TOWARDS SELF-AUTHORSHIP: POSTGRADUATE PSYCHOLOGY STUDENTS' MEANING-MAKING JOURNEYS

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

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Yours faithfully

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Abstract

In this study, the meaning-making processes of postgraduate psychology students were explored as they move towards the development of self-authorship. During the period of emerging adulthood, individuals are afforded the freedom to explore and experiment with potential identity alternatives. Students enrolled at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) represent a subgroup of emerging adults who experience unique challenges to their cognitive and psychosocial development. Baxter Magolda's theory on self-authorship served as the theoretical framework for this study. Following a constructivist-developmental, narrative approach, Baxter Magolda plotted individuals' journeys from an external to an internal way of making meaning within epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Educational experiences challenge the cognitive and psychosocial development of students towards self-authorship. Postgraduate psychology students in particular, undergo a process of personal development and growth along with the acquisition of academic knowledge and skills. Sensitivity for their intrapersonal worlds and interpersonal dynamics as future mental health practitioners is essential.

This qualitative research study followed a multiple case study approach rooted within a constructivist framework. Through purposive sampling, four postgraduate psychology students from the University of the Free State were selected to complete two reflective writing tasks and participate in two in-depth interviews during their honours year. The data were analysed thematically. Each participant's experiences were reconstructed into main and subthemes. A cross-case analysis was also conducted, and the following themes were identified: In their *search for self*, participants' experiences related to identity development, finding purpose and direction, and defining their own belief systems. Experiences that were identified as contributing to personal growth included *the academic* experience, specifically experiences intrinsic to the honours psychology programme and the selection process for the master's degree. Participants were challenged to engage in personal reflection and critical thinking. Interpersonal relationships with classmates, friends, family, husbands, and lecturers were identified as either offering support and/or challenging current worldviews. *Changes* experienced included relational redefinition and restructuring, becoming more autonomous and independent, and questioning authority while listening to their internal voice to define their beliefs, identities, and ways of knowing. The findings of this study highlight the nuanced and cyclical pathway towards self-authorship of postgraduate psychology students who are

expected to undergo significant intrapersonal growth and more advanced cognitive functioning as they journey towards becoming mental health professionals.

Keywords: self-authorship, narrative identity, emerging adulthood, postgraduate psychology students

Opsomming

In hierdie studie is die betekenisvormende prosesse van nagraadse sielkunde-studente in hulle beweging na die ontwikkeling van selfouteurskap verken. Gedurende die tydperk van ontluikende volwassenheid word individue die vryheid gegun om potensiële alternatiewe identiteite te verken en daarmee te eksperimenteer. Studente wat by hoëronderwysinstellings ingeskryf is, verteenwoordig 'n subgroep van ontluikende volwassenes wat unieke uitdagings tot hulle kognitiewe en psigososiale ontwikkeling ervaar. Baxter Magolda se teorie oor selfouteurskap het as die teoretiese raamwerk vir hierdie studie gedien. Deur 'n konstruktivisties-ontwikkelende, narratiewe benadering te volg, het Baxter Magolda individue se reise van 'n eksterne na 'n interne manier van betekenisvorming binne epistemologiese, intrapersoonlike en interpersoonlike dimensies geskets. Opvoedkundige ervarings daag die kognitiewe en psigososiale ontwikkeling van studente in die rigting van selfouteurskap uit. Nagraadse sielkunde-studente in besonder ondergaan 'n proses van persoonlike ontwikkeling en groei tesame met die verkryging van akademiese kennis en vaardighede. Sensitiwiteit vir hulle intrapersoonlike wêrelde en interpersoonlike dinamika as toekomstige geestesgesondheidspraktisyns is essensieel.

Hierdie kwalitatiewe navorsingstudie het 'n veelvuldige gevallestudie-ontwerp, gewortel in 'n konstruktivistiese raamwerk, gevolg. Deur doelgerigte steekproeftrekking is vier nagraadse sielkunde-studente van die Universiteit van die Vrystaat gekies om twee reflektiewe skriftelike opdragte te voltooi en aan twee diepgaande onderhoude gedurende hulle honneursjaar deel te neem. Die data is tematies ontleed. Elke deelnemer se ervarings is in hoof- en subtemas geherkonstrueer. 'n Kruisgeval-analise is ook uitgevoer, en die volgende temas is geïdentifiseer: In hulle *soeke na die self* het deelnemers se ervarings verband gehou met identiteitsontwikkeling, die vind van doel en rigting, en definiëring van hulle eie oortuigingstelsel. Ervarings wat geïdentifiseer is as bydraend tot persoonlike groei het *die akademiese* ervaring ingesluit, spesifiek ervarings inherent in die honneurs-sielkundeprogram en die keuringsproses vir die meestersgraad. Deelnemers is uitgedaag om deel te neem aan persoonlike nadenke en kritiese denke. Interpersoonlike verhoudings met klasmaats, vriende, familie, eggenote en dosente is geïdentifiseer as ondersteunend en/of uitdagend van huidige wêreldbeskouings. *Veranderings* wat ervaar is, het ingesluit relasionele herdefiniëring, groter outonoom- en onafhanklikheidwording en bevraagtekening van gesag terwyl hulle na hulle innerlike stem luister om hulle oortuigings, identiteit en manier van weet te definieer. Die

bevindings van hierdie studie beklemtoon die genuanseerde en sikliese weg tot selfouteurskap van nagraadse sielkunde-studente van wie verwag word om beduidende intrapersoonlike groei en meer gevorderde funksionering te ondergaan op hulle reis om professionele geestesgesondheidswerkers te word.

Sleutelwoorde: selfouteurskap, narratiewe identiteit, ontluikende volwassenheid, nagraadse sielkunde-studente

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Chapter 1

Context of the Study

"Inherent in a college education is the critical search for answers to complex, value-laden questions. Today's college students – tomorrow's leaders – must grapple with the difficult ethical, moral, political, spiritual, economic, ideological, and environmental dilemmas that face our global society" (Baxter Magolda, 2006, p. 1)

Baxter Magolda's statement could not be more applicable to the educational journey of postgraduate psychology students. The nature of the profession that they aspire to work in is characteristic of ethical and moral challenges and requires of professionals to deal with complex questions and situations as they endeavour to examine, understand, and improve the emotional life of humans. Throughout their journey to becoming mental health professionals, they are exposed to ambiguous situations that require the use of thinking patterns that are more developed than the linear, logical, and sequential patterns are. It requires significant growth in terms of epistemological development, intrapersonal and interpersonal dynamics, and the challenge to consider their journey towards a self-authored identity.

This chapter provides a brief overview of the study. Firstly, the reader is introduced to the context and rationale of the study, followed by an overview of the theoretical perspectives underpinning the study. Thereafter, a brief description of the research design and methods is provided. Finally, a delineation of the chapters concludes the discussion in this chapter. All of the indicated areas are discussed only succinctly, as descriptions that are more detailed follow in later chapters.

1.1 Context and Rationale of the Research Study

In today's society, young adults face a plethora of decisions and expectations once they graduate from university and enter the adult world of work. However, authors on the topic suggest that many of these young adults lack the skills and knowledge that are required to navigate the realm of work successfully in the 21st century (Arum & Roska, 2011; Carey, 2011). Young adults are challenged to make difficult decisions, analyse, interpret, and present information from sources that are varied and often novel. Furthermore, they are expected to form opinions and argue their positions on various topics (Baxter Magolda, 2001;

Kegan, 1994). The successful negotiation of these challenges requires of young adults to have developed their own perspectives, values, beliefs, and an internal sense of identity. According to Baxter Magolda (1998), individuals who are able to face and master these challenges have developed self-authorship.

Although a large body of research regarding self-authorship development in various student and non-student populations exist (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013; Baxter Magolda, 2001; Carpenter & Peña, 2016; Pizzolato, 2004; Torres, 2010), criticism against Baxter Magolda's work has been the fact that most of her research focused on white individuals who mostly came from privileged backgrounds and who were all undergraduate students (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2016). In recognition of this fact, Baxter Magolda (2004a) expressed the need for studies on self-authorship within varied populations of students in diverse types of settings.

Postgraduate psychology programmes are unique in the sense that focus is placed on not only attainment of academic and practical skills, but also on personal moulding and development and the process of becoming (Kottler & Swartz, 2004). Hughes and Youngson (2009) argue that personal growth is an essential part of the journey of postgraduate psychology students as negotiation between personal and professional identity development starts to take place (Kottler & Swartz, 2004). As future mental healthcare practitioners who will be working with individuals with differing perspectives and values, postgraduate psychology students are expected to re-evaluate their perspectives, values, beliefs, and identity as they find a balance between their personal and professional identity. They are expected to deal with ambiguous situations as they examine, understand, and try to improve the emotional lives of others. This requires of them to rely on thinking patterns that are more advanced than the linear and sequential patterns that served them well in the earlier stages of their lives (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). They are also expected to possess interpersonal skills that will facilitate the initiation and continuation of a collaborative therapeutic relationship with clients and multiprofessional team members.

Baxter Magolda and King (2012) propose that, for students to navigate situations that require complex reasoning, they must develop the meaning-making capacity that could support complex reasoning and independent judgements. In addition, they also highlight the importance of assessing students' meaning making in order to understand and facilitate the development of self-authorship better (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Thus, the aim of this

study was to explore and describe the meaning-making experiences of four postgraduate psychology students during their journey towards self-authorship. The study was guided by two research questions, namely

- How do the participants make meaning of their experiences during their postgraduate psychology programme?
- What elements of self-authorship are the participants exhibiting?

It is evident that self-authorship plays a significant role in the successful transition from university to the adult world of work. For this reason, it would be valuable to add to existing literature that focuses on understanding and facilitating the development of self-authorship during the university years.

1.2 Theoretical Perspectives Underpinning the Study

Theoretical perspectives that were utilised to create a theoretical framework for the study include life span development, identity development, and self-authorship. In considering the life span development approach, the theory of emerging adulthood, with a specific focus on student development theory, informed the study. Emerging adulthood is an extension of the psychosocial moratorium of Erikson (1968) and covers the age range from 18 to 29 years (Arnett, 2000b). Arnett (2000b, 2014b) proposes five pillars that represent developmental issues that emerging adults face, namely the *age of instability, age of possibilities, age of self-focus, age of feeling in-between,* and *age of identity* exploration. As distinct features of emerging adulthood, these pillars encourage and provide time and space for reflection on identity alternatives in areas such as relationships, career, sexuality, religion, spirituality, and philosophy of life (Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx, & Zamboanga, 2013).

A subgroup nested within emerging adulthood is that of the student population who attend institutions of higher education. Although university students are not a representative sample, Wintre et al. (2008) argue postsecondary education is the normative experience for the majority of individuals in emerging adulthood. To understand the learning and development that takes place during this particular period, literature on student development was used as a framework, with specific reference to cognitive and psychosocial development (Baxter Magolda, 2009a; Evans et al., 2016). These include theories such as Perry's (1968) cognitive development theory, King and Kitchener's (1994) reflective judgement model and

Chickering's (1969) psychosocial theory of development. While identity development is considered to form part of psychosocial development, identity development theory, and more specifically narrative identity (McAdams, 1985b, 2015), was considered specifically in this study to provide a clear conceptualisation of identity.

All of the above creates a foundation for Baxter Magolda's (2001, 2002) theoretical framework towards a more holistic understanding of student development. Baxter Magolda (2001) expands on Kegan's theory of self-authorship and conceptualises it as a theory that delineates the journey that individuals take throughout life. Baxter Magolda (2010) argues that, for individuals to become the author of their lives, they have to take ownership of their beliefs, identity, and relationships. Three dimensions were identified, namely epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Individuals are expected to move through three phases, namely *external formulas, crossroads,* and *self-authorship,* within each of these three dimensions.

1.3 Overview of the Research Design and Methods

A qualitative multiple case study approach was selected for this descriptive and exploratory study (Babbie & Mouton, 2010). The study was placed within a constructivist framework, which describes truth and reality to be constructed and dependent on individual experiences and perspectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The study utilised a narrative inquiry design to gather and communicate the story of the participants' meaning-making journeys. This particular design allowed the researcher to investigate the meaning-making experiences of postgraduate psychology students as they relate to self-authorship.

Purposive sampling (Patton, 2014) was utilised to identify participants who could be considered information-rich cases. Inclusion criteria were set for students who were in the emerging adulthood period (18-29 years) and who were enrolled in the postgraduate (honours) psychology programme at the University of the Free State (UFS). The final sample consisted of four individuals, of whom three were female participants and one male participant.

Reflective writing tasks and in-depth, semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data. Each participant completed two reflective writing tasks and participated in two in-depth interviews during their honours year. Data obtained through reflective writing provided

the researcher with a glimpse into the thought processes of the individuals, as they were expressed specifically in relation to a topic of focus (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015). The semi-structured, in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions in a space that was personal and intimate to elicit detailed narratives (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The participants were required to complete the first reflective writing task during the second quarter of the programme, after which the first in-depth interview was conducted. The second reflective writing task was completed towards the end of the programme, with the second and last in-depth interview rounding off the data-collection process. All the interviews were audio taped and transcribed. Data analysis was done using thematic analysis, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). First, themes and subthemes were identified within each case and presented individually. After individual themes had been identified, the researcher returned to the individual case data and conducted a cross-case analysis to identify salient and divergent themes across the cases.

This study formed part of a larger research project, "On becoming a therapist". This research project is coordinated by the supervisor of the present study and aimed at exploring the perceptions, experiences, and development of postgraduate students in their journeys toward becoming therapists. Authorisation to conduct the study was obtained from the Research Committee of the Department of Psychology, as well as the Committee for Title Registrations of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State. The participants provided informed consent, and important ethical considerations such as autonomy, confidentiality, non-maleficence, beneficence (Patton, 2014), and the matter of compensation were addressed and adhered to.

The issues of quality concerned in qualitative research were also addressed. The nature of this study required of the researcher to promote trustworthiness through enhancing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher made use of various strategies including triangulation, an audit trail, and researcher reflexivity (Mertens, 2010; Shenton, 2004).

1.4 Delineation of Chapters

The research report is structured as follows.

Chapter 2: An in-depth review of existing literature with a focus on the theories of emerging adulthood, student development, identity development, and self-authorship is provided in this chapter. The theories of emerging adulthood and student development provide a context within which to explore and understand the unique cognitive and psychosocial developmental challenges of postgraduate psychology students. Particular attention is given to defining the nature of identity development as it is conceptualised in this study. Next, the theory of self-authorship is discussed in detail and the chapter is concluded with a description of the developmental tasks and challenges of postgraduate psychology students.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3 provides a comprehensive discussion of the research design and methodology that was utilised. Firstly, the research approach and design are discussed, followed by a description of the research participants and the sampling procedures that were implemented. Next, data collection procedures and the process of data analysis are discussed in detail. Finally, ethical considerations and the issues of trustworthiness are covered.

Chapter 4: In this chapter, the results of the study are presented. Initially a brief background description of each participant is provided. This is followed by a discussion of the participant's journey and the themes and subthemes identified during this journey. The results are presented with the use of verbatim quotations from each participant's two interviews and reflective writing tasks. After presenting the results on an individual case basis, the chapter also includes a discussion of a cross case analysis, presenting salient, as well as divergent themes across the cases.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the themes identified in Chapter 4 by using Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship. Previous literature and/or studies based on Baxter Magolda's self-authorship theory or associated with student development and emerging adulthood are utilised to assist in interpreting and understanding the findings of this research study.

Chapter 6: Chapter 6 consists of discussions of the most significant findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

1.5 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the reader with a brief introduction to the research study by contextualising the research and motivating its importance. The context of, rationale for the study, and the theoretical approach were discussed briefly to highlight the framework for the study. An overview of the research design and methods employed was also provided. Finally, this chapter offered an outline of the different chapters that follow. In the next chapter, the theoretical perspectives that informed this study are discussed.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to provide a thorough description of the theoretical framework for this study. In combination, the subsections provide an overview of the most pertinent theories and research as they relate to the study. First, the theory of emerging adulthood is discussed, describing the five primary components or pillars of emerging adulthood. This is followed by a description of student development theories, with a focus on cognitive and psychosocial development of students. Next, the theory of identity development is explored, with specific focus on the work of Erikson (1963) on identity development and Neo-Eriksonian theories of Marcia (1966) and Berzonsky (1992, 2011). The focus is then turned to narrative approaches to understanding identity development, particularly narrative identity. The next section discusses the theory of self-authorship, firstly by considering the constructive-developmental nature of this theory. Next, Kegan's theory of self-evolution is discussed to provide an overview of the context in which the theory of self-authorship found its beginnings. Afterwards, Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship, which served as the overarching framework in this study, is discussed. Lastly, the context for this study is considered with reference to postgraduate psychology students and the mental health profession, highlighting the need for self-authorship development in this particular population.

2.1 Emerging Adulthood

At the beginning of the 21st century, Arnett (2000b) proposed a new developmental stage, emerging adulthood (in the age group ranging from 18 to 29), arguing that this stage is distinct from the periods of adolescence and young adulthood. Emerging adulthood is seen as an extension of Erikson's (1968) psychosocial moratorium, a period during which individuals are free to explore and experiment with potential identity alternatives (Schwartz, Zamboanga et al., 2013. During this stage, young peoples' world perspectives are challenged as they are exposed to diverse settings and views (Arnett, 2000b). However, although emerging adulthood is described as a new life stage, it is not necessarily a universal life stage (Syed, 2015). It has emerged more prominently in specific industrialised societies because of socioeconomic changes that in turn have had an effect on the age of marriage, parenthood,

and the acquisition of various other adult roles (Arnett, 2000b, 2011). In addition, Arnett (2011) also proposes that, rather than focusing on a singular understanding of emerging adulthood, it should be seen as a cultural theory. It is shaped by various factors including ethnicity, economics, class, religion, and gender (Syed, 2015).

This transitional period of emerging adulthood is a pivotal time during which the formation and deepening of a sense of personal identity becomes the focal developmental task (Ritchie et al., 2013). Identity formation entails achieving an integrated sense of self, with ideas and ideology as integral (Erikson, 1963). As individuals gain more independence and start exploring different avenues regarding religion, love, work, and even sexuality, they begin to attain some distance from the values, virtues, motivations, and ideologies that they developed while growing up (Erikson, 1963). The formation of an ideology involves the process of making judgements about beliefs and values, and this ability to decide is an essential part of becoming an adult (Arnett, 1997, 1998). Arnett's (2000b, 2014b) theory of emerging adulthood has five primary components, or pillars: the age of instability, the age of possibilities, the age of self-focus, the age of feeling in-between, and the age of identity exploration. Each pillar is referred to as an age to emphasise that they are of a developmental nature and take primacy during the phase of emerging adulthood (Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

2.1.1 Age of instability.

Adolescence is considered the beginning of a period of instability and uncertainty. However, Arnett (2014a) puts forward that emerging adulthood may also be described as the most unstable of all the stages across the life span. The instability is driven by the exploration of different possibilities, which brings about frequent changes (Arnett, 2014a). Three clearly observable domains of change and instability involve work, residential mobility, and romantic relationships (Arnett, 2014b). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2012), on average, an individual will change jobs at least 11 times between the ages of 18 and 44. During this period, emerging adults also change residences frequently, as they might move out of their family home after high school, move in with and change roommates or romantic partners during university years, before likely settling down (Arnett, 2014b). As these domains are central to the livelihood of emerging adults, the frequent change experienced creates a general sense of flux and instability (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). However, at the same time, the frequent changes and moves are made for the purpose of exploration (Arnett, 2014b).

2.1.2 Age of possibilities.

During emerging adulthood, many individuals are given the opportunity to begin making decisions that could alter the shape and direction of their lives. This freedom of decision offers emerging adults the prospect of possibilities (Arnett, 2014b). Emerging adults have a level of independence and freedom not experienced by adolescents, but they are also not tied down yet by the responsibilities of adulthood. Consequently, the majority of emerging adults are often positive and optimistic about their future, believing that they will accomplish their goals and reach their dreams (Arnett, 2014b; Arnett & Schwab, 2012). One of the features of emerging adulthood that contributes to it being considered the age of possibilities is the departure from the family of origin. Emerging adults leave their family of origin but do not commit to new relationships or interpersonal obligations immediately (Arnett, 2014b). With the departure from their family home, they are afforded unparalleled opportunities to transform their lives (Arnett, 2014b).

2.1.3 Age of self-focus.

With the newfound sense of freedom, responsibility, and independence, emerging adults find themselves able to focus more on themselves. As opposed to when they were adolescents, they are now in charge of their own decisions, and while they are not adults yet, they are privileged to make these decisions without having to consider others (e.g., a partner or children) (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Emerging adults have been referred to as "selfish" (Twenge, 2013), particularly because of the self-focus that takes place during this period. However, Arnett (2013) argues that self-focus is not selfish but necessary and considers emerging adulthood as the optimal time for self-exploration and independent decision-making (Arnett, 2014a). Consequently, according to Arnett (2014a), emerging adults are considered self-focused without being selfish. Through self-focus, individuals endeavour to gain self-knowledge and self-understanding, and they begin to build the foundations on which their adult lives would be based (Arnett, 2014b).

2.1.4 Age of feeling in between.

The period of emerging adulthood is positioned between adolescence and adulthood, and similarly, individuals in this period "feel" as if they are in-between. They have left the period of adolescence and are on their way to adulthood, but they are not quite there yet

(Arnett, 2014a). In today's society, more individuals are experiencing the road to becoming an adult as long and winding. Arnett (2014a) posits that this is because of individuals continuing to rely on parents in certain areas of their lives, while taking more responsibility for other areas. Only when individuals have taken on the full range of adult responsibilities will they escape the feeling of being in between (Arnett, 2014a). Findings from various studies (Arnett, 1994, 1997, 1998, 2001, 2014b; Facio & Micocci, 2003; Mayseles & Scharf, 2003) consistently indicate that the three most important criteria for adulthood include accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions, and becoming financially independent.

These criteria are attained gradually; consequently, emerging adults have a sense of being in between (Arnett, 2006). At the same time, emerging adults have to manage the developmental issues inherent in the remaining pillars successfully. In as much as all five pillars are present during emerging adulthood, Syed and Mitchell (2013) propose that the age of feeling in between is the least intricate of the five pillars, as it is driven mainly by the ages of instability, self-focus, and identity exploration, and this feeling of in-betweenness remits as individuals resolve issues in the other areas.

2.1.5 Age of identity exploration.

This particular pillar is unquestionably the largest and most significant pillar to the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006, 2014a, 2014b). In the process of identity development, aspects akin to instability, possibilities, self-focus, and in-betweenness are present. Although Arnett (2014a) did not originally set out to explore identity issues in particular during the development of his theory of emerging adulthood, he discovered that his participants' responses frequently included identity-related statements. Whether Arnett's (2000a) questions explored romantic relationships, decisions regarding education, future employment, and values and religious beliefs, identity issues continued to come to the fore. It became evident that identity issues are a salient part of development during the emerging adulthood years (Arnett, 2006).

All of the above-mentioned pillars are considered distinct and critical features of emerging adulthood. Yet, there is variance in individuals' ability to navigate the developmental processes within each pillar successfully (Peer & McAuslan, 2016). Even though many individuals will thrive during this time of their life (Arnett, 2007), it has also

been suggested that many will face anxiety and ambivalence as they wrestle with identity issues and explore the many possibilities for their future (Arnett, 2004). As individuals begin to face the possibilities available to them, they might experience a sense of apprehension and doubt about their identity and future (Peer & McAuslan, 2016). This sense of self-doubt is hypothesised to cause emerging adults to begin questioning their abilities and competence (Oleson, Poehlmann, Yost, Lynch, & Arkin, 2000). The five pillars of emerging adulthood proposed by Arnett (2006) provide a clear picture of what the period consists of in terms of working towards independence and the assumption of adult responsibilities later in life.

2.2 Student Development

Although university students are not a representative sample of all emerging adults (Arnett, 2016), in North America, postsecondary education is currently the normative experience for the majority of individuals at the early stage of emerging adulthood (Wintre et al., 2008). Arnett (2016) also argues that university students are confronted with a unique environment in which identity exploration takes places as they contemplate possible work futures, different worldviews, and potential romantic partners. The opportunity that students have to enrol in a variety of modules during the first two years of higher education is considered an avenue for identity exploration as they attempt to determine what areas of study resonate with them (Tanner, Arnett, & Leis, 2009). Furthermore, they are exposed to a population of unattached young people allowing for explorations in friendship and love. Tanner, Arnett, and Leis (2009) also argue that pursuing a college education fulfils the need for self-focus as students focus on gaining knowledge and engaging in academic and social activities.

Higher Education, and student development within the South African context faces unique challenges and opportunities. South Africa is described as a diverse country in terms of culture, ethnicity, language, and race. Since the dismantling of the apartheid system, HEIs are becoming more representative of the country's multicultural diverse landscape. The South African population represents a combination of Western values and indigenous practices and beliefs (Eagle, Haynes, & Long, 2007), which now comes together within the population of higher education students. It is undeniable that significant psychosocial and socioeconomic changes have occurred in the past two decades. However, Niemann (2013) suggests that HEIs in South Africa continue to face academic and social challenges and many fields of study experience increasing pressure to develop and produce graduate students who

are not only able to function in the ever-changing South African society, but who can also become agents of change. Developing countries, such as South Africa, are in need of graduates who are capable of internalising new knowledge beyond disciplinary boundaries and applying it to the real-life problems of the country (Niemann, 2013). This argument highlights the importance understanding the developmental changes that students experience and to facilitate cognitive and psycosocial development that would ensure graduates are capable of functioning optimally in society.

Emerging adults who enrol as students at HEIs undergo distinct developmental changes and engage in processes of transformation (Evans et al., 2016). These processes of transformation contribute to and are facilitated by the developmental features of emerging adulthood, namely instability, possibilities, self-focus, in-betweenness, and identity exploration. To understand the developmental changes, student development theories focus on intellectual growth while considering affective and behavioural changes that students experience because of enrolment at university or any other institution of higher education (Evans et al., 2016). Cognitive and psychosocial development theories provide an understanding of how students grow and mature during the university years (Baxter Magolda, 2009a).

2.2.1 Cognitive development in students.

Cognitive theories aim to explain how students reason, think, and ultimately make meaning of their experiences (Evans et al., 2016). Building on Piaget's (1952) seminal work on cognitive development, Perry (1968) introduced the first theory that examined cognitive development specifically in university students. Perry (1968) argues that students' way of thinking and belief systems progressively transform as they mature. Perry (1968) refers to "forms" in describing the structures that shape how individuals perceive their experiences and proposes that intellectual development progresses along a continuum from simplistic forms during which individuals interpret their world in "unqualified polar terms of absolute right-wrong, good-bad" (p. 3). At the opposite side of the continuum, complex forms exist through which individuals seek to uphold personal commitments "in a world of contingent knowledge and relative values" (p. 3).

To encapsulate the important differences in the meaning-making processes along the continuum, Perry (1968, 1981) describes three successive stages or positions representing the

epistemological differences, namely duality, multiplicity, and relativism. Individuals whose meaning-making experiences fall within the dualistic stage tend to view the world dichotomously as black-white and good-bad. In terms of their learning experiences, they see authorities as possessing the correct answers, and knowledge is gained by a process of information exchange from lecturers to learners (Evans et al., 2016). As dualistic thinkers, individuals engage with the world believing that there is a right answer to every situation or problem (Evans et al., 2016; Perry, 1968, 1981).

However, once individuals are exposed to situations that are more ambiguous, they begin to experience cognitive dissonance, which sets in motion the transition to multiplicity. Perry (1968, 1981) describes the multiplicity stage as a time when individuals honour diverse views in instances where the right answer is not yet known and they regard various opinions as valid. During this stage, students will also begin to perceive their role as individuals who learn to become more independent thinkers instead of individuals who only work hard to learn (Evans et al., 2016). With this realisation, students will begin to perceive their peers as valid sources of knowledge, and their ability to think analytically improves (Perry, 1968, 1981). Finally, a shift to a more relativistic way of thinking and making meaning occurs when students realise that not all opinions are equally valid in all situations and that knowledge is shaped by context and relevant evidence (Perry, 1968, 1981).

King and Kitchener (1994) developed the reflective judgement model (RJM) to extend Perry's cognitive structural theory beyond relativism. King and Kitchener (1994) opine that in ambiguous and uncertain situations, reflective judgement has the purpose of bringing closure to and providing strategies for solving ill-structured problems. Their model also provides insight into how individuals' bases of judgement (or the way a belief is justified) are imbedded in their assumptions about knowledge itself (King & Kitchener, 1994). The RJM consists of seven stages, each representative of a discrete set of assumptions about the nature and process of acquiring knowledge, as well as the strategies to deal with and solve ill-structured problems (King & Kitchener, 1994). The stages can be grouped into three categories, namely pre-reflective thinking (stages 1-3), quasi-reflective thinking (stages 4 and 5), and lastly, reflective thinking (stages 6 and 7).

Pre-reflective thinkers are unable to acknowledge the uncertainty of knowledge; consequently, they are also unaware of the existence of problems that do not have an absolute, correct answer. As quasi-reflective thinkers, individuals become cognisant of the

existence of ill-structured problems and that knowledge surrounding these problems is uncertain (King & Kitchener, 1994). At this stage, individuals are aware of the differences that exist between ill-structured problems and well-defined problems, but they continue to find themselves at a loss when asked to offer their judgement regarding ill-structured problems because they are unable to deal with the intrinsic ambiguity of such problems (King, 1992). Because they realise that many possible answers to ill-structured problems can exist, individuals view knowledge claims as being idiosyncratic to each individual (King, 1992). Reflective thinking, which represents the most advanced set of assumptions in this model, is characterised by an understanding that knowledge is viewed in relation to evidence and context. Reflective thinkers acknowledge the fact that knowledge is not a given, but rather constructed (King & Kitchener, 1994).

In the South African context, the higher education system is attuned to the above-mentioned processes towards more complex cognitive functioning. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) provides boundaries, guidelines, and principles that govern and organises the construction of South Africa's qualifications system (South African Qualifications Authority, 2012). According to proposed NQF levels, as students progress through their university education, they are expected to move from merely acquiring knowledge to engaging with and producing knowledge. As students move from undergraduate (junior and senior levels) to postgraduate learning, they are confronted with academic challenges that are more complex and ill-structured, necessitating the development of the ability to transform their mindset to allow for more complex ways of making meaning (Kegan & Lahey, 2009). In particular, postgraduate students are expected to question multiple sources of knowledge and critically evaluate the process of knowledge production (SAQA, 2012). They have to develop an understanding and appreciation for the complexities and uncertainties of knowledge and processes as well as how it is applied to novel problems and situations (Kagee & O'Donovan, 2011).

2.2.2 Psycho-social development in students.

The cognitive growth process towards more complex ways of making meaning also facilitates psychosocial development. Psychosocial development in students relates to the intrapersonal and interpersonal aspects of development that occur through interaction with others and their environments (Evans et al., 2016). These aspects include self-definition, changes in emotions and personality traits, interpersonal skills, and relationships with others

(Evans et al., 2016; Sigelman & Rider, 2009). Psychosocial theories that focus on student development are primarily a progression of the work of Erikson (Evans et al., 2016).

Building on the psychosocial theory of Erikson (1963), Chickering's (1969) psychosocial theory of development focuses specifically on the issues faced by university students. Chickering (1969) believes the establishment of identity is the essential developmental issue with which university students wrestle. He and his colleagues propose seven vectors of development to present an all-inclusive picture of psychosocial development during the university years (Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The seven vectors are developing competence, managing emotions, moving through autonomy towards interdependence, developing mature interpersonal relationships, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), these seven vectors constitute the pathway towards an established identity.

The first vector, developing competence, refers to the development of three kinds of competence that develop during time spent at university, namely intellectual, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. Intellectual competence entails mastering content, achieving intellectual sophistication, and most importantly, developing a repertoire of skills in order to comprehend, analyse, and synthesise (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Physical and manual competence includes athletic and artistic accomplishments. Lastly, interpersonal competence involves the skills of listening, cooperation, and communication. It enables students to select from various strategies in order to help a relationship flourish (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). In the second vector, managing emotions, Chickering and Reisser (1993) acknowledge that emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety guilt, and shame exist, and the goal is not to eliminate these emotions but to bring them into awareness and acknowledge them as indications. The task for students is to learn to manage these emotions appropriately to prevent that they derail educational and personal goals (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

Moving through autonomy toward interdependence is the third vector, which includes the expectation of students to take responsibility for the pursuit of self-identified goals and to function self-sufficiently (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). This movement requires of students to gain emotional and instrumental independence, and subsequent recognition and acceptance of interdependence. Emotional independence suggests freedom from repeated need for approval and reassurance, ultimately leading to an increased willingness to risk losing

friends. Instrumental independence involves an individual's ability to be self-directed, organised, and to solve problems on his or her own (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The fourth vector, developing mature interpersonal relationships, involves capacity for intimacy and tolerance and appreciation of differences. Increased capacity for intimacy requires a change in the quality of interpersonal relationships, suggesting more selectivity in terms of choice of relationships (Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

The fifth vector, establishing identity, depends on the vectors already discussed. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), identity development involves (1) comfort with body and appearance; (2) comfort with sexual orientation and gender; (3) sense of self in a historical, social, and cultural context; (4) self-concept clarification through life-style and roles; (5) sense of self in reaction to valued others' feedback; (6) self-acceptance and self-esteem; and (7) personal stability and integration.

The second last vector, developing purpose, entails the ability to act intentionally, evaluate options and interests, identify goals, and persist in spite of obstacles (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Lastly, the seventh vector is termed developing integrity and is related narrowly to clarifying purposes and establishing an identity. According to Chickering and Reisser (1993), students' beliefs and values serve as the foundation for interpreting experiences. The development of integrity consists of three successive stages, which tend to overlap. These stages include (1) humanising values; (2) personalising values; and (3) developing congruence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). The first stage, humanising values, involves a shift away from the automatic application of inflexible beliefs. Instead, principled thinking is used to balance one's own self-interest with the interests of others. The second stage, personalising values, represents the development of the ability to affirm core values and beliefs consciously while at the same time being able to respect other points of view. Lastly, the third stage, developing congruency, results in the ability to match personal values with socially responsible behaviour (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Together, these seven vectors allow for the recognition and understanding of the psychosocial changes that students experience during time spent at university.

Based on the discussion above, it is evident that much is expected of students' development in terms of their cognitive and psychosocial development. It has also been argued that individuals who enrol in higher education enter a period that is considered to provide inspiration, experiences for personal growth, and intellectual expansion (Cruwys,

Greenaway, & Haslam, 2015). Students are expected to grow in terms of developing core skills, adding to their knowledge base, and fostering interpersonal relationships that will guide them through their personal and professional lives (Cruways, Greenaway, & Haslam, 2015). Chickering and Reisser (1993) argue that university students experience dramatic changes in how they think, feel, behave, value, and relate to others and themselves.

Foundational theories of student development have been criticised for describing cognitive and psychosocial developmental processes as distinct categories. Several researchers have come to recognise the fact that cognitive, interpersonal, and affective processes are interwoven rather than discrete, isolated processes (Evans et al., 2016). One of these researchers is Baxter Magolda, who integrated both the cognitive and psychosocial developmental tasks students face into her theory of self-authorship. In her approach to self-authorship, the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions are integrated (Evans et al., 2016). Before Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship is explored, identity development is discussed briefly in the following section, with specific reference to narrative identity theory (which is closely related to self-authorship).

2.3 Identity Development

As mentioned before, identity development has become known as a developmental task of primary concern during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Kroger, 2015; Schwartz, Zamboanga et al., 2013). Identity is not a static entity; it evolves in a social milieu where individuals face changing life circumstances influenced by psychological and biological needs (Kroger, 2015). Current theories regarding identity development have roots that can be traced back to Erikson's (1963) work on the construct of identity development. Erikson (1963) proposes an eight-stage psychosocial theory of development, suggesting that individuals must successfully resolve a psychological conflict during each stage in order to become healthy, well-adjusted adults. According to Erikson (1968), the primary developmental task for adolescents is to resolve the conflict during the identity versus role confusion crisis. He also proposes that identity development is ongoing during adulthood when individuals are challenged to reconsider earlier identity-defining commitments and values (Kroger, 2015).

Various authors have elaborated on Erikson's theory of identity development (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010; Meeus, 2011); consequently, a large and complex body of

literature is available on identity development (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010; Meeus, 2011; Schwartz, Zamboanga et al., 2013). The most widely used model that has extended the work of Erikson and that is a well-known neo-Eriksonian theory, is the identity status model of Marcia (1966), who elaborated on Erikson's theory by conceptualising identity development into four identity statuses. The identity status in which individuals are depends on (1) the degree to which alternatives towards identity determination were explored; and (2) the degree to which a commitment has been made towards a specific identity. The first identity status, diffusion, is characterised by neither exploring nor committing to an identity. Secondly, the state of foreclosure occurs when individuals commit to an identity without actively exploring other alternatives. Thirdly, the moratorium status is characterised by an active search in which individuals attempt to determine who they are to become. Lastly, in the state of identity achievement, individuals have thoroughly explored alternatives after which they have reached a commitment.

Another neo-Eriksonian model is the identity style model of Berzonsky (1992, 2011), which is a process-based extension of the identity status model (Schwartz, Zamboanga et al., 2013). In his conceptualisation of identity formation, Berzonsky (1992, 2011) refers to three stylistic approaches or processes that individuals may utilise during identity development. Those utilising the diffuse-avoidant processing style tend to procrastinate or attempt to avoid dealing with decisions that are identity related. Consequently, their identity direction is determined by external circumstances. Individuals using the normative-avoidant processing style adopts the values, ideas, and goals of significant others without questioning any of them (Berzonsky, 1992, 2011). Lastly, individuals utilising the informational processing style seek out relevant information, are open to new experiences, and are in the position to consider obtained information to make decisions.

Narrative approaches to understanding and explaining personality and identity have moved to the forefront during the last decades of the twentieth century (e.g., McAdams, 1985a; Singer & Salovey, 1993). A key concept in the body of work regarding personal narratives and life stories is *narrative identity*, which refers to the internalised, integrative, and ever-evolving story of the self that each individual constructs (McAdams, 2008). Central to the narrative identity approach is how individuals construct stories from their unique life experiences, narrate their stories to others, and finally employ these stories to their individual understandings of the self, others, and the world (Kroger, 2015). Building on the theory of

psychosocial development of Erikson (1963), McAdams (1985a) initially contended that narrative identity transpires as formal operational thinking matures along with societal expectations concerning identity. In addition, McAdams (1985a) argues that formulating a narrative identity – constructing and internalising a life story – offers answers to the three key identity questions (Erikson, 1963), namely (1) Who am I?; (2) How did I come to be?; and (3) Where is my life going?

According to McAdams and McLean (2013), the activity of meaning making is central to the development of a narrative identity. Furthermore, developmental research suggests that there are age-related increases in abilities to make meaning (McLean & Breen, 2009; McLean, Breen, & Fournier, 2010). During the development of a narrative identity, individuals do not merely form coherent stories about experiences, but they employ the skills of autobiographical reasoning (Habermas & Bluck, 2000). Based on autobiographical memories, autobiographical reasoning allows individuals to utilise various interpretive operations to make inferences regarding who they are (McAdams, 2013). Perry (1981) states that as students mature, their way of thinking and their belief system are transformed. This is supported by King (2009) who posits that individuals who are in the emerging adulthood stage will experience the ability to function at a more advanced cognitive level and utilise more complex ways of organising their thoughts. It can then also be concluded that students will possess this same advanced cognitive functioning and more complex ways of making meaning.

McAdams (2015) posits that emerging adults make meaning through the interpretation and reinterpretation of their experiences in the context of their interactions with significant others. These life stories are a reconstruction of the past and imagination of the future that provides individuals with a sense of coherence and meaning in life (McAdams, 1985a, 2013). As mentioned earlier, cognitive growth fosters psychosocial development in students. Various personal enhancements become evident in the process, such as the ability to reflect on own interests, abilities, needs, and desires (Baxter Magolda, 2001; Chickering & Reisser, 1993).

When individuals are able to articulate and commit to a narrative identity, they become authors of their own lives (McAdams, 2013). For example, McLean and Pratt (2005) discovered that individuals considered to be in the moratorium and achieved statuses employed the most mature way of making meaning, whereas individuals who were

considered to have diffused or foreclosed identities utilised the least mature way of making meaning. McAdams (2013) views the emerging adulthood years as a developmental platform for substantial personal growth and considers the capacity to become the author of one's own life as the prime psychological task.

2.4 Self-authorship

Self-authorship is considered a way of making meaning (Kegan, 1994). Baxter-Magolda (2002) argues that an individual's internal sense of self, which is characteristic of a narrative identity, is essential to developing self-authorship. Before discussing literature on self-authorship development, the constructive-developmental approach to meaning making is described. Kegan's theory of self-evolution sets out to advance the constructive-developmental approach to meaning making and is discussed before the focus is turned to Baxter Magolda's theory of developing self-authorship.

2.4.1 Constructive-developmental approach to meaning making.

The constructive-developmental approach to meaning making focuses broadly on the cognitive structures that underlie how people think and interpret experiences, which ultimately influences how they understand the world and make sense of themselves and their environment. King (2009) proposes three major principles of a constructive-developmental approach to meaning making. Firstly, it is argued that individuals engage in actively constructing and organising their interpretations of experience. Secondly, noticeable age-related patterns exist in the ways individuals organise their thinking. Lastly, it is proposed that individual development occurs in context and in interaction that takes place between oneself and one's environment, which makes it highly variable from one individual to another. Constructive-developmental theory is concerned with the construction of individuals' understanding of reality as well as the development of individuals' construction towards greater complexity over time (Kegan, 1994).

Patterns of meaning making are frequently referred to as forms (Kegan, 2000) or structures because individuals construct them to assist in guiding their interpretive processes. In essence, meaning-making structures reveal how individuals think instead of what individuals think (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Boes, Baxter Magolda, and Buckley (2010) elaborate on the notion of constructivism by arguing that meaning is created in the space between one's experiences and one's reactions to them. In addition, they suggest that

the growth that is witnessed in individuals possesses an underlying structure that is considered developmental in nature. The activity of meaning making is considered a dynamic process in which structures of meaning making become increasingly complex over time (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). One of the approaches utilised to study meaning making is Kegan's (1994) theory of evolution of consciousness, which coincides with the developmental nature described above.

2.4.2 Kegan's theory of self-evolution.

Kegan (1982, 1994) endeavours to advance constructive-developmental approaches by drawing on the understanding of Piagetian cognitive psychology and psychoanalytic psychology and developing a holistic approach to human development (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Kegan (1994) is of the opinion that meaning making is such a fundamental aspect of development that all changes that take place throughout an individual's life course stem from this process. In addition, Kegan (1994) contends that a unique internal structure is used to construct meaning, and this internal structure advances systematically and predictably over an individual's life span. The development of this internal structure progresses through a succession of five orders of consciousness, later renamed to forms of mind (Kegan 1982, 1994). These forms of mind include impulsive mind, instrumental mind, socialised mind, self-authoring mind, and self-transforming mind. However, Kegan (1994) acknowledges that progression through these forms of mind are not linear but rather more like a helix with movement upwards requiring reflection on past learning experiences and assumptions.

These forms of mind are considered principles of mental organisation with each principle transcending the last as new ways of knowing develop (Love & Guthrie, 2005). Each has an epistemological (assumptions about knowledge), intrapersonal (assumptions about self or identity), and interpersonal (assumptions about relationships) dimension (Kegan, 1994, 1999). Kegan (1999) argues that the transition from the third (socialised mind) to the fourth form (self-authoring mind) involves attaining self-authorship. While individuals are still in the third form (socialised mind), the mechanism by which they make meaning still resides outside the self, within realities that they share with others. Kegan (1994) refers to this position as being simultaneously "the triumph and limit of the third form" (p. 126). It is considered a triumph in the sense that individuals are able to become part of a community, but at the same time, they are limited by the lack of ability to stand outside of this co-construction in order to reflect and act on it.

The transition from the third (socialised mind) to the fourth form (self-authoring mind) is instigated by a sense of life coming to a halt as one tries to distance oneself from others' expectations (Kegan, 1999). Kegan also claims that this transition involves developing the ability to "write" one's own life or, more specifically, attain self-authorship. The capability for self-authorship is described as being a qualitatively more intricate system used to organise experience, compared to the mental operations of all previous forms of mind. A sense of identity is fostered that is more enduring than the earlier versions that were co-constructed, since the internal self becomes the source of belief instead of the social surround that was present in the third form (Kegan, 1999). During the fourth form (self-authoring mind), individuals achieve the ability to take responsibility for and ownership of internal authority and establish their own sets of values and ideologies (Kegan, 1994, 1999). An internal identity develops, making it possible to coordinate, integrate, or act on values, beliefs, interpersonal allegiance, and intrapersonal states of mind (Kegan, 1999).

2.4.3 Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship.

Baxter Magolda (2001, 2008) expanded on Kegan's deeply theoretical theory of self-authorship. According to Baxter Magolda (2001), self-authorship is conceptualised as a life span developmental theory delineating the journey that individuals take throughout life. This journey involves making a shift from an external to an internal way of knowing (Baxter Magolda, 2010). Self-authorship, as defined by Baxter Magolda (2001, 2010), is the capacity to define one's beliefs, identity and social relations internally.

According to Baxter-Magolda (2010), becoming the author of one's life entails taking ownership of one's own beliefs, identity, and relationships. Consequently, the following three questions take precedence: (1) How do I know?; (2) Who am I?; and (3) How do I want to construct relationships with others? (Baxter Magolda, 2001). Similar to Kegan's (1994) three dimensions, these questions relate to epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions, as illustrated in Figure 1.

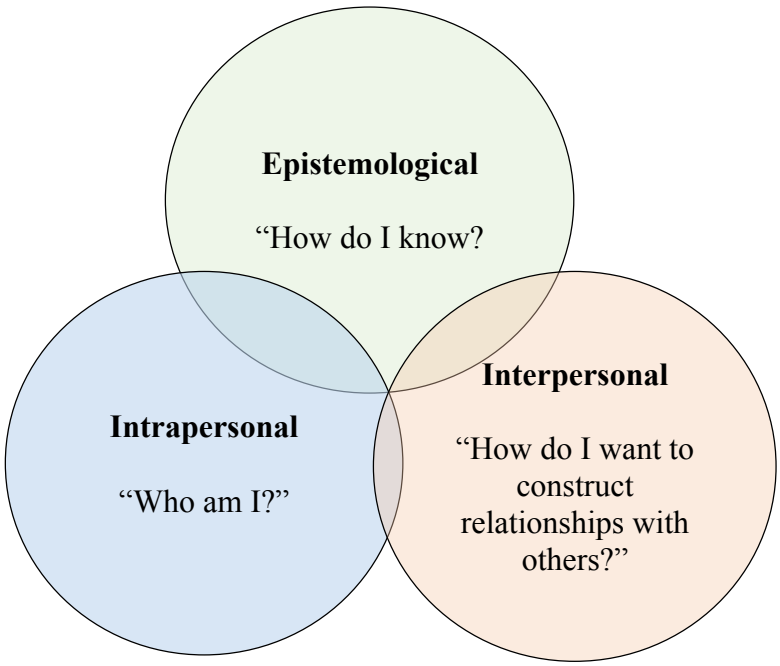

Figure 1. Theoretical dimensions of self-authorship.

According to Baxter Magolda (2001), the first epistemological dimension addresses the question "How do I know?" and describes "the evolution of assumptions about the nature, limits, and certainty of knowledge" (p. 15). Next, the question "Who am I?" relates to the intrapersonal dimension. This dimension describes "the evolution of how one thinks about one's sense of self and identity" (p. 15). Finally, the interpersonal dimension of "How do I want to construct relationships with others?" is described as "the evolution of how one perceives and constructs one's relationships with others" (p. 15).

According to Baxter Magolda (2007), to extract themselves from what they have uncritically assimilated from external sources and to bring the internal voice to the fore, students require more than acquiring merely information and skill. Transformation of their views of knowledge, identity, and relationships with others must take place. According to Baxter Magolda (2001, 2004a, 2008), the path to self-authorship includes three phases or meaning-making structures, namely (1) following formulas; (2) crossroads; and (3) becoming the author of one's life. Each phase has its own interrelated epistemological, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions. This process of constructing a self-authored system and becoming the author of one's own life spans across a continuum from external reliance to internal definition (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Baxter Magolda and King (2012) chart ten positions along this continuum (see Table 1). The ten positions

provide better understanding and insight into the nuanced portrait of self-authorship development and highlights the various pathways towards self-authorship (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Table 1

The Three Phases of Self-Authorship Development and the Ten Positions across the Continuum

SOLELY EXTERNAL MEANING MAKING	CROSSROADS	SOLELY INTERNAL (SELF-AUTHORING) MEANING MAKING
Trusting External Authority (Ea): Consistently and unquestioningly rely on external sources *without recognising* possible shortcomings of this approach.	**Entering the Crossroads** **Questioning External Authority[E(I)]:** Continue to rely on external sources despite *awareness of the need* for an internal voice. Realise the dilemma of external meaning making, yet is unsure how to proceed.	**Trusting the Internal Voice (Ia):** *Trust* the internal voice sufficiently to refine beliefs, values, identities, and relationships. Use internal voice to shape reactions and manage external sources.
Tensions with Trusting External Authority (Eb): Consistently rely on external sources, but *experience tensions* in doing so, particularly if external sources conflict; look to authorities to resolve conflicts.	**Constructing the Internal Voice (E-I):** Begin to *actively work on constructing* a new way of making meaning yet "lean back" to earlier external positions.	**Building an Internal Foundation (Ib):** Trust internal voice sufficiently to craft commitments into a *philosophy of life* to guide how to react to external sources.
Recognising Shortcomings of Trusting External Authority (Ec): Continue to rely on external sources but *recognise shortcomings* of this approach.	**Leaving the Crossroads** **Listening to the Internal Voice (I-E):** Begin to *listen carefully* to internal voice, which now edges out external sources. External sources still strong, making it hard to maintain the internal voice consistently. **Cultivating the Internal Voice [I(E)]:** Actively work to *cultivate* the internal voice, which mediates most external sources. Consciously work not to slip back into former tendency to allow others' point of view to subsume own point of view.	**Securing Internal Commitments (Ic):** Solidify philosophy of life as the *core of one's being*; living it becomes second nature

Adapted from Baxter Magolda & King (2012, pp. 18-19).

To present the nuanced and varying pathways to self-authorship from external reliance to internal foundation as described by the ten positions depicted in Table 1, Baxter Magolda and King (2012) provide a graphical representation in the form of a helix (see Figure 2).

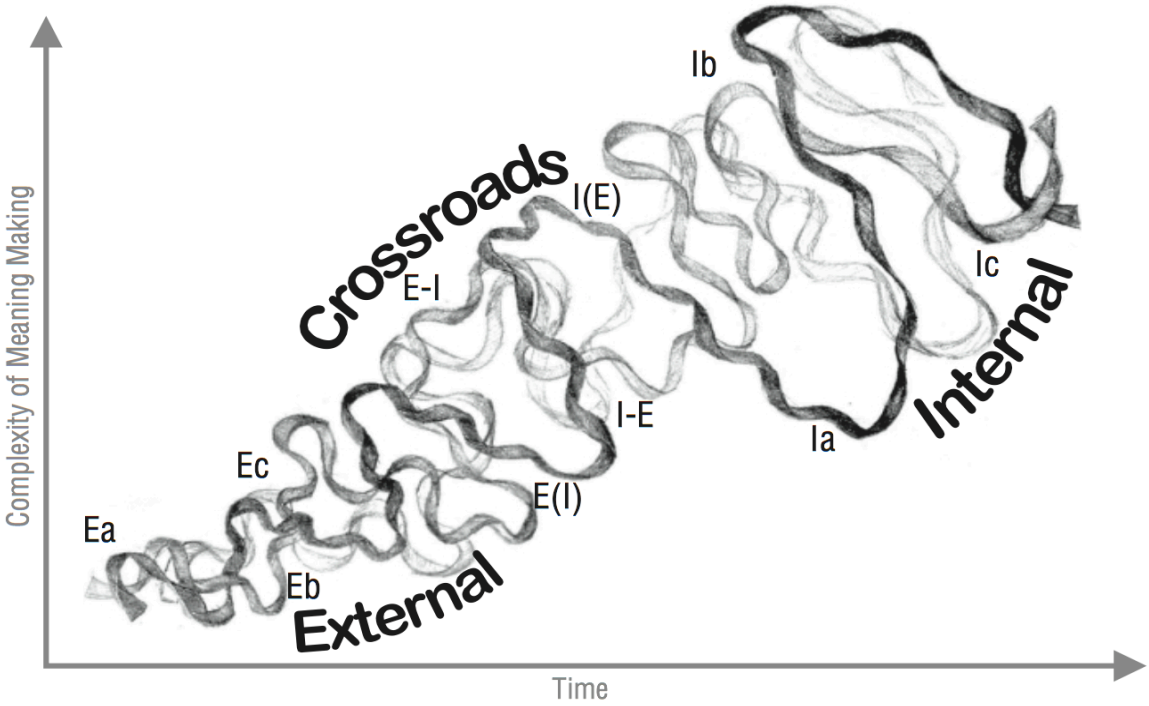

Figure 2. Integrated map of young adults' developmental journey from external reliance to internal definition (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012, pp. 18-19).

The use of a helix to represent the development of self-authorship signifies the continuous and cyclical process that takes place. Baxter Magolda and King (2012) explain how one would move through cycles of differentiation and integration when new experiences are encountered and navigated. Through the process of differentiation and integration, one meaning-making structure blends into the following structure (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2015). However, although this process follows an overall path towards increasing complexity of meaning making, it has been discovered that movement does not follow directly from one structure to the following. Instead, the journey is depicted by transitional periods, convoluted routes, and regression (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2015), with each structure consisting of varying degrees or positions of reliance on external sources and internal voice. In the following section, the three meaning-making structures or phases with the positions present in each, as depicted in Figure 1 and Table 1 respectively, are discussed.

2.4.3.1 Following formulas: External meaning-making structure.

In this particular phase, the meaning-making structure is "solely external" and characteristic of thoughts and behaviours that are constructed from input from external sources and authorities (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). There are differing degrees to which individuals rely on external sources to make meaning of their world. These degrees are represented by the first three positions: (1) *trusting external authority (Ea);* (2) *tension with trusting external authority (Eb)*; and (3) *recognising shortcomings of trusting external authority (Ec)* (see Table 1).

An individual who makes meaning by means of an early external position, *trusting external authority* (*Ea,)* will unquestioningly rely on external sources, giving no attention to the possible shortcomings of using this approach (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). In terms of their cognitive development, they see knowledge as right or wrong and as universal truths that are possessed only by highly trained experts (Barber & King, 2014; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). With regard to intrapersonal development, individuals base their identity virtually entirely on values and beliefs with which they are comfortable (e.g., those from childhood). They are also firmly committed to these values and beliefs, but are unable to explain why they are significant, except because they have grown up with them (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Their interpersonal development reflects relationships with individuals who are similar to them, and they are hesitant to interact with others who are different. In summary, individuals who function in the *Ea* position indicate no acknowledgement of possible shortcomings of their approach and depend consistently on external authorities for their knowledge, identity, and relationships.

If individuals function from a middle external position, *tensions with trusting external authority (Eb)*, they also tend to rely consistently on external sources. However, they are likely to start experiencing tensions in some areas due to conflicting external sources (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Nonetheless, these individuals also tend to turn to external forces to resolve these conflicts. In terms of cognitive development, individuals in this position will start to acknowledge the subjectivity of some areas of knowledge and possible alternative interpretations (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). However, they are still uncomfortable with ambiguity; consequently, they do not evaluate evidence consistently and will shift between multiple interpretations. They begin to recognise the need to question and analyse information, but have not yet developed a set of criteria for doing so (Baxter Magolda &

King, 2012). Regarding intrapersonal development, their identity continues to be informed by social expectations. Nevertheless, there is acknowledgement that identity can shift and change, but they experience apprehension when trying to define and act consistently according to their own views and values. Consequently, they will often defer to the expectations of others (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Interpersonally, individuals begin to share their ideas with others, but do so based on gaining approval and acceptance and will try to avoid conflict. Although they are wary of that which is different, they begin to develop a growing curiosity about those who are different and will eventually begin to interact with other groups (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). However, if tension arises between groups, they will oscillate between groups to try to please both. In sum, individuals functioning in this position live with a discomfort for uncertainty, lack definition and clarity with regard to their own perspectives and beliefs, and continue to act in accordance with the expectations of others.

Lastly, individuals who operate from a late external position, *recognising shortcomings of trusting external authority* (*Ec)*, will also rely on external sources but realise the shortcomings of their current approach. However, they have not yet developed internal voices that provide them with an alternative perspective (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) and as such hesitate to make decisions regarding beliefs, identities, and relationships. In this position, individuals' cognitive meaning making reflects an increasing level of comfort with viewing a greater body of knowledge as uncertain and open for interpretation (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). They begin to develop an appreciation for multiple perspectives, and slowly start making use of their more advanced cognitive abilities to evaluate these perspectives, but ultimately they are still influenced by others regarding their perception of what is considered valid ways of knowing (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Individuals who make meaning from this position also begin to question their intrapersonal development. They begin to acknowledge the need to examine aspects of who they are and recognise the influence of others on their sense of self, but they are not able to mediate this influence yet. A sense of confusion sets in as they begin to let go of an identity that was based on the perceptions and expectations of others, causing some distress. Individuals' interpersonal relationships are still based on the approval and acceptance of others; however, the act of constantly seeking approval and acceptance begins to cause frustration as they become aware that some relationships do not fulfil their needs or are in

conflict with their beliefs and values (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). In other words, individuals who make meaning from this position displays an increasing openness to uncertainty, acknowledgement of the desire and need to be oneself, and lastly, they recognise the possibility of conflict existing between their perspectives and expectations and those of others.

With regard to student development, Baxter Magolda (2008) states that the majority of traditional-age university students begin their educational journey with predetermined beliefs, or external formulas that govern how they learn, interact, and develop a sense of self. In the epistemological dimension, knowledge is considered absolute and is viewed as being handed down as rote from parents, lecturers, and any other authority figures (Barber & King, 2014). At this time, students perceive the quality of their educational journey to depend on the facts they gain from lecturers and textbooks. In terms of the intrapersonal dimension, from the beginning, students' sense of identity and their belief system are affected primarily by social norms and group integration (Barber & King, 2014). The interpersonal dimension is characterised by students trying to please and obey others at the expense of their own needs and desires. Inevitably, students begin to realise the limitations of relying on external authorities as they are exposed to various situations and contexts that challenge them (Baxter Magolda, 2009a).

2.4.3.2 Crossroads.

As individuals move out of the external meaning-making structure, they enter a new meaning-making structure, the crossroads. Four positions have been identified in this meaning-making structure (see Table 1). Characteristic of all four positions in the crossroads category is the ever-increasing trust and reliance on using their internal voice. The first two positions, *questioning external authority [E(I)]* and *constructing the internal voice (E-I),* reflect differing degrees of meaning making that are still defined predominantly externally but where some internal meaning making begins to emerge (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). These two positions are present in the first segment of the crossroads category, namely entering the crossroads.

The first position, *questioning external authority [E(I)]*, is defined as a primarily external meaning-making position that also involves the emergence of an internal voice (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Individuals' narratives primarily suggest dependence on

external sources and authorities for knowledge, self-definition, and interpersonal relations, regardless of the recognition that an internal voice is possible. Awareness of the possibility of an internal voice may be present in only one of the dimensions (epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) or across all three (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). In terms of cognitive development, individuals recognise that the possibility exists to make decisions that are based on values and beliefs that they have constructed internally; however, they are not quite sure how to form the beliefs. At the same time, they are still only discovering who they are and want to be, which complicates their capacity to make decisions that are based internally (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Interpersonally, they recognise that the views of friends and family have an influence on them, but they are not yet able to manage these influences. In essence, individuals begin seeing the need for an internal voice and they begin to question actively and attentively how they want to construct their worldview, identity, and relationships.

The following position, *constructing the internal voice (E-I)*, represents a position where both external and internal meaning-making structures are present and compete for dominance. However, overall, external forces still manage to take priority over internal forces (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Whereas the previous position consisted of an awareness of a new way of making meaning, this position extends beyond that to where individuals begin to construct a new way of making meaning actively. The internal voice begins to compete with external forces and grows stronger as individuals actively explore how they want to construct their beliefs, identity, and relationships. In certain contexts, the internal is predominant, and in other contexts, the external is predominant; however, the external still override the internal more often (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). The balance begins to shift, however, as individuals move to a predominantly internally oriented position during the second segment of the crossroads position, namely, leaving the crossroads.

The next two positions are present in the second segment of the crossroads position, leaving the crossroads, and they are *listening to the internal voice (I-E)* and *cultivating the internal voice [I(E)]* (see Table 1). The position of *listening to the internal voice* is the first position in the developmental journey where the internal voice becomes more prominent (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Individuals have now acquired the ability to look inward and make decisions using their internal voice concurrently. Furthermore, they are able to recognise how they are managing and being influenced by the perspectives of others. As they

begin to listen carefully to their internal voice, they might still internalise the perceptions of others from time to time, but are now able to take responsibility for doing so. The internal voice becomes the predominant force in this position of meaning making (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). As individuals leave the crossroads, they do so in the position of *cultivating the internal voice [I(E)]*. They now actively cultivate their internal voice and engage in introspection to analyse goals, desires, and interests (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Although individuals are now able to distinguish their own point of view from that of external authorities, this process is a conscious process and remains tenuous. Individuals run the risk of slipping back to their dependency on the viewpoint of others (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

According to Baxter Magolda, (Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009), students move into the crossroads domain when they begin to question the influence of authority, form alternative perspectives, and cultivate a more enduring identity. Students in this phase are not comfortable with accepting things at face value anymore and become more aware of self in relation to their personal belief systems, their positions in relation to relationships with others, and the construction of knowledge (Hodge et al., 2009). Baxter Magolda (2009a) refers to crossroad experiences in describing moments when students face challenges with regard to the ways they used to act and think. In particular, she found that the practice of being asked to think and act independently pushed students into the crossroads phase. During this time, they grappled with bringing their internal voices into dialogue with the external voices that they had become accustomed to rely on (Baxter Magolda, 2009a).

2.4.3.3 Becoming the author of one's life: Self-authoring meaning-making structure.

Becoming the author of one's life entails building a self-authored system. During this phase, individuals' internal voices become more dominant, and a new meaning-making structure that is "solely internal" emerges (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Building a self-authored system requires the experiences of the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal developmental dimensions to move "inside" oneself (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Baxter Magolda and King (2012) place the last three positions, namely (1) *trusting the internal voice (Ia)*, (2) *building an internal foundation (Ib)*, and (3) *securing internal commitments (Ic)*, within this particular meaning-making structure (see Table 1). These three positions reflect variation in the degree of self-authored meaning making. In all three

positions, the overall structure of the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions is grounded internally (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

In the initial position, *trusting the internal voice*, the increasing use of the internal voice generates confidence in this voice and consequently decreases the risk of slipping back to relying on the viewpoints of others. When individuals begin to trust their internal voices, they also begin taking responsibility for constructing knowledge, their identity, and relationships (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). They also begin to develop insight into the fact that there is a distinction between reality and their reaction to this reality (Baxter Magolda, 2010). Baxter Magolda (2009b) found that while her participants were learning to trust their internal voices, they gained understanding that what transpired in the world and in their lives, were beyond their control. However, they also discovered that they were in control of how they reacted to what happened. Cognitively, the increased trust allows individuals to become owners of how they made meaning of the world, instead of deferring to others to construct their perspective (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Intrapersonally, there is recognition that their emotions are in their control and they have the ability to create their own happiness. A re-evaluation of relationships also occurs in the interpersonal dimension as individuals begin to trust their internal voices. Those that are not built on the sense of respect and mutuality receive serious reconsideration (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). This newfound internal voice is cultivated as individuals progressively become capable of keeping it in the foreground while acknowledging the contribution of information and advice from authority figures, but not being controlled by it (Baxter Magolda, 2009b).

Once this trust has developed, individuals move to the next position, *building an internal foundation*, and a conscious process of creating a philosophy or framework begins (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). To build an internal foundation, individuals must begin to integrate their beliefs, identity, and social relations with internally held commitments (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Acting as a filter, the internal foundation allows individuals to evaluate external circumstances and guides them to shape their reactions to these circumstances. During the development of an internal foundation, individuals will continually require to gain additional confidence as they face novel or unanticipated experiences, and this will be accomplished by recycling through trusting their internal voices (Baxter Magolda, 2008; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Choices regarding careers, individuals' personal lives, and who they want to become are organised into

commitments to form an internal foundation (Baxter Magolda, 2009b). To continue through the process of self-authorship, it is a necessity to develop an internal foundation upon which meaning-making occurs. However, the development of an internal foundation firstly depends on individuals' ability to cultivate the internal voice and implement their newfound abilities consistently (Baxter Magolda, 2009b; Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

The transition to the *securing internal commitments* position for meaning making occurs when the internal foundation becomes more comprehensive (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). The internal foundation later becomes second nature, resulting in some external influences going unnoticed while other more important influences are processed more readily. A key feature of this position is the signalling of a shift from forming and cultivating internal commitments to actually living them. In living these internal commitments, they become an integral part of the core of an individual's sense of self (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). A blurring of knowledge and sense of self occurs as wisdom develops and the ability to "know" becomes intuitive. Intrapersonally and interpersonally, individuals gain a sense of security and a sense of freedom that enable them to manage external circumstances that are within their control. In addition, they are more open to further growth, leading them back to building additional trust and further refining their internal foundations. These changes come about as they allow themselves to encounter uncertainty and the unknown (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

For students, securing internal commitments is the culmination of the journey towards self-authorship in which experiences are guided consistently and continually by their internal voices (Baxter Magolda, 2004b). As these three positions unfold, it signifies the consolidation of internal meaning-making capacities, and in the process, a self-authored meaning-making structure evolves (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Completing the journey through these three positions prepares students for lifelong learning, intellectually and personally (Hodge, Baxter Magolda, & Haynes, 2009). However, Baxter Magolda also notes that very few university seniors fully demonstrated the self-authoring positions of *trusting the internal voice, building an internal foundation,* and, *securing internal commitments*, and that these positions only developed during the late twenties and early thirties (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

As mentioned before, movement from reliance on external sources to securing internal commitments is not a straightforward progression. Various personal and environmental

factors play a role in an individual's unique developmental pathway towards self-authorship, as highlighted by recent literature on the theory of self-authorship. In the next section, literature on self-authorship in various population groups is discussed.

2.4.3.4 Application of Baxter Magolda's theory in various population groups.

Since the development of Baxter Magolda's theory, many researchers have investigated the development of self-authorship among students from various groupings. While Baxter Magolda (2001) initially proposed that most students enter university with an external meaning-making structure, it has been discovered in several studies that there are students who do possess a degree of self-authorship even prior to entering university (Carpenter & Peña, 2016; Pizzolato, 2004; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Furthermore, the findings of studies allude to the fact that there might be certain circumstances, such as being marginalised, being confronted to reflect on diverse perspectives, and being appropriately challenged or supported, that might change the trajectory and progression of self-authorship.

With a focus on cultural influences on development of self-authorship, Torres (2010) investigated self-authorship in Latino students, exploring the role of their ethnic identity. Her study aimed at addressing the lack of research regarding self-authorship in a particular area, specifically the development of Latino students during the university years and the influence of their ethnic identity on their experiences. Torres (2010) suggests that ethnic identity development can vary between three stages – growth, regression, and stagnation – as an effect of environmental influences. Torres (2010) also notes distinct issues regarding ethnic identity and cultural experiences brought about by cognitive dissonance and even self-authorship development in students. These distinct issues include recognising racism, managing the effects of stereotypes on self-perception, and renegotiating relationships to honour own cultural values while respecting those of others (Torres, 2010; Torres & Hernandez, 2007).

Baxter Magolda (1992) previously reported that as little as 2% of university students achieve self-authorship by the time they graduate, and Garvey Berger (2012) posits that a mere 41% of all adults are self-authored. However, Carpenter and Peña (2016) discovered that self-authorship could be achieved at earlier stages in life. They explored experiences of first-generation, undergraduate students and identified catalysts that were considered to support self-authorship development. These include difficult life events, epistemological

dissonance, the reconstruction of meaning and lastly, role modelling (Carpenter & Peña, 2016). This supports the notion that certain factors and experiences do support the development of self-authorship during the undergraduate years or even prior to entering university.

Pizzolato's (2004) research with academically high-risk and underrepresented students, offers an alternative view on the effect of marginalisation on self-authorship development. Due to experiences of marginalisation during high school, students participating in the study possessed self-authorship prior to entering university. Nevertheless, they would temporarily revert to external meaning making upon exposure to a hostile university environment. Eventually, they would return to previous levels of self-authorship due to the specific method of coping (problem-focused coping) on which they relied to deal with the discrimination (Pizzolato, 2004).

Barber et al. (2013) examined the experiences of students who encountered substantial shifts in self-authorship to understand the source of their growth. Barber, King, and Baxter Magolda (2013) followed the approach of King, Baxter Magolda, Barber, Kendall Brown, & Lindsay (2009) to identify developmentally effective experiences that contribute to development of self-authorship. They discovered the importance of engagement in meaningful roles and experiences that demand an internal voice. This includes (1) experiences that foster identity development; (2) being challenged to evaluate knowledge claims and take ownership of beliefs; (3) belonging as a major source of support; (4) encounters with diverse others and new cultures that promote re-evaluating perspectives; (5) exposure to tragedy or intense personal challenge that requires shifting perspectives; and (6) working through complex relationships (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013). Dissonance, the discrepancy experienced in how participants view the world upon entering university and what they face at university, was found to be a significant component across themes (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013).

Clearly, the journey towards self-authorship is nuanced, unfolds differently in populations, and is driven by various personal and learning experiences. Contrary to what has always been believed about self-authorship development in students, it has been discovered that factors such as discrimination and marginalisation do result in individuals developing self-authorship at earlier stages in life. Cultural and gender identity issues have been identified as factors that contribute to earlier development of self-authorship. Although it was

proposed originally that students did not fully display self-authoring ways until after graduation and entering the workforce (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012), certain populations of students do develop self-authoring ways while at university, especially those who enter postgraduate programmes that require even more complex ways of knowing and making meaning. In addition, it is also clear that certain personal and learning experiences that promote critical thinking and effective reasoning play a significant role in students' substantial shifts in self-authorship (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013).

2.5 The Development of Self-Authorship in Postgraduate Psychology Students

After obtaining a first degree, many students continue their journey towards self-authorship during their postgraduate studies. During postgraduate studies, students are challenged to develop their cognitive and psychosocial abilities to an even higher level of functioning. Postgraduate educational experiences also provide an enabling environment for the development of self-authorship. Unlike many international university programmes, in South Africa, students will enrol in an honours programme as a fourth year of study, once they have completed a three-year undergraduate degree. This honours degree is regarded as a "lower-level" postgraduate qualification (Council on Higher Education, 2009) with the goal of helping students make the transition from purely acquiring knowledge to creating knowledge (Manathunga, Kiley, Boud, & Cantwell, 2012).

Postgraduate students are exposed to multiple perspectives and are challenged to analyse and process these differing perspectives, allowing for mutual construction of knowledge (Baxter Magolda, 2002). At postgraduate level, students are prescribed textbooks that are cognitively more challenging. In addition, they are given assignments with less structure. To complete tests and exams successfully, students are expected to answer questions that require more than mere rote memorisation. Additional reading is required before class to allow students to participate and learn to form their own opinions regarding a specific topic of discussion. Postgraduate students are also exposed to class activities and discussions that allow them to voice their own opinions and perspectives, facilitating intrapersonal development. Postgraduate class sizes are considerably smaller than undergraduate classes, which brings students into more frequent and direct contact with their lecturers and with one another. The requirement of working in teams and completing group assignments facilitates the formation of close bonds (Rosenberg, Getzelman, Arcinue, &

Oren, 2005; Volet & Mansfield, 2006), challenging students to form interpersonal relations with individuals they might perceive as different or the 'other'.

In addition to the above, postgraduate psychology students experience some unique challenges. The journey towards a profession in psychology is an arduous process in which negotiation takes place between personal and professional identity development (Kottler & Swartz, 2004). Intrapersonal growth is an essential element in the journey of a psychology student (Hughes & Youngson, 2009). Woodward, Keville, and Conlan (2015) posit that therapists face various dilemmas regarding maintaining their personal voice in the various roles they fulfil. In addition to acquiring research and clinical skills, Kottler and Swartz (2004) emphasise the identity transformation that takes place during the journey to become a mental health professional (MHP). It is expected of individuals to be aware of what they bring to the therapeutic encounter, including their beliefs, cultural values, and assumptions.

In addition to intrapersonal development, MHPs are expected to possess interpersonal skills that allow them to understand the experience of others and be able to communicate empathy in order to initiate and maintain helping relationships. Simons and Andersen (1995) argue that an integral part of being a counsellor (psychologist) is knowing one's intrapersonal world and interpersonal dynamics. Although theoretical knowledge and practical skills are valuable to have, Human (2012) states that it is insufficient in a context where individuals are expected to establish and maintain helping relationships. The therapeutic relationship between a MHP and client is distinct from any other interpersonal relationship because this relationship must become a working relationship with individuals who are often depressed, disturbed, and rebellious (Human, 2012). Skovholt (2012) argues that difficulties in engaging with clients arise because of an underdeveloped sense of awareness about self-other distinctions as they play out in the therapeutic process. To identify and regulate emotion during the therapeutic process, MHPs must have developed adequate self-awareness and the capacity to collaborate with the client empathetically (Hill & Knox, 2009).

As future MHPs, psychology students will be expected to examine, understand, and improve the emotional life of humans, which exposes them to ambiguous situations that require the use of thinking patterns that are more developed than the linear, logical, and sequential patterns to which they have been accustomed (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). Novice MHPs are overwhelmed by the complexities of the therapeutic process and the emotional and cognitive challenges that they face as they listen to the experiences of clients,

often resulting in the individuals experiencing self-doubt and self-criticism (Hill, Sullivan, Knox, & Schlosser, 2007; Orlinsky & Rønnestad, 2003). In addition, Carroll, Arkin and Shade (2011) state that self-doubt is also related to low self-confidence, which is associated with identity development among university students in general. These complexities, which are inherent in clinical practice and the therapeutic process, require of individuals to possess high levels of reflective reasoning (King & Kitchener, 1994), critical thinking (Moon, 2008), and contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

2.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, four important bodies of literature were discussed: emerging adulthood, student development, identity development, and self-authorship. The theory of emerging adulthood as a distinct developmental period was considered, focusing specifically on the five pillars of emerging adulthood. Student development theories were reviewed, with a primary focus on cognitive and psychosocial development of students. The importance of identity exploration for students during the developmental phase of emerging adulthood was highlighted, as it constitutes one of the five pillars of emerging adulthood. This chapter also introduced a narrative approach to understanding identity development during the emerging adulthood period, and more specifically discussed the process of becoming the author of one's own life. In addition, the theory of self-authorship was also discussed, beginning with an overview of the constructive-developmental approach to meaning making and referring to Kegan's (1994) theory of self-evolution. Thereafter, Baxter Magolda's (2001) theory of self-authorship was presented, with specific emphasis on the movement from external to internal meaning making in the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. A brief review of self-authorship research in various student populations was given. Lastly, the study was placed in the context of postgraduate psychology students, pointing out the importance of personal development in terms of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal dimensions of these students as they work towards becoming mental health practitioners.

Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to present the methodological framework that was employed in this research study to explore and describe the meaning-making processes of postgraduate psychology students. Firstly, the aim and research questions of the study are addressed, followed by an outline of the research design and approach that was utilised. Secondly, the participants and sampling procedures are described, followed by an overview of the data collection and data analysis procedures. Lastly, the relevant ethical considerations and the criteria for trustworthiness are discussed.

3.1 Research Aim and Questions

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the meaning-making processes of postgraduate psychology students during their journey towards self-authorship. The questions that guided the research study can be formulated as follows:

1. How do the participants make meaning of their experiences during their postgraduate psychology programme?

2. What elements of self-authorship are the participants exhibiting?

3.2 Research Approach and Design

The purpose of the study was to understand the participants' meaning-making processes regarding their development and to understand their experiences as they relate to self-authorship. With this in mind, the nature of the research question lent itself to a qualitative research approach. A case study design was chosen for this study and was placed within a constructivist framework. The constructivist notion is that truth and reality is constructed and dependent on individual experiences and perspectives. A narrative inquiry design was used, as the nature of narrative inquiries lends it to exploring how individuals construct and make meaning of their experiences through narrating these experiences.

Qualitative research is primarily concerned with exploring, describing and understanding the meanings that individuals assign to their experiences (Babbie & Mouton,

2010; Silverman, 2011). Furthermore, it captures individuals' perspectives and experiences in context and allows for the use of rich data-gathering methods, such as reflective writings and in-depth interviews (Howitt, 2010). The results obtained are conveyed through rich, thick, in-depth descriptions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2014). The focus is on how the participants interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds accordingly, based on the meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009).

The qualitative case study methodology has been described as one of several qualitative tools that can be used to study a phenomenon in a particular context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). A case study can be defined as a systematic and in-depth investigation of a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context (Rule & Vaughn, 2011; Yin, 2014). Case studies provide qualitative researchers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the events and actions of a single individual or a small number of individual participants to become intimately familiar with their social worlds (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014). Creswell (2013) describes the case study design as the exploration of a "bounded system" across time, utilising in-depth data gathered from various sources of information. In the current study, a multiple case study design entailing four individual case studies was implemented. When a multiple case study design is used, it is typically organised by first providing a detailed description of the themes in each case (within-case analysis). This is followed by thematic analysis across cases (cross-case analysis) and a description of salient themes (Creswell, 2013).

In addition, a constructivist framework informed the study, highlighting the importance of each participant's process of making meaning from individual experiences (Charmaz, 2000). Constructivism holds that what is considered the truth and reality is relative and is dependent on one's perspective (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This paradigm recognises the importance of the subjective creation of meaning that individuals attribute to their experiences. Furthermore, its foundation is laid upon the notion of a social construction of reality (Stake, 2006). Numerous researchers interested in self-authorship used the constructivist framework (Abes & Jones, 2004; Collay & Cooper, 2008; Jehangir, Williams, & Pete, 2011), and as such, this study was conducted within this particular framework.

With the focus on understanding the meaning-making processes of the participants and gaining a holistic understanding of their development, the proposed study utilised a narrative inquiry design. Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) propose that narrative can be both a method and the phenomenon of study. When narrative inquiry is being considered as a method, it

commences with the experiences expressed in the lived and told stories of individuals (Creswell, 2013). Even though narrative inquiry is used commonly in studies that focus on the life stories of one or two individuals (Creswell, 2013), it has been suggested as an appropriate approach for research that utilises a theoretical framework (Chase, 2005) such as self-authorship. Various definitions have been given for the term "narrative" and it has broad meaning (Riessman, 2008). Chase (2005) describes narrative as "a way of understanding one's own and others' actions, or organising events and objects into a meaningful whole" (p. 64). This approach was suited for the purpose of this study, as it allowed the researcher to gather data and communicate the story of the participants' meaning-making journeys. For the purpose of this study, narrative inquiry is defined as the study of experience as stories, used by individuals to enter and interpret their world and make it personally meaningful (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

3.3 Research Context

The study was conducted at the Bloemfontein Campus of the University of the Free State (UFS). According to the UFS (2016a), the institution offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate degrees and diplomas across seven different faculties. The Department of Psychology is one of the various academic departments of the Faculty of the Humanities (University of the Free State, 2016b). The intention of the Department of Psychology is to expose its students to a range of experiences in the field of psychology (University of the Free State, 2016c).

The postgraduate programme (referred to as the 'honours programme' at South African institutions) in this department involves teaching in psychological theory, practical experience through involvement in community and service-learning projects, and the opportunity to carry out an independent research project (University of the Free State, 2016c). More specifically, the programme provides students with the opportunity to deepen their academic understanding of psychological theory and to build on the knowledge they have gained during the first three years of undergraduate studies. The content areas included in the programme are psychological assessment, community and social psychology, applied research methodology, developmental psychology, psychotherapy and ethics, health psychology, and psychopathology. There is an option of full-time (within one year) or part-time (within two years) study (University of the Free State, 2016c). One of the main functions of the programme is to prepare students to apply for admission to postgraduate

training in professional psychology (Master's Degree in Applied Psychology and other applied postgraduate programmes in psychology) or academic psychology (Master's degree in research) (University of the Free State, 2016c). The students also obtain valuable skills and knowledge that allow them to enter the work world pursuing various careers.

3.4 Research Participants and Sampling Procedures

The focus of this study was to explore the meaning-making process of postgraduate psychology students, specifically those who were in the emerging adulthood period. Eligibility criteria included (a) students who were in the emerging adulthood stage (18-29 years); and (b) students who were enrolled in the postgraduate (honours) psychology programme at the UFS.

Emerging adults were included in this study since the "prime psychological challenge of emerging adulthood, is to become the *author of your life*" (McAdams, 2013, p. 151). McAdams (2013) also posits that as a developmental platform, emerging adulthood provides the opportunity for substantial personal growth. Given the changes that individuals go through in terms of personal development, with the aim of eventually authoring their own lives, participants in this developmental period were selected.

Only postgraduate students were considered, as they are exposed to an environment that provides them with many opportunities for developing enhanced cognitive and psychosocial competence. Postgraduate (honours) programmes are designed to draw students from their comfort zone and to facilitate the development of critical thinking skills and behaviour (Van Dijk, 2012), as the programme content challenges them to re-evaluate their values, beliefs, and relations with others.

Psychology students, specifically, were the focus of this study since postgraduate psychology programmes uniquely challenge students towards developing academic and practical skills, in combination with personal moulding (Kottler & Swartz, 2004). Mental health care professionals should be able to examine their own worldviews and values (Roysircar, Gard, Hubbell, & Orteg, 2005), as well as develop a professional identity that facilitates working with and helping diverse individuals. The type and level of interaction that psychology students have to aspire to requires development not only in the interpersonal dimension, but also in the intrapersonal and epistemological dimensions. Hence, these

students are expected to undergo personal development and change, which fall within the realm of self-authorship.

Purposive sampling (Patton, 2014) was utilised in this study. The researcher sought to identify and involve participants that could be considered as information-rich cases for the study. Within a constructivist paradigm, researchers tend to use the method of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was utilised for this study because it allowed the researcher to identify and select participants because they could inform an understanding of the research question and central phenomenon that was under investigation. Patton (2014) states that, in purposive sampling, cases are selected based on the criteria of providing "rich information" and being illuminative. Criticism of this specific sampling procedure includes the lack of generalisability, however, as the focus of typical qualitative research is on the in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, while empirical generalisation is not the ultimate goal.

The researcher approached the coordinator of the honours programme in the Department of Psychology, requesting to introduce the research study to the class. The students were informed about the nature of the research study and that selected participants would be expected to complete two reflective exercises and two in-depth interviews throughout the year. After the presentation, the students were provided with an informed consent letter (see Appendix A) and requested to complete and return it to the coordinator if they did decide to participate in the study. The researcher received twelve signed consent forms. Interested students who did not fall within the specified age range were excluded. Based on the exclusion criteria, as well as availability and respecting the time pressures experienced by some of the interested students, four participants were selected to partake in the study. Once participants had been selected, they were contacted via electronic mail to thank them for their interest in the study and to confirm their intended participation. The final sample of participants consisted of four postgraduate psychology students. To keep the participants' identities confidential, each individual was assigned a pseudonym. In Table 2, each participant's pseudonym, gender, age, and ethnicity is summarised.

Table 2

Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Ethnicity
1	Anne	Female	26	White
2	Becky	Female	22	White
3	Ryan	Male	21	White
4	Arya	Female	22	Pakistani

3.5 Procedures of Data Collection

To add rigour, breadth, and depth to a study, Denzin and Lincoln, (2003) suggest that a combination of multiple methods and empirical materials be used. Therefore, in this study, reflective writing tasks and in-depth, semi-structured interviews were selected as appropriate sources of data. Data collected from the reflective writing tasks provided material for the subsequent in-depth interviews. Each method of data collection was administered twice throughout the programme, one reflective writing task and in-depth interview during the early stages of the programme and a last reflective writing task and in-depth interview towards the end of the programme. This allowed the researcher to collect data that provided information regarding the participants' experiences throughout the year, instead of a snapshot of one specific time during the programme. The reflective tasks and in-depth interviews together formed a holistic data package for each participant, which was analysed in the same way during the analysis process.

3.5.1 Reflective writing tasks.

Reflection on experience has the potential to contribute to understanding and learning (Bulman & Schutz, 2004). In the area of personal development, research can be found on journaling, diaries, and other forms of reflective writing as forms of data collection in qualitative research (Jasper, 2005; Wright et al., 2006). Data obtained through reflective writing provides the researcher with a glimpse into the thought processes of the individual as they are expressed specifically in relation to a topic of focus (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2015). Keeffe and Andrews (2015) argue that personal reflections provide rich and nuanced data. One of the positive aspects of reflective writing as a method of data collection is that it

gives participants the opportunity to take time and reflect on the question and their responses more deeply (Jasper, 2005).

In this study, once confirmation had been received from all the selected participants, the first reflective writing task was emailed to them after they had been in the programme for about four months (in April 2016). Topics such as challenges faced, emotions experienced during these challenges, and how these challenges were dealt with, were provided to the participants to guide their writings. A second reflective writing task was sent via email to the participants toward the end of the programme. There was no difference between the questions asked during the first and second reflective-writing task (See Appendix B), as the aim was to continue exploring a significant experience as the participants continued through the honours programme.

3.5.2 In-depth, semi-structured interviews.

In-depth interviews are personal and intimate encounters during which open questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). In-depth interviews are the most frequently used interviewing method for qualitative research, as it allows researchers to delve deeply into and immerse themselves in personal and social matters of the participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Semi-structured, in-depth interviews provide the researcher and participant much more flexibility than structured interviews do, and the researcher is able to follow valuable avenues that arise during the interview process. These types of interviews are described as an innovative method of studying the participants' perspectives and feelings on a particular topic in depth (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

The advantages of in-depth interviews include how these types of interviews allow for unique relevance, especially in cases where the topics are of a sensitive and personal nature. In addition, in-depth interviews generate greater depth and understanding of the person and the information gathered (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). It is possible to reflect on and further discuss opinions with the participant, which allows for a more accurate interpretation of the experiences of each participant (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Patton, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Criticisms have been laid against in-depth interviews. Firstly, it has been argued that in-depth interviews do not benefit from participant interaction, which is an advantage that is

afforded by focus group discussions (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2011). The flexibility of in-depth interviews may imply a degree of unreliability, and the validity of data collected may be questioned due to their subjective nature. In addition, the time commitment and additional administrative planning have also been highlighted as disadvantages of this method of data collection (Babbie & Mouton, 2010; Patton, 2014; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Although the interviews were semi-structured, their design could be described more appropriately as taking a general interview guide approach (Patton, 2014). This approach allows the researcher to ensure that the same relevant areas of information, as they pertain to the study, are collected from each participant. However, the structure and order of questions might differ for each participant, as the researcher adapts questions based on the participant's responses. In this study, although the construction of the interview schedule was based on the research aim (see Appendix C), it was used flexibly. It can be said that the main segments of each interview were constructed in situ as the conversation progressed.

The first interviews were scheduled towards the middle of the programme (in June 2016), after the reflective writing tasks had been returned. A time that was convenient for each participant was scheduled. The interviews were conducted in the psychotherapy room of the Psychology Department. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded to be transcribed verbatim at a later stage. Rapport was established before the first interview formally began to make the participants more relaxed and comfortable during the interview. By showing genuine interest and using effective non-verbal communication to acknowledge what was being shared, rapport was maintained. The interviews took on a dialogical nature, as the researcher would ask the participants to clarify or elaborate on phrases or statements that the researcher did not understand.

Towards the beginning of each interview, all participants were asked the question, "Tell me about your most significant experience during your honours year." Although most of the experiences occurred in the university environment, participants were free to discuss experiences that occurred off campus (e.g., family, friends, or relationships). As the participant shared an experience, the researcher used probing and follow-up questions to elicit details about the content of the experience and the thought process that the participant used to make sense of the experience. Probing questions included the following: How did you approach it?; Who and/or what did you rely on for support?; and Are there things that you

learned about yourself during this time? At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher recorded brief notes with her reflections about each interview.

3.6 Data Analysis

A number of different connotations are connected to the terms *narrative research*, *narrative inquiry* and/or *narrative analysis*. They often intersect, creating confusion as to what exactly is meant by each term (Bamberg, 2010). For this reason, it is necessary to highlight that there is a difference between research *on* narratives, where the focus is on the study of narratives, and research *with* narratives, where focus is placed on narratives as a tool to explore something other than the complete narrative itself. The focus in this study was on working with narratives by utilising a narrative inquiry design to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning-making journey of each participant. Although one might make use of a narrative inquiry design, how the narratives will be used determines what type of analysis one will decide on.

Riessman (2008) delineates four main methodological approaches that are used when conducting different types of narrative research. These different approaches include structural analysis, dialogic/performance analysis, visual narrative analysis, and thematic analysis. Each approach has a different focus and purpose in analysing narratives. Structural approaches pay specific attention to narrative form and can focus on genre, linguistic form, or storyline, analysing how the content is organised. Secondly, dialogic/performance analysis explores questions such as who narrates, when and why to explore the dialogical nature and the influence of society and/or culture. Thirdly, visual narrative analysis integrates words and images to explore how individual and collective identities are composed. Lastly, and most relevant to this particular study, is thematic analysis. This form of analysis places exclusive focus on the content of each narrative, with minimal focus on how the narrative is spoken or written (Riessman, 2008).

Thematic analysis is defined as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting the patterns or themes discovered in the data. The result is organisation and description of the data set in rich detail (Braun & Clark, 2006). Boyatzis (1998) argues that the process can be taken even further to interpret various aspects of the particular research topic. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is used widely and can be considered an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis

is a flexible method in the sense that it is essentially independent of any specific theory or epistemology and compatible with essentialist and constructivist paradigms in the field of psychology (Braun & Clark, 2006). This allows for the possibility of incorporating a hybrid approach of a data-driven inductive and a deductive approach based on the theoretical framework utilised in the specific research study (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Hence, based on the focus and aim of this study, thematic analysis is the most suitable analytical approach.

The process of thematic analysis involves the researcher identifying themes through a process of careful reading and re-reading of the data (Braun & Clark, 2006). Watts (2014) proposes that reading and rereading of the transcripts is a crucial step in establishing the first-person perspective of the researcher and should be conducted before any coding is considered. During this stage, the researcher should put the voice of the participant first by maintaining a first-person perspective. This also ensures that the perspectives and assumptions of the researcher are bracketed out (Watts, 2014). Apart from taking the first-person stance to ensure that the voice of the participant comes to the fore, similarly, distance from the data can also be achieved in this way by refusing to bring external knowledge to bear. When and if it is necessary, taking a third-person perspective also allows for distancing from the data. This perspective is not informed by the researcher's own views, but instead by the researcher's comprehensive knowledge of relevant theoretical literature (Watts, 2014). Although external knowledge is not considered while taking the first-person perspective, the third-person perspective allows for the strategic application of external knowledge. The third-person perspective is particularly necessary during the process of selecting extracts for analysis as well as during discussion of the findings.

Although thematic analysis is described as the foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), no clear agreement exists about how to proceed with thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Braun and Clarke (2006) provide a step-by-step guide for conducting thematic analysis that consists of six phases (see Table 3).

Table 3

Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of the process
1. Familiarising yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading, and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes:	Coding interesting features of the data systematically across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells; generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of analysis.

Adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 87)

The process depicted above was followed in this study to code data and identify themes for each individual case. After the themes had been identified for each case, the researcher conducted a cross-case analysis to identify themes salient across all cases. An inductive approach was followed; consequently, the themes identified were linked strongly to the raw data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the next section, the process that was followed, guided by the six phases discussed above, is discussed.

The first step was to transcribe the collected data. The interviews were transcribed by trained research assistants. The researcher returned to the original recordings and listened to each one while following the transcript to ensure that the participants' experiences were recorded verbatim. Listening to the interviews again allowed the researcher to become familiar with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, before the process of coding started, the researcher engaged with the data in depth by reading and re-reading the individual data sets.

During the second phase, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that the researcher generate initial codes that represent interesting features in the data set. This process was conducted by making use of Microsoft Word to tag selections of text by using the comment function. The comments were then extracted into a table on a separate document before being transferred to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. This allowed the researcher to move information around during the phase of identifying themes.

During the third phase, the researcher identified initial themes by collating codes that were considered to fit together into basic themes. Braun and Clarke (2006) define a theme as representing an important part of data, as it relates to the specific research question of the study. In identifying themes, the researcher aims to represent meaning or a patterned response in the data set. Once basic themes had been identified, the researcher analysed the basic themes by relating them back to the data to ensure that they were true representations of the identified codes. This was followed by narrowing the basic themes to identify themes and subthemes.

In the fourth phase, the researcher reviewed the themes in relation to one another to ensure that they were defined clearly and distinctly from one another (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important that the themes form a coherent pattern and that they accurately represent the data and meanings in the data.

The fifth phase represents the activity of defining and naming the identified themes. During this process, the researcher had to ensure that the label of each theme immediately provided the reader with an indication of what the theme represented (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the sixth and final phase, the findings identified in the initial phases were written up to represent a coherent story of the data. At the same time, the results and discussion should also provide the reader with convincing arguments regarding the validity and applicability of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this final phase, the researcher also interpreted the results in the light of current literature on the specific phenomenon under investigation.

The process discussed in this section highlighted the six phases of thematic analysis and provided a brief description of how it applied to analysis of the data for the current research study. However, it is also important to highlight that these phases are not completed

linearly; instead, the researcher applied the steps recursively, continuously reverting to the raw data and refining identified themes.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The Research Committee of the Department of Psychology, as well as the Committee for Title Registrations of the Faculty of the Humanities, University of the Free State (UFS), provided authorisation for the study. Ethical clearance to conduct the research was also obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities at the UFS (Appendix D).

In the context of social research ethics, the principle of autonomy suggests that participants should be free to decide for themselves whether they want to participate and should be able to withdraw from the research study at any point (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012; Willig, 2013). In respecting the autonomy of participants, informed consent is obtained before the data are collected. Informed consent can be defined as an agreement of trust between the researcher and the participant (Patton, 2014; Silverman, 2011). It ensures that participants are fully informed about the purpose, specific methods used, the intended use of the data, and the risks involved (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). This gives the participants the necessary information when deciding whether they want to participate in the study.

The researcher presented the specifics of the research study to the participants and highlighted the necessary time commitment that would be expected of each participant. All participants completed an informed consent letter that provided brief but descriptive information about the focus of the research study. At the beginning of each interview, the consent form was revisited and participants gave verbal confirmation that they agreed and felt comfortable with participating in the interview. Consent was also obtained from each participant to record the entire interview using a digital recorder. The participants were also reminded about the voluntary nature of their participation each time they were requested to complete the reflective writing task.

Another ethical principle that serves an important function in the practice of research in general is the principle of confidentiality. As the data collection occurred during face-to-face interviews, the study cannot be described as an anonymous study; however, the data collected are kept confidential. In assuring the participants' confidentiality, the researcher must

guarantee that no identifying material will be obtainable by any individual, other than those directly involved in the research study (Patton, 2014). The aim of guaranteeing confidentiality is to allow participants the freedom to disclose personal and sensitive data (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). It is the researcher's responsibility to maintain complete confidentiality with regard to any information collected from participants during the research process (Willig, 2013). In addition, the commitment to maintain confidentiality requires of the researcher to refrain from sharing data with academic colleagues, informally or formally, in a way that would allow easy identification of any of the participants (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). To ensure confidentiality in this study, the researcher conducted the personal interviews herself, and all the audio recordings were saved and password protected on her personal computer. The interviews were transcribed by two formally appointed and trained research assistants. They were bound by contract to maintain confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants to ensure they cannot be identified, and no personal information was disclosed that could possibly jeopardise the participants' identities.

Qualitative research involves the sharing of personal and sensitive information (Creswell, 2013). It is expected of researchers to anticipate possible adverse outcomes of an interview and consider potential harm that might occur as a result (Patton, 2014; Silverman, 2011). Hammersley and Traianou (2012) argue that doing no harm is the cornerstone of ethical conduct. The potential harm that can occur includes but is not limited to physical, psychological, emotional, or social harm (embarrassment) (Patton, 2014). The participants were invited to discuss experiences that they perceived as significant during their postgraduate year; however, they were assured that it would not be expected of them to share something with which they did not feel comfortable. To manage the possible risk of harm, at the end of each interview, the participants were debriefed and were given the opportunity to talk about anything that had come up during the interview that might have upset them. All participants were informed that if they presented with any signs and symptoms of severe emotional distress during the interview process, they would be offered the option of referral for professional counselling.

In addition to all of the principles mentioned up to this point, the researcher also must consider the matter of compensation. Patton (2014) argues that the consideration of whether and how to compensate participants involves questions pertaining to ethics and data quality. The researcher must keep in mind the possibility that compensation might affect the

participants' responses and enhance the incentive to respond in a specific way. With this in mind, the researcher decided to highlight the personal intrinsic benefits that participants could obtain from participating in the research study. In the initial e-mail sent to the prospective participants to inform them of their selection for the study, the researcher emphasised the fact that participation would be an experience that would benefit each as an individual and as a student. In addition, it was explained that they would be given the opportunity to do some personal reflection and gain first-hand experience of the process of qualitative research. This relates to the kinds of benefit that can be derived from qualitative research. Apart from the fact that valuable knowledge is produced, the participant often also benefits from participating in research. Grenz (2010) found that many participants enjoyed being interviewed and occasionally found it therapeutic. This was particularly the case during this research study. Participants admitted afterwards that they "felt lighter" or "gained some insight" into their current situation.

3.8 Trustworthiness and Rigour of the Study

The quality criteria of reliability and validity traditionally used in quantitative methods are not necessarily appropriate for use with qualitative methods (Pitney, 2004). Positivists often question the trustworthiness of qualitative research; however, it has been suggested that it is possible for qualitative researchers to incorporate measures that deal with validity and reliability in qualitative studies (Shenton, 2004). The criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability have been suggested as worthy of consideration by qualitative researchers as they endeavour to conduct trustworthy studies. In addition, researcher reflexivity has gained a vital role in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005); for this reason, it will also be considered when discussing elements of trustworthiness.

3.8.1 Credibility.

Credibility relates to whether the research findings capture what is truly occurring in the context and whether the researcher has learnt what he or she intended to learn (Pitney, 2004). According to Merriam (2009), credibility deals with the question, "How congruent are the findings with reality?" Credibility parallels internal validity and is one of the most important criteria in establishing trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Credibility can be supported and strengthened through processes such as triangulation and an audit trail strategy (Mertens, 2010; Shenton, 2004).

Triangulation primarily involves collecting data from multiple and varying sources and utilising multiple data-collection strategies (i.e., both interviews and reflective writing tasks). The primary idea of using triangulation is to crosscheck data collected and the findings to ensure that a complete and accurate understanding of the phenomenon under investigation is obtained (Pitney, 2004). During this particular study, the researcher used triangulation by requiring the participants to complete two reflective writing tasks in addition to the semi-structured interviews conducted. The data from both sources were utilised during the process of analysis and coding of themes.

Recording the interviews allowed immediate access to the information gathered throughout the data-gathering process and allowed the researcher to check and re-check the data. The longitudinal nature of this particular study allowed the researcher the opportunity to verify data gathered from the reflective writing tasks and the initial interviews during subsequent interviews using follow-up questions to particular topics. The prolonged engagement in the study and contact with the participants was also beneficial, as it allowed trust to develop, which allowed the participants to feel more at ease discussing various personal experiences. Jootun, McGhee, and Marland (2009) suggest that when participants feel more relaxed, the data gathered are more likely to be credible.

Lastly, an audit trail strategy comprises a thorough documentation of the inquiry process and findings during which the researcher accounts for all the research decisions and activities to indicate how data were collected, recorded, and analysed (Bowen, 2009). Documents that enable a thorough audit trail and that should be kept for cross-checking of the inquiry process include the raw data, interview and observational notes, and any other documents or field notes (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher ensured that all documents gathered during the research process were kept safe for rechecking later. These documents include all communication with participants, research data collected, and personal writings and reflections.

3.8.2 Transferability.

In quantitative research methods, external validity refers to the extent to which findings generated by a specific study can be transferred to other situations (Merriam, 2009). Positivist researchers are concerned with the generalisability of the results of a study. In contrast, qualitative researchers are concerned with depth rather than breadth of information and are

therefore not as concerned with generalisability but instead use the term *transferability* (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). More specifically, Merriam (2009) refers to reader generalisability, which is provided through enough context and rich detail that allow the reader to determine the transferability of the results to new contexts.

A full description of all the contextual factors affecting the study is needed, and these include (a) the number of participants taking part in the study and where the study was based; (b) any inclusion and exclusion criteria with regard to the participants who provided data; (c) data collection methods that were utilised; (d) the number and duration of data-collection sessions; (e) and the specific period during which the data were collected (Shenton, 2004). These descriptions delineate the boundaries of the study. Guba and Lincoln (2005) argue that it is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that sufficient contextual information has been provided about the environment and participants. The specific context in which the study was undertaken was explained in detail.

In using thick, rich descriptions, the researcher offers insight into the time, place, and context of the particular study. This provides the readers with a clear picture of the context, which in turn allows them to determine whether the results are applicable to another context or environment (Creswell, 2013). The data-collection procedures and interview question in this specific study were chosen specifically and designed to elicit stories related to the participants' journey towards self-authorship.

3.8.3 Dependability.

To allow others to follow the process and logic and to be able to replicate or repeat a qualitative research study, dependability must be ensured (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Similar to what is expected in obtaining transferability, the researcher must provide full details of the research methodology and contextual information that might be of importance in replicating or repeating the study. In quantitative research, this is commonly known as reliability. However, ensuring reliability in qualitative research is complicated by the changing and contextual nature of the phenomena investigated by qualitative researchers. Nonetheless, to ensure an acceptable level of dependability, the researcher reported all processes (such as participant selection, data collection, and analysis) in detail. Dependability is also established using an audit trail and triangulation (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Triangulation and

an audit trail, as discussed in the section on credibility, also serve to ensure dependability in the interpretation of the data.

3.8.4 Confirmability.

Confirmability refers to the degree to which findings materialise from the data collected, free from the researcher's biases and motivations (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). It can be seen as the qualitative researcher's comparable consideration to objectivity, which is pursued in positivist studies (Shenton, 2004). In striving for confirmability in a study, steps must be taken to ensure, as far as it is possible, that the findings of the study are the direct result of the experiences and opinions of the participants instead of the imposed characteristics and possible preferences of the researcher. Once again, the important role of triangulation in promoting confirmability is emphasised, in this instance to reduce the effect of researcher bias. In addition, an audit trail is also suggested in order to provide evidence that the researcher did not simply set out to find what he or she wanted to find (Bowen, 2009). The use of a reflective journal is also advised to establish confirmability. This strategy is discussed in more detail in the following section.

3.8.5 Researcher reflexivity

In qualitative research, the researcher determines the specific questions to ask, what to observe and what to make note of; therefore, it is important to consider who the researcher is and what assumptions, values, beliefs, or biases the individual might bring to the study (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, it is suggested that the researcher reflect on these factors and constantly monitor them throughout the process to determine their effect on the data and interpretation thereof (Mertens, 2010). However, Willig (2013) argues that reflexivity is more than merely acknowledging personal biases. It also invites the researcher to think about how his or her reactions to the research context and the data will actually produce certain understandings and insights. The emphasis of researcher reflexivity is on recognising the crucial position of the researcher in the process of constructing knowledge. It is necessary for one to become aware of and reveal one's own subjective lens through which one filters the literature, data, and interpretations. Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge that it is impossible to disregard one's own experiences during the process (Etherington, 2007).

On a more practical level, the cognitive process of setting aside one's perceptions of the phenomenon under study is known as bracketing (Etherington, 2007). Speziale and Carpenter (2007) posit that the researcher will be in a better position to conduct accurate and honest research if all biased ideas and beliefs are brought to the surface. However, bracketing consists of more than merely setting aside personal bias. Tufford and Newman (2010) argue that identifying and setting aside biased ideas and beliefs is the first form of researcher engagement. The second form includes revisiting the data and one's understanding of the data analytically, as knowledge about the topic increases.

To minimise or account for researcher bias, it is advised to make use of a reflective journal. Throughout this research process, the researcher kept a reflective journal (see Appendix E) noting personal experiences and perceptions regarding the process and content of each interview and the research process in general. During the process of analysis and documenting the findings, the researcher also discussed (face to face or via e-mail) concerns and struggles with her supervisor. This interaction provided the researcher with an objective and unbiased perspective at times when the researcher became too close with the data and the participants' journeys. The reflective journal and discussion with the supervisor allowed the researcher to reflect on various personal and contextual aspects that were brought to light during this process.

As the researcher had been a psychology honours student the year prior to conducting the study, it was necessary to remain cognisant of how her own experiences might influence the interview and the analysis process. The researcher noted after the first round of interviews that she was able to identify and relate more with certain participants' experiences compared to others. This realisation allowed the researcher to be more sensitive to instances where focus diverted from the participants' experiences during the second round of interviews. The researcher also had to be careful not to allow her personal experience to influence the lens through which the data were analysed, resulting in researcher bias.

All of the participants applied for the master's programme or intended to apply. Once the selection process was completed, the researcher also had to be sensitive towards the feelings and experiences of those who were not successful in their application. As a master's student, the researcher represented that which to some currently seemed unattainable. Reflecting on personal experience during this process, the researcher entered the second round of interviews being prepared for varied emotions and reactions towards the psychology

programme and possibly towards the researcher. These instances had to be detected and managed appropriately.

In addition, the researcher also had to distinguish between her newly found role as psychotherapist and researcher. Although Grenz (2010) posits that in-depth interviews by nature can also be of therapeutic value to the participants, the researcher had to be cognisant of her natural desire to cross over into a therapist role as the participants discussed the struggles they were experiencing. Certain aspects of creating a therapeutic environment certainly allowed the participants to feel more comfortable to share personal experiences, but this process had to be managed carefully.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the qualitative research approach followed and offered justifications for choosing this type of research design for the current study. The process of participant selection was contextualised, and a detailed discussion was provided regarding the particular data-collection methods. The use of thematic analysis in a narrative inquiry design was rationalised, and the analytic process was discussed thoroughly. Criticisms and limitations were considered throughout to present an informed view on the methodology of this current study. Ethical considerations that are key to research and qualitative research in particular were discussed. The chapter concluded with a discussion of the trustworthiness of this study. After having provided a description of the methodology of this current study, the research results are presented and discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Research Results

The aim of this chapter is to present the themes that emerged from the participants' experiences, as described through the reflective writing tasks and interviews. At first, the themes that were identified for each case are discussed individually, followed by a discussion of cross-case analysis. A brief description of each participant's background is provided, after which a visual overview of each participant's themes and subthemes is presented. This is followed by a description of the participants' journeys as they unfolded through the themes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the cross-case analysis

Direct extracts from the original transcripts are used to ground the data in the context and 'true voice' of each participant. Some quotations have been altered slightly, which is indicated by replacing removed information with three periods. Where individual words were changed or added to provide context, they are indicated by the use of square brackets, as indicated: [ ]. Although all the reflective writing tasks were completed in English, some participants completed interviews in Afrikaans. To retain authenticity, the Afrikaans quotes are used as such, with English translations provided as footnotes. The sources of quotes are identified by using the following 'descriptors': first interview – FI; second interview – SI; reflective writing task one – RW1; and reflective writing task two – RW2. The (p) indicates the page number and (line) the line number where the quotation is located in the document.

4.1 Anne

Anne was a 26-year-old female who attended a private school before enrolling at the university to study journalism. She worked in the public relations domain before enrolling for the honours programme in psychology. At the time of enrolling for the honours programme, Anne had been married for two years, and her husband played a significant role in her decision to continue her studies and in providing support throughout the year. The decision to continue her studies was a very difficult and personal decision for her, but she realised that it was necessary as part of her personal development.

4.1.1 Anne's journey: Being true to myself.

Anne came across as an independent and self-assured young woman. However, throughout our discussions, it became evident that Anne was working actively on being truer to herself within the dimensions of intrapersonal and interpersonal development. Pursuing a career in psychology was something "*very close to [her] heart"* [FI, p. 4, line 46], but in the process, she had to come to terms with various conflicting expectations on personal and societal level. Although following a career in psychology was a personal desire, she was also questioning how this decision would affect her marriage, as is evident in the following statements: *"I felt conflicted and torn between two things I love – time with my husband on the one side and time spent on my psychology studies on the other*." [RW1; p. 1, line 42] and *"Even though I've worked before … , I did wonder, did I make the right decision? Is this going to impact my marriage, which is very important to me"* [FI, p. 4, line 28].

Throughout the year, she was challenged to reconsider how she perceived herself and how she experienced herself in relation to others, while pursuing her desire for personal growth and development. However, as the year continued and Anne began to focus on her own development, academically and personally, she came to realise that she was discovering more about herself, becoming more congruent with herself and this in turn had a positive effect on her interpersonal relationships: "*So I think that's definitely been an area in terms of my social life with my husband that's been affected by and that I've grown from as well. That it is okay not to feel that I HAVE to be there all the time, that I can grow as well as a person"* [FI, p. 3, line 14].

Her developing insight into herself also led to her redefining her interpersonal relationships in terms of who she valued as important and worthy of her time and attention: "*In the end, I need to do what is good for me as a person and for those people closest to me, my important others, so to speak. And then, yes, I can give attention to other people, but not to the detriment of my own happiness and my own well-being in a sense"* [SI; p. 2, line 24].

In considering Anne's journey of personal growth, two themes with subthemes emerged. The themes and subthemes are presented visually in *Figure 3*.

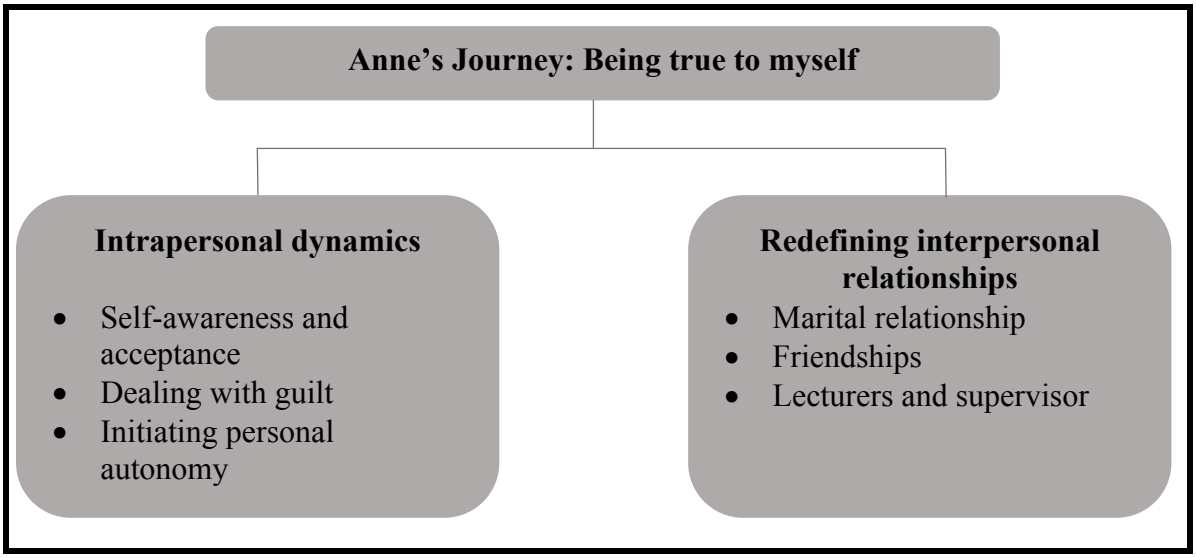

Figure 3. Visual display of Anne's journey: Being true to myself.

4.1.2 Intrapersonal dynamics.

Anne's journey of accepting and being truer to herself involved interplay of various intrapersonal factors. An understanding of her cognitive processes, motivation, individual preferences, strengths, and weaknesses allowed her to gain personal autonomy, which facilitated her experience of the honours year as a period of personal growth. In discussing intrapersonal dynamics, the themes *self-awareness and acceptance, dealing with guilt* and *initiating personal autonomy* are presented.

4.1.2.1 Self-awareness and acceptance.

For Anne, becoming more aware of herself as an individual separate from others contributed significantly to her experience as an honours student. Anne identified one particular realisation that seemed to have prepared her for seeking and accepting growth experiences throughout the year: "*I have realised it is okay to be an introvert*" [FI, p. 2, line 7]. "*The realisation gave me the courage to embrace myself as an introvert and to get to know the strengths associated with this personality style"* [RW1, p. 1, line 26]. Prior to coming to this realisation, Anne had a negative attitude towards this particular personality style and consequently also tried to be more extroverted as she did not want to identify with this "*inferior personality quality"* [RW1, p. 1, line 21]. In coming to the point of self-acceptance on one particular aspect of her personality, she embarked on a journey to becoming truer to herself: "*I have experienced a sense of growth in myself ever since, living*

more fully and being more comfortable in my own skin. I am also more at peace with myself knowing that I am not attempting to fill a role that was never mine to fill in the first place" [RW1, p. 1, line 27].

An experience that Anne identified as significant in terms of self-awareness and personal growth was selection for the master's degree: *"The master's selection process was definitely an experience that had a great impact on my growth as an individual, personal evaluation, personal exploration, and my values"* [RW2, p. 1, line 8]. Although she naturally is a reflective person, she admits that this experience challenged her to look even deeper and ask serious questions: "*I think it was an opportunity to really delve deeply. I always tend to try and reflect on myself as a person but it was really a process that pushed me to reflect on myself, IN DEPTH, and to get to know myself a little bit more than I thought I would* [SI, p. 1, line 7]. *In both preparing for and reflecting post-interview, I asked many questions to myself, about myself"* [RW2, p. 1, line 11]. This set in motion a journey of discovery of herself as unique and separate from others: "*These questions increased my awareness of myself as an individual with unique preferences, needs, wants and choices in life"* [RW2, p. 1, line 18]. This realisation also allowed her to deal better with the feelings of guilt she was experiencing.

4.1.2.2 Dealing with feelings of guilt.

Apart from struggling at first to accept herself as an introvert, Anne also experienced significant guilt. As mentioned before, pursuing a career in psychology was very important to Anne, and she had a personal desire to develop herself as a person, but her personal aspirations conflicted with her perceived expectations of herself as a wife: "*So I think for me at first in the beginning of the year I felt really guilty coming home at 8 or 9 o'clock at night seeing my dog, seeing my husband"* [FI, p. 3, line 9]. She also experienced guilt about not always wanting to spend time socialising with classmates, but instead go home to focus on her academic work: "*Personally, I prefer, I want to go home and I want to work. That is what I want to do, that makes me happy. And I would feel guilty if they wanted to go for coffee or they want to do this or want to do that. And then I feel bad for saying no all the time … , I would feel so angry with myself because now I'm unhappy for going in the first place"* [SI, p. 2, line 16].

At first, dealing with these feelings of guilt was a personal struggle for her as she admits that having to constantly be concerned about others' feelings meant that at times she had to act in contradiction to what she truly wanted to say and do: *"It's sometimes annoying because I'll step on my own toes just to not hurt someone else's feelings"* [FI, p. 6, line 5]. It was not until later in the year, that she became able to challenge the feelings of guilt. Through developing greater self-awareness, she came to identify the source of her guilt. In addition, the tough questions she started asking herself paved the way for her to embrace independence and initiate her personal autonomy.

4.1.2.3 Initiating personal autonomy.

Anne displayed a degree of independence at the beginning of the year, especially in how she makes decisions and her way of dealing with criticism from others: *"I think you have to consider the person's intentions behind the criticism in the first place. So you also have to look at who is criticising you and not content based. You need to decide what you can learn from it. You need to decide not to feel offended by it"* [FI, p. 1, line 27]. However, she also admitted later on that she originally did not rely on her own identity consistently: "*I became more reliant on my own identity so to speak … I can now kind of separate the two and say, 'No, why do I have to feel guilty about that?'"* [SI, p. 2, line 13]. She also had to reconsider her decision-making approach as it pertains to her own well-being and admitted that becoming more assertive definitely made a difference: "*So perhaps, definitely becoming more assertive in the way that I make decisions have made me more autonomous"* [SI, p. 3, line 33].

In terms of not taking responsibility for others' decisions and feelings, Anne acknowledged and accepted her desire to be more self-focused: "*I don't get offended easily, I don't, but I'm always worried, or I used to be worried about offending other people. And I've realized that I need to make decisions that is good for me now"* [SI, p. 3, line 29]. In addition, she also used this acceptance of the desire for independence and self-focus to reprioritise without feeling guilty about her decision: "*I'm prioritising better and perhaps even to the detriment of other peoples' feelings, which is unfortunately sometimes necessary"* [SI, p. 3, line 27].

Anne started to appreciate the importance of self-determination: "*It made me again realise that I choose the activities and people with whom I surround myself and to whom I*

give my time. I also choose the influences that I allow in my life as well as the type of influence I want to be" [RW2, p. 1, line 19]. She managed to challenge her feelings of guilt: "*I realised that people will always get offended about things, but that I can't manage their offences – they have to take responsibility for and manage their own feelings"* [RW2, p. 1, line 30]. As she began to prioritise, she began to redefine her interpersonal relationships in terms of who and what is important: *"Thus, I made a point to rather spend my time around the people whom I value and the rest of it focused on personal development and other things that are important to me"* [RW2, p. 1, line 28].

4.1.3 Redefining interpersonal relationships.

Considering the intrapersonal growth that Anne had experienced throughout the year, it was inevitable that this would also have an effect on her way of relating to others. She came to see her pursuit for independence and personal growth as contributing to the well-being of her relationship with her husband. She also became more selective in who she associated with in terms of friendships in an academic and personal context. Anne's manner of relating to lecturers was affected significantly as she started to form personal relationships with a selected few who contributed to her journey of personal growth and self-discovery. Each of these three areas of interpersonal relationships is discussed briefly.

4.1.3.1 Marital relationship.

As was mentioned, Anne had concerns regarding the effect her studies would have on her marriage. During the first reflective writing task, Anne admitted that her relationship with her husband was very dear to her, and she regarded his happiness as of great importance to her: "*I trust and value his insights. His happiness is also very important to me and I like to consider his perspectives"* [RW1, p. 2, line 5]. For this reason, primarily, she had to find some sense of confirmation that her decision would improve and not harm their relationship: *"I spent time deeply reflecting on the situation. I find this very useful to organise my thoughts and feelings. I then also spoke to my husband about my struggle"* [RW1, p. 2, line 4]. She came to realise that he was not expecting her to be there for him the whole time: *"I don't have to feel bad and guilty about it because we both have our own things and that's fine, it works for our relationship. In fact, I think it actually made us grow closer"* [FI, p. 3, line 29]. On the contrary, he supported her decision: *"And what I found is that it's okay. And my husband is very supportive so I can work until twelve o'clock, whatever I need to do. I mean*

he has his own things going on and we've got a very good relationship in that way. We believe that as much as we are a unit we also have to develop in our way as individuals" [FI, p. 3, line 3]. Having her husband's support and the "*inner fulfilment and peace"* [RW1, p. 2, line 15] also allowed her to re-evaluate her personal preferences and choices in terms of friendships and with whom she spends time.

4.1.3.2 Friendships.

As a more mature student, Anne had to adjust being in class with younger classmates. From the beginning, she knew that she preferred to spend time with friends of her own age: "*I find that I still prefer my own mates that are my age, you know, even though I'm in this environment where I study and I kind of have to do things with them ... but I still prefer my own age of people"* [FI, p. 3, line 17]. As she came to get to know herself better and accept certain aspects of herself, she also began to redefine her relationships with others to align with her personal values and goals: *"I've formed closer relationships with other people who tend to have the same values as I do ... So I definitely don't think I have the same group that I had at the beginning of the year"* [SI, p. 2, line 37].

Anne incorporated many aspects that she had learnt about herself with her decision process of selecting friends: *"People that are independent, people that can think for themselves"* [SI, p. 3, line 7]. She also realised that it was important for her to surround herself with people who were also able to reflect objectively on the perspectives and criticism of others: "*I like people who can respect that as well, can respect people having different perspectives and different views, who don't get offended easily and who are not oversensitive. That's a very big thing for me, forming friendships with people who are not overly sensitive about things"* [SI, p. 3, line 12]. Having greater certainty about how and with whom she wanted to relate, Anne was also able to challenge the guilt she had felt about being so specific with how she spent her time.

4.1.3.3 Lecturers and supervisor.

Apart from her relationship with her husband, friends, and classmates, a new dimension to her interpersonal relationships developed during the year. As opposed to the large number of students in undergraduate classes, the honours class provides a more intimate and personal environment where students have the opportunity to really interact with lecturers. Having this

opportunity was of great value to Anne's development throughout the year: "*Lecturers have been amazing, I have had two lecturers who I feel definitely impacted my life this year"* [SI, p. 2, line 1]. She not only found value in the 'book knowledge' that they imparted to the students, but also appreciated and preferred the personal experience that they were able to share with students in terms of the more practical aspects of practising psychology*:" I feel I find a lot in personal experience, when they come to class and they discuss cases, when they discuss things that they have experienced … So I feel that yes, I can read the textbook, I can manage, I'll be fine. But I value when they do come to class and they give you some of their own experience, things that I can't find anywhere but from them"* [FI, p. 4, line 18].

Anne relished this new dimension to her interpersonal relationships, and she described her relationship with her supervisor as more than merely a student-supervisor relationship: *"My supervisor, for instance, gave me a lot of leeway with my research. I could literally just do whatever and then come to her when I needed help and she would help me. So I didn't feel like I was kind of, you know … someone was looking over my shoulder the whole time. We had a very good working relationship"* [SI, p. 5, line 21]. In allowing her to take more responsibility and work independently, her experience with most lecturers was described in a positive light and these newfound relationships contributed to her personal goal of development: "*I feel like I have a good relationship with them and I specifically feel that those two lecturers … have been instrumental in my year"* [SI, p. 2, line 7]. Anne had discovered a new relationship dimension that supported her desire for more mature interpersonal interaction and which also supported her goal of becoming more independent.

It is evident from the discussion above that the honours year had been a growth-enhancing experience for Anne, and that she made use of challenging situations to get to know herself better. Changes on an intrapersonal level also had a significant effect on her interpersonal relationships. Throughout this year, she was searching for meaning in all situations due to her personal desire for more independence and ultimately being truer to herself.

4.2 Ryan

Ryan was a 21-year-old male who was enrolled in a B.Soc.Sc. degree with majors in psychology, sociology, and criminology prior to applying for the psychology honours programme. He was also involved in a long-term relationship with his high school

sweetheart. Ryan was residing with his parents while completing his studies and regarded them as an important support system during this time.

4.2.1 Ryan's journey: Finding my rhythm and direction.

From Ryan's journey, it became evident that this year provided him with an opportunity for testing and revising his sense of self as well as becoming acquainted with the realities of becoming an adult. He faced numerous uncertainties and challenges in terms of his future career plans and had to become comfortable with this in order not to become overwhelmed by it all. Ryan's journey centres on getting to know and understand himself better in relation to others outside his family. In interacting with fellow psychology students and integrating what he was learning in his psychology modules, Ryan came to see and understand himself differently: "*How they have influenced me the most, however, is how these students of psychology can give me an outside perspective of myself"* [RW1, p. 1, line 44], and: "*I want to become a counselling psychologist, and use these new learnt therapies to help others as they have helped me gain knowledge about myself"* [RW1, p. 1, line 34].

Although Ryan was originally confident about his degree of independence and his self-knowledge and understanding, he seemed to move back and forth between relying on himself and seeking external acceptance and validation: *"All these outside acceptance and insights have challenged me to re-evaluate myself as these individuals do"* [RW1, p. 2, line 8]. Ryan also experienced various difficulties and disappointments with regard to career choices; yet, he continued to search for and accept the possibility of alternatives. This was indicative of a road of self-discovery. As he was in the process of identity exploration, he could easily see himself in various career roles: *"Daar was baie ander geleenthede, so dit was nou nie net die deur is heeltemal toegemaak nie"* [SI, p. 3, line 1].[1]

Ultimately, Ryan's journey was about establishing his sense of self; integrating what he had originally believed about himself with the information he was receiving from external sources. He also started to realise that a shift had to be made towards becoming an adult: *"Ek is nou besig om in die volwasse wêreld in te tree"* [SI, p. 6, line 2].[2] This also meant gaining independence and restructuring interpersonal relationships: *"Ek hoef nie meer almal oom en tannie te noem nie, en ek moet nou op dieselfde plato kom, om dieselfde respek te kan*

[1] … and there were many other opportunities, so it was not that the door was completely shut.
[2] … I am now busy entering the adult world … .

verdien. Dit was nogal iets wat verander het met my identiteit die jaar" [SI, p. 6, line 3].[3] Although Ryan displayed a subjective sense of independence, especially in his approach to making decisions, he also relied on the acceptance and approval of others.

Ryan's journey as an honours psychology student is captured by two main themes, namely *self-discovery* and *shifting towards becoming an adult*, each with various subthemes. The themes and subthemes are depicted visually in Figure 4.

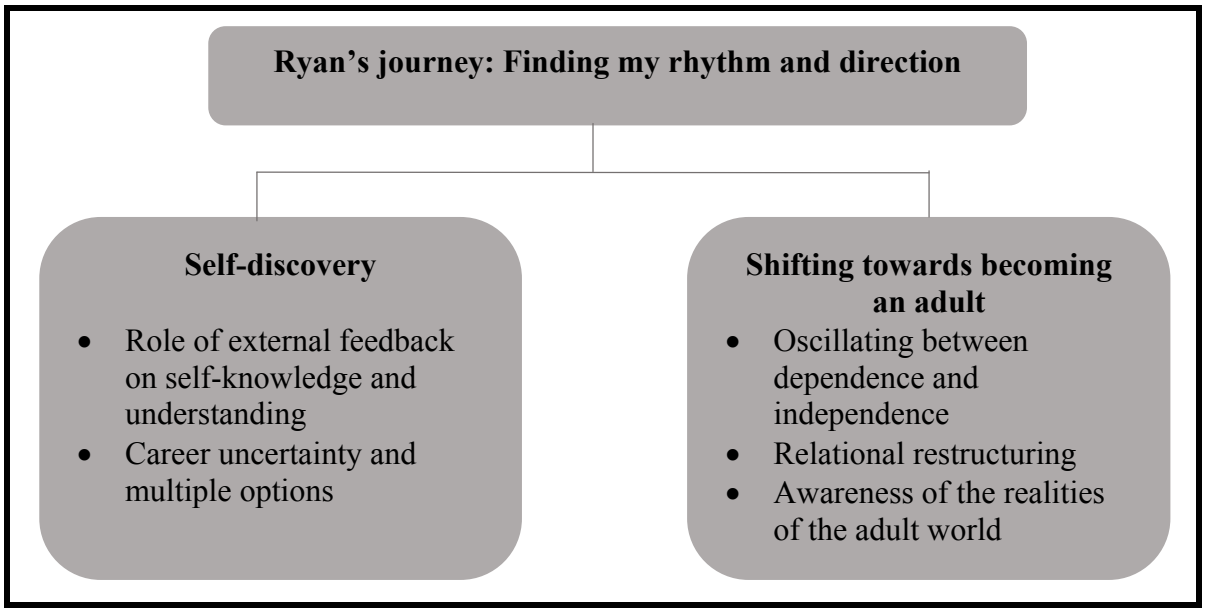

Figure 4. Visual display of Ryan's journey: Finding my rhythm and direction.

4.2.2 Self-discovery.

Although Ryan entered the year with a perceived sense of knowing and understanding himself, he was challenged on various fronts by outside perspectives, some of which he accepted and others that he discarded due to them being incongruent with what he believed about himself. His approach to considering and accepting alternative career options also reflected his process of discovering more about himself in the context of career choices. The theme of *self-discovery* is explored by discussing the subthemes of *role of external feedback on self-knowledge and understanding,* and *career uncertainty and multiple options*.

[3] … I need not address everyone as uncle and aunt anymore, and I have to get onto the same level to deserve the same respect. That was quite something that changed in my identity this year.

4.2.2.1 Role of external feedback on self-knowledge and understanding.

Throughout the year, external feedback played a significant role in challenging or affirming Ryan's self-knowledge and understanding. Initially, Ryan was confident about certain aspects of his personality and identity; however, through interaction with others and integrating what he was learning in certain psychology modules, he came to learn more about himself and understand himself better: *"I not only relate to the ways in which the therapists view human nature, but I relate even more to the way I can apply these perspectives to myself as an individual"* [RW1, p. 1, line 17]. Ryan identified the selection process for the master's degree as having a significant effect on his perception of himself. This was when he experienced the greatest degree of conflicting feedback regarding himself: *"Hoe mens deur die jare gegaan het met jou persepsie van hoe jy self is, sal ek gesê het dat die meesters nogals 'n groot impak gehad het. Veral by terugvoering wat mense kry van kenners van die veld … en dit kon jou 'n hele ander persepsie oor jouself gegee het"* [SI, p. 1, line 5].[4]

Initially he was not accepting of some of the feedback: *"The feedback was not really what I wanted to hear"* [RW2, p. 1, line 26] and *"I felt that the statement she [psychology master's programme coordinator] made was a bit unfair, because I always thought of myself as someone who really took the time to think about others and the situations they are in, instead of myself and what I could gain from the situation"* [RW2, p. 1, line 28]. He turned to his peers in search of opinions about whether his perception of himself was incorrect or not: *"Toe gaan praat ek nou met ander mense net om hulle opinie te hoor"* [SI, p. 1, line 33].[5] Although he might have questioned the accuracy of his self-knowledge and understanding for a moment, the feedback he received from his peers gave him reassurance, as their input supported his perception of himself: *"Hulle het dieselfde gevoel oor hoe ek daaroor voel. Dis nie hoe hulle my gesien het nie"* [SI, p. 1, line 34].[6]

On the other hand, feedback that corresponded with his knowledge and understanding of himself was accepted easily. Even negative feedback regarding aspects of himself of which he was aware was integrated more easily: *"Another statement where I agreed with her [psychology master's programme coordinator] was the fact that [the selection panel]*

[4] … how one went through the years with your perception about how you are, I would say that the master's had a great impact. Especially in feedback people receive from experts in the field … and that could have given you a completely different perception about yourself.
[5] … then I went and talked to other people just to hear their opinion.
[6] … they felt the same as I felt about it. That was not how they saw me.

recognised my anxiety and she proposed that I start doing more stuff to improve my communication skills. I agree that I have difficulties with communicating" [RW2, p. 1, line 35].

4.2.2.2 Career uncertainty and multiple options.

During the first reflective writing task, Ryan made it clear that he was still uncertain about what would follow his honours year: *"In the beginning of the year I was unsure what I wanted to do after my honours degree"* [RW1, p. 1, line 33]. Like many psychology students, he realised that a career as a psychologist was the aspiration of most of his fellow students, and there was no denial about the stringency of the master's selection process: *"Psychology can also be hard; if you have [your] honours you can't also do much but if you have your master's ... the doors are much [more] open than with honours"* [FI, p. 9, line 9]. Realising that the possibility of getting into the master's programme was slim, Ryan already considered alternative options early during his honours year: *"My plan B if plan A doesn't work out is applying for assistant position ... And then just working for a little bit"* [FI, p. 7, line 36].

Ryan's process of considering various alternative career paths can be regarded as a reflection of his process of getting to know himself better. At the beginning of the year, Ryan indicated several options that he was keeping in mind: *"I want to become a counselling psychologist"* [RW1, p. 1, line 34], and: *"If I do not achieve this goal, I would like to become a lecturer and teach psychology ..."* [RW1, p. 1, line 36]. As the year progressed and it became clear that his original goals were not possible, he experienced a sense of desperation and being lost: *"Daar was nogal 'n oomblik van desperaatheid van soos wat gaan ek nou doen volgende jaar?"* [SI, p. 2, line 41].[7]

However, in reflecting about and integrating the feedback he received regarding the need for personal development, his outlook regarding future career opportunities changed: *"En dit werk nogal uit hoe 'n mens terugvoering kry en dan maak ander deure vir jou oop"* [SI, p. 1, line 28].[8] Ryan's flexibility in terms of considering career options was aided by the fact that he was still exploring his own identity and getting to know himself in relation to others and his environment. In the end, he came to acknowledge that he could envision himself in various other career roles: *"Even though my first options did not work out I still*

[7] … there was a moment of desperation about what I am going to do next year.
[8] And it actually works out how one receives feedback and then other doors open up for you.

have a lot of options to consider" [RW2, p. 2, line 4]. At the same time, Ryan also wrestled with the inevitable requirements of making the shift towards becoming an adult. This process is discussed in the following theme, *shifting towards becoming an adult.*

4.2.3 Shifting towards becoming an adult.

Ryan also came to realise that challenges he was experiencing at the time were indicative of becoming an adult. In discussing the theme of *shifting towards becoming an adult,* the following subthemes are considered: *oscillating between dependence and independence*, *relational restructuring*, and *awareness of the realities of the adult world*.

4.2.3.1 Oscillating between dependence and independence.

An area in which Ryan attempted to initiate independence was in how he made decisions. In a sense, he took pride in making independent decisions: *"That is why I pride myself in ... not pride myself in not asking other people's advice, but that is why I am surefooted in my own decisions"* [FI, p. 10, line 29]. At the same time, he also indicated that this was one of his weak points: *"One of my weak points is that I don't usually rely on other people's opinion that much. I kind of got my own way as well"* [FI, p. 8, line 23], suggesting that he had come to realise that this approach did not serve him well in all situations. It became clear throughout the discussions during the year that, in many aspects, he was still oscillating between becoming independent and continuing to rely on others. Ryan perceived himself as an independent decision maker, however, he often based decisions on the feedback and opinions of others: *"I had discussions with my family and asked them in what profession do they see me. I also discussed with my long-term girlfriend and asked her what she thought of my choices"* [RW1, p. 2, line 29].

In explaining the role that his family played in his life, he stated, *"It sounds ... cliché, but talking to your family helps because they point out things you didn't think about ... with their consent sort of ... you feel more motivated to make the right decisions"* [FI, p. 8, line 28]. Ryan admitted that the fact that he was still living with his parents was a concern in the sense that he felt others thought that it was not a sign of maturity: *"Somebody in my year said, 'Are you still living with your parents?' ... 'But that doesn't make you a mature person'"* [FI, p. 8, line 33]. In describing how he wished he could respond to that person, it was evident that he had a desire for living more independently, but at the same time, he had a

sense of responsibility towards his family: *"I just wanted to ... say, 'But your parents still pay your home and education stuff so you can't be that condescending about me.' ... 'I am saving my parents money by staying with them.' ... I feel more ... not responsible, but kind of, you don't want to waste you parents' money"* [FI, p. 8, line 35]. In a way, Ryan was also not ready to fully embrace independence and the implications and responsibilities that come with it: *"All these contributions, thinking about what the implications are going to be on your family and your relationship as well. I didn't apply outside of Bloemfontein now for master's just to see ... I am not ready to leave Bloemfontein yet"* [FI, p. 8, line 40].

Ryan was also challenged in terms of his independent knowing and thinking in one of his ethics classes. Ryan was comfortable to claim more independence in situations that were more familiar and predictable. In referring to the response of his lecturer regarding how she handled an ethical issue, he said, *"She is now more experienced ... I am not experienced and I don't know the impact it may make. So for me, I would probably be more 'textbook' for now, until you can make sure that the decisions you make benefit the client more"* [FI, p. 10, line 47]. Although he strived to make most decisions independently, this was an ambiguous situation and he preferred to rely on a textbook, which he perceived as having the correct knowledge: *"Rely rather on the textbook in the first few sessions if it is not clear cut"* [FI, p. 11, line 11]. He believed that honours students did not have sufficient personal judgement to make decisions in ambiguous situations, as is evident in his statement: *"I don't think you should disclose that for honours students ... now they are going to leave the honours class and be like 'OK I can make decisions on my own judgement now'"* [FI, p. 11, line 7].

While he was still struggling with gaining more independence and making use of more independent thinking and knowing, Ryan also began to notice that changes were taking place in terms of interpersonal interactions with others.

4.2.3.2 Relational restructuring.

Ryan experienced changes in interpersonal relationships in two groups. Firstly, restructuring of his friendships occurred for academic and personal reasons. He admitted that some friendships were neglected and with others, he completely lost contact because of the demands of the academic year and the fact that individuals became more self-focused during this developmental period: *"As gevolg van die besige jaar is daar baie vriendskappe wat afgeskeep was of kontak wat gebreek is ... want mens is nou in hierdie stadium van jou lewe*

wat mens nou meer aan jouself moet fokus om jou eie toekoms reg te kry" [SI, p. 7, line 35].[9] However, he accepted these changes as part of becoming an adult and did not experience it as a loss: *"Ek sal sê dis nie so negatief nie. Al is daar nou 'n paar vriendskappe weg, die belangrike vriendskappe is nog steeds daar"* [SI, p. 7, line 42].[10] Ryan also became more selective in whom he associated with: *"Dit het nogal baie verander in terme van wie ek myself mee geassosieer het"* [SI, p. 3, line 12].[11] He also became less concerned with the need for acceptance: *"Ek gee nie meer so baie om as ander mense nie van my hou ... nie. So daai behoefte om aanvaar te word, is nie meer so sterk soos aan die begin van die jaar ... nie"* [SI, p. 3, line 41].[12]

The second group with regard to which relational restructuring took place was authority figures and his interaction with these authority figures. Ryan's culture expects of him to address adults in a certain manner that automatically suggests a degree of authority and respect: *"Omdat ek nog so jonk is, en uit 'n kultuur uitkom van jy moet mense nog gesagsfigure noem"* [SI, p. 5, line 48].[13] He recognised that there had been a change in his identity because of interacting with professors and other lecturers. He became more comfortable in relating to these individuals more professionally and he perceived to be respected more since he was also entering the realm of adulthood: *"Dis nogal iets wat in my identiteit verander het die jaar. Ek ... word [nie] ondermyn omdat hulle gesag beklee nie"* [SI, p. 6, line 5].[14] Nonetheless, he admits that this is an aspect of his identity that he wants to expand: *"So ek wil daai identiteit bietjie meer uitgebrei hê ... ek wil nou ook hê ons moet mekaar op dieselfde vlak kan hanteer"* [SI, p. 6, line 9].[15] With this newfound appreciation for being treated more like an adult and the sense of respect that comes with it, Ryan also became acquainted with some of the other roles and responsibilities of becoming an adult.

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[9] … Due to the busy year, many friendships were neglected or contact was broken … because one is now in this stage of your life where you have to focus on yourself more, to prepare your own future.

[10] I would say it is not that negative. Although a few friendships have been lost, the important friendships are still there.

[11] … It has changed quite a bit in terms of whom I associated myself with … .

[12] … I do not care as much anymore when other people do not like me. So that need to be accepted is not so strong anymore as it is was at the beginning of the year … .

[13] … Because I am still young and come from a culture where you have to call people authority figures.

[14] … It is actually something about my identity that has changed this year. I … am [not] undermined because they hold authority.

[15] So I want to expand that identity … I want us to handle each other on the same level.

4.2.3.3 Awareness of the realities of the adult world.

With all the challenges and difficulties that Ryan experienced during the year, he came to the realisation that this is what it means to be an adult: *"'n Mens ... besef 'n mens is nou besig om 'n volwassene te raak. En om dit wat sleg gaan, soos die meesters-keuring, jy besef jy moet self daardeur kan werk"* [SI, p. 6, line 12].[16] With all the challenges that Ryan experienced throughout the year, specifically related to career choices, he had to ask himself whether that was what it was going to be like from then on: *"En dit laat 'n mens wonder, is dit nou hoe die lewe is? Gaan daar elke jaar sulke goeters gebeur? En dan besef ek ja, ... dis nou maar deel van die lewe"* [SI, p. 6, line 13].[17] He also came to realise that he eventually needed to move out from under the protection of his family and depend less on others: *"Ek kan nie meer soveel staat maak op ander mense nie, dis nou tyd om baie meer onafhanklik te raak"* [SI, p. 6, line 30].[18] Although Ryan might have considered himself rather independent, coming into contact with the adult world made him realise that much more was expected of him. On the one hand, he was embracing certain aspects, but on the other hand, he was not yet ready to take the leap.

From the above discussion, one can see clearly that Ryan's honours year turned into a journey of re-evaluating himself to integrate what he had come to believe about himself with information he was receiving from others. Apart from still being in the process of negotiating his preferred level of independence, Ryan embraced certain aspects of becoming an adult. He accepted the fact that some friendships were lost and other relationships changed. Relating to authority figures in a way that made him feel more respected was definitely a significant point of growth in his developing identity and sense of self. In turn, he began to find his rhythm and gained a clearer picture about the direction his life was to take.

4.3 Becky

Becky was a 22-year-old female who originally studied Media Communications with undergraduate specialisation in journalism before applying for the honours programme. She

[16] … One realises that one is now becoming an adult. And to handle that which goes wrong, like the master's selection, you realise you have to work through it on your own.
[17] And it makes one wonder, is this now how life is? Will things like this happen every year? And then I realise yes, … this is just part of life.
[18] … I cannot depend on others as much anymore, it is now time to become much more independent.

was the youngest of three girls and described herself as always getting what she wants. She was also able to identify this as a factor in her interactions with friends and classmates, which she constantly had to be aware of. Becky came from a close Christian family, and the values and beliefs with which she grew up were very important to her. During her honours year, she was in a relationship, and she described it as flourishing because she had learnt so much about herself and had challenged some of her long-held beliefs and values.

4.3.1 Becky's journey: Personal growth.

Early in the year, Becky identified an overarching theme of *personal growth*, to describe her experience as an honours psychology student: *"Ek dink die groot overarching theme is dat ek kan voel ek groei, soos ek is besig om baie dinge van myself te leer, wat ek nie dink ek sou noodwendig geleer het as ek nie in die sielkunde honneurs-klas was nie"* [FI, p. 2, line 27].[19] The majority if not all of Becky's intrapersonal, interpersonal, and educational experiences were identified as contributing to *self-knowledge and awareness* and providing her with a sense of *purpose and direction*. Becky was challenged by different perspectives and soon realised that she was struggling to stand her ground as she had not taken ownership of own values and beliefs: *"I feel like I am learning a lot about myself. What values I truly believe in and what values I have always taken from others which I now get to re-evaluate and reform"* [RW1, p. 1, line 39].

In addition to challenging her beliefs and values, she also had positive and negative experiences in other interpersonal relationships. The class context especially brought about change in how she approached making friends and how she defined her boundaries: *"Ek dink ek het baie maklik vir mense net enige iets gesê of makliker gepraat … met alles wat gebeur het hierdie jaar gaan ek nie sommer meer net praat nie"* [SI, p. 2, line 36].[20] Becky's interactions with classmates were largely positive during the early stages of the programme, but as the year progressed and other dynamics came into play, she was actually hurt and disappointed by people whom she had considered friends. On the other hand, she had positive interactions with lecturers, which also contributed to her personal growth. However, from our discussions it appeared that, in terms of being her own person and discovering her identity,

[19] I think the big overarching theme is that I can feel that I am growing, like I am busy to learn a lot about myself, which I don't think I necessarily would have learnt if I had not been in the psychology honours class.
[20] I think I easily just told people anything or talked more easily … with everything that has happened this year I am not just going to just talk anymore.

she struggled in the interpersonal dimension. In this dimension, she emphasised the approval and acceptance of others, including classmates and lecturers.

Becky described finding purpose and direction during her honours year: *"Maar nou is jy hier en nou voel ek soos daar is purpose en iets om voor te werk. Al is dit nie noodwendig, al kom mens nie in vir meesters nie, mens is klaar in die rigting, jy is klaar op pad"* [FI, p. 4, line 20].[21] This came about as a combination of getting to know herself better and finding her own voice in terms of her values and beliefs. This further led to improved romantic relationships and establishing necessary boundaries in terms of other interpersonal interactions. In return, having found some purpose and direction also contributed to her sense of self and belonging.

To understand what contributed to Becky's overarching journey of *personal growth*, the following themes were identified: *defining own value system*, *self-knowledge and awareness*, *interpersonal dynamics*, and *finding purpose and direction*. A visual display is provided in Figure 5.

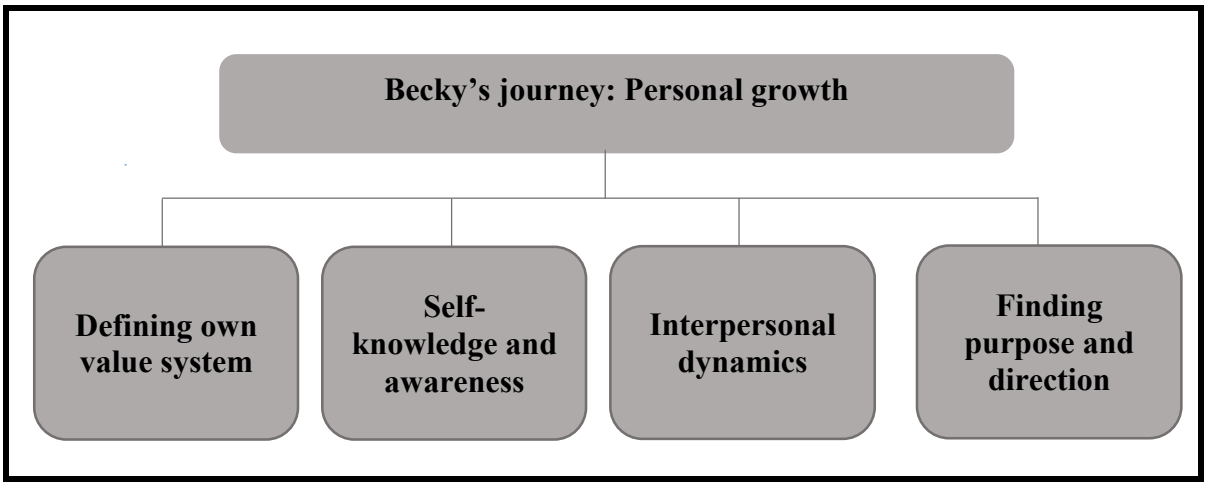

Figure 5. Visual display of Becky's journey: Personal growth.

4.3.2 Defining own value system.

During the first interview, Becky already realised that one of the areas in which she was experiencing the greatest sense of change and challenge was in terms of her values and beliefs. She found herself in a context where she was confronted with differing perspectives

[21] But now you are here and now I feel that there is purpose and something to work for. Although it is not necessarily, even if you do not get into master's, you are already in the direction, you are already on your way.

and with classmates who had contrasting values and beliefs, and she admitted that she was challenged to defend her viewpoint on certain topics: *"We once spoke about drinking and partying a lot and I was challenged to explain my mind set with them"* [RW1, p. 1, line 8]. Becky realised that, in order to truly defend her viewpoint, she had to take ownership of what she believed in and stood for: *"Ek het hierdie waardesisteem gehad, maar ek dink dit het gekom van my ouers, of gekom van die kerk ... wat nie noodwendig 'n slegte ding is nie, maar jy moet op 'n stadium besluit is dit wat jy wil hê of is ... dit wat ander mense so half ... op jou afdwing ... Ek dink in terme van my waardesisteem het ek rêrig ... besef, ... hierdie is wat ek doen en hierdie is wat ek glo. En nie omdat iemand anders sê ek moet nie"* [FI, p. 2, line 45].[22]

In coming to this conclusion, Becky also reflected on previous relationships and was able to make the connection between the experience of feeling trapped in her relationships and trying to live up to the expectations of her parents and the church community: *"So dit was weer daardie waardesisteem soos wat ek weer moes challenge"* [FI, p. 3, line 42].[23] In re-evaluating her existing values and beliefs, she came to experience less pressure, which allowed her to step back and think for herself: *"So dit is net daardie pressure is net afgehaal. En 'n mens kan soos rêrig, mens kan net dink"* [FI, p. 3, line 46].[24] Towards the end of the year, Becky described her experience of defining her own value system as follows: *"Ek dink ek is bietjie meer self-assured as dit kom by waardes want ek weet nou dis hoe ek voel en dit is wat ek daarvan gemaak het ... Ek kan ook bietjie meer selfversekerd voorkom teenoor ander mense. En as ek ... nuwe verhoudings bou, dan dink ek ek kan bietjie meer myself wees"* [SI, p. 5, line 7].[25]

Although Becky was very excited about this new area of development, she also realised that it would be a process of learning to apply it to her life consistently, but ultimately just

[22] I had this value system, but I think it came from my parents, or came from the church … which is not necessarily a bad thing, but at some point you have to decide if it is what you want or is … it what other people kind of … force onto you … I think in terms of my value system I really … realised … this is what I do and this is what I believe. And not because other people say I must … .

[23] So it was that value system again, that I had to challenge again …

[24] So it was just like the pressure was taken off. And one can like really, one can just think.

[25] I think I am a little more self-assured when it comes to values because I know now that this is how I feel and this is what I made of it … I can also come across more self-assured towards other people. And when I build new relationships, then I think I can be myself a little more.

knowing what she stood for already made a difference in how she came to understand and experience herself: *"Ja, ek dink mens is maar konstant in daai proses om dit toe te pas op jou lewe, maar net om te weet darem dat hierdie is wat ek glo en wat ek voel en ek dink ... Dit is nou net om dit toe te pas op jou lewe"* [SI, p. 5, line 2].[26] Not only did Becky begin to challenge her existing value system, but she also began to reflect on other aspects of her identity and personality, which brought about a greater degree of self-knowledge and awareness.

4.3.3 Self-knowledge and awareness.

In completing specific academic tasks, Becky also began to reflect on her own identity development. In identifying where she was developmentally, she gained insight into her behaviour and experiences. She came to realise that, owing to her focus and attention being shifted to family issues during a crucial period of her identity development, she found herself looking for an identity in relationships: *"Ek het nie my eie identiteit gehad nie so ek kon nie 'n identiteit saam met iemand anders rêrig vind nie. Ek het so half vasgevang gevoel en weet nie wie ek is nie"* [FI, p. 3, line 29].[27] Furthermore, Becky also turned to her studies to fill some void, but her undergraduate degree proved to disappoint her and ultimately also pushed her to gain a sense of her identity in relationships: *"As an undergraduate student, I always thought I would marry early and be a house mom. I studied journalism because I love writing, but did not feel stimulated by the course. Thus, I felt demotivated to study and be productive and tried to find my identity in relationships because I did not feel satisfied with my studies"* [RW1, p. 1, line 15].

Becoming aware of her struggles with her own identity provided her with a better understanding of her experiences and behaviour in relationships; consequently, she was able to be more free and more herself in her current relationship: *"Nou is ek in 'n verhouding en dit gaan eintlik baie goed en ek voel glad nie gepressure, of daai pressure van ek is vasgevang ... So dit is nogal iets meaningful vir my van hierdie jaar, wat ek besef het en*

[26] Yes, I think one is constantly in the process of applying it to your life, but just to know that this is what I believe and what I feel and what I think … Now it is just to apply it to your life.
[27] … I did not have my own identity, so I could not find an identity with someone else really. I felt somewhat trapped and do not know who I am.

waarin ek kon werk" [FI, p. 3, line 32].[28] Throughout the year, the challenge of defining her own identity remained; however, it became a positive experience of learning more about herself and learning to understand herself better. As mentioned before, in the interpersonal area, Becky still seemed to struggle with defining herself and being more herself, regardless of what others thought.

4.3.4 Interpersonal dynamics.

Growth in the interpersonal dimension proved to be the most challenging for Becky. Even though she had some positive experiences with some classmates, she also learnt some hard lessons in terms of boundaries and trust. During the first interview, Becky described her circle of friends in the class as a diverse group who nonetheless were able to accept one another's differences: *"Ons is nogals 'n diverse klomp en ek dink wat waardes ook aanbetref verskil ons baie. Maar dit voel vir my ons is darem al op 'n plek waar mens mekaar eintlik so half aanvaar soos wat jy is, so dit is nie asof iemand jou wil probeer verander nie"* [FI, p. 4, line 48].[29] However, despite this acknowledgement of different perspectives, she experienced intrapersonal conflict in terms of who she was and who she should be in order to maintain friendships: *"Al is dit nou wie ek is. Want toe besef ek nou ek wil nie daardie persoon wees nie"* [FI, p. 5, line 30].[30] Becky had to find a balance between pushing her own agenda and getting her way, like she had always done, and on the other hand, respecting others and allowing them the space to contribute.

Another aspect of Becky's personality that affected her way of interacting with others was her need to be liked by others. Most likely because she struggled with her own identity, she was unsure what intrinsic value she could bring to the friendship. In turn, she felt like she had to prove herself as a friend: *"Ek dink baie keer voel ek dat ek myself moet bewys en ek hou daarvan om ... ek is nogals 'n persentjie mens ... so ek hou daarvan om vir mense persentjies te gee en soos amper iemand se vriendskap te wen ... alhoewel dit nie so is nie, maar ek hou daarvan om vir mense goed te gee. En weet dit is dat hulle meer van my hou"*

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[28] … Now I am in a relationships and it is actually going well and I do not feel pressured at all, or that pressure of I am trapped … So it is actually something meaningful for me this year, that I have realised and that I can work on.

[29] … We are quite a diverse bunch and I think with regard to values we differ much. But it feels to me that we are at least at a place where one actually accepts one another for who you are, so it is not as if someone is trying to change you.

[30] Even though it is who I am. Because I realised then that I do not want to be that person.

[FI, p. 8, line 39].[31] In order to get people to like her, Becky was a very open person who would share most things with them. However, her experience with the same circle of friends after the selection for the master's degree turned out to be quite negative. This was because of her being criticised for how she handled the whole process and her acceptance into the master's programme. This resulted in her reflecting on how much she opened up and questioning whether it was a good personal quality.

Even though selection for the master's degree was a negative experience, Becky seemed to learn something about herself in social contexts, which she perceived to be valuable: *"Ek was baie oop gewees oor baie goeters en wat ek nou besef het ek is nie meer nie ... Wat ek dink 'n goeie ding is ... So miskien was dit 'n valuable lesson"* [SI, p. 2, line 38].[32] Although her experience can be perceived as negative in view of the fact that she became warier and more sceptical of people, she perceived it as valuable because it clarified to her that she needed to be more careful with whom and how much she shared. She also learnt to be more conscious of her boundaries, personally and professionally. The last factor that contributed to her personal growth and could be considered as an outcome of personal growth was that of finding purpose and direction.

4.3.5 Finding purpose and direction.

Overall, Becky had a positive attitude towards the year and the programme. Even though she admitted that it was a challenge, she was able to experience it as a positive factor because for the first time, she felt energised and stimulated by the material covered in the honours programme: *"Ja dit was vir my challenging aan die begin ... Dit was iets wat ek moes, ek moes in die rhythm van dit kom. So dit was baie anders, maar dit voel ook meer fulfilling"* [FI, p. 4, line 12].[33] Her experience of the undergraduate programme left her feeling unfulfilled and disappointed: *"Voorgraads het ek gevoel, 'Wat doen ek op kampus?'*

[31] I think I often feel that I have to prove myself and I like to … I am a present person … so I like giving people gifts and like almost winning someone's friendship … although it's not like that, but I like to give people things. And know that it is so that they will like me more …
[32] I was open about a lot of things and what I realise now I am not anymore … Which I think is a good thing … So maybe it was a valuable lesson.
[33] Yes, it was a challenge for me in the beginning … It was something that I had to, I had to get in the rhythm of it. So it was quite different, but it also feels more fulfilling.

'Wat doen jy met jou lewe?' Mens het so half meaningless gevoel, want waarheen is jy op pad?" [FI, p. 4, line 17].[34]

Because she was a strong Christian and had little faith in her own abilities during the selection for the master's degree, she interpreted her acceptance to the programme as a sign of her path being predestined. In turn, it only further confirmed to her that she had finally arrived where she was meant to be and that she was heading in the right direction: *"My view of life changed as I got in and realised that I did nothing to get in and that it must be for a bigger reason that I got accepted. I realised that life will play out as it should and on that I am so grateful towards God. I believe He opened doors and predestined my path"* [RW2, p. 1, line 21].

From the above, it is clear that Becky encountered both positive and negative experiences that all contributed to her personal growth. The honours year allowed her to develop her identity, establish her own set of values and beliefs and understand herself better in terms of interpersonal relationships. Although her experiences with classmates turned out to be negative, she viewed it as a valuable lesson. Most importantly, she experienced a sense of purpose and fulfilment, which further fuelled her desire for continued growth: *"This is the beginning of an amazing chapter in my life, and I look forward to the growing experience"* [RW1, p. 1, line 36].

4.4 Arya

Arya was a 22-year-old female. She identified herself as a Pakistani born in South Africa, but who lived in Lesotho for a period. After high school, she applied to the School of Medicine but was not accepted. Not being accepted was a devastating event for her, since she perceived a degree in medicine to be a family expectation. She comes from a family of doctors and for this reason experienced tremendous pressure to pursue the same career. During her high school years, she experienced bullying and felt alone due to not 'fitting in'. This resulted in Arya working actively on becoming her own person. Still, she could not deny her cultural background and values. Her struggle with her identity and the academic and career expectations of her family played a significant role in how she approached and experienced the year.

[34] As an undergraduate, I felt, "What am I doing on campus?" "What am I doing with my life?" One felt a little meaningless, because where are you heading?

4.4.1 Arya's journey: Experiencing a sense of incompleteness.

Arya was a lively and well-spoken individual and she easily shared her true experiences regarding the year. At times, it felt as if she was directing some of her frustration towards the researcher, as she perceived the researcher to be a part of the psychology department. From the initial reflective writing task and interview, it became evident that Arya was experiencing the year as an emotional rollercoaster. Arya was the only participant that concluded the honours year with a predominantly negative experience. In describing her experience, she referred to feeling incomplete even though she would complete her degree: *"So it's just that, it feels incomplete. This year has left an incomplete feeling for me"* [SI, p. 2, line 42].

Entering the honours year, Arya had to manage her family's expectations, her struggle with her identity and the effect that her academic performance had on her sense of self-worth. Psychology was also not her first choice; initially, she viewed psychology as an inferior programme that did not garner the respect of family, friends, and fellow students. In addition, she also had various experiences during the honours year that had a further negative effect on her identity and sense of self-worth. The final outcome of her journey included frustration with the psychology programme and department and ultimately regret about enrolling in the honours programme. She experienced a lack of direction and purpose. Although she described coming to some sort of acceptance, it did not provide her with any reassurance but rather resulted in her completely giving up on the dream of a career in psychology. Nonetheless, she did identify some personal growth in terms of self-knowledge that came about because of studying psychology.

Three main themes, with various subthemes, capture Arya's meaning-making journey. The themes and subthemes are depicted visually in Figure 6.

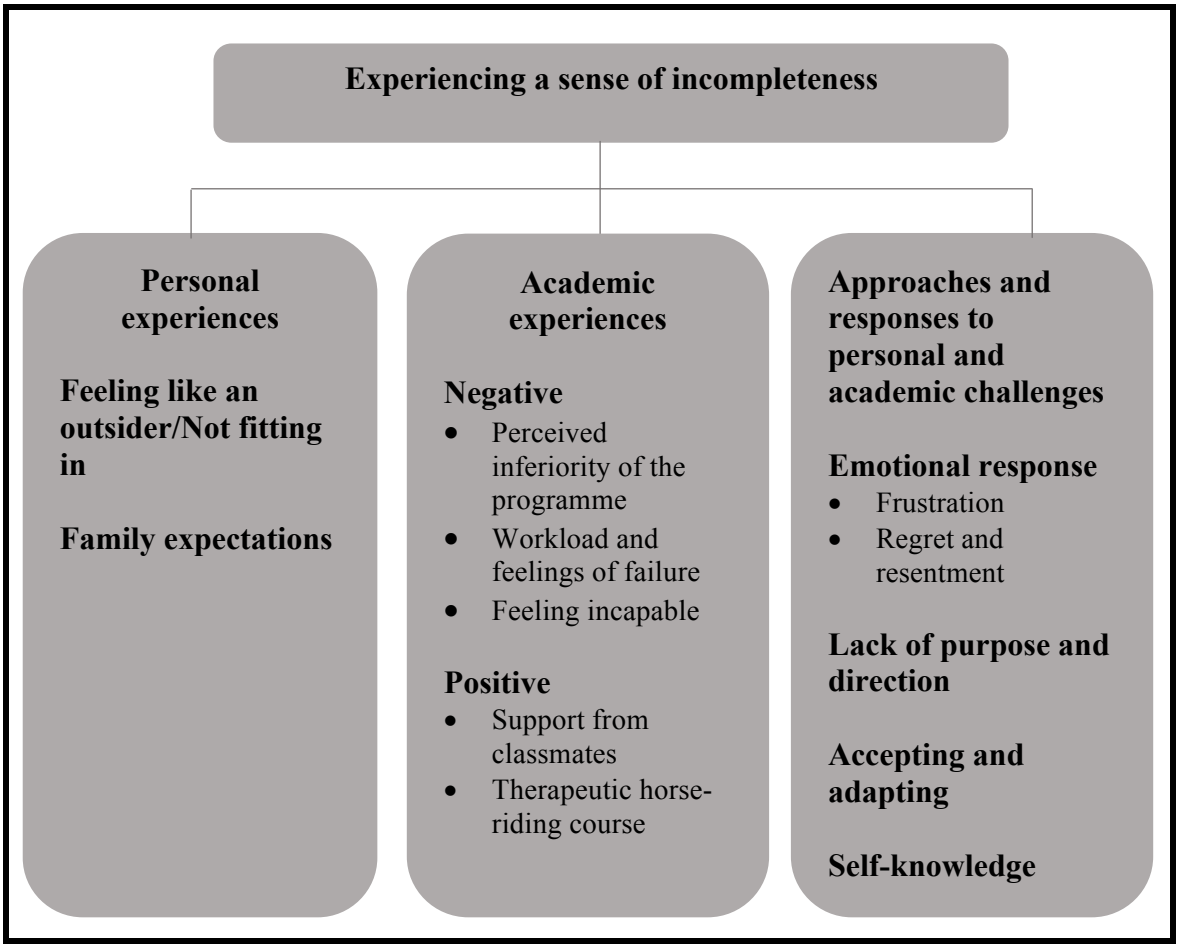

Figure 6. Visual display of Arya's journey: Experiencing a sense of incompleteness.

4.4.2 Personal experiences.

Prior to enrolling for the honours programme, Arya already struggled with various personal factors that contributed to her experience of the year as an 'emotional rollercoaster'. Although she identified with her cultural background and the values of her family, Arya had a great desire to become her own person. Subthemes identified within the main theme of *personal experiences* include *feeling like an outsider/not fitting in*, and *family expectations*.

4.4.2.1 Feeling like an outsider / not fitting in.

Arya was certain of one aspect regarding her identity, namely that she always felt alone and resented categorisation. She did not fit in anywhere, and being part of any group took away from who she truly was: *"I was a loner and just blended into the background or initially stayed in the shadow of someone. Not opposing or disagreeing. Never happy"* [FI, p. 5, line 30]. In describing her struggles with her cultural identity and what was expected of

her, she said the following: *"I am a Pakistani girl, born in Pakistan, but I grew up in Maseru, Lesotho, and I got my education from South Africa. I am not Pakistani, but my parents are very cultured, they want me to feel Pakistani. I am not from Lesotho; they tell me that I am not from there type of thing. And then I am not South African. So I never really fit into a criterion"* [FI, p. 5, line 23]. She accepted being different and actively avoided being categorised or defined by a group: *"So you realise that it is okay to be different, it is okay if I don't fit into a category, but now because of that I sort of resent categorisation. I don't want to be part of a group"* [FI, p. 5, line 49]. In describing her experience of herself, she stated, *"So what I am constructed of is a whole lot of things from the past, a whole lot of battles and stuff, realising what is right and what is wrong and what is acceptable and what is not"* [FI, p. 6, line 5].

Arya also shared how she lost some friendships because she did not feel that her life stage "fit" with that of her friends. She experienced a sense of not fitting in with them anymore because they were focused on different aspects of their academic and personal lives: *"But it's just at this point it feels like I have other things to worry about. Like at this point I'm thinking about getting a job or if I'm not going to be able to get a job. If I have to move back with my parents, if I can't sustain myself and things like that. Where for them it's just passing another year"* [SI, p. 4, line 12]. Friendships also ended as she began to distance herself from friends in undergraduate programmes: *"I think it's a choice. I don't want to spend time with them anymore because some of them are in undergrad so it is … I don't know if it's ego or something or a snobbish feeling of you don't want to be"* [SI, p. 4, line 9]. Arya's experience of not fitting in transcended various domains of her life.

4.4.2.2 Family expectations.

Arya's family placed cultural and academic expectations on her, which affected her development as an individual. Arya struggled to develop into her own while honouring the cultural expectations of her family: *"And my family has very strong values and traditions and norms, because my parents grew up in Pakistan. And sometimes I oppose their values and it hurts me to go against my parents, but it hurts even more to just succumb to what they want me to believe"* [FI, p. 6, line 11].

Apart from the cultural expectations placed on her, Arya also had to deal with the academic expectations of her family. Arya admitted that, although she was confident in who

she was, she was not necessarily happy, since she was not living up to the expectations of her family: *"Yes, I am confident in who I am and I believe hopefully one day I will be happy with who I am, because another category I was supposed to fit into was medicine. I was supposed to go into medicine and I did not and I did psychology and that was undermining"* [FI, p. 8, line 39]. She carried a sense of failure for letting her parents down, as she did not get into medicine: *"So I was on a pedestal and my parents completely looked up to me ... and then I applied for medicine and I did not get in and everything just went down the drain. Everything that I worked for went down the drain"* [FI, p. 9, line 2].

In order to justify being different from her family, she felt that she had to be the best academically in order to prove to her family that who she had decided to become was all right: *"To prove my worth I have to be the best. You understand? To make my parents realise, the type of person that I am, I have to excel in school ... so they can be like ... 'granted she has different values but she is good at something'"* [FI, p. 6, line 21].

4.4.3 Academic experiences.

Arya's identity was deeply engrained in her academic performance. As she was still struggling with other aspects of her identity, her academic performance became an integral part: *"That is the problem, that is why I said my identity has not formed yet. I base everything I am and my confidence and self-esteem, everything on my academics. I needed that one thing that I was excelling at. Everyone needs that one thing"* [FI, p. 12, line 5]. She struggled academically and missed the opportunity to apply for the master's programme, and this disheartened her: *"Now that is the same thing in honours ... I don't think I am going to do master's. So master's was for me in my head, was being the best. Now that whole play, that whole scenario is coming into my mind as I am not going to be the best, so how am I going to prove that who I am, Arya ... My self-worth is directly linked to my academics and my studies and everything, because I come from a family of doctors"* [FI, p. 6, line 24]. Arya identified positive and negative academic experiences that contributed to her journey. Although there were positive experiences, the negative experiences unfortunately overshadowed everything else.

4.4.3.1 Negative experiences.

Areas that were identified as negative academic experiences included *perceived inferiority of the programme, workload and feelings of failure,* and *feeling incapable.*

Firstly, coming from a family of doctors, Arya considered *psychology as inferior*. She admitted that she initially did not want to do psychology: *"And then I said I just want to do psychology, but I didn't like it also, because everyone has a negative view of psychology … because they always tell me it is difficult to get into honours, it is too difficult, and master's is worse"* [FI, p. 9, line 20]. Being a psychology student also did not provide her with the respect and admiration she was looking for: *"But people don't really look up to me because well 'you couldn't make it in B.Sc., that is why you are here, you took the easiest subject on campus'"* [FI, p. 9, line 30]. Her attitude towards the programme and her expectations of being respected made her vulnerable to the challenges she was about to face during the honours year. At first, she admitted that the honours programme provided her with a sense of pride: *"But when I got into honours, I got a sense of pride, with a sense of responsibility. And then people looked up to me"* [FI, p. 9, line 40]. However, because her identity and sense of worth were based predominantly on academic performance, she was bound to experience ups and downs during the year.

Secondly, Arya also felt overwhelmed by the workload and experienced a sense of failure: *"We did not expect it. The academics, the environment, the pressures, the achievements and the failures"* [FI, p. 12, line 42]. She was confronted with the reality of the academic demands and what she perceived as the immediacy of failure: *"Then everything else, I won't lie, I have kind of taken it as it comes because, for me personally it was an emotional rollercoaster this year. And I kind of blame my academics. Like it is too much work, it is too much work"* [FI, p. 2, line 31], and *"People are stressing so much and I think honestly sometimes you stress more than what you think you do. Because everything is so immediate. The fall, the failure is so immediate"* [FI, p. 11, line 46].

Arya also experienced self-doubt as she began to question her capabilities in completing the programme and using the theories of psychology to help people: *"I don't know what it is this year, I really don't know what it is but a lot of us have realised that we are just not capable. We don't think that we are not worthy, but we are not capable"* [FI, p. 2, line 4]. Early in the year, she began to question whether psychology was truly what she

wanted to do, as she began to doubt her own capabilities: *"And that makes you realise, is this what you want to do? If I am capable … I am capable of learning something right now and writing an exam, but am I really capable of helping someone with that information? That really stood out, it's a combination of everything that has happened so far. Going to classes, remembering for the tests, remembering for the exams, having interactions with the students and the lecturers and realising the amount of knowledge someone has and someone does not have"* [FI, p. 1, line 25]. In addition, comparison to peers also led to Arya feeling incapable: *"The challenging aspect comes in when I have so much motivation and drive and when I walk into my classroom to realise the amount of people working really hard to get into master's and make their aspirations come true"* [RW1, p. 1, line 26], and *"And I don't see myself as being capable of a lot of things, because I have come to realise how much people are above me"* [FI, p. 10, line 34].

Although she never applied for the programme, Arya experienced selection for the master's degree as a trying time. Owing to her sense of feeling incapable, she did not want to apply for master's selection because she could not deal with the possibility of not getting in: *"Failure kills me. I can't stand failure. I hate failure so much I would rather not do it at all. You understand? … So I don't think I am going to apply for master's, even though there is a chance, because I feel like I am going to fail and that will devastate me"* [FI, p. 7, line 10]. For someone who based her identity on academics, the fact of not applying for or being selected for the master's programme created a sense of uncertainty and being lost: *"I personally think it's very scary because if you don't have master's in mind, what do you want to do with your degree? Especially for someone who has based everything on academics"* [SI, p. 1, line 24].

4.4.3.2 Positive experiences.

Arya identified positive experiences in two areas. Firstly, *support from classmates* helped her to stay motivated and gave her struggles some validation, as she realised she was not the only one feeling this way: *"I have to say that if, where I am today, and if I am doing well it is because of the support system I got from nowhere else, just my class. Because they are the only ones who can make me feel better"* [FI; p .3, line 16], and *"It strengthened the ones in class and weakened the ones outside of class. In class, I felt like everyone was on the same level as me because, like I said, when people ask you, 'Are you going to do a psychology job?' and you say, 'No, it degrades me' … I then speak to my classmates and ask*

if they think like me almost. They have the same frustration, the same feeling of being lost and they also analyse people the same way I do. You can relate to them better, which is nice" [SI, p. 3, line 47].

The second positive experience that Arya had, occurred because of her engagement in the therapeutic horse-riding project. She perceived this project as an opportunity to get out of her comfort zone in order to change and develop: *"In the end I had to realise that this year is about change and pushing boundaries. I had to let go of my comfort zone and challenge myself"* [RW1, p. 2, line 18]. She gained some confidence, which provided her with a degree of motivation to continue with her pursuit of a career in psychology: *"I never saw myself as a professional psychologist and after experiencing the sessions with the children I have some confidence in myself"* [RW1, p. 1, line 14].

4.4.4 Approaches and responses to personal and academic challenges.

In response to her experiences during the honours year and her struggle with defining her identity, Arya had various *emotional responses* about the year and experienced a *lack of purpose and direction*. She also described a process of *accepting and adapting* to the realities of the year and her future. A positive aspect was identified because of the challenges and struggles she experienced throughout the year, and that was *self-knowledge*.

4.4.4.1 Emotional response.

The primary emotion that Arya displayed was *frustration*. She was frustrated with the programme, the psychology department and the field of psychology. More specifically, Arya could not understand the reasoning or practicality behind completing an honours degree that without a master's degree does not allow individuals to pursue a career in psychology: *"I'm not just talking about the honours programme, the whole thing of the practicality of us coming here for a year, spending so much money, taking so much time and stress, all of that for nothing. It feels so incomplete"* [SI, p. 4, line 49]. She also admitted that the thought of quitting often came up: *"Like quitting is probably the first pop-up thought that comes into my mind every morning because this has been my goal and there's nothing, it doesn't make any sense"* [SI, p. 6, line 29].

Along with the transient desire to quit the programme, Arya also began to regret applying for the honours psychology programme: *"I kind of regretted doing psychology"* [SI, p. 1, line 36], and *"That experience made me highly pessimistic about the year and the fact that I was doing Psychology. This profession has a high demand yet only a handful get selected for master's, I will never understand this process"* [RW2, p. 1, line 14]. In the end, she resented the programme and the faculty: *"Honestly, I just have resentment, I have a lot of resentment against this place"* [SI, p. 6, line 32].

4.4.4.2 Lack of purpose and direction.

The feeling of incompleteness was largely because Arya felt that, although she would complete her honours degree, it would mean nothing to her: *"And this year was, and especially psychology, but especially the honours year is so different because, you know you have to complete it but you don't know where the end really is"* [SI, p. 4, line 25]. Without the possibility of a career in psychology and no other area in which she can base herself, she experienced a sense of going nowhere: *There's nothing in my life that's sorted. You know how some people get married? So they feel like they are based in that or some people get a job so they are based in that. So they can come back to study because they have one area secure. I have nothing right now, so it's like, what am I doing?"* [SI, p. 5, line 7]. Her desperation and sense of feeling lost was evident in the following statement: *"I can't answer you. I wish I could, I so wish and pray that I could, but I can't. I don't know, my only aim is to maybe try and pass my exams. So at least I get this honours done and dusted and from here where I'm going I don't know"* [SI, p. 6, line 24].

4.4.4.3 Accepting and adapting.

In dealing with the challenges and disappointments, Arya shared her experience of just accepting the realities and adapting to the situation: *"I don't know if it's like my mood today that's affecting it, but it's just acceptance … So a lot of people have to adapt and I am still adapting to my situation"* [SI, p. 1, line 21]. However, it became evident that her acceptance and adaptation was more a sign of resignation: *"Acceptance, just acceptance. At one stage you kind of deny the fact and say, 'I'm sure there's something better for me, I'm sure there's something different.' But then when you start applying for jobs or you start applying for other options and then you realise I'm not that different"* [SI, p. 2, line 16]. In describing how she was adapting to the situation, she also shared her regret in the programme choice:

"So that's why I'm saying adapt, just adapting to the situation that I think this was a mistake. Maybe I should have done another honours rather than psychology" [SI, p. 1, line 41]. In her acceptance, she came to realise that this was what adult life would most likely be and felt it was a learning experience: *"This makes me wonder how difficult adulthood will be like. So, in a way, honours is preparing me for realities I am going to face later in life"* [RW1, p. 1, line 30]. Another positive aspect that she identified was the fact that she gained *self-knowledge,* which was probably the one important positive experience that she had during the year.

4.4.4.4 Self-knowledge.

Arya admitted that some positive change took place: *"Well, honestly, I think this year has really changed me. Not my personality, but just it was so much self-evaluation. I have a better grip on my strengths and weaknesses"* [SI, p. 1, line 8]. Even during the first interview, she already indicated the realisation that the year would involve getting to know herself better: *"All in all, it has been ... a journey that was not about academics, it is rooted in academics, but it really tells us who we are"* [FI, p. 11, line 38]. She admitted that being enrolled in the honours programme allowed her to face challenges that highlighted her strengths and weaknesses: *"Yet, at this point, we had evaluated ourselves so many times that I have a deep understanding of my strengths and weakness, which makes me stronger. This strength I could have only obtained by being faced with challenges over and over again"* [RW2, p. 1, line 21]. However, even though she gained self-knowledge from this experience, it was not enough for her to feel that things were complete at the end of the year.

From the discussion above, it is evident that Arya experienced the honours year predominantly as negative. Her strong emphasis on academics as a defining factor of her identity resulted in her being vulnerable to disappointment and having a sense of failure throughout the year. Arya's choice of programme and ultimate career was rooted deeply in being respected, and she struggled to find this respect and admiration as an honours psychology student. Her final decision regarding the way forward indicated that she would continue to seek a career that would help her justify and substantiate her identity: *"I would love to carry on studying but I'm going to probably go into another field, if I ever do study again because like I said, it's just so sad for me"* [SI, p. 4, line 46].

4.5 Salient Themes Emerging from the Cross-Case Analysis

Drawing on important themes that emerged from each case, a cross-case analysis was conducted to determine the presence of themes that were similar across the individual cases and to identify unique variations on these themes. The analysis was not about comparison of cases but instead relied on thick description in order to understand the meaning-making journeys of postgraduate psychology students towards self-authorship better. In the process of cross-case analysis, four salient themes were identified, namely *the search for self, the academic experience, the role of significant others,* and *movement towards greater independence, more defined belief systems, and a future perspective*. These themes are depicted visually in Figure 7.

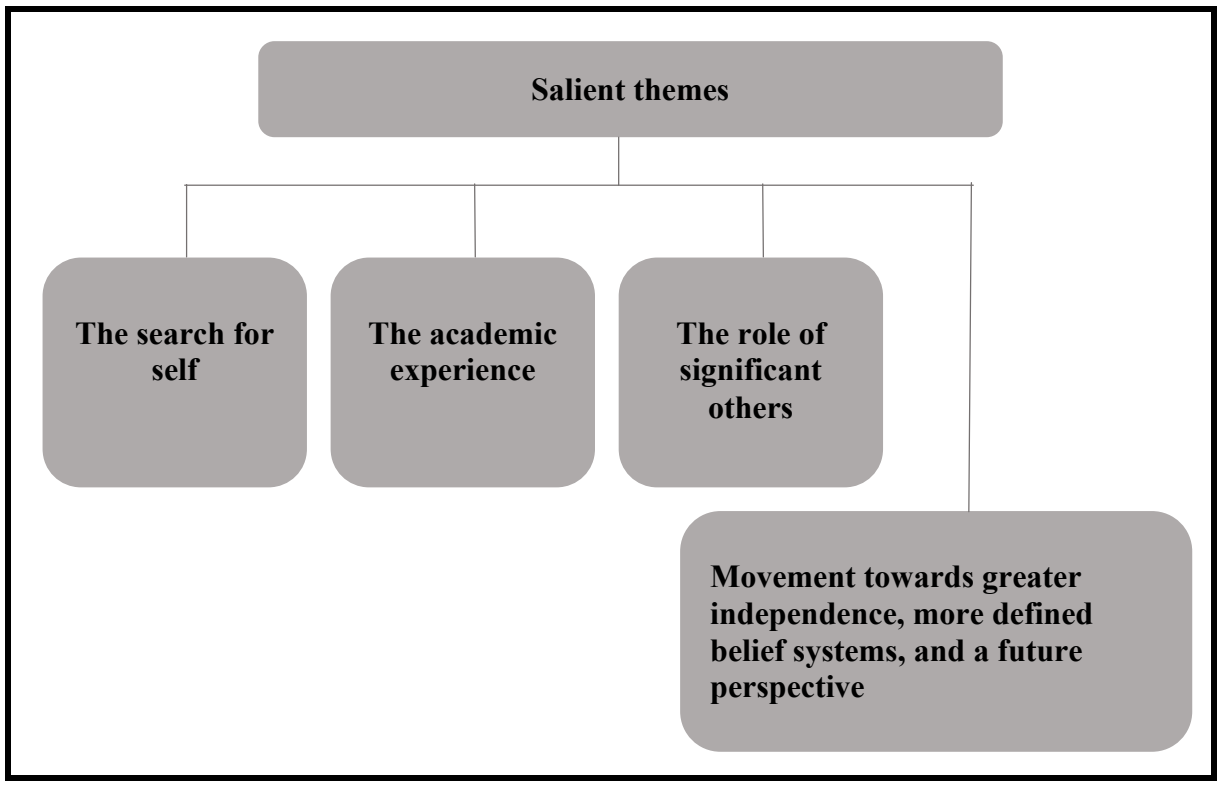

Figure 7. Visual display of salient themes emerging from the cross-case analysis.

4.5.1 The search for self.

A prominent aspect in each of the individual cases is the participants' search for self and the development and deepening of their identities. All the participants gained more knowledge about themselves, became more aware of intrapersonal qualities, came to a greater understanding of themselves and strived to becoming truer to themselves. In this process, all of them wrestled with dissonance and discomfort, and had to challenge and

reconsider their self-acceptance. Although this search for self was a general theme, each participant's experiences and approach to dealing with this domain of development differed in noticeable ways.

All of the participants' narratives suggest that they gained more knowledge and insight about themselves. Anne shared her experience of how she had come to learn more about certain aspects of her personality. She gained insight into the fact that, although she could not control external events and others' feelings, she had the power to determine how to react and how it would affect her. The knowledge and insight that Ryan gained helped him to begin positioning himself in the adult world. Becky's knowledge and insight helped her to navigate and manage interpersonal relationships more effectively. For Arya, much of the knowledge she had gained affirmed previously held notions. However, at the same time she also came to the realisation and insight about possible aspects of herself and her situation that were not so easy to accept.

The knowledge and insight gained led to self-acceptance, depth, and becoming truer to self. In particular, Anne admitted that she experienced a sense of congruency and peace as she came to accept herself. Although Ryan and Arya were probably the two participants who struggled most with positioning themselves in relation to their own sense of self, a degree of self-acceptance existed. Ryan's openness to other career possibilities was a process that unfolded throughout the year as he came to acknowledge and accept newly discovered dimensions of his personality and career interests. Becky described her experience as a sense of personal growth. Her personal growth was fuelled by the knowledge and insight she had gained.

For some of the participants, the search for self was more of a conscious decision to establish a more defined identity, and for others it was an inevitable process, whether they wanted to explore it or not. Each participant's process of discovering or understanding his or her self was facilitated, or in some cases hindered, by individual and intrinsic factors. Ryan was challenged to re-evaluate his own understanding of himself as he struggled to integrate external feedback received from various sources during the year. Becky realised that she had always tried to establish her identity within romantic relationships. She concluded that, for her relationships to work, she had to find her own identity outside of relationships. Arya, whose cultural identity also played an integral part in her honours year, actively worked on integrating various aspects of her culture, religion, and choice of career into how she came to

understand her own identity. For Anne, it also became important to have a more defined identity, as she was challenged to re-evaluate who she was and what she stood for.

Interestingly, most of the participants displayed a sense of confidence in their identity at the beginning of the research study. However, as time passed, all of them experienced a degree of dissonance before finally describing a sense of personal growth and greater certainty regarding who they were and where they were heading. Ryan displayed a sense of confidence in his identity, but at the same time, he was open to the external feedback of others. He even relished the outside perspectives that he was receiving. However, it became clear that outside perspectives and external feedback that did not correspond with his existing sense of self began to create dissonance. He was challenged in how to handle conflicting information, but in the process, he began to regain a degree of certainty regarding who he wanted to be and what he wanted to do. Anne and Becky also experienced a brief period of uncertainty as they were challenged in various domains of their lives to re-evaluate and re-define their identity. In the end, they experienced a greater sense of direction and purpose,

Arya's experience did not necessarily lead to a more defined and stable sense of self. She experienced a degree of personal growth, but it was tainted by her predominantly negative experience of the honours year. Arya declared that she was certain about who she was; however, at the same time, she came to realise how tenuous this certainty was when she experienced a sense of academic failure. Arya's search for self presented the most dynamic interplay of cultural, religious, academic, and interpersonal factors. Her self-confidence and identity were interwoven tightly with her academic performance. As she struggled to adapt to academic expectations, she also began to experience a wavering sense of self. Her cultural identity also played a significant role in how she perceived herself and her sense of belonging. At the same time that she relied on these aspects to gain a sense of who she was, she also tried very hard to distance herself from it and become someone different. In a way, she developed a love-hate relationship with her own process of individualisation. She continued to struggle throughout the year with situating her identity in terms of her cultural background and academics. She admitted that she had developed into an individual very different to what was expected of her.

It became clear that the search for self was driven by self-reflections. The need for self-reflection was prompted mostly by their academic experiences and the role of significant others. These aspects are discussed in the next sections. The participants identified self-

reflection as an activity that was encouraged and required during the year and contributed to the clarification of their self-concept. All of them identified it as a challenge but yet a positive and necessary process during this particular period in their lives. Anne, who described herself as being a reflective person naturally, admitted that events during the year required her to reflect on a level that was much more in-depth than she was used to. The other participants also mentioned that self-reflection was an integral part in their process of re-defining and establishing their identity and sense of self in relation to others.

4.5.2 Academic experiences.

The participants' search for self was influenced greatly by the academic context of the honours year in which they found themselves. For one participant in particular, her academic identity was prominent in her search for self; consequently, her academic experiences played an integral part in how she perceived herself. Most of the participants described disappointment with their undergraduate studies, as well as the academic and personal shift, that had to be made in their honours year. All of them described feeling overwhelmed at first and shared their individual ways of adapting to the demands and expectations. The selection process for the master's degree was also a defining experience for most of the participants.

All the participants acknowledged that postgraduate modules were challenging and the academic expectations of the programme were not what they had become used to in their undergraduate programmes. All the participants experienced a sense of being overwhelmed by the pace and content of the honours programme. Arya in particular, described how she struggled to adapt to the more demanding schedule. She compared her preparation for tests in undergraduate modules with what was expected of her in the honours year and came to the realisation that the amount of time she spent on her academics during her undergraduate studies would not suffice at postgraduate level. For her, the workload was just too much, and she was unable to adjust to the academic expectations. Some of the participants acknowledged that they were not used to the increased number of tests they had to write throughout the semesters.

As the year progressed, most of the participants began to embrace the academic challenges. They experienced them as contributions to their personal growth. They identified adjusting and adapting to the academic demands as a personal accomplishment that contributed to their positive experience of the honours year in general. Becky welcomed the

greater cognitive complexity of the material because she believed that it required her to apply herself. This experience provided her with a sense of accomplishment and purpose, knowing she had mastered the challenges. As Anne found a way to balance her academic and personal life, she was also able to embrace the year for what it could teach her. Arya, on the other hand, did not adjust as quickly and admitted that she did not thrive like others: *"The pressure is too much in the first three months. Not everyone can work that well under pressure ... It is not everyone, some people thrive"* [FI, p. 12, line 34]. Her inability to adjust to the challenges led to her experiencing a sense of failure. Ryan was unable to say exactly how he managed to adapt. However, he admitted that taking it one step at a time and not worrying about things that were out of his control made the situation more manageable. It is evident that all the participants found various aspects of the more challenging postgraduate programme overwhelming. Even though it was challenging, it also brought about positive change.

Regardless of the challenges with regard to workload and pressure, participants admitted that the psychological nature of their modules facilitated change, as they were able to internalise what they were studying. This was an experience very different from their undergraduate years. Although the participants experienced an increase in academic demands, they acknowledged that the psychology modules had a significant effect on their self-knowledge, understanding and acceptance. Ryan described his experience as follows: *"How this has come to 'challenge' me is in the way I can relate to these therapies. I not only relate to the ways in which the therapists view human nature, but I relate even more to the way I can apply these perspectives to myself as an individual"* [RW1, p. 1, line 16]. Learning about various theories of human behaviour provided them with a different perspective and frame of reference through which they approached everyday life.

There was consensus that the selection for the master's degree process put a lot of pressure on everyone. All of the participants acknowledged the importance of having a master's degree if they wanted to embark on a career as psychologists. The defining nature of this selection process caused significant anxiety and a degree of self-doubt for all of the participants. Two participants whose applications were not successful, Ryan and Arya, also had to deal with the emotions of disappointment and the uncertainty about the way forward. Although Arya did not apply, the process still affected her significantly, and she and shared her observation of how it affected the class in general: *"But when you get rejected, that rejection literally brought a very big dip in the class's motivation"* [SI, p. 2, line 38]. For

Arya and many honours students, the reason for their enrolment in the programme was to move on to a master's degree. This prospect is often a driving force for many to persevere. For those who are not accepted, it is a challenge to remain motivated to complete their honours degrees. Many, like Arya, begin to question their choice of programme and are often turned away from psychology. However, some like Ryan take the experience and the feedback to advance his personal growth and development with the intention of applying again the next year.

For Anne and Becky, selection for the master's degree was a time of in-depth reflection and self-acceptance. Although they were both accepted, they admitted that during the process of selection, they experienced self-doubt and questioned their own behaviour and experiences. In preparation for selection for the master's degree and in preparation for the outcome, the participants experienced significant anxiety. They had to deal with the lingering question of "What do I do if I do not get in?" Becky and Ryan explained how they engaged in self-talk to convince themselves that it would not be the end of the road if they were not accepted. For Anne and Becky, it was an undeniable fact that their acceptance into the programme validated the challenges and negative experiences that they had during the honours year. It also provided them with a greater sense of certainty regarding themselves and their future.

4.5.3 The role significant others play.

As mentioned earlier, academic experiences and the role of significant others played an integral role in encouraging self-reflection and re-evaluation of self. The roles that significant others played in each of the participants' lives during the year differed. Most of the participants experienced positive and negative interactions with family, friends, and classmates.

Most of the participants identified their family as playing a supportive role throughout the year. Becky and Ryan were two participants who referred to their family members most often when describing how they worked through difficult times during the honours year. Becky described the role of her family as supportive and encouraging: *"My familie was baie ondersteunend … en ek het glad nie druk van hulle kant af gekry om te perform nie"* [SI, p. 1,

line 45].[35] Ryan's family functioned as a 'home base' during his honours year, as he ventured into unknown and uncertain territory. Although Arya also mentioned her family, it was not related to receiving support from them during the honours year. In contrast to the other participants' experiences of their families as supportive, Arya did not share the same sentiments. Her family had certain expectations of her, and these contributed to a great sense of being not worthy or being a failure. Performing academically and eventually becoming a medical doctor was an expectation of her family. Therefore, even though she could not please them by being a 'Pakistani girl', she felt that she could fulfil their wishes of having a daughter that followed in the footsteps of all the other doctors in the family. Unfortunately, trying to live up to the expectations of her family only led to more disappointment during her honours year. In her own eyes, she was a failure to her family for not 'being the best': *So master's was for me in my head, being the best. Now that whole play, that whole scenario is coming into my mind as 'I am not going to be the best, so how am I going to prove that who I am, Arya'"* [FI, p. 6, line 25].

Anne had one additional significant other that played an instrumental supportive role during her honours year. As the eldest of all the participants and the only married individual, Anne's marital relationship played a significant role in her experiences during the honours year. Although she mentioned friends, family, and classmates when discussing interpersonal relationships, her relationship with her husband was most prominent. When topics of personal growth, academic demands, decision-making and support were discussed, her response more often than not included some reference to her husband or their relationship. In contrast to Arya's experience of *"nothing in my life is sorted"* [SI, p. 5, line 7] and her sense of not being based in anything, Anne had a secure identity as an individual in a committed relationship. This provided her with an anchor and reference point during her journey of personal growth. Her certainty in one aspect of her life afforded her the support and encouragement to face the challenges during the honours year and use them as opportunities to improve herself – for her own sake as well as the relationship.

Each participant spoke of changes that occurred in terms of relationships with classmates and friends outside the classroom. Changes were observed in all the cases; however, the reasons for these changes differed. Ryan and Arya admitted that their relationships with classmates improved because their classmates were able to relate with the

[35] … My family was very supportive … and I did not feel pressure from them to perform.

challenges and struggles that they were going through. The comfort and support they received validated the struggles and challenges they were experiencing. Ryan indicated that changes in his friendships with classmates occurred because he was seeking out others who handled disappointments the same way as he did. Although Arya described herself as an independent person who did not like to be categorised, she gravitated towards classmates and started associating with those who shared her frustration and disappointment. In addition, the need to become more self-focused also contributed to changes in either the number or quality of friendships for both. Both mentioned that they had come to realise that they were at a stage where the focus was on self-development and preparing oneself for the adult world in terms of a career.

Anne and Becky experienced a move away from relationships with classmates to being more focused on friendships outside the academic context. This was due to negative experiences and personal preferences in terms of the qualities of a friendship. Both admitted that shared interests and values became important qualities that they considered when forming friendships. In Anne's case, changes in interpersonal relationships came about because of being truer to herself. It was important that her friends were independent and tolerant of differing perspectives, something she had come to realise and accept in herself. Anne preferred to associate with friends who were her own age. As a more mature honours student, she did not always find common ground with the majority of younger classmates. Becky started the year embracing the diversity of her friendship circle. However, after selection for the master's degree, the atmosphere in the class changed, and students who had not been selected became less supportive or accepting of those who were selected. Becky felt judged for how she handled the process and personal attacks ensued. Consequently, she began to distance herself from certain people. She also learnt to be more selective with what she entrusted to whom. All of the participants experienced a restructuring of interpersonal relationships that came about as changes in other domains of their lives took place. Changes in the quality of friendships or the loss of friendships occurred as participants became more self-focused and associated more with others who shared their values and interests.

In terms of interactions with lecturers, most of the participants mentioned that this added a new dimension to their interpersonal interactions. All of them identified the experience of feeling intimidated by the knowledge and authority of the lecturers. They admitted that some adjustment was required because of the more personal nature of

interactions with lecturers at honours level. Anne and Becky acknowledged that they were self-conscious about raising their own opinions in class or simply asking questions. Anne, specifically, shared how she was always concerned about how she would come across: *"I feel they might not think I make sense or that I might lose my track of thought"* [FI, p. 6, line 31]. Arya's interaction with lecturers led her to experience more self-doubt as she compared her level of knowledge to theirs: *"It's scary sometimes ... Where I want to be is teaching me right now and the amount of knowledge they have. So I think it is just an unavoidable power play ... Unavoidable thing of being scared of my lecturer or the fact that they know 10 times more than I do"* [FI, p. 10, line 22]. Ryan relied on the knowledge presented in textbooks, and any deviation caused uncertainty for him. Although he did not voice his disagreement towards lecturers, he did share his experience of not agreeing with one of his lecturers. Most of participants regarded their lecturers as providing valuable support. They also admitted that they sought affirmation and validation, which played a significant role in their motivation during the year, as well as self-esteem and self-worth. Anne described her experience as follows: *"Like they would praise good things, they are builders and would build you up as a person"* [SI, p. 2, line 3]. Ryan's experience of this newfound relationship with lecturers contributed significantly to his sense of becoming an adult, and similar to Anne, he experienced it more as a 'working relationship' between two adults. Most of the participants identified that interactions with lecturers encouraged an adjustment in relating to and engaging with 'authority figures' as mature adults.

4.5.4 The movement towards greater independence, more defined belief systems and a future perspective.

Despite the individualised path that each participant took during the honours year, certain changes were evident in everyone's narrative. It is evident that there was movement towards greater independence and autonomy, more defined belief systems, and a developing future perspective.

Movement towards greater independence could be observed in various domains of each participant's life. It was evident in how they began to approach decision-making and how they began to take more responsibility for their own lives. The participants' description of how they made decisions and how much they relied on others indicated that independence was a sign of adulthood for them. Most of the participants indicated that their 'gut feeling' would guide them in knowing what was right and wrong, and some also relied on past

experiences to guide their endeavours of becoming more autonomous individuals. This was especially true for Ryan and Arya, as both mentioned that being honest with themselves and listening to their instincts helped them to make decisions that were more independent. Ryan, who was still living with his parents, displayed the greatest desire to gain autonomy and often moved back and forth between self-reliance and dependence on others. Arya was the one participant who had been working on gaining autonomy long before entering the honours year. To her, gaining autonomy signified a process of individualisation. Her dislike of categorisation from an early age led her to rely mostly on herself; however, it became evident during the period of this study that her perception of autonomy was causing her great distress and unhappiness as well. Becky's experience was the only one where the theme of autonomy was not as salient; however, in re-evaluating her belief system, it could be argued that she gained a sense of greater autonomy in terms of her way of knowing. It is evident that most of the participants regarded becoming autonomous as a symbol of adulthood, and all but one recognised the importance of interdependence.

Most of the participants also indicated the need for the re-evaluation of and commitment to their own belief systems. All of them admitted that during the honours year, differing perspectives in the classroom context challenged them. Not only was it a challenge for them to accept and respect the perspectives of others, but for some it was also necessary to re-evaluate their belief systems. In particular, Anne and Becky admitted that re-evaluation of and commitment to their personal values and beliefs were necessary. Although both had strong values and beliefs, these were challenged during the year, and as Becky explained, in order to defend her beliefs, she had to make them her own and not merely accept them from family and the church. For Anne, it was important to decide and commit to certain beliefs and values, since it affected her process of being truer to herself and her interpersonal relationships. It is evident that most of the participants came to the realisation that in situations where they were challenged by differing perspectives and values, they struggled to defend their own if it was not something they had individualised and internalised. In the process of internalising beliefs and values, participants became selective with previously held beliefs if they did not support or compliment their newfound sense of self during the year. Although all of them were challenged by differing perspectives, they described it as a positive experience that also allowed them to broaden their own frames of reference.

A perspective of developing in the future was evident in most of the participants' narratives. As mentioned earlier, some of the participants found their undergraduate studies disappointing and questioned the direction in which they were heading. Becky, in particular, expressed her frustration about feeling purposeless and heading nowhere in particular before she enrolled in the honours programme. All of the participants had aspirations when they entered the honours year. The possibility of being selected for the master's programme and a career in psychology was a driving force for many of them. Despite the challenges, disappointments and setbacks, most of the participants continued to display a sense of hope and a positive future perspective. It is understandable that Anne and Becky, who were accepted to do the master's programme, would feel positive about their purpose and direction. However, this was also observed in Ryan's case, although he was not successful in his application for the master's programme. Notwithstanding the fact that his first option did not work out, Ryan generated various options and established new goals, which continued to provide him with a sense of purpose and direction. Ryan had a larger picture in mind, which provided him the ability to persist and confront the challenges. Towards the end of the year, Arya's only prospect was to complete her honours degree. She had no aspirations and no sense of direction or purpose, leaving her experiencing resentment, despair and presenting with a negative future perspective. Most of the participants were able to find reasons for the positive and negative experiences they had. They were able to make sense of their experiences and find benefit.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an outline of the results of the individual four cases as well as a description of salient themes across all cases. Firstly, each of the four cases were treated as a single unit to highlight and describe each participant's unique journey in detail. Secondly, salient themes across the four cases with their unique variations were presented. It was evident that the movement to postgraduate studies was a challenge for all of the participants on the personal and academic levels. Significant changes and growth occurred throughout the year. The first theme identified through cross-case analysis, *the search for self,* highlighted the processes and challenges that the participants experienced in defining their identities. The second theme, *academic experiences*, included the participants' experiences of postgraduate study, how they handled and adapted to greater academic challenges and expectations. It also highlighted the effect of selection for the master's degree on the experience of the honours

year. In the next theme, *the role of significant others*, the interplay and changes to interpersonal relationships were presented. Lastly, in the theme *the movement towards greater independence, more defined beliefs systems, and a developing future perspective*, the challenges of gaining autonomy, re-evaluating belief systems and developing a future perspective were highlighted. These results are discussed and interpreted in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion of the Research Results

In this chapter, the themes that were presented in Chapter 4 are interpreted in the light of existing literature. The discussion is guided by the research aim, namely to explore the meaning-making journeys of postgraduate psychology students, as informed by Baxter Magolda's (2001) theoretical framework of self-authorship. Reference is made to and comparison with others studies is made to highlight similarities to and variances from existing knowledge on self-authorship development. The discussion of the findings is guided by the three phases of self-authorship proposed by Baxter Magolda (2001), namely following formulas, crossroads, and becoming the author of one's life. The more nuanced development of self-authorship is also elucidated by discussing the participants' meaning-making journeys in terms of the ten meaning-making positions identified by Baxter Magolda and King (2012).

5.1 Developmental pathways towards self-authorship

The dynamic nature of development was evident in the narratives of all the participants of this study. Baxter Magolda and King (2012) argue that learning and development transpire simultaneously in the individual and in context. To understand student learning and development, attention must be paid to personal characteristics, as well as contextual or situational characteristics (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Personal characteristics such as personality traits, coping skills, and sense of self (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) played a significant role in the development of each of the participants. In attempting to understand the uniqueness of the participants' journeys, the role of contextual characteristics such as social, cultural, and spiritual backgrounds, should also be acknowledged. Individual qualities and contextual aspects together contributed to the different meaning-making positions with which each participant started the honours year. It also continued to affect their experiences during the honours year and resulted in the participants being situated in different meaning-making positions towards the end of their honours year.

In this study, the journey of each participant indicated progression towards an increasing complexity of meaning making. However, their journeys were replete with transitional periods, convoluted routes, and even regression, as the participants moved towards self-authorship. It was evident that the pathway towards self-authorship is not a

linear progression from one phase to the next. As depicted in Figure 2, the journey towards self-authorship is a cyclical and nuanced process during with individuals move back and forth between meaning-making positions within the specific meaning-making structures. Baxter Magolda and King (2012) describe this cyclical movement as a process of differentiation and integration. The meaning-making structures should not be considered separate and removed from one another. Rather, one meaning-making structure blends into the following structure (Baxter Magolda & Taylor, 2015).

In looking more specifically at the movement towards self-authorship in each of the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions, it is clear that all of the participants experienced growth within the dimensions. The presence of epistemological growth was evident and presented within the theme of *the movement towards greater independence, more defined belief systems, and a future perspective*. All of the participants described how a re-evaluation of their belief systems was either required or encouraged during the honours year. The theme, namely *the search for self*, encompassed all of the intrapersonal development that the participants experienced during the honours year. Self-knowledge and awareness were driven by reflection. Through reflecting on intrapersonal aspects, most participants experienced personal growth and a more stable sense of self. The changes and growth that took place in the interpersonal dimension were highlighted by experiences related to the theme *role of significant others*. Experiences of challenges and support encountered in the academic context were presented in the theme *academic experiences.* Participants' narratives suggested that positive and negative academic experiences played a role in growth in the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions. For some participants, growth in the interpersonal dimension spilled over to the other two dimensions. For others, growth in the epistemological and intrapersonal dimensions facilitated growth in the interpersonal dimension.

The growth that was evident in the participants' journeys can also be understood by considering the cognitive and psychosocial development of students during the emerging adulthood years. Cognitive development of students who are enrolled in postgraduate programmes entails the use of more autonomous thinking, reflective reasoning, and ultimately reflective judgement. As King and Kitchener (1994, p. 1) explained, "one of the most important responsibilities educators have is helping students learn to make defensible judgments about vexing problems." As proposed by Perry (1968), all the participants moved

beyond dualism towards considering relativism and became more comfortable with commitment within this relativism. All participants' psychosocial developmental processes were also seen in how they explored, committed to, and narrated their identities. Although Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development were not explored specifically, the salient themes identified suggest that many of the developmental challenges characteristic of the seven vectors were present to varying degrees in the experiences of the participants.

5.2 Journeys in Development of Self-Authorship

To honour the individual journey of each participant, their journeys are discussed individually as it pertains to the specific meaning-making structures that they were utilising. Reference to the salient themes is made throughout to show the connection with growth that took place in the three dimensions. Although the structure of the discussion might seem linear, it does not in any manner suggest a linear progression towards self-authorship. The cyclical and nuanced developmental pathway towards self-authorship is acknowledged and emphasised.

5.2.1 Following formulas: Solely external meaning making.

As delineated in the literature review chapter, the phase of following formulas is characterised by developmental positions that reflect various degrees of externally defined meaning making (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Baxter Magolda (2008) posit that the majority of traditional-age university students begin their educational journeys with predetermined beliefs or external formulas that govern how they learn, interact, and develop a sense of self. Although this study did not explore the meaning-making structures of the participants at the beginning of their educational journeys, it is assumed that they did enter university relying on external meaning-making structures, with the exception of Arya, whose narrative regarding her high school experiences indicated a degree of self-authorship earlier in life already. Ryan in particular presented with the meaning-making processes that typify the phase of following formulas.

While the intrapersonal theme of *the search for self* was prominent throughout all the participants' experiences, Ryan's search was built nearly exclusively on external perspectives. During the first interview, Ryan described the importance of new outside perspectives on his developing sense of self. Ryan welcomed the external feedback that he

was getting about who he was and how he came across. Throughout the year, he continued to use social expectations and perspectives to form and express his identity. His approach to making meaning of experiences regarding intrapersonal development is characteristic of the *trusting external authority (Ea)* position within the external meaning-making structure. Similar to what Baxter Magolda and King (2012) describe, Ryan trusted that others knew him better than he knew himself. Thus, Ryan's sense of self was influenced greatly by this external meaning-making structure, which allowed external voices to influence how he perceived himself.

Accompanying the search for self, establishing an identity and solidifying it was the single most significant process during the honours year for all of the participants. Arnett (2014b), who defines identity exploration as one of the five pillars of emerging adulthood, states that identity issues reach peak intensity during the emerging adulthood years. For Ryan, external influences had the greatest effect on his identity development. Of all the factors that Chickering and Reisser (1993) consider as part of identity development, Ryan's struggle with establishing his identity was influenced by two, namely sense of self in response to feedback from valued others, and personal stability and integration. As he was exposed to a new academic and interpersonal context in his honours year, feedback from these external sources was not always in agreement with each other or with his self-acknowledgement and understanding. This created dissonance resulting in his experiencing tensions with relying consistently on external sources in defining his identity.

Selection for the master's degree, identified as a significant event within the theme of *academic experiences,* also had a defining effect on most of the participants. Selection for the master's degree prompted most of the participants to re-evaluate their way of thinking about and approaching situations within the intrapersonal and epistemological dimensions. This finding is congruent with Barber et al. (2013) and Carpenter and Peña (2016), who believe that difficult life events or exposure to intense personal challenges serve as a catalyst for the re-evaluation of perspectives. Dissonance, which, according to Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda (2013), facilitates substantial shifts in self-authorship development, was also identified in the experiences of all the participants in this study. For Ryan, this dissonance resulted in a move towards a more complex way of knowing and making meaning, albeit still within the external meaning-making structure. The feedback that he received from valued others (such as the selection panel) resulted in his moving to the next position of *tensions*

with trusting external authority (Eb) in the intrapersonal dimension as he attempted to integrate conflicting information in his sense of self.

During the early months of the honours year, Ryan made sense of his interpersonal experiences from the position of *tensions with trusting external authority (Eb). The role of significant others* was identified by all participants, with various role players contributing to the participants' personal growth (either as a source of support or challenge). For Ryan, the support, approval and acceptance of most of his classmates was of utmost importance. This finding is in line with Barber et al. (2013), who also identified university peers as a source of support. However, towards the end of the honours year, after working through the academic challenges and the selection for the master's degree, it became evident that Ryan realised the need to restructure interpersonal relationships and began making meaning of his experiences from the position of *recognising shortcoming of trusting external authority (Ec)*. Towards the end of the year, he admitted that acceptance and approval was not as important anymore, and finding relationships that met his needs or aligned with his values took precedence.

Ryan attributed the changes that took place in terms of interpersonal relationships to the need for self-focus and the desire for more mature interpersonal relationships. Ryan's need to be more self-focused is in line with Arnett's (2000b, 2014b) explanation of the age of self-focus in emerging adulthood. Chickering and Reisser (1993) also posit that students encounter the vector of development, namely developing mature interpersonal relationships. This explains Ryan's need for and the importance of restructuring relationships. Similar to Chickering and Reisser's (1993) explanation of the changes that occur, Ryan began to be more selective by choosing relationships that he perceived as supportive and nurturing.

Throughout the honours year, Ryan's meaning-making structure in the epistemological dimension remained solely external and characterised by the meaning-making position of *trusting external authority (Ea)*. For Ryan, it was important to make the right decisions, based on correct information. He was most comfortable in situations that were familiar or predictable and did not enjoy being confronted with relativity. As Baxter Magolda and King (2012) explain, students utilising this meaning-making structure are uncomfortable with ambiguous situations and will look to authority figures to provide the 'right' answer. This is akin to Perry's (1968, 1981) dualistic stage, during which individuals view the world dichotomously, and see authority figures and textbooks as possessing the knowledge and answers.

Ryan's journey indicates significant reliance on external sources to define his identity and to deal with ambiguous situations. This had a significant effect on his process of searching for self. Although he had become aware of the need for developing more mature relationships with authority figures, his lack of an internally defined identity and belief system created uncertainty about how to proceed to reformulate these relationships. Despite the fact that external voices largely guided Ryan's epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal development, he still experienced *movement towards greater independence, a more defined* (although not entirely internally defined) *belief system, and a future perspective*. Ryan's view of a future with various possible career options supports Arnett's (2014a) notion that, although emerging adulthood is considered a time of struggle, it is also a time of notable optimism and possibilities.

5.2.2 Crossroads.

As individuals begin to experience dissonance with relying solely on external voices, movement into the crossroads is experienced. Four positions have been identified in this meaning-making structure. This meaning-making structure is identified by ever-increasing trust in and reliance on the use of one's internal voice. The positions of *questioning external authority [E(I)]* and *constructing the internal voice (E-I),* is situated in the first segment of the crossroads dimension, namely *entering the crossroads.* During these two positions, meaning making is still predominantly defined externally. However, some internal meaning making begins to emerge (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). In the next segment of the crossroads dimension, *leaving the crossroads,* the next two positions are found. They include *Listening to the Internal voice (I-E)* and *cultivating the internal voice [I(E)]*. The position of *listening to the internal voice* is the first position on the developmental journey, where the internal voice becomes more prominent (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, Arya's narrative about her high school experiences indicated a degree of self-authorship. Torres (2010) and Torres and Hernandez (2007) suggest that distinct issues related to ethnic identity and cultural experiences are associated with cognitive dissonance and even earlier development of self-authorship in students. These distinct issues include recognising racism, managing the effects of stereotypes on self-perception, and renegotiating relationships to honour own cultural values while at the same time respecting those of others (Torres, 2010; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). Arya faced the intrapersonal dynamics that Torres's (2010) and Torres and Hernandez's (2007) participants faced in the

process of refining their ethnic identity and dealing with marginalisation. From the position of *cultivating the internal voice [I(E)]*, Arya needed to make meaning of her experience as a Pakistani, born in Lesotho, and living in South Africa, as it had a great effect on her sense of belonging and identity. Arya's distinct journey in the intrapersonal dimension was highlighted clearly by the struggles she experienced in establishing and committing to an identity. She was driven to become self-reliant, and from an early age, she began to question the appropriateness of her family's cultural beliefs and values to her process of identity formation.

Although Arya displayed a more self-authored meaning-making structure earlier in her life, it is evident that various personal and academic experiences resulted in her reverting to the crossroads meaning-making structure. This is not an unusual developmental pathway towards self-authorship, as Pizzolato (2004) discovered that students who experienced marginalisation during their high school years would enter university with a degree of self-authorship; however, they would revert to an external meaning-making structure when faced with hostile or difficult experiences at university. Consequently, during the honours year, Arya made meaning of her experiences utilising the position of *cultivating the internal voice [I(E)]*. Specifically within the theme of *academic experiences,* Arya struggled to develop a more coherent sense of self. Rather, she experienced a very tenuous sense of self. This had an effect on her development in the intrapersonal dimension. Contrary to Pizzolato's (2004) participants, who eventually returned to their previous self-authored meaning-making structure by the end of the honours year, Arya was struggling to find her way back. This could possibly be explained by looking at her way of coping with the challenges and stressors that she experienced. Pizzolato's (2004) participants managed to return to a self-authored meaning-making structure due to their style of coping, namely problem-focused coping. Arya was not utilising a problem-focused coping style but instead resorted to blaming external sources such as the profession, the programme, and the workload for her lack of purpose, direction and academic success.

In discussing *the role of significant others,* Arya mentioned the role that her family played in her developing identity. Dynamics in the interpersonal dimension had a noticeable effect on Arya's development in the intrapersonal dimension. During the honours year, Arya's meaning-making journey was characterised by the struggle to cultivate the internal voice in the face of family and cultural expectations. From the position of *cultivating the*

internal voice [I(E)], Arya worked really hard to maintain her point of view and defend the decision to be different from her family. She utilised this meaning-making position to make meaning of her experiences within the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal dimensions. Arya had managed to commit to a cultural identity, constructed and defined by her own criteria, despite the fact that it also hurt her to move away from some of her family's values and beliefs. In Syed and Mitchell's (2013) argument that emerging adulthood might be different for racial minorities, they described Arnett's (2000b, 2014b) age of self-focus as being influenced by the family obligations characteristic of certain cultures. Arya's family had expectations of her regarding academic and career choices, as well as her cultural values and beliefs. Attending university and doing well is considered an aspect of family obligation for many ethnic minorities (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). The academic and career expectations of her family were not so easy to mediate using her cultivated internal voice, which is in line with Baxter Magolda and King's (2012) description of this particular meaning-making position as an arduous process of distinguishing one's individual point of view from that of others. Although Arya presented as an independent decision maker, the academic expectations of her family had a significant effect on her sense of competence and her overall experience of the honours year.

In terms of the seven vectors of student identity development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), three of the vectors were of particular importance in Arya's meaning-making journey. These vectors included developing competence, managing emotions, and developing purpose. Arya struggled with all three, which resulted in her questioning her capabilities, experiencing a lack of direction and purpose, and lastly experiencing a sense of failure, regret and resentment towards her choice of major subject as well as those involved in the programme. In terms of future perspective, Arya struggled to find and commit to goals that would give her hope and direction. Most of Arya's experiences could be considered normal in light of Arnett's (2000b, 2014b) five pillars of emerging adulthood. However, the feeling of instability, being stuck and in between contributed to her experiencing scepticism and doubt about her competence and future, which supports the finding that for some individuals, emerging adulthood is marked by ambivalence and is considered as a struggle (Oleson et al., 2000). Because Arya tried to make meaning of her experience from the position of *cultivating the internal voice [I(E)]*, she struggled to manage her emotions of anger, disappointment and resentment. In the end, she was overwhelmed by them and described her process of making meaning as adaptation and acceptance. However, her adaptation and acceptance did not bring

relief, but in turn had a negative effect on her honours year experience. Chickering and Reisser (1993) acknowledge that emotions of anger, fear, disappointment and doubt have the power to derail the educational process and that students need to develop the capacity for self-regulation and find a balance between awareness and integration. Arya had gained knowledge and a degree of insight; however, unlike the other participants, she did not necessarily experience self-acceptance.

Although Arya was aware of her emotions, and to a degree their effect, she was not able to integrate these emotions in such a manner that it contributed to a more authentic and coherent sense of self. As mentioned earlier, Barber et al. (2013) posit that intense personal challenges, which in Arya's case consisted of obstacles to academic success, require students to re-evaluate knowledge, identity, and relationships. The selection for the master's degree, identified as a challenging personal experience for all participants, did not result in a positive experience for Arya. It is possible that she experienced significant tension between listening to her internal voice and excluding external voices. She was challenged to think differently and determine how to proceed in a fashion that would align with her intrapersonal sense of self, as posited by Carpenter and Peña (2016).

With regard to the theme of *the role of significant others,* all the participants acknowledged change and growth that took place in the interpersonal dimension. Arya recounted changes that took place in terms of friendships with classmates and friends outside of class. As she attempted to make meaning of her academic experiences, a change in the quality of interpersonal relationships also occurred. Arya's struggle with the academic workload and expectations led to her reaching out to classmates in search of support and validation for her experience. She moved from being independent and autonomous towards a greater degree of interdependence, which suggests that she was beginning to cultivate her internal voice more as she attempted to make meaning from the *cultivating the internal voice [I(E)]* position. In a fashion similar to Ryan, Arya also identified classmates as a great source of support, as she could share with them similar experiences and emotions, especially related to the honours and master's experiences. A re-evaluation of her degree of autonomy and independence in relation to relationships also occurred. In line with Chickering and Reisser's (1993) movement toward interdependence, Arya began to recognise and accept interdependence.

Arya's epistemological dimension was probably the most resilient and consistent, despite challenges to her identity and beliefs that affected her way of knowing. In this dimension, her meaning-making position of *cultivating the internal voice [I(E)]*, was most evident as she was able to cultivate an internal voice that allowed her to stand by her way of knowing. Barber et al. (2013) found most of their participants developed an awareness and acceptance of multiple perspectives, but claimed that many never went further to develop a complex appreciation of diversity and how it influenced their view of the world. However, Arya demonstrated an acceptance and appreciation of diversity and enjoyed engaging with others who had differing perspectives. She also brought this element into class discussion to get a more abstract understanding of principles being taught. In terms of King and Kitchener's (1994) reflective judgement model (RJM), she was able to appreciate the fact that knowledge is shaped by context and relevant evidence, indicating a degree of reflective thinking.

Becky's meaning-making journey indicated a movement from the *questioning external authority [E(I)]* position within the crossroads meaning-making structure to the *constructing the internal voice (E-I)* position across all three dimensions. Baxter Magolda (2001) describes the meaning-making process of individuals utilising the former position as characteristic of an internal voice that questions authority, realises the dilemma of external definition, and acknowledges the need to develop an internal identity that could be brought to relationships. Becky's meaning-making journey highlighted the intersections among the developmental dimensions of epistemology, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Although three participants (Becky, Anne, and Arya) explicitly described the role of their belief system and values in their meaning-making journey, this was a prominent theme for Becky.

Within the salient theme of *the search for self*, Becky's experiences included establishing an identity outside of her romantic relationships and friendships, which was facilitated by a re-evaluation of her belief system. Most of the participants identified encounters with diverse others as a significant contributor to personal development and growth, as it required of them to evaluate their assumptions about knowledge. This is in line with the findings of Barber et al. (2013) and Barber and King (2014), who identified encounters with diverse others as a salient theme across the experiences of participants who experienced substantial shifts in self-authorship. Becky's inability to articulate and defend her perspectives in discussions with classmates brought about the realisation that she had to

take ownership of her values and belief system by questioning the sources and validity thereof. This questioning of the sources of her belief system, which is characteristic of the *questioning external authority [E(I)]* position, led to her experiencing growth within the epistemological dimension. Similar to the participants' experiences in Barber and King's (2014) study, Becky described her interaction with diverse others as helping her to be more open-minded. Her interaction with diverse others facilitated the movement towards a more defined belief system. She was able to acknowledge and accept the existence of multiple perspectives, but like the participants of Barber et al. (2013), she could not fully appreciate diversity, as she was still in the process of re-evaluating and reformulating her beliefs and values based on her interactions with diverse others. Her struggle to commit to her newly defined belief system can be explained largely by the fact that, although her meaning-making structure consisted of constructing her internal voice, she continued to 'lean back' to the earlier external position of meaning making and found it difficult to edge out external voices.

Early on during the honours year, Becky's description of her experiences indicated that she was beginning to actively construct a new way of making meaning, characteristic of the *constructing the internal voice (E-I)* position within the crossroads meaning-making structure. The internal voice begins to grow as individuals begin to explore how they want to construct her beliefs, identity, and relationships (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Similar to the experiences of some of Baxter Magolda and King's (2012) participants, Becky described the balance between external and internal voices as tenuous as she struggled to employ this newfound way of making meaning consistently. Becky's personal and academic experiences contributed to significant intrapersonal growth as she began to take greater ownership of her experiences and developed a sense of purpose due to the construction of her internal voice in the position of *constructing the internal voice (E-I)*.

Becky's *academic experiences*, which include experiences intrinsic to the honours year modules and projects, and the selection process for the master's degree contributed to development within Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vector of developing purpose. She admitted that during her undergraduate years, she lacked purpose and direction as her study choice did not stimulate her cognitively and left her dissatisfied. For Becky, the honours modules, more than the selection for the master's degree, challenged her perspectives and required critical thinking and reflective reasoning. As she engaged in these processes, she gained greater self-knowledge and awareness, which facilitated her identity development.

Unlike the other participants, Becky's experience of the selection for the master's degree did not necessarily result in a more complex way of making meaning, but affirmed to her that she was exactly where she was meant to be. Her meaning making of this experience was influenced largely by her strong religious background. It can be argued that epistemological dissonance, identified by Carpenter and Peña (2016) as a catalyst for development of self-authorship, was brought about by Becky's experiences intrinsic to the honours year, more so than her experiences of the selection process for the master's degree.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) postulate that the vector of developing integrity is related closely to the vectors of establishing identity and clarifying purposes. For Becky, developing integrity also became a salient developmental experience. She began to move away from applying uncompromising beliefs and using principled thinking in order to balance her own self-interest with the interests of others (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). She also personalised her values and beliefs by taking ownership of them. Ultimately, she developed a degree of congruence by matching her behaviour in interpersonal relationships and aligning her approach to knowledge with her values and beliefs. However, despite being able to do so, her crossroads meaning-making structure was largely still external which influenced how she made meaning of her experiences and reacted to them.

5.2.3 Becoming the author of one's life: Solely internal meaning making.

The last and most self-authored meaning-making structure is that of *becoming the author of one's life*. Within this structure, students have acquired the ability to build a self-authored system. During this phase, an individual's internal voice becomes more dominant and a new meaning-making structure that is 'solely internal' emerges (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Baxter Magolda and King (2012) place the last three positions, namely (1) *trusting the internal voice (Ia)*, (2) *building an internal foundation (Ib)*, and (3) *securing internal commitments (Ic)*, within this particular meaning-making structure. Building a self-authored system requires the experiences of the epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal developmental dimensions, to move 'inside' oneself (Baxter Magolda, 2008).

In contrast to the other participants' journeys, Anne's meaning-making journey was identified as indicative of the use of the most mature meaning-making structure during the honours year. This finding supports Perry's (1968) argument that students' way of thinking and their belief systems progressively transform as they mature, as Anne was the other

participants' senior by four to five years. Anne's experiences during the honours year predominantly centred around the intrapersonal dimension, *the search for self,* which had a ripple effect on development in the epistemological and interpersonal dimensions. Baxter Magolda (2009a) notes that participants who are naturally self-reflective often begin with their intrapersonal dimension when they attempt to sort through challenges in all three dimensions. This was evident in Anne's meaning-making journey. The reflective nature of certain honours modules and the selection process for the master's degree required and encouraged significant introspection and personal reflection from all the participants. The importance of the role of reflection in promoting learning and development has been underscored in the findings of Barber et al. (2013), as reflection allows students the opportunity to learn from their experiences rather than merely having experiences. Engaging in reflection brought to awareness the need to refine their identity and internalise their beliefs and values in order to function more congruently in interpersonal relationships. For Anne, this reflection was unique in the sense that it cultivated self-acceptance in relation to not only who she was, but also how she related to others.

For Anne, the salient theme of *the search for self* centred on being truer to herself. It became important for her to make decisions and react to situations in a manner that was more congruent with who she was. Her meaning-making processes can be situated in the *trusting the internal voice (Ia)* position, identified as one of the three elements of building a self-authored system (Baxter Magolda, 2008). Individuals who utilise this meaning-making position are able to recognise that external events are often beyond their control; however, their reactions to these events are within their control (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). More than any of the other participants, Anne began to trust her internal voice to navigate the challenges she was experiencing in the three developmental dimensions as she utilised the *trusting the internal voice (Ia)* position. Similar to Becky's experience, self-awareness and acceptance contributed to her identity development. For Anne, it allowed her to recognise that she was in control of her own emotions and happiness. Anne's experiences in the intrapersonal dimension were in line with the experiences of Baxter Magolda's (2008) participants in that she also realised that a distinction could be made between reality and one's reaction to it.

Arnett's (2000b, 2014b) proposed age of self-focus and identity exploration were central developmental issues in Anne's journey. She realised that, in order to begin trusting

her internal voice, she had to focus on what was important to her and align her interpersonal relationships and way of knowing with her identity and values. Much like *the academic experiences* of the other participants, Anne identified selection for the master's degree as a significant experience that required in-depth reflection leading to greater self-knowledge and awareness. Difficult life events (Carpenter & Peña, 2016) and exposure to intense personal challenges (Barber, King, & Baxter Magolda, 2013) were identified as significant themes in development towards self-authorship. In this study, the selection for the master's degree was experienced as a difficult event that brought about intense personal challenges for all of the participants. In Anne's case, this experience also led to a shift towards a more complex way of knowing and making meaning.

In the interpersonal dimension, in terms of *the role of significant others,* Anne identified various role players who had a positive effect on her process of establishing her identity and becoming truer to herself. Baxter Magolda (2008) argues that self-authorship enhances relationships, as a more internal way of making meaning initiates a restructuring and reframing of relationships to represent more authentic relationships that are in line with one's internal sense of self. All of the participants (Arya to a lesser degree) experienced changes in interpersonal relationships as changes to their meaning-making structure occurred. This finding is in line with Baxter Magolda's (2007) assertion that the process of building and maintaining mature interdependent relationships while constructing an internal belief system and sense of self requires a delicate balance of self and other. For Anne, this was a prominent theme in describing the role of significant others, including her husband and classmates. As in Ryan's case, she experienced changes in interpersonal relationships during the year, as she ended friendships that did not align with her newfound sense of self and values, but she also formed new relationships with lecturers. These decisions were based on her ability to trust her internal voice.

Carpenter and Peña (2016) identify role modelling as a catalyst for self-authorship development. Participants in their study identified the role of an institutional agent, such as a lecturer or counsellor, as facilitating development of self-authorship through challenging assumptions and supporting internal reflection (Carpenter & Peña, 2016). Anne had a similar experience, as she identified the supportive role of specific lecturers as instrumental to her personal growth. This finding is in contrast to that of Barber et al. (2013), who suggest that their participants identified peers as the greatest source of support whereas lecturers were

associated with classroom challenges. Anne's experience of lecturers as a source of support could be explained possibly by the fact that making meaning form the *trusting the internal voice (Ia)* position allowed her to refine and define relationships based on her internal voice. Growth in her epistemological dimension also possibly contributed, as she became more of a reflective thinker and acknowledged the fact that knowledge was co-constructed and relative. She viewed her lecturers as her co-constructers during her journey.

Anne's high school experience at a private school facilitated a degree of independent knowing, as she was expected to work independently through the coursework. As she explained her experience of the class context and the role of the lecturers, it became clear that Anne was functioning as a reflective thinker (King & Kitchener, 1994). She was able to acknowledge that knowledge is not merely given, but rather constructed, and was comfortable to face ambiguous and uncertain situations. She acknowledged her appreciation for personal stories that the lecturers shared about experiences of ethically ambiguous situations with clients in practice, which did not necessarily correspond with information in the textbooks.

Significant growth in Anne's epistemological and interpersonal dimensions was facilitated by dissonance that she experienced in her intrapersonal dimension. Anne was forced to re-evaluate her meaning-making structure as she worked to construct meaning of her intrapersonal challenges. A re-evaluation came about in an attempt to align interpersonal interactions and her way of knowing with her internal needs and values, and who she was. Anne's developmental experiences aligned with a number of Chickering and Reisser's (1993) vectors of development. Developmental vectors salient in Anne's journey included developing intellectual and interpersonal competence, managing emotions, establishing identity, developing purpose, and developing integrity. Being able to trust her internal voice more sufficiently afforded her the opportunity to refine her beliefs, values, identity, and relationships. Subsequently, Anne's meaning-making journey during her honours year was described as a positive and growth-enhancing process as she took charge of her emotions, reactions to external events, and how she defined herself. She also managed to develop and maintain a positive future perspective in the face of academic and personal challenges.

5.3 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, an in-depth discussion of the salient themes, as they relate to the development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001) across the three phases, was presented. Literature on the theories of life span development (Arnett, 2000b), cognitive development (King & Kitchener, 1994; Perry, 1981), and psychosocial development (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) was also discussed, as they related to the journey of each participant. The next chapter provides a conclusion to this study, with particular focus on the key findings, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 6

Key Findings, Limitations and Recommendations

The aim of this chapter is to highlight the most significant findings, discuss the limitations of the study, and provide recommendations for future research.

6.1 Summary of Most Significant Findings

The purpose of this section is to provide an overview of the most significant findings with regard to the meaning-making journeys of postgraduate psychology students and the elements of self-authorship that each participant exhibited. From the cross-case analysis, four salient themes were identified, namely (1) the search for self; (2) the academic experience; (3) the role of significant others; and (4) the movement towards greater independence, more defined belief systems, and a future perspective. To a large extent, these themes and their respective subthemes were in alignment with existing theory and literature on the development of self-authorship in emerging adults.

It is evident that in the journey of all the participants, identity development and the role of interpersonal relationships were significant contributors to their personal growth. Owing to the focus on intrapersonal growth in the postgraduate psychology programme, it was inevitable that all the participants would be challenged in this dimension. However, the intrinsic characteristics of each participant played a significant role in the developmental path towards intrapersonal growth. Kottler and Swartz (2004) suggest that the journey towards a profession in psychology is an arduous process, and intrapersonal growth is an essential element in this journey (Hughes & Youngson, 2009). All of the participants described experiences that indicated that they had struggled with this difficult process throughout the year. Some were able to learn and grow from the experiences, while for others it was a greater challenge to find intrapersonal congruency and a sense of purpose and direction. This finding suggests that, although the content and structure of the honours programme encourages psychosocial and cognitive development, not all students necessarily will perceive it as a positive and growth-enhancing experience.

The defining role of cultural identity and values in individual development, and more specifically development of self-authorship, was supported by the findings of this study.

Similar to individual characteristics such as personality traits and coping strategies, contextual characteristics such as culture and religion were found to mediate the meaning-making journey. The findings of this study highlight the role of cultural identity and engagement with diverse others in developing self-authorship. The importance of diversity and engaging with diverse others suggests that academic programmes should consider and incorporate activities and discussions that encourage exposure to and, more importantly, engagement with diverse others.

In describing their development and personal growth, most participants referred to their attempts to gain greater independence and the value of finding purpose and direction. This finding raises the question about the role that greater independence and purpose play in development towards self-authorship. These factors could possibly be contributing factors, which, if encouraged and developed in students, could facilitate development towards self-authorship during the university years. This finding suggests that students will benefit from being encouraged to take more responsibility for their learning experience. This will possibly engender a sense of purpose as they are given greater control of their own learning experience and academic journey. Structuring student-lecturer interactions to encourage independent thinking will also facilitate students' movement towards self-authorship.

The sources of dissonance that participants experienced included academic experiences (specifically selection for the master's degree), engaging with diverse perspectives, and self-reflection. In this study, a factor that was not considered to generate dissonance, but which facilitated growth supportively, was found to be the role of lecturers. For one participant, the supportive role of lecturers was highlighted as an integral part of her development towards more complex ways of making meaning. This finding highlights the fact that lecturers' influence on student development is not limited to cognitive development only, but also the psychosocial development of students.

The selection process for the master's degree was identified as a significant personal and academic challenge that played a role in the journey of all the participants. Most of the participants experienced significant intrapersonal growth, as the experience encouraged personal reflection and introspection. Most of the participants indicated that self-reflection brought about a greater degree of self-awareness and knowledge. The observed instrumental role of self-reflection in personal growth suggests that this quality should be encouraged and developed in students at all levels of postsecondary education. Incorporating the activity of

reflection into the academic schedule will allow students to not only have experiences, but also be given the opportunity to learn from their experiences.

Observations made in this study mainly reflect the developmental pathway towards self-authorship described by Baxter Magolda (2001). Although one participant had entered the self-authoring phase, the others were still moving towards self-authorship, supporting the notion that many students who graduate from university lack a self-authored system to navigate the challenges of the adult world. The findings of the study also highlight the nuanced pathway towards self-authorship, as each participant's journey was influenced by various personal and contextual factors. One participant's journey, due to her cultural and ethnical background, underscored the effect of culture and all the expectations and perspectives that come with it. This finding supports the notion that the journey towards self-authorship of ethnic minorities should not be considered as following the same pathways as those of other cultures, specifically Caucasians. The findings of this study also provide valuable insight into experiences that facilitated self-authorship development and can be utilised to structure and implement interventions and academic programmes that will facilitate development of self-authorship during the university years.

6.2 Limitations of the Study

A number of limitations related to this study need to be stated.

Firstly, it has to be noted that the majority of the participants in the sample were Caucasian, which does not represent the true demographic composition of the population of honours students at the University of the Free State. Baxter Magolda's work has been criticised for the fact that her research focused mostly on white individuals who come from privileged backgrounds (Evans et al., 2016). As such, Baxter Magolda (2004a) has encouraged the exploration of self-authorship in various student populations in diverse settings. This study aimed to explore self-authorship in a specific population of students (postgraduate psychology); however, the sample continued to represent mostly Caucasians. As is evident from the findings of this study, cultural dynamics have a noticeable effect on the journey towards self-authorship. This highlights the importance of including more culturally diverse participants to reach a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. Considering the demographic composition of South Africa, a more accurate understanding of

the development of self-authorship would necessitate a more inclusive and representative sample.

This case study research was conducted within the delimited system of the postgraduate psychology programme at the University of the Free State. Although qualitative research is more concerned with transferability than with generalisability, it should be noted that the experiences of the four participants who were sampled purposively and volunteered for the study may not be the experiences of all honours students and cannot be generalised. Postgraduate programmes differ from institution to institution, and institutional cultures vary. Given the important role of the academic experience, as witnessed in this study, it is clear that the results of the current study do not represent the entire picture.

It is acknowledged that the researcher's own experience as an honours student and current master's student could have resulted in possible subjectivity in understanding and interpreting the experiences of each participant. The interpretations and discussions were shaped by the personal beliefs, values, and perspectives of the researcher. Inherent in a constructivist approach is the understanding that experiences and meanings are co-constructed between the researcher and participants. Although the researcher made use of a reflective journal and feedback sessions with a supervisor to bracket and reflect on possible subjectivity, it is acknowledged that the themes identified are only some of a number of possible themes. For this reason, the findings should not be considered as absolute truth, but rather as a co-construction of personal stories, beliefs, values, and experiences. Equally important to note is the theoretical bias that was present. Since Baxter Magolda's theory of self-authorship served as the overarching theory in this research study, the researcher was more sensitised to themes relating to this particular theory. Consequently, other truths and perspectives might have been missed.

The researcher was also a novice in conducting qualitative research, and more specifically in conducting individual interviews. It has been recommended that individuals be trained properly to conduct interviews to assess self-authorship development. It is acknowledged that the researcher received no formal training in conducting the interviews. With more experience, the researcher would have been able to create and/or identify more opportunities for exploration and clarification, which could have provided even richer information. However, it should be mentioned that the researcher's training as a therapist provided her with knowledge and skills related to exploring personal and sensitive

information and asking more specific questions to gain a better understanding of the individuals' experiences.

Despite these limitations, the themes identified in cases and across cases highlight the importance of this study. The data gathered contribute to knowledge about development of self-authorship and, more specifically, provide greater understanding of the meaning-making journeys of a specific subgroup of students.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

A number of recommendations for future research can be considered. While some of the recommendations relate to ways in which the limitations of the current research study can be addressed, recommendations for new directions in future studies are also made.

To overcome the limitations of the current study in terms of a more culturally diverse sample, future researchers can consider an extended sample of the student population that will ensure sufficient gender and racial representation. This will allow for research studies to present findings that offer a more accurate and truthful depiction of self-authorship. Related to this, multi-site researchers, including a variety of institutions and postgraduate programmes, can be considered. By integrating the findings on the processes and environments that facilitate self-authorship from different institutions, psychology programmes can be informed, especially since the importance of self-authorship in the profession of psychology has been highlighted. In addition to this, future researchers can consider comparing the processes towards self-authorship between various disciplines (beyond psychology). The unique nature of disciplinary foci will provide additional perspectives and experiences regarding the meaning-making journeys of postgraduate students.

In the true sense of constructivism, that knowledge is socially constructed in interaction with others and the environment, valuable findings regarding self-authorship may emerge if focus groups are included as a method of data collection. Focus groups will provide participants with the opportunity to construct their way of making meaning actively as they discuss topics that elicit reflection on epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal issues. In addition to creating a context in which participants can relate their experiences, the views of significant others such as friends, family, and lecturers could also be incorporated in future

research. The perspectives of significant others can provide another lens, and valuable insight could be gained from exploring how the perceptions and experiences of significant others confirm or differ from how students perceive their own journeys.

It is evident that self-authorship is mediated by cultural factors. Not only does participants' cultural identities influence their journey, but interactions with others from diverse cultures also facilitate development of self-authorship. For this reason, further research is recommended to ensure that an accurate understanding of the effect of culture and cultural exposure and engagement is generated. Owing to the demographic composition of the South African population, it is expected that future mental health practitioners will represent a diverse group of cultures. At the same time, mental health practitioners are guaranteed to work with clients who come from various ethnic backgrounds. This underscores the necessity to understand how cultural and ethnic factors mediate development of self-authorship. In addition, the need to cultivate mental health practitioners who are sensitive to and accepting of diverse perspectives and cultures is undeniable in the South African context.

The body of literature on self-authorship will benefit from additional research that specifically focuses on the role of lecturers and supervisors in students' developmental pathways towards self-authorship. In this study, the role of lecturers is described as either providing challenge or support. Interactions with lecturers also engender the need for restructuring relationships to establish a more mature sense of self and a way of relating to others. Greater understanding of the role that lecturers and supervisors play in developing students' self-authorship can be of value.

A longitudinal research approach is also recommended to follow development of self-authorship beyond the honours programme experience. Since all the participants' journeys were still incomplete at the end of this study, a longitudinal approach that follows those who were accepted into the master's programme, for example, will provide additional knowledge regarding self-authorship. An even greater understanding of the meaning-making journey of postgraduate psychology students could be achieved by examining their experiences in a programme that concentrates extensively on intrapersonal development, independent knowing, and the ambiguity of knowledge. Furthermore, longitudinal research that tracks participants' self-authorship journeys beyond their studies, as they begin their careers as

psychologists, could shed light on how moving from being a novice therapist to an experienced therapist informs the self-authorship journey.

6.4 Concluding Remarks

This chapter represents the conclusion of the study and provided an overview of the most significant findings, limitation of the research, and recommendations for future research. The aim of this study was to explore the meaning-making journey of postgraduate psychology students towards self-authorship and provide a more nuanced and connected image of student development, and specifically development of self-authorship over time. Insights gained from these findings contribute to the body of literature on development of university students, with a specific focus on development of self-authorship in a specific subgroup of students. The findings of this study have highlighted various avenues of research that could enhance researchers' understanding of self-authorship. More importantly, it contributes to the development of programmes and interventions that can facilitate the development of self-authorship of university students.

A university education should be considered as a journey that encompasses more than the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills. Graduates leave university and enter the realm of possibilities in which they are faced with, as Baxter Magolda (2006) claims, "… ethical, moral, political and spiritual …" dilemmas (p. 1). Considering the importance of being prepared for this substantial shift and being able to function as effective citizens in their communities, the need for holistic student development cannot be denied. Considering the population that psychologists work with and the context in which they function, it can also be argued that the need for self-authorship development is of utmost importance during the journey of psychology students. It is more than likely that the incorporation of activities and experiences that foster self-authorship development during the university years will facilitate a more congruent transition from psychology student to psychology professional.

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Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Reference: Nadia du Toit
University of the Free State
BLOEMFONTEIN
9301

Telephone: 082 776 8674

Email: ndutoit14@gmail.com

March 2015

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 students' journey towards self-authorship. The construct "self-authorship" can be understood as the ability to take ownership of one's own beliefs, identity, and relationships. The aim of this research study is to gain a deeper understanding of how postgraduate psychology students make meaning of their experiences.

If you volunteer to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in two individual interviews during the year as well as complete a number of personal reflective writing exercises. The individual interviews will take approximately an hour 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, values and motivations and how they inform your sense of self;
- Gain a deeper understanding of how you make meaning of experiences and how that perception informs all other decisions in your personal and academic life.

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

Nadia du Toit

Department of Psychology / Departement Sielkunde
205 Nelson Mandela Drive/Rylaan, Park West/Parkwes, Bloemfontein 9301, South Africa/Suid-Afrika
PO Box/Posbus 339, Bloemfontein 9300, South Africa/Suid-Afrika, T: +27(0)51 401 2187, www.ufs.ac.za

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE STUDENT / PARTICIPANT

Study: **Towards Self-authorship: Postgraduate psychology students' meaning-making journeys.**

Researcher: **Nadia du Toit**

Participant's details

Name: _____

Student number: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Racial / ethnic group: _____

Home language: _____

- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned study.
- I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what the risks and benefits are.
- I give the student / researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation, subject to the stipulations he/she has indicated in the above letter.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix B: Reflective Writing Task

Below are two reflective questions that I would like you to answer. There is no limit to how little or how much you may write. I only request that you answer truthfully and with sincere and genuine reflection on each question.

1. As individuals we are sometimes influenced and even significantly changed by a specific or a series of experiences. The psychology honours programme provides students with opportunities for personal growth and challenges each person to re-evaluate personal goals, values and beliefs. I would like you to think of an experience that you have had during your time as a postgraduate psychology student that has challenged you. Please share your story. How has it changed your view of your life, yourself and of others? How did you make meaning of it?

2. Think of a time when you had to make a really important decision regarding any aspect of your studies as a postgraduate psychology student. Tell me the story… How did you approach the situation? What was the process that you followed? Who or what, if anyone or anything, did you make use of to help you? How did you know what to do?

Appendix C: Interview Schedule

1. **What was the most meaningful or significant experience during the honours year so far?**
   a) Looking back, what have you learned about yourself or others?
   b) Are there things you would approach differently due to what you have learned?
   c) Did this experience in any way challenge your beliefs or values?
   d) If there were important decisions to be made, how did you approach it? Who did you rely on?

2. **Can you tell me about a situation in which you were not sure about a decision you made or whether your beliefs were right?**
   a) How did you go about making the decision?
   b) Looking back, would you use the same process to make decisions?

3. **Have you had any conflicts during the honours year so far?**
   a) If so, can you tell me a bit more about how you handled the conflict?
   b) How has it affected how you approach interactions with others?

4. **Can you tell me about your interaction with classmates friends and lecturers?**
   a) How has your experience been in terms of interacting with classmates and working together?
   b) When you are interacting with lecturers, how do you experience it?
   c) Have you ever disagreed with a lecturer?
   d) Can you tell me about your experiences with friendships during the year?

5. **Can you describe yourself in a few sentences?**

6. **Is there anything else that you would like to share about your honours year experience?**

Appendix D: Ethical Clearance

UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA FREISTATA

UFS·UV HUMANITIES GEESTESWETENSKAPPE

1 June 2015

Prof L Naudé
Department of Psychology
UFS

Ethical Clearance Application: On becoming a therapist

Dear Prof Naudé

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence, is:

UFS-HUM-2015-82

This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Katinka de Wet

Ethics Committee (Faculty of the Humanities)

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

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Appendix E: Example of Researcher's Reflective Journal

Reflections after the first interview with each participant

Arya – 9 June 2016 at 11:00

I really enjoyed the interview with Arya. However, I was very aware of how nervous I was. I associated the research interviews with my first therapy sessions with clients. I found her to be a well-spoken individual who seemed to be very self-assured about what she believes. At times, I questioned the purpose of her word choices. Later in the interview, she explained how she relied on her ability to speak in order to be accepted. I wonder what she is hiding or trying to prove to others?

As a student therapist, I am sometimes surprised by how easily people will talk about personal struggles. I experienced this with Arya as well. I found myself relating to her description of her high school experiences. At times, I felt as if I was taking on more of a therapist role than a researcher role. This is something I will have to be cognisant of in my other interviews. I experienced a sense of disappointment when listening to Arya's early experiences of the honours year and the fact that she had decided not to apply for the master's programme based on the perception that she did not stand a chance. My personal experience as an honours student correlates with some of her experience, but it could possibly be the positive outcome of my experience that results in disappointment that others do not experience it the same way. Interestingly, I think that Arya benefited from the interview, as she was able to express some of her frustration.

Ryan – 16 June 2016 at 11:30

Ryan seemed very nervous throughout the interview. I was constantly aware of this and made various attempts to make him feel more comfortable. He preferred to do the first interview in English, but throughout I sensed that he struggled at times to express himself fully. I shall emphasise the fact that he is more than welcome to complete his next interview in Afrikaans. At times, I felt that Ryan's answers to my questions were too 'psychologised'. In describing himself, he referred to psychological theories that he had learnt. In a way, it felt as if he was trying to impress me, or maybe he felt a little intimidated by being interviewed by a master's psychology student. With Ryan, more clarification questions had to be asked to ensure the essence of the question was discussed.

Ryan's enthusiasm for the programme and his enjoyment of the modules reminded me about the value of learning psychology. He showed genuine gratitude for the knowledge that he was gaining about himself. I became aware of his sensitivity to feedback from others, and had to be sensitive to how I responded, verbally and non-verbally, during the interview. A sensitive issue for Ryan was the fact that he was still living with his parents, and I sensed that he provided a detailed explanation of why in order to convince me of his independence, regardless of where he lived. Once again, I questioned how he perceived the interviewer (as fellow student, or as part of the faculty).

Becky 31 July 2016 at 12:00

Becky came across as a very gentle person. From the beginning of the interview, she was very comfortable and easily shared personal accounts. I was excited to hear about the positive experiences that she had had so far this year. As a naturally reflective person myself, I enjoyed listening to how she described experiences that provided her with an opportunity to challenge herself and what she learnt. Reflecting on how I experienced Arya's interview, I realise that my personal experiences as an honours student affect how I interpret the participant's stories. I have to keep this in mind during my analysis of the data.

Becky seemed to enjoy the interview, and it was evident that some of the follow-up questions required her to do some personal reflection. At times, it was evident that a question brought about awareness of something she had not considered. This was an indication that the questions were designed not only to elicit information, but they also required careful consideration of certain aspects of the participants' lives. The goal of the questions was not to elicit reflection, but hopefully, the questions will lead to insight that can be shared in the second interview.

Anne 31 July 2016 at 13:00

Anne presented as a very self-assured person, and to a degree, I was a little intimidated by her surety and confidence. However, she was a very easy person to engage in conversation. Anne's responses to some questions suggested that she was trying to provide me with the information I was looking for. I had to remind her that there was not something specific that I was looking for but that I just wanted to understand her personal experiences. The sacrifices that Anne had to make in order to complete her honours degree resonated with me, and once

again, I had to place boundaries around what my experience was and what belonged to the participants.

Reflections during the early stages of analysis

I am feeling overwhelmed by the amount of data and is unsure how to approach the analysis process. In listening to the recordings, I was concerned that the transcriptions would not reflect the true experience and meaning of what the participants were trying to convey. Even during the process of re-reading the transcripts and doing some editing, I became aware of the fact that my own bias and understanding of each person's experience could influence this process.

Although both Anne and Becky experienced the honours year as contributing to personal growth and an overwhelmingly positive experience, I have to keep in mind what role the master's selection plays. At the same time, I have to be aware that the master's selection is only one part of the honours year experience.

After a first attempt at doing thematic analysis, I am questioning my ability and approach. I am finding it difficult to code the data with the participant's voice in mind. I have to remind myself that during this early stage of coding, it is the participant's voice that has to come to the fore. I cannot deny the impact of my knowledge of the theory on my analysis of the data. I am considering sending a draft of my thematic analysis and findings to my supervisor to ensure that I am on the right track.

I have come to realise that the researcher cannot be separated from the data and the identified themes. As much as I am trying to stay objective, I cannot deny the fact that I am forming a framework for each participant's experience in my head.

I experience frustration with the identification of themes for one of the participants due to the contradictory nature of his responses. I set aside the case for a week and proceeded on to one of the others. Hopefully, I shall be able to return to the case with a more open mind later. Once I was able to identify themes for all the cases, documenting the data actually came quite easily. For the first time, I started to see the data take shape and the journey of each participant coming to life. This created a sense of excitement in my research topic again, after I had experienced frustration due to a lack of progress.

Final reflections

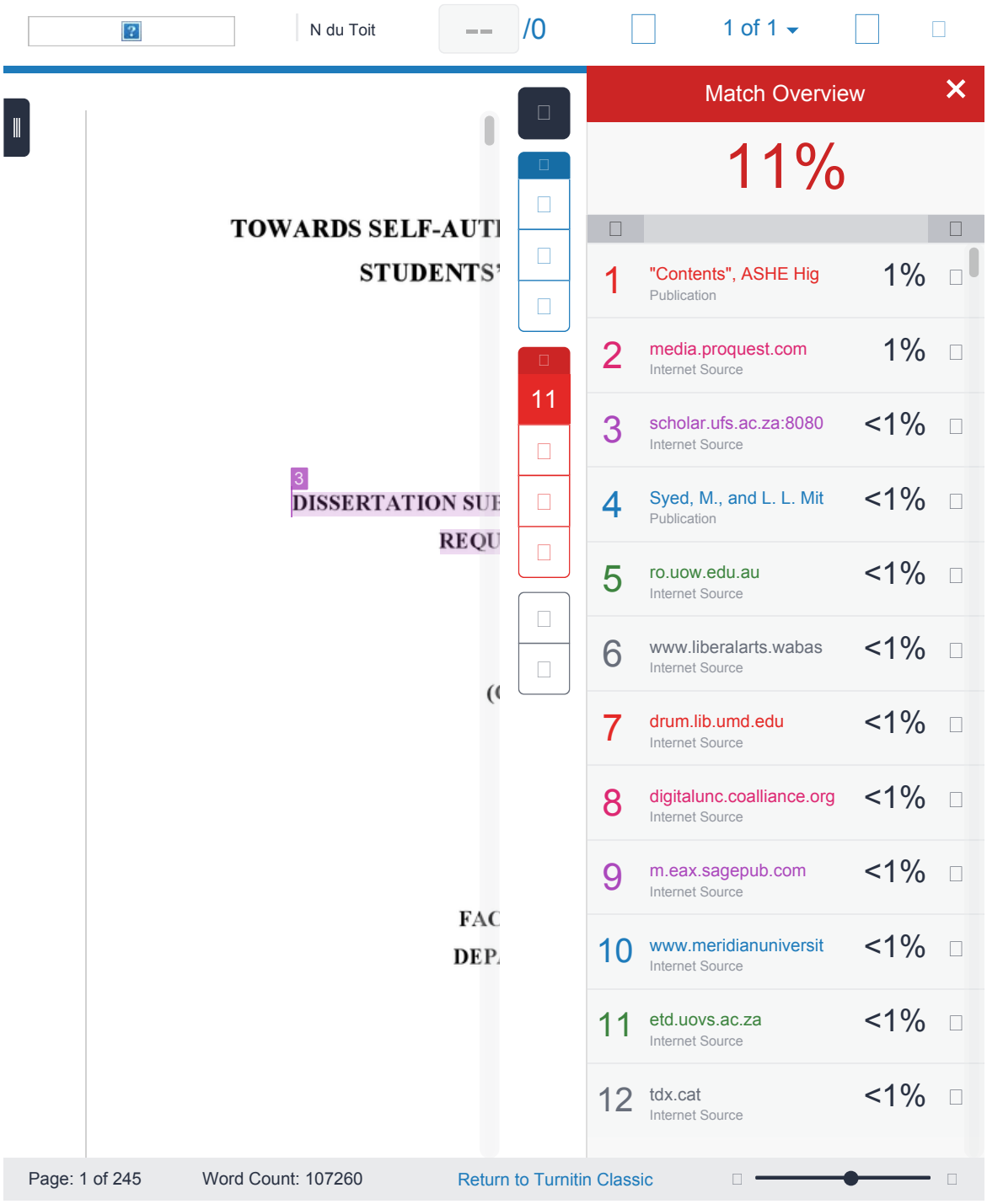
The greatest challenge once the findings have been documented was to integrate the data with literature. Although it is important to place the findings within the literature, I wanted to respect the individuality of each participant's experience.

I am developing a love-hate relationship with my theoretical framework and the data. I also question whether I honoured each participant's experiences in my representation of it. As I am nearing the submission date, I look back at where this journey started, and this brings about an appreciation for the process and purpose of qualitative research. As a novice researcher, qualitative research was a challenge, but I cannot deny the valuable lessons that I have learnt.

As I complete this research study, I cannot help but wonder how each participant's journey has continued and how the phenomenon of self-authorship has continued to influence their experiences of whatever they endeavoured to pursue.

Appendix F: Turn-it-in Report

Feedback Studio



https://ev.turnitin.com/...p/carta/en_us/?s=1&lang=en_us&o=756746763&session-id=7e7230fa74f996df8a2baf1c74f3eca4&u=1009801102[2017/01/04 03:03:44 PM]