t my autobiography good enough – you don’t really have peace in your heart regarding the fact that you did not get in, but if you rely on prayer then you feel more comfortable. But if you don’t have it you won’t know where to look for answers.”

⁵³ “You won’t force it onto other people or ask what Jesus would do or something like that but it will always be at the back of your mind and (pause) even though you have to be ethical ... you still have your values as a Christian or whatever religion you are. You must still respect your client’s religion. I won’t always bring it up but I think it will influence how you make decisions.”

dalk, dan (pause) soos die (pause) tipe uhm (pause) 'treatment' (laugh), daar is obviously baie reëls en goed wat mens moet volg maak ek dink dit sal jou besluite lei van wat jy moet sê vir die mense en die 'confidence' wat jy het as jy begin met so iets ...” (II 3.32).⁵⁴ Starting out as a psychologist might be an uncertain time in a person’s life, and it might be easier to rely on an established decision- making system when conducting therapy. Michelle thought that spirituality formed an integrative and well-known part of who she was as a person. When she felt unsure, this was the first domain of identity to which she turned. Her spiritual identity was a facet of her identity that provided her with confidence and intuition when assuming a new, professional role.

Michelle also hypothesised that she might use her spirituality in meaning-making as a psychologist but that this depended on the strength of her spirituality later in life: *“Dit hang seker maar hoe sterk jou verhouding is in jou geloof as jy maar (pause) as ek nou ’n groot geloof het daai tyd ook nog (pause) ...*” (II 3.40).⁵⁵ From this statement, it is clear that Michelle had not made strict commitments regarding her spiritual identity and that she was still exploring this domain. There was still room for development. However, she did acknowledge that meaning-making would be difficult if she were a very religious psychologist: *“Maar ek dink dit gaan vir my moeilik wees om te verstaan hoekom hulle dit so sien en dit mmm (pause) dit is nie my geloof nie”* (II 3.34)⁵⁶ and *“... goeie en slegte situasies wat hulle vir my sê sal seker gekoppel word aan my geloof en wat ek dink”* (II 3.40).⁵⁷ Michelle was unsure how strong her religion would be in the future; therefore, she was unsure how she would experience her clients, and how she would make meaning of their experiences.

⁵⁴ “Like if I am a psychologist one day maybe, then (pause) the like (pause) type of uhm (pause) treatment (laugh), there is obviously a lot of rules that you have to follow but I think it will lead your decisions and will influence what you say to people and your confidence when you start with something like that.”

⁵⁵ “It probably depends on how strong your relationship is in your religion If you have (pause) if I still have a strong religion then (pause) ...”

⁵⁶ “... but I think it is going to be difficult for me to understand why they see it that way and that mmm (pause) isn’t my religion.”

⁵⁷ “... good and bad situations that they tell me about will always be connected to my religion and what I think.”

Michelle hypothetically assessed the effect that her spirituality would have on her career as a psychologist. This was a difficult process, primarily because she was still exploring her identity as an emerging adult.

4.3.3 Exposure to culturally diverse thought processes. Michelle did not spend much time pondering religious and spiritual diversity. However, she was sensitive and non-judgemental towards her peers.

Michelle was born and raised a Christian. Through Michelle's reflections, it was clear that she never deviated from Christianity or explored other religions/world views before postgraduate studies: *"Ek bedoel ek ken nie enigiets anders nie ... dis maar hoe ek groot geword het ook"* (II 3.42).⁵⁸ The lack of religious exploration complicated meaning-making processes regarding spiritual/religious uniqueness between people. Michelle's limited experience with diversity also led to challenges in noticing spiritual differences between people: *"Ek's nie baie goed daarin om dit duidelik op te tel as iemand 'n ander geloof is nie behalwe as dit baie duidelik is soos Muslim of iemand ..."* (II 3.38).⁵⁹

During postgraduate studies, Michelle was exposed to a variety of cultures despite her challenges with identifying spiritual diversity. She attributed the differences in spirituality/religion to the differences in culture: *"Ek dink dit gaan ook maar oor kultuur want dis maar meer algemeen dat ... sulke goeters verander in kulture"* (II 3.40).⁶⁰ Michelle communicated that she had never been confronted in the class setting with a conflict situation regarding spirituality and religion. She did mention that she was confronted with someone that did not believe at all: *"Ek was 'geconfront' met 'n 'ateïs' en hulle is so aggressief oor die feit dat die Bybel nonsens is ... ek het net weer besef mens stry nie met sulke mense nie ... ek*

⁵⁸ "I mean I don't know anything else ... it was the way I grew up."

⁵⁹ "I'm not really good at it to recognise when someone is from a different religion unless when it is very obvious like a Muslim or someone ..."

⁶⁰ "I think it is also about culture because such things generally ... differ between cultures."

probeer nie met hulle in konflik kom ...” (II 3.40).⁶¹ It made Michelle extremely uncomfortable when her religious beliefs were challenged, and she preferred to avoid such interactions.

As a postgraduate student, Michelle had a growing interest in diversity and she engaged in exploration on her terms. Michelle felt comfortable around others that were also religious and followed doctrines. It seemed as if Michelle was open to such discussions and found them intellectually stimulating: “... *die een meisie in my klas wat ’n – dis amper dieselfde ding – hulle is nog steeds catholic en sy’s ’n non en dis so interessant...*” (II 3.40).⁶² Michelle tolerated people who were religious but not people who were irreligious. It can be hypothesised that Michelle wanted to avoid critical questions about her beliefs and that it made her uncomfortable. Michelle could find similarities between herself and other religious individuals; therefore, these discussions were not as threatening to her sense of spiritual self.

Michelle found religious/spiritual diversity interesting: “*Dit is interessant vir my om te dink hoe ander mense dink ...*” (II 3.40).⁶³ She realised that diversity did not result in immorality: “*Hulle is nie dan slegte mense of anders nie, hulle is (pause) maar net almal mense, hulle glo maar net bietjie anders ...*” (II 3.40).⁶⁴ These extracts show a growing interest and abstract thinking. Michelle hoped to gain more information as she grows into a professional psychologist: “... *hopelik daardie tyd weet ek meer van gelowe en hulle probeer help volgens hulle geloof en wat vir hulle reg is*” (II 3.36).⁶⁵

⁶¹ “I was confronted with an atheist and they are so aggressive about the fact that the Bible is nonsense ... I just realised that you don’t disagree with people like that ... I try to avoid conflict with them.”

⁶² “... the one girl in my class – it’s almost the same thing – they are still catholic and she is a nun and it is so interesting ...”

⁶³ “It is interesting to think about how others think.”

⁶⁴ “They are not bad people or different, they are (pause) just all people, their beliefs just differ slightly.”

⁶⁵ “... hopefully by that time I would know more about different religions and how to help them according to their religion and what is right for them.”

Owing to her limited exposure, Michelle hoped to gain more exposure to diversity. However, this was challenging, as Michelle was still very hesitant to engage and connect with others on this level.

4.3.4 In conclusion. Michelle's spiritual development was greatly influenced by a personal relationship with God. She experienced the strength of the connection differently at different times in her life. Through her reflections, it became apparent that religious activities were essential in Michelle's spirituality. Michelle was aware that her religion/spirituality influenced her experiences of being a postgraduate psychology student and that her religion/spirituality might influence her career as a psychologist. Michelle indicated a growing interest in spiritual diversity; however, exploration was still largely absent. Michelle hoped that she would become more knowledgeable regarding her own spirituality and the spirituality of others as she matured into adulthood.

4.4 Mpho: Relationship with God

Mpho presented as a mature 22-year-old female student. Mpho was the only black student interviewed, and was a second- language English speaker. She was the only participant that mentioned that she had a bursary to study psychology. Financial difficulties were a major topic of discussion during our interview.

Mpho was excited to attend the interview. She was patient and open. She asked me to repeat questions when she did not understand. She had difficulty expressing herself at times. She was passionate, and excited about the topic of spiritual identity development, and eager to engage with me during the interviewing process.

The main theme that emerged from Mpho's reflection was her relationship with God. Mpho's unique experiences are described by referring to three themes, namely 1) meaning-making through financial hardship, 2) God as parental figure, 3) finding a community, and 4) being focused on the future. Mpho's journey of spiritual identity development is depicted in Figure 6.

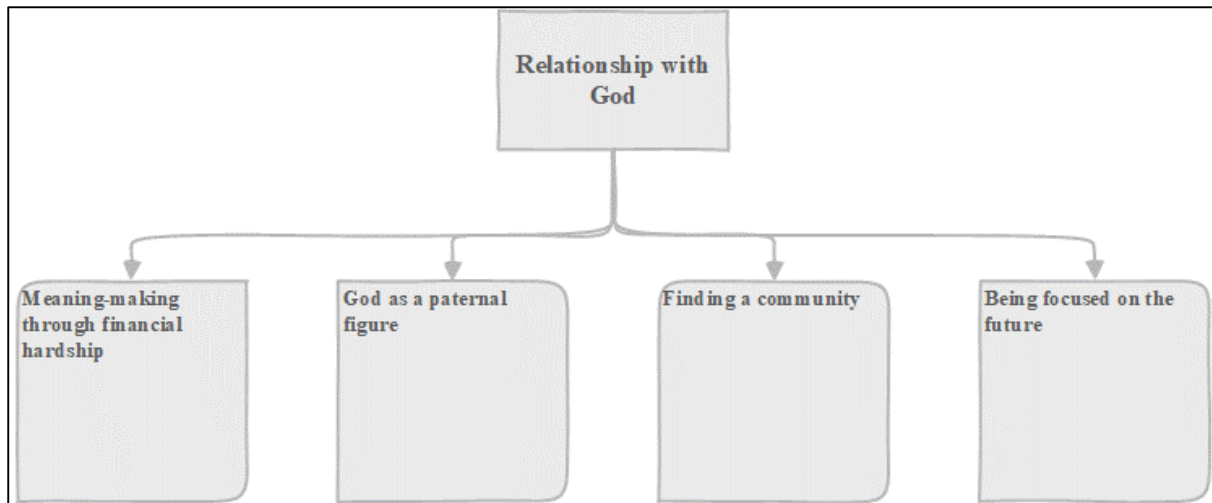


Figure 6. Visual display of Mpho's journey.

4.4.1 Meaning-making through financial hardship. Mpho came from poor socio-economic circumstances. Her history provided a very specific and unique context for her spiritual identity development. Mpho wanted to come to university and become a psychologist. However, this was uncommon and somewhat misunderstood in Mpho's culture. She therefore had to take this journey alone: *"Okay I grew up in a context where an education was not ... really regarded as (pause) it is really important but because you know. You don't really have money to take the child to school so it's like ahh. will I go to school or not, doesn't really matter? You will just find your own way ..."* (II 4.36). Her ideas and views differed vastly from those of her parents, and she learnt from a young age to rely on herself.

She told a story of her journey of higher education: *"... when I completed my undergrad last year. There was no funding at home and I did not know how I am gonna come here to sort of continue my studies ... because of the lack of support that you get from home, it sort of tried to take me down, to discourage you ... So when I called back home, it's a life challenge neh ... when I call back home and I say that (pause) I am struggling here and they like we told you to go look for a job. We told you that do not go to school and you know find a job ..."* (II 4.42). Mpho's family did not understand Mpho's desire to obtain a psychology degree. There was clearly a difference between Mpho's world view and the view of her family. When she struggled, instead of encouraging her to continue, her family told her to give up and find employment. As a first-generation student, Mpho's family did not know how to support her. They greatly disagreed with her and it seemed that there was severe conflict in the family system when Mpho decided to continue her education. The conflict in the system acted as a

trigger for spiritual identity development because Mpho had to break away from her family of origin and establish a new support system.

Mpho was ashamed of her circumstances and did not want to rely on others to help her. During the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate studies, Mpho had no money to survive. She reached out to some friends to help with accommodation but never confessed the severity of her situation. She felt extremely ashamed: *“I did not want to tell them the situation because I did not want to feel like I’m eating on them or depending on them”* (II 4.42) and *“I was keeping it sort of a secret to most people so that I cannot feel like I am a vulnerable person or I want them to feel pity for me”* (II 4.48). She mentioned that during severely stressful times, she would reach out for others but that she could not always rely on them: *“When I call family members, they were not able to help and when I call my friends ... they weren’t there for me and I was like you know this is life”* (II 4.42). Conflict in relationships and lack of emotional support resulted in reliance on the self and on God.

Mpho attempted to make meaning through her financial hardships by assuming self-responsibility. She took responsibility for her life, and especially for her future: *“We tend to blame things that happened way back, which is wrong for me to blame that because I might be born in poverty but it will be my uhm (pause) problem to grow up and die in poverty”* (II 4.50). The sense of self-responsibility and resilience helped Mpho to overcome and embrace life challenges. *“... if you want something, go for something that you want. You cannot just sit here and wait for somebody to pity you and sympathise with you. Ag shame (pause) No, I thought ... I don’t want that ...”* (II 4.48). Mpho was very determined to pursue her career as a psychologist; therefore, she took extreme measures: *“If it cost me to sleep at the library then I will do that ... I went to the library, got the textbooks, study, study, studied”* (II 4.42). Mpho would do anything to achieve the goals she had set for herself. The journey of achieving these goals was testing, and at times, this led to self-doubt: *“God ... what am I gonna do? Can I deregister and go back and look for a job?”* (II 4.42) Mpho stated that, during such times *“when you lack that support ... back to your spirituality ... to speak to God and you relate to God ...”* (II 4.8). Challenges were a trigger for spiritual identity development.

Mpho was separated from her family, and had minimal resources to her disposal. She suffered to get to where she was. However, Mpho saw challenges as opportunities to learn, and to rise above her circumstances. Mpho created meaning through suffering: *“I make meaning in terms of understanding that challenges are not there to harm me ... They are there to make me*

strong and give me experience that I might make use of in the future ... I try to embrace it although it's not always easy, to say, I am what I am because of the challenges that I have experienced and will be a better person because of this challenges" (RW 4.4). Mpho acknowledged the role that challenges play in shaping one's identity. Mpho narrated her story in such a way that it showed that she had learnt and gained insight through the challenges that she had encountered.

Mpho experienced positive feelings during adverse life experiences because of her strong spiritual identity: *"I find peace; I find hope; I find (pause) I am able to be resilient. I am able to you know have that self-confidence and self-esteem even when things are not working out the way that I want them to work ... In everything God is there, he is aware, that is why he will always come through, and will always help"* (II 4.50). Mpho could transcend her circumstances because of resilience obtained from a strong sense of spiritual identity.

4.4.2 God as paternal figure. God was the most important figure in Mpho's life, and she relied on Him like she would on a father. From Mpho's reflections, it seemed as if this relationship was established only during emerging adulthood. However, her upbringing did form a foundation for her relationship with God.

Mpho acknowledged the importance of upbringing in forming a tentative spiritual identity: *"In spiritual identity it can be something that you understand in terms of how you grew up, that you grew up in this type of environment where they say they are Christians, you are also gonna define yourself in that way"* (II 4.2). Although Mpho grew up in a Christian household, she did not initially understand Christianity to the extent that she did as an emerging adult: *"When I was an adolescent, I did not really have that knowledge about it and I did not know how to define myself according to it, I did not know what it is actually. But then, now that I am in it. I feel like it's more or less like (pause) I am into it more than in the past ..."* (II 4.18). Mpho had the knowledge regarding the appropriate Christian traditions and values but did not know how to incorporate it into who she was as a person. Mpho started to investigate her spiritual identity and her personal relationship with God only as an emerging adult.

From Mpho's perspective, doctrines were meaningless to her during adolescence: *"... before going to church for me meant nothing. It was like oh going to church just to (pause) pull up your conscience and now because it's something that I understand, you do it knowing that no man, it's not about the conscience but it's about you building yourself, it's about growing*

yourself and knowing who you are in the end” (II 4.20). As a child and as an adolescent, Mpho went to church because it was the right thing to do, and because it was expected from her family. It seemed as if Mpho’s family had authority over the religious activities at home. As an emerging adult, she came to the realisation that spirituality was about the self, and about shaping one’s identity. It seemed that Mpho moved from a concrete understanding of religion to understanding a deeper and abstract meaning of spirituality.

Mpho incorporated her spirituality into her sense of identity: *“Okay, spirituality is the inner person: it is about you personally as a person. How you sort of relate to the world, relate to yourself, relate to the bigger person which is God”* (II 4.6). Spirituality wasn’t separate from Mpho but encompassed the relationship with the self, the world, and with God.

The most important relationship was the most essential aspect of spirituality: *“I feel like the core for me about spiritual identity is that relationship you have with God”* (II 4.26). Her relationship with God took precedence over other aspects of her life as an emerging adult: *“So, I am able to say that, uhm you know what spirituality or spiritual identity take first priority in my life before it can come to other areas... like spiritual identity and maybe my social life, my educational life, my family life comes after”* (II 4.36). The spiritual domain was the most important domain of identity for Mpho. Owing to Mpho’s circumstances, she could rely on this domain of identity to make meaning of her life. As an emerging adult, Mpho viewed social, academic, and family life as secondary. It can be hypothesised that Mpho focused on herself and her personal relationship with God rather than on relationships with others.

The personal relationship with God was established in 2012 when she was: *“born again and came into this world”* (II 4.66). She mentioned that her spiritual identity had not changed since, even after she had started with her postgraduate studies: *“It hasn’t really changed because when I started being in this world knowing who I am spiritually, I have been like that even now. I am still praying, I am still seeing myself as a child of God ... I am still defining myself the way I used to define myself way back you know when I was born again and came into this world”* (II 4.66). Mpho committed to her spiritual identity when she went through the process of spiritual rebirth (possibly through a church). Although she did not think that her spirituality had changed during postgraduate studies, she was still exploring: *“Instead of my spirituality changing, I feel more interested in knowing and understanding more about my spirituality than only knowing the basics”* (RW 4.8). Learning more about one’s spirituality is a factor in exploration and would lead to a deepening of spiritual identity.

Mpho had a personal and open relationship with God: “... *from my spiritual identity to say you know what because of the relationship I have with God. I can sit down there and talk to him about anything. You know to be open about it and I don't feel like it's more of a professional kind of situation. But it's more of a personal kind of identity ... to speak to God and you relate to God in a manner that you can be comfortable in*” (II 4.8). Mpho related to God like a child would relate to a parent. She relied on God above all else – especially during times of stress. It can be hypothesised that He was the only one on whom she could rely because of the conflict in worldly relationships.

During Mpho's journey, she relied on God above all else: “*I felt like with God by my side, I was able to pull through because most people couldn't ... you cannot read on my forehead to say this one is going through, this one has got a problem ... God has been there for me, that's why I feel like spirituality for me is important because without God I wouldn't have been here ...*” (II 4.42). Mpho believed in God's power but did not deny her own resilience and own role in the positive outcomes of her life.

Mpho's relationship with God allowed her to overcome obstacles in her life through conversing with God: “*I try to make meaning out of it, I am like you know what because I have a relationship with God, I always go back to God, pray about it and say God I am experiencing pressure at school and it's a challenge for me and it's a challenge in my spirituality because sometimes, when you go through challenges, you sort of wanna neglect your spiritual life ...*” (II 4.40). Mpho admitted that it was hard to maintain a relationship with God during troubling times but utilised prayer as a means to spiritual connection.

4.4.3 Finding a community. In Mpho's journey, finding a community was essential to her spiritual identity development. Mpho communicated that she as a psychologist would obtain her strength from God: “... *as a future psychologist, would be the strength I draw from God when situations of work get tough and overwhelming*” (RW 4.6). However, she mentioned the importance of others who shared spiritual identity with her, as she believed that these individuals would understand her better: “... *and the support I will get from the people I share identity with, will help me to continue to be strong and have faith ... When I feel emotionally drained by other people's problems, I will know where to pour my heart to when perhaps my supervisor does not really get me*” (RW 4.6). Mpho needed relationships with people with whom she shared her spiritual identity, who would be better equipped to help her in challenging times, rather than with individuals who were spiritually different from her.

Mpho also relied on her church for support during stressful times: *“I went to church and just poured my heart there and it was really. I was crying almost every day”* (II 4.42). Mpho did not feel safe to share her troubles with her family or her friends but felt secure enough to share her difficulties with members of her church. Shared spiritual beliefs were essential for interpersonal trust.

In our discussion, it became apparent that Mpho wanted to share her spirituality with others. She did this by leading home cells, and also by participating in community work: *“... you know uhm lead home cells you know share the word with other students and pray with them and then become part of all organisations whereby now, we are doing community work ... now we try to sorta help people with their spiritual identity in a way ...”* (II 4.20). She wanted to influence, support, and help other individuals through her well- established spiritual identity.

When asked about her classmates, Mpho acknowledged that they were all different and reflected about how her spiritual views contrasted with the views of the church: *“But I feel like churches are teaching us to think that, not putting other religion but we are more important and we have to dominate the world, we have to infiltrate other religious ... I don’t feel like that is the right way to do it because God created all of us and all of us have their own choices ... we are all different, so I feel in my class we are all different and we will always be different”* (II 4.74). Mpho disagreed with the preaching of the church and acknowledged and appreciated the differences between individuals. The polarities in her thinking became known when Mpho was discussing the class experience. In a postgraduate situation emphasis is placed on diversity, and mutual respect is encouraged by lecturers. Mpho did not have this opinion when prompted about any other aspects of her life – especially her life as a therapist.

Mpho tried to make sense of the differences between the spirituality of people by referring to their cultural background: *“I can start by looking at their cultural background ... if you grow up in a community of Christians, obviously or most likely your family is Christian you will most definitely or likely be a Christian in most situations”* (II 4.85). From this reflection, it is clear that Christianity might not be appropriate in all situations and that Mpho felt that this was the case in a postgraduate psychology class. She asserted, *“It’s not for me to judge but you know to accept and make peace ... rather learn about other religion, cultures so that we can be able to accommodate each other in class, at school, and everywhere ... we mustn’t take other people’s sense of autonomy of belonging or feeling comfortable away ...”*

(II 4.85). Mpho acknowledged the importance of learning about different religions during her postgraduate studies and that it would be selfish to focus only on one world view.

Mpho showed compassion and understanding towards students that were different from her: *“I have my own religion. I have my special identity. Others as well have their own. So respect that ... you discover that you are different from me but we are doing the same thing or yes we might be different but one person we believe in is God. We might be doing other aspects of religion ... before I used to think ... everything is sort of surrounded by Christian life ... But now I think no aaah things are different, people are different”* (II 4.89). Mpho acknowledged the similarities between religions and people, but it was difficult for her as an emerging adult to utilise this knowledge and not to judge people who were different from her.

The topic of cultural diversity made Mpho think critically about her own beliefs, upbringing, and culture. It made her aware of her own biases and judgements.

4.4.4 Being focused on the future. Mpho’s strong sense of self-responsibility and resilience obtained from her relationship with God influenced her view of the future. She wanted to become a religious psychologist.

Mpho was cognisant of the fact that her strong sense of spiritual identity would influence her work as a psychologist. She was aware of her limitations, and reflective of the effect of her spiritual identity: *“My spiritual identity might influence me in such a way that I might only work with people whom I share same spiritual identity with, in order to avoid imposing my beliefs and spirituality to somebody of different identity from mine, which is ethically unacceptable”* (RW 4.6). She was sincere, acknowledging that her spiritual identity might influence her so strongly that she would prefer to work with spiritually similar individuals. She confessed that she would influence others to the point of pressurising others to conform to her religion: *“... not really pressurise or force people to believe in God or to be born again. But somewhere somehow, I feel like I will influence them in my own spiritual values to say you know what, with God you can be anything you want to be and with God you can just gain the strength to (pause) just fly ... so I feel like I am gonna pressure ... maybe I will be more spiritual, if I can put it that way”* (II 4.52). Although Mpho would not consciously try to pressurise others, she believed that her spirituality was ingrained in who she was as a person. Her religion was so essential to her that she needed to convert others to Christianity.

Christianity has helped her in times of severe difficulties, and she wanted others to experience this enlightenment.

Because of the difficulties in differentiating from her spiritual beliefs, Mpho wanted to become a spiritual therapist. Mpho possibly thought that this was the only route to psychological health: *“If I work with someone who is not of my religion ... I will struggle to understand their point of view ... normally in our churches ... they normally teach us that we have to evangelise to the people, make people accept Jesus not really force them but you know spread the gospel of Jesus Christ so that people can come to the kingdom of God ... I am sitting with. I am evangelising to a Muslim and tell them about Jesus ... They wouldn’t understand; it will be like now I will force you ... I will want them to sort of convert to my religion”* (II 4.54). Objectivity would be difficult to maintain, and Mpho confessed that her approach would always incorporate her religious beliefs: *“... but then the approach will sort of divert a lil bit to Christianity because it about, you trying to be good ... trying to help others, be empathetic, be compassionate ... I will also dive in my values, which is wrong and I am not sure how to work around that”* (II 4.60). She was aware that this was not preferable or ethical but that she was not sure how to deal with the problem. Mpho believed in one truth.

Mpho was aware of cultural diversity, even though she personally had difficulty distancing herself from her spirituality. There were strong contradictions regarding her views about where she was currently and who she wanted to be as a therapist: *“At the end of it all, they feel so helped and not put under pressure and not imposing or they don’t feel like I am imposing my uhm view and values about religion and spirituality onto them”* (II 4.64). Mpho did not want to impose her views and values about religion on others, and believed that this would make others feel misunderstood and unsafe. However, Mpho did not have the skills to provide this sort of support to clients.

4.4.5 In conclusion. The core of spiritual identity for Mpho was the relationship that she had with God. Throughout her journey, she established this relationship and felt the needed to share it with others. She wanted to help individuals who were suffering like she had suffered while growing up. Although Mpho acknowledged cultural diversity, it was still difficult to establish objectivity when she worked or communicated with individuals with diverse beliefs and outlooks.

4.5 Leana: Non-judgement

Leana was a 22-year-old female. She had resided in Bloemfontein all her life. Leana had an interest in childhood development and believed that it was her purpose to work with children. Although she did not mind fulfilling this purpose by doing diverse careers, she hoped to pursue a career as a counselling psychologist.

Leana came to the interview expecting the interview to revolve around the topic of religion. Leana struggled with the concept of spiritual identity and had doubts when expressing herself. I experienced Leana as a very open-minded individual and someone who showed great understanding and compassion towards others. What stood out in Leana's reflection was the liberal household in which she had grown up. The circumstances in the household greatly shaped her spiritual identity development journey.

The main theme that emerged from Leana's reflections was non-judgement. Leana's experiences are described according to the following themes: 1) parental values, 2) Christianity as a moral compass, 3) appreciation and respect for spiritual diversity and 4) mindfulness and gratitude. The themes and subthemes in Leana's journey are presented in Figure 7.

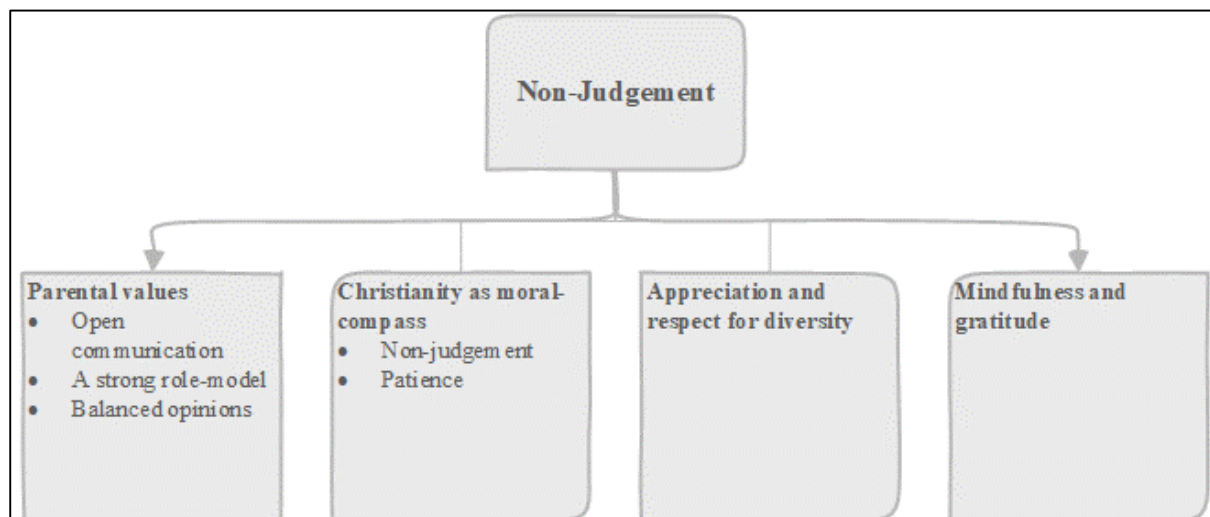


Figure 7. Visual display of Leana's journey.

4.5.1 Parental values. Leana grew up in a loving, Christian home. She described the relationship with her family as crucial to her spiritual identity: "... en ook om ondersteuning te kry by jou familie en vriende is vir my 'n groot deel want ek voel (pause) geen mens is gemaak

om alleen te “cope” met enigiets nie ...” (II 5.21)⁶⁶ and “Ek sal sê ek vind betekenis in die lewe deur mense ... my familie ...” (II 5.11).⁶⁷ Although Leana’s spirituality involved her relationship with God, her parents’ value system played a critical role in her spiritual development. The strong influence of the values of Leana’s parents in her spiritual identity is illustrated by referring to three subthemes, namely 1) open communication, 2) a strong role-model, and 3) balanced opinions.

Open communication

From Leana’s reflections it could be derived that she had grown up in a household that was loving and understanding. Since childhood, her parents had created a household in which open and critical discussion was encouraged: “*Ek dink ek sal sê my ouers het meer vir my die voorbeeld gestel met dit, want hulle het nog altyd, soos toe ons nog kleiner was ook, al my vriende het altyd na my huis toe gekom omdat hulle daar gevoel het (pause) hulle kan praat oor alles*” (II 5.59).⁶⁸ Leana was aware that her parents were somewhat more open, flexible and non-judgemental – this was inviting towards others. Leana was aware that her peers, much like herself, also felt welcome and accepted in this household. It might be assumed that they did not experience unconditional positive regard in their own homes. Their homes might have been more conservative, and certain topics might have been seen as unacceptable, and their parents as unapproachable.

Leana’s parental values – especially the home environment that they created through their value system – influenced her popularity among her peers and had a positive effect on her self-concept as an adolescent. Since childhood, Leana felt secure in herself and never felt the needed to explore in secret. During the interview, Leana communicated that she was not easily influenced by others and that she might have been the instigator when it came to exploration: “... *groepsdruk veral, ek was nie eintlik iemand wat onder dit geval het nie, ek was meer ...*

⁶⁶ “... and also to get support from your family and friends is a big part for me because ... no person was created to cope alone.”

⁶⁷ “I would say that I find meaning in my life through people... my family ...”

⁶⁸ “I think I would say that my parents set an example, because they have always, even when I was younger, all my friends always came to my house because they felt (pause) that they could talk about everything.”

iemand wat dit sou 'initiate' dalk (lag) op skool ...” (II 5.15).⁶⁹ The fact that Leana did not give in to peer pressure related to the fact that there was open communication and trust in her household: *“Dit was nooit dat my ouers bang was as ek dalk saam my vriende êrens heen gaan dat ek nou goed verkeerd gaan doen nie”* (II 5.15).⁷⁰ Leana’s parents allowed her and her friends to explore in the household. The relationship was open and non-judgemental, and Leana knew that her parents trusted her. The strong values of trust, non-judgement, and unconditional positive regard greatly influenced Leana’s spiritual identity development throughout her adolescent and emerging adulthood years.

A strong role-model

A strong and secure relationship with Leana’s mother was observed during the interviews. Her mother was her role model, and she strived to be like her. From her perspective, her mother had a great influence on her identity development: *“Soos my ma was later die een waarmee hulle gaan praat het eerder as wat hulle met hul eie ma’s gaan praat het en ek weet nie dit het my half baie (pause) ek dink in daai sin gevorm want ek wil ook eerder ’n oop persoon wees waarnatoe mense kan kom as om toe te wees en mense te laat voel ek is beter as hulle”* (II 5.61).⁷¹ Leana observed her mother as she was growing up and focused on her mother’s core values, which influenced Leana’s value systems and formed a basis for her spiritual identity. Leana also wanted to be non-judgemental, accepting, loving, and understanding. She believed that these values were essential qualities for a psychologist to have. Leana’s mother provided a space where Leana and her friends could ask questions and ponder topics not deemed appropriate in other households. Leana’s mother was a safe haven, a mentoring figure, and an unofficial psychologist to Leana and her friends.

Leana’s mother was important in Leana’s meaning-making process as an emerging adult: *“My ma het ook altyd soos een van haar grootste sê-goeters wat sy my altyd geleer het was*

⁶⁹ “... peer-pressure especially, I was never someone who succumbed. I was more the one that initiated it (laugh) in school ...”

⁷⁰ “My parents were never afraid that I would go somewhere with my friends and do something wrong.”

⁷¹ “Like my mother was later the one with whom they communicated rather than communicating with their own mothers I don’t know it shaped me. I also want to be an open person people can go to rather than be closed off and make people feel I am better than they are”

'life goes on' (pause) so dit help nie mens gaan sit in 'n houpie en kry jouself jammer omdat jy nou nie gekry het wat jy wou gehad het nie ...' (II 5.29).⁷² Although Leana's mother was open, loving, and understanding, she also advocated strength and resilience. It was clear that Leana's mother's voice became internalised and she utilised this voice as an emerging adult during challenging experiences.

As an emerging adult, Leana still had a secure relationship with her mother. When we discussed selection outcomes, Leana mentioned that she consulted with her mother: *"... toe het ek ook maar net met my ma en vriende daaroor gepraat ..."* (II 5.83).⁷³ It can be hypothesised that her mother and friends were the first people Leana turned to in times of distress and not necessarily her religion or God. Therefore, her interpersonal relationships played a crucial role in her meaning-making processes as an emerging adult.

Balanced opinions

Leana was exposed to a unique household, primarily because of her parents. During her reflections, Leana mentioned differences between her parents' parenting styles: *"My pa is baie meer konserwatief en my ma is baie liberaal. So dit was altyd half (pause) my ma se dis oraait om iets te doen, want sy voel mens moet goed doen om te kan groei, waar my pa was altyd meer gewees van 'jy kan dit en dit oorkom as jy dit en dit gaan doen'"* (II 5.15).⁷⁴ Leana's mother was an advocate for exploration, while her father was somewhat more cautious. This led to some inner conflict: *"... dit altyd gevoel hulle soos probeer my terughou ..."* (II 5.15).⁷⁵ It can be hypothesised that Leana preferred her mother's style of parenting growing up. However, as an emerging adult, Leana showed respect for both her mother and father's ways: *"Soos ek nou ouer word, besef ek dis net omdat hulle vir jou omgee, en dat jy nie noodwendig reg was vir*

⁷² "One of my mom's biggest sayings that she always taught me was 'life goes on' (pause) it doesn't help to sit in the corner and feel sorry for yourself when you didn't get what you wanted ..."

⁷³ "... then I just spoke to my mom and friends about it ..."

⁷⁴ "My father is much more conservative and my mother is very liberal. So it was always like (pause) my mom would say it's okay for me to do something, because she feels that you have to do things in order to grow, while my dad was always like 'this can happen to you when you do this'."

⁷⁵ "... it always felt like they were holding me back ..."

alles wat jy wou gedoen het op daardie tyd nie” (II 5.15).⁷⁶ This statement shows maturity, the ability to reflect and make meaning of her upbringing.

It can be hypothesised that Leana was provided with enough freedom to explore her spiritual identity within healthy boundaries set by trusting parents. Leana also acknowledged her own shortcomings as an adolescent and realised that she had unrealistic expectations of her own emotional and physical maturity.

4.5.2 Christianity as moral compass. Values were an important domain of Leana’s spirituality. The Christian religion strongly influenced Leana’s spiritual identity. However, as an emerging adult, Leana established her own value system. This moral compass (based on Christianity) navigated Leana’s behaviour, thoughts, and feelings. The most important values were 1) non-judgement and 2) patience.

⁷⁶ “ As I’m getting older, I realise that it was because they cared for me and that I was not necessarily ready for everything that I wanted to do at the time.”

Non-judgement

From the beginning of the interview, it became clear that Leana thought that judgement of others was wrong – even sinful. Our conversation frequently turned to this topic, as it was very important to her: “*Dit is vir my ’n baie groot ding die ’judge’ goeters ...*” (II 5.35).⁷⁷ She believed that her non-judgemental attitude would enable others to feel comfortable with her: “*... dat jy hulle nie gaan ’judge nie’ dat hulle gemaklik voel om hulself met jou te wees, of dat hulle weet dis okay om te sukkel ...*” (II 5.43).⁷⁸ She believed that one should get to know others before one draws conclusions about them: “*... voordat hulle ’even’ met jou praat, dan voel mens half nou hoekom moet ek nou die moeite doen om enige iets te sê of jou te leer ken of wat ook al...*” (II 5.49).⁷⁹ It was important for Leana to get to know people and to provide a safe space where people felt comfortable enough to be true in her presence. Considering Leana’s upbringing, this value might have been observed and learned from her mother.

From Leana’s reflection, it was clear that this value had been tested before. She had been judged by others before. This clearly hurt Leana much, and she incorporated these life experiences into her world view. She attempted to make meaning of her previous suffering by helping others: “*Jy kan ander mense ook half motiveer daardeur om te wys dat ek het ook al deur hierdie goed in my lewe gegaan en ek het daardeur gekom, so jy kan ook*” (II 5.43).⁸⁰

Leana was a self-identified Christian. She experienced conflict between her personal values and the institution of Christianity: “*... dis hoekom geloof en spiritualiteit ... ek voel dis meer ’n persoonlike verhouding met die Here ... soos in my geval nou, want veral in soos, ek voel in kerke veral word daar verskriklik baie mense (pause) gejudge*” (II 5.49).⁸¹ Although

⁷⁷ “.... judgement is a very big thing for me ...”

⁷⁸ “... that you won’t judge them and that they would feel comfortable to be themselves, or that they will know that it is okay to struggle ...”

⁷⁹ “... before they even talk to you, then a person kind of feels like why should I even attempt to say anything or get to know you or whatever ...”

⁸⁰ “You can motivate others by showing them that you have also been through these things in life and you came through it, and so can you”

⁸¹ “... that is why religion and spirituality ... I feel it is a more personal relationship with God ... like in my case, because I feel that there is a lot of judgement in churches especially”

Leana was a devoted Christian, she considered non-judgement essential to her spirituality. Christianity served as a moral compass for Leana but she did not agree fully with the church.

Leana's passion was understanding and helping people. The foundation of this passion was built on the internal value of non-judgement. Leana was passionate about children. She considered remedial education as a career option if she could not become a psychologist. She believed that she could utilise this value in this setting: "*Ahm (pause) ek dink dit help (pause) byvoorbeeld soos nou as jy kyk na die remediërende onderrig ... as jy hulle net kan help om te leer, want ek dink baie ander mense kyk neer op hulle en dan dink hulle dadelik okay ja dis omdat hy/sy nie intelligent is nie terwyl dit eintlik net 'n leerprobleem is, so ek dink dit kan help deur om hulle te wys dat as jy net aan een klein dingetjie werk kan dit 'n groot verskil maak*" (II 5.37).⁸² She thought that she had the ability, more than other people, to work with children without judgement.

Non-judgement was the most important value that Leana mentioned with regard to her spirituality, and this value formed the foundation for her spiritual identity.

Patience

Leana dreamed of becoming a psychologist and she believed that this career was her calling. However, Leana had patience in fulfilling this purpose. She communicated that, before master's selection, she never considered another career: "*Die meesterskeuring was vir my erg gewees want ek het van skool af het ek nog nooit regtig 'n plan B gehad nie; dis altyd wat ek nog wou doen ...*" (II 5.29).⁸³ This was challenging for Leana because she had to renegotiate who she believed she would be in the future: "*... dit is half soos jou hele droom gewees en nou moet jy jou hele uitkyk en hele droom verander*" (II 5.85).⁸⁴

⁸² "Ahm (pause) I think it helps (pause) for example if you consider remedial education ... if you could help them learn, because I think many other people look down on them and immediately think it is because he/she is not intelligent, while it is a learning problem, I think that it can help if you show them that working on one small thing can make a big difference."

⁸³ "The master's selection was tough for me because since school I've never had a plan B; it has always been what I wanted to do."

⁸⁴ "... it was your whole dream and now you have to change your whole perspective and whole dream."

Leana's spirituality helped her to maintain a problem-solving mindset. Although her plan and heart's desire was to become a psychologist, she realised that there were other ways to fulfil her purpose: "... *toe het ek maar begin dink aan ander maniere ... daardie selfde passie wat jy het vir sielkunde deur dit kan uitleef ...*" (II 5.29).⁸⁵ She wanted to help others, create a safe and understanding space, and identify with people: "*Ek hou daarvan om mense te ondersteun en te probeer verstaan en hulle te laat voel dat, al is almal half teen hulle is ek nog steeds 'n plek waarheen hulle kan gaan en met mens praat waar hulle nie 'gejunge' gaan word nie*" (II 5.35).⁸⁶

Leana's utilised her spirituality to remain optimistic. She preferred to think about the long-term plan and the bigger picture: "... *het maar net geglo dat al ek nie nou die korttermyn doelwit dan half bereik nie, wat ek wou bereik het nie dat daar nog steeds 'n groter plan is ... waar ook al ek opeindig sal dit nog steeds betekenisvol wees en ek sal nog steeds half waarde daarin vind al is dit nie presies wat ek wou doen nie*" (II 5.33).⁸⁷ Through Leana's spirituality, she believed that her life was part of a greater plan: "... *glo dat die Here 'n groter plan het as wat ek vir myself in gedagte gehad het en vertrou op Hom dat ek daarby sal uitkom al werk alles nie uit soos ek dit sou wou hê nie*" (RW 5.4).⁸⁸ Leana had unquestioned faith in God and believed that her life would be meaningful even when things did not go as she planned.

4.5.3 Appreciation and respect for diversity. Leana appreciated differences between people. Appreciation and respect for diversity was influenced by her upbringing, and by her self-defined value system.

As an emerging adult, Leana did not discriminate against individuals that were from different religious or spiritual backgrounds. Leana associated with a diverse circle of friends:

⁸⁵ "... then I just started thinking about different ways ... to living the same passion for psychology ..."

⁸⁶ "I like to support and try to understand people and to make them feel that, even though everyone is against them, that they still have a place where they can go to where they can talk without judgement."

⁸⁷ "I just believed that even though I did not achieve the short-term goal that I wanted to that there was a bigger plan ... where ever I end up will be meaningful and I will find value in what I do even if it isn't exactly what I want to do."

⁸⁸ "I believe that God has a bigger plan for me than I envisioned for myself and I trust in Him to get there even when everything doesn't work out like I wanted."

*“In die vriende groep waarin ek is (pause) weet ek daar (pause) soos twee wat in my vriende groep is, het h heeltemal ander uitkyk daarop. My een vriendin is glad nie gelowig nie ...” (II 5.67).*⁸⁹ Leana’s values permeated all aspects of her life. She did not believe that she was better than a non-religious person, and she also did not want others to feel that way. Leana’s spirituality reminded her to put people first: *“... dink dit help mens ook om te onthou om ander se belange bo jou eie te sit en vir jou naaste om te gee en soveel as moontlik te help en te ondersteun” (RW 5.6).*⁹⁰

Associating with these individuals did not influence her. She knew who she was, what was important to her, and did not feel threatened by diverse opinions: *“Ek is h mens wat by my beginsels en standpunt bly. So ek gee glad nie om as hulle met my daaroor praat nie en ek luister hulle opinies uit, omdat dit is vir my baie interessant hoe hulle goed sien, maar ek dink nie dit beïnvloed hoe ek spiritueel voel (pause) of my spirituele uitkyk op my lewe ...” (II 5.69).*⁹¹ She felt secure enough in her spiritual identity to respect and appreciate other spiritual beliefs: *“Soos hulle respek moet hê vir my spiritualiteit en geloof moet ek vir hulle ook hê” (II 5.73).*⁹² It can be assumed that Leana already committed to a spiritual identity. She was open to new opinions and did not feel threatened by diversity. In a sense, Leana listened to different opinions about spirituality in an attempt to understand others, and also to make others feel understood and accepted.

Leana showed insight and was cognisant that there were multiple truths in the world: *“Ek verstaan half omdat ek voel elkeen het sterk ‘beliefs’ wat hulle het. So ek dink mens moet dit net op daai manier probeer sien. Soos hulle is nie noodwendig altyd besig om jou geloofstelsels of spiritualiteit af te kraak nie. Hulle spiritualiteit is vir hulle net so belangrik soos wat elkeen*

⁸⁹ “In my friendship group (pause) I know of (pause) like two of my friends have a completely different outlook. My one friend is not religious at all ...”

⁹⁰ “I think it helps you to remember to put other people’s interests above your own, to care for your neighbours and to help and support as much as you can.”

⁹¹ “I am a person that stands by my principles and my point of view. I don’t care when they talk to me about it and I listen to their opinions, because I find it interesting how they experience things, but I don’t think it influences how I feel spiritually (pause) or my spiritual outlook on life.”

⁹² “Just like they should have respect for my spirituality and religion, I should also have for theirs.”

van ons s'n vir ons is” (II 5.93).⁹³ Leana’s non-judgemental attitude made her aware of the social construction of truth and beliefs. She realised that this was not personal but that people had diverse ways in understanding the world.

4.5.4 Mindfulness and gratitude. Spiritual maturity brought about mindfulness in Leana’s journey. Leana confessed that postgraduate studies challenged her spirituality: “*My spiritualiteit is uitgedaag aangesien dit ’n ongelooflike stresvolle jaar was vir my, en sover die mees uitdagendste – i.v.m. akademie, ek het ook baie gebid oor die meesters keuring, ek het uitgeval voordat die onderhoude nog plaasgevind het, maar ek het besluit dat ek die Here gevra het om my te plaas waar ek behoort te wees*”⁹⁴(RW 5.8). She also mentioned that: “... *beseft jy dat nagraads soveel anders is*” (II 5.63).⁹⁵ Although postgraduate studies were challenging, it seemed that postgraduate studies also served as a catalyst for spiritual reflection, meaning-making, and self-compassion.

Leana worked hard in her undergraduate studies, hoping to be selected for master’s. However, through Leana’s transition from undergraduate to postgraduate, she learned to have compassion for herself and to be mindful of her academics: “*Soos ek het die heelyd geleer, ek het die heelyd opgesom... waar hierdie jaar het ek half beseft mens moet, jy moet maar doen waarvoor jy tyd het... en jy kan nie daarna terug kyk en sê, okay ja maar jy moes dit en dit beter gedoen het nie... miskien sou jy keuring gekry het nie... jy sit jouself op ’n moeilike plek*” (II 5.65).⁹⁶ Leana’s spirituality provided her with a sense of serenity and taught her not to judge herself too harshly.

⁹³ “I understand because I feel that everyone has strong beliefs. Therefore, I think you should try to see it in that light. They are not necessarily busy to attack your belief system or to break your spirituality down. Their spirituality is just as important to them as it is to all of us.”

⁹⁴ “My spirituality has been challenged since it was an unbelievably stressful year, and the most challenging thus far – in terms of academics, I prayed a lot about the master’s selection, and my selection was unsuccessful before the interviews took place, but I decided that I asked God to place me where I should be.”

⁹⁵ “... you realise that postgraduate studies are so different”

⁹⁶ “Like I studied the whole time, I made summaries ... this year I realised that you can only do what you have time for and you cannot look back and say, okay yes I should have done this better... maybe then you would have been selected then you place yourself in a difficult position.”

Leana applied for master's selection but was not invited for interviews at UFS. She found peace regarding the outcome and saw it as the outcome that she prayed for: *"Ek het baie daaroor gebid en gesê as ek nie in kom vir dit nie (pause) dit (pause) dit klink half simpel as ek dit hard sê (pause) soos as ek nie op die ou einde gaan in kom vir dit dan wil ek nou al uitval..."* (II 5.77).⁹⁷ Leana's spiritual identity protected her sense of self and her ego.

Leana reflected that spiritual identity resulted in gratitude. Leana realised this by observing a non-religious friend. Leana's one atheist friend was invited for the interviews at UFS and Leana observed that this girl was extremely hard on herself, and did not see opportunities that Leana saw: *"Jy het gedoen wat jy moes doen, dit help nie jy karring jouself heelyd daaroor nie (pause). Sy bly half daar, sy kom nie oor dit nie, maar sy is deur na die meestersonderhoude toe, maar sy was nie eers bly daaroor nie, want dit was vir haar die volgende 'obstacle' gewees en ek het vir haar gesê dit is nie 'n 'obstacle' nie dit is 'n baie groot geleentheid wat baie mense kry. So ek dink half jou spiritualiteit maak ook of jy positief of negatief is oor sekere goeters"* (II 5.67).⁹⁸ From Leana's perspective, spiritual identity provides optimism and influences one's world view to a great extent.

Spiritual identity led to self-compassion and gratitude. These helped her to cope with the outcome of master's selection and allowed her to derive meaning from this experience. It can be hypothesised that spirituality served as a protective factor in Leana's life – protecting her self-esteem and sense of self.

4.5.5 In Conclusion. Leana's story was well described by the title "do not judge". Her story of spiritual identity development centred on her non-judgemental attitude and behaviour towards everyone around her. Leana's spiritual identity and especially her values were

⁹⁷ "I prayed about it much and said that if I didn't get in (pause) for it (pause), it sounds stupid when I say it out loud (pause), but if I am not selected for the course in the end then I want to fall out now in the beginning."

⁹⁸ "You did what you had to do, it doesn't help to nag about it all the time (pause). She stays there, she doesn't get over it, she is through to master's interviews, but she wasn't even happy about it, because for her it was the next obstacle and I told her that it was not an obstacle but a great opportunity that only a few people got. I think your spirituality makes you positive and negative about certain things."

influenced greatly by her mother. Leana's story is also a testimony of the importance of a place where adolescents can explore all spheres of their identity within safe boundaries.

4.6 Mary: Be true to yourself

Mary is a 22-year-old female. Unlike the other participants, Mary was a first- language English speaker. Mary had a passion for forensic psychology and hoped to pursue a career as a clinical psychologist.

Mary displayed much self-confidence regarding the topic of spirituality. She did not associate with any religious domination and spoke about her personal journey with the sacred. She was open and willing to share these experiences. She found it easy to express herself, even though she was hesitant about her understanding of the concept of 'spiritual identity'.

The main theme that emerged from Mary's reflection was to *be true to yourself*. Mary's experiences are described using two subsequent themes, namely 1) path of spiritual growth, and 2) characteristics of a spiritual identity. Mary's journey is depicted in Figure 8.

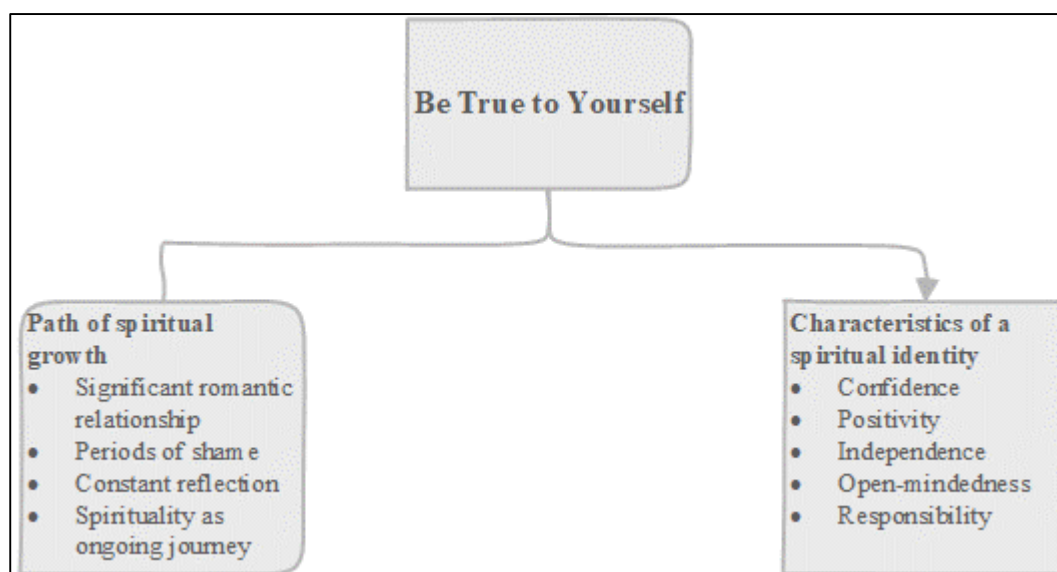


Figure 8. Visual display of Mary's journey.

4.6.1 Path of spiritual growth. Mary's path of spiritual growth was everything but ordinary. She was aware that the journey of spiritual identity development was not a linear journey but rather a journey that changed constantly. Her path of spiritual growth was characterised by 1) a significant romantic relationship, 2) periods of shame, 3) constant reflection, and 4) spirituality as an ongoing journey.

Significant romantic relationship

Unlike most of the participants Mary rarely mentioned her upbringing and her parents when she spoke about her journey of spiritual identity development. However, she did mention a significant romantic relationship with an ex-boyfriend that immensely influenced her views regarding spirituality: *“I can think of an experience with a person who kind of changed my ideas a lot. I was in a relationship for four years and the relationship was something that was very significant to my life obviously and then he was not someone who was religious at all, but he was very spiritual...”* (II 6.10).

During adolescence, a romantic relationship or significant friendships have the ability to influence one's identity development. It can be hypothesised that Mary learnt about religion and spirituality from her parents. However, as an adolescent, open to exploration and new ideas, she was influenced by another socialising agent. During this developmental stage, Mary was able to think abstractly about the nature of the world and about who she wanted to be in the world. Her boyfriend became the most important role player in establishing a tentative spiritual identity. The relationship was a long-term, committed relationship and continued into Mary's emerging adulthood years: *“... when I was 16-21 ... we broke up about a year ago ...”* (II 6.12). Since adolescence, Mary had not had much time to explore her own spiritual identity independent from the influence of others (e.g., parents or boyfriend). The lack of independent exploration led to a period of severe exploration during the last two years.

Mary was exposed early to a different and abstract view regarding spirituality. When enquired about how she understood spiritual identity, she stated, *“Spiritual identity is whoever you see yourself as when you are connected to a higher power whether that be the universe, nature, god or whoever/whatever else”* (RW 6.2). She developed a definition of spirituality completely independent from religion, encompassing various perspectives. Mary acknowledged her ex-boyfriend for her intricate definition of spirituality: *“But I think that's the biggest change. Like he opened my eyes to a different side of spirituality and to be more centred with yourself and not really seeing them together anymore. To see that you can be spiritual without necessarily being super religious”* (II 6.12). Mary realised that spirituality was more concerned with the inner world of the individual and became aware of the possibility that a person might be spiritual without being religious. Through differentiating religion and spirituality, Mary could focus on her inner world and deepen her personal connection with the sacred.

Mary self-identified as a spiritual individual: *“I’m not really a religious person but I am more spiritual ... I’ve always felt like ... connected to something else and I’ve always relied on that, especially in times of stress and challenge and change”* (II 6.4). During Mary’s reflections, she did not mention specific spiritual/religious practices that helped her cope; the feeling of connection was sufficient.

Periods of shame

Shame about personal beliefs was a prominent theme in Mary’s journey of spiritual identity development. Mary was asked about the influence of her spiritual identity as a psychologist. She experienced inner conflict in trying to communicate her personal views. She differentiated between what she thought was appropriate, vs. what she really felt: *“That is what is so difficult because I kind of feel like I should be saying this, but that’s not how I feel so how I really feel is that I don’t feel like my spiritual identity will be important in my career as a psychologist ... I don’t look out into the world with a filter of my world view”* (II 6.36). Mary could differentiate her spirituality from her sense of self because she had not committed to a specific spiritual identity. She also believed that a psychologist should have a certain world view and should adhere to certain values (e.g., being open-minded).

Mary had preconceived ideas regarding what was appropriate and not regarding the topic of spirituality, which was possibly due to the culture to which Mary had been exposed. She mentioned that she frequently had conversations with religious people: *“I spoke to a lot of people with different spiritual identity to me, they are a little more religious ... I think that what is different for me is the fact that I think I relied on myself a lot more I didn’t ... rely on a higher power ...”* (II 6.28). Mary differentiated completely between religion and spirituality: *“Now I see them as two completely separate things and it’s something that I don’t see them touching each other ...”* (II 6.8). She experienced guilt about her feelings and emotions during the interview, and it seemed as if Mary had the expectation that spirituality must be prioritised *“I do not want to say I’ll put my spiritual identity on the back burner, like I’ll go in there and like completely not be me anymore ...”* (II 6.46). Although she previously said that she was not religious, she contradicted herself by saying, *“I am someone who is religious but that is not my all being, I think that I am more spiritual”* (II 6.28). It seemed as if Mary wanted to justify her spiritual identity and that it was somehow frowned upon to be non-religious. It was clear that Mary was still greatly influenced by others’ opinions. Mary’s peer group was still important to her and she wanted to relate to her peers to a certain extent.

Constant reflection

Reflection was a big part of Mary's journey of spiritual identity development. Mary acknowledged that she was naturally intuitive: *"I am someone who is naturally open-minded, receptive, intuitive and interested in understanding other people's subjective realities"* (RW 6.6). These attributes were established by constant reflection regarding the self, the world, and the future. Mary was constantly in the process of meaning-making. Although Mary was naturally reflective, postgraduate education and master's selection provided her with unique experiences and opportunities to reflect on her spiritual identity and to engage in meaning-making.

Mary described postgraduate studies in depth: *"This year provided me challenges, new obstacles, and situations that I had to overcome and my spiritual identity in those situations have already pushed me to be more reflective and think about myself and also to take more quiet time and just to evaluate and to really think and sit and really question you know who I am, who I want to be, how am I going to get where I want to be..."* (II 6.52). Postgraduate studies provided Mary with a platform to reflect on matters not previously considered important. As a student, Mary utilised cognitive resources to become critical about herself, reflective, and ask difficult and philosophical questions: *"This year has forced me just, I don't want to say question everything, but kind of just question everything, from the beginning to just like really reflect and think and to just get to know myself all over again ... you're pushed much closer to your limits... have to become more critical... reflective of who you are..."* (II 6.56). Postgraduate education placed Mary in a new situation with new experiences. This platform exposed her to re-evaluate and re-negotiate her spiritual identity.

Mary emphasised growth as a natural consequence of postgraduate studies: *"I can look back and be like wow I feel like I've grown so much in the past 6 or 7 months and I think I grew more in these 7 months than I did in my whole undergraduate career and I can say that with confidence because I genuinely feel that way"* (II 6.56). The challenges associated with postgraduate studies served as a catalyst for reflection regarding spiritual identity during emerging adulthood. The reasons for this intense reflection might have been a variety of factors (e.g., academic demands, class discussions, and the prospect of master's selection).

Master's selection procedures forced Mary to be reflective, even more than usual: *"You know I was forced to be super reflective and introspective and think about myself a lot more*

and I do that already but you know, I had to do that even more and everything that I was saying was being questioned, so that was tough” (II 6.24). Mary struggled to admit that there were things about her identity that she had not considered before. These difficulties were also experienced in our interview: *“I was like what do I want to say about my own spiritual identity, I was like I’m not exactly sure how I feel about it... I do not know if I know my spiritual identity very well and that it is so fixed, that you know it’s not changeable ... I think it is definitely a journey ...” (II 6.46).* Mary might have engaged in reflection, but these reflections might not have extended to the spiritual domain. Difficult questioning related to her sense of spiritual self and meaning-making might be challenging and not something that she has reflected on before.

Although Mary was still exploring her identity, she attempted to be congruent with who she believed she was during the interviewing process: *“I tried to be really confident in who I was and I didn’t want to be someone I wasn’t for me ... I was criticised and obviously I was challenged a lot, I mean it was good for me because it allowed me to really think about myself a lot more and kind of see parts of myself that might not be working so well ... although it wasn’t the outcome I wanted... was such a good experience” (II 6.26).* This experience was confrontational, but through reflection, Mary could make meaning of this experience. She constructed a narrative explaining how she could utilise this experience as insight for the future.

Spirituality as an ongoing journey

According to Mary, spirituality was a dynamic process. It was non-linear, subjective journey, and along the journey, Mary was constantly changing, growing, and improving: *“I feel like my spiritual identity is constantly growing and is constantly improving and with every challenge that I go through...” (II 6.4).* She believed that her spiritual identity development would continue into adulthood and that her identity was flexible.

Mary was aware of the developmental nature of identity and realised that life events could change one’s identity: *“My ideals and ideas about things might be different now than what they were when I was 16 and will probably be different when I’m 32... I think it is constantly changing” (II 6.4).* Mary’s spirituality developed due to physical and emotional maturity. She had a growth mindset and stated that she allowed herself *“to feel uncomfortable in order to grow” (RW 6.4).* Difficult life events, and change served as triggers for identity development: *“As a result, the challenging experiences in my life have all been powerful lessons that I have used to aid me in my further growth and development throughout life. I always aim to turn a*

challenging situation into something positive that I can learn from in the long run” (RW 6.4). Difficult events led to critical self-reflection, which led to growth. Mary attempted to internalise these events and incorporate them with her sense of self.

Mary believed that her spiritual identity and spirituality would still develop throughout adulthood as she had not made commitments regarding her spiritual identity. Therefore, it was difficult for Mary to answer questions regarding the role of spirituality as a future psychologist: “... but I feel like I might not have explored my spiritual identity as much as I need to or as much as I should... maybe if you ask me the same question in six months’ time, it might be completely different and I might feel like yes it might be a huge part of my life as a psychologist” (II 6.40). As an emerging adult, Mary was exploring her identity and therefore she struggled to come to conclusions regarding how she would feel about spirituality later in life. It can be assumed that she was currently renegotiating her spirituality, as she mentioned that her views might change within a short period.

The transition to postgraduate studies was mentioned as a life event that challenged and changed Mary’s views about spirituality. Mary’s beliefs changed in every stage of life: “*Absolutely, I think my spirituality has changed a lot since starting postgraduate studies as it has in every other stage of my life. With every phase, challenge, and experience I learn more about myself and how I handle stressful situations*” (RW 6.8). It was not the fact that Mary started with postgraduate studies but rather that she was entering a new life stage. New life stages led to changes in her spiritual convictions. It was clear that spiritual change occurred in times of stress that generated the need to utilise coping mechanisms and engage in meaning-making reflection.

4.6.2 Characteristics of a spiritual identity. Mary’s spirituality had a strong influence on her sense of self. This influence is discussed by referring to five themes, namely 1) confidence, 2) positivity, 3) independence, 4) open-mindedness, and 5) responsibility.

Confidence

From Mary’s perspective, spirituality influenced the inner world: “*Spirituality is more inward, focusing on yourself, it’s central and being more centred in who you are*” (II 6.6). She used her spiritual identity as a route to self-love and a healthy self-esteem. She described spirituality as follows: “*I think it’s just being who you are, it’s literally just being who you are, and owning who you are and being unapologetic about it and knowing yourself as well. I think*

that's for me what spiritual identity is" (II 6.16). Mary believed true spirituality was unconditional self-acceptance and being confident and comfortable in one's own identity. This perspective helped Mary with challenges encountered in her life: "I've always been someone who has really taken challenges and difficult situations in my stride so I always try to see the positive side of the situation... So I think I've been resilient in those challenges and you know, help myself to overcome it" (II 6.18). Mary's understanding of spiritual identity helped her to be optimistic about herself and about external events that were out of her control.

During master's selection, Mary utilised her spiritual identity, which enabled her to be true to herself and confident in her abilities. Furthermore, confidence in herself enabled her to derive meaning from difficult situations: *"I just tried to really be confident in who I was and I didn't want to be someone I wasn't ... basically the meaning that I derived from the whole situation. Just to take something out of it and take something positive out of it and although it wasn't the outcome that I thought I wanted ... such a good learning experience ..."* (II 6.26). It can be hypothesised that Mary would not have been able to manage disappointments as well as she did if it had not been for her strong spiritual identity.

Positivity

Mary's spiritual identity helped her to overcome challenges in her life. Her spiritual identity had a significant effect on her perspective of challenges: *"I've always been someone who has really taken challenges and difficult situations in my stride so I always try to see the positive side of the situation... So I think I've been resilient in those challenges and you know, help myself to overcome it" (II 6.18). Her spiritual identity has helped her throughout her life and also on the journey of becoming a psychologist: "I rely on my spirituality so often times, like even now with the master's selection that wasn't such a great experience, obviously ... I feel like okay with the outcome" (II 6.4).*

Mary found contentment through her spirituality and experienced challenges as opportunities and not as obstacles. She had a mindset geared towards improvement of the self: *"I always strive to see an opportunity to grow or learn in every challenge that I face... allowing myself to feel uncomfortable at times in order to grow. As a result, the challenging experiences in my life have all been powerful lessons that I have used to aid me in my further growth and development throughout my life" (RW 6.4). Mary placed much pressure on herself to learn and*

to grow. She enjoyed the experience of developing, growing and changing. She was positive about the dynamic journey of life.

Independence

Independence was a major theme in Mary's life story. During difficult life circumstances, Mary relied on herself and not on a higher being: *"I wasn't relying on a god or relying on some other higher power to get me through the situation, I mean I was relying on myself and my own strength and capabilities"* (II 6.28). Independence was related directly to what Mary believed about spirituality. She did not see spirituality and religion as similar concepts and believed that spirituality concerned the inner life of a person.

Mary took full responsibility for her life, and therefore felt that she had control over outcomes of events: *"I relied on my spiritual identity and that sense of myself and that's why I still feel like okay with the outcome even though it was not something that I wanted"* (II 6.4). It can be hypothesised that attributing outcomes of events to a higher being would take Mary's sense of autonomy and control away. She wanted to be in control of her life and wanted to set the standards for herself: *"I have always been inclined to challenge myself, demanding more of myself every step of the way"* (RW 6.4). Attributing outcomes of events to herself meant that she could change something in the future. Placing this responsibility in someone else's hands would mean that the outcome was fixed and that her choices and actions could not change the outcome of events.

Open-mindedness

Non-judgement and open-mindedness were important to Mary's spiritual identity. These attributes influenced how Mary described herself: *"As I mentioned, one's spiritual identity will always be in the background of one's everyday encounters. For me, however, I am someone who is naturally open-minded, receptive, intuitive, and interested in understanding other people's subjective realities"* (RW 6.6). Mary had empathy towards other human beings: *"I have the ability to really see, well it's not really empathy, obviously a lot of people have empathy... but the ability to put yourself into someone else's shoes and to be non-judgemental about their situation and really take their perspective on things ..."* (II 6.40). Mary was able to differentiate herself completely from her spiritual world view, maybe because her world view was flexible and open to influence or because her world view encompassed various perspectives.

Open-mindedness was important to Mary's sense of identity and drove her behaviour and future ambitions: *"... I feel now in my own spiritual identity so I think I will take the approach with everyone I work with I strive to make people feel comfortable and I strive to make people feel safe and just really appreciated"* (II 6.48). Mary was a person who wanted to understand people from all walks of life, and wanted to make others feel safe and understood, regardless of their personal history.

Mary had an interest in and passion for working in the criminal justice system: *"I really want to work with offenders or people in the criminal justice system. So what is really difficult about that is that basically everyone I am working with is very different from me in terms of ideologies, in terms of belief systems, in terms of religion even, you know culture and race and all of those things"* (II 6.44). Although Mary strived to be open-minded, she was cognisant of her own moral compass and value system and how these might influence her unconsciously: *"I try not be as judgemental as possible, obviously I'm realistic in the fact that there is going to be times that it is going to be very difficult for me ... Of course those things are difficult and different but I still think in those situations I'll hold on to my belief to be as non-judgemental as possible"* (II 6.44). Mary was idealistic about becoming as open-minded and as non-judgemental as possible with people from all walks of life.

Unconditional acceptance and unconditional love were things to which Mary aspired: *"I think it is something really powerful to be able to acknowledge that that is very different from*

you and that is something you would never belief in and that is something you would never say or anything like that but to then just accept it and to allow them to be that way, without it affecting you ...” (II 6.62). For her, complete non-judgement and open-mindedness only happened when other people’s beliefs, behaviours, and emotions did not affect her personal thoughts and emotions. These values are related to the highest forms of spiritual identity development, and Mary might only arrive at this stage of spirituality much later in life.

As an emerging adult, Mary attempted to be open-minded regarding the beliefs of her peers. She reflected about her class mates and their religious/spiritual beliefs: *“I think there’s a lot of people in my class who probably quite similar, I don’t know it’s not really a topic that we explored so I can’t say, or tell you for sure that yes we are definitely very similar or very different ... It doesn’t really affect me and if that is what works for them I am happy” (II 6.54).* Religion and spirituality was a taboo topic in class, but it seemed as if Mary was not too interested in the topic. Her non-judgemental and open-minded attitude influenced how she viewed religious and spiritual differences between people. Mary wanted others to be congruent and happy with who they were.

There were negative aspects about Mary’s open-mindedness. This attitude hindered her ability to stand up for her own thoughts and opinions about spirituality: *“I’m not closed off about it... I celebrate the differences in people so I want to know. If there is a debate on like a touchy subject, it’s not like I’ll say anything because I don’t want to be involved in confrontation” (II 6.60).* Mary struggled to take a stand during spiritual conversations. Difficulty to assert herself might have originated from her lack of spiritual commitment. It can be hypothesised that she did not have strong opinions regarding these matters and preferred to learn from diversity: *“... where someone has completely different beliefs than me ... obviously it’s interesting for me, I don’t want to use the word compare, but to kind of just see like what areas we’re similar in and where our difference lie ...” (II 6.60).*

Mary was still exploring her world view, trying to establish who she wanted to be spiritually. She preferred to explore and reflect in private. In social situations, she observed and arrived at conclusions in private.

4.6.3 In conclusion. Mary’s journey of spiritual identity development was an ongoing process. The core of spiritual identity for Mary was to *“be who you are”*. This could not be more applicable to Mary’s journey. She was a person who accepted that her spiritual identity

was constantly changing, and that she was curiously searching for truth. She acknowledged that her spirituality helped her to see herself and the world in a positive light, but that her spirituality was not her entire identity. Mary was true to herself and very honest regarding the developmental process as an emerging adult.

4.7 Cross-case Analysis

In this section, the most important themes that emerged in the case analyses are discussed. A cross-case analysis was conducted to determine the similarities across the individual cases and to identify variations in the identified themes. The analysis did not focus on comparison, but rather on description of spiritual identity development of postgraduate psychology students. In the process of cross-case analysis, six themes emerged and were labelled, namely 1) a journey across the life span, 2) the role of significant others, 3) trigger events along the journey and meaning-making, 4) finding one's voice among others, 5) values and characteristics to a spiritual identity, and 6) spirituality and becoming a psychologist.

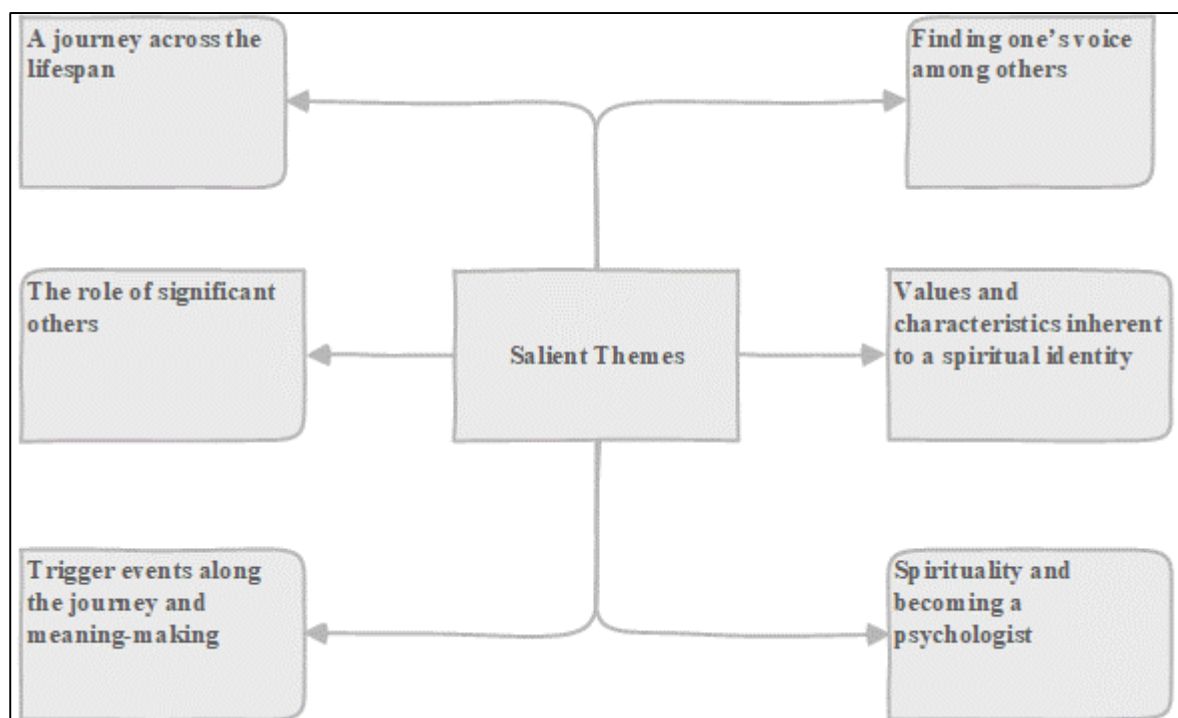


Figure 9. Salient themes across cases.

4.7.1 A journey across the life span. The journey of spiritual identity development was a clearly defined theme in all the participants' reflections. Spiritual identity development was described as a developmental process with specific changes occurring at different times

during their lives. Childhood was a time of life largely influenced by parents and doctrines practiced in the parental household. As emerging adults, participants reflected on their childhood, noticed a lack of depth in their spiritual understanding, and did not engage in questioning. It was clear that there was an absence of abstract thinking during the childhood years and that participants concretely made sense of religion. Participants mentioned an increase in spiritual questioning during adolescence, and some development of conflict with the beliefs of their parents. Although some participants, notably Tammy, Leana and Mary, overtly questioned and disagreed with their parents, another participant, Elsa, questioned and disagreed with her parents internally. Unlike the other participants, Mpho did not engage in disagreement or critical questioning of her parent's beliefs, probably due to the difference in culture and the fact that Mpho was not allowed to question her parents' authority. Overall spirituality was somewhat misunderstood during adolescence. Mpho, for example, said that she engaged in spiritual activities but it was done without much depth. All the participants acknowledged an increase in the depth of their spirituality during the emerging adulthood years.

Participants like Mary and Tammy acknowledged that they were still exploring their spirituality and that it might be transformed as they were growing older. Others like Elsa, Mpho, Leana, and Michelle believed that they had committed to their spirituality but that it was still deepening. In a sense, all the participants were still exploring their spiritual identity as emerging adults.

The developmental nature of spiritual identity development was evident; however, this journey was individualised and unique in every case. Participants were in different stages at different times in their lives.

4.7.2 The role of significant others. All the participants acknowledged the role of their upbringing and significant others in their spiritual identity development. Most of the participants acknowledged the role of their parents and their parents' beliefs. For most of the participants, these beliefs formed a foundation for their spiritual identity development. Elsa stated that religious upbringing helped her to form a spiritual identity and made it easier for her as she did not have to explore or experiment with different belief systems. Other participants like Tammy, Leana, Michelle and Mpho used tentative belief systems as a starting point from which to navigate. However, they individualised and differentiated from their families as emerging adults. Mary did not reflect on the influence that her parents had on her spiritual

identity development. However, this does not mean that they did not have any influence on her journey.

Parental beliefs significantly influenced participants' tentative commitment to a spiritual identity. Although Mpho, Elsa, Michelle, and Leana's spirituality might have deepened or might have differed slightly from parental beliefs, in essence, they were still relying on their Christian faith to make sense of their spiritual identity.

All the participants, except Mary, mentioned their parents as the most influential people in their spiritual identity development. Unlike the others, Mary mentioned a romantic relationship in high school that significantly influenced her spirituality. It seemed that Mary was the only participant that had a significant romantic relationship during adolescence, and this greatly influenced her spiritual beliefs. Mary, unlike the other participants, tentatively committed to beliefs influenced by someone other than her parents.

Peers were also acknowledged as important role players in spiritual identity development. They were especially important during adolescence when participants began to explore their identities. For example, Elsa felt that there was no room to explore with her peers, even in her religious domination, while Leana had the freedom to explore in any way she liked. Other participants did not mention the role of peers overtly in their spiritual identity development as adolescents. This might be because other role players were more important. For Michelle and Mpho, their families were the primary influential people with regard to their spiritual identity development, and for Mary, her boyfriend was.

During emerging adulthood, participants mentioned questioning and the need for deeper exploration. Peers were especially important during these years, as they provided a platform for participants to discuss and explore spirituality. However, discussions with peers were not evident in all cases, and some participants found it uncomfortable to talk about their spirituality. Michelle engaged in reflection and questioning internally and chose to keep her spiritual views private. Others, like Tammy and Leana, chose diverse friendship groups and felt comfortable to engage in critical conversations with their peers. Mpho and Elsa associated only with peers that held similar belief systems than they did. Mary was non-judgemental and open-minded when it came to spiritual discussion but did not participate actively in these conversations.

The salience of role players changed across the life span, especially with regard to parental influence. All the participants, except Mary, mentioned the salience of their parental

beliefs as children and adolescents. In all cases, the spiritual influence of the parents decreased during emerging adulthood. Mary's romantic relationship ended; therefore, the role that this individual played also decreased. For all the participants, the decrease in the importance of significant others led to deepening of reflection regarding spirituality all the participants.

4.7.3 Trigger events along the journey and meaning-making. Participants mentioned meaning-making through spirituality in challenging times. Most participants used their spirituality as a coping mechanism and as a means of self-compassion and resilience. All the participants mentioned trigger events that resulted in reflection and meaning-making.

Challenges were a catalyst for spiritual questioning and growth in participants' spiritual identity journeys. Challenges led to an increase in personal reflection and helped participants to re-evaluate and re-negotiate their identities.

The most significant challenge that most participants mentioned was the master's selection process. Master's selections posed meaning-making difficulties for all the participants. After the interviews, all the participants asked questions about themselves the outcomes. The participants differed in the extent to which they used spirituality and religion. The only participants that were selected were Elsa and Mpho. These participants did not engage in meaning-making and identity re-evaluation (regarding this event) as much as the participants who had less favourable outcomes. It was very clear that the outcome of the selection processes had a strong effect on the amount of spiritual reflection that took place. The participants that were more spiritual /religious (Michelle and Leana) had more self-compassion regarding the outcome. They made meaning through this experience by utilising spiritual /religious resources, while the participants that were still in a state of spiritual exploration (e.g., Tammy and Mary) were somewhat more critical of themselves and their role in the outcomes.

Participants experienced other triggers to spiritual identity development subjectively. For Mpho, socio-economic difficulties encouraged her to rely on her spirituality and religion during difficult life circumstances. Socio-economic difficulties served as a trigger for spiritual deepening and ultimately spiritual identity development. For Michelle, Tammy, and Mary, conflict in interpersonal relationships served as a trigger for spiritual identity development. Michelle turned to her relationship with God when she experienced conflict in interpersonal relationships. She found comfort and relief in her relationship with God. Tammy differed from Michelle in how she reacted to interpersonal conflict. She did not turn to a God-figure or

religion but rather reflected deeply on her spirituality. Interpersonally, Mary experienced situations in which her sense of self was challenged. These situations triggered reflection, questioning, and self-improvement. Another trigger experienced by participants was situations/information that challenged their world views. This was primarily experienced by Tammy and Mary. In both instances, these situations/information led to re-evaluation of spirituality /religion and world view. For Mary, these situations were primarily linked to a significant other person. On the other hand, Tammy's world view was challenged by information that contradicted what her parents had taught her. Lastly, heart- breaking experiences in the world also lead to a process of inner reflection and spiritual growth. All the participants mentioned that their spirituality helped them to make sense of sad/disappointing experiences in the world. For example, Elsa mentioned that she used her spirituality to make sense of child abuse.

All the participants utilised their spirituality in meaning-making. However, participants differed in the extent to which they utilised their spirituality in meaning-making processes. For example, Mary and Tammy relied on themselves in challenging times and tried to rationalise challenges by analysing their own role in adverse outcomes. The sense of autonomy facilitated a process of self-improvement and growth. Elsa, Michelle, Mpho, and Leana relied on their spirituality, trying to see challenges as part of a greater 'plan'. These participants believed that they had minimal influence on outcomes of experiences and that they should accept outcomes as they were. This mindset resulted in inner peace for most participants, but it was clear that there was still existential questioning when things did not turn out as planned. This was especially the case with Michelle and Leana. Because of their strong religious views (God had full authority), they felt that they were not allowed to question the outcomes.

Participants used their spirituality to make sense during challenges – especially when these challenges held a risk to their sense of self. All the participants (even those that did not rely on their spirituality in challenging times) acknowledged that relying on religion/spirituality made meaning-making much easier. Meaning-making often involved self-compassion and protected participants' sense of self.

4.7.4 Finding one's voice among others. As emerging adults, participants attempted to find their voice among others. University provided all the participants with the opportunity to differentiate from their family of origin and to explore different domains of their identity. For some participants like Elsa, university was the first opportunity to explore her own spiritual

identity and to make decisions regarding spiritual practices. A major contributing factor in Elsa finding her voice was the move from home to residence. In the residence, Elsa could explore various facets of her identity and was exposed to diversity in her social environment. Others, like Mpho, could deepen their spirituality with people that they related to. Mpho found a faith community where she believed she could explore and deepen her spirituality. Mary could become the person that she always wanted to be – honest and congruent. Leana and Tammy could choose their friendship circle and explore their identities in a safe and non-judgemental space, while Michelle could choose to associate with people that shared religion with her.

During emerging adulthood, participants were challenged psychosocially. They had to find and maintain a balance between the search for support from like-minded individuals and dealing with diversity. Some participants found like-minded individuals in their friendship groups and some from their spiritual communities. Leana, Tammy, Michelle, and Elsa found like-minded individuals in their friendship groups. Mpho was part of a strictly religious community and she found that she could connect with individuals that formed part of this community. Mary was unique and was open towards all kinds of individuals (religious, non-religious, spiritual, and not spiritual).

All the participants were exposed to spiritual and religious diversity during their postgraduate studies. They differed in how they reacted behaviourally towards diversity, and made meaning of diversity. Leana respected diverse beliefs and was non-judgemental; she made meaning by reflecting on subjectivity when it came to values and acknowledged the need for respect in these topics. Michelle avoided diversity as much as she could; she listened when it came up in discussion but did not want to engage. She found it easy to relate to individuals of different religions and acknowledged the similarities. She made meaning by considering cultural differences. Mary encouraged diversity; she did not engage in discussion regarding spiritual/religious diversity but attempted to incorporate different views into her own. She made meaning by looking at similarities between different belief systems. Tammy was curious regarding diversity and encouraged discussions regarding spiritual diversity. However, this was not always successful. She engaged in meaning-making by considering different value systems in different cultures. Lastly, Elsa and Mpho, both very religiously inclined, attributed spiritual diversity to religious upbringing and attempted to make meaning by looking at religious background and context.

Participants established unique and personal spiritual practices. Participants like Leana, Michelle, Elsa, and Mpho engaged in prayer and participated in church, and Mary and Tammy engaged in reflection. How participants decided to deepen their spirituality was personal and unique, but all of them found a community where their voice was heard and accepted.

Participants established their own definition with regard to what they believed spirituality and spiritual identity entail. These definitions were derived from various life experiences, and no two participants' definitions were similar. Leana, Michelle, Elsa, and Mpho's definitions of spirituality and spiritual identity were influenced strongly by the Christian religion. Tammy and Mary had encompassing definitions and believed that there was more to spirituality than merely religion.

Participants wanted to use their newly found voices and had the desire to share their voices with others. Mpho wanted to share these beliefs with others and found a community of people where she could transfer knowledge. Others, like Tammy, Leana, Elsa, and Mary, had discussions with peers in an attempt to transfer their beliefs. Michelle differed from the other participants, as she believed that religion and spirituality were personal. She did not engage in discussions with others regarding her spirituality. Most of the participants realised that their spiritual voices would be heard in the psychology profession.

Finding one's voice as a postgraduate psychology student was personal, unique, and subjective. Some participants believed that they had found their voices, while others like Mary and Tammy were still finding their voices in a socially complex environment.

4.7.5 Values and characteristics inherent to a spiritual identity. Participants established tentative value systems by using their spirituality and/or religion. It is important to note that all the participants acknowledged the role of religion in their spiritual understanding and spiritual identity development. They differed in the extent to which they internalised religion as part of their identities. Participants like Mary and Tammy disregarded religion as part of their spiritual identity while others like Mpho, Elsa, Michelle, and Leana clearly integrated their religious beliefs as part of their identities. Values influenced how participants interacted with the world and how they chose to portray themselves to others. These values strongly influenced all spheres of the participants' identities. It influenced what friends they chose and how they behaved. Values influenced participants' motivation to commit to a helping career.

Value systems were personal and individualised, but there was a certain degree of similarity between participants' values. The similarities were especially evident in values considered important in the psychology profession. Leana held non-judgement, selflessness, passion, patience, and compassion in high regard. Tammy believed that congruence, respect, kindness, tolerance, and love should be followed. Elsa mentioned respect, love, hope, peace, and compassion as behavioural driving factors. Michelle believed discipline in relationships was most important. She also mentioned Christian values such as hope, compassion, and respect as important to her sense of self. Mary affirmed that self-acceptance, compassion, respect, and unconditional love were most important, and Mpho spoke about self-responsibility and resilience. These values were embedded in participants' identities, and it drove their moral compass more than religion or spirituality did. Although none of the participants mentioned courage as a value to which they adhered, it was clear that all the participants derived courage from their spirituality and/or religion. Courage helped participants when they had to face uncertainty or when their sense of self was challenged. For example, Mpho was courageous when facing severe socio-economic difficulties. Mary's spirituality gave her the courage to be herself and to grow during difficult life events. All the participants derived courage during the master's selection processes. Courage provided participants with a sense of control, peace of mind, and self-compassion.

With regard to the psychology profession, participants agreed on respect and compassion as important professional values to adhere to. All the participants mentioned that it was important to respect diversity and to show compassion to people from all walks of life. Participants were cognisant that values, more than religion, differentiated people. They were aware that people were different because of differences in value systems. They realised that values, more than religion, would influence the therapeutic relationship. Values were embedded strongly in identity, and participants mentioned that it would be difficult to hide their most salient values during therapeutic interactions. Some participants (e.g., Mpho and Elsa) mentioned that their most salient values would influence the therapeutic relationship directly, while others (e.g., Michelle, Leana, Tammy, and Mary) mentioned that it would influence the relationship indirectly. The general consensus was that personal values (e.g., respect, non-judgement and compassion) would influence the therapeutic relationship positively and that psychologists should never force their spiritual values on anyone. These values provided participants with the comfort and self-confidence to enter the therapeutic relationship knowing that they would not harm their clients.

Participants realised that various factors influenced their value system. Some participants (e.g. Elsa and Michelle) revealed their religion as the most important influential factor with regard to their value system. Others (e.g. Leana and Mpho) mentioned that their upbringing and/or their parents were the most important influence. Other influential factors included: culture (e.g., Michelle and Mpho), significant romantic relationships (e.g., Mary) and reflection upon life experiences and information (e.g., Mary and Tammy).

In conclusion, although value systems were personal and individualised, there were similarities between participants. Some values were strongly present among all the participants, while others were unique to each participant. It can be established that value systems were embedded in participants' spiritual identity and that participants could not differentiate these values from their sense of self.

4.7.6 Spirituality and becoming a psychologist. Postgraduate studies in psychology played an essential role in all the participants' journeys of spiritual identity development. Postgraduate studies provided individuals with a context in which there was a variety of different people and in which they were exposed to different world views, beliefs, and faiths. Participants differed in how much they embraced diversity in the class setting.

All the participants acknowledged spiritual/religious differences between themselves and their peers. They were cognisant of the diverse nature of a postgraduate psychology class. All the participants realised that diversity should be respected and that people were generally diverse. Participants realised that there were similarities in diversity. Most of the participants realised that other students' religion and/or spirituality was just as important to them as it was to themselves. Some participants like Tammy, Mary, and Michelle tried to establish similarities between religions, stating that the basic premises of religions were similar.

Although all the participants were in the Honours class at the UFS, they differed in their reflections regarding the extent to which they had been exposed to diverse religious and spiritual beliefs during postgraduate studies. Michelle mentioned that she had not been exposed to spiritual diversity in a personal capacity or in the postgraduate psychology class. Mary, Leana, Michelle, Tammy, and Mpho mentioned exposure to different cultures but that religion or spirituality was rarely a topic of discussion in class. All the participants mentioned that it was interesting to learn about different religions and diversity in general. They believed that it was important for a psychologist to be aware of the differences between people. All the

participants mentioned that they hoped to understand and learn more about diversity before they became psychologists.

Although participants acknowledged that they found discussions regarding spirituality and religion interesting, none of them were comfortable in disclosing their opinions in class. It was clear that spirituality was considered a very private topic and a topic to explore in personal relationships. It seemed that there was a strong consensus on respect for spiritual diversity to the extent that participants avoided the topic completely. It also became apparent that participants chose class friends with whom they either shared a value system, spirituality, or religion.

Postgraduate psychology training presented cognitive challenges to most participants. Mary mentioned that postgraduate studies had been the most challenging learning curve for her, and Leana felt that more was expected from her academically. Michelle struggled to balance academic challenges with her spirituality, while Mpho did not have any academic support from home. Elsa was the only participant who did not mention academic challenges during postgraduate studies, and she trusted fully in God. However, all the participants were confronted with academic challenges in their honours year, as they had to excel academically to apply for masters. Participants used abstract reasoning during their postgraduate studies and were able to reflect critically on their views about spirituality. Although participants differed in the depth of their reflection, no participant was entirely concrete.

A specific situation that confronted all the participants was the master's selection process. All the participants applied, but not all of them were selected. Master's selection provided a unique opportunity for the participants to reflect on their identity. This process provoked anxiety for most of the participants and led to an increase in questioning about the self. The outcome strongly influenced how participants evaluated themselves during the selection process, and they tried to incorporate this experience as part of their identities. Participants utilised this experience to define themselves in a way that would make the outcome of the experience less traumatic. For example, Mary used this experience as a learning curve, while Leana realised that she could utilise her strengths in different careers. Michelle tried to make meaning through prayer, and Tammy tried to investigate what she could do to improve herself. Mpho and Elsa were selected for the master's programme and therefore engaged in far less reflection (regarding master's selection) than the other participants did. All of the unsuccessful applicants wanted to apply again in the future by incorporating the insights derived from this

experience. Leana was the only participant that reflected on different career opportunities during the interviewing process. All the participants had the emotional regulation to deal with the outcome of master's selection and were able to engage in meaning-making regarding the outcome.

Participants had future views regarding themselves as psychology professionals. Participants had vastly different ideas regarding how much their spirituality would influence their work as psychologists. Participants like Tammy and Mary acknowledged that their spirituality might one day influence their work but that they currently did not believe that it would because they were still in a state of exploration. Others like Mpho stated that she would find it exceptionally difficult to differentiate her profession as a psychologist from her religious beliefs. Michelle, Elsa, and Leana acknowledged that their spirituality would influence their jobs to a certain extent because their spirituality was embedded in who they were as people.

Participants acknowledged that spirituality would play an essential role in meaning-making regarding their patients' experiences. Opinions about the role that spirituality would play differed among the participants. Mary mentioned that her values would drive her behaviour as a psychologist. Tammy mentioned that she would question their experiences. Mpho would pray for her clients. Michelle and Elsa would try to find meaning by considering God's plan in suffering. All the participants acknowledged that psychologists have to maintain objectivity, but that their value system and spirituality would consciously or unconsciously influence their approach to their clients.

4.8 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the results of this study were presented and a description was provided of the most prominent themes across the cases. Firstly, the six individual cases were introduced, describing and exploring each participant's journey of spiritual identity development. Secondly, prominent themes across the cases were presented, while focusing on the unique variations of experiences in each theme. The cross-case analysis is discussed in more detail in the next chapter, by referring to literature.

Chapter 5 – Discussion of Research Results

In this chapter, the themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis in Chapter 4 are interpreted in the light of literature. The discussion intends to describe and explore postgraduate psychology students' experiences of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. The journey of spiritual identity development of postgraduate psychology students is discussed by referring to five themes, namely 1) spiritual identity development from a life span perspective, 2) spiritual identity formation processes, 3) spiritual identity as a life story and a life purpose, 4) the contextual nature of forming a spiritual identity, and 5) emerging adulthood, spirituality and psychology. The outline of the chapter is presented in Figure 10.

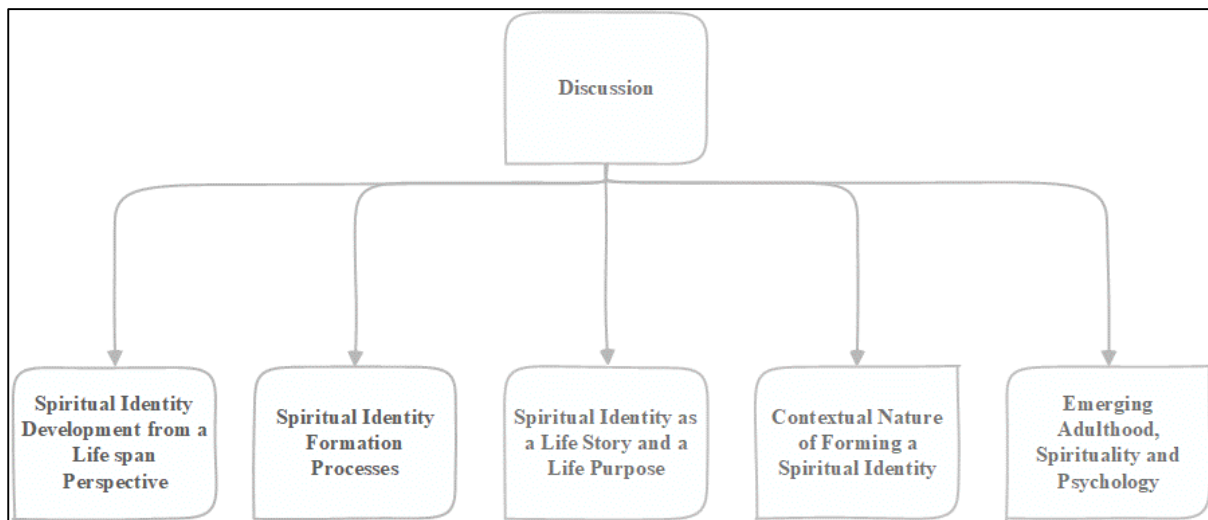


Figure 10. Outline of the discussion.

5.1 Spiritual Identity from a Life Span Perspective

In the previous chapter, the cross- case theme called *a journey across the life span* was discussed. It was clear from participants' reflections that spiritual identity developed across the life span. Participants referred to spiritual identity as an ongoing process or a journey throughout life. Although spiritual exploration and questioning were more evident in certain life stages, no life stage warranted preference for spiritual identity development. According to Templeton and Eccles (2006), spiritual identity development does not develop in a linear pattern, nor is there a critical period for spiritual identity development. Furthermore, various other stage theorists (Elkind & Elkind, 1962; Erikson, 1958; Fowler, 1981; Oser & Gmunder, 1991) and narrative theorists (McAdams, 2008; McLean & Pratt, 2006) agree that development takes place over the life span.

From the results, it can be derived that most participants' spiritual identity development began during childhood. During the interviews, most participants did not focus on spiritual development during childhood but rather reflected on adolescence and emerging adulthood. However, it was evident that spiritual /religious experiences during childhood provided a foundation for future spiritual identity development. Childhood spirituality /religion was poorly understood by participants, and spiritual /religious practices were influenced mainly by caregivers. The finding that spirituality /religion concepts are present during childhood is supported by theorists. Fowler (1981), Kohlberg and Hersh (1977) and Oser (1991) include childhood religion /faith /morality in their respective models.

In this study, it was found that participants experienced their adolescent years as a time of increased questioning (either overtly or privately), rebellion towards parents, and internal conflict. Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1966, 1980) assert that adolescence is a time of increased identity exploration and crisis. In the light of the research, a sense of rebellion, questioning, and conflict are part of the journey of adolescents. However, although participants experienced inner conflict and questioning during adolescence, they had difficulty with critical self-reflection regarding beliefs. Therefore, most participants surrendered to their parents' beliefs and spiritual practices. Piaget (1952) postulates that the highest form of cognitive development is formal operational thought. This mode of thought is characterised by abstract thinking and hypothetical reasoning (Piaget, 1952). All the participants reached the stage of formal operational thought and could therefore reflect on their religious and spiritual experiences. However, it was found that there were differences in the depth of reflection among the participants. This is in line with the opinion of Cartwright (2001), who states that spiritual understanding can develop beyond post-formal thought and that adults are able to transcend previous understanding by incorporating new experiences with their cognitive abilities. Furthermore, it was observed in this study that participants were concerned about the "rightness" of their actions. All the participants established subjective value systems, irrespective of religious or spiritual orientation. Values strongly influenced participants' behaviour and encouraged them to engage in socially acceptable behaviour. Participants displayed awareness of the subjectivity of their values. If one considers Kohlberg's theory (Kohlberg & Hersh, 1977), it might be assumed that participants have reached Stage 5 of moral development. During Stage 5, which occurs on the post-conventional level, the social world is viewed as having subjective opinions, rights, and values. Literature indicates that moral

reasoning and cognitive development influence spirituality and religion (Day, 2011; Elkind & Elkind, 1962; Oser, 1991).

As participants matured physically, emotionally, and morally, so did their faith and spirituality. Some theorists, e.g. Cartwright (2001), assert that spiritual development parallels other aspects of human development. In this study, a significant change in spiritual /faith /religious development was observed between adolescence and emerging adulthood. Consistent with Fowler's (1981) theory, during this life stage, participants were typically conforming and noncritical, while participants became self-critical and reflective during emerging adulthood. As emerging adults, participants were critical about themselves and assumed self-responsibility for their lives. They were exposed to a new social environment, new world views, and therefore new value systems. It was clear that participants had gone through a transitional period in terms of their faith development. Critical self-reflection is characteristic to the *individuative-reflective* stage of faith development (Fowler, 1981).

Lastly, another important finding to support the notion that spiritual identity develops across the life span was the fact that all the participants mentioned that they were exploring their spiritual identity (in various degrees). Participants were at different stages of development at different times in their lives. Participants noticed that spiritual identity development would continue throughout the life span. These findings are consistent with the idiosyncratic nature of development discussed by Erikson (1968), Fowler (1981) and Poll and Smith (2003).

5.2 Spiritual Identity Formation Processes

Spiritual identity formation processes were unique to each case. The variety in the experiences of spiritual identity formation processes were evident in the cross- case themes of *trigger events along the journey* and *values and characteristics inherent to a spiritual identity*. First and foremost, for all the participants, their spiritual identity formation processes originated in their family of origin. Most of the participants in this study grew up in Christian households, and for most, familial religion formed the foundation for spiritual identity. The terms *spirituality* and *religion* were used interchangeably during the interviewing processes, and some participants could not differentiate between the concepts at all. Most participants were self-identified Christians, while others described themselves as being spiritual but not religious. The multifaceted nature of religiousness and spirituality was clear in the findings, and it was evident that spirituality and religiousness were subjective and personal to

participants. These findings correspond with opinions of various theorists (Dysen et al., 1997; Roehlkepartain, 2006; Roeser et al., 2008; Wink & Dillon, 2002) that people can be spiritual and religious simultaneously, identify as being spiritual but not religious, or use their religion as an expression of their spirituality. Nevertheless, religious and /or spiritual participants had undergone spiritual identity processes throughout their lives.

As most participants were religious, emphasis was placed on Oser and Gmunder's (1991) theory of religious judgement. In this study, it was found that most participants were in the second stage of religious judgement. Individuals in this development stage believe that God or an ultimate being could be influenced by prayers and religious practices (Oser, 1991). The religious individuals in this study relied on religious practices in stressful times and believed that prayer would influence the outcome of events. This was especially evident during master's selection. Tammy and Mary were in the *deism* stage of religious judgement and assumed self-responsibility. They did not attribute the outcome of events to a higher being and believed that they were independent. The stage of religious judgement influenced participant's meaning-making processes, their self-concept, and their identity development processes. It was found that religious participants were much more self-compassionate compared to those who were not religious. Literature indicates that the *divine plan* stage is linked to emerging adulthood. This is in contrast with findings of this study, namely that no-one had reached this stage.

The presence of identity exploration was evident in this study. Participants engaged in critical reflection about who they were and who they wanted to be. Identity formation processes became prominent during the adolescent years. Although spiritual self-reflection was still largely absent, individuals started to become aware of different facets of their identities. Some participants experienced interpersonal conflict, and others intrapersonal conflict. Yet, identity development took place because of psychosocial conflict during this life stage. Adolescence is described as the most important stage for identity exploration, which believed to take place consciously and unconsciously (Erikson, 1968; Kroger, 2007; Marcia, 1980).

Although identity development of the participants took place during adolescence, it was found that most spiritual identity exploration took place during the emerging adulthood years. This is consistent with theories of faith development (Fowler, 1981), spiritual identity development (Poll & Smith, 2003), and the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). It was clear that some of the participants had made tentative commitments to a spiritual identity, but others were in the process of exploration.

During the life stage of adolescence, participants were strongly influenced by significant others, most notably their parents. Therefore, most participants did not explore their unique spiritual identity during this life stage and made tentative commitments based on the beliefs of others.

Marcia (1980) refers to individuals who have made identity commitments prior to exploration as *foreclosed*. Identity foreclosure relates to Fowler's (2001) *synthetic-conventional faith* in which beliefs and values are influenced strongly by significant others and in which exists a strong tendency to conform. In this study, spiritual identity exploration and moratorium occurred during the emerging adulthood years. This is in contrast with general identity development theory; for example, Erikson (1968), Marcia (1980), and Crocetti et al. (2008) believe that exploration and achievement of identity are most prominent in adolescence. According to Marcia's (1980) identity status model, tentative commitments are followed by a period of moratorium. As emerging adults, some participants were still in the *identity moratorium status*, while others were in the *identity achievement status*.

For participants in this study, emerging adulthood and higher education presented a time of spiritual exploration that led to opportunity to make identity- defining commitments. Higher education presented triggers to spiritual identity development, and these triggers stimulated spiritual reflection and spiritual growth. The most significant trigger that confronted participants was the master's selection processes. Nevertheless, participants had personal trigger events along their journeys of spiritual identity development. These occurred specifically during the emerging adulthood years. According to Erikson (1968) and Marcia (1980), conflict /crisis stimulates identity development and identity status.

It was found that some participants were currently in the process of exploration of spiritual identity. They engaged in critical reflection, asked difficult questions, and had doubts about spirituality and religion. Participants in moratorium relied on themselves during difficult times. In contrast, participants who were committed to a spiritual identity did not doubt their spirituality /religion and engaged in minimal reflection about their beliefs. Foreclosed individuals attributed their spirituality to their upbringing and acknowledged the important role of their parents and context in their spiritual identity development. These findings correspond with those of Kiesling et al. (2006) on the application of Marcia's (1966) identity status theory and spiritual identity development. Kiesling et al. (2006) found differences between spiritually foreclosed individuals and individuals in moratorium. Spiritually foreclosed individuals

attributed their spirituality to their upbringing, while people in moratorium relied on themselves in search of truth. Foreclosed individuals did not question, doubt, or engage in reflection, while individuals in moratorium did (Kiesling et al., 2006).

As mentioned, some participants had made strong commitments with regard to their spiritual identity but were still in the process of reflection and exploration regarding these commitments. The process of further exploration regarding commitment corresponds with the theories of Crocetti et al. (2008) and Luyckx et al. (2006). Most religious participants had made decisions regarding their spiritual identity and were participating actively in activities to strengthen their spiritual identity (e.g., by attending church regularly). Although they were committed, they were in the process of deepening, reflecting, and discussing their spiritual identity commitments. Other participants, however, were in the process of reconsidering their spiritual identity commitments. These participants preferred to commit to certain values. They were, as Luyckx et al. (2006) put it, in the process of *exploring in breadth*. Participants, especially those who were reconsidering and questioning their religious upbringing, were exploring various options with regard to values and beliefs.

Consistencies were found in the results of this study and Roeser et al.'s (2008) characteristics of spiritual identity. Participants identified as spiritual people, had spiritual ideals, life purpose, spiritual world views, a spiritual life story and engaged in spiritual practices. Nonetheless, participants exhibited unique variations among these characteristics. Some participants had the spiritual ideal of an ultimate being (e.g., Elsa, Mpho, Leana, and Michelle) and engaged in spiritual practices. On the other hand, others had the spiritual ideal of an ultimate state of being (e.g., Michelle and Tammy) and engaged in reflection. All the participants reflected a spiritual life story, had a life purpose and values that influenced their behaviour. However, diversity in the manifestation of these characteristics were evident in the results. Templeton and Eccles (2006) define spirituality as an individualised identity that reflects the role of spirituality in a person's life. They assert that the content of spiritual identity will differ between individuals. Internalisation of values is important in spiritual identity and drives people's behaviour (Templeton & Eccles, 2006; Roeser et al., 2008). It can be concluded that the participants collectively presented with the characteristics of spiritual identity but that the content of these characteristics differed among the participants.

In the study, internalisation of unique spiritual experiences and subjective spiritual identity drove participants' behaviour. Poll and Smith (2003) put forward an integrative model

of spiritual identity development across the life span. Participants in this study have moved sequentially through the *pre-awareness*, *awakening*, *recognition* and *integration* stages. All the participants mentioned awareness-raising events during their spiritual identity development processes. These awareness-raising events or triggers challenged either interpersonal relationships or the sense of self. It was also found that participants were more 'aware' of the sacred during crisis situations. When participants were asked to reflect on their spiritual identity development, they indicated that most spiritual growth occurred during awareness-raising events. These findings are supported by Poll and Smith's (2003) theory. Spiritual identity development is a process, and individuals should first experience awareness-raising events before recognition can occur. Participants mentioned that they all trusted the sacred (whether the universe or God). This finding is evidence that participants have developed past the recognition stage of spiritual identity development. From the results, it seemed as if all the participants were in the *integration* stage of spiritual identity development. Participants were able to internalise their spiritual experiences as part of their identities. Although participants differed in religiosity, all the participants interacted with the world in ways congruent with their core values and their spiritual selves. Participants acknowledged diversity and could utilise meaning-making strategies to make sense of these differences. It corresponds with Poll's and Smith's (2003) premise in the sense that religious orientation, personality traits, previous life experience, etc. influence the experience of spiritual identity.

5.3 Spiritual Identity as a Life Story and a Life Purpose

In the reflections of the participants, it became apparent that their spiritual identity provided them with a coherent life story and a life purpose. This was most prominent in the cross- case themes *values and characteristics inherent to spiritual identity* and *trigger events along the journey*. It was found that participants created a life story and derived a life purpose through the use of their spiritual identities. The concepts of life story, life purpose and meaning-making are found in the work of McAdams and McLean (2013) regarding narrative identity. In the findings, it was evident that participants' spiritual identities were constructed socially. Participants constructed stories about their life experiences in an attempt to establish unity, meaning and purpose. These findings are in line with the nature of spiritual development from a narrative perspective (McAdams, 2013; McNamara Barry et al., 2010). Participants used their spiritual identity to integrate life stories and to make sense of life experiences. All the

participants were able (although variations existed in the results) to engage in meaning-making processes regarding their spiritual experiences through storytelling.

All the participants' stories started during childhood, but their ability to reflect on experiences and integrate these experiences with their sense of self came to the fore only during adolescence and emerging adulthood. According to McAdams (2013), storytelling becomes more complex with age, and the ability to form narrative identity only emerges during late adolescence and emerging adulthood. Proof of the increasingly complex nature of storytelling could be seen in how participants made sense of difficult life experiences, how they reflected on these experiences, and how they internalised experiences as part of their identities. An example of this concept was appreciated by participants' accounts of master's selection. Participants utilised memory telling as a means of meaning-making during master's selection. They were able to construct coherent narratives and to derive meaning from their experiences. Furthermore, the participants (especially those who were not accepted into the programme) integrated and drew insights from the experiences. They intended to use these experiences as a means of self-reflection and personal growth. This process of reconstruction and internalisation of life experiences is similar to the process of autobiographical reasoning found in the work of McAdams (2013). People utilise autobiographical reasoning to derive meaning from difficult life experiences.

It was found that participants preferred to derive insights and lessons from negative life experiences. Spiritual identity provided participants with courage, compassion, and hope. The ability to reflect on the past, integrate negative life experiences, and simultaneously reflect on a hopeful future gave participants courage to fulfil their life purpose. The narrative processes of foreshadowing and retrospective reflection (McAdams, 2013) underpinned these processes. By integrating spiritual self-stories (related to purpose in life), individuals could find reasons for negative outcomes in life. This finding is consistent with the work related to spiritual identity development by Sparrowe (2005).

All the participants utilised storytelling and their personalised spirituality in meaning-making and in the process of transcending their environments. Evidence of the role of spirituality can be found in the work of Frankl (1985), Emmons (2005) and Wong (2013). The journeys of participants indicated progression towards complexity in meaning-making during emerging adulthood. Participants' purpose in life were related strongly to core values and influenced behaviour, relationships, and decision-making. It was found that negative life

experiences were especially important in construction of value systems and spiritual identity. This is in line with the premise that spirituality is related to meaning-making, values, and purpose in life (Frankl, 1985; McAdams & McLean, 2013). Furthermore, Frankl (1985) asserts that people utilise spirituality to make meaning of suffering in the world.

By considering the findings in the cross- case theme *values and characteristics inherent to a spiritual identity*, it is clear that participants' core values (influenced by their spiritual identity) played an essential role in their desire to enter a helping career. Ultimately, their core values were related to their purpose in life. According to Klenke (2007), one of the core pillars of spiritual identity is self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice was evident in all cases, as all the participants wanted to nurture the human spirit.

In conclusion, spiritual identity provided participants with a life story that was unified by spiritual experiences across the life span. Spiritual identity was closely related to participants' value systems and therefore influenced their purpose in life. Through storytelling and other narrative processes, participants were able to not only tell their life stories and reflect on their life purpose but also to make meaning of their lives.

5.4 Contextual Nature of Forming a Spiritual Identity

The contextual nature of forming spiritual identity was unmistakable in this qualitative study. The contextual nature was evident in all the cross- case themes but was most prominent in *the role of significant others* and *finding one's voice among others*.

In this study, it was found that spiritual identity development cannot be separated from the environment in which it occurs. Across the life span, participants' spiritual identities were moulded by their environment. Different contextual factors resulted in a variety of results, as all the participants developed unique spiritual identities. Participants mentioned the importance of various role players (parents, peers, culture, and religious communities) in their spiritual identity development processes. For most participants, the context during emerging adulthood, namely the university setting, played an essential role in their spiritual identity development. From the results, it was clear that participants' spiritual identities were influenced by the people in their lives and the environments to which they were exposed. In addition, participants also influenced their environments. These findings are consistent with the developmental systems theory. This theory places specific emphasis on the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

During adolescence, parents, peers, and romantic partners played an important role in establishing a basis for spiritual identity development. For most participants, the most essential role players during this life stage were the family members, especially the parents. During this life stage, parents had the authority over spiritual and religious practices, and the participants engaged in religious /spiritual activities as part of families. As children, the participants did not have autonomy regarding which spiritual practices they wanted to pursue and were pressurised to conform to specific practices. This finding is consistent with literature regarding spiritual socialising agents during adolescence (McNamara Barry et al., 2010). It comes as no surprise that most spiritual identity exploration takes place after adolescence. Only when individuals move into a new environment and utilise autonomy, they can truly explore their identities. Furthermore, most participants did not challenge their parents regarding their religious beliefs, either because of personality characteristics or culture. Therefore, fusion and lack of differentiation occurred and participants could not explore their identities. According to the literature, lack of differentiation hinders spiritual identity growth (Poll & Smith, 2003).

Throughout the participants' journeys, their context changed, presenting new backdrops for spiritual identity development. Parental authority decreased, and participants were allowed the autonomy to make their own decisions regarding all facets of identity. As emerging adults, the influence of parents as socialising factors regarding spiritual identity development decreased, and other significant role players came to the fore. Arnett and Jenson (2002) also observe a change in socialising agents after adolescence. For the participants, the change in the system led to a change in spirituality and eventually in spiritual identity. Role players during emerging adulthood consisted of peers, religious communities, culture, and information.

The extent to which the social environments of the participants changed from adolescence to emerging adulthood differed. Some participants applied for hostel residence, left their parental homes and moved to another city; others still resided with their parents. Nonetheless, all the participants experienced a change in social environment, as all of them became students. These changes in the participants' systems led to changes in identity development processes. Most participants systematically differentiated from their parents and investigated and explored various spiritual and religious options in their new social environments. This was the case with all the participants: those who come from a strict religious background, those in hostel residences, and those still residing at home. Participants wanted to form their own spiritual identities independently from their parents. This finding

corresponds with findings in the literature regarding spiritual development during emerging adulthood (Arnett & Jensen, 2002; Levinson et al., 2014). Furthermore, it was found that most religious participants continued to be religious during emerging adulthood. This is in contrast with research conducted by Arnett (2004), who states that religious socialisation in childhood did not influence religiousness or spirituality in emerging adults. Most of the participants who had a religious basis continued to be spiritual /religious in the emerging adulthood years.

The role of peers in spiritual identity development differed among participants. Some participants associated only with individuals that were spiritually similar to them, while others explored their spirituality and religiosity with a diverse friendship circle. Furthermore, most participants felt secure in their sense of self and were not influenced by diversity in beliefs. It was also found, as proposed by Desrosiers et al., (2011), that engagement in spiritual conversation with friends increased feelings of interpersonal connection. This was especially evident in cases where participants had a diverse group of friends. They experienced their friendship circles as a secure and safe place where they could reflect and critically discuss their spirituality. Some participants preferred to have friends with similar belief systems. These participants engaged in minimal exploration regarding spirituality and religion. According to Desrosiers et al. (2011), peer religiosity predicts religiosity during emerging adulthood. In this study, this finding was not supported, as some participants that were religious had non-religious friends, while non-religious participants had religious friends.

For most of the participants, spirituality and religion were very private and personal. Instead of relying and connecting with others they preferred to turn and connect with God /the universe. According to Poll and Smith (2003), this is part of healthy spiritual development and part of the differentiation process. They state that individuals should strive towards an objective spiritual identity, despite contradicting information.

Communities and culture played an important role in spiritual identity development of the participants. Faith communities were important socialising agents in their lives because most participants were religious. It was found that faith communities provided individuals with emotional support and influenced how they made meaning during difficult life circumstances. Participants' beliefs as well as their spiritual and religious practices were influenced strongly by their faith communities. Literature reflects findings that that cultural and community socialising methods have a direct influence on emerging adults' spirituality, beliefs, and practices (Mattis et al., 2006; McNamara Barry et al., 2010).

During the interviewing processes, participants were asked to reflect on the multi-cultural society of South Africa. It was found that culture played an essential role in the spiritual identity processes of participants. Culture and community are parts of the macro-system (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and play a role in identity development. Participants were cognisant of the multicultural nature of South Africa and especially the university setting. Apostolides (2016) asserts that South African youth live in a rainbow nation and that the context involves diversity in religion, faith, and spirituality. The most prominent finding was the influence that social experiences and discourses had on participants' respect and openness to other spiritual beliefs and faiths. It was clear that the social experiences were internalised and formed part of individuals' core values. Participants were also cognisant of the fact that they had the freedom to choose their religion and that no religion was better than another.

Most of the participants were Christian, Afrikaans speaking individuals, and only one English, black individual was interviewed. According to the literature, the South African youth usually tend to combine beliefs across dominations (Brittian et al., 2013). Many researchers, e.g. Brittian et al. (2013), Edward and Thwala (2010), and Knoetze (2014), investigated native African beliefs and the integration of Westernised and African beliefs. Some authors concluded that the South African youth, especially black South Africans, would associate with more than one denomination. This finding was not supported by this study. All the participants identified with either one religion or with no religion at all. However, participants did integrate different informational sources into their world views. This finding is consistent with the literature (Smith & Snell, 2009).

Participants were mostly exposed to the multicultural nature of South Africa at university level. For all the participants, the university context formed the backdrop for spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. Certain findings were significant. Firstly, participants were aware of diversity in the university setting and were respectful of such differences. Secondly, higher education provided no support with regard to spiritual diversity issues. Apostolides (2016) found that spiritual needs were generally not discussed in the social setting. The lack of mentorship with regard to spiritual needs leads to complete avoidance of the topic. It can be hypothesised that students would have had much more opportunities for spiritual identity development if spiritual issues had been incorporated into course work.

For all the participants, the multicultural university context stimulated significant psychosocial and cognitive growth. University exposed the participants to a complex social

environment that challenged their world views and beliefs. The multicultural and diverse environment of university provided them with new information and insights with regard to their spiritual identity. Participants wanted to learn from this environment and embrace diversity. The experience of postgraduate studies differed among participants: Some stated that it was immensely stressful, and others described it as a time of personal growth.

Participants mentioned that postgraduate studying was academically challenging. These challenges stimulated reflection regarding world views, beliefs, and values. According to the literature, higher education stimulates the exploration of world views, beliefs and values, as well as cognitive and psychosocial development (Arnett, 2000; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Perry, 1970). Participants were cognisant of diversity (culture, ethnicity, religion, upbringing, etc.) and realised that knowledge and truth were contextual. In the light of Perry's (1970) theory of cognitive and ethical development, all the participants developed beyond *dualism* towards *commitment within relativism*. Participants integrated their knowledge about spirituality and religion with the knowledge of others. This process was easier and more comfortable for participants in moratorium, as they were receptive to new information. The participants that had made only tentative commitments found it a little more uncomfortable.

It was evident that the participants experienced psychosocial challenges related to establishing their identities, developing purpose, developing competence, and managing emotions. These psychosocial challenges corresponded with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of identity development of students. It was interesting that most of these psychosocial challenges were related to the journey of becoming a psychologist and not necessarily to being a student.

5.5 Emerging Adulthood, Spirituality, and Psychology

For participants, the journey of becoming psychologists was on the foreground during the interviewing processes. It came to light that spiritual identity played an essential role in the journey of becoming psychologists. Becoming a psychologist was the dream of all the participants.

It was found that psychology studies and the nature of the studies (e.g., academic demands, personal reflection, and master's selection) influenced how participants experienced the emerging adulthood developmental stage. The pillars of emerging adulthood, described by Arnett (2000, 2014) were evident in all cases. However, it was truly unique how much

psychological studies and the outcomes of master's selection processes influenced the experience of emerging adulthood. Most participants (with the exception of Elsa) experienced postgraduate studies as a time of uncertainty and instability that led to interpersonal conflict and anxiety. Arnett (2000, 2016) identified instability regarding career development, romantic relationships, and educational choices as a pillar of emerging adulthood. However, the instability that individuals in this study faced was related to the career field of psychology. Participants were completely aware about the selection processes and were visibly anxious about the future. Arnett et al. (2014) assert that the feeling of instability is related to identity exploration during this life stage. All the participants had the life ideal to become psychologists; therefore, all of them applied for master's selection. Unsuccessful applicants had to renegotiate their career choices, their self-ascribed purposes in life, and their identities. The instability that occurred resulted in reflection, questioning, and meaning-making. One participant noticed that she experienced more spiritual growth during master's selection processes than during any other time in life. On the other hand, students that were selected did not engage in similar in-depth reflection about their educational choices and careers. It can be concluded that instability that threatens the sense of self trigger spiritual identity development.

The participants in this study were self-focused. Their focus was related specifically to their careers and the prospect of becoming psychologists. This finding is consistent with Arnett's (2014) theory. He states that emerging adults generally prioritise tasks related to their personal development as they gain independence. In this study, participants differed in how independent they were during this life stage. Whether participants had left home had an effect on how independent they were. Furthermore, participants neglected aspects of their lives not deemed essential to their future careers. Participants found it difficult to maintain a balance and to focus on interpersonal relationships and only focused on their vision of becoming psychologists.

From participants' perspectives, master's selection was the most important event during the honours year. Although most participants were not selected for the course, they still believed that they would achieve their career goals and life purpose in the future. As mentioned before, participants reflected, showed self-compassion, and engaged in meaning-making processes. It was found that participants were optimistic, regardless of the outcomes: all of them managed disappointment well. *Optimism and possibilities* is a pillar of Arnett's (2000, 2014) theory.

Postgraduate psychology studying, although provoking anxiety at times, was also a time of immense personal growth for the participants. They were cognisant of the diversity in class regarding religion /spirituality. Most participants attributed diversity to culture and upbringing, although discussion of diversity was seemingly rare. Research conducted on spiritual competency of psychologists found that there was a universal gap in coursework and supervision regarding spirituality and religion (Miller et al., 2006; Schulte et al., 2002; Walker et al., 2004).

Participants mentioned the desire to learn more about diverse religions and cultures. At the same time, they were aware of their lack of knowledge regarding these topics. It seemed that respect was a strong collective value in the class; therefore, most opportunities for spiritual growth in class were ignored. Therefore, participants did not know how to deal with religious /spiritual diversity in the rare cases that it did occur. These findings are consistent with other findings regarding the incorporation of spirituality in the profession of psychology (Richards, 2005; Schulte et al., 2002).

Most participants experienced the journey of becoming a psychologist as daunting. Participants concurred that their spiritual identity would definitely influence their work as psychologists. They believed that their spiritual identity was ingrained in who they were, related to their value systems, and unconsciously influenced their behaviour. It was also concluded that they would utilise their spirituality as a tool to make meaning of their clients' experiences. These experiences of spiritual identity are consistent with the notion that spirituality 1) is the core of identity (Templeton & Eccles, 2006), 2) influences meaning-making (Kiesling et al., 2006; Roeser et al., 2008), and 3) results in behaviour that is congruent with one's values (Kiesling et al., 2006). Other researchers (Andrade, 2014); Walker et al., 2004) agree that world views, values, and own beliefs might unconsciously influence the therapeutic process. Another significant finding was that participants felt unsure about how to balance their personal values with values that they deemed important to the psychology profession. They acknowledged that clients would bring spiritual or religious issues into therapy and that spirituality and religion were essential to the human experience. None of the participants knew how to address these issues, and none mentioned supervisors or lecturers as approachable with regard to such questions. These concerns were shared with various researchers in the literature, e.g. Andrade (2014), Miller et al. (2006), Richards (2005), Parker (2011), and Walker (2004).

In this study, postgraduate psychology studies stimulated reflection on the meaning of life. Participants' reflections showed that the journey of postgraduate studies influenced faith development. Parks's (1986) findings suggest that students are preoccupied with existential questions regarding their life purpose and their prospective careers. Participants dream of changing the world (Parks, 1986). In this study, it was found that some participants contemplated existential questions, while others contemplated their career choices. The students who were not selected for master's contemplated both. All the participants wanted to become psychologists and to empower and help people. In the participants' reflections, they frequently mentioned existential questions regarding suffering in the world. Participants utilised their faith in their meaning-making processes. They desired to make secure commitments with regard to their faith and their careers, but most of them were still exploring various facets of their own identities. Because of emerging adults' investigative nature, Parks (1986) recommends mentors for support and guidance.

In conclusion, emerging adulthood and postgraduate studies influenced participants' experiences of spiritual identity development. Participants said that they would continue to explore or deepen their spiritual identities throughout the life span. Support during postgraduate studies with regard to spiritual and religious issues would be invaluable to students and in their processes of becoming psychologists.

5.6 Chapter Summary

Spiritual identity is a lifelong journey. In this chapter, the research results were discussed by referring to most relevant theories in the literature. Spiritual identity is a multifaceted and complex construct and cannot be explained adequately without incorporating various psychological perspectives. Evidence for the life-span perspective, status theories, narrative perspective, and systems perspective were obtained from the results. The next chapter consolidates the various aspects of this study by providing a conclusion and addressing key findings, limitations, and recommendations.

Chapter 6 – Key Findings, Limitations, and Recommendations

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the noteworthy findings, explore possible limitations to the study and provide recommendations for future research in the field of spiritual identity development.

6.1 Summary of Most Significant Findings

The aim of this section is to provide an overview of the most significant findings related to the aim of this study. This study was qualitative in nature and utilised IPA. Through the process of cross-case analysis, six salient themes were identified relating to the experiences of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. These were identified as 1) a journey across the life span, 2) the role of significant others, 3) trigger events along the journey and meaning-making, 4) finding one's voice among others, 5) values and characteristics inherent to spiritual identity, and 6) spirituality and becoming a psychologist. These themes were discussed in the light of literature related to spiritual identity development.

Various psychological perspectives in the literature review were considered in interpreting the results. The study identified consistencies as well as inconsistencies between the literature and the research results. The aim of the study was achieved by exploring cases in the light of a broad range of theories. It was found that the nature of spiritual identity development was multifaceted, subjective, and complex. Therefore, it would be naïve to expect to explore participants' experiences by focusing on only one psychological lens. This study contributed to the body of literature regarding spiritual identity in that it 1) addressed the concepts of spirituality and identity development from a variety of psychological perspectives, 2) focused on a unique developmental stage, namely emerging adulthood, and 3) incorporated theory regarding spiritual identity with theory on student development.

The study provided significant insights regarding spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. Firstly, it was found that significant and continuous spiritual identity development occurred during the emerging adulthood developmental stage. Secondly, the emerging adulthood developmental stage held unique opportunities and challenges with regard to spiritual identity development. Thirdly, spiritual identity development occurred across the life span and continued throughout adulthood. Fourthly, higher education, especially postgraduate psychology studies, provides challenges that require complex and sophisticated

meaning-making processes regarding purpose in life. Fifthly, among the psychology student population, a need exists for coursework and mentorship with regard to spiritual and religious diversity. It was found that spiritual identity influenced values, behaviour, and decision-making processes. Lastly, it was evident that spiritual identity development occurred in context. This study provided context- specific information regarding South African students. Although these findings cannot be used universally, they can be implemented and used in the psychology profession in South Africa

6.2 Limitations of the Study

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches have certain limitations and certain strengths (Atieno, 2009). Qualitative and quantitative research approaches rely on different assumptions regarding reality and involve different instruments and procedures to find data that are applicable to the aims and objectives of research studies (Atieno, 2009). This study aimed to explore and describe participants' experiences of spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. Therefore, A qualitative research approach was appropriate to the aim and objectives of the study. The qualitative research approach is a naturalistic and interpretive approach that is aimed at investigating the meanings that people attach to phenomena (Ritchie et al., 2013). Furthermore, IPA researchers investigate the 'lived worlds' of participants (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 53). Therefore, IPA was a good match with the research aim, as it would not have been possible to get rich contextual information by using quantitative research.

Spiritual identity development is a very personal and unique journey for all people (Templeton & Eccles, 2006). Results obtained from the six postgraduate psychology students cannot in any way be generalised to the general population of emerging adulthood or to all psychology students. As seen in this study, context plays an essential role in the experience of development. Therefore, the results obtained will differ if the context of participants varied even slightly.

The researcher was a novice researcher and therapist. She had no previous experience of conducting qualitative research or interviews. During the data- collection process, both reflective writing exercises (Jasper, 2005) and semi-structured interviews (Galletta, 2013) were utilised. Both of these methods are used frequently in qualitative research and have certain

strengths (Galletta, 2013; Jasper, 2005). Since the reflective writing exercises were provided as an initial reflective exercise, the questions might have been too broad and too philosophical.

The limited experience of the researcher, rather than the methodology, introduced limitations to the study. Questions asked during the interviews might have influenced the data that were collected, and opportunities for follow-up questions might have been missed. There were variations in the length of interviews. This provided some irrelevant data in some instances and lacking data in others. As a new therapist, the researcher experienced difficulties balancing the role of therapist and the role of researcher. To combat these limitations, the researcher attempted to follow an interviewing script, consulted with her supervisor, and engaged in reflection. From an IPA perspective, the researcher influences research results and should therefore engage in reflection throughout the process (Christensen et al., 2014).

IPA researchers should be constantly aware that their personal world views, values, knowledge, and beliefs might influence the research results and research analysis. The results in IPA is a product of both the researcher's interpretation and the participants' experiences (Watt, 2007; Willig, 2013). The researcher utilised an established research method and followed the IPA steps put forth by Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008), Smith and Osborn (2003), and Willig (2013). However, the influence of the researcher in the research results and analysis cannot be denied. The results obtained are in no way objective, and another researcher might have analysed the results differently.

A small sample was utilised in this study. In IPA research, participants are generally selected purposively (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014) because the researcher is interested in a homogenous group. However, the final sample in this study consisted of six females and the majority were Caucasian. This sample was not representative of the true psychology student population at the University of the Free State. Spiritual identity development occurs in context. Therefore, gender, ethnicity, race, socio-economic factors, and culture influence the experience of spiritual identity development. A more diverse sample would have provided much richer data and would have provided another dimension to the research study. The fact that other religions were not represented in the study might have had a significant effect on the results that were obtained.

Lastly, the researcher was a postgraduate psychology student currently busy with her master's degree in clinical psychology. It should be noted that the researcher's own perception

of the psychology course might have influenced her ability to assess the phenomena under investigation objectively.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Various recommendations can be made regarding expanding the research on spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. It was clear in the literature review that there was a great need for spiritual identity development research across the life span (Kiesling et al., 2006; Poll & Smith, 2003).

It would be beneficial to investigate spiritual identity development by utilising a more representative sample. Samples should include different cultures, genders, ethnicities, and religions. Reliability and validity would become a possibility by utilising a quantitative approach (Shenton, 2004). Research conducted on a representative sample would greatly benefit the knowledge base regarding the topic of spiritual identity development of postgraduate psychology students in South Africa. Universities across South Africa would then be able to utilise the data in their respective programmes.

It would be interesting to investigate the differences in meaning-making between individuals in the early stages of emerging adulthood and individuals in the later stages. Investigating individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 would enable the researcher to compare cases and to truly experience spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood. This will contribute not only to literature on spiritual identity development but also literature on emerging adulthood. Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood was criticised. Some theorists (e.g., Côté, 2014) even asked whether the emerging adulthood developmental stage exists. Further research on emerging adulthood would broaden the research field regarding this developmental stage.

Future researchers might also consider utilising a longitudinal research approach, as spiritual identity development occurs over the life span. Longitudinal research is used when the aim of the study is to analyse change over time (Ployhart & Vandenberg, 2010). Spiritual identity development changes over time; therefore, the topic is a perfect match with longitudinal research. Doing a longitudinal study on spiritual identity would enable researchers to evaluate existing theories of spiritual identity across the life span critically and in the light of new research could develop new theories based on a modern and diverse society, e.g. meaning-making processes of psychology students (first year to internship). Researchers could

study the same group of individuals throughout their studies. These findings would provide unique insights with regard to spiritual identity development, meaning-making processes, and the process of becoming a therapist.

A deeper understanding of spiritual identity development might be obtained by collaborating with other professionals. Such professions might include student counsellors and spiritual, religious, and cultural leaders. This will result in a holistic approach not fragmented and separated by paradigm. According to Jeffrey (2003), a central motivation for cross-disciplinary research is the fact that problems in the real world rarely present in theoretical boxes. The real world is much broader than one discipline or one paradigm. Cross-disciplinary research will produce rich data that could be implemented in practice.

The South African context provides unique challenges with regard to spiritual identity development during emerging adulthood (Apostolides, 2016; Edward & Thwala, 2010; Brittian et al., 2013). A qualitative study investigating spiritual identity during emerging adulthood in general might provide unique insights regarding spiritual identity development in South Africa. Spirituality and religion as cultural phenomena (Mattis et al., 2006) could be investigated thoroughly.

More context- specific research should be conducted on the importance of spirituality in the profession of psychology in South Africa. South Africa is a multireligion, multispiritual and multicultural society (Apostolides, 2016; Brittian et al., 2013; Masango, 2006). Therefore, it is more important than ever to incorporate these aspects in the training of postgraduate students. The results of this study show that spirituality cannot be separated from values and world views and that these aspects will influence the therapeutic process. Training psychology students to develop multicultural competencies would enable them to serve a broader population of clients and to feel more comfortable in the face of diversity. Furthermore, incorporating these aspects into postgraduate training programmes would also enable students to become aware of their own values and the values related to the profession of psychology. Incorporating spirituality with training would teach students how to balance their personal values with the values of the psychology profession.

6.4 Conclusion to the Study

This chapter served as the conclusion of the study on the experiences of spiritual identity development of postgraduate psychology students. This chapter provided an overview of the

most significant findings of this study, limitations of the research, and recommendations for future researchers. The aim of the study was to explore and describe postgraduate psychology students' experiences of spiritual identity development during the emerging adulthood developmental stage. The findings contribute to the body of research on spiritual identity development in the emerging adulthood developmental stage, focusing specifically on postgraduate psychology students.

This study provided a comprehensive overview of research pertaining to spiritual identity development over the life span. However, the research was not all-encompassing, and it is clear that there is still a great need for further research on this topic.

It can be argued that meaning-making is the most important facet of any human's life. Psychologists are able to investigate meaning-making processes of their clients and to empower their clients to make and maintain meaning in their lives. Spiritual identity is essential to meaning-making and life purpose, irrespective of religion, culture, age, race, and ethnicity. People need to have purpose and meaning in life to be psychologically healthy participants of society. To become investigators of meaning, psychologists need to make sense of their own lives, experiences, and suffering. Incorporating spiritual and religious courses with postgraduate studies will give rise to a meaning-centred community of psychologists. These individuals will have a unique set of skills that might enable them to work with diversity as confident and ethical professionals.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form



Researcher: Lara Fick
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July 2016

Dear honours student

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read through the following information to be sure you understand what will be expected of you.

The research study is designed to explore postgraduate psychology students' experiences of spiritual identity development. Spirituality can be described as the grounded sense of connection with the "sacred" or "transcendent". This study focuses on the exploration and commitment of the spiritual aspect of the self during the emerging adulthood years. The aim of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of post-graduate psychology students' subjective experiences of spiritual identity development.

If you volunteer to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in a reflexive writing exercise regarding your personal journey regarding spiritual identity development. Furthermore, it will also be expected of you to participate in an individual interview. The individual interviews will take between 1 and 2 hours to complete.

As an honours student, I am sure you will benefit from this study, as participation will allow you to:

- Critically reflect on your own beliefs and values, and how these inform your sense of self
- Gain a deeper understanding of how you make meaning of challenging experiences in your life
- Critically reflect on how your spiritual identity might influence your work as a future psychologist.



I do not foresee any possible physical, psychological and social risks involved in participating in this study. Therapeutic services will be available if you feel that certain issues that arise during the interviews need to be explored further. You are free to share only the information that you are comfortable to share, your privacy will be protected, and you are free to withdraw from this project at any time without any negative consequences.

Your participation in the study as well as all information gathered will be handled with utmost respect and confidentiality. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part in this study. If you do choose to take part, and an issue arises which makes you uncomfortable, you may at any time withdraw from the study with no judgment or repercussions.

Your participation in this study will be greatly appreciated and I encourage you to see it as an opportunity to enhance your growth as a student and prospective professional in the world of work.

Kind regards



Lara Fick (master' student in Psychology)

Appendix B: Reflective Writing Exercise

Dear Student

Thank you for participating in a reflective writing exercise. I am interested in the following aspects of your experience regarding spiritual identity development:

How do you describe and understand Spiritual identity?

How do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?

How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?

Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?

Please answer these questions comprehensively and in your own words.

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Questions for reflective writing exercise and semi-structured interviews:

1. How do you describe and understand Spiritual identity?
 - Can you elaborate on your experiences of spiritual identity development?
 - How are your views regarding your spiritual identity different from when you were an adolescent?
 - What is the essence of spiritual identity for you?
 - How does your spiritual identity inform other aspects of your view of self?
2. How do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?
 - Can you elaborate on one recent life event that you found challenging?
 - How did you make meaning of this experience?
 - How do you think your spiritual identity changed your perspective regarding this challenging event?
3. How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?
 - Can you elaborate on specific situations which might be difficult for you when working with individuals with different belief systems than your own?
 - How do you think your spiritual identity will inform your approach your clients?
 - How do you think your spiritual identity might help you make meaning of your clients experiences?
4. Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?
 - How do you experience your classmates? Do you think that they hold similar/diverse belief systems than your own?
 - Can you think of a specific situation during your postgraduate studies (so far) which have made you think critically about your belief system?
 - How do you make meaning when confronted with diverse/contrasting beliefs in class?

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance

25 January 2016

Prof L. Naudé
Department of Psychology
UFS

Application for extension for ethical clearance: On becoming a therapist (UFS-HUM-2015-82)

Dear Prof Naudé

With reference to your application for extension for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted extension with the assumption that there are no major changes with regards to the study.

Thank you for submitting the application for extension. We wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,



Prof LJS Botes
Dean: Faculty of the Humanities

Copy: Charné Vercueil (Research Co-ordinator: Faculty of the Humanities)



Appendix E: Example of Reflective Journal

Reflections after semi-structured interviews:

Leana: I felt excited before the interview with Leana. However, once she arrived I felt scared and nervous. As this was my first interview I struggled with the recorder and felt uncomfortable in my position as researcher. Leana was a friendly and warm person but I observed that she was also uncomfortable and stressed. Leana wanted to answer the questions in Afrikaans and this threw me off completely. She communicated that she thought the interview revolved around the topic of religion and asked me to explain the concepts to her...in Afrikaans. I struggled, but did my best. I realised that I had a lot to learn in conducting interviews.

I realised that I felt pity towards Leana during the interview. She confided in me that she was not selected for Masters and I could relate to the feelings that she was experiencing. At times I wanted to console and empathise with her – I wanted to assume a therapist role. I became aware that this would happen throughout the interviewing process as I was a novice therapist and a novice researcher. I had to be better prepared for the next interview.

Elsa: Elsa was also Afrikaans speaking but luckily I learned from my mistake and practiced the interview questions in Afrikaans. I was much more comfortable in my interactions with her and in turn she was also at ease. Elsa spoke very fast and it was difficult for me to follow her train of thought. Elsa was very religious and she primarily spoke about her religious development. Elsa's journey reminded me about some of my own family members. I started thinking about the universality of spiritual identity development.

Michelle: Michelle was immensely private and the discussion with her was difficult. I felt as if Monique was holding back in the interview and I constantly had to probe her for answers. However, during this process I realised that the questions were very personal and that I would also struggle to talk to a complete stranger about my spiritual identity development. I realised that spirituality is very personal and private. It might have been a good idea to meet the participants before I conducted the interviews with them.

Mpho: Mpho provided a new perspective regarding the role of context in spiritual identity development. I really wished that I had more black participants. I admired Mpho's resilience during the interview and thought how I would handle her challenges. She had a difficult life and faced many challenges. During this interview I realised how much people could endure if they had faith. I am starting to see similarities and differences between participants.

Mary: What a breath of fresh air. Mary was mature, positive, and passionate about life. She spoke a lot and I rarely had to prompt her for questions. Of all the participants I related most

to Mary's understanding of spiritual identity and would have been able to talk to her for hours. I became aware that I was also in a process of spiritual identity development and that I was truly interested in this concept.

Tammy: I experienced Tammy as an old soul. She was reflective and philosophical and spoke English very well for an Afrikaans first-language speaker. I could feel Tammy's confusion during our interview. She spoke a lot and contradicted herself. She was clearly still in the phase of exploration. I enjoyed my interview with her; she had interesting perspectives and stories to tell. I experienced Tammy as very open and comfortable in my presence. From all the participants Tammy had the most to say about the topic.

Data Analysis

I feel very overwhelmed and don't know where to start. I feel lucky to have a supportive supervisor. I have to listen to the recordings more than once, make corrections, listen again. I don't understand what my participants are saying. It all sounds very confusing, I really, really doubt my abilities to do this. What if I am not reflective and 'deep' enough, what if I change what the participants meant to say? I realise that my own perceptions, worldviews, and even research experience will influence the results – this realisation makes me anxious. I deal with this by reading articles and consulting with my supervisor.

I work on my data analysis for a week during the holidays and I feel like I am not making any progress. I read and reread, I make notes I try to see the world through my participants' eyes. This is immensely difficult. I realise how much our interpretation is based on our own understanding and framework of the world. I know that I will probably do many drafts of this chapter. I realise that I clearly did not know what IPA entailed when I started the process.

General Reflections

The literature is hard to understand and I have to read through every article I find. I struggle to make sense of the philosophy and theology ingrained in this topic. I find it overwhelming but I am learning so much. I realise that most of the literature related to spirituality and spirituality is quite old and that there is definitely a need for research in the field.

The most challenging part for me is to write in an integrative manner. As aforementioned the topic was difficult to understand and I battled to integrate the literature with my findings. I am also hesitant to write anything because I am afraid that I might interpret the results incorrectly.

Personal Journey of Spiritual Identity Development

This research made me reflect on my personal journey of spiritual identity development. Like most participants I grew up in an Afrikaans Christian household. I am the second youngest of five children. My family is quite diverse and currently everyone has their own spiritual identity and associated spiritual practices.

During my childhood years my family participated in religious activities together. I didn't really understand these activities but enjoyed spending time with my family. A lot of my favourite childhood memories are related to Christianity (e.g. Christmas, Easter, 'Sondagskool').

As I was reaching puberty I started asking questions about the church. My family and I stopped attending church but continued to deepen our spirituality through our relationship with each other in the household. My mother and father are both open-minded and approachable individuals and it is easy to have critical discussions with both of them. Religion and spirituality was never a taboo topic in our household.

As an adolescent I was fascinated by diversity, spirituality, religion, and meaning in life. I read books on religion and spirituality and wanted to understand this part of life. I wrote poetry and scripts (for drama) in an attempt to make meaning for myself about these concepts. I remember that I even wrote a book regarding life after death. Even as an adolescent I realised the importance of spirituality in the process of meaning-making in life. As an adolescent I explored my spirituality in depth but did not make any commitments.

As an emerging adult I still wanted to know more about people, meaning-making, and the search for happiness. I therefore applied for a course in psychology. Throughout my personal journey of becoming a therapist I have continuously realised the importance of spirituality in finding purpose of life and meaning-making. Psychology broadened my worldview. During this life stage I explored more regarding spirituality and religion than ever before. I learned and practiced yoga and meditation. I read numerous books on eastern and western principles regarding meaning of life. I made friends from all walks of life (e.g. Muslim, agnostic, atheist, traditional African, Buddhist, etc.) I have come to realise that your spiritual identity is shaped by those around you, and by your own processes of reflection. I know that my spiritual identity is not fully established yet and that I will, like my participants, continue to develop and grow as life progress.

The topic of spiritual identity development was close to my heart and something that I was sincerely interested in. From my perspective meaning-making is the most essential quality for any psychologist to have.

Appendix F: Reflective Writing and Interview Transcripts

Pseudonym: Tammy (Age 21)

Reflective writing exercise

RW 1.1 **Question:** How do you describe and understand Spiritual identity?

RW 1.2 **Tammy:** Spiritual identity refers to values a person adheres to. My spiritual identity is connected more to the rights of others and respecting these rights and principles, as could be done by the values and principles one practices in their daily life and interactions with others (it's about doing, more than saying) [Thus you can identify with a denomination/set of values, but practice might serve to really cement it as part of the identity]. Generally, these refer to respect for others' rights, not inflicting harm, and trying to do good in interactions with others, to reciprocate what you would have others do to you, being tolerant and accepting. On a more personal level regarding the specifics of spirituality, I believe I'm still on a journey of discovery, due to the fact that I experienced a split with formal religion. This brought about many doubts about what a higher power means, and about the role of religion in previous years. This was mostly due to discrepancies in beliefs and practices seen in others, as well as the use of religion to control people. I also believe I made the mistake of associating religion with spirituality. As a result, it has not been something I explored further. I recognize now that religion and spirituality are different. Spirituality seems to mean a holistic view, an approach towards others and perhaps a way of living. In a sense, religions adopted basic human rights and incorporated it, and proceeded to socialize people with these values and viewpoints. Thus, living out these basic approaches and values could constitute spirituality to me, irrespective of religious denomination (an atheist can follow the exact same values and still be spiritual, but not religious). I concentrate more on the rights of individuals than religious dogmas. I think all people should receive similar treatment, since mostly we are not that much different, and what justifies a hierarchy of persons? Essentially we are the same and thus should be treated similarly. This may not equate a connection to the sacred/transcendent, but I think it is something that was 'lost' when I encountered the information that caused my doubts. In a sense it refers to moving beyond simply reacting to events, but perhaps thinking more rationally about why one does things. For me it could also mean transcending the control of outside institutions/forces, and being connected to the self (and a higher power if someone believes in one) and one's own strong sense of direction and what is right/wrong. Sometimes finding these meanings can be difficult as my mind is clouded by distractions, and I think it hinders the process of clarifying my spiritual identity in the sense of really thinking about what it is I believe in and the values I would uphold and practice. The most basic has sprung to mind, but I think a deeper exploration might be necessary – I just don't necessarily know where to start.

RW 1.3 **Question:** How do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?

RW 1.4 **Tammy:** I have a more rational approach to challenging events. They do not necessarily have a great spiritual impact (perhaps due to the fact that I'm still trying to explore this facet – by thinking about it every now and then). Most recently, I adopted the approach that “things will happen as they should”, but I did not arrive at any conclusions as to why things happened as they did (e.g. Masters selection). I knew I did all I could, so the outcome was not in my hands. In a sense I turned to

the viewpoint that there must be some higher power or fate that might play some role in the course of events. At the same time, I know there are things I might have done differently that could perhaps have changed the outcome. I seem to take a more mixed approach, fluctuating between different ways of trying to make sense of an event. Regarding the death of a loved one, I had a similar approach, mostly thinking that it must be due to the illness, as well as a power that saved the people from further suffering. I begin to think that since most people grew up with the idea of a powerful being that could smite you when you do things wrong/challenge the ideas, or has a final say in what happens to you in the afterlife (if such a place exists), perhaps developed a subconscious fear of deviating from these beliefs, and as a result may turn more towards it subconsciously. Sometimes I do find it difficult to arrive at conclusions about why I do things or why events happen as they do, but I think this could be the challenge of spirituality in the process of sense-making – it does not offer a framework to explain events/challenges as religion does, but is more centered on one's own interpretations, meanings, beliefs and way of sense-making.

RW 1.5 **Question:** How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?

RW 1.6 **Tammy:** Since I believe in respecting the basic rights of others, I think this could be a positive attribute as a psychologist. It could make one more mindful of interactions with others, since you would be more aware of what you say and how your beliefs may differ. Since clients may look to you for guidance and clarity and support on some matters, it could be negative that I'm still unsure about my own spiritual identity. However, some therapeutic approaches stressed the fact that therapy can serve as a journey of discovery for both client and therapist, so depending on the approach followed, it might not be negative but could help the process of discovery if two people try to make sense of their experiences and the world together (better insights, learn from each other).

RW 1.7 **Question:** Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?

RW 1.8 **Tammy:** Some changes already started in undergraduate studies, in the sense that I have become more aware that some gap exists that needs to be addressed. I was exposed to different people's views and noticed that I'm more open to hear more about it. This made me more aware of the difference between religion and spirituality.

During postgraduate studies, there was more of a halt in the discussion of beliefs and spirituality, but some subjects have highlighted the fact that a way of living could be important for a person's life, and that they need to define their own values – break away from those they learned from others, and define a new set of values. In a way, I think this could connect to spirituality as it is more focused on the individual and what they believe and do, vs. what a religion or another person told them to believe and do. There is a more individualistic approach vs. "one size fits all", and as a result a person could be more true to themselves and free from expectations that could cause guilt or a feeling of being incongruent with themselves.

Individual Interview

II 1.1 **Interviewer:** How do you understand and describe spiritual identity?

II 1.2 **Tammy:** Okay, for me it is more of a practice that is important than necessarily associates with a specific denomination, uhm, I think, you know, for me it's something that's very basic – respecting people's basic values, or rights, sorry, and

living by a certain set of values that I find for myself it's difficult for me to define, it's just more like a feeling that you get in certain contexts. I can't really think of an example per se but I think if you are confronted with something you need to do, then I think it's like a feeling that kind of directs you, uhm, more than necessarily associating specifically with the a denomination, but for me, I've noticed that it's, uhm, like a problem that I've had, uhm, I grew up in a religious uhm way, and then I was confronted with some information about religion and the way that it is used in uhm society that really made me doubt, you know, religion and if there is a Higher Being. So, for me that was kind of what does it really mean? And then I think the mistake that I made was that you, I associated religion with spirituality. So for me it's still something that I think I should continue to discover. I think it's like, university has been a good place to kind of realise that there are different people with different values and maybe, now and then had discussions about religion and, uhm, I've noticed that some people are very narrow in their focus

II 1.3 **Interviewer:** Yes

II 1.4 **Tammy:** And I've noticed that for me the narrow focus, because I've had conflicting information, I can't follow that necessarily, but then I find it difficult to really connect with something that's like a sacred being or a higher power. I don't know if there really is something like that. Because sometimes uhm, you know, you would think, oh, its fate, but then you have to start thinking what determines fate

II 1.5 **Interviewer:** mmm

II 1.6 **Tammy:** So, I think I'm still struggling with trying to figure out where I stand with that.

II 1.7 **Interviewer:** So, on the journey of discovery?

II 1.8 **Tammy:** Ja, I think so, especially you know, I've been, I keep thinking, you know, I've read somewhere this man said in an interview that he was never really religious, but then he became I think a Catholic, if I remember correctly, because he started wondering what if there is an afterlife and then he started having some fears about what would happen to him. Something that, ja, it's like planning for a future that you are unsure of.

II 1.9 **Interviewer:** Uhm, what would you say is the difference between spirituality and religion?

II 1.10 **Tammy:** Well, for me religion is more like a... framework

II 1.11 **Interviewer:** Yes.

II 1.12 **Tammy:** And for me it was, uhm, say with the Catholics and Protestants, I don't have a lot of knowledge on that, so it's something that I really, it's a gap in myself and in my knowledge and I think I should work on, but it was used to control people, you know?

II 1.13 **Interviewer:** Yes

II 1.14 **Tammy:** For me that doesn't really, it's like to have like a social order. But with spirituality for me should be more about just knowing doing the right thing knowing what it is to do. And Uhm, I think with Egyptian, uhm, religions the ceremony of weighing of the heart before the person is allowed in to basically heaven, it's like have you lived a good life and have you done good things in your life. I think it is like a basic thing of principals and if you well are confronted with something that you do, would you do the right thing or the wrong thing. I think, for me, it's something very basic.

II 1.15 **Interviewer:** Mmm, I can hear that you have me thinking about this a lot, actually, and that you have been on this journey for quite some time probably.

- II 1.16 **Tammy:** Ja, but not always necessarily thinking about it all the time, but ja, recently it's been popping up.
- II 1.17 **Interviewer:** Can you elaborate on your experiences of your spiritual identity development. Maybe start in high school or, uhm how your views regarding your identity is different from what it was that time?
- II 1.18 **Tammy:** Well, I think for me uhm, when I was younger I think I was very religious and for having a child like believe, so that for perhaps for a child was spiritual in a sense where you really felt a connection, but then, I think... I sorta taking it for granted in a sense because, it sounds contradictory because we never really went to church a lot, uhm, and then we started going again and that was more or less in high school again where I was thinking, but you are saying this then but I know it's not always necessarily like this. So, for me it was difficult to reconcile, you know, what I knew what I was back then with this new information. Uhm, I don't know, for me it's difficult to answer, you know, who you are and who you identify with, I don't know why, it's just a difficult question for me, but, uhm, ja, I think it's kind of like a split between what you think you knew and almost how you defined yourself in a sense of, how can I put this... uhm... ja, I think it basically comes back to believes, and then it's almost as if you didn't really have anything to believe anymore. You know, there's no, necessarily, okay, well, I believe this person is up there in the sky and... it's just more like, again, basic values that I think one should define the way you want to live. And in a sense you can start, uhm, integrating yourself by saying ja, I'm kind to other people or, uhm, I do not inflict harm or whatever the case might be. I think it's difficult for me because and in a sense there's almost like a fear, uhm, of the unknown, so that's not really, you are kind of caught in the middle to either just blindly following something or trying to do more and then I think I experience like a fear of the unknown, of going, I noticed even basic things like switching to oil pulling for your teeth, I'm scared to take that jump, so I think it's the same for me, you know you're safe in your previous definitions or slightly altered definitions, uhm, and then trying to redefine yourself in your spirituality cause I've really been struggling with that. I don't know
- II 1.19 **Interviewer:** What would you say is the essence of your spiritual identity? The core.
- II 1.20 **Tammy:** (silence) Well, I know there is something of a connection, there has to be some sort of connection. So, perhaps if you could find something that uhm...you really connect with, then you can kind of build on that. Perhaps if you spend more time in nature, or say if you do follow a denomination and you work more on the relationship of whichever god or being that you believe in rather than simply me saying I'm Christian or I'm Buddhist, but more thinking of getting to the heart of whatever it is you believe in. I think it's difficult always to find, uhm, for example, Buddhism is very abstract, uhm, so for me, I really think it's something that you connect with or it's something that you do. I think if you do something it becomes more a part of yourself. I think... Now, that's a new thing I'm thinking of now, so (laugh).
- II 1.21 **Interviewer:** (Laugh) What is that thing that you are thinking?
- II 1.22 **Tammy:** That if you are doing something it might become more a part of you.
- II 1.23 **Interviewer:** Okay, it that something new that you just discovered while you were speaking?
- II 1.24 **Tammy:** I think so (laugh). So, I don't know, say if I say that I do not inflict harm on other people, then I think you really have to make a point of it in your interactions with others, be aware of if you are causing harm, even inadvertently,

- even if it is say difficult confrontation with someone, uhm... you might not, it might not even be harmful for the person, but the way you act could be negative for them, even if it isn't, I think you should just be aware of how you work with someone.
- II 1.25 **Interviewer:** How does your spiritual identity form other aspects of your view of yourself?
- II 1.26 **Tammy:** Well, it's as if there are doubts, and I kind of question a lot what I do and, uhm sometimes, not always, so uhm, ja, I think I would question why I do things or uhm in a sense because you have to rely on what you believe in a way, it doesn't have to be strict, I think it's a way of consistency even perhaps, uhm so, if you doing something and you know it's not really in line with what you believe in, uhm it raises some questions. Even if it's in the back of your mind, so, say if you.... Hmm goodness, I'm not good at this... expressing myself.
- II 1.27 **Interviewer:** You're doing very great.
- II 1.28 **Tammy:** Uhm, if you are doing something and I think it's like this feeling that you get, it doesn't really, uhm what is it... cognitive dissonance, I think, that's what they call it.
- II 1.29 **Interviewer:** Okay
- II 1.30 **Tammy:** So I think that should be a queue for you to say that what you are doing is not necessarily... you.
- II 1.31 **Interviewer:** And do you think it's your spiritual identity that forms that little voice at the back of your mind?
- II 1.32 **Tammy:** I think, maybe. For me, it's difficult to say because, uhm someone else I spoke to said it's like a, it's not necessarily a learned behaviour, but it is instinctual. So I think you are conditioned with certain values and stuff and then it becomes more instinctual so in a way it's society's little voice that's speaking to you, but then you start getting information about other things as you kind of learn new information, uhm I think... you are not a clone of society and there are a lot of different cultures and religions, so a lot of different information that you get. And I think in a sense you have to kind of integrate that and I think it's a cyclical process where you learn something, either integrate it or not, and then you can begin to see that as your spiritual identity and then as you go along kind of inform you again, I think...
- II 1.33 **Interviewer:** Do you have anything else to add to that first question on your view of spiritual identity?
- II 1.34 **Tammy:** No, I think I'm confusing myself (laugh nervously)
- II 1.35 **Interviewer:** (Laugh) The second question is how do you make meaning of challenging experiences in your life?
- II 1.36 **Tammy:** When I saw that question I really started thinking what am I doing, so I find it difficult.
- II 1.37 **Interviewer:** Because you have been going for a challenging time?
- II 1.38 **Tammy:** Ja, because like I said, you know I have this view of either its fate or it's just I could have done something, so I think I have some difficulty... integrating these two perspectives, because like with the Masters selection, I'm like, okay, well it's something I should have done differently, but then at the same time I'm thinking, oh, it wasn't meant to be now. But then again, I'm still thinking what is this meant to be, who determines that? And...
- II 1.39 **Interviewer:** Polarities, in your thinking actually.
- II 1.40 **Tammy:** Ja, you're right, it is, so ja, I think I'm having some difficulty integrating those views because I think that's why I'm so calm, it's like, oh, it's fate, but then

I could have done this differently, but there's nothing I can do about it now, but then, okay, it's like a cycle, of thinking, but then struggling to incorporate them, uhm, I think also mention there that, uhm, say if someone dies, then you are thinking, okay, it's a way to, uhm... you know release them from whatever difficulties they were facing, so if they were ill, or uhm, they were suffering or something like that, uhm, but at the same time you still thinking your questioning but couldn't something more have been done and if there is a higher power, why not do something? Why not intervene? Why allow suffering in the world? And then you're thinking, well there is nothing you can do about it. I don't know, it's really difficult for me, because, uhm, I think in a way I just take things as they come – okay that happened - and then move on. You've asked me what was a challenging experience, I couldn't really think of something immediately...

II 1.41 **Interviewer:** Would you say a recent challenging event to you was this Masters selection?

II 1.42 **Tammy:** Hmm, definitely.

II 1.43 **Interviewer:** And, uhm, how did you make meaning of this experience for yourself? I know there hasn't been a lot of time and it's probably still in the process, but have you started to make meaning of the selection and of this challenging event?

II 1.44 **Tammy:** Uhm, one the one hand I think again something I could have done, but then I also think these people on the panel, they know more than I would and, uhm, they are experienced and I think they might be able to see things in me that I can't yet recognise, because I think they know what to look for... in a person they would want to select. So, in a sense it tells me that perhaps, uhm, it's not necessarily a fault, but something that I could do to improve myself. uhm, But then again, it's like, okay, well, maybe it's meant to be, that I should take another year perhaps to find, uhm, more information on exactly what I'm supposed to do in life. Perhaps it's uhm meant to be this way so that I can find out whether or not this is the right course for me because I do have doubts about that as well. So, in fact, what am I doing, that's what I'm wondering about, and also wondering why can't I just keep to A conclusion, uhm, ja, it's very chaotic still for me...this. One the one hand I'm not really thinking about it and if I do I over analyse and just bring myself down in a way.

II 1.45 **Interviewer:** It's also okay to be there at this stage, it's not necessary for you to make meaning thereof.

II 1.46 **Tammy:** Ja, I think perhaps extending it for a little while could be better, I mean there are more important things now that are immediate for me to focus on such as getting through these courses that I'm still doing and research, etcetera, so it's kind of on the backburner, but I know that sometime I should pay attention to it. It's just that trying to begin to make meaning of this is difficult for me because I think I tend to look to myself to find faults, to say I should have done something this way or that way, it's not necessarily that I'm thinking I didn't do what I believe in, it's just more who I am as a person and I think that's also still something that is a process of discovery because you are in emerging adulthood and you are confronted with new information and uhm such as these experiences again that kind of make you wondering what am I doing, why am I doing this. I know it's difficult for me.

II 1.47 **Interviewer:** Do you think your spiritual identity in any way changed your perspective regarding the Masters selection and regarding the outcomes?

- II 1.48 **Tammy:** I don't know, I don't really think so because, uhm, I know I did what I could. Because, I mean you go in there blind, you don't know what to expect. You don't know what they are looking for, so you just go in and try your best and being who you are and if that's not correct or what they want, then you, there isn't really much you can do about it, uhm. Because I know I did, I wasn't false, I wasn't, you know, denying any aspect of myself. I got very personal with those people and I think that's probably (laugh) the reason why (laugh) it's too much information (laugh). But I just think I really didn't put on any, uhm, you know, a mask to say that this is who I am, but in reality it's not, so for me, I think if I have to connect that spiritual identity in this intrinsic feeling if you're doing something right or wrong it just, I didn't feel like I was doing anything wrong. And Ja...
- II 1.49 **Interviewer:** Is there anything else you would like to add on meaning making and challenging experiences in your life?
- II 1.50 **Tammy:** I just think it's, uhm, it's a process and I think, uhm, if you could have someone to help you to get a different perspective that could also help and I mean if they say something you agree with then I think that kind of means it's in line with what you believe about yourself and your general uhm outlook in life, I think. So I think getting someone else's perspective if they say something different I think it's something you need to look at. And even if you might not want to look at it now, it could pop up later that you think really it's been brooding at the back of my mind, so perhaps it is important to consider. I think getting second opinions are important and not just... I think it is like a spiritual identity in meaning making is for the most part personal and it's uhm your own path that you have to follow, but I tend to try and look at other people's views as well, because sometimes it feels like I'm not sure of what I'm doing and I just think getting clarity on that helps because I think uhm that helps you realise the path that you should follow or not, say if you are thinking of doing one thing but you ask someone then you might realise but in reality if they might point out something else that you didn't consider and then like, okay, well, maybe it's not for me for what I want to do.
- II 1.51 **Interviewer:** How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?
- II 1.52 **Tammy:** That's a difficult one because I don't know if I can be a psychologist now (laugh). Uhm, I just think I'm more open, like I want to know more about certain things, even if I feel like I don't have time necessarily right now, uhm, intensely follow something, but it's, if someone comes to me and said something different from what I believe in, I would be open and try and understand why they say that and... not reject them on the basis of different beliefs, because I can realise that they are not me and I'm not them, so I cannot come and try and control them in any way and, or tell them what they are doing is wrong, uhm, and also think that basic things, like I said, you know, you try to be kind to people and not harm them or anything, I think it could kind of help me with the ethical aspects of working with someone, perhaps to make me more aware of how I go about in my interactions with them. Uhm, and say they come to me for... I don't know why they would, but let's say they don't want to go to a pastor or someone for guidance on say a value or principle kind of thing, then you know, I would be open with them and tell them that I'm still on this journey of discovery, but I think one of the, uhm therapeutic approach is where it's a joint journey that you take with this person, you grow together, you learn together. I think, like I said, if you go back and get someone else's opinion, it helps you as well. So, I think if you could have like a conversation with someone, say, in a therapeutic session, it would help not only the person but

- also the therapist as well. I think it's difficult for me to say, because I don't really know if someone sits in front of you how you should go about things, I think it's difficult. I like to have someone tell me this is more or less the approach you should follow... Ja, I'm not always sure if what I'm doing is right, necessarily. Not because it doesn't ugh align with what I believe in, but you still wonder if what you're doing and what you believe in is necessarily right for the profession.
- II 1.53 **Interviewer:** Can you elaborate on a specific situation with a client that would be difficult for you, uhm, if they have a different believe system than you have.
- II 1.54 **Tammy:** I think if, if... it's fine, you can have a different believe system, but if you come and you're very, you get almost aggressive or extremely defensive
- II 1.55 **Interviewer:** With the client?
- II 1.56 **Tammy:** Yes, then I would, I would find it very difficult to work with this person because you are trying to help them and try to give then new information and if they keep saying oh, but the bible says this or I can't do this because of that and that... but why not? Have you considered doing something differently and I know I had a discussion with a friend of mine about Christianity, you know, I told her that I read somewhere that it is a cult and immediately I saw this, she closed up, this reaction like: what?! How could you say that?! She got very angry with me and I'm like, I'm not trying to assault you, I mean it's not about you, it's about the way it functions.
- II 1.57 **Interviewer:** You were giving an opinion.
- II 1.58 **Tammy:** Ja, and I was thinking we would have like an open discussion about this and she got so defensive. That makes it immediately difficult for you to converse with a person and work with them, so I think that could, uhm...
- II 1.60 **Interviewer:** It could be difficult.
- II 1.61 **Tammy:** Ja, what you would want to do with this person, because say now they know this is what you think and if you want to tell them, say, you want to help them achieve some sort of goal, they might not necessarily want to uhm accept your help, because you differ so much from them on something as simple as what you believe.
- II 1.62 **Interviewer:** And how would your spiritual identity inform your approach towards a person like that? When that happened, how did you approach that person?
- II 1.63 **Tammy:** Well, I saw her reaction and didn't address it, I think that was perhaps wrong, I shouldn't have done that, uhm, but I still try to remain open to what she said. I try to understand that she's very religious, so perhaps religion and spirituality for her is the same, I can't change that, but I didn't... I didn't try to convince her that I am right and she is wrong, uhm, I don't think you can do that. I just think you could give someone information and they will do what they want with it, because I mean, I'm pretty sure... my assumption, if she got the information I did in high school that she would not really believed it, she would just be like, or she wouldn't really have seem the way it functioned, it's that controlling aspect of religion in society, she would just be like, no, it's not true.
- II 1.64 **Interviewer:** What information did you get in high school?
- II 1.65 **Tammy:** Well, it was mostly a discussion on the church and the way religion was used. I think it was way back when, medieval times, it was used as a way to exploit people and to control them and uhm to uhm ya...that was basic it, and then for me that was, how could, if there is a god who gave us this religion, how could he sit back and allow someone or some institution to misuse it? How could there not be some kind of intervention and then, again, thinking there is already so much suffering and terrible things in the world, how is there not anything that intervenes.

- II 1.66 **Interviewer:** It made you question.
- II 1.67 **Tammy:** Yes, and then, just sitting here and, if there is, why not? Perhaps there are some cases of miracles, perhaps. My father I think, he saw, he was driving behind a bakkie and a man sat on the back of the open cab and he fell off and hit his head on the road and he was bleeding from his ears and his nose and I mean that is a sure sign that something this person is not going to make it and my dad sat with this guy uhm the man went to the hospital he phoned later, I think either that afternoon or the day afterwards, I can't exactly remember and asked this person that fell off if he was orait, what happened, and they were like ja he was discharged. So, for me that kind of says but something must have happened, because I think he did pray with, for him. uhm, ja, I think my dad is spiritual, but we don't have discussions about it, so I think if I perhaps...
- II 1.68 **Interviewer:** Is it not something that you discuss in your house?
- II 1.69 **Tammy:** No, no that's the thing, uhm, not at all. Cause like I said, we did go to church when I was younger, and then it just stopped. And I have no idea why, I mean, I'm a little child and you are not really thinking why do we stop going to church. It was just like, yay, I can sleep late on a Sunday (laugh) that was one aspect.
- II 1.70 **Interviewer:** It was not something you understood at that time.
- II 1.71 **Tammy:** Ja, and I remember that I stood up, got dressed and I went downstairs and said we are going to church now and it was no, we're not going to church. So I remember something like that and I didn't understand and I also didn't question it. And I think, uhm, it is important to start questioning things.
- II 1.72 **Interviewer:** Yes
- II 1.73 **Tammy:** Because uhm like my sister said with the enlightenment, she did a thesis on, uhm, it was like zodiac stuff, why uhm... information is so important for someone, etcetera. I'm still going to read it, but ja, she discussed enlightenment and how it changed people's views on religion and spirituality, because now they are able to get their own information, they are not dependant on someone to give it to them and then they can start questioning the message, uhm, so I think the theme here is there is questioning, this constant wondering this or that. I think that is important in some ways, but uhm I think having something to believe in is also good, because it grounds you in a sense, because I mean I feel like I'm just floating and I'm not really sure what I'm doing, where I'm going whereas someone who is very religious is quite sure of their path. Uhm I think that's the positive, but in a way society as it is today we have access to information, so there isn't necessarily a greater controlling aspect of religion anymore and in some ways I think we are in first of all industrialised countries. I think in that way if you identify with religion, I think it could be more spiritual than a controlling aspect.
- II 1.74 **Interviewer:** And your spirituality, as it is at this moment, where you are at, all of the questions, all of that, how do you think that will help you one day to make meaning of your clients' experiences and what they are going through?
- II 1.75 **Tammy:** Well, I thing because I question things, I would question what they are experiencing, uhm, I think I would try to call attention to various aspects of their experience if I should see it, because I'm not always very observant, but I think, even in my discussions with my friends, I try to consider all the aspects and then try to understand whatever it is we need to do, uhm, so I think in a way I could be good because I could help the person to just stand back and think about what it is that is happening and consider why, and just look at different angles.
- II 1.76 **Interviewer:** Explore it with them.

- II 1.77 **Tammy:** Ja.
- II 1.78 **Interviewer:** Is there anything else you would like to add on this topic on practising as a psychologist?
- II 1.79 **Tammy:** No.
- II 1.80 **Interviewer:** Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting post graduate studies?
- II 1.81 **Tammy:** Not really, I think it was more undergrad for me.
- II 1.82 **Interviewer:** Okay.
- II 1.83 **Tammy:** Like I said, I had this discussion with my friend and, uhm, this was when I saw the way someone would react if you...
- II 1.84 **Interviewer:** When exactly was this discussion?
- II 1.85 **Tammy:** It was last year, so it was almost postgrad I guess (laughter) so, ja for me it was just, uhm, you see, I think in my house we're very open-minded and we can have these discussions, I was just never confronted with someone who immediately closes up and becomes defensive before, uhm, so that was a new experience for me, I didn't really know what to do with it, uhm, 'cause I was thinking, ooh we are going to have a discussion now and then immediately she was like, no, I don't believe you, this can't be right, uhm but I think my other friends, 'cause we're not friends anymore (she's not a nice person), but they are much more open and I've noticed that if I do discuss things with them, they are open to other avenues of looking at things, uhm, and ja, they are just more open, it's not, they are not, uhm, with blinkers on. They are able to say okay, I see what you are saying, but what about this? Ja, again, is this conversation an inspiration, we can go on together, I guess.
- II 1.86 **Interviewer:** Are these friends of yours in the class with you?
- II 1.87 **Tammy:** Yes they are.
- II 1.88 **Interviewer:** Okay, so do you think they will hold similar beliefs than you?
- II 1.89 **Tammy:** To an extent, yes. Because I think we are all different, I might approach something differently from them, but I think, you know, the basics beliefs are the same.
- II 1.90 **Interviewer:** And the rest of the class mates? How do you feel about that? Do you think that they share similar beliefs or different belief systems than you?
- II 1.100 **Tammy:** I think there could be differences because we are a multi-cultural group, so immediately, ja, some people might follow a different religion. But I think from the little bit I do know about different religions, it all comes down to the same basic features or principals that you have to follow.
- II 1.101 **Interviewer:** What are those?
- II 1.102 **Tammy:** Well, for me it's just basically doing good to others and respecting their rights and not stealing and not murdering people and just, I think that's why it's society that becomes religion becomes, you know, it's like a cycle, it's doing basic things to kind of allow people to live without necessarily endangering them in some way, but it's kind of uphold the peace of sorts, uhm, but like I said for me, it's just basically kindness and love and, uhm, just trying to be a good person in some way or another, uhm, and I think that is where the differences again come in, because every person is, perhaps have a different view of being a good person, so, but I must say, uhm, I don't really, there hasn't been a discussion on religion in the class per se, uhm, all we did discuss was uhm practices in funerals, that was it. So I don't think it really goes deeper, it didn't go deeper than that.
- II 1.103 **Interviewer:** Can you think of a specific situation during this year so far which made you think critically about your belief system?

- II 1.104 **Tammy:** (Silence) Well... I can't really think of anything at the moment, but what pops up for me is my cat actually, she is sick and uhm, you know I find it difficult to accept the fact that someone might decide now is the time for her to go. But then one the one hand again, is it fate, is it someone deciding, oh this the poor cat is suffering so much, let's just put her at peace or is it just literally age. It's difficult for me to really think about why things are happening.
- II 1.105 **Interviewer:** In class, how do you make meaning when you are confronted with diverse belief systems? I know you used the example of last year with the friend and that you kind of just took a step back because you didn't want to offend her?
- II 1.106 **Tammy:** Ja, I think I tend to step back, but I try to understand the person's view point, uhm... ja, like I said, it was just the different funeral practices, it was different approaches to the same event and in a way I think it helps to make meaning, so I'm, for some people it might seem strange, these different practices, for example I think one was the person's body is lain out on a table somewhere and they have to mourn this person for a week. In some ways it could be strange, it's a strange thing to do in our society as it stands today, but then you realise it's a different approach to for that person to the same event and if that helps them who am I to come and say that it's wrong.
- II 1.107 **Interviewer:** Meaning the wake processes are different.
- II 1.108 **Tammy:** Ja, it's just if it works for you then it works for you, uhm I think another discussion we had, uhm it was pathology modules when it becomes problematic for the person then you have to start thinking but that's not necessarily correct, uhm, but other than that, if their approach is something that helps them make sense of the world, then I can't come and try change that or feel offended because, I mean that's different experiences. I think I'm just a bit more open in that sense that I can say, okay, that's your way of doing it. I don't...
- II 1.109 **Interviewer:** You are very accepting of others.
- II 1.110 **Tammy:** Ja, I think so. If it is something extremely strange for me, I think I would show it, what are you doing, but uhm, if I really tried then I could try to understand it. And then, who know, you might discover something that works for your new spiritual identity and develop that (laughter).
- II 1.111 **Interviewer:** Okay, anything else on this topic that you would like to discuss?
- II 1.112 **Tammy:** One can have a lot of discussion on this, but it's difficult for me to elaborate on that.
- II 1.113 **Interviewer:** That is all the questions, is there anything else that you would like to add?
- II 1.114 **Tammy:** I just think that it is like a journey for me still, it's difficult to say with certainty that this is, you know, who I am in a spiritual sense, I just think I'm struggling with my identity as it is and just no spiritual connections as it is, so I think uhm as I grow, I think it will become better and more clarity in these matters.
- II 1.115 **Interviewer:** Thank you very much.
- II 1.116 **Tammy:** Thank you.

Pseudonym: Elsa (Age 21)

Reflective Writing Exercise

- RW 2.1 **Question:** How do you describe and understand Spiritual identity?
- RW 2.2 **Elsa:** Spirituele identiteit is wie jy is in jou geloofslewe. Dit is wat jy glo, waar jy as individu inpas in jou geloofsisteem en ook waar en hoe geloof inpas in jou lewe.
- RW 2.3 **Question:** How do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?
- RW 2.4 **Elsa:** My geloof help my definitief om uitdagings beter te hanteer. Ek glo dat alles wat my God oor my pad stuur, met 'n rede gebeur – ons moet net ten volle op Hom vertrou. Ek doen my bes in alles wat ek aanpak en los die res in God se hande. Wat ook al gebeur nadat ek my beste gegee het, glo ek is die Here se wil. Dit help dat ek teleurstellings beter hanteer – om te weet dat wat ook al gebeur die Here se wil is, maak my rustig en help dat ek makliker aanvaar wat oor my pad kom.
- RW 2.5 **Question:** How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?
- RW 2.6 **Elsa:** Sielkunde is 'n baie emosionele uitputtende werk en soms maak min dinge vir jou sin. Dis ook nie 'n baie “ondankbare werk”. Met 'n sterk spirituele identiteit glo ek dat mens uitdagings en moeilike dae beter kan verwerk en nie noodwendig altyd antwoorde soek wat mens kan “sien” nie. Mens verstaan dat sekere dinge maar slegs die Here se plan is en daar nie noodwendig 'n logiese verduideliking is nie. Mens moet egter versigtig wees om nie jou spirituele identiteit en geloofsoortuigings op ander af te dwing nie.
- RW 2.7 **Question:** Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?
- RW 2.8 **Elsa:** Nee, my spirituele identiteit is vroeg reeds “gevestig” en daarom glo ek dit sal moeilik wees om nou 'n ander denkwysse rakende spiritualiteit te vorm.

Individual Interview

- II 2.1 **Interviewer:** So die eerste vraag wat ek jou gaan vra – dit gaan alles oor jou spirituele identiteit en spirituele ontwikkeling, jou spirituele identiteitsontwikkeling spesifiek – so net om te begin, ek gaan al die vragies vir jou vra wat ek vir jou in die e-mail gevra het, maar dan gaan ek net onderafdeling-vragies vra, en jy kan net uitbrei soveel soos wat jy wil en as jy iets nie verstaan nie, vra maar net. Dis baie relaxed, jy hoef nie te worry nie en jy kan baie eerlik wees. So kom ons begin met hoe jy spirituele identiteit verstaan – hoe sal jy dit verduidelik en hoe verstaan jy dit as 'n konsep?
- II 2.2 **Elsa:** Okay, ek dink dit is maar wie jy is in jou geloof – hoe jy sien waar jy daar inpas en waar dit in jou lewe inpas. So ja... jou identiteit self, is tog maar “ek is Mari”, en jou geloof of spirituele identiteit is dan “ek is 'n Christen”, maar dan ook sê nou maar “ek gaan na die NG Kerk toe” of “dis hoe ek dinge sien en dinge benader”. En dan hoe geloof in my lewe inpas is dan sê nou maar met die onderhoude sal ek glo as ek nie gekeur word nie, dan is dit die Here se plan dat ek nie gekeur word nie en as ek gekeur word, is dit obviously die Here se wil – dis dan byvoorbeeld waar dit in my daaglikse lewe inpas. Antwoord ek jou vraag?
- II 2.3 **Interviewer:** Ja dit doen. Hoe dink jy vorm dit deel van jou identiteit van wie jy is – jou spiritualiteit?
- II 2.4 **Elsa:** Ek dink dit het nogal 'n groot invloed want ek maak obviously baie besluite gebaseer daarop. As ek ook sê nou maar universiteite moes kies in my matriekjaar het ek geglo die Here sal die deure oopmaak wat oopgemaak moet word. As ek nie vir die Here gebid het nie, sou ek byvoorbeeld sommer net na enige universiteit toe gegaan het en dan sou my pad baie anders gewees het en baie ander draaie geloop

- het. In mens se daaglikse bestaan maak mens ook maar besluite gebaseer daarop – of as jy deur moeilike tye gaan, kry jy ook maar jou krag daarvan-af of so.
- II 2.5 **Interviewer:** Kan jy uitbrei op hoe jy jou identiteitsontwikkeling ervaar het toe jy jonger was byvoorbeeld toe jy 'n tiener was of as 'n kind?
- II 2.6 **Elsa:** Uhm okay, ek het nog altyd in 'n Christelike huis groot geword so dit het dit aan die een kant 'n bietjie makliker gemaak. Uhm so ek het nooit regtig besluit met watter geloof wil ek nou eksperimenteer of wil indelf in nie. My Christenskap self was nog altyd daar en ek het dit nog nooit betwyfel nie, maar die manier hoe mens spiritualiteit uitoefen het dalk oor die jare bietjie verander. Ons was nog altyd in my ma-hulle se kerk, hulle wou nie dat ons sommer na ander kerke toe gaan nie. As ons dalk een keer saam met 'n maatjie wou gaan, kon ons gaan, maar ons kon nie sê ons gaan nou na hierdie kerk toe en julle na 'n ander kerk toe nie. Uhm maar dit was op hoërskool vir my nogal moeilik want my ma-hulle is in 'n verskriklike konserwatiewe gemeente – dis soos die orrel en mense dra hoedens- en ek is klein bietjie meer liberal so eks rustig daarmee mense kan aantrek wat hulle wil en sulke tipe goed – daar het ek bietjie gesukkel maar ek kon niks daaraan doen nie en byvoorbeeld my pa het altyd gesê ons mag nie na ander kerke se kerkkampe toe gaan nie, want hy weet nie wat daar gebeur nie. Wat ek vandag verstaan, maar dit was vir my moeilik want ek wil graag gaan en al my maatjies gaan en ek mag nie gaan nie, maar op universiteit kon ek nou natuurlik meer na 'n kerk toe gaan waarna ek wil gaan en op die kamp gaan waarop ek wil gaan.
- II 2.7 **Interviewer:** Sou jy sê dis baie verskillend as toe jy 'n adolessent was of is dit baie dieselfde – die identiteit wat jy daaruit gekry het?
- II 2.8 **Elsa:** Die identiteit is steeds dieselfde, ek dink en glo nog steeds dieselfde, maar die manier van doen is dalk net 'n bietjie meer liberaal. Soos my male is in 'n streng gereformeerde kerk en hier kon ek 'n bietjie sê nou maar meer Baptistekerk toe gaan of so maar... ek glo nie enigsins anders of so nie
- II 2.9 **Interviewer:** Wat sal jy sê is die essence (kern) van spirituele identiteit?
- II 2.10 **Elsa:** (Lag) Skuus wat is “essence”?
- II 2.11 **Interviewer:** Essence is soos die kern, die core, die ja die belangrikste element daarvan.
- II 2.12 **Elsa:** Ek dink dit verskil van persoon tot persoon – uhm in myself sal ek maar sê jou alledaagse lewe: Want as jy sou sê jou core van spirituele identiteit is “ek gaan Sondae kerk toe” dan is dit net op Sondae, maar as jy sê hoe dit in jou daaglike lewe ingeweef is ja ek sal glad nie loop met die Bybel onder my arm nie deel die heelyd vir mense Bybelverse uit nie. Maar ag ek dink dit is maar ingeweef in jou manier van doen soos ek skree nie op mense as ek kwaad is nie want ek weet dit is nou nie regtig die manier van doen nie of dit is nie wie ek is nie... uhm. Ja.
- II 2.13 **Interviewer:** Het jy enige iets anders wat jy dink jou spirituele identiteit sal verduidelik? In 'n woord. Een woord wat dit vir jou is?
- II 2.14 **Elsa:** mmm. Shoe. As mens een moet sê om dit maklik op te som is maar example, dit kom maar terug na die gewone gesegde van “Lead by example”- soos wat ek netnou gesê het, dit help nie jy probeer mense heelyd oortuig van jou spirituele identiteit nie, leef dit eerder en dit word so oorgedra ja...
- II 2.15 **Interviewer:** Nou gaan ek jou nog 'n challenging vraag vra. Die example wat jy wil wys vir die wêreld wat is die core van die example wat jy wil wys wat jou spiritualiteit vir jou sê dit is die core wat ek wil wys vir die wêreld?
- II 2.16 **Elsa:** Ag ek dink as jy vrede en liefde uitstraal... so dan cover mens redelik alles as jy vrede en liefde en vrede uitstraal dan gaan jy in elk geval meeste van die tyd

- respek hê vir mense, mense mooi hanteer en jy gaan nie sommer skree al voel jy jy wil skree nie of so
- II 2.17 **Interviewer:** okay, so liefde en vrede. Hoe dink jy “inform” jou spirituele identiteit ander dele van jouself soos jou sosiale deel van jouself, jou akademiese deel van jouself?
- II 2.18 **Elsa:** Joeh ek dink nogals ’n groot deel. Dis maar soos wat ek netnou gesê het, dis als ingeweef met mekaar soos byvoorbeeld met die akademiese deel ook weet ek, ek doen my deel, wat ook al daarna gebeur is in die Here se hande. Is ek op die regte pad? Met die sosiale lewe ook (lag) – mens doen seker maar nie sekere dinge nie omdat jy voel dis nie wie jy is nie. Uhm, ja... ek dit het maar betrekking tot als.
- II 2.19 **Interviewer:** Hoe maak jy betekenis van moeilike gebeurtenisse in jou lewe?
- II 2.20 **Elsa:** Dis ook maar soos ek netnou gesê het – ek glo alles gebeur met ’n rede en dit maak dinge makliker so jy bevraagteken nie noodwendig die heeltyd alles nie en as iets slegs met jou gebeur sal jy nie die fout intern soek en vra “Is ek swak? Wat is fout met my?” of so nie. Ek skryf baie eerder goed daaraan toe dat dit nou maar die pad is wat ek moet stap en dis nou maar hoekom dinge gebeur. Ja dit maak dit bietjie makliker dat jy nie alles intern sit nie, ja jissie ek wil nie sê ekstern nie. Maar ja jy maak beter sin daarvan darem.
- II 2.21 **Interviewer:** Ja jy kry ’n betekenis êrens. Kan jy uitbrei op een lewenservaring waar jy baie moeilik gevind het in die laaste tyd? En hoe jy toe betekenis gemaak het daarvan.
- II 2.22 **Elsa:** Ek kan nou nie spesifiek aan iets van die laaste tyd dink nie, maar een waaraan ek kan dink is toe ek matriek was wou ek graag Potch toe gegaan het omdat my ouers en my pa, ma en my ouma en oupa en almal daar was, my ma was ook in die koshuis daar. Ek het gedink ek het redelik ’n goeie CV, want ek was baie gebalanseerd op skool, toe stuur ek al my goedjies daar in, toe kry ek nie by een koshuis plek nie. Soos nie by my eerste keuse nie, nie by my tweede keuse nie, nie by my derde keuse nie. Dit was nogal vir my vreemd want ek het net gevoel op papier behoort ek darem – al kom ek nie by my eerste of tweede keuse in nie behoort hulle darem vir my te sê sjoe wil jy nie by hierdie koshuis inkom nie. En toe stuur toe my goed by Bloem in en toe kry ek dadelik by my eerste keuse koshuis plek en toe sien ek dit ook as die Here se hand. Mens kan dit nie altyd alles logies verklaar nie, maar daardie was nie my pad nie. Ek wou dalk Potch gaan ’n groot deel van my lewe, maar ek glo net vandag ek moes Bloem toe kom en dit het ook in my eerste jaar as ek – ek kom van Limpopo af so dis maar vêr van my huis af – het ek nooit gewonder “Moet ek hier wees?” of “Moet ek nie maar teruggaan huis toe nie?” want ek het geweet hierdie is my plek en ek moet hier wees. Die afgelope vier jaar was regtig vir my ’n geseënde tyd, ek het ongelooflike vriendinne gemaak, ’n oulike kêrel ontmoet en toe kom my boetie ook na twee jaar Bloem toe want hy wou landbou swot en Potch bied nie landbou aan nie. So dit was maar net ons gesin se pad en ja ons al twee is al twee baie gelukkig hier. So toe kon ek dit maklik daaraan toeskryf... en daardie lewensles kon ek ook al baie in my lewe gebruik. En ek’t sê baie op papier maak goed nie sin nie, maar jy moet maar net aanvaar dis jou pad.
- II 2.23 **Interviewer:** Ja dit is nogals so né? Het jy enige moeilike tyd gehad onlangs? Iets in hierdie jaar wat jy baie moeilik gevind het wat jou spiritualiteit jou kon help om betekenis daaruit te kry?
- II 2.24 **Elsa:** Shoe... dit moeilik om nou net so daaraan te dink... Daar was nie regtig iets wat my uitmekaar geskeur het of platgeslaan het in die jaar nie, dit was eintlik ’n

- heel okay jaar sover. Dis maar net klein goedjies soos sit bietjie hier vas met iemand – of ja... ek kan nou nie aan 'n spesifieke groot gebeurtenis dink nie.
- II 2.25 **Interviewer:** So jy't 'n goeie jaar gehad sover. Dis okay. Ons kan dan na die volgende vragie toe gaan. Hoe dink jy sal jou spirituele identiteit jou werk as 'n sielkundige beïnvloed?
- II 2.26 **Elsa:** Uhm joe, ek kan nou nie sê positief of negatief nie, maar ek weet in die sielkundewêreld is dit baie moeilik om jou spirituele identiteit te behou want die sielkunde is mos maar baie wêrelds en baie op teorieë en filosofieë uhm gebaseer en baie mense sê as jy so diep daarin delf kan mens baie vroe ontwikkel en wonder maar sjoe, as hierdie dan so is, hoe glo ek dan? Ek dink dit kan baie help om jouself bietjie “sane” te hou soos as dinge moeilik gaan – dan weet jy waar om jou krag vandaan te kry, maar ek dink dis baie belangrik om nie jou spirituele identiteit op jou kliënte af te dwing nie soos byvoorbeeld as hulle sê hulle is nie 'n Christen nie, moenie eers daar gaan nie, moenie eers vir hulle vra hoekom nie, wil jy nie oorweeg om kerk toe te kom nie (lag) ek voel net dis nie jou plek nie. Uhm dank om dit maar terug na die example deel. Ek dink definitief dit kan jou help om bietjie meer rustigheid oor dinge te kry – of soos wat mens 'n sielkundige het om bietjie betekenis oor dinge te kry, soos as daar byvoorbeeld kindertjies na jou toe kom wat gemolesteer is en jy maak nie regtig sin daarvan nie.
- II 2.27 **Interviewer:** Kan jy aan 'n spesifieke situasie dink waar dit vir jou 'n uitdaging sal wees om met mense te werk wat ander geloofstelsels as jy het?
- II 2.28 **Elsa:** Ek het al met dit te doen gekry omdat ek in die koshuis was, so dis nie vir my verskriklik vreemd nie. Natuurlik het ek my eie manier van doen, maar eks glad nie ten gunste daarvan om jou manier van doen op ander af te dwing nie. Ek weet partykeer sê hulle mens moet ander probeer oortuig, maar ja ek voel net dis nie my plek nie. Dit sal vir my moeilik wees as mense my heeltyd probeer challenge – ek weet een van my vriendinne was 'n au pair in Nederland vir 'n jaar en die gesin het glad nie geglo nie so hulle het haar heeltyd gechallenge en gevra: “As jy dan glo, hoekom gebeur daar slegte goed in die wêreld?” en “As God dan jou Pa is, hoekom kyk hy nie na sy kinders nie?” – dit sal vir my moeilik wees as mense jou so challenge. Mens kan nie altyd alles logies uitredeneer nie – daar kom tog 'n deel in van glo soos 'n kind. Dit sal vir my moeilik wees as mense heeltyd teoretiese antwoorde wil hê want dis nie hoe geloof werk nie.
- II 2.29 **Interviewer:** Okay. Hoe dink jy sal jou spirituele identiteit dan jou “approach” tot jou kliënte beïnvloed – hoe sal jy dan met sulke mense werk? Hoe sal jy dan so situasie hanteer as dit met jou gebeur in praktyk eendag?
- II 2.30 **Elsa:** Aan die een kant sal ek sal maar net eerlik wees en sê voor hulle dan al hierdie antwoorde wil hê, moet hulle dan maar eers in my skoene kom staan, eers bietjie in dit in delf voor hulle net antwoorde wil hê en dan sal hulle dalk sien dit is nie moontlik om net alles uit te redeneer nie (as hulle byvoorbeeld vroe het oor Noag se ark wat so groot was of hoe is Jona deur 'n vis ingesluk). Mens kan nie alles uitredeneer nie en alles word ook mos nie letterlik in die Bybel bedoel nie, baie is mos maar gelykenisse en so, so as hulle daarvoor wonder dan moet hulle maar eintlik saam die pad kom stap en dit kom maar weer neer op “Glo soos 'n kind”. Dit is maar waaroor spirituele identiteit gaan.
- II 2.31 **Interviewer:** Hoe dink jy sal jou spirituele identiteit jou help om sin te maak van jou kliënte se ervarings?
- II 2.32 **Elsa:** Shoe. Ag ek dink die spirituele identiteit sal veral handig te pas kom in die “ontlaai” deel soos wat ek netnou gesê het as daar mense met baie slegte omstandighede soos kindertjies na jou toe kom wat al deur 'n baie rowwe tyd was

- sal dit help om daaroor te kan besin en te besef dis nie noodwendig van die Here wat hulle straf of so iets nie, in die wêreld gebeur daar maar slegte goed, maar dis nou nie dat die Here dit vir almal uitdeel of so nie.
- II 2.33 **Interviewer:** Kan jy aan enige iets anders dink hoe dit jou sal help om betekenis te vind in ouer mense se ervarings – enige iemand wat na jou toe kom met enige tipe probleem? Dink jy dit sal jou beïnvloed hoe jy betekenis maak van wat hulle ervaar?
- II 2.34 **Elsa:** Ag ek dink in 'n mate beïnvloed dit ons definitief, ek dink mens moet maar net sover as moontlik probeer om dit intern te hou dat wat ook al mens dink nie op hulle wil toeskryf nie. Ek sal nou nie vir hulle sê volgens my geloof gebeur alles met 'n rede of moenie worry nie, die Here het die wêreld klaar oorwin nie, want dis nie wat hulle op daai oomblik wil hoor nie. Hulle gaan nie noodwendig sin maak van situasies soos wat ek sin maak van situasies nie. Ek wil nie sê mens moet in hulle spirituele identiteit inklim nie, glad nie, want dis tog maar jou eie, mens moet maar net probeer agterkom wat is hulle spirituele identiteit en hoe hulle sin maak van dinge. Dit help nie jy stel vir hulle iets voor wat vir hulle vreemd is nie, want dit gaan hulle nie help nie. Vra eerder waar het dinge al in hulle lewe sleg gegaan en wat het toe gehelp in plaas daarvan om jou manier van doen net so op hulle af te dwing.
- II 2.35 **Interviewer:** Dink jy dat jou spirituele identiteit verander het in hierdie jaar?
- II 2.36 **Elsa:** Nee ek dink nie so nie...
- II 2.37 **Interviewer:** Dink jy dis presies dieselfde?
- II 2.38 **Elsa:** Ja...
- II 2.39 **Interviewer:** Hoe ervaar jy jou klasmaats? Kom jy goed met hulle oor die weg, het jy baie vriende?
- II 2.40 **Elsa:** Ek wil nie sê ons is op gedeel in groepies nie, want ek kom definitief met almal oor die weg en daar is niemand wat ek glad nie kan verdra nie. Ek is nog altyd 'n klein groepie mens en ek sal nou nie na almal toe stap en myself voorstel nie, maar ek gesels nogal lekker individueel met meeste van hulle. Ek het een vriendin wat net so oud is soos ek en dan is daar 'n paar ouer vrouens – ons doen maar altyd alles saam soos byvoorbeeld take en buiten dit gaan drink ons saam koffie en so.
- II 2.41 **Interviewer:** Het die mense in jou klas dieselfde of verskillende geloofstelsels as jy?
- II 2.42 **Elsa:** Ons het nie regtig in 'n groot klasopset regtig daaroor gepraat nie, maar die mense in my vriendekring of wat saam met my werk – ons het almal dieselfde geloofstelsels.
- II 2.43 **Interviewer:** So jy sê in die “broader sense” weet jy nie eintlik nie? Is dit iets wat ooit opkom in die klas?
- II 2.44 **Elsa:** Nie sommer nie, nee.
- II 2.45 **Interviewer:** Kan jy dink aan 'n spesifieke situasie in hierdie jaar, in die honneursklas, wat jou laat krities dink het oor jou geloofstelsel?
- II 2.46 **Elsa:** Ek onthou in ‘developmenta’ l sê hulle maar net weer van die evolusieteorieë en hoe goed in mekaar pas en hoe mense sê nou maar eksperimente doen om goed te bewys toe het ek net ander dag gedink ek verstaan hoekom mense sê dat sielkunde en geloof nie regtig langs mekaar loop nie en mense dan dinge wil uitredeneer. Ek het dit nie self probeer uitredeneer nie, maar ek verstaan hoe mense op daai punt kan kom.

- II 2.47 **Interviewer:** Wat het jy gedink toe jy deur daardie hele ding gegaan het, wat was jou gedagtepatroon – het jy krities geëvalueer wat jy glo of krities geëvalueer wat ander glo?
- II 2.48 **Elsa:** Ek het glad nie krities geëvalueer wat ek self glo nie, ek dink ek is goed daarmee om nie krities na ander te kyk nie, so dis eintlik vir my 'n goeie ding om te besef hoekom mense vrae vra hieroor in plaas daarvan om te dink “hoekom dink jy anders hieroor??” en “hoekom dink jy nou eers introspeksie?”. In plaas daarvan om hulle te oordeel, het ek eerder verstaan waardeur hulle gaan en gesien dit kan moontlik wees as mens nou met al hierdie inligting gebombardeer word en dalk onseker is oor sekere dinge in jou lewe dat jy kán vrae vra.
- II 2.49 **Interviewer:** Hoe maak jy betekenis daarvan wanneer jy gekonfronteer word met 'n ander geloofstelsel as jy? Hoe hanteer jy dit as hierdie persoon na jou toe kom en hy het 'n heeltemal ander geloofstelsel as jy, 'n ander spirituele identiteit as jy en hierdie mens staan voor jou en jy moet nou betekenis maak van hierdie situasie? Hoe doen jy dit gewoonlik?
- II 2.50 **Elsa:** Bedoel jy ons praat spesifiek daarvoor of is dit maar net oor die algemeen?
- II 2.51 **Interviewer:** Julle kan praat of hulle kan net daar wees – hoe maak jy sin daarvan dat iemand heeltemal anders as jy glo?
- II 2.52 **Elsa:** Ek voel jy kan nie regtig iets van iemand sê as jy nie regtig 'n myl in hulle skoene geloop het nie, so ek sal glad nou nie dink “O, jy gaan duiwel toe!” of “you’re doomed nie” (Lag) nie. Ek weet nie wat is hulle agtergrond, wat het hulle ma-hulle geleer, of wat het in hulle lewe gebeur nie. Dalk het 'n kerk hulle kwaad gemaak en toe besluit hulle, hulle gaan nooit weer kerk toe gaan nie. Spiritualiteit en geloof voel vir my dis baie jou eie, dis hoekom ek sê ek sal nie sommer na mense toe gaan en vir hulle iets daarvoor sê tensy ek nie al 'n pad met hulle gestap het nie. As ek al 'n pad met iemand gestap het en uit hulle eie uit begin hulle meer vrae vra en jy kan sien maar hulle is nuuskierig en hulle wil graag meer weet oor hoe jy dit doen, dan deel ek maklik en sê “oh maar vandat ek grootgeword het doen ons hierdie so, of ek doen hierdie so omdat dit” maar ek sal nooit my manier van doen op hulle afdwing nie. So Baie keer sal mense wat ook 'n Christen is sal een van my vriendinne – maar ons het verskillende manier van doen onder andere doop – sê nou maar ons praat van klein doop en groot doop – dan kan ons ure lank 'n rustige gesprek voer oor hoekom ek sê nou maar klein gedoop is of sy groot gedoop is. Dan sal ek nie sê oh maar in ons kerk sê hulle dit is so en dit is so nie (slaan hande). So ons sal net so oh. Dan sal ons sê ek hoor wat jy sê. Ek kan redelik maklik met ander mense daarvoor gesels. En as hulle my vra sal ek sê hoe ek dit doen sonder dat daar nou 'n geveg of oordeling betrokke is.
- II 2.53 **Interviewer:** Sien jy spiritualiteit en geloof enigsins as verskillend of sien jy dit as een ding?
- II 2.54 **Elsa:** Ek weet dit is nie eintlik een ding nie, maar ek dink dis baie naby aan mekaar. Geloof is volgens my maar wat jy glo en wat daarmee saam kom en ek dink spiritualiteit is meer binne in jou of hoe alles in mekaar kom. Is ek reg.
- II 2.55 **Interviewer:** Daar's nie 'n reg of verkeerd nie. Dankie.

Pseudonym: Michelle (Age: 21)

Reflective Writing Exercise

RW 3.1 **Question:** How do you describe and understand Spiritual identity?

RW 3.2 **Michelle:** Spiritual identity for me refers to the way that you are based on your spiritual relationship based on whichever religion you are. It is the amount of influence that your religion and spirituality has on who you are and how you make

choices in your everyday life. I understand spiritual identity as the amount of influence my religious choices, of being a Christian, has on who I am, what I choose to do and how I make decisions every day. For me it includes my relationship with God and the practices of what it is to be a Christian.

RW 3.3 **Question:** How do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?

RW 3.4 **Michelle:** I do believe that God has a plan for every single person and that He sometimes gives us challenges to face in order to show us that we do need Him and that He is bigger than any challenge and if we have Him on our side we can never fail. I also sometimes get frustrated and feel that I'm faced with too many challenges and that He has forgotten about me and that I cannot face whatever is in front of me, but I have also experienced with these feelings comes validation and reassurance. This year especially, I have tried to look at the challenges I am faced with, as something that God has deliberately put into my path to make me trust Him more and rely on Him more than I ever have.

RW 3.5 **Question:** How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?

RW 3.6 **Michelle:** I believe it will. Although a psychologist needs to be objective in aspects such as religion, I know my relationship with God is valuable to me and I know when I come across situations in which I don't know what to do I will need the guidance of the Lord to make the right decision in the end. I was raised in a Christian home and I want to continue that legacy. I will never judge someone based on their choice of religion or believes, but my views will not change due to the fact I need to be objective when dealing with clients.

RW 3.7 **Question:** Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?

RW 3.8 **Michelle:** Yes, at the beginning of my honours course I was overwhelmed by stress and anxiety and had no time to have the relationship with God the way I used to. I considered others things more important and felt alone when I had to face hard times. But through the holiday I reconnected with God and make the conscious decision of knowing that I will not be able to get through the rest of the year without Him. I pay a lot more attention to spending time on building my relationship and rely a lot more on being patient in hearing His voice when I need to make a decision. With Masters Selection coming up, I know I will definitely not get through it without the guidance and support of God.

Individual Interview

II 3.1 **Interviewer:** Hoe verstaan jy, en hoe sal jy spiritual identiteit beskryf?

II 3.2 **Michelle:** Uhm, ek sal dit beskryf soos die geloof wat jy het en watse geloof jy volg en hoe belangrik dit is in jou lewe en hoe dit jou maak wie jy is en of dit jou beïnvloed. En of nie.

II 3.3 **Interviewer:** Okay, kan jy vir my uitbrei op jou die ervarings wat jy gehad het op jou "journey" van spiritual identiteitsontwikkeling. Jy kan enige plek begin waar jy wil.

II 3.4 **Michelle:** Ek dink almal het maar hulle op en af. Ek is n Christian en so dis maar, partykeer raak mens te besig en vergeet mens daarvan, dit gebeur baie. Die oplettendste ding vir my was in eerste semester waar ons so min tyd het en dit dan gevoel het of ek, van laas jaar af my verhouding verloor het met die Here en daai deel van my lewe, en my uhm... soos my spiritual lewe. Ja, mens moet maar net fokus daarop en ek het dit besef die vakansie, dat ek dit nie sal deur maak sonder dit nie. So toe bou ek daarop toe ek nou tyd gehad het en mens moet daaraan werk en soos tyd daarvoor maak.

- II 3.5 **Interviewer:** Okay en sal jy sê dat jou seining oor spirituele identiteit anders was as toe jy n tiener was?
- II 3.6 **Michelle:** Ja... ek dink dis baie makliker as mens jonk is om te glo en te dink alles is okay en – mens – die probleme wat mens kry is nie regtig as gevolg van die Here nie, dit is net jou eie goed. Maar hoe ouer mens raak en hoe ouer ek geraak het, het ek maar net besef soos mens is waar mens is... deur die Here en mens kan nie sonder Hom doen nie. Hoe ouers mens raak dink ek hoe beter raak jou spiritual identity. Spirituele identiteit.
- II 3.7 **Interviewer:** Okay en wat sal jy sê is die kern van spiritual identiteit, vir jou persoonlik?
- II 3.8 **Michelle:** Uhm ek sal sê dit is soos die verhouding wat jy het, soos ek dink altyd as mens Sy stem baie duidelik kan hoor, dan... is mens op n goeie plek. Partykeer as jy nie op n goeie plek is nie dan... weet mens nie regtig wat om te doen nie en niemand of niks sê vir jou wat om te doen nie. Maar as mens op n goeie plek is, en soos die kern daarvan is om duidelik 'n stem te hoor wat vir jou sê of wat jy doen reg is.
- II 3.9 **Interviewer:** Okay, wat is vir jou die verskil tussen spiritualiteit en geloof?
- II 3.10 **Michelle:** Daar is nie vir my n baie groot verskil nie, weet nie of daar moet wees nie (lag). Uhm... Dit is vir my maar dieselfde ding. Ek weet nie of dit seker...
- II 3.11 **Interviewer:** Daar is nie n reg of verkeerd nie.
- II 3.12 **Michelle:** Ja dit is seker nie in die 'dictionary' dieselfde ding nie, maar ek sien dit maar as dieselfde ding. Maar net soos jou geloof lewe en alles wat dit insluit.
- II 3.13 **Interviewer:** Okay en identiteit daarvan is maar net hoe dit jou "inform" oor wie jy is?
- II 3.14 **Michelle:** Ja.
- II 3.15 **Interviewer:** Okay, die volgende vraag is hoe maak jy sin van moeilike gebeurtenisse in jou lewe?
- II 3.16 **Michelle:** (Lang pause) Uhm... ek let nogals op daarna, soos uhm mens is baie meer geneig om te sê soos alles gaan sleg as wat jy sal sê alles gaan goed. So as slegte tye of moeilike tye kom dan... is mens meer geneig om te fokus op jou geloof en goed en dan wil jy hulp hê. Maar mens doen dit nie so baie as mens deur goeie tye gaan nie.
- II 3.17 **Interviewer:** Okay en kan jy op n ander "recent" ervaring dink wat baie 'challenging' was vir jou en hoe jy betekenis gemaak het uit hierdie ervaring uit?
- II 3.18 **Michelle:** Die mees "recent" ding vir my nou is die meesters keuring want ek bly in Pretoria, en ek het aansoek gedoen hier en in Pretoria en in Potch en ek het net hier gekry, maar die hele vakansie lank het ek net gebid en gebid dat ek net op een plek kry sodat ek nie hoef te kies waar ek moet gaan vir n interview nie en... ek het dit so "for granted" geneem want ek het so gebid dat ek net in plek sal in kom sodat ek nie hoef te kies nie en toe kom ek net in een plek in. Want dis waarvoor ek gebid het. En nou is dit maar net vir my, om die regte "mindset" te hê, want die meesters ding is nou die grootste ding in my lewe wat kom.so...
- II 3.19 **Interviewer:** Natuurlik, ja.
- II 3.20 **Michelle:** Ja, so om net die regte "mindset" te hê en soos ja, dit is n "challenging" ding en ek rely baie op my geloof in hierdie situasie.
- II 3.21 **Interviewer:** So dit het die situasie vir jou makliker gemaak?
- II 3.22 **Michelle:** Ja baie, dit het my baie rus in my hart gegee want dit is waarvoor ek gebid het en dis wat ek gekry het. So ek kan dit nie "question" regtig nie.
- II 3.23 **Interviewer:** Okay en uhm... hoe dink jy, hoe dink het jou spirituele identiteit jou perspektief oor hierdie gebeurtenis verander. Sê nou maar, jy het nie hierdie

- spirituele identiteit gehad nie, hoe sou dit jou perspektief verander oor dat jy neet by een plek in gekom het?
- II 3.24 **Michelle:** Ek sou redelik kwaad gewees het en gedink het, was jou punte nie goed genoeg nie of jou “autobiography” nie genoeg nie en jy’t nie regtig vrede in jou hart oor dat jy nie in gekom het nie, maar as mens nou daarop gaan “rely” om te bid daarvoor voel mens maar net meer gerus. Maar as mens dit nie het nie dan weet mens nie regtig waar om antwoorde te soek nie.
- II 3.25 **Interviewer:** Okay, en kan jy aan enige ander voorbeelde dink oor waar jou spirituele identiteit jou gedra het om betekenis te maak van n moeilike gebeurtenis?
- II 3.26 **Michelle:** Dis maar net oor die algemeen baie algemene klein goed dink ek. Soos aan die begin van die semester het ek met twee van my beste vriendinne so baklei en as sulke goetertjies gebeur dan wil mens maar net terug draai daarna en kan staat maak op mens se geloof en op die verhouding wat jy het.
- II 3.27 **Interviewer:** Okay, is daar enige iets anders wat jy wil by sê op daai vraag?
- II 3.28 **Michelle:** Nee (lag).
- II 3.29 **Interviewer:** Is jy reg? Okay. Hoe dink jy sal jou spirituele identiteit jou werk as n toekomstige sielkundige beïnvloed?
- II 3.30 **Michelle:** Ek dink dit sal dit nogals beïnvloed. Dalk... Ek weet mens moet so objektief as moontlik wees as jy n sielkundige is maar... ek dink as mens n sterk geloof het en goed gaan mens dit nie net weg gooi en goed omdat jy nou n sielkundige is nie. Mens sal dit nou nie op mense af dwing nie of vra wat die Here sou doen of so iets nie maar dit sal altyd aan die agterkant van my kop wees en... al moet mens soos eties wees volgens die reëls as n sielkundige, het jy nog steeds jou waardes as n Christen of wat ook al geloof jy het. Ons sal nog steeds moet respekteer die van jou kliënt watter geloof hulle het en so aan. Ek sal dit nie altyd opbring nie maar ek dink dit sal mens affekteer in die besluite wat jy neem.
- II 3.31 **Interviewer:** In die besluite... Kan jy uitbrei op die tipe besluite wat jy dink dit sal affekteer?
- II 3.32 **Michelle:** Soos as ek nou n sielkundige is eendag dalk, dan... soos die... tipe uhm... “treatment” (laugh), daar is obviously reëls en goed wat mens moet volg maar, ek dink dit sal jou besluite lei van wat jy moet sê vir die mense en die “confidence” wat jy het as jy begin met so iets. Ook om jou te dra as n sielkundige want dis meestal negatiewe mense waarmee jy werk. So daai las ligter te maak. Dink ek is belangrik.
- II 3.33 **Interviewer:** Okay, kan jy op n spesifieke situasie uitbrei wat vir jou baie moeilik sal wees om met iemand te werk wat n ander geloof stelsel as jy het.
- II 3.34 **Michelle:** (Lang pause) Ek dink die moeilikste ding sal maar net wees... om net dalk te verstaan hoe hulle dit sien want uhm, eks nou nie ’n baie hardkoppige mens nie en ek gaan nou nie vir hulle se hulle is verkeerd nie, ek is nie so tipe persoon nie. Maar ek dink dit gaan vir my moeilik wees om te verstaan hoekom hulle dit so sien en dit mmmm... dit is nie my geloof se manier nie.
- II 3.35 **Interviewer:** So as hulle dit opbring, die situasie, se nou maar hulle bring hierdie situasie op in die terapeutiese sessie, hoe sal jou spirituele identiteit, die manier wat jy hulle “approach, inform”? Soos hoe sal jy op hulle reageer? Of hoe dink jy?
- II 3.36 **Michelle:** Ek dink nie ek sal iets noem van die geloof nie, van hulle geloof of my geloof nie. Al bring hulle hulle s’n op en so aan, sal ek nie... is dit nie nodig om vir hulle te sê wat myne is nie en dat ek dink my manier is reg nie maar ek sal hopelik daardie tyd meer weet van meer gelowe en hulle probeer help volgens hulle geloof en wat vir hulle reg is.

- II 3.37 **Interviewer:** Okay, so wat jy sê is dat jou spirituele identiteit sal jou beïnvloed maar jy sal dit nooit afdwing op iemand anders nie, dis wat ek hoor wat jy sê.
- II 3.38 **Michelle:** Ja.
- II 3.39 **Interviewer:** Okay, hoe dink jy sal jou spirituele identiteit jou help betekenis maak van jou kleinte se ervarings? Waardeur hulle gaan elke dag en wat hulle mee kom in terapie?
- II 3.40 **Michelle:** Uhm... ek dink ek sal... Dit hang seker maar hoe sterk jou verhouding is in jou geloof as jy maar... as ek nou 'n groot geloof het daai tyd ook nog... en mense sê vir my goed wat gebeur in hulle lewe dan sal mens dadelik dink soos... ja dis die genade van die Here of soos... uhm die slegte goed – dat Hy doen vir n rede of so iets. Mens sal dit altyd wil dink, maar mens sal dit nie altyd vir hulle kan sê nie. Dit sal net altyd, goeie en slegte situasies wat hulle vir my sê, sal seker gekoppel word aan my geloof en wat ek dink.
- II 3.41 **Interviewer:** So jy sal hulle ervarings interpreteer uit jou perspektief uit? Uit jou spirituele perspektief uit?
- II 3.42 **Michelle:** Ja, ek dink so. Ja. Ek bedoel ek ken nie enigiets anders nie, so ja. Dit is maar hoe ek groot geword het ook.
- II 3.43 **Interviewer:** Die vierde vraag is, dink jy jou spirituele identiteit het verander vandat jy met jou nagraadse studies begin het?
- II 3.44 **Michelle:** Uhm... nie regtig nie uhmm, soos ek se daar was al baie op en af deur my lewe gewees en tye waar dit goed gaan met my verhouding en tye wat dit nie goed gaan nie. Uhm... In die begin van die jaar, en soos die eerste semester het dit nie so goed gegaan nie, nie so goed soos wat ek gedink het of soos ek wou gehad het nie... maar...
- II 3.45 **Interviewer:** In watse terme het dit nie goed gegaan nie?
- II 3.46 **Michelle:** Maar net omdat ek net nie... ek het nooit tyd gemaak het om kerk toe te gaan nie of aan my verhouding of aan my geloof te werk nie. Ek het maar net die “bare minimum” gedoen maar ja ek het maar soos net op n punt gekom wat ek besef het dit is so n belangrike deel van mens se lewe, en uhm ek moet tyd in sit en... ek is die enigste een wat my verhouding kan opbou so ek moet dit probeer doen so uhm... En ook omdat goed maar net rustiger geraak het die vakansie en nou tweede semester, dink ek ook maar net ek voel rustiger en daar is meer tyd om daaraan te werk. So dit het maar hierdie een jaar op en af gegaan.
- II 3.37 **Interviewer:** Okay, en hoe ervaar jy jou klasmaats, wat saam met jou swot? In jou Honneurs klas. Dink jy hulle het dieselfde of ander geloofstelsels as jy? En het jy dit al ooit opgetel?
- II 3.38 **Michelle:** Nog nie... Ek het dit nog nie... Ek's nie baie goed daarin om dit duidelik op te tel as iemand 'n ander geloof is nie behalwe as dit baie duidelik is soos n Muslim of iemand. Maar...
- II 3.39 **Interviewer:** Soos enige gelowe stelsels oor die algemeen? Enige “beliefs” wat anders is as joune? Al is hulle nie gelowig nie, al is hulle iemand wat nie eers glo nie? Was jy ooit met so iets “geconfront” al hierde jaar?
- II 3.40 **Michelle:** Dit was nie in my klas nie, maar ek was “geconfront” met n ateïs en hulle is so aggressief oor die feit dat die Bybel is net nonsens en sulke goeters en... en ek het net weer besef ek stry nie met sulke mense nie – glad nie – ek probeer nie met hulle in konflik kom en vra hoekom hulle dit nou so is nie. Dit is interessant vir my om te dink hoe ander mense dink. En die een meisie in ons klas wat 'n – dis amper dieselfde ding – hulle is nog steeds catholic en sy's 'n non en dit is so interessant om te hoor hoe hulle lewe en dit is anders... en... ek weet nie mens besef maar net dat jy nie kan dink almal is verkeerd as hulle nie jou geloof volg nie

want hulle glo wat hulle glo en dit is baie interessant om daarvan te leer en hulle is nie dan slegte mense of anders nie, hulle is... maar net almal mense, hulle glo maar net bietjie anders. Maar dit is... uhm ek dink dit gaan ook maar oor kulture want dis maar meer algemeen dat... sulke goeters verander in kulture.

II 3.41 **Interviewer:** Okay, so dis maar bietjie hoe jy betekenis maak van sulke situasies as jy daarmee gekonfronteer word?

II 3.42 **Michelle:** Ja...

II 3.43 **Interviewer:** Okay, en kan jy aan n spesifieke situasie dink in jou studies sover wat jou laat krities dink het oor jou eie geloof stelsel? Enige iets wat hierdie jaar gebeur het? Wat jou regtig laat dink het oor jou eie spiritualiteit.

II 3.44 **Michelle:** Daar was nog nie iets so opvallend gewees nie. Dit was maar net die hele alles saamgevat, al die stres en al die werk wat so baie was en so “overwhelming” was, wat maar net omdat dit so sleg gegaan het en toe goed gegaan het, dat mens so hard daarop fokus en dat mens sien mens moet so goeie verhouding hê deur die goeie tye en die slegte tye.

II 3.45 **Interviewer:** Okay, is daar enige iets anders wat jy wil “add”, op die “topic”, enige iets wat jy nie gesê het nie,

II 3.46 **Michelle:** Ek dink nie so nie (huiwerig), ek hoop ek het jou vra reg geantwoord (lag).

II 3.47 **Interviewer:** Daar is nie n reg of verkeerd op die vra nie, maar dan is dit dit...

Pseudonym: Mpho (Age 22)

Reflective Writing Exercise

- RW 4.1 **Question:** How do you describe and understand Spiritual identity?
- RW 4.2 **Mpho:** Spiritual Identity understands who you are in terms of the religion you belong to or the spiritual person you are. For example, an individual can say that they are a Muslim or a Christian merely because they are part of a certain religion and practice everything of that religion. In addition, spiritual identity is deriving your identity through the connection you have with the supernatural Human being which I call God.
- RW 4.3 **Question:** How do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?
- RW 4.4 **Mpho:** Firstly, I tell myself that challenges will be there always. One of the things that I look at and inform myself of with regard to the kind of a challenge I am faced with or I face every day is, "If I can change it, I try to and if I can't change it, I try to accept the fact that I can't change it and move on". I make meaning in terms of understanding that challenges are not there to harm me, or discourage or even kill me. They are there to make me strong and give me experience that I might make use of in the future. I also make meaning by changing the way I think about challenges I experience. Instead of thinking that they are bad and evil and exist to ruin me and my future, I try to embrace it although it's not always easy, to say, I am what I am because of the challenges that I have experienced and will be a better person because of this challenges.
- RW 4.5 **Question:** How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?
- RW 4.6 **Mpho:** My spiritual identity might influence me in such a way that I might only work with people whom I share same spiritual identity with, in order to avoid imposing my beliefs and spirituality to somebody of different identity from mine, which is ethically unacceptable. One of the other influences of spiritual identity to my work as a future psychologist, would be the strength that I will draw from God when situations at work get tough and overwhelming, the peace that I will have when dealing with sad cases and the support that I will get from the people I share identity with, will help me to continue being strong and have faith and hope that will influence the client to want to fully cooperate and hope that all things will be okay. When I feel emotionally drained by other people's problems, I will know where to pour my heart to when perhaps my supervisor does not really get me.
- RW 4.7 **Question:** Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?
- RW 4.8 **Mpho:** I don't think it has changed. I still see myself the way I used to few years ago in terms of my spiritual being. Instead of my spirituality changing, I feel more interested in knowing and understanding more about my spirituality than only knowing the basics.

Individual Interview

- II 4.1 **Interviewer:** The first question is how do you describe and understand spiritual identity?
- II 4.2 **Mpho:** Okay, uhm... spiritual identity is...okay I feel like is related to how you see yourself with regard to your religion or your spirituality. How you define your values, how you define your morals as well and then being able to... you know, live life knowing who you are in that regard. And then with spiritual identity it can be something that you understand in terms of how you grew up, that you grew up in this kind of an environment where they say they are Christians, you are also

- gonna define yourself in that way. And then it will be...I don't know if I'm just, I am talking to myself now. I don't know if I am just being...uhm, not being on the construct like defining the construct really well. But then, Yah, you know, it can be basically like that. You define yourself according to your religion and your spirituality.
- II 4.3 **Interviewer:** There is no right or wrong answer so you can define it anyway that you want.
- II 4.4 **Mpho:** Okay.
- II 4.5 **Interviewer:** What do you think is the difference between religion and spirituality?
- II 4.6 **Mpho:** Okay, Spirituality is the inner person; it's about you personally as a person. How you sort of relate to the world, relate to yourself, relate to the bigger person which is God. Religion is more or less about the rituals that you practice, the kind of things that you do maybe on Sundays, every day or in your personal space and it is... Yah and one other thing about spiritual identity is...I mean spirituality is that, it is more universal.
- II 4.7 **Interviewer:** Okay. Uhm, can you elaborate a bit on your experiences of your spiritual identity development?
- II 4.8 **Mpho:** Okay, for me...with regard to spiritual identity, I started in 2012 being exposed to this kind of environment, and knowing how to make my decisions with regard to that. Err...I just, Okay...in my growing up I was going to church but then I did not understand that it has an impact or influence in your whole life as a person and with that spiritual identity, I feel like it's taking...it is what I am today because I am able to differentiate from my spirituality, from my spiritual identity to say you know what because of the relationship I have with God. I can sit down there and talk to him about anything. You know be open about it and I don't feel like it's more of a professional kind of a situation. But it's more of a personal kind of an identity. Like for example, you would find that, when you face struggles or you not able to cope, when you lack that support, you go back to your spirituality, you go back to your spiritual identity, you go back to your...you know...to speak to God and you relate to God in a manner that you can be comfortable in.
- II 4.9 **Interviewer:** Okay. You said that your journey started in 2012...
- II 4.10 **Mpho:** 2010.
- II 4.11 **Interviewer:** 2010.
- II 4.12 **Mpho:** Yes.
- II 4.13 **Interviewer:** So the next question is your views regarding this identity different from when you were adolescent?
- II 4.14 **Mpho:** I think my views were different. Though before being an adolescent it was like I didn't understand because I was just taking from parents what they say is wrong and what they say is right. When I started being an adolescent... Am I? Sorry, can you please repeat your question.
- II 4.15 **Interviewer:** uhm...How was it different from when you were an adolescent?
- II 4.16 **Mpho:** and now?
- II 4.17 **Interviewer:** Yes, and now.
- II 4.18 **Mpho:** Okay, yah. Like I was saying, when I was an adolescent, I did not really have that knowledge about it and I did not know how to define myself according to it, I did not know what it is actually. But then, now that I am in it. I feel like it's more or less like.... I am into it more than in the past and then...
- II 4.19 **Interviewer:** What do you mean when you say you are more into it?
- II 4.20 **Mpho:** Okay, for example, I would go to church most of the time, I would pray uhm every day and then uhm...you know uhm lead some home cells you know

share the word with other students and pray with them and then become part of all organisations whereby now, we are doing community work but then it sort of related or it's sort of under you know uhm a particular church whereby now we try to sort of help people with their spiritual development in a way. Because we cannot really neglect it when we talking about other life factors. So now it's more or less uhm...not more or less but I'm, I feel like I'm...I understand it more than before because going to church for me meant nothing. It was like oh going to church just to... just to pull up your conscience and now because it's something that you understand, you do it knowing that no man, it's not about the conscience but it's about you building yourself, it's about growing yourself and knowing who you are at the end

II 4.21 **Interviewer:** Okay. What is the essence of spiritual identity for you?

II 4.22 **Mpho:** Okay the essence of spiritual identity, It's...can I say as well, as well as what is the importance?

II 4.23 **Interviewer:** Or the core.

II 4.24 **Mpho:** Core. Okay.

II 4.25 **Interviewer:** Most important thing.

II 4.26 **Mpho:** Okay. Most.... Cos I heard you asking the question about religion and spirituality. I feel like the core for me about the spiritual identity is that relationship that you have with God.

II 4.27 **Interviewer:** Okay.

II 4.28 **Mpho:** Yes.

II 4.29 **Interviewer:** Thank you.

II 4.30 **Mpho:** Alright.

II 4.31 **Interviewer:** How do you think your spiritual identity informs other aspects of your view of self?

II 4.32 **Mpho:** Joeh... (Sighs) Okay. How do I think spiritual identity inform my other aspects of my life?

II 4.33 **Interviewer:** Of yourself.

II 4.34 **Mpho:** Of myself?

II 4.35 **Interviewer:** Other aspects of your identity in a sense.

II 4.36 **Mpho:** Okay, yah...for me, I...Okay. I grew up in a context where an education was not...I am diverging a lil bit. Education was not really regarded as...it is really important but because you know. You don't really have money to take the child to school so it's like aah. Will I go to school or not, doesn't really matter you will just find your own way...so for me seeing uhm education as important I feel like...I relate it mostly to spiritual identity to say that you know If I am spiritually grounded and I put God first then my education will also follow because it's not about me to say for everything...like for me to look at everything and to say where does it start, where has it started, I cannot just say...it's science, but there is a bigger God or power that created and started that thing. So, I am able to say that, uhm you know what spirituality or spiritual identity take the first priority in my life before it can come to other areas of my life so I think it's like spiritual identity and maybe my social life, my educational life, my family life comes after. So it's kinda related in a way. I am not sure if I am answering the question but...

II 4.37 **Interviewer:** Are you saying that it's not separate from all of the other things?

II 4.38 **Mpho:** Yes.

II 4.39 **Interviewer:** Okay, that answers the question perfectly. The second question is how do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?

- II 4.40 **Mpho:** How do I make meaning (clears throat) from challenging life experiences? Okay. Uhm... when I encounter challenges normally I don't...I see them as challenges. They hurt sometimes, and sometimes, I tell myself that you need to be strong. But then when I try to make meaning out of it, I am like you know what because I have a relationship with God, I always go back to God, pray about it and say God I am experiencing pressure at school and it's a challenge for me and it's a challenge in my spirituality because sometimes, when you go through challenges, you sort of wanna neglect your spiritual life. You wanna neglect your relationship with God. You know I am like you know what Uhm life is, there way I make meaning and be to accept the situation and to move on and to just know that it doesn't really end there, you know, it's there to just build you up, be a better person; and you know to make you strong, to be able to help others and yah...
- II 4.41 **Interviewer:** okay. Can you elaborate on a specific situation when you...eish sorry. Can you elaborate on the recent life event that you found challenging?
- II 4.42 **Mpho:** Okay, recent life event...Okay, uhm. This year, I struggled with, you know, okay when I completed my undergrad last year. There was no funding at home and I did not know how I am gonna come here to sort of continue with my studies. And I was like, you know with a degree, I am not really satisfied and I feel like you know er, because of the lack of support that you get from home, it sort of tried to take me down, to discourage you. But I told myself that whether they will support me or not, I am gonna go to school and I applied to universities and then they took me here. And then you know what I said because I don't have money for funding let me just go to school, register. I went to my savings and took the money and then for transport and accommodation. I came to this university to register because it was...I did not know about this free registration but then there is a clause uhm for that. I was able to register, after registering then and then I stopped, I was like God I don't have money for food, I don't have money for books, I don't have money for accommodation, I don't have money for anything. So when I called back home, it's a life challenge neh...when I call back home and I say that...I am struggling here and they like, we told you to go look for a job. We told you that do not go to school and you know find the job. But I was like No; I can't just find a job because I don't feel ready for the workplace. It came back to...I almost gave up after NSFAS sent me sms to say you know what our funds have been depleted. And I was like huuu...I am not. I don't even know what to do, where to look and I kept on praying and asking my friends from...uhm church back at home to pray with me and then I went to church and just poured my heart there and it was really. I was crying almost every day. It happened that we are attending, we are doing the, we are writing tests. When we were writing tests, I don't have anywhere to sleep and ask friends, can I crash at your place? And then I did not want to tell them the situation because I did not want to feel like I'm eating on them or depending on them. And then sharp, I go to the friend's place and I crash there and the next morning I come to school. I try to write and I fail some test and some test I pass because I had text books from last year. The ones I did not have text books for I was like for now, I am gonna go to the library. If it cost me to sleep at the library, then I will do that. Then I was like, let me just go to the library and get those books. Study for the test because we are writing and then, I went to the library, got the textbooks, study, study, studied. After studying when it's time now to. I am tired; I did not know where to go and what to do. Then I went back to my friend's place and I am like...can I please sleep for the last time again. Then I crashed at the friend's place and I was like God how am...what am I gonna do. Can I just

deregister and then go back and look for a job and then and then when I call family members, they were not able to help and when I call friends, they would really be there for me and they weren't there for me and I was like you know what this is life. There is nothing I can do or just push and see what will come out. And then I decided to go to the postgraduate centre. I did not know about it. When I got there, the head of the finance or that bursary schemes was willing to help me and I was like you know what. Give me your academic record and I ran to the academic record, When I was on the queue to print out my academic record. That's when I got a call to say you know what, can we please speak to Mpho and I was like "yes that's me". And they said, you have received the bursary from JB Marks education trust fund. And we will fund your school fees, your tuition fees, accommodation, books and meals. So quickly run and look for accommodation. And then immediately, I left the line. I went to...they even sent me to campus key, they were like you know what go to campus key, look for a place there. I didn't find a place at campus key. And I am like, I am stuck again. Then I went to KPA, didn't get it. To cut the story short, I finally got accommodation at Unilofts. And then everything was fine and then I was like. I had to push them again and say I need books ASAP because I am writing in between and the tests are just around the corner. And they provided for everything and I was just grateful saying like you know what, out of this I felt like with God by my side, I was able to pull through because most people couldn't. Like no one. Everyone has their own problems but you cannot read on my forehead to say this one is going through, this one has got a problem. I was coming here in the morning every day, sitting like everyone, trying to listen but sometimes you don't concentrate when you are thinking of what is your next move gonna be. You understand. But with that I felt like. Yah that's how God has been there for me, that's why I feel like spirituality for me is important because without God I wouldn't have been here and I would maybe have been sitting at home, struggling to even get a job. You understand so yah.

II 4.43 **Interviewer:** And this difficult experience that you just spoke about this, it sounded like really...how long was this whole experience for...How long did you struggle for?

II 4.44 **Mpho:** It's started January up until February.

II 4.45 **Interviewer:** It was long time.

II 4.46 **Mpho:** No this year, January until February.

II 4.47 **Interviewer:** Month of struggle. So how did you make meaning of this experience?

II 4.48 **Mpho:** okay, I said okay with this experience. I said to myself everything is possible. I said you know if you want something, go for something that you want. You cannot just sit there and wait for somebody to pity you and sympathise with you. Ag shame...No, I thought like, I don't want that and I need that in my life. That's why I was keeping it sort of a secret to most people so that I cannot feel like I am a vulnerable person or I want them to feel pity for me. I felt like it made me strong today, being able to stand to say, you know if I see someone struggling and it gave me to say you know what, when I work one day I also wanna find that one person whom I can make a difference in their lives. Who struggling. I struggled. I did struggle and help them.

II 4.49 **Interviewer:** Okay and uhm...how do you think your spiritual identity change your perspective regarding this event.

II 4.50 **Mpho:** Okay. My spiritual identity was uhm...I am not sure if I get it because it didn't really change my perspective. Okay...it really did. Okay, how did it change my perspective is that – how you look at life- you know I felt like you know

however your background is, where you come from, that how you grow up being and we tend to blame our parents. We tend to blame things that happened way back, which is wrong for me to blame that because I might be born in poverty but it will be my uhm... problem to grow up and die in poverty. And I felt like with this spirituality I find peace, I find hope; I find...I am able to be resilient. I am able to you know have that self-confidence and self-esteem even when things are not working out the way I want them to work. I would be like you know what “everything works together for good to those who love the Lord”. I feel like uhm...yah. In everything God is there, he is aware, that is why he will always come through, and he will always help me. Yes.

II 4.51 **Interviewer:** the third question is how do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?

II 4.52 **Mpho:** (sighs) on the...I was like for some reason because I feel like what God has done for me is really huge. What God is doing for me is still huge. I feel like I will tend to..., not really pressurise or force people to believe in God or to be born again. But somewhere somehow I will, I feel like I will influence them in my own spiritual values to say you know what, with God you can be anything you want to be and with God you can just gain that strength to...just fly wherever you wanna go. so I feel like I am gonna pressure...I might put people under pressure to say you know what, it's...yes...I am not really forgetting that as a person you also have to be more uhm...aware of yourself, aware of your abilities, aware of what you can do and all of that. But I will be more of a...I don't know maybe I will be more spiritual if I can put It that way. Yah.

II 4.53 **Interviewer:** Can you elaborate on the specifically situation which might be difficult for you when you work with individuals who have different belief systems than you have.

II 4.54 **Mpho:** Any situation, uhm...if I work with someone who is not of my religion if I may put it that way. I will struggle to understand their point of view because in our...normally in our churches, jah –churches-, they normally teach us that we have to go evangelise to the people, make people accept Jesus not really force them but you know spread this gospel of Jesus Christ so that people can come to the kingdom of God and all that you know. So I feel like if for example I am sitting with. I am evangelising to a Muslim and tell them about Jesus, saying that he is the son of God but he is also God. They wouldn't understand, it will be like now I will force you. Jesus was not one of the prophets, he was God himself. You understand. I will want them to sort of convert to my religion so it will be like a difficult situation to sit in with people that I differ with them in terms of religion and spirituality.

II 4.55 **Interviewer:** Okay. How do you think this spiritual identity will inform your approach to your client?

II 4.56 **Mpho:** Uhm...can you please expand a lil bit on that question?

II 4.57 **Interviewer:** Uhm...when you interact with your clients, how do you think your spiritual identity, who you are spiritually will influence how you will approach that client. How you will treat them. How you will make sense of their experiences and basically your whole approach toward your client. How will your spiritual identity inform that?

II 4.58 **Mpho:** Okay, How I will approach the client with my spiritual identity would be. Okay first and foremost, I believe in God.

II 4.59 **Interviewer:** Sorry believe in...

II 4.60 **Mpho:** God. I believe in prayer and I believe in God. So I will always wanna, not really tell the client that I am born again unless it is important for me to tell them.

- But then the approach will be sort of diverted a lil bit to Christianity because it about, you know trying to be good, uhm...trying to help others, be empathetic, be compassionate and all that. So I thought like my approach will not, okay yes...it might be person centered but in that person centered kind of a situation, I will also dive in my values, which is wrong and I am not sure how to work around that.
- II 4.61 **Interviewer:** So you still a lil bit unsure of how that will be one day.
- II 4.62 **Mpho:** Yes.
- II 4.63 **Interviewer:** Okay and how do you think your spiritual identity will help you make meaning of your client's experiences?
- II 4.64 **Mpho:** My spiritual identity will just uhm...be as a tool or as a direction to say you know what my client is going through this situation and I would like to help this client, be in their shoes. So I am gonna pray about their situation, I am gonna pray about them, I am gonna pray about myself to be able to you know help them like help them freely. Help them win, help them in a way that at the end of the day, at the end of it all, they feel so helped and not put under pressure and not imposing or they don't feel like I am imposing uhm my views and values about religion and spirituality onto them. So I will just really see how their...uhm you know like when they...(struggle to find words) the challenges they have experienced, I can just relate to what I have went through because you know I have went through a lot as a child and adolescent, so I will just I don't know...I will just...always pray about it and always do my best to read enough information about how to help the person and the approach I am gonna use with regard to therapy and all that.
- II 4.65 **Interviewer:** Okay. The last question is do you think your spirituality has changed since starting your postgraduate studies?
- II 4.66 **Mpho:** It hasn't really changed because when I started being in this world of knowing who I am spiritually, I have been like that even now. I am still praying, I am still seeing myself as the child of God, I still see myself as...I am still defining myself the way I used to define myself way back you know when I was born again and came into this world.
- II 4.67 **Interviewer:** How do you experience your classmates? Do you think they have similar or different belief systems than you?
- II 4.68 **Mpho:** Okay I learnt that we are different and then we have different views about everything so I know and I see that we all have different belief system but am I answering the question?
- II 4.69 **Interviewer:** Not yet. But uhm do you think that, how do you experience them?
- II 4.70 **Mpho:** Okay.
- II 4.71 **Interviewer:** You said that all are different but how are they different?
- II 4.72 **Mpho:** Okay the thing is you know uhm I chose to be a Christian and I feel like everybody has their own.... that autonomy to choose what they wanna be who they wanna be in terms of spirituality. So I respect that, I respect that we have different views. We have different values, we are different. I just and even more I ask to say oh tell me more about yourself with regard to your spirituality or yourself as a person and that open my eyes to say that you know what do not impose who you are to other people because I felt like with... personally the religion. Maybe I am misinterpreting it. But....
- II 4.73 **Interviewer:** There is no right or wrong answer.
- II 4.74 **Mpho:** But I feel like the churches are teaching us to think that, not putting other religion but we are more important and we have to dominate the world. We have to infiltrate other religious, religions and all that. And I don't feel like that is the right way to do it because God created all of us and all of us have their own choices.

- We can't say okay because this one is in a dominant religion has to influence the smaller one. No we are all different, so I feel like in class we are all different and we will always be different.
- II 4.75 **Interviewer:** Can you think of a specific situation during your study so far which made you think critically about your belief systems.
- II 4.76 **Mpho:** Specific situations?
- II 4.77 **Interviewer:** In this year so far yes.
- II 4.78 **Mpho:** That made me thinks critically about my spirituality?
- II 4.79 **Interviewer:** Yah about your belief systems.
- II 4.80 **Mpho:** (Sighs) not that I can think of anything now.
- II 4.81 **Interviewer:** That's okay. If you think of something we can come back to it.
- II 4.82 **Interviewer:** How do you make meaning when confronted with diverse or contrasting beliefs in class?
- II 4.83 **Mpho:** How do I make meaning...Can you please expand more a lil bit.
- II 4.84 **Interviewer:** When you are in class and you confronted with something, someone that believes something completely different than you or something that seems completely actually far-fetched to you. How do you make meaning of that person's beliefs or systems of beliefs?
- II 4.85 **Mpho:** Okay, I can start by looking at their cultural background and try to think, okay why did that person choose to be this person and how did they come about it. Because I feel like we make meaning according to situations that we come across in life like uhm...if you grow up in a community of Christians, obviously or most likely your family is Christian you will most definitely or likely be a Christian in most situations. So I feel like making meaning out of that diverse spirituality and religion and all that, it's not gonna be for me, it's not for me to judge but you know to accept and make peace to say you know what rather learn about their religion, cultures so that we can be able to accommodate each other in class, at school and everywhere. You understand, because I feel like...I'm sorry, I feel like...yah we mustn't take other people's sense of autonomy or belonging or feeling comfortable away and think that who you are in terms of your religion is important than others.
- II 4.86 **Interviewer:** Okay, That's all the questions. Do you want me to repeat the previous question?
- II 4.87 **Mpho:** okay, please.
- II 4.88 **Interviewer:** Can you think of a specific situation in your postgraduate so far that made you think critically about your beliefs systems.
- II 4.89 **Mpho:** Yes yes yes. When we were talking in class about our cultures, I feel like the way it is spoken of today especially in the psychology modules area really important because when you are gonna see a client even when you talk to someone you have to really know that your culture and their culture might be different. So it showed me that uhm...I have my own religion. I have my special identity. Others as well have their own. So respect that. so the one specific situation is when we were talking as individuals, we discover that you are different from me but we are doing the same thing or yes we might be different but one person we believe in is God. We might be doing other aspects of religion, it's okay, it's okay, you know. Do you and I will do me? You understand. It's not...it changed how...before I used to think that everything is sort of...uhm...Everything is sort of surrounded by the Christian life, something like that. But now I think that no aaaah things are different, people are different. So you have to accept and allow people to live their lives freely and you yourself as well live your life the way you want to be happy

out of it because every day you will try to please people whether in religion or wherever, you end up being miserable.

II 4.90 **Interviewer:** Okay, That's all of the questions, do you have anything to add.

II 4.91 **Mpho:** No no no. No. I think. I am good.

II 4.92 **Interviewer:** Thank you very much.

Pseudonym: Leana (Age 21)

Reflective Writing Exercise

- RW 5.1 **Question:** How do you describe and understand Spiritual identity?
- RW 5.2 **Leana:** Ek verstaan spirituele identiteit as 'n manier waarop jy kies om sin te maak van die wêreld rondom jou, hoe jy glo alles het tot bestand gekom, waarheen jy draai in moeilike tye, dit wat jou hoop gee en kalm maak. Dis ingeweef in jou eie identiteit omdat dit deel vorm van jouself en ook hoe jy sekere situasies gaan hanteer.
- RW 5.3 **Question:** How do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?
- RW 5.4 **Leana:** Ek is 'n Christen, so ek sal sê skep betekenis deur moeilike ervarings in my lewe deur te glo dat die Here 'n groter plan het as wat ek vir myself in gedagte het en vertrou op Hom dat ek daarby sal uitkom al werk alles nie uit soos ek dit dalk sou wou hê nie.
- RW 5.5 **Question:** How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?
- RW 5.6 **Leana:** Ek dink dit help mens hoofsaaklik om te cope met die stres en uitdagings wat sielkunde inhou, aangesien dit emosioneel baie aan mens vat, veral wanneer jy nie seker is hoe om 'n bepaalde individu te help met 'n sekere probleem nie. Dit maak die emosionele en sielkundige uitdagings minder oorweldigend en ek dink dit help mens ook om te onthou om ander se belange bo jou eie te sit en vir jou naaste om te gee en soveel as moontlik te help en te ondersteun.
- RW 5.7 **Question:** Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?
- RW 5.8 **Leana:** Nee, ek dink wel my spiritualiteit is uitgedaag, aangesien dit 'n ongelooflike stresvolle jaar was vir my, en sover die mees uitdagendste – i.v.m. akademie, ek het ook baie gebed oor die meesters-keuring, en ek het uitgeval voordat die onderhoude nog plaasgevind het, maar ek het besluit dat ek die Here gevra het om my te plaas waar ek behoort te wees so ek moet nou net vertrou dat dit nie as 'n sielkundige is nie, en dat Hy 'n groter plan vir my het. Ek het nog nooit ophou glo of oorweeg om 'n ander geloof te volg of op 'n ander manier spiritueel te wees nie.

Individual Interview

- II 5.1 **Interviewer:** Ek dink dit werk nou, laat ek net sommer op my foon ook 'n ekstra recording maak vir as dit nie werk nie...
- II 5.2 **Interviewer:** Goed, hoe oud is jy nou?
- II 5.3 **Leana:** 22
- II 5.4 **Interviewer:** 22, so jy is nou in Honneurs jaar?
- II 5.5 **Leana:** Ja
- II 5.6 **Interviewer:** Okay, so die onderhoud, soos ek gesê het gaan oor spirituele identiteit, so kan jy vir my verduidelik net hoe jou eie, uhm, ondervindings van spirituele identiteitsontwikkeling vir my vertel?
- II 5.7 **Leana:** Okay, uhm, soos hoe ek dit...
- II 5.8 **Interviewer:** Ja, net soos hoe jy dit verstaan, hoe jy dit ervaar, is dit vir jou belangrik...
- II 5.9 **Leana:** Okay, uhm dit is mos maar deel soos van Christenskap en... is dit soos dit?
- II 5.10 **Interviewer:** Dit is nie Christenskap nie, Christenskap kan dit "inform", maar dit is meer, dit gaan baie oor hoe jy betekenis in die lewe maak en hoe jy sin maak van die lewe as gevolg van jou geloofstelsel, maar dit gaan nie oor Christenskap nie, dit gaan oor hoe jy die "connection" maak. Ja...

- II 5.11 **Leana:** Okay, uhhh... weet nie ek sal sê ek vind betekenis in die lewe deur mense, veral soos verskillende mense, my familie... uhm en ek voel ook soos dat nie... ahm, soos dat nie heeltemal Christenskap nie, maar soos 'n persoonlike verhouding met God meer is vir my hoe ek betekenis maak deur... Veral in moeilike tye in my lewe, soos nou met die meesterskeuring en al daardie goed, dit het my uhm nogals baie gehelp om te dink daar is 'n plan en mens kom eventually uit waar mens moet uitkom al is dit nie altyd soos wat jy dit wou gehad het nie, maar... en ja.
- II 5.12 **Interviewer:** Okay, en dink jy dis anders as wat dit was as toe jy 'n tiener was, het dit verander intussen 'n bietjie, het jy meer gegroei, het jy van jou ouers verskil, of was alles nog net altyd “set in stone” vir jou?
- II 5.13 **Leana:** Ahm, die spirituele deel was maar nog altyd vir my min of meer dieselfde, maar natuurlik soos toe mens 'n tiener was, het jy mos nou maar ander sienings as jou ouers en jy kan nie verstaan hoekom hulle nou sê so en so nie... maar...
- II 5.14 **Interviewer:** Kan jy uitbrei op daardie sienings wat jou ouers gehad het of dit wat jy met hulle gedeel het nie?
- II 5.15 **Leana:** Ahm, soos my pa is baie meer konserwatief en my ma is baie liberaal. So dit was altyd vir my half... my ma sê dis oraait om iets te doen, want sy voel jy moet goed doen om te kan groei, waar my pa was altyd meer gewees van “jy kan dit en dit en dit oorkom as jy dit en dit en dit gaan doen” so dan het dit altyd gevoel hulle soos probeer my terughou om nou nie goed te gaan... Maar soos ek nou ouer word besef ek dis net omdat hulle vir jou omgee, en dat jy nie noodwendig reg was vir alles wat jy wou gedoen het op daardie tyd nie. Soos uhm... mens kon... ek weet nie... groepsdruk veral, ek was nie eintlik iemand wat onder dit geval het nie ek was meer iemand wel iemand wat dit sou “initiate” het dalk (lag), op skool gewees so dit was nooit dat my ouers bang was as ek dalk saam my vriende êrens heen gaan dat ek nou goed verkeerd gaan doen nie, dit was net hulle het geweet... en ek is baie impulsief so... ek dink dit het maar ook 'n rol gespeel. Maar soos wat ek ouer geword het en goeters het ek besef dit was glad nie om my weg te hou of weg te hou van goed af nie, dit was dalk net omdat ek dalk nog te jonk was vir alles wat ek wou doen daardie tyd.
- II 5.16 **Interviewer:** So jou ouers het nogal 'n groot rol gespeel in jou identiteit op daardie stadium?
- II 5.17 **Leana:** Ja en ek is die enigste kind ook so ja...
- II 5.18 **Interviewer:** Okay, okay... so wat sal jy sê is die ‘essence’ van spirituele identiteit vir jou? Die belangrikste, die ‘core’ daarvan?
- II 5.19 **Leana:** Ek is nie heeltemal seker presies wat spirituele identiteit is nie, ek het gedink dit gaan oor Christenskap, soos jou geloof ens.
- II 5.20 **Interviewer:** Dit gaan, dit kan deel wees daarvan, die verskil tussen spirituele identiteit en geloof is basies die aspek van hoe dit jou... geloof kan mense doen sonder om spiritueel te wees, dit het te doen met ‘doctrines’ en al daardie tipe goed, spiritualiteit is 'n baie persoonlike ding, dit gaan oor hoe jy persoonlik ‘meaning’ maak, so dit gaan nie oor die geloof self nie, dit gaan oor hoe jy meaning maak in die lewe as gevolg van wat jy glo, verstaan jy nou meer?
- II 5.21 **Leana:** Ja, okay ek sal sê dan die ‘essence’ daarvan vir my is ek het baie vroeg geleer om nie mense te ‘judge’ nie, want dit... almal het hulle rede hoekom hulle is soos wat hulle is so ek het nooit gedink as iemand dit doen is dit om oh okay, hulle doen dit want dit en dit is so of wat ook al nie, en ook om ondersteuning te kry by jou familie en vriende is vir my 'n groot deel want ek voel... geen mens is gemaak om alleen te “cope” met enige iets nie. En ahm, ja...

- II 5.22 **Interviewer:** Hoe dink jy ‘inform’ jou spirituele identiteit ander dele van hoe jy jouself sien?
- II 5.23 **Leana:** Mmm... mens moet seker maar leer om nie jouself ook te hard te judge oor enige iets wat jy doen, of as jy nie uitkom waar jy wil uitkom nie moet jy nie dink dis omdat ek nie dit gedoen het, of dit moes reg gedoen het, mens moet maar net aanvaar dat die lewe het maar sy eie pad wat hy met jou stap.
- II 5.24 **Interviewer:** Okay, so sal jy sê dat dit ‘inform’ jou wie jy is, sal jy sê dis so groot deel van jou identiteit?
- II 5.25 **Leana:** Ja, ek dink so...
- II 5.26 **Interviewer:** Okay, so die volgende vraag is hoe maak jy sin van moeilike tye in jou lewe, dit was ook op die exercises, so jy kan maar net verder uitbrei op daardie vraag.
- II 5.27 **Leana:** Okay...
- II 5.28 **Interviewer:** So, kan jy net weer vir ons recap’ hoe jy sin maak daarvan, van... meaning maak van moeilike tye, jy het nou veral gepraat oor die meesterskeuring...
- II 5.29 **Leana:** Ja, uhm die meesterskeuring veral was vir my erg gewees want ek het, van skool af het ek nog nooit regtig 'n plan B gehad nie, dis altyd wat ek nog wou doen, en ek weet nie, my ma het ook altyd soos een van haar grootste sê-goeters wat sy my altyd geleer het, was ‘life goes on’... so dit help nie mens gaan sit in 'n houpie en kry jouself jammer omdat jy nou nie gekry het wat jy wou gehad het nie, so toe het ek maar begin dink aan ander maniere om dieselfde passie uit te leef, om dalk volgende jaar op 'n manier uit te kom by remediërende onderwys. Sodat mens steeds daardie selfde passie wat jy het vir sielkunde deur dit kan uitleef. So ek weetie soos daai ‘saying’ van jy moet blom waar jy geplant is, ek dink dis nogal 'n groot deel, mens moet... mee vrede maak.
- II 5.30 **Interviewer:** So jy gebruik dit om betekenis te maak van moeilike tye, daai half soos jou innerlike spraak as ek jou nou reg verstaan?
- II 5.31 **Leana:** Ja.
- II 5.32 **Interviewer:** Okay, so jy sê die “recent life” event was nou die meesterskeuring, en jy het betekenis daaruit gekry deur 'n plan B amper te ontwikkel... het jy enigsins deur jou spiritualiteit probeer sin maak daarvan, van daai gebeurtenis?
- II 5.33 **Leana:** Ek het maar net geglo dat al het ek nie nou die kort-termyn doelwit dan half bereik nie, wat ek wou bereik het nie dat daar nog steeds 'n groter plan is en dat ek nog steeds, wat, waar ook al ek op eindig sal dit nog steeds betekenisvol wees en ek sal nog steeds soos half waarde daarin vind al is dit nie spesifiek presies dit wat ek wou gedoen het nie.
- II 5.34 **Interviewer:** Okay...
- II 5.35 **Leana:** Die grootste ding was vir my maar gewees om mense te... ek hou daarvan om mense te ondersteun en te probeer verstaan en hulle te laat voel dat, al is almal half teen hulle is daar nog steeds 'n plek waarheen hulle kan gaan en met mens praat waar hulle nie ‘gejudge’ gaan word nie. Dis vir my 'n baie groot ding – die ‘judge’ goeters, so... ahm en ek het agtergekom soos nou met die perdry ook, ek weet nie ek hou daarvan om, ek hou meer daarvan om te gee as om te kry, ek voel dit help met spiritualiteit deel dalk ook want dit... soos voel vir my as jy regtig, as dit regtig sleg gaan met jou en jy reik half uit om ander mense te help dan doen dit baie vir jouself ook so ahm... toe het ek gedink soos met die onderwys, die remediërende onderwys, jy kan nog steeds daardie passie, veral vir kinders uitleef en hulle help waar ander mense dalk nie noodwendig hulle probleem sou verstaan nie.

- II 5.36 **Interviewer:** Okay, dis “great” dat jy dit so kon gesien het. Ek weet dis 'n baie moeilike ding, die meesterskeuring, dis nie baie lekker nie. Okay, uhm hoe dink jy jou spiritualiteit, soos wat jy nou vir my verduidelik het jy is 'n Christen, jy is baie erg oor “judging” en jy dink dis die “essence” daarvan van spiritualiteit is om nie mense te judge nie, hoe dink jy sal dit jou werk as 'n sielkundige beïnvloed eendag... of as 'n remediërende onderwyser of wat ook al jy op jou pad nou gaan doen?
- II 5.37 **Leana:** Ahm... ek dink dit help... byvoorbeeld soos nou as jy kyk na die remediërende onderrig, baie van daardie kinders voel half klaar, okay dis nie dat hulle minder intelligent is nie hulle sukkel net om te leer, so as jy hulle net help om te leer, want ek dink baie ander mense kyk neer op hulle en dan dink hulle dadelik okay ja dis omdat hy/sy nie intelligent is nie terwyl dit eintlik net 'n leerprobleem is, so ek dink dit kan help deur om hulle te wys dat as jy net aan een klein dingetjie werk kan dit 'n groot verskil maak.
- II 5.38 **Interviewer:** Ja...
- II 5.39 **Leana:** Ja... is daar nog? moet ek meer... ?
- II 5.40 **Interviewer:** Ja, praat nog.
- II 5.41 **Leana:** Ahm, en ek dink ook veral omdat dit 'n emosionele impak op jou gaan hê, as jy nie altyd die resultaat kry wat jy kan kry, byvoorbeeld veral as jy baie hard probeer om hierdie een te help en dit werk nie altyd soos wat jy wil hê dit moet nie, dan dink ek jou spiritualiteit of jou geloof, wat ook al, kan jou help om dit beter te verstaan, om nie so hard op jouself te wees nie en te weet dat alles vat tyd en dis nie noodwendig jou skuld of daai persoon se skuld nie, dis maar net, mens moet maar net aanhou om daaraan te werk.
- II 5.42 **Interviewer:** So dit kan mens half amper sagter maak op jouself, minder “harsh approach tot life”, okay... en hoe dink jy gaan dit jou “approach” tot jou kliënte verander?
- II 5.43 **Leana:** Uhm, Wel, ek dink soos veral die dat jy hulle nie gaan “judge” nie dat hulle gemaklik voel om hulself met jou te wees, of dat hulle weet dis okay om te sukkel, dis hoekom hulle hier is en dis hoekom jy hulle help. En ek dink ook jy kan ander mense ook half motiveer daardeur om te wys dat ek het ook al deur hierdie goed in my lewe gegaan en ek het daardeur gekom so jy kan ook deur dit wat vir jou moeilik is in jou lewe ook kom en ook daardeur gaan. En ek dink dan net soos uhm... ook net jou spiritualiteit help jouself net om met jou eie goed ook maar met ander mense rondom jou se goed ook te “cope”, want ek voel as jyself nie op 'n goeie plek in jou lewe is nie dan kan jy nie ander mense help nie, ek dink mens moet eers seker maak dat jy op 'n goeie plek is.
- II 5.44 **Interviewer:** Dis waar ja. Okay, is daar enige iets anders wat jy dink hoe jou spirituele identiteit die uhm, jou “approach” tot kliente sal beïnvloed?
- II 5.45 **Leana:** Mmm (long pause) my brein is nou net soos toe...
- II 5.46 **Interviewer:** Dis okay jy kan jou tyd vat om te dink, dit is moeilike vrae en dis nogal filosofies ook.
- II 5.47 **Leana:** Ahm... (long pause) ... nie wat ek nou aan kan dink nie...
- II 5.48 **Interviewer:** Okay, en laaste vraag, oor hoe dit jou werk as 'n sielkundige sal beïnvloed, is ahm, hoe dink jy sal jou spirituele identiteit jou help om sin te maak van jou kliënte se ervarings?
- II 5.49 **Leana:** Ek dink ahm... soos veral omdat jy half daai “approach” inneem van jy judge nie mense nie en... ek voel as hulle gemaklik is om alles oop en eerlik met jou te praat dan wys jy vir hulle dat jy bereid is om hulle te verstaan sonder om te sê “dis omdat jy dit verkeerd doen of dat verkeerd doen” dan vat jy half 'n

- gemaklike posisie in wat hulle ook weer gemaklik laat voel en ek dink dis half... dis vir my baie belangrik want as mens by enige plek kom en jy voel dadelik almal “judge” jou en hulle... soos voordat hulle nog “even” met jou praat, dan voel mens half nou hoekom moet ek nou die moeite doen om enige iets te sê of jou te leer ken of wat ook al. Soos die, dis hoekom geloof en spiritualiteit vir my ook, soos ek het, ek voel dit is meer ’n persoonlike verhouding met die Here wat jy moet, soos in my geval nou, want veral in soos, ek voel in kerke veral word daar verskriklik baie mense... gejudge.
- II 5.50 **Interviewer:** Dis die geloof, reg
- II 5.51 **Leana:** Ja
- II 5.52 **Interviewer:** Ja, so dit is nie spiritualiteit nie
- II 5.53 **Leana:** Ja, so ek voel dit gaan meer oor die persoonlike verhouding wat jy het en dan, dit maak dat jy ’n beter mens wil wees en mense wil help en hulle ook op die ou einde te kry dat hulle soos die beste “version” van hulle self kan wees.
- II 5.54 **Interviewer:** Ok
- II 5.55 **Leana:** Ek weet nie, dit is vir my ’n baie belangrike deel van my lewe om almal so vêr te help, net dat hulle die beste “versions” van hulle self kan wees.
- II 5.56 **Interviewer:** OK, en jou spirituele identiteit inform jou oom soos dit te wees?
- II 5.57 **Leana:** Ja
- II 5.58 **Interviewer:** Dit is, dit is nie goed wat jy by jou ouers geleer het?
- II 5.59 **Leana:** Nee... uhm... Ek dink, ek dink ek sal sê my ouers het meer vir my die voorbeeld gestel met dit, want hulle het nog altyd, soos toe ons nog kleiner was ook, al my vriende het altyd na my huis toe gekom omdat hulle daar gevoel het ... hulle kan praat oor alles...
- II 5.60 **Interviewer:** Ok
- II 5.61 **Leana:** Soos my ma was later die een waarmee hulle gaan praat het eerder as wat hulle met hul eie ma’s gaan praat het en ek weet nie dit het my half baie ... ek dink in daai sin gevorm, want ek wil ook eerder soos ’n oop persoon wees waarnatoe mense kan kom as om toe te wees en mense te laat voel ek is beter as hulle ... of soos sulke goed.
- II 5.62 **Interviewer:** Ok, dit is ’n baie mooi uitkyk om te hê in die lewe. Ok, die laaste vraag is – ek wil net gou-gou weer vertaal... (lag) Dink jy jou spiritualiteit het bietjie verander met jou nagraadse studies? Met jou honneurs graad?
- II 5.63 **Nadia:** Ek dink dit het, want, ek dink nie soos terwyl mens besig is met voorgraads besef jy dat nagraads soveel anders is.
- II 5.64 **Interviewer:** Ja, dit is né?
- (Lag in die agtergrond)
- II 5.65 **Nadia:** So ek het ehm, ek was altyd ... voor hierdie jaar was ek redelik hard op myself. Soos ek het die heeltyd geleer, ek het die heeltyd opgesom. Ek het soos weke voor die tyd begin. Waar hierdie jaar het ek half besef mens moet, jy moet maar doen waarvoor jy tyd het in die tyd wat jy het om dit doen en jy kan nie daarna terug kyk en sê, okay ja maar jy moes dit en dit beter en dit beter gedoen het nie sou jy miskien beter gedoen het in die toets of miskien sou jy dan keuring gekry het, want dan dink ek sit jy jouself op ’n moeilike plek.
- II 5.66 **Interviewer:** Okay, en hoe ervaar jy jou klas maats? Dink jy hulle het ’n dieselfde of ander geloofstelsels as jy?
- II 5.67 **Nadia:** ehm, in die vriende groep waarin ek is ... weet ek daar... soos twee wat in my vriende groep is, het ’n helemal ander uitkyk daarop. My een vriendin is glad nie gelowig nie. Sy glo glad nie daarin nie en ek kan sien dat sy... sy is ook verskriklik baie hard op haarself en sy kan half soos hierdie wat ek vir haar sê van

- jy het gedoen wat jy moes doen, dit help nie jy karring jouself heelyd jouself daaroor nie... sy bly half daar, sy kom nie oor dit nie, maar sy is deur na die meestersonderhoude toe, maar sy was nie eers bly daaroor nie, want dit was vir haar die volgende “obstacle” gewees en ek het vir haar gesê dit is nie ’n “obstacle” nie dit is ’n baie groot geleentheid wat baie min mense kry. So ek dink half soos jou spiritualiteit maak ook of jy positief of negatief is oor sekere goeters waar ... ek was ook op ’n stadium meer negatief en bang vir alles, maar veral soos met nagraads ... jy kan nie bang wees vir alles nie, want dan gaan jy net niks doen nie.
- II 5.68 **Interviewer:** mmmm, ja dit is hoe ek dink. En as jou vriende so anders dink as jy en redeneer as jy, wat doen dit aan jou eie spiritualiteit?
- II 5.69 **Leana:** ehm, ek dink, soos veral soos op skool omdat ek nie half geneig was om onder groepsdruk en goed te val nie ... ek is ’n mens wat by my beginsels en standpunt bly. So ek gee glad nie om as hulle met my daaroor praat nie en ek luister hulle opinies uit, omdat dit is vir my baie interessant hoe hulle goed sien, maar ek dink nie dit beïnvloed hoe ek spiritueel voel ... of my spirituele uitkyk op die lewe.
- II 5.70 **Interviewer:** Ok, is dit vir jou moeilik as hulle oor sulke goed praat? Of geniet jy dit en is dit regtig vir jou interessant?
- II 5.71 **Leana:** Ja, dit is vir my regtig interessant.
- II 5.72 **Interviewer:** So dit pla jou glad nie as mense and gelowe of “belief systems” as jy het?
- II 5.73 **Leana:** Nee, glad nie. Ek voel net soos wat ek respek moet hê... soos hulle respek moet hê vir my spiritualiteit en geloof moet ek vir hulle ook hê.
- II 5.74 **Interviewer:** Ok, en kan jy aan ’n spesifieke situasie dink gedurende jou honneurs studies sover wat jou laat krities dink het oor jou geloofstelsel? Enige situasie waaraan jy kan dink.
- II 5.75 **Leana:** ehm... kan negatief of positief wees?
- II 5.76 **Interviewer:** Ja
- II 5.77 **Leana:** Ok, ek het soos voor die meesterskeuring ... het ek baie daarvoor gebid en gesê dat as ek nie in kom vir dit nie ... dat... dit klink nou simpel as ek dit hard sê... soos as ek nie op die ou einde gaan in kom vir dit dan wil ek nou al uitval. Ek wil nie deurgaans onderhoude toe en dan uitval... dat jy half daai hoop kry...
- II 5.78 **Interviewer:** Ja
- II 5.79 **Leana:** En as dit nie vir my bedoel is nie... as daar vir my ’n ander doel is waar ek moet opeindig sal ek dit verstaan en toe dit “actually” gebeur dat dit nie daar is nie... is dit half moeiliker om dit nou... soos jy gesê het... as dit nie my plan is nie sal ek dit verstaan en toe ek nou daar kom... dit maak dit moeiliker. Veral toe ons nou gaan uitvind het oor die NGOS, nou die week êrens...
- II 5.80 **Interviewer:** Die ekskuus?
- II 5.81 **Leana:** Die nagraadse onderwys...
- II 5.82 **Interviewer:** O ja, ja.
- II 5.83 **Leana:** Dit was altyd so gewees dat jy ehm... as jy ’n skoolvak kort, want ons het mos nou die sielkunde... tel net as een ... dan kon jy dit gedoen het in een jaar. Waar nou het hulle dit opgebreek in twee jaar. So nou voel dit half... dit het ook vir my gevoel soos dit was nou my plan. Nou werk daai plan ook nie uit nie. Nou is dit weer ’n ander plan. En toe het ek ook maar net met my ma en my vriende daarvoor gepraat en hulle het ook almal gesê dit vat nou net bietjie langer om daarby uit te kom, maar mens kom nog steeds daarby uit. So ek dink dit het half... dit was vir my die grootste deel hierdie jaar waar ek regtig op my spiritualiteit gefokus het omdat jy gevra het daarvoor so nou moet jy net glo dat dit is hoe dit gaan uitwerk.

- II 5.84 **Interviewer:** En omdat dit so 'n belangrike en moeilike ding is ook. Dit was nie 'n klein ding nie.
- II 5.85 **Leana:** Ja dit is half soos jou hele droom gewees en nou moet jy jou hele uitkyk en hele droom verander.
- II 5.86 **Interviewer:** Ja.
- II 5.87 **Leana:** So ja, maar ek dink dit was maar die grootste gebeurtenis die jaar.
- II 5.88 **Interviewer:** Ok, ehm die laaste, ek het eintlik al hierdie vraag vir jou gevra... As jy in die klas sit en ehm mense het baie ehm... verskillende gelowe en daar is sê nou maar 'n debat of half 'n ... dis 'n negatiewe situasie in die klas en almal stem nie saam nie. Hoe voel jy gewoonlik in so situasie en hoe maak jy 'n betekenis uit daarvan?
- II 5.89 **Leana:** Soos as dit spesifiek oor geloof gaan?
- II 5.90 **Interviewer:** Ja, oor geloof en “beliefs”, ja
- II 5.91 **Leana:** ehm, ek weet nie, dit is nie iets wat my regtig ... soos ek luister dit maar uit en ek luister elkeen se punt. Dit is nie... ek weet nie. Ek ervaar dit nie altyd as negatief nie. Dit is vir my interessant.
- II 5.92 **Interviewer:** Hoe maak jy betekenis daaruit? Wat verstaan jy uit dit uit as mense so ... oor so iets praat?
- II 5.93 **Leana:** Ek dink... ek verstaan dit half omdat ek voel elkeen het sterk “beliefs” wat hulle het. So ek dink mense moet dit net op daai manier probeer sien. Soos hulle is nie noodwendig altyd besig om jou geloofstelsels of spiritualiteit af te kraak nie. Hulle spiritualiteit is vir hulle net so belangrik soos wat elkeen van ons s'n vir ons is. So ek dink dit moet net met baie respek hanteer word en uit geluister word.
- II 5.94 **Interviewer:** Klink amper weer soos daai non-judging ding van jou wat so belangrik is.
- II 5.95 **Leana:** Ja, eerder as om dit as 'n persoonlike aanval op jou geloof te sien en of die situasie te vererger deur nou ook te begin stry oor “myne is beter as joune”.
- II 5.96 **Interviewer:** Ok, dit is al my vrae. Het jy enige iets wat jy nog wil by sê of enige iets wat jy wil vra?
- II 5.97 **Leana:** Het ek die konsep vir jou reg reg verstaan?
- II 5.98 **Interviewer:** Ek hoop, ek dink jy het dit reg verstaan, dalk kan jy net op afsluitingsnoot vir my sê wat jy verstaan uit spirituele identiteit uit na ons gesprek?
- II 5.99 **Leana:** Okay ek dink dit is soos die “essence” van jou “being” en hoe jy sin maak uit alle gebeure soos positief of negatief, uit jou lewe uit en hoekom jy dit doen soos of dit 'n persoonlike besluit was of a.g.v. jou familie of vriende of deur iemand beïnvloed was.
- II 5.100 **Interviewer:** Ja, okay (lag) baie dankie dat jy gekom het ek waardeer dit baie, laat ek net die ding afsit.

Pseudonym: Mary (Age 21)

Reflective Writing Exercise

RW 6.1 **Question:** How do you describe and understand Spiritual identity?

RW 6.2 **Mary:** In my understanding, spiritual identity is whoever you see yourself as when you are connected to a higher power whether that be the universe, nature a god or whoever/whatever else. In my belief, your spiritual identity is different from your religious identity although the two are often seen in conjunction with one another. To me, your spiritual identity is who you are at your core when you are quiet and connecting to the deepest parts of yourself and the rest of the world. Your spiritual identity may not always come to the fore but it is in the background of your everyday life- in the decisions you make, the conversations you have, the moral dilemmas you resolve. Spiritual identity to me is more of an abstract concept that is unique to every person and as a result, it is very difficult to study because it is based on people's own subjective realities and understandings that are not easily revealed.

RW 6.3 **Question:** How do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?

RW 6.4 **Mary:** I always strive to see an opportunity to grow or learn in every challenge that I face. I have always been inclined to challenge myself, demanding more of myself every step of the way and allowing myself to feel uncomfortable at times in order to grow. As a result, the challenging experiences in my life have all been powerful lessons that I have used to aid me in my further growth and development throughout life. I always aim to turn a challenging situation into something positive that I can learn from in the long run.

RW 6.5 **Question:** How do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?

RW 6.6 **Mary:** Of course, as I mentioned, one's spiritual identity will always be in the background of one's everyday encounters. For me however, I am someone who is naturally open-minded, receptive, intuitive and interested in understanding other people's subjective realities. As a result, I don't believe that my own spiritual identity is something that will influence my work as a psychologist in future. As a psychologist, I aim to be a change agent and in order to facilitate change one needs to put one's own experiences and worldviews aside for a moment and adopt and attempt to understand your client's perceptions/ realities as far as possible. Therefore, I don't believe my spiritual identity will influence my work as a future psychologist much but this opinion may change in future as I grow and change and explore my spiritual identity more.

RW 6.7 **Question:** Do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?

RW 6.8 **Mary:** Absolutely, I think my spirituality has changed a lot since starting postgraduate studies as it has in every other stage of my life. With every phase, challenge and experience I learn more about myself and how I handle stressful situations. Postgraduate studies can naturally be quite stressful and I find myself being more spiritual and more aware of my spirituality during these times, probably as a way to cope with the stress. I have also found that I am a lot more open to other people's spiritual beliefs regardless of how different they are from mine.

Individual Interview

II 6.1 **Interviewer:** How do you describe and understand spiritual identity?

II 6.2 **Mary:** I think for me spiritual identity is such an abstract concept. It is not something that is like fixed or specific to one person and is very subjective. So

when I think about spiritual identity, I think of who you think you are in your deepest form when you are alone and quiet and in your own space and when you are connected to a like higher power. Like I said in my reflective writing, a higher power can literally be anything like nature or the universe in general in nature or God, or anything that might be. Ya ugh... I mean I don't know if I have an exact definition of spiritual identity just because it is so unique and central to every person, but yes, I would say that is basically what it is.

II 6.3 **Interviewer:** Okay, can you please elaborate on your experience on spiritual development? You can start maybe in adolescence or even earlier than that.

II 6.4 **Mary:** I think for myself I've always thought I was a spiritual person and for me spirituality and being religious is like two different things and I'm not really a religious person but I am more spiritual than a am religious. So yeah, basically, I've always felt like I've known if been connected to something else and I've always relied on that, especially in times of stress and challenge and change and going through tough challenges and things like that, those are the times I rely on spirituality so often times, like even now with the masters selection that wasn't such a great experience, obviously, but I think I relied more on my spiritual identity and that sense of myself and that's why I still feel like okay with the outcome even though it was not something that I wanted. So yeah, I feel like my spiritual identity is constantly growing and is constantly improving and with every challenge that I go through and everything that is tough, and even not, if it is just like daily experiences, and every year I feel like I'm different and that I'm changing and growing and my ideals and ideas about things might be different now than what they were when I was 16 and will probably be different when I'm 32, so it's completely different and I think it is constantly changing.

II 6.5 **Interviewer:** You mentioned that spirituality and religion is different for you, can you elaborate a bit on that? What do you think is the difference between the two?

II 6.6 **Mary:** I think religion, in my understanding of it, I don't think everyone holds this opinion, but religion is more institution bound. So going to church, and being more, I don't want to say out there, but kind of like outwardly showing your spirituality if I can say it like that. Where, spirituality is more inward, focusing on yourself, it's more central and being more centred in who you are and it's focussing on your own experiences and it's a quite thing, it is not something you project outward whereas religion I think, is something people like to project outward, portray it and show people they are religious or tell people about their religion and I don't think spirituality is like that. That is what I find basically to be the biggest difference.

II 6.7 **Interviewer:** And do you think the beliefs that you hold now, about your spirituality, do you think they are different from when you were an adolescent or do you think they are kind of similar?

II 6.8 **Mary:** I think they are kind of similar. Obviously there's tweeks and changes but I think as a whole they are quite the same. I think the biggest difference is that then, I thought that spirituality was way more connected to religion than I think now. And now I see them as two completely separate things and it's something that I don't even see them touching each other. So that's probably the biggest difference from then versus now. But it is still pretty similar in the sense that I still believe in the same things, I still hold the same ideals and I still think of myself in a very similar way than I did back then.

II 6.9 **Interviewer:** And where did this change happen for you? If you think about that as a perspective?

- II 6.10 **Mary:** I can think of an experience with a person who kind of changed my Ideas a lot. I was in a relationship for four years and that relationship was something that was very like significant to my life obviously and then he was not someone who was religious at all, but he was very spiritual. He was very like connected to the world, like kind of hippyish, if I can say it like that, very different to how I am.
- II 6.11 **Interviewer:** Was this in high school or after school?
- II 6.12 **Mary:** This was now, when I was 16 to 21, so recently yes. We broke up about a year ago and um ya it was a great relationship but that was ending, but anyways that's irrelevant. But I think that's the biggest change. Like he opened my eyes to a different side of spirituality and to be more centred with yourself and not really seeing them together anymore. To see that you can be spiritual without necessarily being super religious.
- II 6.13 **Interviewer:** And if you could put a word to all of this that you experience, to spiritual identity, what would the essence of spiritual identity be for you?
- II 6.14 **Mary:** that is a good question, like one single word or a symbol?
- II 6.15 **Interviewer:** yes, anything like that, just the essence or core, what is the most important part for you about spiritual identity?
- II 6.16 **Mary:** I think it's just being who you are, it's literally just being who you are, and owning who you are and being unapologetic about it and knowing yourself as well. I think that's for me what spiritual identity is. Uhm ya... that's what I would say about that.
- II 6.17 **Interviewer:** Okay that was the first question, do you have anything else to add on that topic? Okay, the second question is how do you make meaning from challenging experiences in your life?
- II 6.18 **Mary:** I've always been someone who has really taken challenges and difficult situations in my stride so I always try to see the positive side a situation and to really make sure that my mind set is geared toward seeing the positive side even if it is a little difficult or challenging. So I think I've been resilient in those challenges and you know, help myself to just overcome it and to you know, I don't know how to say it, but you know to just be positive about it and see the lessons and what progress I can make out of the difficult life situations and I think I've always been that way.
- II 6.19 **Interviewer:** Okay, so you're very optimistic?
- II 6.20 **Mary:** I try to be ya.
- II 6.21 **Interviewer:** And can you elaborate on a recent life event that was very challenging for you?
- II 6.22 **Mary:** Very challenging, um, I mean just an event that is very recent and fresh in my mind, obviously, is the masters interviews and selection. And that was a great experience for me, it was challenging in the sense that I was never put in a situation where I was now expected to present myself and be interviewed by a number of people and actually...
- II 6.23 **Interviewer:** It can be frightening...
- II 6.24 **Mary:** Yes exactly, and to be put on the spot. You know I was forced to be super reflective and introspective and think about myself a lot more and I do that already but you know, I had to do that even more and everything that I was saying was being questioned so that was tough. But ya, to me it was such a great experience and I am grateful for that and I think that I'll be way more equipped now and I will be equipped more probably in a year to do what I want to do eventually, because in hindsight now it probably wouldn't have been my time next year and I kind of think I knew that all along, but I kind of just wanted to keep going with it because

it is like the next logical step and it is like my time and I need to do it, and everyone else is going along with that sort of thing and I kind of felt like I should also still be going along with that and I have the opportunity now why don't I just go for it and I did and it didn't work out and yeah, I still feel good about it. I felt like I did my best.

II 6.25 **Interviewer:** And during this experience, how did you make meaning of everything?

II 6.26 **Mary:** I think that I just tried to really be confident in who I was and I didn't want to be someone I wasn't so for me, regardless, I mean obviously I was criticised and obviously I was challenged a lot, I mean it was good for me because it allowed me to really think about myself a lot more and kind of see parts of myself that might not be working as well as they should and that's not functioning as well as they need to be and to make those necessary changes and obviously now I know what they are and I can make those changes in the next six months or year or whatever. So yeah, I mean that's basically the meaning that I derived from that whole situation. Just to take something out of it and take something positive out of it and although it wasn't the outcome that I thought I wanted it was still something that was such a good learning experience and growing experience for me.

II 6.27 **Interviewer:** how do you think your spiritual identity changed your perspective regarding this experience? If it was different, your spiritual identity, how do you think you would have looked at it differently?

II 6.28 **Mary:** uhhuh, that's actually a very interesting question because, I mean I spoke to a lot of people with different spiritual identity to me, they are a little more religious in that sense, so I think that what is different for me is the fact that I think I relied on myself a lot more, I didn't rely necessarily on a higher power in that sense, I don't know it is so difficult to say, because I don't want to sound demeaning and that is not at all what I mean, I don't want to project it that way because I am someone who is religious but that is not my all being, I think that I am more spiritual. So uhm, what I mean is that, I wasn't relying on a god or relying some other higher power to get me through the situation, I mean I was relying on myself and my own strength and capabilities and ya, I think that if my spirituality was different in the sense that it was not as strong as it is now or if it was suppressed and my religiousness was a little bit stronger, maybe that would have been my main focus and I would have relied on religion a bit more or you know, some sort of higher power to get me through that experience.

II 6.29 **Interviewer:** Okay, so basically it would have changed everything in the whole situation?

II 6.30 **Mary:** yes, exactly.

II 6.31 **Interviewer:** Okay that is the second question, is there anything you want to add on how you make meaning during the challenging times in your life?

II 6.32 **Mary:** No, I think I've covered everything that I wanted to say about that.

II 6.33 **Interviewer:** The next question is how do you think your spiritual identity will influence your work as a future psychologist?

II 6.34 **Mary:** It's so tough, because for me, like I don't know if I'm on the right track of what I'm thinking spiritual identity is and this is obviously from my own perception and what I think spiritual identity is.

II 6.35 **Interviewer:** There is no right or wrong answers...

II 6.36 **Mary:** That is what is so difficult because I kind of feel like I should be saying this, but that's not how I feel so how I really feel is that I don't feel like my spiritual identity will be important in my career as a psychologist and the reason I say that

is because... while I am really confident in my spiritual identity and who I am and who I am when I am quite and alone, I don't feel like I will take all of that out with me to my work because I am someone who is open minded and who is accepting and I try to be as non-judgemental as I can, as hard as it is sometimes obviously, but I just feel like, you know, I don't look out into the world with a filter of my own world view. I allow someone else who is in my presence to really, I want to emerge our subjective realities and their experiences and how they feeling and seeing things and everything (laugh at noise outside).

II 6.37 **Interviewer:** sorry it is just very loud.

II 6.38 **Mary:** No it's okay, are they celebrating something?

II 6.39 **Interviewer:** I have no idea; I think it is spring.

II 6.40 **Mary:** yes, well I really think I have that ability to really see, well it's not really empathy, obviously a lot of people have empathy, but it's not necessarily empathy, but the ability to put yourself into someone else's shoes and to be non-judgemental about their situation and really take their perspective on things. That is why I don't think my spiritual identity will be that important, but I feel like might not have explored my spiritual identity as much as I need to or as much as I should and so maybe once I do that I'll learn so much more about myself and how I feel about that topic and it might be completely different, like maybe If you ask me the same question in six months" time, it might be completely different and I might feel like yes it might be a huge part of my life as a psychologist, as this and this is why. But right now, the way that I feel, I don't feel it will be a huge part of my life as a psychologist or my work as a psychologist.

II 6.41 **Interviewer:** It's basically still a journey for you, still journeying toward what you think about this topic.

II 6.42 **Mary:** Yes, of course.

II 6.43 **Interviewer:** And I hear that you're saying you're a very non-judgemental person, and that you might not judge your clients, but can you think of a specific situation that might be difficult with a client, that has different belief systems than you?

II 6.44 **Mary:** Of course, I think especially with the population that I want to work with, and this was like a huge topic of debate in my interviews where they really criticised me a lot on, is the fact that I really want to work with offenders or people in the criminal justice system. So what is really difficult about that is that basically everyone I am working with is very different from me in terms of ideologies, in terms of belief systems, in terms of religion even, you know culture and race and all of those things. So there is going to be huge differences, so I understand that there is going to be times that is going to be so different I'm going to, and it's not that I'm not judgemental, I try not to be as judgemental as possible, obviously I'm realistic in the fact that there is going to be times that it is going to be very difficult for me, but if I have to think of a specific situation, I think just working with an offender or who has committed a crime or something that is almost impossible for me to understand. You know working with the youth that is engaging in activities that is completely different from what I'm used to. Of course those things are difficult and different but I still think in those situations I'll still hold onto my belief to be as non-judgemental as possible and I know it's not always going to be a reality and as possible as I am thinking or hoping it will be but yeah, I think I'll try to do that as far as possible.

II 6.45 **Interviewer:** And do you think your spiritual identity will inform your approach to those types of clients and how will it inform your approach?

- II 6.46 **Mary:** I think it will, but also not that much. I don't want to say that I'll put my spiritual identity on the back burner, like I'll go in there and like completely not be me anymore, it is obviously still going to be a part of me and obviously I'll take my spiritual identity and who I am into any situation I go into. But I don't feel it is really going to impact me as much and that might be also because I'm still discovering my spiritual identity so much more, because I don't feel like it's fixed, I don't feel like I know exactly, like even when you sent out the reflective writing thing, I was like what do I want to say about my own spiritual identity, I was like I'm not exactly sure how I feel about it because I know that I have a strong spiritual sense but I don't know if I know my spiritual identity very well and that it is so fixed, that you know it's not changeable, but I know it's not that, I know it's something to change so yeah, I think it is definitely a journey, I think you used the right word there.
- II 6.47 **Interviewer:** And if you take where you are now with your spiritual identity, how do you think that will help you make meaning of your clients' experiences and what they are going through?
- II 6.48 **Mary:** I think now I am someone who tries to be open with people, I try to be receptive to people, I try to really listen to them and take their own subjective realities into consideration so that is the way I feel now in my own spirituality, spiritual identity so I think I will take that approach with everyone that I work with I strive to make people feel comfortable and I strive to make people feel safe and just really appreciated in the moment and just kind of creating good climate when they reveal information about themselves that is not necessarily nice or just reveal very sensitive and personal information and yeah that is just how I feel. I feel like my spiritual identity will obviously really play a role in that situation because I'll take with me all that qualities that I feel that I have and apply it to that situation, or any situation.
- II 6.49 **Interviewer:** Thank you for that, that is everything for that question, is there anything you want to add?
- II 6.50 **Mary:** No nothing.
- II 6.51 **Interviewer:** The last question is do you think that your spirituality has changed since starting postgraduate studies?
- II 6.52 **Mary:** Definitely, I feel like especially, I mean this year obviously was quite stressful and a lot to do and a lot to adapt to and changes to make and it is quite a big jump from undergrad to postgrad studies so I think in terms of my spiritual identity I've become someone, not more grounded is necessarily the word, but just, I know I sound very contradicting now because I say I'm on a journey and I know who I am and I know that but I feel like I know who I am and I know who I want to be but I'm still learning about it and I know as much as I can know right now and I feel at 22 I know as much as I have explored and allowed myself to explore that side. So definitely this year has provided me challenges, new obstacles and situations that I had to overcome and my spiritual identity in those situations have really pushed me to be more reflective and think about myself and also to take more quiet time and just to evaluate myself and to really think and sit and really just question you know who am I, who do I want to be, how am I going to get where I want to be and I think it's those challenges and those difficult things that come with postgraduate research studies that has pushed me in that direction to force me to question those things and to think about those things a bit more.
- II 6.53 **Interviewer:** And your classmates, how do you experience them, do you think that they have similar belief systems than you or do you think theirs might differ?

- II 6.54 **Mary:** I think that there's a lot of people in my class who probably quite similar, I don't know it is not really a topic that we explored so I can't say, or tell you for sure that yes we are definitely very similar or very different, but I know that there are a lot more people in my class who are a lot more religious in the sense that they are more institution bound, you know more in terms of fixed within a church and that sort of thing and then I also know that there are people on the other hand that are more spiritual, and I don't know if they see spirituality and religion as the same thing, I know I don't, so yeah, I guess I see them as just who they want to be really. It doesn't really affect me and if that is what works for them then I am happy.
- II 6.55 **Interviewer:** Can you think of a specific situation during the year so far that have made you think critically about your own belief system?
- II 6.56 **Mary:** uhm (silence)... I mean; I don't know if I can think of a specific situation. Let me just think about that for a second. I can't really think of a specific situation but I really belief that the whole combination of this year has forced me just, I don't want to say question everything, but kind of just question everything, from the beginning to just like really reflect and to think and to just to get to know myself all over again because I think in undergrad especially, you know, you kind of going through the motions, it's not that tough, it's easy and you're not challenged and not pushed to your limits and I think with starting a postgraduate course, you're pushed much closer to your limits than you've known before and so with that, obviously you have to think a lot more, you have to become much more critical of yourself and, I know I say reflective a lot, but more reflective of who you are and really thinking about who you are and I think that that has basically just been a combination of this whole year and I think now that things have quitted down a little bit after the first semester, I can look back and be like wow I feel like I've grown so much in the past 6 or 7 months and I think I grew more in these 7 months than I did in my whole undergraduate career and I can say that with confidence because I genuinely feel that way.
- II 6.57 **Interviewer:** That is great, so it has been a learning curve?
- II 6.58 **Mary:** A huge learning curve. Ja.
- II 6.59 **Interviewer:** If you are in class and you are confronted with diverse and different and absolutely just completely contrasting beliefs than you have, how do you usually make meaning of that?
- II 6.60 **Mary:** I mean I am open to people's ideas so I want to know about those sorts of things I mean I'm not closed off about it, like no I don't want to hear about that, it's different, like for me I celebrate the differences in people so I want to know. If there is a debate on like a touchy subject, it's not like I'll say anything because I don't want to be involved in confrontation but if the debate rolls around and people are talking about it or there is a specific situation where someone has completely different beliefs than me, you know what, obviously it's interesting for me, I don't want to use the word compare, but to kind of just see like what areas we're similar in and where our differences lie as well and yeah, can you ask that question again just so I can understand.
- II 6.61 **Interviewer:** The question is how do you make meaning when confronted with diverse beliefs in class?
- II 6.62 **Mary:** Okay, in terms of making meaning of that, it is really just being open to people, being accepting, I don't like the word tolerate, because it sounds like you don't want to tolerate them, but you do. But just being tolerate of people's differences and being accepting of those things, and being open to listening to them even if it is very different from you and you know, it is easy to quietly judge and

sit back and be like okay that's fine what you believe, but you're wrong, I think it is something really powerful to be able to acknowledge that that is very different from you and that is something you would never belief in and that is something you would never do or say or anything like that but to then just accept it and to allow them to be that way, without that affecting you, you know. So in terms of, I don't know if I answered your question, I keep talking around it (laugh), but in terms of meaning, I think it's just being, really just open and accepting of people and just allowing them to be who they are and hoping they will allow the same for you in return.

II 6.63 **Interviewer:** Thank you that is all the questions. So do you want to add anything else on the whole interview?

II 6.64 **Mary:** No, I'm just wondering what is spiritual identity?

II 6.65 **Interviewer:** Spiritual identity has different meanings for different people, but I think you answered the questions very well and thank you for your time, I really appreciate it.

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