

The Voice of a Generation: An Adlerian Psychobiography of Whitney Houston

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Photograph of Whitney Elizabeth Houston



Whitney Houston in 1987

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Table of Contents

Photograph of Whitney Elizabeth Houston	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Turnitin Originality Report	iv
Student Declaration.....	v
Statement by Language Editor.....	vi
Statement by APA Editor	vii
Table of Contents	viii
List of Tables.....	xiv
Abstract.....	xv
Chapter 1: Introduction, Rationale, and General Overview of the Study	1
1.1 Chapter Preview.....	1
1.2 Introduction and Research Aim	1
1.3 Context of the Study	2
1.3.1 <i>Rationale of the Study</i>	2
1.3.2 <i>The Psychobiographical Subject</i>	3
1.3.3 <i>The Psychobiographical Design and Method</i>	5
1.3.4 <i>Adler's Theory of Individual Psychology</i>	6
1.4 Overview of the Study	7
1.5 Chapter Summary	7
Chapter 2: Historical Overview of the Life of Whitney Houston.....	8
2.1 Chapter Preview.....	8

2.2	Whitney Houston’s Socio-cultural and Historical Context.....	8
2.2.1	<i>African American Christianity</i>	8
2.2.2	<i>Racial Segregation and The Great Migration</i>	9
2.2.3	<i>Civil Rights Movement</i>	10
2.2.4	<i>Homosexuality during Houston’s lifetime</i>	11
2.2.5	<i>Drug Use during Houston’s lifetime</i>	12
2.3	Historical Periods in the Life of Whitney Houston (1963-2012).....	13
2.3.1	<i>Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983)</i>	13
2.3.2	<i>Breakthrough and Fame (1984-1991)</i>	19
2.3.3	<i>Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999)</i>	27
2.3.4	<i>Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005)</i>	32
2.3.5	<i>The Final Performance (2006-2012)</i>	36
2.4	Chapter Summary	39
	Chapter 3: Alfred Adler’s Theory of Individual Psychology	40
3.1	Chapter Preview.....	40
3.2	Biography of Alfred Adler	40
3.3	View of Human Nature	41
3.4	Key Theoretical Constructs.....	43
3.4.1	<i>The Inferiority Complex</i>	43
3.4.2	<i>Life Task</i>	49
3.4.3	<i>Lifestyle</i>	51

3.4.4	<i>Social Interest</i>	54
3.4.5	<i>Striving for Superiority</i>	55
3.4.6	<i>Schema of Apperception</i>	56
3.4.7	<i>Sense of Inferiority</i>	57
3.5	Optimal Development and Psychopathology	59
3.5.1	<i>Optimal Development</i>	59
3.5.2	<i>Psychopathology</i>	61
3.6	Evaluation of the Theory	62
3.6.1	<i>Value and Critiques</i>	62
3.6.2	<i>Psychobiography</i>	64
3.7	Chapter Summary	66
Chapter 4: A Theoretical Overview of Psychobiography		68
4.1	Chapter Preview	68
4.2	Qualitative Research	68
4.2.1	<i>Introduction</i>	68
4.2.2	<i>Qualitative Approaches to Case Study Research Design and Methodology</i>	73
4.3	Psychobiographical Research	78
4.3.1	<i>Psychobiography Defined</i>	79
4.3.2	<i>Psychobiography and Related Concepts</i>	81
4.3.3	<i>Psychobiographical Research Trends</i>	86
4.3.4	<i>Psychobiography in the South African Context</i>	95

4.3.5	<i>Value of Psychobiographical Research</i>	99
4.3.6	<i>Critical Analysis of the Psychobiographical Research Design</i>	106
4.4	Chapter Summary	112
Chapter 5: Research Design and Methodology		114
5.1	Chapter Preview.....	114
5.2	Research Design and Methodology	114
5.3	Research Aim and Objectives	115
5.4	The Psychobiographical Subject.....	116
5.5	Data Collection	119
5.6	Data Extraction and Analysis.....	121
5.6.1	<i>Evaluating Interpretations</i>	122
5.6.2	<i>Irving Alexander's Indicators of Salience</i>	123
5.6.3	<i>Questioning the Data</i>	129
5.7	Conceptual Framework and Matrix	131
5.8	Trustworthiness and Rigour	133
5.9	Reflexivity and Bracketing	135
5.10	Ethical Considerations in Psychobiography	136
5.11	Chapter Summary	139
Chapter 6: Research Findings and Discussion.....		139
6.1	Chapter Preview.....	139
6.2	Houston's Birth Order and Familial Dynamics	140

6.2.1	<i>Houston's Birth Order</i>	140
6.2.2	<i>Houston's Familial Dynamics</i>	143
6.3	Conceptual Outline for the Presentation and Discussion of Findings	144
6.4	Houston's Adlerian Personality Development Throughout Her Lifespan	145
6.4.1	<i>Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983)</i>	145
6.4.2	<i>Breakthrough and Fame (1984-1991)</i>	154
6.4.3	<i>Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999)</i>	164
6.4.4	<i>Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005)</i>	174
6.4.5	<i>The Final Performance (2006-2012)</i>	180
6.5	Chapter Summary	185
Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks, Limitations and Future Recommendations		187
7.1	Chapter Preview	187
7.2	Reviewing the Research Aim	187
7.3	Summary of the Research Findings	187
7.4	Value and Contribution of the Study	191
7.5	Limitations of the Study	193
7.5.1	<i>The Psychobiographical Subject</i>	193
7.5.2	<i>Psychobiographical Research Methodology</i>	194
7.6	Future Recommendations	195
7.7	Concluding Thoughts and Remarks on the Researcher's Personal Journey	195
7.8	Chapter Summary	196

References.....	198
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List of Tables

Table 4.1	<i>Case Study Work during various Phases of the Research Process.....</i>	77
Table 4.2	<i>South African Master's and Doctoral Level Psychobiographies</i>	97
Table 5.1	<i>Primary and Secondary Sources utilised in the study of Whitney Houston</i>	120
Table 5.2	<i>A Psycho-historical Conceptual Matrix of the Historical Life of Whitney Houston and Alfred Adler's Theory of Individual Psychology</i>	132
Table 6.1	<i>Psycho-historical Conceptual Matrix over the lifespan of Whitney Houston</i>	144

Abstract

Psychobiographical research has experienced significant growth in local and international settings, gaining traction among academic supervisors, promoters, and postgraduate students within various Departments of Psychology in South Africa. Psychobiography, a longitudinal case study of the psychological development of an influential figure, is well-suited to examining personalities who have left a profound impact on society within the historical period in which they lived. One such figure is Whitney Elizabeth Houston (1963–2012), a globally acclaimed singer and actress renowned for her extraordinary vocal talent, groundbreaking achievements in music and film, and her role in crossing racial barriers in the entertainment industry. She remains one of the best-selling music artists of all time, earning widespread recognition for her artistic contributions and leaving a lasting cultural legacy that continues to influence generations of performers. Historically, psychobiographical studies have often focused on extraordinary White male subjects. However, there is increasing recognition of the need for broader representation, particularly in terms of gender and race. Despite Houston's global recognition and contributions to popular culture, no existing academic studies have offered an in-depth psychological exploration of her life. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was utilized to select Houston as a psychobiographical subject. Consequently, this psychobiography was undertaken to provide a psychological exploration and description of Houston's personality functioning and development across her life within her socio-cultural and historical context. This study utilised Alfred Adler's theory of Individual Psychology to analyse publically available biographical and historical primary and secondary data on Houston. Alexander's nine saliency indicators were applied to arrange and prioritise the extensive biographical data available on Houston. Research questions were posed to the data, guiding the extraction of units of analysis that are relevant to the study's aims. Furthermore, a psycho-historical

conceptual matrix was utilised to systematically categorise and facilitate the analysis of Houston's Adlerian personality development across distinct historical periods of her life. Findings suggest that Houston may have had an inferiority complex, as demonstrated by her misuse of drugs throughout most of her adulthood. Despite this, she seemed to possess a resilient spirit in her continuous striving for superiority in her career and fulfilment of the occupation, social, love and marriage life tasks. She also displayed a genuine concern for the well-being of others, extending her social interest beyond individual relationships to encompass broader communities and society. This was evident not only in her acts of generosity but also through her active support for various social causes throughout her life. This study contributes to expanding the body of knowledge on Houston's personality and life and to Adler's theory of Individual Psychology.

Keywords: Psychobiography, Whitney Elizabeth Houston, Alfred Adler, Individual Psychology

Chapter 1: Introduction, Rationale, and General Overview of the Study

1.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter presents an introduction to this study. First, the primary aim and general overview of the study are provided. The study's rationale, subject, psychobiographical design and method, and the selected Adlerian theory of Individual Psychology are all included in the discussion under the section, Context of the Study. This chapter concludes with an overview of the chapters that comprise the mini-dissertation.

1.2 Introduction and Research Aim

The study employed a psychobiographical case study design and methodology to explore and describe the life of Whitney Elizabeth Houston (1963-2012) within her socio-cultural and historical framework. The research paradigm was qualitative and utilised both a morphogenic and longitudinal methodology. The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe Whitney Houston's Adlerian personality development. This was accomplished by implementing a psychological framework, specifically Adler's (1930, 1952, 1956, 1958) Individual Psychology. This demonstrates the exploratory-descriptive nature of the inductive approach employed in this study, as it involved a thorough and new exploration and description of Houston's Adlerian personality development. The secondary aim of this study was to illustrate the applicability and appropriateness of the psychological framework in examining Houston's life. This illustrates the descriptive-dialogic nature of the deductive approach employed in this study, as it entailed establishing a dialogue between the biographical and historical research findings on the life of Houston and the theoretical constructs of Adlerian theory.

1.3 Context of the Study

This section includes a description of the rationale of the study, an introduction to the research subject, Whitney Houston, and a description of the psychobiographical design and method. A brief outline of Adler's theory of Individual Psychology is also provided.

1.3.1 *Rationale of the Study*

Psychobiographical research explores the lives of extraordinary personalities (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Ponterotto, 2014). Psychobiographies utilise psychological theory to illustrate and reconstruct historically significant experiences, events, and contributions in the life of an exceptional individual, considering their socio-cultural context (Mayer & Van Niekerk, 2024; Runyan, 2003). Psychobiographical studies primarily examine the lives of notable individuals in history (Kőváry, 2011). Over the last decades, psychobiographical research has become a dynamic and prominent field, attracting national and international interest (Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Mayer et al., 2023). Furthermore, various researchers across the globe advocate the value of the approach in the psychological study of lives (Fouché, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Kőváry, 2018; Mayer et al., 2023; Ponterotto, 2015; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

The increasing attention that psychobiography receives is further evidenced by the extensive collection of special issues on psychobiography in books and journals published in the field over the past few decades. For instance, the *Journal of Psychology in Africa* published a special issue devoted to psychobiography in 2015 (Fouché, 2015). Additionally, a special edition on psychobiography was recently published in the *International Review of Psychiatry* (Mayer & Van Niekerk, 2024) and a special edition on psychobiography in the *Journal of Personality* (Adler & Singer, 2023). Furthermore, book publications in the field of psychobiography include *New Trends in Psychobiography* (Mayer & Kőváry, 2019),

Psychobiographical Illustrations on Meaning and Identity in Sociocultural Contexts (Mayer et al., 2021), and *Beyond Weird: Psychobiography in Times of Transcultural and Transdisciplinary Perspectives* (Mayer et al., 2023). Recently, *The Psychobiographer's Handbook: A Practical Guide to Research and Ethics* (Ponterotto, 2024), and *Psychobiography: In Search of the Inner Life* (Anderson, 2024) have also been published, further contributing to the field of psychobiography.

In South Africa, psychobiography has become an established research methodology utilised by various academics and postgraduate scholars in the Departments of Psychology at South African universities (Fouché et al., 2018; Knight, 2024; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Mayer et al., 2023; Verwey & Knight, 2019). Several psychobiographies on female personalities have been conducted at South African universities, including studies on Brenda Fassie (Nortje et al., 2013), Amy Winehouse (Hoque, 2018), Coco Chanel (Verwey & Knight, 2019), Frida Kahlo (Joubert, 2020), Petronella Van Heerden (Hugo, 2023), Oprah Winfrey (Mayer, 2023), and Cecilia Johanna Steyn (Erasmus & Knight, 2024). The researcher anticipates that this study on Whitney Houston will contribute to the expanding field of psychobiography in South Africa, particularly those on women and African personalities.

1.3.2 The Psychobiographical Subject

Whitney Elizabeth Houston (1963-2012) is widely regarded as one of the greatest vocalists of all time. Due to her unmatched vocal talent and influence, she is often referred to simply as “The Voice” (Kennedy, 2022; Macdonald, 2018). Before her debut as a singer, she became one of the first African American women to grace the cover of *Seventeen* magazine at just 17 years old (Houston, 2013). Houston’s self-titled debut album made history, as she became the first woman to achieve three number-one singles from a debut album on the Billboard Hot 100 (Hudson, 2012). Her second album, *Whitney*, further solidified her status as a trailblazer, making her the first female artist to debut at number one on the Billboard 200

chart (Houston, 2013). Throughout her career, Houston won numerous accolades, including six Grammy Awards, 22 American Music Awards, and an Emmy Award (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022).

Born in Newark, New Jersey, to parents Cissy and John Houston, Houston grew up in a musically inclined family. Her mother, a renowned gospel and soul singer, and her close association with artists like Aretha Franklin greatly influenced Houston's goal to become a professional singer (Houston, 2013; McCarten, 2022). Faith and gospel music were lifelong anchors for Houston, influenced by her Christian upbringing and early involvement in church. Houston began singing in Newark's New Hope Baptist Church choir and soon became a soloist (Hudson, 2012). Her exposure to the music industry deepened during her teenage years when she occasionally performed as a backup singer for artists like Chaka Khan (Kennedy, 2022). Houston's youth was marked not only by her musical ambitions but also by the beginning of her struggles with drug use (Broomfield, 2017). During her youth, she developed a close friendship with Robyn Crawford, who would later become her executive assistant and confidante (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013).

In 1985, she released her successful self-titled debut album, *Whitney Houston*, which catapulted her to fame. The Civil Rights Movement influenced the socio-cultural environment in which Houston grew up (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022), especially as she emerged as a symbol of Black success in a previously racially segregated entertainment industry. However, the pressures of fame, combined with struggles related to drug abuse, added to her challenges (Crawford, 2019; Macdonald, 2018). Houston's career soared with sold-out tours and worldwide recognition, leading to a lavish lifestyle. However, her personal life became increasingly complicated. In 1992, Houston married singer Bobby Brown, a union that was fraught with public scandals, including allegations of infidelity, drug abuse, and legal troubles (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). Despite these challenges, Houston cherished

her role as a mother to their daughter, Bobbi Kristina Brown (Houston, 2013). Moreover, Houston's legacy as a groundbreaking artist and cultural icon, as well as her contributions to society, continue to influence generations (Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022).

1.3.3 The Psychobiographical Design and Method

McAdams (2006, p. 503) maintained that psychobiography translates an individual's life into a "coherent and illuminating story". Psychobiographies primarily involve qualitatively analysing one or more cases using a morphogenic and longitudinal methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ponterotto, 2014; Simonton, 1999). Moreover, psychobiographies are grounded in the social constructivist and interpretivist paradigms (Kőváry, 2011; Van Niekerk, 2007), asserting the existence of numerous socially constructed realities (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Ponterotto, 2014). Psychobiographies entail systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of an individual's lifespan data within their socio-cultural and historical context, facilitating a comprehensive study of the significant facets illuminating the subject's life story (Hugo, 2023). Psychobiography aims to employ psychology to obtain a greater psychological understanding of the individual under study within their socio-cultural and historical framework (Kőváry, 2019).

In addition, psychobiography facilitates the illustration of the applicability and significance of the relevant theory and model in relation to the subject's life, offering an opportunity for the advancement and refinement of psychological theories and models (Panelatti, 2018; Runyan, 2005). This may result in formal propositions that can ultimately be validated against bigger populations (Schultz, 2005a). Psychobiography presents numerous benefits for the field of psychology as a research methodology (Kőváry, 2011; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019). For example, this study presented several advantages: (a) recognition of the uniqueness of Houston's case; (b) incorporation of the socio-cultural and historical context of her life; (c) acknowledgement of her subjective reality; (d) study of behavioural patterns

throughout her lifespan; (e) evaluation of the theory in relation to her life; and (f) integration of the findings within psychology. The psychobiographical approach and its methodological challenges are thoroughly examined in subsequent chapters 4 and 5.

1.3.4 Adler's Theory of Individual Psychology

Alfred Adler's (1929, 1930, 1952, 1958) theory of Individual Psychology served as the theoretical framework for this psychobiography. According to Adler (1929, 1930), individuals possess an innate drive to pursue an ultimate goal, which they subjectively create early in life. This goal is often rooted in the desire for superiority, which is central to human motivation. Adler asserted that all individuals experience a sense of inferiority from birth. To overcome these feelings, people strive toward superiority, shaping their unique lifestyle and giving coherence to their personality (Adler, 1930, 1958). The striving for superiority is a fundamental attempt to improve oneself and master life's challenges. It is also driven by seeking recognition, purpose, and belonging within one's social world. As individuals seek to overcome feelings of inferiority, whether physical, psychological, or both, their striving becomes increasingly pronounced. However, when these feelings are not adequately managed, personality disturbances or maladaptive behaviours, such as substance misuse, may emerge, exacerbating the individual's sense of inferiority (Adler, 1958).

Adler's (1930) theory emphasises that people are not merely shaped by hereditary or environmental factors. Rather, they are creative, proactive, and meaning-making beings who can exercise free will and control over their choices (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Watts, 2015). This creative power can manifest cognitively, behaviourally, or emotionally and can be directed in socially positive or negative ways. These choices lead to either constructive achievements or destructive conflicts and behaviours. As a holistic, socially oriented, and teleological (goal-directed) approach, Adler's theory aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of human behaviour (Siedlecki, 2013; Watts, 2009).

The holistic nature of Adler's theory makes it particularly suitable for use in psychobiography (Hugo, 2020). Additionally, Adler's theory is grounded in Western notions of personality, which aligns with the study of Whitney Houston, who grew up and lived within a Western cultural context. Adler's key concepts are highly relevant to Houston's life, particularly the idea of striving for superiority. This is evident in her remarkable creativity and her use of singing and acting as a means to compensate for her deep-seated feelings of inferiority. Furthermore, Adler's theory may suggest that her struggles with drug misuse reflected an amplified sense of inferiority, which contributed to the challenges she faced later in life.

1.4 Overview of the Study

This study comprises seven chapters. This chapter offered an introduction and overview of the study. Chapter 2 offers a detailed historical account of Houston's life. Chapter 3 discusses Adler's (1929, 1930, 1956, 1958) theory of Individual Psychology. Chapter 4 presents a theoretical overview of psychobiographical research. In Chapter 5, the research design and methodology are discussed. Chapter 6 discusses the research findings about the Adlerian personality development of Houston, while Chapter 7 concludes the study and addresses its values, limitations, and recommendations for further research.

1.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter included an introduction and overview of the study. The study's primary aim was presented, followed by discussions of the study's rationale, research subject, psychobiographical approach, and the psychological theory employed. The chapter concluded with a summary of the chapters that comprise this mini-dissertation. Chapter 2 provides a historical overview of the life of Whitney Houston.

Chapter 2: Historical Overview of the Life of Whitney Houston

2.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter will focus on the life of Whitney Elizabeth Houston, offering an in-depth biographical and historical overview of her life spanning from her birth in 1963 to her death in 2012. The chapter commences with a discussion of Houston's socio-cultural and historical context to provide an accurate understanding of her life. Thereafter, Houston's biographical information is presented in chronological order, with each section highlighting significant periods of her life. The years encompassed in this timeline are: Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983); Breakthrough and Fame (1984-1991); Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999); Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005); and The Final Performance (2006-2012). The information from this chapter was drawn from numerous biographies to ensure data triangulation and more accurate information regarding Houston's life. The chapter concludes with a summary of the information discussed herein.

2.2 Whitney Houston's Socio-cultural and Historical Context

2.2.1 African American Christianity

The history of African American Christianity, often referred to as the Black Church, traces back to the 17th and 18th centuries when enslaved Africans were introduced to Christianity by European missionaries and slave owners (Barnes, 2005; McKinney, 1971). Initially, Christianity was promoted by slave owners as a tool for control, with an emphasis on biblical passages that advocated obedience to masters (Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990). However, African Americans began to reinterpret Christian teachings, focusing on themes of liberation, justice, and equality, which aligned more closely with their experiences of oppression (Avent & Cashwell, 2015; McKinney, 1971). This reinterpretation also gave rise to a rich tradition of spiritual music that eventually evolved into what is known today as

gospel music (Whitley, 2012). Gospel music emerged as a powerful expression of faith and hope, combining African rhythms with Christian hymns, playing a central role in the worship and cultural life of African American communities (Avent & Cashwell, 2015; Whitley, 2012). Through the Black Church and its associated cultural practices like gospel music, African American Christianity has profoundly shaped the cultural, social, and political identities of African Americans (Barnes, 2005; Chandler, 2010). The Black Church has long served as a cornerstone of support for African American communities, offering spiritual guidance, fostering a sense of community, and providing a crucial platform for social and political activism (Avent & Cashwell, 2015).

2.2.2 Racial Segregation and The Great Migration

Houston's maternal grandparents, Nicholas and Delia Mae Drinkard, were from Georgia, a southern state in the United States of America (USA), under Jim Crow ¹laws during the early 20th century (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). These laws enforced racial segregation in southern states, discriminating against African Americans by restricting their use of public facilities and access to the education system, as well as deprivation of their voting rights (Gregory, 2005; Tolnay, 2003). Additionally, African Americans faced widespread terror, including lynchings and other forms of racial violence, which were used to enforce social control and maintain White supremacy (Wilkerson, 2010). These circumstances in the South of the USA prompted many African Americans to move to areas with less rigid racial barriers, a period referred to as the Great Migration (Kennedy, 2022; Leibbrand et al., 2020).

¹ Jim Crow was a character in a show created by Thomas Rice in the early 19th century. Rice, a white actor, performed in blackface, portraying a caricature of African Americans that was stereotypical and racist. This act, known as "Jump Jim Crow," became widely popular and the term "Jim Crow" eventually became synonymous with the laws and customs enforcing racial segregation in the USA (Guffey, 2012).

The Great Migration was one of the most significant demographic shifts in the United States during the 20th century (Gregory, 2005; Tolnay, 2003). The Drinkard family migrated to Newark, New Jersey, from Georgia in 1923 (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). This mass movement was driven by the dual forces of escaping the oppressive system of Jim Crow segregation and seeking better economic opportunities (Leibbrand et al., 2020). In contrast to southern states, northern cities were relatively less racially hostile and offered higher wages and better working conditions than the agricultural South (Black et al., 2015; Leibbrand et al., 2020). This migration transformed northern cities' social and economic landscapes and laid the groundwork for the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement (Wilkerson, 2010). African Americans faced fewer voting barriers in northern cities than in the South (Lemann, 1992). As a result, they gained political influence and began to participate more actively in the political process (Tolnay, 2003; Wilkerson, 2010). The growing African American population in northern cities became a significant electoral union, influencing local and national politics and supporting candidates and policies that promoted civil rights (Leibbrand et al., 2020).

2.2.3 Civil Rights Movement

The Civil Rights Movement, spanning from the mid-1950s through the late 1960s, was a crucial period in the USA aimed at ending racial segregation and ensuring equal rights for African Americans (Carson, 2005; Reed, 2019). Born in 1963 in Newark, New Jersey, Houston entered the world at the height of this transformative era (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018). Nonviolent resistance, a strategy championed by leaders like Martin Luther King Jr., became a hallmark of the movement, influencing national and global advocacy for social justice (Nimtz, 2016; Reed, 2019). Landmark campaigns such as the

Montgomery Bus Boycott ²and the Birmingham Campaign ³highlighted the power of peaceful protest and brought national attention to the severe realities of segregation and racial injustice (Krochmal, 2010; Nimitz, 2016). The movement's significant legislative achievements, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, were pivotal in dismantling institutional racial discrimination (Nimitz, 2016). The Civil Rights Movement also catalysed further advocacy for legislative and social change, setting the stage for subsequent rights-based movements such as women's rights and the LGBTQ⁴+ rights movements (Smith, 2013; Stone, 2016).

2.2.4 Homosexuality during Houston's lifetime

In the 1960s, homosexuality was largely stigmatised and considered a mental illness by major institutions, including the American Psychiatric Association (APA) (Drescher, 2015). In 1952, the APA classified homosexuality as a sociopathic personality disturbance in the first edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) (Drescher, 2015; Wakefield, 2024). During this time, LGBTQ+ individuals faced widespread discrimination, and same-sex relationships were criminalised in many states (Hegarty, 2017). The Stonewall Riots of 1969 marked a turning point, igniting the modern LGBTQ+ rights movement and sparking increased visibility and activism for gay rights (Hanson, 2011; Hegarty, 2017). In 1973, the APA removed homosexuality from the DSM, a critical step toward destigmatising same-sex attraction (Wakefield, 2024). However, the onset of the AIDS crisis in the early 1980s brought about a resurgence of homophobia, as the disease

² The Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955-1956) was a pivotal civil rights protest where African Americans in Montgomery, Alabama, refused to use city buses to oppose racial segregation, leading to the Supreme Court ruling that segregation on public buses was unconstitutional (Carson, 2005)

³ The Birmingham Campaign of 1963 was a pivotal civil rights movement effort to desegregate public facilities in Birmingham, Alabama (Munro, 2014)

⁴ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (Stone, 2016)

disproportionately affected gay men. The crisis galvanised the LGBTQ+ community, leading to increased activism and the formation of organisations which fought for greater awareness, research, and support for those affected by AIDS (Hegarty, 2017; Herek, 2004). The 1990s witnessed a gradual shift toward greater acceptance and visibility of LGBTQ+ individuals, though with continued resistance (Wakefield, 2024). The decade saw the emergence of more prominent LGBTQ+ representation in media, including television and film (Hegarty, 2017). At the same time, legal battles over gay rights intensified.

The early 2000s saw a continued evolution in attitudes toward homosexuality, with increasing advocacy for LGBTQ+ rights and significant legal victories. Several states began to legalise same-sex marriage, starting with Massachusetts in 2004 (Eskridge, 2014; Hull, 2016). Public opinion polls during this period showed growing support for same-sex marriage and LGBTQ+ rights, reflecting a broader cultural shift (Eskridge, 2014). These achievements marked significant progress toward equality and acceptance for the LGBTQ+ community. However, despite these advances, many LGBTQ+ individuals continued to face challenges, including legal disputes, stigmatisation, and violence (Coleman, 2019).

2.2.5 Drug Use during Houston's lifetime

During the 1960s and 1970s, the countercultural movement embraced drug experimentation, particularly with marijuana and psychedelics, while the War on Drugs⁵, initiated by President Richard Nixon in 1971, began imposing stricter law enforcement measures (Cooper, 2015; Pozen, 2024). The 1980s saw an escalation of this war under President Ronald Reagan, coinciding with the crack cocaine epidemic, which disproportionately affected urban African American communities and led to harsh penalties

⁵ The War on Drugs is a USA government-led initiative starting in the 1970s, aiming to reduce illegal drug use through strict law enforcement, resulting in widespread incarceration and social impact (Cooper, 2015).

and widespread incarceration (Barton, 2017). The media's portrayal of drug users during this time often reinforced negative stereotypes, contributing to the stigmatisation of drug use (Furst et al., 1999; Habib et al., 2023). In the 1990s, the tough-on-crime approach continued, with policies like mandatory minimum sentencing exacerbating the mass incarceration crisis (Barton, 2017). The emergence of the opioid crisis in the 2000s further highlighted the complexities of addiction, leading to a gradual shift in public attitudes towards harm reduction strategies and the legalisation of marijuana for medical use in several states (Chiu et al., 2021; Volkow & Blanco, 2021). Despite these changes, the stigma around drug use persisted and continued to impact individuals struggling with addiction, often hindering their access to treatment and support (Krendl & Perry, 2023).

2.3 Historical Periods in the Life of Whitney Houston (1963-2012)

2.3.1 Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983)

Whitney Elizabeth Houston was born on August 9, 1963, in Newark, a city located in the northern state of New Jersey, USA (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). She was the only daughter and youngest child of Cissy Houston and John Russell Houston, Jr., with two older brothers, Gary Garland and Michael Houston (Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). Houston's name was derived from a television character that her mother admired, while Elizabeth was her paternal grandmother's name (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). Cissy Drinkard, the youngest of eight children, was born in Newark in 1933 during the great depression. Her parents, Nicholas and Delia Mae Drinkard, were devout Christians with strong connections to the African Methodist Episcopal Church (Houston, 2013). She grew up attending church and was taught the importance of faith and gospel music from a young age, which profoundly influenced her life and Houston's (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022). Houston's mother formed part of the Drinkard Singers, a renowned gospel group that included her and three of her siblings (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). The group's performances at church services

and events garnered significant attention in the gospel music scene. Through her musical career, Houston's mother eventually met John Houston in 1958, a former soldier who would later become her husband (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Houston's father was also from New Jersey, and her paternal grandfather was part Native American (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022).

John Houston was thirteen years older than Cissy Drinkard and was married, although he was separated from his wife at the time they met (Houston, 2013). Before she met him, Houston's mother had been married and divorced Freddy Garland, the father of her firstborn child, Gary (Houston, 2013). Her parents began dating and moved into an apartment in Newark, where they lived with her brother. They then became pregnant with their first son, Michael, in 1961 (Houston, 2013). During their pregnancy with Houston, Cissy Drinkard was an active member of the Drinkard singers, directed choirs at churches around Newark, and sang background for popular musicians (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). John was working as a taxi driver and made efforts to manage music groups, such as the Gospelairees, which consisted of Houston's cousins, Dionne Warwick ⁶and Dee Dee Warwick (Bald, 2021; Hudson, 2012). After Houston's birth in 1963, her parents planned to buy a house and move in with their three children (Houston, 2013). The Houstons relocated to a home in a working-class neighbourhood in Newark, which was less crowded, aiming to provide their children with a safe and comfortable environment (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). In 1964, almost a year after Houston's birth, her father's divorce was finalised, and he and her mother were able to get married (Houston, 2013). Houston was raised in the Christian faith and regularly attended New Hope Baptist Church with her family (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). Houston, the youngest child and only daughter, was especially cherished by her parents, with her father treating her like a princess (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). From her years as a

⁶ Dionne Warwick is an American singer, actress, and television host (Kennedy, 2022)

toddler, Houston displayed a playful and curious personality. She was described as a beautiful and explorative child, beginning to walk at just six months old (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). During this period, her father began calling her 'Nippy,' inspired by a comic strip character known for getting into trouble (Crawford, 2019). The nickname began to be generally used by Houston's family and friends, and later her fans, as she was often called Nippy (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). She joined the New Hope Baptist Church choir in Newark at five years old and learned to play the piano (Hudson, 2012). During this period, her mother continued to fulfil her singing duties and established a background singing group called Sweet Inspirations with three other members (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022).

As a member of the Sweet Inspirations, Houston's mother sang background for prominent musicians such as Aretha Franklin and Elvis Presley (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017). She was often away from home due to her music career, characterised by frequent recording sessions and performances. Houston's mother was the primary breadwinner and disciplinarian in the Houston household, while her father often stayed at home with her and her brothers (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). Houston often cried whenever her mother had to leave home to go on tour, which also affected her; she was often away from her children (Houston, 2013). During this time, Cissy Houston resigned as a member of Sweet Inspirations and embarked on a career as a solo singer (Kennedy, 2022). The Houston family's neighbourhood in Newark began to be plagued by a proliferation of drugs, an escalating crime rate, and riots influenced by the Civil Rights Movement. As a result of this, the Houstons moved from Newark to East Orange, New Jersey, in 1970 (Bald, 2021; Crawford, 2019). Houston often played in their home's backyard pool with her brothers and children from their neighbourhood, with whom she shared her belongings (Houston, 2013). Whitney was characterised as generous, friendly, and playful as a child (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). Houston attended Franklin Elementary School in East Orange and

performed well academically. However, she experienced bullying from other learners due to her family's rise in social status and her appearance (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). She rarely spoke about the bullying to her family and preferred not to confront the issue (Houston, 2013). Her family became aware of the bullying, and her mother, alongside her brothers, confronted the school and the learners about the bullying Houston experienced (Houston, 2013). By the sixth grade, Houston's parents decided to transfer her to Mount Saint Dominic Academy, a Catholic girls' private school known for its excellent academic performance (Hudson, 2012; Kennedy, 2022). Houston was unhappy about the move and begged her parents to let her stay in public school (Houston, 2013). She had a difficult time adjusting to the Catholic school and reportedly experienced racism from other White learners (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013).

When she was around nine or ten, Houston sang at home as she would go to her mother's studio in the basement, dress up, and perform (Houston, 2013). She often recruited her brother Michael and cousins to act out a band, using items like brooms and buckets as musical instruments while she assumed the vocalist role (Houston, 2013). By the age of twelve, Houston made her solo performance debut at New Hope Baptist Church and declared her intention to pursue a professional singing career to her parents (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022). As her interest in music deepened, Houston began to spend more time with her mother. She often accompanied her mother to recording sessions, where she had the opportunity to listen to renowned artists such as Chaka Khan, Aretha Franklin, and Luther Vandross (Kennedy, 2022; Macdonald, 2018). Houston began working alongside her mother, performing as a background vocalist during local performances and in recording studios (Broomfield, 2017). Furthermore, she continued to refine her skills at New Hope Baptist Church, where she sang in the choir and participated in various church performances (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). Under her mother's guidance, she trained rigorously to

prepare for a career in professional singing. Around the age of fourteen, Houston's mother began bringing her along to nightclubs around Manhattan, New York, where she would perform alongside her as a background singer (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022). She received her first standing ovation at Manhattan's Town Hall after delivering a rendition of 'Tomorrow' from the Broadway musical *Annie* (Houston, 2013; McCarten, 2022). Houston was also offered her first recording contract at this time, but her mother insisted that she finish school first (Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). When Houston was fifteen years old, she provided background vocals for several tracks on Chaka Khan's 1979 album *Naughty* (Kennedy, 2022).

Houston began receiving magazine offers to model, recognising her beauty and charisma. Her tall, slender frame and radiant smile caught the attention of fashion scouts, leading to opportunities beyond the music industry (Kennedy, 2022). When she was sixteen, Houston signed with a modelling agency called Click (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). She was featured in various teen magazines, such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Essence*, *Vogue*, and *Seventeen* (Hudson, 2012). She was one of the first African American women to appear on the cover of *Seventeen* (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). Her parents constantly argued at home, which created a tense home environment (Bald, 2021). Witnessing her parents' frequent disputes deeply affected her, leading to noticeable changes in her behaviour (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). For example, she began trying to convince people that she was just an ordinary girl from the neighbourhood, distancing herself from her family's more privileged background (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). Additionally, her academic results dropped, and she distanced herself from her parents (Houston, 2013). Cissy and John Houston decided to separate, and he moved out of their home (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013).

During this period, Houston began working at a community development centre in East Orange at the age of seventeen. Here, she met Robyn Crawford, a nineteen-year-old

female college student who would become her lifelong friend (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018). Houston, still attending Mount Saint Dominic Academy, was actively involved in singing and modelling. When she introduced herself to Crawford, she shared details about her background, her aspirations in music, and her experiences growing up (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). Crawford was drawn to Houston's beauty, charisma and ambition, and the two quickly formed a close bond (Crawford, 2019). Their relationship also involved sexual intimacy, which they kept a secret between them (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). Houston moved out of home during this time and moved into Crawford's apartment (Bald, 2021; Crawford, 2019). Despite their closeness, Houston's mother disapproved of their friendship. She was particularly concerned about the intensity of their relationship and the influence Crawford might have on Houston (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). As their friendship deepened, Houston confided in Crawford about the pressures she was facing at home and her challenges as she navigated her burgeoning career in music (Crawford, 2019).

Moreover, Houston revealed to Crawford that she had started using drugs at the age of fourteen, a habit she had picked up alongside her brothers (Crawford, 2019). Houston often recreationally smoked nicotine and marijuana during her youth (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). Crawford was not using drugs at the time, but she began indulging with Houston, a behaviour that continued throughout their friendship (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). In 1981, Houston graduated from high school (Houston, 2013). Her parents recruited Tara Productions, a management agency, to provide guidance and support as she prepared to begin her career (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). In 1982, she made her debut as the main vocalist with the song "Memories" on the album *One Down* by the group Material (Broomfield, 2017). In 1983, Tara Productions decided to promote Houston by organising a series of exclusive showcase events specifically for high-ranking executives from record companies (Macdonald, 2018). She delivered a rendition of "Greatest Love of All" that

caused the entire venue to burst into applause (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018).

Impressed by Houston's talent, Clive Davis, the head of Arista Records, extended a record deal offer to her, which she ultimately accepted and signed (Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). At nineteen years old, Houston made her first appearance on national television in June 1983, during an episode of *The Merv Griffin Show* (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). During this period, Houston confided in Crawford about her wish to cease engaging in sexual intimacy with her (McCarten, 2022). She believed that continuing such activities would pose challenges to her career and hinder her desire to start a family (Crawford, 2019).

Furthermore, Houston presented Crawford with a bible and emphasised the significance of Christian values in shaping her as a person (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). Nevertheless, the two maintained a strong friendship, and Crawford eventually assumed the role of her assistant (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018).

2.3.2 Breakthrough and Fame (1984-1991)

Following her record label agreement with Arista Records, Houston began working on her debut album. She worked alongside Davis, who was instrumental in selecting songs, songwriters, and producers for her album (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). Davis had a clear vision for Houston, aiming to make her a universal artist rather than one perceived strictly as a Black artist, which he believed could limit her success as a pop star (Kennedy, 2022). His strategy involved carefully choosing material that would appeal to a broad, diverse audience, helping to position Houston as a crossover artist in both the pop and R&B markets (Kennedy, 2022; Macdonald, 2018). Houston collaborated with various producers, including Jermaine Jackson⁷, who co-produced several songs and performed a duet with her on the

⁷ Jermaine Jackson is an American singer, songwriter, and producer, best known as a member of the Jackson 5, alongside his brothers, including Michael Jackson (Crawford, 2019)

tracks “Nobody Loves Me Like You Do” and “Take Good Care of My Heart” (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Houston and Jackson also had a brief romantic relationship (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019). Jackson, who was older and married at the time, kept their relationship discreet, and it did not last long. When Houston learned about Jackson’s marital status, she was reportedly upset and hurt by how he handled their relationship (Crawford, 2019). The breakup affected her emotionally, though she maintained professionalism in their ongoing collaboration. During this period, Houston also contributed vocals to other artist’s projects, such as Teddy Pendergrass’s single ‘Hold Me’, which became a hit and introduced her voice to a wider audience (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013).

In February 1985, Houston released her self-titled debut album, *Whitney Houston* (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). The album was an immediate commercial success, selling over 25 million copies worldwide and eventually becoming one of the best-selling debut albums by a female artist (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022). The singles “Saving All My Love for You,” “How Will I Know,” and “Greatest Love of All” all reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 chart, establishing Houston as a major new voice in the music industry (Macdonald, 2018). Additionally, these singles performed well on the R&B charts, with “You Give Good Love,” another single from the album, reaching number one on the R&B/Hip-Hop Songs chart (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). The album also charted at number one and maintained its presence on the charts for several weeks, crossing over into both the R&B and pop categories (McCarten, 2022). Houston’s schedule became packed with high-profile appearances and performances, including participating in the 28th Annual Grammy Awards in 1986 (Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). That night, Houston not only performed her hit single “Saving All My Love for You” but also won the Grammy Award for Best Female Pop Vocal Performance for the same song (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). She also won an

Emmy Award for her “Saving All My Love for You” performance at the Grammy Awards (Broomfield, 2017).

Houston also made a significant impact at the 1986 MTV Video Music Awards. She performed her hit “How Will I Know,” and her video for the song won the MTV Video Music Award for Best Female Video (Houston, 2013; McCarten, 2022). At a time when MTV was often criticised for ignoring music videos by African American performers, Houston’s presence and recognition were particularly noteworthy (Kennedy, 2022). Michael Jackson⁸ was one of the few African American performers whose videos aired regularly on MTV, and Houston became the first African American female artist to have her music videos played on rotation on the network (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). Houston’s success on MTV was a breakthrough, helping break down racial barriers on the network and further solidifying her crossover appeal and influence in pop music. Despite these accomplishments, Houston began facing criticism from some within the African American community, who felt that her music was too mainstream and lacked the authentic R&B sound that many associated with Black artists (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022; Macdonald, 2018). This criticism intensified as her crossover success grew, with some feeling that her music was catering more to a pop audience (Macdonald, 2018). The criticism was particularly bothersome to Houston, who had always identified strongly with her African American heritage and gospel roots (Houston, 2013). The negative comments about her artistry being “not Black enough” hurt her, as she felt they disregarded the genuine emotion and effort she put into her work (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022).

During this period, Houston established Nippy Inc., a management company named after her childhood nickname, “Nippy” (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). The company was

⁸ Michael Joseph Jackson was an American singer and actor, recognized as the most successful entertainer of all time by the Guinness World Records (Ruiters, 2013)

created to manage her growing career and business interests. Her father, John Houston, took on the CEO role in the company, handling much of the business management and financial operations (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). Crawford held a key position within Nippy Inc., serving as Houston's executive assistant (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). Following the success of her debut album, Houston embarked on her first worldwide tour, the *Greatest Love World Tour*, which began in July 1986 and continued through 1987 (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). The tour featured performances across North America, Europe, Japan, and Australia (Houston, 2013). The *Greatest Love World Tour* showcased Houston's vocal abilities and featured a setlist primarily composed of songs from her debut album. The tour was well-received, with many shows sold out, reflecting her growing popularity on a global scale (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). Houston's entourage on tour included a mix of family members, close friends, and professional staff. By this time, drug use had already become part of Houston's lifestyle (Broomfield, 2017). Her brother Michael supplied her with drugs that she often used before and after performances (Crawford, 2019). Houston recreationally used drugs such as nicotine, marijuana, cocaine, as well as alcohol during this period (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). Additionally, her brother Gary, who was also one of her backup singers, was heavily involved in drug use and frequently caused trouble on tour (Crawford, 2019).

Houston began to work on her second album, *Whitney*, which was released in June 1987 (Houston, 2013). The album debuted at number one on the Billboard chart, making history as the first album by a female artist to do so (Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). It featured four chart-topping singles: "I Wanna Dance with Somebody (Who Loves Me)," "Didn't We Almost Have It All," "So Emotional," and "Where Do Broken Hearts Go." This success further cemented Houston's status as a leading figure in the music industry. After the release of her second album, she embarked on the *Moment of Truth World Tour*, which ran

from 1987 to 1988 (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). As her career flourished, Houston's fame and wealth also expanded. With the guidance of her father, who managed her finances, she made several purchases. For example, Houston purchased a mansion in Mendham, New Jersey, which provided her with a luxurious home (Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). Crawford moved in with her, continuing to play a role in both her personal and professional life (Houston, 2013). The Mendham house became a retreat for Houston amid her demanding career and frequent travelling, offering her a private space away from the public eye (Kennedy, 2022). Houston occasionally hosted gatherings for her closest friends and relatives. In addition, there were occasions when she would spend days in her room, isolating herself as her struggles with drug use intensified (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). Crawford became increasingly worried about Houston's drug use and confronted her, reminding her of the promise they had made to each other to stop (Crawford, 2019). Despite Crawford's concerns, Houston dismissed her, claiming she had things under control. Distressed by Houston's dismissive response, Crawford eventually confided in Houston's mother about the ongoing drug use. Her mother confronted Houston regarding her drug use, but she disputed the matter and insisted she was doing well (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). Moreover, she frequently denied rumours regarding the romantic nature of her relationship with Crawford during that period. She occasionally reacted with anger when the media questioned her association with Crawford and her potential homosexuality (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022).

Houston performed at a benefit concert that raised funds for the United Negro College Fund in 1988 (Houston, 2013). Later that same year, she took part in a tribute concert for Nelson Mandela's 70th birthday, held at Wembley Stadium in London (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022). Her performance at the concert was part of a global movement to honour Mandela, who was still imprisoned at the time, and to raise awareness about the apartheid

regime in South Africa. In 1989, furthering her philanthropic efforts, Houston founded her non-profit organisation, *The Whitney Houston Foundation for Children* (Crawford, 2019; Hudson, 2012). The foundation was established with the mission of helping children in need, focusing on issues such as homelessness, education, and children with cancer or HIV/AIDS (Houston, 2013). Despite her enormous success and charity contributions, Houston continued to face criticism about her music (Broomfield, 2017). At the 1989 Soul Train Music Awards, she was booed by some members of the audience and was mockingly referred to as “Whitey” when her name was announced (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). This incident left a significant emotional impact on Houston, compounding the personal and professional pressures she was already facing (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). In an interview with *Essence* magazine, Houston responded to criticism about her music by stating, “I don’t know how to sing Black—and I don’t know how to sing White, either. I know how to sing. Music is not a colour to me” (Houston, 2013, p. 136).

The 1989 Soul Train Awards marked a significant moment in Whitney Houston’s personal life, as it was the evening she first met Bobby Brown (Houston, 2009). Brown was a well-established artist at the time, having gained recognition as a member of the R&B group New Edition before achieving solo success with his album *Don’t Be Cruel* (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). This album produced several hits and solidified Brown’s position in the music industry as a prominent figure known for his energetic performances and “bad boy” image (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). Houston initially expressed interest in Brown by seeking his attention at the awards, indicating an attraction to his charismatic presence (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). Houston was six years older than Brown, yet despite their age gap, the two began dating after that evening (Bald, 2021). Brown, who already had children from previous relationships and a history of conflict with the law, presented a public image that contrasted sharply with Houston’s (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017). While Houston

was widely regarded as a pop icon with a polished and sophisticated public persona, Brown was characterised by his provocative stage presence and a reputation for rebellious behaviour (Kennedy, 2022). Houston and Brown's relationship was met with concern and disapproval from those close to Houston. Her family, particularly her mother and her close friend, Crawford, expressed concern about the relationship, fearing that Brown might negatively influence her (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). The media also scrutinised the relationship, often emphasising the stark contrast between Houston's clean image and Brown's more controversial reputation (Houston, 2009).

Despite the external pressures and criticism, Houston invited Brown to her 26th birthday celebration at her Mendham home (Broomfield, 2017). The relationship between Houston and Brown quickly became a focal point of media coverage, with widespread speculation about its potential impact on Houston's career and public image (Broomfield, 2017; Kennedy, 2022). Throughout 1989 and 1990, Houston was in the process of creating her third studio album (Houston, 2013). While Davis had played a central role in selecting the songs and producers for her first two albums, Houston took a more active role in the creative direction of this project (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). Demonstrating a desire for greater artistic control, she became more involved in the selection of both the material and the collaborators for the album (Crawford, 2019). In pursuit of a more urban R&B sound, Houston recruited several prominent artists and producers to contribute to the album (Bald, 2021). Among them were Luther Vandross, a respected figure in the R&B genre, as well as Babyface and L.A. Reid, who were known for their work in producing hits that blended pop and R&B elements (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). This strategic move was intended to shift her sound towards a more contemporary urban feel, aligning her music more closely with traditional R&B while maintaining the crossover appeal that had characterised her earlier work (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018). In November of 1990, Houston released

her third album, *I'm Your Baby Tonight*. Despite this strategic shift in her musical direction, *I'm Your Baby Tonight* experienced a mixed reception in terms of commercial performance (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). The album produced two singles, "I'm Your Baby Tonight" and "All the Man That I Need," reaching number one on the chart (Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). It also performed well on the R&B/Hip-Hop Albums chart, reaching the top position. However, in terms of overall sales, her third album did not match the commercial success of Houston's first two albums (Houston, 2013).

Two months after the release of her third album, Houston was scheduled to perform the national anthem, The Star-Spangled Banner, at Super Bowl XXV in January 1991 (Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). She was both honoured and excited about the opportunity to perform the national anthem at the Super Bowl (Crawford, 2019). Houston's rendition of the anthem was notable for its powerful vocal delivery and emotional resonance, and it resonated deeply with the American public, particularly in the context of the ongoing Gulf War⁹ (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2021). The performance was so impactful that it was released as a single by Arista Records, reaching number 20 on the Billboard chart (Hudson, 2012). Houston donated the proceeds from the single to the American Red Cross to support American soldiers involved in the Gulf War (Houston, 2013). She also participated in the *Welcome Home Heroes* concert, organised by Home Box Office (HBO) in March 1991. The concert aimed to honour American soldiers returning from the Gulf War and was Houston's first televised solo concert (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). Throughout the remainder of 1991, Houston continued to engage in various professional endeavours, including ongoing tours and promotional activities for her album. Following the conclusion of the *I'm Your Baby Tonight* tour, Houston was approached by American actor Kevin Costner, who had been

⁹ The Gulf War (1990-1991) was a conflict where a coalition led by the USA expelled Iraqi forces from Kuwait after Iraq invaded Kuwait (Sidaway, 2002)

in contact with her for several months regarding a potential film project (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013).

Costner had previously sent Houston the script for a movie titled *The Bodyguard*, in which he intended for her to star alongside him. Initially, Houston was hesitant to take on the role, a sentiment shared by her mentor and producer, Davis (Houston, 2013). Nevertheless, Costner persisted in his efforts to secure Houston for the lead role, emphasising the potential impact of the film and her suitability for the character (Bald, 2021; Crawford, 2019). Ultimately, Houston agreed to star in *The Bodyguard*, marking her debut in a lead acting role. Her character, Rachel Marron, was a famous singer who became romantically involved with her bodyguard, portrayed by Costner (Broomfield, 2017; Kennedy, 2022). Production on the film began around late 1991, with Houston travelling to Los Angeles to commence shooting (Crawford, 2019). At the same time, she and Brown had secretly gotten engaged and were planning their wedding (Houston, 2013; Crawford, 2019). Houston continued to face increasing media scrutiny regarding her relationship with Brown and persistent questions surrounding the nature of her friendship with Crawford (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2021).

2.3.3 Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999)

Houston continued filming *The Bodyguard* at various locations across the USA (Houston, 2013). In addition to her acting, she was actively involved in the production of the film's soundtrack, recording music on and off the film's setting (Macdonald, 2018). It was also during this time that Houston became pregnant, but she unfortunately experienced a miscarriage (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). Experiencing a miscarriage was a source of sadness for Houston, as she had long expressed a desire to become a mother (Houston, 2013). In July 1992, Houston and Brown got married in a ceremony held at Houston's estate in Mendham, New Jersey (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019). The event was marked by its lavish nature, with family, close friends, and notable figures from various fields in

attendance. Crawford was her maid of honour, and her mentor, Davis, was also present (Houston, 2013; Crawford, 2019). The guest list also included prominent personalities such as Donald Trump, reflecting the high-profile nature of the occasion (Hudson, 2012). Months after their wedding, Houston announced that she was pregnant (Houston, 2013). *The Bodyguard* concluded its production and was released in November 1992, achieving significant commercial success by grossing highly globally (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018). The film's soundtrack album was equally successful, selling 44 million copies worldwide. The album featured Houston's rendition of "I Will Always Love You", which became a monumental hit (Hudson, 2012; Kennedy, 2022). She won numerous acting and music awards for her music albums and her acting role during this period (McCarten, 2022). Her fame continued to grow significantly after the release of *The Bodyguard*, leading to an increasingly busy schedule (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2009).

On March 4, 1993, Whitney Houston gave birth to her and Bobby Brown's daughter, Bobbi Kristina Brown, the couple's first and only child together (Bald, 2021; Crawford, 2019; Hudson, 2012). Houston enthusiastically embraced motherhood, frequently expressing her love and devotion to her daughter in private and public settings (Houston, 1993). She also cherished her marriage to Brown, often stating that she felt blessed to have him as her partner (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 1993). As a new mother, she went on tour to promote *The Bodyguard* album just months after the birth of her daughter. Houston took her daughter along on the tour, managing her professional responsibilities while caring for her (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). Houston was scheduled to perform at the closing ceremony of the International Federation of Association (FIFA) World Cup. However, she was unable to perform due to issues with her voice, which led to the cancellation of this performance and others scheduled around the same time (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). Houston expressed sadness over the cancellations, feeling she had let down her fans and team (Houston, 2013).

During this period, Houston spent most of her time with her husband, their daughter, and her close relatives (Crawford, 2019). In private, Houston continued to use drugs, often in the company of her husband (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2009). In October 1994, Houston was honoured with the opportunity to perform at the White House, and she sang at a state dinner held for Nelson Mandela (Houston, 2013). She had long been openly opposed to apartheid, and her support for the anti-apartheid movement was further demonstrated in November 1994, when she became the first major artist to perform in post-apartheid South Africa (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022). The tour consisted of three concerts in Johannesburg, Durban, and Cape Town and was titled *Whitney: The Concert for a New South Africa* (Houston, 2013). Houston donated proceeds from ticket sales to children's charities in South Africa, including orphanages and museums led by individuals who had taught Black South African children to read during apartheid (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012).

After her debut in acting with *The Bodyguard* and the film's significant commercial success, Houston became highly sought after in the entertainment industry for both her singing and acting talents (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). In 1995, she was invited to join the cast of *Waiting to Exhale*. The movie focused on the lives of four African American women, and Houston accepted the role of Savannah Jackson, a successful television producer searching for fulfilment in her personal life (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). While filming *Waiting to Exhale* in the USA, Houston travelled with her daughter and entourage (Crawford, 2019). However, her drug use became increasingly problematic, and she reportedly overdosed on cocaine while on set (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019). Fortunately, she survived and continued with the film production. Houston was also involved in the production of the film's soundtrack. She was key in recruiting emerging artists to collaborate on the album (Kennedy, 2022). *Waiting to Exhale* has been recognised as a significant cultural breakthrough for the African American community in cinema (Hudson, 2012;

Kennedy, 2022). The soundtrack also achieved commercial success, with one of the standout singles, “Exhale (Shoop Shoop)”, debuting at number one on the chart and contributing to the album’s substantial global sales (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). In 1996, Whitney Houston received an offer to star opposite award-winning African American actor Denzel Washington in the family Christmas movie *The Preacher’s Wife* (Crawford, 2019). Despite her enthusiasm for the role, her husband, Brown, was reportedly opposed to the project, expressing jealousy and discomfort with his wife’s roles alongside male actors (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). Nevertheless, Houston ultimately accepted the offer and began working on the film. *The Preacher’s Wife* was released in December 1996 and was largely considered a success (Hudson, 2012). The accompanying soundtrack, *The Preacher’s Wife: Original Soundtrack Album*, achieved remarkable commercial success, becoming the best-selling gospel album of all time (Crawford, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Following the success of *The Preacher’s Wife*, Houston starred in the television movie *Cinderella*, playing the role of the fairy godmother (Kennedy, 2022).

Houston and Brown’s marriage was marked by frequent arguments and conflicts, sometimes in private and public spaces (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). Reports indicated that their disputes occasionally escalated into physical altercations (Macdonald, 2018). The couple also engaged in drug use together and were known to attend parties during this period, which further fuelled public and media scrutiny (Bald, 2021). Their union was widely criticised by fans and media, as well as disapproved by her friends and family. Many observers viewed their union as tumultuous and destructive, often pointing to Brown’s influence on Houston’s struggles (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017). The media frequently called Brown “Mr Whitney Houston” (Kennedy, 2022, p. 128), a label that underscored his perceived subordinate role in the marriage and highlighted the ongoing criticism of their relationship dynamics (Bald, 2021). Houston often involved Brown in her professional

endeavours, publicly displaying affection for him and proudly identifying as Mrs Brown (Houston, 1993). During this period, Houston also faced personal challenges related to her father's health. Her father began experiencing heart problems, which deeply affected Houston, as she had always shared a close bond with him, often described as his princess (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). Throughout this period, she ensured that his health was taken care of, attended some of his medical appointments, and provided support (Houston, 2013). However, the difficulties in Houston's personal life began to impact her professional life. Reports emerged that she was missing concerts, arriving hours late to appearances, and displaying rude behaviour towards her staff (Broomfield, 2017). These issues were exacerbated by her continued drug use, which increasingly affected both her career and personal relationships (Bald, 2021; Crawford, 2019). Concerned about the negative impact on her professionalism, Davis reportedly confronted Houston about her drug misuse (McCarten, 2022). He expressed concern for her well-being and the potential consequences for her career, suggesting that she seek rehabilitation (Houston, 2013; McCarten, 2022). However, she denied having a drug problem and insisted that she was doing okay (McCarten, 2022). Houston began working on her fourth studio album, *My Love Is Your Love*. Released in 1998, the album marked a significant shift in her musical style, incorporating contemporary R&B and hip-hop elements while still showcasing her powerful vocal abilities (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). The album achieved critical and commercial success, producing several hit singles, including "Heartbreak Hotel", "It's Not Right but It's Okay", and the title track "My Love Is Your Love" (Hudson, 2012). Furthermore, it sold millions of copies worldwide, earning Houston her sixth Grammy award, solidifying her status as a versatile and enduring artist in the music industry (Hudson, 2012; Kennedy, 2022). In the summer of 1999, Houston embarked on the *My Love Is Your Love World Tour*, performing in cities across the globe. During the tour, she occasionally brought her husband

and their daughter on stage, sharing moments with her family in front of her audience (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018). Unfortunately, Houston struggled to complete the tour due to problems with her health, including issues with her voice and ongoing personal problems (Houston, 2013).

2.3.4 *Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005)*

In January 2000, Houston and Brown were stopped at an airport in Hawaii after marijuana was found in their luggage (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Despite this, they managed to board a plane back to the USA. Shortly after their return, Brown was arrested for a probation violation and subsequently spent a month in prison (Hudson, 2012). Amid these personal challenges, Houston was scheduled to perform at the Academy Awards in March (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). However, reports from rehearsals indicated that Houston appeared to be under the influence of drugs, as observers noted that her behaviour was erratic (Hudson, 2012). For example, she repeatedly sang to Brown, missed her cues, chose songs she preferred rather than those she was supposed to perform, and frequently walked off stage (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019). As a result of this behaviour, Houston was dismissed from performing at the award ceremony (Houston, 2013). She was reportedly shocked by the decision to let her go, as she believed she could perform well and felt she had the situation under control (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). Houston continued her professional endeavours and released *Whitney: The Greatest Hits* (Hudson, 2012). Nonetheless, her personal struggles greatly affected her professionalism, gradually tarnishing her pristine reputation in the entertainment industry (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018). Criticism of her behaviours continued to escalate as she made media headlines for her erratic actions and ongoing struggles (Broomfield, 2017). Her record label and film agents, increasingly concerned about her well-being and the impact on her career, organised interventions involving her close family and friends (Crawford, 2019; Macdonald, 2018). Despite the

severity of the situation, Houston pleaded with her mother not to go through with the interventions, insisting that she could manage her problems on her own (Houston, 2013). Around this time, Crawford, Houston's longtime friend and confidante, resigned from her position as executive assistant (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022). Crawford (2019) attributed her resignation to the growing difficulties in their relationship, exacerbated by Houston's continued drug abuse and tumultuous marriage with Brown.

Brown continued to face legal issues, including being detained for drunk driving charges (Bald, 2021). Throughout these challenges, Houston stood by her husband and publicly supported him, demonstrating her loyalty to him despite the ongoing turmoil (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013). Amid the personal difficulties surrounding her life, Houston's professional career took a significant turn in 2001 when Arista Records signed her to a new recording contract (Houston, 2013). This deal became the most lucrative recording contract in music history at the time, underscoring her enduring value and status in the music industry (Bald, 2021; Hudson, 2012). In September 2001, following the 9/11 attacks¹⁰, Arista Records re-released Houston's recording of *The Star-Spangled Banner* (Hudson, 2012). The song resonated with the public once more, inspiring many and reminding audiences of the powerful impact Houston's voice could have during times of national crisis (Kennedy, 2022; Macdonald, 2018). Around this time, Houston was scheduled to perform at the Michael Jackson 30th Anniversary Special (Crawford, 2019). When she appeared at the event, she looked noticeably thin and unkempt, sparking further concern and speculation about her health and well-being (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013). This appearance added to the

¹⁰ On 11 September 2001, a series of terrorist attacks were carried out in the USA by an Islamist terrorist group al-Qaeda, resulting in the deaths of nearly 3000 people (Bram et al., 2002)

ongoing public and media scrutiny of her struggles, particularly regarding her physical condition and rumoured drug addiction (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022).

In 2002, Houston faced significant personal and professional challenges, including the discovery that her father had been mismanaging her finances (McCarten, 2022). This revelation deeply troubled her, as she had always shared a close bond with her father, who had played a major role in managing her career (Houston, 2002; Macdonald, 2018). The situation escalated when John Houston filed a lawsuit against his daughter, demanding a hundred million dollars (Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). The lawsuit centred on claims related to financial agreements and management fees, leading to a highly publicised legal battle that further strained their relationship (Houston, 2002; Macdonald, 2018; McCarten, 2022). This legal dispute added to the growing pressures in Houston's life, contributing to the overall turmoil she was experiencing during this period. Amid growing public concern over her health and personal struggles, Houston participated in a highly publicised interview with Diane Sawyer (Houston, 2002). The interview became infamous for Houston's candid discussion of her life, including her struggles with drug use (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017). During the interview, Houston denied using crack cocaine, delivering the now-famous line, "Crack is wack" while acknowledging that she had engaged in drug misuse (Houston, 2002). The interview was a pivotal moment in her public life, as it highlighted the extent of her challenges and brought widespread attention to her deteriorating condition (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022).

John Houston passed away at the age of 82 in 2003 (Houston, 2013). The lawsuit remained unresolved, and Houston and her father never had the opportunity to reconcile (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Despite the strained relationship due to the lawsuit and other personal matters, including his divorce from Cissy Houston and remarriage, Houston was deeply saddened by his death (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). She went back home and

spent time with her family the day before the funeral but chose not to attend the funeral itself (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022). Houston moved from her home in Mendham, New Jersey, during this time. She relocated to Atlanta, Georgia, with her husband, their daughter, her brother Gary and his wife (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). She purchased a large house in Tullamore Place, Georgia, where she and her family settled (Houston, 2013). However, the challenges in Houston and Brown's marriage persisted. Their relationship continued to be marked by drug abuse, physical altercations, infidelity, and legal issues. In late 2003, Houston made an emergency call regarding an incident with Brown but did not wish to file a formal report (Crawford, 2019; Hudson, 2012). Despite her reluctance, the police charged Brown with domestic violence (Bald, 2021). Houston chose to stand by her husband, attending court to support him during the domestic violence charges (Houston, 2013). Brown downplayed the incident, describing it as a minor altercation, and Houston publicly supported his account (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013).

In December 2002, Houston released her fifth studio album, *Just Whitney* (Kennedy, 2022). Following the release of *Just Whitney*, Houston continued her musical endeavours and, in late 2003, released her first Christmas album, *One Wish: The Holiday Album* (Kennedy, 2022). Around this time, Houston decided to undergo a rehabilitation programme for her drug use, acknowledging the need to address the issues that had increasingly impacted her life and career (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). In September 2004, she made a surprise appearance at the World Music Awards, where she performed a tribute to Davis, reaffirming the long-standing professional relationship and personal bond between the two (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). During this period, Brown decided to star in a reality television show titled *Being Bobby Brown* (Hudson, 2012). Houston joined the cast, including their daughter and Brown's other children and relatives (Houston, 2013). The show aired in 2005 and followed the daily lives of the Brown household. *Being Bobby Brown* painted

Houston in a controversial light, portraying her as aggressive, forgetful, erratic, and sometimes rude (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). The show further highlighted the nature of their marriage and household, offering the public an unfiltered look into their tumultuous union (Houston, 2013). The reality show was widely criticised for its portrayal of Houston, contributing to the ongoing concerns about her well-being and the impact of her personal life on her career (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). Despite her multiple attempts at seeking rehabilitation, she continued to struggle with drug misuse, which persisted as a significant challenge in her life (Macdonald, 2018).

2.3.5 *The Final Performance (2006-2012)*

Houston separated from Bobby Brown, and their divorce was finalised in 2007 (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017). Around this time, she moved out of her home in Atlanta and relocated to Los Angeles, California, where she settled with her daughter and close relatives (Houston, 2013). Davis established his label and invited Houston to record with him again. She agreed and signed on to produce a new album under Davis's direction, marking a renewed professional collaboration between the two (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Houston released her album *I Look to You* in 2009, which was met with commercial success (Hudson, 2012). The album featured two successful singles, "Million Dollar Bill" and the title track "I Look to You", both of which received positive responses from fans and critics alike. By 2009, as Houston began promoting her new album, *I Look to You*, she agreed to an interview with Oprah Winfrey, her first in seven years (Macdonald, 2018; McCarten, 2022). During the interview, Houston appeared to be in better health and candidly admitted to having used drugs with her ex-husband, Bobby Brown (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2009). She also opened up about the abuse she endured during her marriage to Brown and discussed her multiple attempts at rehabilitation (Houston, 2009; Kennedy, 2022). Houston embarked on the *Nothing but Love World Tour*, her first world tour in over a decade (Kennedy, 2022).

The tour was initially announced as a triumphant comeback, signalling Houston's return to the global stage and her determination to reclaim her position in the music industry (McCarten, 2022).

However, the *Nothing but Love World Tour* encountered several difficulties that led to negative media coverage. Some concerts were postponed due to Houston's health, and she faced widespread criticism from fans who were unhappy with the quality of her performances (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). Reports indicated that Houston had difficulty reaching her signature high notes and displayed erratic behaviour on stage (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017). As a result, some audience members left the concerts early, with a few even requesting refunds (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022). During this time, Houston relapsed into drug use, which continued to affect both her personal and professional life. She also began a relationship with Ray J¹¹, an actor and singer eighteen years her junior (Houston, 2013). Their relationship drew criticism due to the significant age difference and Ray J's reputation as a controversial figure in reality television, which contrasted sharply with Houston's established image as a seasoned artist (Kennedy, 2022; Macdonald, 2018). These challenges raised further concerns about Houston's well-being and overshadowed what was intended to be her triumphant return to the stage. In 2011, Houston sought rehabilitation to address her ongoing struggles with substance abuse (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). Around this time, it was announced that she would be producing and appearing in a remake of the 1976 movie *Sparkle*, a project she had long wanted to undertake (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Houston played the character Emma, a mother of three young singers who formed a girl group (Kennedy, 2022). She was deeply involved in the film's production and spent significant time

¹¹ Ray J, born William Ray Norwood Jr., is an American singer, actor, and television personality, also known for being the younger brother of R&B singer Brandy (Kennedy, 2022)

with her family, including her mother, daughter, and brothers, during this period (Houston, 2013).

Houston was scheduled to perform at Davis's annual pre-Grammy party on February 11, 2012 (Macdonald, 2018; McCarten, 2022). The event was to be held at the Beverly Hilton Hotel in Los Angeles, where she had been staying in the days leading up to the event (Broomfield, 2017). The days before the party, Houston attended rehearsals and engaged with friends and colleagues in the industry. However, she was also reported to have been partying heavily, appearing disoriented, and displaying aggressive behaviour (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). On February 9, 2012, Houston made what would become her final public performance, singing "Jesus Loves Me" on stage alongside her friend and colleague Kelly Price at a pre-Grammy event (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). On February 11, 2012, Houston was found unresponsive in the bathtub of her hotel room at the Beverly Hills Hilton, just hours before she was scheduled to perform at Clive Davis's pre-Grammy party (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022). She was discovered by her staff, who had left her in the room to freshen up for the event (Kennedy, 2022). Paramedics were quickly called to the scene, but Houston was pronounced dead at 3:55 pm on February 11, 2012, at the age of 48 (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). The cause of death was not immediately known at the time of her passing. News of Houston's death quickly spread, making local and global headlines. Millions of fans worldwide and those close to her were deeply saddened by the news, which was seen as both untimely and tragic (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). Despite Houston's death, Davis's pre-Grammy party continued at the Beverly Hills Hilton as planned, a decision that sparked mixed reactions among the public and media (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017).

Houston's funeral was held at her church, New Hope Baptist Church, in Newark, New Jersey, on February 18, 2012 (Houston, 2013). The service was attended by numerous celebrities, friends, and family members, with several performances paying tribute to her life

and legacy (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). Houston was laid to rest in Fairview Cemetery, New Jersey, next to her father, who had passed away in 2003 (Houston, 2013). A few months after her passing, it was revealed that the cause of death was accidental drowning, with heart disease and the effects of long-term drug use identified as contributing factors (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022; Macdonald, 2018). Later, in 2012, the film *Sparkle*, which Houston had completed before her passing, was released posthumously (Hudson, 2012). The film served as a final testament to her talent and enduring legacy in the entertainment industry.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a comprehensive account of Houston's life, both biographical and historical, in a chronological manner. Firstly, the chapter discussed Houston's socio-cultural and historical context, which is crucial for gaining a thorough and accurate understanding of an individual. Thereafter, Houston's biographical and historical information was presented, commencing with her birth in 1963 and concluding with her death in 2012. The most significant sources that the researcher identified for Houston's biographical data include Houston (2013), Crawford (2019), and Kennedy (2022). These and numerous other sources integral to this study are detailed in the reference list.

Chapter 3: Alfred Adler's Theory of Individual Psychology

3.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter focuses on Alfred Adler's theory of Individual Psychology, which served as this psychobiography's theoretical framework. This framework offers a dynamic perspective on the complex development of personality within an individual's social context. The chapter begins with a brief overview of Adler's biography, followed by a discussion of how Adler viewed and understood human nature. Then, the theory's key theoretical constructs are explained and discussed. In addition, the reader is provided with an explanation of the theory's understanding of optimal development and psychopathology. The chapter concludes with an evaluation of the theory's strengths and shortcomings, as well as its applicability to psychobiographical research.

3.2 Biography of Alfred Adler

Alfred Adler (1870–1937) was born in Vienna, Austria, on February 7, 1870, as the second of six children (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). He was of Jewish descent; his father was a grain merchant, and his mother was a housewife. According to Corey et al. (2021), Adler's early childhood experiences were instrumental in shaping and influencing the development of his theory. Adler suffered from numerous illnesses, including rickets, which prevented him from walking until he was four years old, and he nearly died of pneumonia at the age of five (Corey et al., 2021; Wagner, 2010). Despite a childhood plagued by poor health, physical weakness, and feelings of inferiority towards other children, particularly towards his athletic and popular older brother, Adler was determined to overcome his limitations. He compensated for these feelings of inferiority by working hard in his scholastic performance with a dream of becoming a physician. Adler pursued his childhood dream of becoming a physician and obtained his degree in medicine from the University of Vienna in

1895 (Boeree, 2006). He began his medical profession as an ophthalmologist but switched to general medicine, specialising in neurology and psychiatry. Adler took an interest in Sigmund Freud's work. In 1902, Freud invited him to join the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. He became one of Freud's earliest colleagues and was elected president of the society in 1910.

Due to disagreements with Freud's theoretical framework, Adler resigned from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society in 1911. He founded the Society of Individual Psychology in 1912 and continued establishing and further developing his theory. Adler's theory focused on the social and cultural influences on the development of personality. In contrast to Freud's deterministic view of human nature, Adler's theory was founded on a goal-oriented view of human nature, as his focus was on what individuals do to achieve their goals (Corey et al., 2021). Several psychoanalysts also strayed from Freud's conventional stance. The theorists, namely Karen Horney and Erich Fromm, agreed that relational, social, and cultural factors hold greater importance in developing personality (Corey et al., 2021). Ansbacher (1979) classified these thinkers as Neo-Adlerians due to their separation from a Freudian deterministic view on personality, instead embracing Adler's social, psychological, and goal-oriented framework.

3.3 View of Human Nature

Holism, teleology, and the person-oriented approach were all central to Adler's view of human nature (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler placed significant emphasis on the uniqueness and unity of the human personality. Individual psychology originated from the Latin word *individuum*, which signifies an undivided entity, highlighting the individual as a unified and coherent whole (Mosak & Maniaci, 1989; Wagner, 2010). Adler was strongly influenced by the literary works of Jan Smuts, a prominent South African statesman (Fouché, 1999). Smuts introduced the concept of holism to the world, positing that all individuals can only be understood as integrated wholes within their environments (Adler, 1929, 1930, 1958;

Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Smuts' work inspired Adler, which led him to integrate the concept of holism into his theoretical perspective. Adler's perspective maintained that humans are holistic beings, characterised by integration and wholeness, rather than being comprised of separate and distinct parts. Adler's work was similarly influenced by Gestalt approaches, which refuted psychoanalytic approaches and elucidated intrapsychic processes as holistic features that embody unity (Corey et al., 2021; Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Adler (1927) argued that it is inappropriate to view individuals in a state of isolation but rather as holistic beings capable of cognitive, behavioural, and emotional functioning, all of which occur within a dynamic interplay with their environments. People are viewed as integral parts of larger systems, and due to their self-determined nature, their contexts must be considered for an accurate understanding (Adler, 1927). Thus, to fully understand individuals, it is necessary to investigate them in the context of their socio-cultural environments (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008).

Adler's view of human nature diverges from reductionism and determinism. Adler viewed human behaviour from a teleological perspective, which perceives behaviour as goal-driven. Adler believed that individuals show purposeful action driven mainly by their future-oriented goals rather than being solely influenced by their past experiences. Adler's belief in behaviour as goal-oriented was significantly shaped by Vaihinger's (1925) *as-if* philosophy (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). According to Vaihinger (1925), humans are guided towards the pursuit of achievement by an unconscious fictional goal. Vaihinger believed that the notions of God, heaven, and hell exemplify fictional concepts that exerted and continue to exert a major influence on the behaviours and choices made by most people (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler (1929) understood the concept of a fictional goal as an individual's subjective conceptualisation of significance, achievement and superiority. The goal serves as a means to overcome one's present predicaments and transcend any feelings of inferiority and social challenges (Corey et al., 2021; Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). While subjective and future-

oriented, the final goal acts as a framework that structures and directs an individual's actions, intending to achieve future success (Adler, 1930; Sperry, 2003). The notion of fictional finalism posits that individuals possess a significant degree of autonomy in shaping their futures, implying the existence of free will among human beings (Adler, 1929, 1930, 1958).

Furthermore, Adler emphasised the importance of examining the individual within the broader familial, societal, and cultural factors contributing to a meaningful existence (Adler, 1929, 1930, 1958). Adler (1958) postulated that every person's perceptions and pursuits of success differ. Therefore, the final goal of each individual's life is unique and tailored to the individual, considering the specific upbringing and decisions made by the individual (Mosak & Maniaci, 1989). Adler acknowledged both intrinsic and extrinsic influences. However, he saw these aspects as secondary to people's purposeful behaviour and their capacity for self-awareness in setting and pursuing their goals (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). The following section endeavours to offer an understanding of Adler's key theoretical constructs, which form the basis of his theory.

3.4 Key Theoretical Constructs

The key theoretical constructs of individual psychology utilised within this study include the inferiority complex, life task, lifestyle, social interest, striving for superiority, the schema of apperception, and sense of inferiority. These constructs are discussed in detail below.

3.4.1 The Inferiority Complex

Adler regarded the sense of inferiority as a motivator for creative work rather than a disadvantage (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Corey et al., 2021). However, he acknowledged that certain people develop an inferiority complex due to becoming so

consumed by the forces of their inferiority that they become excessively preoccupied with themselves (Adler, 1929, 1930, 1958).

This profound sense of inferiority leads to despair and the belief that one cannot manage life tasks or provide meaningful contributions to society (Adler, 1930, 1958). An inferiority complex does not promote successful compensation but instead impedes development (Dreikurs, 1967). The heightened feelings of inferiority are attributed to an individual's perceptions of themselves and the world around them rather than being mainly influenced by hereditary or environmental factors (Perry, 2012). Nevertheless, it is important to consider factors that can potentially influence the development of an inferiority complex (Adler, 1996a, 1996b; Orgler, 1963). These factors include physical disabilities, family dynamics, and the social environment (Stein & Edwards, 1998).

3.4.1.1 Physical Disabilities. The manifestation of an inferiority complex during childhood can be significantly influenced by a physical disability or an organ impairment (Adler, 1929, 1958). Physical disabilities can present either at birth or during the early years of childhood development (Perry, 2012). Notably, Adler placed greater emphasis on the psychological implications of physical disabilities in comparison to their physical consequences. Within this framework, subtle distinctions exist between actual and perceived organ inferiorities, which are contingent upon the subjective interpretation of the individual (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Unsurprisingly, children who are affected with illnesses or organ impairments encounter greater challenges in fulfilling environmental demands when compared to their healthy counterparts. Moreover, when these children compare themselves to healthy people, they may develop a sense of inferiority towards them (Perry, 2012). Coupled with feelings of loneliness, these feelings of inferiority can cause a child to avoid social interaction (Human, 2015). Such a trajectory may result in a decline in social interest and the formation of an unfavourable and pessimistic worldview (Adler, 1929).

Despite the potential negative effects associated with a physical disability, it can provoke an innate tendency towards seeking compensation. According to Adler (1930), the extent to which an illness or physical disability impacts growth and contributes to forming an inferiority complex is determined by an individual's attitude towards their disability. There are numerous approaches that people can use to address organ impairment. These strategies include (a) enhancing the strength of the weak organ relative to other organs, (b) cultivating another organ to achieve an extraordinary degree of functioning, or (c) adapting psychologically by learning additional abilities (Boeree, 2006). These ways of compensation can be fulfilled when the individual does not perceive the physical disability as burdensome to their personal growth (Adler, 1927, 1958).

3.4.1.2 Family Dynamics. Families serve as the primary social environment in which children develop, during which they initially acquire societal norms and construct self-perceptions and worldviews (Adler, 1958; Mosak, 1984). Family dynamics encompass two significant elements: birth order and parenting styles (Perry, 2012).

3.4.1.2.1 Birth Order. According to Adler (1930, 1958), birth order is a significant component of the family dynamic. This is due to his belief that “there are certain roles and behaviour patterns associated with birth order position which give rise to typical personality traits in all children who occupy a particular position in the family” (Meyer et al., 2008, p. 140). An individual's position comprises their worldviews, significantly impacting their interactions with their environment (Corey et al., 2021). “Individuals develop a certain style of relating to others in childhood and form a definite picture of themselves that they carry into their adult interactions” (Corey et al., 2021, p. 107). Therefore, the personality is significantly impacted by the unique experiences of each of these positions. Adler (1930, 1958) categorised children into the following five positions from which they tend to perceive life: first child or oldest, second child, middle child, youngest child, and only child.

For Meyer and Viljoen (2008), firstborn children receive undivided attention and experience a pleasant and secure existence. However, this continues until the second child is born, at which point the first child undergoes a “dethronement” due to a change in position (Adler, 1958). According to Adler (1958), the oldest children who have experienced dethronement in their early years are, among other characteristics, retrospective, relatively sentimental, and pessimistic about the future. They may spend their lifetimes striving to regain the privileges they previously enjoyed due to the changed position’s impact on their lifestyle (Perry, 2012). As adults, they portray characteristics including perfectionism, meticulousness, and an authoritarian attitude (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Second-born children are typically ambitious and competitive with the oldest child (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). The second child exists in a competitive environment, where they must share parental attention and time with their sibling. They may respond by trying to surpass and overthrow the firstborn. However, should they perceive the older sibling as exceedingly accomplished, they might be disheartened to withdraw from the competition. This discouragement may serve as the bedrock for developing an inferiority complex later in life (Adler, 1996a, 1996b).

Similar to the second child, the middle child is typically competitive, although they may choose a different sibling to compete against (Boeree, 2006). The youngest child often demonstrates the strongest desire for power (Human, 2015). Although they may occasionally develop a dependent lifestyle due to being lavished with attention and indulgence by the family, their development is usually remarkable (Adler, 1958). The only child receives undivided attention from their parents. Consequently, the child’s capacity to cooperate with other children may be hindered (Perry, 2012). Similar to the youngest child, individuals in this position are subjected to the adverse effects of being spoilt and pampered (Adler, 1927, 1930).

3.4.1.2.2 Parenting Styles. Adler (1958) argued that parental involvement is vitally important for forming cooperation. Children are initially exposed to cooperation through their parents; if parents do not model cooperation, it becomes impossible to instruct their children in the virtue of cooperation. A child raised in an unhealthy family environment may develop an unhealthy lifestyle and erroneously view life as having no purpose (Adler, 1929, 1958). According to Stein and Edwards (1998), Adler considered the mother's role to be the primary determinant in the child's development of social interest. Promoting social interest and fostering cooperation among children are considered the primary duties of mothers (Adler, 1970; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Orgler, 1963). When the biological mother is absent in person or because of emotions, a mother substitute will assume equivalent significance in promoting the child's cooperation and reciprocal affection (Adler, 1958). If the primary caregiver fails to perform those duties, problems may arise in the future.

Pampering and neglect are two parenting styles that may contribute to child development issues (Adler, 1929, 1958). An instance of pampering includes mothers whose excessive clinginess hinders their children's ability to develop cooperation with others. Children of such parents consistently desire to be the centre of attention and demand to receive rather than give if the mother satisfies their every wish (Adler, 1958; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Pampered children may develop a parasitic relationship with the world and lack independence and enterprise. Due to their reliance on others, these individuals cannot establish the independence required to live a healthy lifestyle. Their lack of interest in others and preoccupation with their own welfare may render them unsuitable for occupation, love, and marriage (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Abuse or neglected children may feel worthless and hopeless due to the lack of support and affection they receive from their families (Adler, 1996b; Olson & Hergenhahn, 2010). A lack of compassion or neglect by primary carers may foster mistrust of society

within children. Adopting such an attitude is not conducive to promoting cooperation. Neglect and abuse during the child's formative years hinder the development of social interest (Stein & Edwards, 1998; Wolfe, 1932). According to Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956), children who are neglected and whose need for affection is denied seek affection from themselves. Because they are self-centred, those who are pampered, neglected, or physically disadvantaged are not equipped to confront life tasks and challenges (Adler, 1930). As a result of their lack of social interest, they suffer from a lack of self-confidence and courage (Adler, 1930; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Therefore, by fostering a safe and nurturing family environment that imparts guidance and support, a child is able to acquire the essential life skills required to face the three major life tasks (Stein & Edwards, 1998). Human (2015) added that these individuals demonstrate enhanced abilities to strive for superiority, overcome challenges, and establish a sense of social interest.

3.4.1.3 The Social Environment. Since humans are socially embedded, it is impossible to comprehend them in isolation from their social environment (Adler, 1964; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adlerians maintain that individuals' perceptions of the world and themselves may be shaped by societal influences (Carlson et al., 2006; Stein & Edwards, 1998). Feelings of inferiority can be perpetuated by social discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, age, socioeconomic status or religion (Adler, 1929; Carlson et al., 2006; Stein & Edwards, 1998). In this regard, Adler was particularly troubled by the overestimation of masculinity and the underestimation of femininity in his culture (Adler, 1929, 1930; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Throughout Adler's lifetime, women were commonly perceived as the subordinate gender, a societal norm that potentially hindered their personal development (Adler, 1952, 1956).

Furthermore, it is worth noting that societal norms and emphasis on masculinity as a symbol of superiority can potentially have detrimental effects on men's well-being (Perry,

2012). The overemphasis on masculinity in society leads to elevated standards for boys and men. Consequently, when they are unable to achieve these expectations, they encounter heightened feelings of inadequacy (Stein & Edwards, 1998). As previously explained, experiencing a sense of inferiority is an ordinary phenomenon. However, when the surrounding environment becomes hostile, the sense of inferiority may intensify and give rise to an inferiority complex (Adler, 1930, 1996a, 1996b; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The existence of an inferiority complex leads to an expanded pursuit of superiority, resulting in what is commonly referred to as a superiority complex (Adler, 1929, 1958). According to Lundin (2017), both complexes may coexist within the same individual. These seemingly contradictory complexes may coexist as they represent exaggerated manifestations of the typical feelings of inferiority and the strive for superiority (Adler, 1929, 1958).

3.4.2 Life Task

Throughout life, humans encounter various tasks at distinct stages of development. These tasks are universal, requiring their fulfilment by people irrespective of their age, gender, or nationality. It is necessary for individuals to successfully complete these tasks in order to effectively function in their respective social environments (Corey et al., 2021; Orgler, 1963). Adler (1929, 1958) outlined three tasks: the social task, the love and marriage task, and the occupational task. These tasks are considered crucial as any impairment in any of them is frequently suggestive of a mental disorder.

3.4.2.1 Social Task. Adler (1958) argued that individuals have an innate desire to develop and sustain a sense of belonging and significance within their communities. People are integral members of a larger society, so understanding them necessitates exploring their social environment (Corey et al., 2016). Adler believed that social tasks entail connection with others and active involvement in collaborative efforts for the benefit of society (Carlson & Johnson, 2016). Social engagement is a significant indicator of mental well-being, as

individuals with social interests are inclined to direct their behaviour towards personal and societal welfare (Adler, 1958; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The experience of a community feeling holds value, as individuals are driven by a basic need for belonging and social affiliation. Thus, individuals who lack this sentiment encounter demoralisation and experience mental health issues

3.4.2.2 Love and Marriage Task. According to Adler (1958), the love and marriage task encompasses an individual's commitment to a partnership with someone of the opposite sex, manifested via a connection and physical attraction with the ultimate goal of procreation. Modern-day Adlerians recognise that love and marriage can encompass homosexuality as well (Brown et al., 2020). Love is viewed as a joint effort that necessitates the participation of both individuals involved. Orgler (1963) stated that a person's manner of loving is indicative of their personality, encompassing their overall lifestyle. Adler (1958) believed that children form their initial attitudes towards love and marriage based on behaviours and dynamics observed in their parents' relationship. The child's subjective perspective on his parents' relationship will determine their perspective on love and marriage. Thus, the level of harmony and commitment in the parents' marriage directly influences the children's attitude toward love and marriage positively. On the other hand, if the parents' love and marriage are characterised by dysfunction, the children's attitude towards love and marriage will likely be marked by dysfunction (Nel, 2013).

Adler (1958) believed that the task of love and marriage can be accomplished if each partner is interested in the other rather than in themselves. This results in equality, with neither partner feeling diminished. Equality generates an effort in which each partner can support the life of the other and in which each partner feels secure and valued. Furthermore, Adler (1958) postulated that the successful resolution to the task of love and marriage required a lifelong commitment to partnership and the collective decision to have children.

Adler (1930) argued that monogamy is the most socially responsible approach to marriage, attributing polygamy and a lack of commitment to one's partner to a lack of social interest and unwillingness to accept the full responsibilities of love and marriage. Regarding divorce, Adler (1958) asserted that there is the possibility of a breakup in a marriage but that it is simpler to avoid if the individuals involved perceive love as a social task they are expected to accomplish.

3.4.2.3 Occupation Task. According to Adler (1958), the occupation task entails individuals' need to earn an income and actively contribute to the collective well-being while also providing means to alleviate insecurities and foster opportunities for members of society. The intrinsic value of each occupation is individually determined and is significant in its societal contributions. Adler (1958) maintained that the perception of an occupation might vary between being a source of creative fulfilment or a burden, and an individual's approach to work can serve as an indicator of their unique style of living. The attainment of success in one's chosen occupation is indicative of a strive for superiority that involves the desired recognition sought by the individual (Orgler, 1963). Individuals who demonstrate significant levels of competence in their occupation typically have self-confidence, which grants them acknowledgement and motivates them to pursue success. However, an excessive strive for success can impede significant accomplishments as it generates psychological distress, thus hindering growth and achievement of other tasks (Orgler, 1963).

3.4.3 Lifestyle

Lifestyle, or style of life, pertains to the core beliefs and assumptions that shape an individual's trajectory in life and structure their perceptions of reality, imbuing meaning to various experiences (Carlson & Johnson, 2016; Corey et al., 2021). These beliefs impact the specific goals that individuals identify and the behaviours they exercise to achieve those goals. This is related to an individual's attempts to compensate for feelings of inferiority and

strive for superiority (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). A person's lifestyle plays a vital role in shaping their perceptions of self, others, and the world, ultimately shaping their personality (Corey et al., 2021). The formation of a lifestyle is influenced by the social interactions that occur during the early years of an individual's life (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Mosak, 1984).

During the initial five years of an individual's life, they establish a life goal and a lifestyle to navigate both actual and perceived challenges in their lives (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The construct of lifestyle is significant in Adler's theoretical framework, encompassing elements such as creativity, stability, subjectivity, stability, and a teleological orientation (Strauch, 2003). An individual's lifestyle is believed to be unconscious since they lack an understanding of the core assumptions regarding their own identity and the nature of existence (Christopher & Bickhard, 1992). "Man [and woman] understands nothing about his [or her] goal but pursues it. He [or she] understands nothing about his [or her] lifestyle, yet is continually bound to it" (Adler, 1982, p. 6). Adler further posited four distinct types of lifestyles: the ruling type, the getting or leaning type, the avoiding type, and the socially useful type. The various types are categorised based on their levels of social interest and movement towards achieving success (Adler, 1982).

3.4.3.1 Ruling Type. According to Adler (1982), individuals with the ruling lifestyle type are self-centred power seekers (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). They do not portray social interest but actively pursue their own goals and exhibit antisocial behaviour fuelled by their hunger for power and dominance (Adler, 1958). "Since I cannot be a lover, I am determined to prove a villain" (Adler, 1982, p. 5) is the attitude of individuals who perform this lifestyle type through acts of delinquency, tyranny, and sadism. Those who tend to hurt others by harming themselves, as through suicide, drug addiction, or alcoholism, would be a less active example of the ruling lifestyle type (Adler, 1982; Boeree, 2006).

3.4.3.2 Getting or Leaning Type. The getting or leaning lifestyle type is the most common and is defined by low activity and high levels of social interest (Adler, 1982). Despite their assumption of community-focused goals, individuals with the leaning lifestyle type pursue them by waiting for others to take the lead (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Due to their lack of independence and initiative, they are inclined to use their charisma and persuasion to convince others and lean on them for their assistance in pursuing their own life tasks (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

3.4.3.3 Avoiding Type. The avoiding lifestyle type is characterised by low social interest and low activity. Individuals are generally lazy, antisocial, and passive-aggressive (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). They define success by avoiding a resolution to life's tasks and social interaction. Instead of contending, they withdraw from challenges to avoid defeat (Adler, 1982). As a result, they retreat into their own bubbles (Boeree, 2006). According to Adler (1982), the lifestyles of both leaning and avoiding types are frequently marked by neurotic and psychotic symptoms. Adler (1927, 1982) argued that the aforementioned three lifestyle types represent the useless side of life. People who adopt these lifestyles have difficulty completing the three life tasks due to their incapacity to contribute and cooperate with others (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

3.4.3.4 Socially Useful Type. Individuals demonstrating the socially useful lifestyle type are characterised by high social interest and high activity. These individuals face the responsibilities and difficulties of life inside a sophisticated structure of social interest and with a positive outlook on what the future holds (Adler, 1958, 1982). Commonly, these people were reared within a familial environment defined by cooperation, trust, and respect (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Individuals engage in persistent efforts and exert considerable energy to effectively address and solve challenges, subsequently making valuable contributions to the welfare and advancement of others (Adler, 1982).

3.4.4 *Social Interest*

Social interest is an inherent desire to contribute to society's well-being and pursuit of communal harmony that extends beyond one's immediate social circle to encompass all humankind (Adler, 1979). Social interest is a means to a perceived sense of inferiority and a move towards achieving superiority through adopting a cohesive and integrated lifestyle. Adler (1964) posited that social interest is the main feature of all behaviours. It involves an understanding of one's membership in the broader society, the process of identifying with and feeling a sense of belonging within the social context, and an individual's unique approach to navigating social interactions (Ansbacher, 1992). Adler (1929, 1930, 1958) maintained that social interest is an innate capacity, yet he underscored the importance of its conscious cultivation. The establishment of social interest is facilitated by processes of socialisation and identification with one's family, peers, and community (Jones & Lyddon, 2003). The first connection between parental figures and children plays a crucial role in developing their lifestyle and satisfying their basic needs and life tasks.

Adler viewed the true meaning of life as an individual's ability to collaborate with others and continuously strive to contribute to society (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Human, 2015). The individual's desire to feel a sense of belonging, contribute to the community, and work towards creating an ideal society serves as motivation for behaviour (Corey et al., 2021). According to Adler (1929), the aim of managing feelings of inferiority also pertains to groups. He believed that from nature's perspective, humans are inferior and defenceless compared to animals. Their inability to survive on their own, adjunct with the realisation of this truth, drove them to form the conditions that would ensure their survival (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Their resolution to the problem was forming group life, which provided a secure and prosperous environment (Adler, 1930; Orgler, 1963). Through the division of labour, living in a group made it possible for people to solve problems that

would have been unimaginable for a person to manage alone (Adler, 1927). Thus, individuals can only survive if they cooperate (Adler, 1958; Orgler, 1963). To do so, they must be committed to the progress of the larger society.

The development of social interest provides individuals with a sense of harmony with the universe and an appreciation for the significance of connection with others (Perry, 2012). They will feel a connection to the past and devote their time and energy to the future by positively contributing to society. Adler (1964) maintained that individuals can only confront life's tasks with courage if they feel connected to humanity. He considered social interest to be the criterion for determining whether a lifestyle is adaptive or maladaptive (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Manaster & Corsini, 1982). As the primary indicator of mental health, social interest is observed in a socially useful lifestyle type. This lifestyle type is marked by empathy, courage, and an active and cooperative contribution to society (Adler, 1929). According to Adler (1930), psychologically well-adjusted individuals live in such a manner that their actions benefit the community. However, a lack of social interest leads to egocentrism, self-absorption, and excessive self-identification, resulting in intrapsychic and interpersonal conflicts (Adler, 1930). These individuals are ill-equipped to manage the three life tasks and are prone to forsake their responsibilities through self-destructive behaviour (Adler, 1929; Ansbacher, 1992).

3.4.5 Striving for Superiority

Adler (1927, 1929, 1930, 1958) maintained that the primary motivation behind individual development is the pursuit of superiority. The strive for superiority is initiated by a perceived sense of inferiority that arises from early childhood, prompting individuals to perform compensation to overcome feelings of inferiority. Compensation is a response against challenges or adversity that may occur consciously or unconsciously (Adler, 1930, 1956). The feelings of inferiority thus drive individuals to strive for superiority, giving rise to

their distinct life goals (Adler, 1927, 1929). Life goals enable people to regard themselves as being of a higher status than their present challenges, as the existence of a goal offers the possibility for future success and provides meaning for their behaviours (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler (1929) believed that striving for superiority can have two forms.

The first manifestation is the strive for power. The strive for power is characterised by people prioritising personal gain, success, and security over cooperation with others (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). The second manifestation is the strive for social interest or social feeling. Social interest involves acting towards helping others and collaborating to achieve social benefits (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). According to Adler (1927), individuals can only achieve a genuine sense of superiority and fulfilment if they prioritise cooperation and contribution to society instead of a socially unproductive route. The strive for power and social interest are attained in various ways because each individual has their own unique life goal. The goal is an abstract, self-created ideal that is influenced by the individual's genetic and environmental influences but not determined by them (Adler, 1930, 1958). Adler believed that the significance that people ascribed to their environment and heritage led to the formation of their goals (Perry, 2012).

3.4.6 Schema of Apperception

Adler (1958) proposed that the circumstances that individuals encounter are influenced by their subjective reality, which is then interpreted through their perspective. These experiences subsequently shape an individual's self-concept, self-ideal, morality, and world image (Adler, 1958). This is what Adler referred to as the schema of apperception. During the initial stages of childhood, people form their perceptions and construct their understanding of themselves and the world, thereby establishing their goals following these perceptions (Perry, 2012). As the child has autonomy during this creative process, it is inconceivable to predict what this perspective will be or the nature of the established goals

(Adler, 1958). Thus, the lifestyle is developed with the child's progress towards the established goal. How an individual perceives themselves and the world is impacted by their style of life (Perry, 2012). A schema of apperception, which distinguishes what an individual perceives from reality, comprises the formulations of the world by the individual (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Carlson et al., 2006; Orgler, 1963; Stein & Edwards, 1998). Adler (1929) argued that by virtue of their schema of perception, individuals construct their own personalities and behaviours as they exist in a subjective reality.

The construct of the schema of apperception has a profound relation to the philosophical foundations of social constructivism. Adler posited that the accuracy of individuals' views of the world can vary and that certain people may possess a distorted view of reality (Perry, 2012). These inaccurate perspectives often originate from misunderstandings formed during childhood and are significant because they affect an individual's course of development (Adler, 1927, 1958; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Carlson et al., 2006; Stein & Edwards, 1998). Although absolute accuracy in viewing the world is unattainable, certain individuals possess schemas of apperception that are more in tune with objective reality than others (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The magnitude of this disparity is relatively insignificant in the case of psychologically well-adjusted individuals. Nonetheless, individuals who are psychologically maladjusted experience a heightened contrast in this regard, resulting in a diminished ability for instinctive and adaptable fulfilment of life tasks. Consequently, problem-solving becomes more challenging, and the pursuit of goals is impeded (Perry, 2012).

3.4.7 Sense of Inferiority

At the core of Adler's theory of Individual Psychology is the construct of inferiority, which he believed is a universal condition inherent in all individuals, acting as the motivating force behind their behaviours (Corey et al., 2021). Every person is confronted with a sense of

inferiority, and their efforts to address this feeling begin in early childhood. Adler delineated three potential explanations for the origins of the sense of inferiority. The first explanation pertains to the perception of children as physically smaller and intellectually or socially less competent than adults (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Infants, by relying on adults to fulfil their needs, display an awareness of their own inadequacy compared to adults and consequently consider themselves inferior in this regard (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). The premise of organ inferiority is identified as the secondary explanation for the origin of feelings of inferiority (Boeree, 2006). Organ inferiority pertains to the inherent or acquired physical weaknesses that people may have due to congenital conditions, illnesses, or injuries. According to Adler (1958), an individual's personality is shaped by their efforts to compensate for flaws or weaknesses in their bodily parts or organs. The third explanation pertains to the influence of parenting styles, specifically the practices of pampering and neglecting (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008).

Adler (1929, 1958) argued that pampering involves excessively indulging children, resulting in them assuming a central role within the household, leading to a persistent insistence on satisfying their needs. On the other hand, neglect is characterised by a deficiency in affection and a lack of emotional security towards children, primarily due to parental indifference or hostility (Adler, 1929, 1958). Consequently, these circumstances incline the individuals who were parented in those manners to experience emotions characterised by low self-esteem, intense resentment, and a lack of confidence in others (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Feeling inferior can manifest in individuals who exhibit either a superiority complex or an inferiority complex. Superiority complex refers to the psychological defence mechanism employed by individuals to conceal their feelings of inferiority by adopting an outwardly superior demeanour (Boeree, 2006). The pursuit of superiority can be witnessed in children's imaginative play, specifically when they engage in

role-playing activities that emulate adult behaviour (Boeree, 2006). According to Adler (1958), the inferiority complex manifests when individuals lack the necessary skills to resolve an issue, limiting their actions and focusing primarily on avoiding future failure rather than actively pursuing success.

Individuals employ three strategies to manage their shortcomings and feelings of inferiority: compensation, sensitivity, and overcompensation (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Compensation is a healthy reaction to experiencing feelings of inferiority as it represents an effort from the individual to overcome their perceived weaknesses. Adversity is transformed into an opportunity for a favourable outcome through compensation. Sensitivity and overcompensation are both regarded as maladaptive reactions to feelings of inferiority. Sensitivity is characterised by individuals being excessively preoccupied with their own weaknesses, to the point where they are very susceptible to emotional distress upon encountering any mention or allusion to their flaws. Overcompensation is portrayed when individuals amplify their capabilities to conceal or compensate for perceived inadequacies (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). As mentioned before, the sense of inferiority is pervasive and is universally experienced by individuals. These feelings of inferiority stimulate positive development, progress, advancement, and proactive behaviour (Adler, 1929, 1930, 1958). Therefore, the sense of inferiority is viewed as advantageous due to its ability to motivate people to strive for superiority (Human, 2015).

3.5 Optimal Development and Psychopathology

3.5.1 Optimal Development

Adler (1958) posited that individuals who have achieved optimal development have a life centred around addressing negative childhood traumas and shortcomings through pursuing and obtaining socially meaningful and beneficial work (Human, 2015). These

individuals are characterised by their constant display of creativity and courage when confronted with various social challenges (Adler, 1958, 1964; Massey, 1986). Individuals who adopt a socially desirable lifestyle demonstrate considerable levels of courage and social interest as they endeavour to overcome their limitations in a way that benefits society (Adler, 1929, 1930, 1958). According to Adler (1958) and De Bruin (2018), genuine optimal development is achieved through the individual's ability to positively impact others. Adler (1930) considered social interest the fundamental aspect of mental health and a crucial requirement for advancing humanity. Adler (1929, 1930, 1958) argued that the most favourable setting for optimal development is a familial environment that fosters a sense of social contribution and values trust and cooperation. Furthermore, he believed that children attain their maximum potential for development when they are showered with compassion and attention from their families.

Consequently, these children mature into productive and cooperative adults who can confront life's challenges, cultivate meaning with others, and strive for personal growth (Stein & Edwards, 1998). Individuals who have achieved optimal development are more adaptable than those who experience discouragement. Their schema of apperception aligns with common sense, enabling them to operate in a way that is cooperative, productive, practical, and task-oriented (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Mosak & Maniaci, 1989). Enhanced social interest reduces feelings of inferiority, motivating individuals to pursue adaptive and socially beneficial goals (Corey et al., 2021). An increased level of concern towards fellow human beings reduces self-inflicted issues, including prejudice, persecution, and war (Adler, 1929, 1930, 1958). Thus, Adler (1929, 1930, 1958) emphasised that social interest was important to human evolution; without it, humans could perish from their own self-inflicted problems.

3.5.2 *Psychopathology*

Adler maintained that psychopathology originates from an unhealthy preoccupation with oneself and a lack of social interest (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Criminals, neurotics, psychotics, alcoholics, perverts, troublesome children, and suicidal individuals, in Adler's opinion, are all failures due to their lack of social interest (Adler, 1958, 1996a, 1996b). He believed that mental health issues stem from an ingrained sense of inferiority that emerged during early childhood due to various factors such as physical disability (Adler, 1930). The primary factors contributing to psychopathology are an overly heightened sense of inferiority and an inadequate sense of community (De Bruin, 2018; Stein & Edwards, 1998). Individuals who lack social interest are driven by their private logic and interpret events accordingly (Adler, 1964). These individuals establish excessively ambitious goals, which are egocentric and result in poor interpersonal and intrapersonal functioning (Adler, 1958, 1964). It is possible to argue that psychopathology is associated with the absence of *Ubuntu*, more specifically, the lack of regard, compassion, and understanding for fellow human beings (Human, 2015).

Individuals with an inferiority complex may exhibit optimal performance in specific contexts and situations. However, when they view particular demands as threatening, they safeguard their unconscious ideals or fragile self-esteem (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Safeguarding mechanisms refer to behavioural patterns individuals employ to protect their exaggerated self-esteem. These measures enable people to conceal their inflated self-image while maintaining their current lifestyle (Adler, 1964). In this way, they acquire a false sense of superiority through the use of safeguarding mechanisms. Stress can be triggered by excessively burdensome demands to the point where people feel incapable of managing them or when they necessitate adjustments (Adler, 1996a, 1996b). As previously discussed, psychologically maladjusted individuals possess negative schemas of apperception that are

rigid and inflexible. Individuals with this characteristic face resistance to change and resort to safeguarding mechanisms to preserve their fragile self-esteem and evade life challenges (Adler, 1958; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Due to their excessive self-involvement, psychologically maladjusted individuals are unable to accomplish life tasks. Instead, these individuals adopt ineffective coping strategies that often manifest as excuses (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008).

3.6 Evaluation of the Theory

3.6.1 Value and Critiques

Adler's view of personality development was considered progressive during the Freudian era (Mosak, 1984). Adler made significant contributions to understanding the individual as being intricately connected to their social environment. He emphasised the importance of understanding individuals within the broader socio-cultural and historical framework. Adler's contributions had a significant impact on the field of psychology, particularly its integration into humanistic (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008), cognitive-behavioural (Watts, 2003) and existential-phenomenological frameworks (Corey et al., 2021). Additionally, his theoretical perspective greatly contributed to understanding the significance of birth order, family constellation, dreams and early memories in human development (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Meyer & Viljoen, 2008).

Adler (1958) formulated his theory to promote social awareness and advocate for marginalised communities (Watts, 2000, 2013). Adler observed that the prevailing perspective during his time regarding gender assigned lesser value to women (Karpati, 2012). Consequently, Adler (1958) advocated for universal rights and devoted a portion of his writings to promoting gender equality, arguing for equal treatment of women and the inclusion of gender equality in school curriculums (Ansbacher, 1990; Rattner, 1983). Adler

cautioned that boys' adoption of a belief in male superiority could lead to the development of maladaptive behavioural patterns, ultimately resulting in a decline in social interest and an increase in feelings of inferiority (Ansbacher, 1990). Furthermore, Adler's perspective offers advantages for individuals with disabilities and special needs. By focusing on the influence of organ inferiority, this theory facilitates a deeper understanding by identifying ways of compensation, striving for superiority, and developing a unique lifestyle (Dinkmeyer et al., 1987).

Despite the contributions, Adler's writings were criticised for being too oversimplified (Corey et al., 2021; De Bruin, 2018). Adler's writing style consisted primarily of anecdotes and failed to clearly explain the theory. The theory's scientific rigour is questioned due to the relative ambiguity and challenge of empirically validating its key theoretical constructs (Boeree, 2006). Meyer and Viljoen (2008) emphasised the concern regarding validity, stating that assessing the credibility of Adler's theoretical constructs is challenging since his work is not quantified empirically but rather lies on clinical observations. Adler's constructs of striving for superiority and a sense of inferiority are inherently intangible and resistant to quantification or experimental manipulation (Boeree, 2006; De Bruin, 2018; Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Moreover, Adler's view of homosexuality as a deficit in social interest, a manifestation of neuroticism, and a condition requiring remediation has been criticised (Chandler, 1995; Dreikurs, 1971; Sperry, 1995). Critics argue that Adler's focus on heterosexual love and marriage is outdated, excluding homosexual experiences. Neo-Adlerians counter this by advocating for a reinterpretation of social interest, asserting that it should encompass all loving relationships, regardless of sexual orientation, to promote inclusivity and social equality (Brown et al., 2020; Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017).

Nonetheless, throughout the past two decades, there has been a surge of research about the efficacy of Adlerian theory (Corey et al., 2021; Watts & Shulman, 2003). This trend

has been particularly initiated by the *Journal of Individual Psychology* (<https://utpress.utexas.edu/journals/journal-of-individual-psychology/>). Adler (1958) expressed concern about the inadvertent assimilation of his developing theory into the prolific ideologies of the time. Later Adlerians, such as Dreikurs, Mosak, and Corsini, made significant contributions to the theory's advancement. These scholars, known as 'neo-Adlerians', acknowledged the theory's adaptability and the critical need for its modification to address contemporary political, psychological, social, sexual, and spiritual concerns (Brown et al., 2020; Corey et al., 2021; Watts, 2003). Adler highlighted the importance of social interest in the progression of humanity and advocated for the unity of personality by establishing a lifestyle in which every thought, emotion, and behaviour is directed towards a fictional goal of success, mastery, and security (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). According to Adler (1958), neither heredity nor environmental influences play a role in personality formation. Conversely, he argued that every individual possesses the drive and creative ability to create their own life in the world. This teleological perspective on development, which prioritised cooperation and health as fundamental social interests, placed significant emphasis on the concepts of freedom and choice (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008; Mosak, 2000). This earned Adler a reputation as a forerunner in the existentialist movement and the humanistic approach to psychology (De Bruin, 2018). However, this teleological perspective is not without its critics, as it undermines the fundamental importance of a decision, subsequently complicating the idea of rational justification (De Bruin, 2018).

3.6.2 Psychobiography

For Fouchè (2015), psychobiography is a viable and underused method of studying lives, connecting the domains of biography and psychology (De Bruin, 2018). Prominent theorists, namely Alfred Adler (1870-1937) and Erik Erikson (1902-1980), maintained that an approach involving a psychologically informed biography is the most effective way for

comprehensively understanding an individual's life within a specific context (McAdams, 1994). The selection of suitable psychological theory for integration into a psychobiography is of utmost importance as it determines the ability to derive meaningful interpretations and conduct a study of high quality (Du Plessis & Stone, 2019). An Adlerian approach to psychobiography prioritises understanding over providing explanations (Pozzuto, 1982). Moreover, it is worth noting that Adlerians have traditionally exhibited a preference for employing an idiographic case study approach. According to Watts (2013), case study research is considered a valuable addition to evidence-based research and is specifically relevant to persons who follow the Adlerian approach.

The theory's dynamism and flexibility allow for the interpretation of the intricate nature of a subject that is in a state of constant change (Perry, 2012). However, understanding an individual remains a complicated endeavour (Adler, 1958). In order to highlight the individual lifestyle within the framework of teleology, it is imperative to comprehend subjects within their social-cultural and historical context, as well as from a subjective perspective of reality (Adler, 1930, 1958; Pozzuto, 1982). Adler's theory considers societal influences and various behavioural forces that shape an individual's personality and development (Perry, 2012). Therefore, Adlerian psychobiography provides a comprehensive understanding of an individual by examining the influences of genetics, social context, and environment on their developmental trajectory (Pozzuto, 1982). The theory of Individual Psychology holds significant value in the field of psychobiography because of its view of studying an individual's life in relation to its ultimate goal (Carlson, 1988). This view is facilitated by the concept of a fictional goal (Adler, 1956).

Furthermore, it is possible to interpret the autobiographical essence of the Adlerian construct of lifestyle as a form of life script (Schneider & Stone, 1998). Because of this, Individual Psychology is highly applicable to psychobiographical studies (Perry, 2012). The

individual's lifestyle is conceptualised as a personal mythology that one lives by, treating it as a real truth (McAdams, 1996, 1997; Mosak, 2000). The myth in question serves as a narrative that offers guidance and comfort to the individual, instructing them on a fictitious goal and preparing them to confront the future through already-tested lifestyles (Adler, 1958). Examples of psychobiographies that utilized the theory of Individual Psychology include Hugo (2020), Joubert (2020), and Segal (2022).

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined Adler's theory of Individual Psychology as the theoretical perspective through which to uncover the personality development of Whitney Houston. Adler's theory maintains that each person is predisposed to an innate sense of inferiority and that individuals act towards overcoming this sense of inferiority by striving for superiority. The precise trajectory of this journey is determined by an individual's unique life goal, which, while subject to the influence of environmental and genetic factors, is not predetermined by them. Lifestyle refers to the unified structure of personality that is firmly established during early childhood. An individual's schema of apperception, which influences all their psychological processes, is also formed during infancy. In addition, Adler asserted that it is impossible to separate humans from their social environment. Socialisation is a fundamental human capability that requires nurturing. Adler defined this occurrence as social interest, which is important to advancing humanity. He viewed social interest as the essence of optimal development present in psychologically well-adjusted individuals. Increased feelings of inferiority, an unreasonable and excessive strive for superiority, and underdeveloped social interest characterise psychopathology. Despite the ambiguity of Adler's theoretical constructs, his theory upholds a positive perspective concerning the capacity of humans to exercise self-determination and free will. The comprehensive nature of Individual Psychology's approach

to understanding human nature renders it suitable for its application in psychobiographical research. A theoretical overview of psychobiographical research is presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: A Theoretical Overview of Psychobiography

4.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter discusses the development and practice of psychobiography as a design and case study approach in the field of qualitative research. Firstly, the qualitative research methodology is introduced and explained. The case study is also emphasised as a unique research design and methodological approach. Subsequently, psychobiographical research is defined and distinguished from related concepts. An overview of the trends in psychobiography is provided, followed by a brief explanation of its developmental history internationally and within the South African context. The chapter concludes by discussing the value and criticisms of using a psychobiographical approach.

4.2 Qualitative Research

4.2.1 Introduction

Researchers use qualitative, quantitative, or a mix of the two approaches while conducting research. A qualitative research design and methodology is frequently utilised in sociology, politics, journalism, history, and psychology. Due to its diverse and comprehensive nature, qualitative research offers the researcher flexibility and enthusiasm for the research endeavour (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Ponterotto, 2005; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013a, 2013b, 2019). There are significant differences between quantitative and qualitative research within the social sciences (Bryman, 2012; Flick, 2006). While certain scholars have raised doubts regarding the merit of this distinction, others consider it a foundational contrast (Bryman, 2012).

The philosophical paradigm of positivism that underpins quantitative research holds the following: (a) reality is limited to that which is perceptible through the senses, and (b) the majority of knowledge is empirical in character (Ponterotto, 2010). The field of psychology

has since shown a heavy inclination toward positivist and postpositivist research paradigms (Ponterotto, 2010). Consequently, throughout history, the field of psychology has endeavoured to emulate the precision of the natural sciences paradigm by establishing standardised and quantitative research methodologies (Saccaggi, 2015). Although the positivist approach has decreased in popularity in the last 30 years, its influence is still evident in the wide range of tools used in social science research, such as statistical models, surveys, questionnaires, and the conceptualisation of research as a process of testing hypotheses (Hughes, 1990; Flick, 2006). While quantitative research is widely used in psychology, it has inherent limitations. According to Simonton (2003), research studies published in mainstream psychological journals often rely on quantitative data that lacks intrinsic value. “Both the participants and the data they provide are merely the means to an end: the testing of nomothetic hypotheses about human thought, affect, or behaviour” (Simonton, 2003, p. 618).

Qualitative research provides in-depth insight into individuals, consequently increasing its value in research (Simonton, 2003). As a result, there has been a progressive change in how research is conducted, with qualitative research gaining popularity and acceptance as a research methodology in applied psychology (Ponterotto, 2010). In contrast to quantitative research, qualitative research emphasises meanings and processes not subjected to experimental manipulation or quantified in terms of frequency, magnitude, intensity, or quantity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2018). Qualitative research encompasses a comprehensive and interrelated network of terms, concepts, and assumptions (Flick, 2006). This includes various traditions such as positivism, postpositivism, and poststructuralism, as well as perspectives related to cultural and interpretive research (Flick, 2006). Qualitative research is categorised into three research paradigms: postpositivism, constructivism-interpretivism, and the critical-ideological approach (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Nel, 2013;

Ponterotto, 2010). Postpositivism holds the notion that there is a true reality, but it can only be observed imperfectly because of human fallibility. According to this paradigm, researchers should strive to maintain a dualistic and impartial approach by adopting the role of a *disinterested scientist* (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Nel, 2013; Ponterotto, 2010). The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm posits that there are numerous socially constructed interpretations of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 2008). These constructed realities are real and can be observed through a researcher-participant relationship involving a high interaction level (Nel, 2013; Ponterotto, 2010). According to Guba and Lincoln (2008), the researcher assumes the *passionate participant* role. The critical-ideological paradigm maintains that reality is influenced by political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, and social factors and values. In this paradigm, the researcher adopts an involved and proactive approach guided by values and assumes the role of a *transformative intellectual*, which entails promoting emancipation and transformation through research (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Nel, 2013).

The assessment of the quality of qualitative research is generally based on its paradigmatic foundations and the norms of the specific field in which it is conducted (Hugo, 2020; Morrow, 2005; Nel, 2013). The aforementioned philosophical paradigms enable qualitative research approaches to incorporate numerous methodological and theoretical concepts (Flick, 2006; Saccaggi, 2015). This provides the researcher with diverse investigative methods and procedures to thoroughly study individuals and delve into human motivations, experiences, perceptions, and behaviours (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the qualitative research approach can focus on various areas: (a) the socially constructed nature of reality, (b) the importance of the researcher's relationship with the subject, (c) the situational constraints that shape the study, and (d) the value-laden nature of the study. Qualitative research adopts an interpretive and

naturalistic perspective toward the world (Du Plessis, 2017; Ponterotto, 2010). Qualitative researchers investigate phenomena within their natural settings, aiming to analyse and understand them based on the subjective significance attributed by individuals (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Consequently, the researcher is usually immersed in the world they intend to investigate, necessitating careful consideration of their subjectivity and reflexivity (Du Plessis, 2017).

Researcher subjectivity or bias refers to the inclination of the researcher to either idealise or critique the subject due to counter-transference reactions that may emerge throughout the study, potentially compromising the accuracy of the findings (Fouché, 2015). Reflexivity refers to the practice of engaging in critical self-reflection as a researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 2008; Willig, 2019) and can be employed to reduce researcher bias (Fouché, 2015). Unlike quantitative methodologies, which strive for researcher objectivity, qualitative researchers readily recognise their subjectivity throughout the data collection and analysis process (Morrow, 2005). Depending on the chosen paradigm, the researcher can either attempt to regulate and restrict their thoughts and responses or acknowledge and utilise them as distinct data (Levitt et al., 2017; Morrow, 2005). The psychobiographer must uphold objectivity and balance when analysing the inner psychological aspects of the subject (Ponterotto & Moncayo, 2018; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017).

Research conducted using a qualitative approach has numerous benefits. Ponterotto (2010, 2014) outlined the advantages specific to the field of psychology, encompassing several research paradigms, in the following manner:

1. Constructivist qualitative methods frequently involve examining the cognitive and emotive dimensions of an individual's life experiences, as perceived via their socially constructed worldviews.

2. Qualitative methods are valuable during the exploratory stages of research due to their focus on discovery rather than explanation.
3. Qualitative research enhances the descriptive depth of quantitative data.
4. The iterative and interactive process of ongoing data gathering, analysis, and interpretation makes qualitative methods effective for theory development.
5. Qualitative research is excellent for studying and understanding the complex processes inherent in psychotherapy.
6. The study of complex psychological phenomena can be conducted efficiently through qualitative research, which is not restricted by predetermined or limited variables. Instead, it allows for the exploration of variables as they emerge during the research process.
7. Qualitative research is adept in determining the clinical significance of research, as it involves active participation from participants in framing research questions and evaluating and interpreting findings, subsequently enhancing clinical relevance.
8. Qualitative research is participant-oriented and can enhance the public's understanding and receptivity of research.
9. Qualitative research can connect the objective hypothetico-deductive model of science and the subjective everyday experiences of practitioners and clients.
10. Finally, the qualitative method successfully constructs procedural evidence, where the analysis procedure makes understandable, credible, and consistent findings clear.

Qualitative research employs several methodological approaches to analyse data, as described before (Manning, 1982; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Tavallaei & Abu Talib, 2010). The case study method is one particular approach. Psychobiography is a form of case study that examines the psychological aspects of an individual's life (Fouché, 2015; Saccaggi, 2015). The subsequent section provides a concise overview of the case study approach in the

context of qualitative methodology. This will help situate psychobiography within the broader field of research.

4.2.2 Qualitative Approaches to Case Study Research Design and Methodology

A case study is a methodical approach that involves an in-depth investigation and systematic presentation of a case or multiple cases in which the variables under study are thoroughly examined (Edwards, 1998; Runyan, 1984; Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007; Yin, 2018). The structure of the case may consist of a variety of elements, including an individual, family, group, clinical session, event, organisation, community, or country, and it may focus on one case or several cases (Yin, 2018). Therefore, although a case study approach typically emphasizes a particular case's intricacy, uniqueness, and individuality, it can also examine the similarities and resemblances among cases while acknowledging both concurrences and contradictions within each case (Brown, 2010). According to Van Wynsberghe and Khan (2007), the prototypical case study generally has the following qualities:

1. It involves conducting an in-depth investigation of a particular unit of analysis.
2. The reader is presented with highly detailed and contextualised descriptions.
3. Research is conducted in a natural setting where there is minimal control of the variables being investigated (i.e., behaviour, events, or organisations).
4. The description of the case study establishes a distinct time and spatial scope to provide context for the unit being examined.
5. Working hypotheses are generated based on the information discovered or developed during data collection and analysis.
6. The convergence of multiple lines of inquiry enables triangulation, which produces accurate and convincing findings.

7. Lastly, case studies can augment and transform the understanding of a phenomenon as researchers examine complex social interactions to consolidate and clarify these connections within a specific context.

The case study approach is considered valuable for several reasons: (a) helping to bridge the gap between theory and practice, (b) taking advantage of challenging or unique experiences, which can lead to the development of a theory that is relevant to real-world situations, and (c) generates detailed observations that can be used to adapt or modify existing theories (Kressel, 2009; Stiles, 2009). This research method is context-bound and enables a thorough and all-encompassing investigation (Brown, 2010; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2018). Thus, this method is valuable in acquiring an in-depth understanding of issues, comprehending the various stages of research procedures, and gaining a deeper insight into the circumstances in which they arise (Gilgun, 1994). The utilisation of a case study approach should be seen as “transparadigmatic and transdisciplinary” due to its ability to examine subjects from several paradigms and disciplinary perspectives (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007, p. 2). Case studies can generate and evaluate ideas regarding real-world phenomena within the *post-positivist* paradigm. By approaching a case study from this perspective, the researcher can uncover the specific case and identify the variables or units of interest within the case (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007). However, an *interpretivist* paradigm prioritises examining the particular reality relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. The analysis highlights the narrative style of presenting the phenomenon and the iterative nature of constructing the case study (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007). The case study approach enables the building of a representation of the subject’s actual experiences and reality. Finally, a case study conducted using a *critical theory* paradigm specifically examines the socio-historical context of a subject (Van Wynsberghe & Khan, 2007).

The case study is not limited to qualitative research alone since it can incorporate quantitative, qualitative, or a mixture of both methodologies (Yin, 2018). For instance, *historiometry*, which is the practice of quantitatively analysing historical data, involves using modified versions of standard psychometric measures to assess various characteristics of historical figures, such as personality, intelligence, interests, beliefs, motivation, values, and psychopathology (Simonton, 2003). Furthermore, quantitative multivariate approaches enable researchers to manipulate and quantify variables. Nevertheless, these methodologies might fail to identify the distinct attributes of the specific case (Edwards, 1998). Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for the development of novel theories that may be tested and validated through empirical evidence (Burnell, 2013; Eisenhardt, 1989). The case study approach is crucial for developing theories in various fields, including psychotherapy, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, personality psychology, and humanistic and transpersonal therapeutic procedures (Edwards, 1998; Kressel, 2009; Welman, 2020). The literature has presented many qualitative approaches based on case studies (Edwards, 1998; Runyan, 1984; Yin, 2018).

Edwards (1998) provided a concise summary of the assumptions that are commonly shared by competing case-based research methods:

1. Measuring human experience and behaviour about the variables from which predictions can be drawn is not the primary goal of scientific research. There are limitations to the relationship between factor analytic models and genuine psychological and interpersonal processes.
2. The pursuit of quantification is not motivated by intrinsic value.
3. The quality of data influences the quality of scientific endeavours.

4. The qualitative researcher portrays a respectful attitude towards research participants and recognises the value of exploring and understanding their narratives. The participants may even be seen as co-researchers or collaborative collaborators.
5. An adequate amount of qualitative data should be gathered to contextualise it.
6. Research should adopt a case-based and case-centred approach, where case material is utilised to develop theories. This may subsequently enhance the researcher's understanding of future cases.

The case study is a widely used relevant method in theory development because it effectively links qualitative evidence with deductive research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). This is exemplified by the recurring pattern of research in establishing theories: the inductive process of theory development relies on evidence derived from case studies that contribute to the generation of novel ideas (Ponterotto et al., 2015). These novel theories can be subjected to deductive theory testing using case data, thereby completing the cycle (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). The case study approach can be seen as a counterpoint to traditional deductive reasoning, as it generates accurate, engaging, and testable hypotheses (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Edwards (1998) described this research approach as cyclical, emphasising the significance of case study research in the entire research process. He added that the various types of case study work appear to align with the three stages of the research process, which he defined as a descriptive stage, a theoretical-heuristic stage, and a theory-testing stage (Edwards, 1998). Table 4.1 provides a visual representation of the propositions Edwards (1998) indicated.

Table 4.1*Case Study Work during various Phases of the Research Process*

Research Process Phases	Case Study Work Phases
Descriptive work	Exploratory-descriptive work Focused-descriptive work
Theoretical-heuristic work	Grounded theory building Hermeneutic work
Theory-testing work	Testing propositions within grounded theory Meta-theoretical deconstruction

Note. Adapted from “Types of case study work: a conceptual framework for case-based research,” by D. J. A. Edwards, 1998, *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 28(3), pp. 36-70.

As shown in Table 4.1, Phase One (descriptive work) focuses on the meticulous observation and objective description of the phenomenon being investigated, particularly if it is a relatively recent phenomenon. Applying a case study methodology allows for *exploratory-descriptive work*, intending to produce a structured and intelligible presentation of the phenomenon. Once the phenomenon has been described, it can be further analysed through *focused-descriptive work*. During Phase Two (theoretical-heuristic work), the case study approach might be advantageous in using the descriptions obtained in Phase One to establish the theory. In the process of *grounded theory building*, the theory is constructed using highly justified observations. Grounded theory building involves the following components: (a) categorisation, (b) formulation of correlational relationships, (c) establishment of psychological structure, (d) formulation of hypotheses about the process, and (e) formulation of hypotheses about causal relationships. The theory derived from *hermeneutic work* is acknowledged to have been formed historically and culturally rather than being an absolute truth. Theories can now be explained through rigorous discourse and systematic inquiry. In Phase Three (theory testing work), the process of *testing propositions within grounded theory* can be achieved by thoroughly examining individual cases. Additionally, *meta-theoretical deconstruction* can be employed during Phase Three to radically reformulate ideas by examining case studies and revealing the underlying assumptions on which a psychological theory is developed (Edwards, 1998).

The researcher can employ the case study in diverse ways. For instance, one can gain a deeper understanding of a case by employing theory to analyse it, or a case can be utilised to evaluate and improve a theory (Stiles, 2009). According to Stiles (2009), the process of using a case study to develop a theory involves three logical operations: deduction, induction, and abduction. Deduction involves using existing theory to generate specific ideas that can be tested through research (Stiles, 2009). Induction involves applying observations to theory, and abduction involves creating and modifying theories. (Stiles, 2009). The psychobiographical approach, a form of case study research, can employ either deductive or inductive case research or a combination of the two (Edwards, 1998; Fouché, 1999). Psychobiography enables researchers to generate and evaluate psychological theories through analytical generalisation (Coetsee, 2017; Hugo, 2020). In contrast to statistical generalisation, analytical generalisation establishes connections between findings and pre-existing theories rather than deriving conclusions about populations (Yin, 2018).

The following section provides a more comprehensive account of the psychobiographical study approach. Firstly, the relevant definitions and descriptions are presented, followed by an overview of the field's developmental trends and its practice within the South African context. Subsequently, the value, including the criticisms of the case study design and the psychobiographical approach, are presented.

4.3 Psychobiographical Research

Psychobiography is a field of study also referred to as psychological biography, personology, narratology, or life history (Cara, 2007). Recently, there has been an increasing acceptance among methodologists of the qualitative and archival research methodologies commonly used in psychobiography (Ponterotto, 2014, 2015). Furthermore, recent psychobiographies published by various psychiatric professionals have garnered positive

reception from both the scientific community and the general public (Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005a). Psychobiography and its related concepts are explored and discussed next.

4.3.1 Psychobiography Defined

According to Mayer and Kőváry (2019), psychobiography is a qualitative and idiographic research approach that utilises psychological theories and models systematically and explicitly when writing biographies and examining the life history, activities, and personality traits of historically significant individuals. Furthermore, psychobiography is described as a methodology that provides a rich understanding of individual lives (Saccaggi, 2015). On the contrary, psychobiography can be differentiated from biography by its application of psychological theory to interpret and understand the life of the subject under investigation (Ponterotto, 2017). Therefore, biography is predominantly descriptive and seeks to answer *what* questions, whereas psychobiography is more interpretive and explanatory in nature rather than seeking to answer *why* questions. Thus, both methodologies strive to provide answers to inquiries, including (a) how the lifespan of an individual can be fully understood (Howe, 1997; Runyan, 1984), (b) how one explains the most efficient methods to study the trajectory of an individual's lifespan over time (Howe, 1997; McAdams, 1988, 1994), and (c) how some children develop into highly skilled, remarkably resourceful, and productive adults (Howe, 1997; Simonton, 1994).

Researchers in the fields of psychology and biography have shown great interest in the lives of enigmatic and controversial individuals (Howe, 1997; McAdams, 1988, 1994). However, it was only in the early 20th century that psychological concepts began to be overtly applied in biographical texts, intending to present psychological interpretations of the subject's life. This fostered a mutually beneficial, albeit somewhat tense, connection between psychology and biography (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005, 2010). Simonton (2003) stated that the psychobiographical approach typically involves four main

components: (a) a qualitative analysis of a single case, (b) an idiographic and longitudinal method, (c) the objective of testing hypotheses, and (d) primarily focusing on a micro-analytical unit (an individual) through indirect assessment.

Psychobiography refers to the methodical application of psychological theories, particularly personality-related ones, to create a meaningful and enlightening narrative about an individual's life (McAdams, 1988). The purpose of psychobiography is to provide both a scholarly and psychological understanding of the person in question (Schultz, 2001b). The psychobiographical approach seeks to reveal elements of an individual's life (Schultz, 2001b) and comprehend their lives through the use of psychological notions, themes, and methods (Kramer, 2002). Psychobiography is deemed as a research approach that investigates personality development throughout a person's lifespan, using longitudinal life history data (Carlson, 1988). Van Niekerk et al. (2019) identified the following universal characteristics commonly found in psychobiography: (a) the predominant use of qualitative data; (b) a preference for studying an individual's entire lifespan rather than focusing on specific episodes; (c) the identification of subjects by name, in contrast to anonymous subjects in quantitative research; (d) reliance on biographical data collected by other researchers such as biographers and historians; (e) data collection not necessarily aimed at solving predetermined research problems, but rather driven by the historical and psychological significance of the information, which is inherently interesting and valuable.

Ponterotto (2015) offered a comprehensive explanation of psychobiography, defining it as "the intensive lifespan study of an individual of historic significance in their socio-cultural context using psychological and historiographic research methods and interpretations from established theories of psychology" (p. 2). The following section focuses on clarifying concepts strongly related to psychobiography.

4.3.2 *Psychobiography and Related Concepts*

4.3.2.1 Autobiography and Biography. Bertaux (1981) and Bromley (1986) defined an *autobiography* as a story of an individual's entire life or a specific portion of it, recounted by the person themselves. Fouché and Van Niekerk (2005) defined it as the process of recording an individual's life, or a specific element of it, narrated in the first person, where the individual is the author of their own life story (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005, 2010). It is necessary to acknowledge that autobiographies inevitably contain a degree of selection bias since authors tend to select the information that presents a favourable view of themselves to the reader (Becker, 2009; Panelatti, 2018). The author, thus, disregards everything unpleasant or insignificant to them, although the information can be highly intriguing to the reader (Becker, 2009; Panelatti, 2018). Autobiographies are often influenced by selection bias, resulting in the inclusion of the individual's subjective opinions on what they consider essential or fascinating about their own lives (Fouché, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005, 2010).

A *biography* is a story of a person's life written by a third party or observer, which may or may not require the subject's participation (Fouché, 1999; Nel, 2013). Typically, biographers (a) lack extensive psychiatric training, (b) approach their writing from a literary perspective (Chéze, 2009), and (c) the level of scientific diligence and accuracy in their work depends on whether they were able to obtain the cooperation of the subject (Fouché, 1999). A biographer documents and analyses real individuals' lives (Basson, 2020); thus, they have a similar interest in life stories as a psychobiographer. Both fields utilise a variety of sources, including autobiographies, diaries, pre-existing biographies, and personal correspondence, to gather biographical information (Bertaux, 1981; Bromley, 1986; Chéze, 2009). However, their analysis and understanding of this data vary (Fouché, 2015; Van Reenen, 2022). The main differentiation between psychobiographies and biographies lies in the fact that

psychobiographies prioritise the provision of scientific explanations based on theory (Basson, 2020; Cara, 2007; Ponterotto, 2015).

Schultz (2001b) contended that psychology and biography had commonalities that can form a mutually advantageous connection. However, this union can be riddled with tension (Elms, 1994). The primary differentiating characteristic between a biography and a psychobiography is the explicit utilisation of psychological theory to analyse and understand the individual being studied. In a psychobiography, psychological theory is prominently used, whereas, in a biography, a more historical, intuitive, and subjective approach is taken to comprehensively understand the subject (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; McAdams, 1988; Ponterotto, 2015). Nevertheless, biography and psychobiography share significant similarities, as both thoroughly examine an individual's life and rely on rigorous research methods to gain insight into that life (Ponterotto, 2015).

4.3.2.2 Life Stories, Life Narratives, and Life Histories. *Life stories* refer to the stories that individuals select to recount about their own lives and specific experiences using their own words; thus, life stories are entirely subjective (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). The research methodology centres on collecting life narratives or stories to analyse these autobiographical accounts (Fouché, 2015; Knight, 2019; Saccaggi, 2015). *Life narratives* can be defined as the act of sharing an individual's personal experiences and events using their own words (McAdams, 2010). These accounts of life experiences offer psychologists a distinctive opportunity to acquire a holistic understanding of an individual's existence and the social environment in which it takes place (Hugo, 2023; Knight, 2019). *Life histories* are primarily constructed from life narratives. However, they are augmented with additional data from many sources to establish an unbiased layer of knowledge, creating a comprehensive life history (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Moreover, Bromley (1986) defined life history as a scientific process of reconstructing and interpreting the most significant and influential

episodes in an individual's life based on the most reliable evidence. Life histories encompass the following qualities: (a) their objective is to understand similarities among various individuals, in contrast to psychobiographies which focus on the uniqueness of an individual life (Rosenwald, 1988), (b) they gather both subjective and objective information from multiple sources (McAdams, 2006; Yin, 2018), and (c) they seek to identify common patterns and relationships across many lives to gain a thorough understanding of the group (Bromley, 1986; McAdams, 1994; Segal, 2022).

McAdams (2010) defined a life story as a tool for the author to “how I came to be, who I am today, where I am going in the future, and what I believe my life means within the psychosocial niche” (p. 179). Therefore, the subjective stories of individuals about particular parts of their personal experiences (Etherington, 2009), such as family, friends, society, work, cultural, and ideological resources (McAdams, 2010), make up life stories. The life history method necessitates deliberate efforts to logically explain an individual's development within their cultural context, focusing on their personal experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). The life history approach necessitates intentional attempts to conceptualise an individual's development in the context of their cultural environment, focusing on their personal experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Unlike biographical or autobiographical writers, researchers who compile a life history prioritise a reliable interpretation of the subject's experiences over the creative aspects of the story (Becker, 2009; Knight, 2019). A single case design is typically used in the context of performing a life history, specifically for conducting comparative biographical studies of subjects (Fouché, 1999; McAdams, 1988). Life history study typically portrays cultural and societal narratives in individuals' life stories, as viewed through sociological and social-psychological lenses (McAdams, 1988). The life history method possesses three primary advantages: (a) it provides a comprehensive account of the subject's entire life course, enabling the reader to gain indirect insight into the subject's

experiences, (b) it generates hypotheses that can be empirically tested in subsequent studies, and (c) it facilitates comparative analyses of multiple life histories, clarifying phenomena such as personality types and behavioural processes (Basson, 2020; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Panelatti, 2018).

Marshall and Rossman (1989) elaborated on the life history method, highlighting its emphasis on the value of an individual's story and its contribution to a larger whole, like pieces of a 'mosaic'. This method exhibits significant interdisciplinary connections and attracts the interest of researchers in fields where the two main approaches to life history research are (a) psychobiography and (b) the therapeutic use of recollection as a method in the course of life review writing (Bertaux & Kohli, 2009; Nel, 2013). Psychobiographical research and life narratives employ biography, story, and narrative as a framework to investigate human development (Basson, 2020; Pawelec, 2021).

4.3.2.3 Psychohistory, Historical Psychology and Historiography. The ambiguity surrounding the distinctions between psychohistory and psychobiography (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Ponterotto, 2014) stems from the conflicts that arise between the two fields of study: psychology and history (Runyan, 1988b). *Psychohistory* is an academic field that interprets historical events through the lens of psychological theory, including significant cumulative and formative influences on the life course and psychological development (Fouché, 2015; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019; Van Reenen, 2022). According to Pozzuto (1982), the maturation of psychohistory enabled researchers to fill the void in their comprehension of sociohistorical processes and understanding of the individual. Runyan (1984) further elaborated on this notion by classifying psychohistory into two primary subdivisions: group psychohistory (investigating the attributes of groups) and individual psychohistory (encompassing psychobiography). As such, psychobiography can be regarded as a constituent element of the more extensive field of psychohistory (Fouché, 2015;

Ponterotto, 2014; Ponterotto et al., 2015). Presently, it stands as the largest subfield within psychohistory (Fouché, 2015).

Historical psychology studies the history of psychological theories, concepts, and phenomena and conceptualises psychology as a historical science (Fouché, 1999, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Runyan, 2003). The concept of *historiography* refers to formulating historical explanations by employing diverse historical data sources (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). Moreover, this data is assessed to investigate historical events and reconstruct significant explanations for them (Berg, 1995). An additional distinction can be made by specifying that psychohistory is concerned with the psychological dimensions of a given situation, as opposed to its historical aspects (Itzkowitz & Volkan, 2003). Nevertheless, psychohistory remains inherently interdisciplinary, representing a collaboration between the fields of psychology and history (Belzen, 2010; Segal, 2022).

4.3.2.4 Personality Assessment and Psychobiography. Although both personality assessment and psychobiographical research examine personality throughout one's life and in social contexts, they do so from distinct perspectives (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Fouché (1999) defined *personality assessment* as measuring and evaluating lives in progress. The distinction between the two fields is rooted in the fact that psychobiography does not require the concept of prediction (Alexander, 1990). On the contrary, it exhibits an interest in examining the issue of comprehension, enabling researchers to monitor human development in a manner that transcends the limited scope of clinical case studies (Alexander, 1990; Basson, 2020; Nel, 2013). The researcher examines the narrative of a subject's whole (and mostly concluded) life in psychobiography (Alexander, 1990; Van Os, 2007). Nonetheless, personality assessments analyse, evaluate, and quantify the individual through psychological tests and measurements to understand the factors influencing behaviour. For instance, unique psychological traits, moral principles, identity, worldview, and thought processes are all potential influences

(Cervone, 2004; Cohen & Swerdlik, 2005). The field of research known as the psychobiographical approach is constantly evolving and developing (Kőváry, 2011). The subsequent section aims to provide the reader with an understanding of these trends.

4.3.3 *Psychobiographical Research Trends*

Human beings demonstrate a natural propensity for storytelling through several platforms, including folk tales, myths, pantomimes, and motion films (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 1999; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; McAdams, 1994). These stories demonstrate people's ability to create narratives reflecting their history and anticipating their personal and societal futures (Elms, 1994). Throughout history, individuals have expressed a natural inclination to construct psychologically rooted life narratives of captivating individuals (Schultz & Lawrence, 2017).

The documentation of psychological insights on individuals' lives extends back to ancient Greek writers such as Xenophon and Thucydides, and later, Plutarch's profiles of Aristides and Themistocles (Schultz, 2001a), might also be considered significant precursors of modern psychobiography. The four Gospels, which document the life of Jesus and the writings of the Buddha, demonstrate the innate human need to create psychological depictions of remarkable and compelling personalities (Schultz, 2001a). During the Middle Ages, there was a consistent and ongoing popularity of hagiographies of Christian saints. *Hagiography* pertains to biographical accounts that were intended to provide moral guidance and glorify the subjects being studied (this practice was particularly prevalent in ancient Egypt, Babylonia, and Syria) (Elms, 1994; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; McAdams, 1988; Meissner, 2003).

In the Victorian era, the highly praised testimonials often overlooked the subject's vulnerabilities, fantasies, emotions, and cravings (McAdams, 1988). According to McAdams

(1988), Lytton Strachey, a biographer known for his books on notable Victorian characters like Cardinal Manning and Florence Nightingale, was considered the pioneer in deviating from the dominant 19th-century practice of idealising biographical subjects. In his biographical writings, Strachey employed psychological principles to study and illuminate the hidden and frequently more sinister realities beneath the facade of greatness (McAdams, 1988). He is frequently acknowledged (and criticised) for shifting the biographer's objective from being a deferential eulogist to becoming a psychological surgeon (McAdams, 1988). However, McAdams argued that Strachey's rebellion may be deemed harsh and remarked that his work frequently bordered on character assassinations.

Although there have been previous mentions of psychology in historical works, the connection between biography and psychology was officially established in the 20th century (Runyan, 2003). This occurred with the publication of Sigmund Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood* in 1910, which is widely regarded as the first academic psychobiography (Carlson, 1988; Kőváry, 2018; Schultz, 2001a, 2001b; Van Niekerk et al., 2019) and a momentous work in the advancement of qualitative analysis (Simonton, 2003). With his 1910 publication, Freud sought to rectify the prevailing trends of pathography and hagiography by highlighting the importance of exercising caution in avoiding the idealisation or mockery of one's subject (Schultz, 2001a, 2001b).

In his work of *Da Vinci*, Freud presented a set of guidelines about the methodology for psychological life writing, which he ironically failed to adhere to (Schultz, 2001b). The guidelines stipulate that (a) one must refrain from pathographising or idealising the subject, (b) avoid constructing arguments based on a single cue, and (c) exercise caution when drawing conclusions from limited evidence (Elms, 1988). Although Freud made methodological faults and other earlier works in the field, his work is widely considered the most significant (Runyan, 1988a). *Da Vinci* was not the sole focus of his psychobiographical

research. Additionally, Freud undertook psychobiographical investigations on several historical personalities, including Moses and Fyodor Dostoevsky (Schultz, 2001a). However, the majority of Freud's written works focused on clinical case studies (Schultz, 2001a). After Freud's research, several psychobiographies were written, mostly examining artists and employing psychoanalytic theory to comprehend the creative intellect (Kőváry, 2011; Saccaggi, 2015). The Freudian era of psychobiography made significant contributions to the field by stressing (a) the importance of having a thorough theoretical understanding of psychology and applying it to the study of historical figures, as well as (b) establishing a stronger connection between the fields of history and psychology (Ponterotto, 2015).

An account of the development of psychobiography in the 20th century, which began with Freud's essay on Da Vinci, is presented by Runyan (1988a). The early works conducted in the 1910s and 1920s involved examining many individuals, such as Socrates, William Shakespeare, Giovanni Segantini, Richard Wagner, Margaret Fuller, Martin Luther, Edgar Allan Poe, Abraham Lincoln, and Samuel Adams. During the 1930s, psychobiographies were written about notable individuals, such as Alexander the Great, Moliere, Tolstoy, Goethe, Sand, Coleridge, Rousseau, Poe, Nietzsche, Napoleon, Caesar, and Darwin (Anderson, 1978). In the 1940s, the number of psychobiographies produced decreased due to World War II (1939-1945). Only two were published during this time: one about King George III in 1941 and another about Adolf Hitler in 1943 (Kőváry, 2018). This shift occurred because research during this period began to prioritise nomothetic, experimental, and quantitative methods, placing greater focus on using larger samples, obtaining generalisable data, and deconstructing individuals into specific, measurable components such as attitudes, cognitions, behaviours, and feelings (Elms, 1994; Ponterotto, 2015; Runyan, 2005).

Nevertheless, a change in focus led to a resurgence in the creation of psychobiographies in the 1950s, as this period saw the emergence of studies on notable

figures, such as Beethoven, Jonathan Swift, Woodrow Wilson, and Lewis Carroll (Kőváry, 2018; Runyan, 1988a). Erik Erikson's psychobiographical research on Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958) and Mahatma Gandhi (Erikson, 1969) was highly praised; it is widely recognised as influential in the field. These studies have become exemplars of the development of the psychobiographical approach (McAdams, 1988; Pietikainen & Ihanus, 2003). According to Runyan (1988a), starting in the 1960s, there was an increase in the number of psychobiographies written about famous individuals, including artists, singers, authors, scientists, religious leaders, and political leaders. Social scientists typically focused on political or historical personalities as their subjects, whereas humanistic scholars examined creative artists, and psychologists analysed the pioneers of their particular field (Carlson, 1988). Ponterotto (2014) proposed that this trend persists, as psychobiographical subjects are still selected from these groups. The number of publications on psychobiographies had a substantial rise in the early 1960s, which was further accelerated in the 1970s, with a total of 617 psychobiographies published in the United States and Europe during this period (Runyan, 1988a). The popularity of psychobiography continued to grow, and in 1988, the *Journal of Personality* devoted an entire issue to essays on life narratives and psychobiography (Schultz, 2001b, 2005a). In the 1990s, there was a significant resurgence of interest in psychobiography, as observed by Kőváry (2011); this period also observed a growing popularity of idiographic personality research (Barenbaum & Winter, 2013).

Following the publication of these works, numerous personality psychology textbooks began incorporating psychobiographical methods. Psychobiographical research benefits from its multidisciplinary nature, as evidenced by contributions from various fields such as adult personality, lifespan development, and life history research in psychopathology (Fouché, 1999; McAdams, 1994; Simonton, 2003). These contributions have greatly enhanced the study of lives in psychobiography (Fouché, 1999). The *Handbook of Psychobiography*, edited

by Schultz, was released in 2005. Schultz (2005a) stated that psychobiographical research had not made enough progress because (a) academic psychologists tended to prefer rigorous methods and abstract universal problems, and (b) there was also a lack of formal training for psychobiographers (Runyan, 1984; Schultz, 2005a). This resulted in a lack of attention towards idiographic scholarship and a decrease in the amount of psychobiographical research conducted at academic psychology institutions during this period (Runyan, 1984; Schultz, 2005a). However, there is now a shift occurring in this trend (Schultz, 2013). Although psychobiographies are less prevalent than quantitative approaches, formal training in this field has become more widespread, particularly in the United States. This trend is driven by the efforts of national and international scholars to contribute more to the field (McAdams, 2006; Schultz, 2013).

From the early 1900s to the 1930s, “Freudian psychoanalysis served as the chief theory underlying psychobiographical investigation” (Ponterotto, 2017, p. 255). Significant changes were made in psychobiographies in the second half of the 20th century. These changes included moving away from relying solely on one theoretical model and involving psychologists not oriented toward psychoanalysis. Nevertheless, contemporary methodology in psychobiography indicates the use of several psychological theories (Hugo, 2020), with the application of psychoanalytic theory being particularly prominent in the field’s evolution. Because Freud and his followers viewed psychobiography as a form of applied psychoanalysis (Runyan, 2003), it has traditionally been viewed as the primary theoretical framework for psychobiography (Carlson, 1988; Schultz, 2001a; Welman, 2020).

While psychobiographers continue to rely on Freud and Erikson’s theories, they might enhance their understanding by incorporating the insights of Post-Freudian and Post-Eriksonian theorists, like Otto Kernberg, Heinz Kohut, and Donald Winnicott (Anderson & Dunlop, 2019). Psychologists who do not follow the psychoanalytic approach maintain that

focusing on a single theory in psychobiographical studies is limiting (Ponterotto, 2015; Schultz, 2005b). According to this group of scholars, the complexity and diversity of human beings cannot be sufficiently understood using a single theoretical framework (Ponterotto, 2015; Schultz, 2014). The difficulty increases when studying historical personalities who lived many years before the researcher, as theories are always influenced by the socio-cultural and historical context in which they were developed (Anderson, 1981; Ponterotto, 2014, 2015, 2017). Utilising numerous theories enhances the depth and breadth of understanding in psychobiography, as evidenced by the widespread application of diverse psychological theories in contemporary practices. These psychobiographies aim to improve the precision and thorough examination of prominent individuals' lives by incorporating integrated theoretical frameworks. Psychobiography, an interdisciplinary field of study (Mayer & Maree, 2017), has gained traction since researchers in this field now rely on well-established psychological theories, rigorous historical research methodologies, and increased ethical awareness (Ponterotto, 2015). This aids in enhancing the calibre and thoroughness of psychobiography, a constraint frequently encountered by the methodology (Ponterotto, 2014). These works aim to improve the credibility and influence of psychobiography in the field of psychology and other fields by using more advanced scientific methodologies and emphasising ethical research practices (Ponterotto, 2015). The evolution of psychobiography has resulted in a more diverse and distinct self-perception (Runyan, 1988a) as it gained popularity among scholars from other fields (Carlson, 1988; Mayer & Maree, 2017). Psychobiographical researchers encompass a wide range of professionals, including personality psychologists, psychoanalysts, historians, sociologists, anthropologists, occupational therapists, political scientists, psychohistorians, literary critics, and experts in religion, education, music, the arts, and scientific history (Cara, 2007; Runyan, 1988a). Thus, the field of psychobiography consists of a large and diverse group of researchers.

There is a noticeable trend in counselling towards using various methods (Hays et al., 2016), as seen in the growing interest in qualitative research methods such as case studies and psychobiographical approaches (Du Plessis, 2017; Ponterotto, 2014, 2017; Schultz & Lawrence, 2017). Kőváry (2011) argued that the field of psychology is currently experiencing “a renaissance of psychobiography” (p. 739). The claim is supported by Barenbaum and Winter (2013), who saw a contemporary rebirth in the study of individual lives (Ponterotto, 2014). Ponterotto (2017) asserted that Kőváry’s (2011) statement is further corroborated by the swift global dissemination of psychobiographical research carried out by diverse mental health practitioners across multiple fields (Barenbaum & Winter 2013; Du Plessis 2017; Fouché 2015; Kasser 2017; Ponterotto 2014, 2015; Schultz 2005c, 2014). Moreover, contemporary psychobiography can utilise any type of organised or structured psychological theory (Hugo, 2020). Furthermore, psychobiography has started incorporating theories from cognitive, developmental, social, and abnormal psychology (Runyan, 1988a), expanding across several subfields within psychology (Ponterotto, 2014). The growing interest in narrative techniques is seen in multiple domains of psychology, including cognitive, social, developmental, cross-cultural theory, personology, and psychotherapy (Howard, 1991; McAdams, 1988). According to Elms (1994), psychobiography has the potential to provide significant advantages for the field of psychology. Psychobiography has the potential to address particular challenges in psychology by focusing on the study of personally significant events rather than statistically significant ones (Elms, 1994). By examining important individual cases, psychobiography can generate new theories and ideas for the field (Kőváry, 2018, p. 7).

Psychobiography should integrate additional theories from positive psychology, as this has the potential to have a positive influence on individuals and societies to “provide guidance orientation by giving positive and constructive examples of role models and on how

to conduct one's life balanced with purpose and meaningfulness" (Mayer & May, 2019, p. 155). Mayer and May (2019) maintained that utilising positive psychology frameworks and theories in psychobiography is beneficial for comprehending positive human functioning. Furthermore, psychobiography has the potential to make valuable contributions not just to the field of psychology but also to other specialised areas within psychology, such as career development (Mayer, 2019).

The popularity of psychobiography is growing among counsellors and psychologists across all specialised areas (Du Plessis, 2017; Fouché, 2015; Kőváry, 2011; Ponterotto, 2017). Recent articles, such as the special section on psychobiography in *The American Psychologist* in 2017, provide evidence of this (Du Plessis & Du Plessis, 2018). Another work is the special edition on psychobiography authored by Du Plessis and Du Plessis (2018) in the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology*, which aimed to draw attention to emerging scholarship in the field of psychobiography (Fouché et al., 2018; Latilla & Kramer, 2018; Mayer & Maree, 2018). Additionally, a special issue of the *Journal of Personality* in 2023 (Volume 91 Issue 1) focused on psychobiographies of social change agents. The articles contained within this issue encompass a wide range of contemporary psychobiographical research methods and theoretical perspectives, including contributions aimed to advance the field by exploring frameworks and methodologies that are anti-racist, LGBTQ, and indigenous (Adler & Singer, 2023; Hugo, 2023). Recently, *The Psychobiographer's Handbook: A Practical Guide to Research and Ethics* (Ponterotto, 2024), and *Psychobiography: In Search of the Inner Life* (Anderson, 2024) have also been published, further contributing to the field of psychobiography.

This demonstrates the current significance and practicality of psychobiography, especially within the field of psychology (Du Plessis & Du Plessis, 2018). Psychobiography is currently experiencing a period of growth and innovation, as evidenced by recent

comprehensive works such as *New Trends in Psychobiography* (Mayer & Kőváry, 2019), *Psychobiographical Illustrations on Meaning and Identity in Sociocultural Contexts* (Mayer et al., 2021), and *Beyond Weird: Psychobiography in times of transcultural and transdisciplinary perspectives* (Mayer et al., 2023). Moreover, in a recent special issue in Europe's *Journal of Psychology* titled 'Creating a meaningful life: Psychobiographical investigations' by editors Mayer et al. (2021) added the phenomenon of psychobiography's burgeoning state. Psychobiographical investigations were an attractive study option during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mayer (2021) conducted a psychobiographical study on Albert Camus, specifically examining existentialism. The study demonstrated the significance of such studies at times of adversity, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The study also emphasised the significance of theoretical psychobiography and its practical use in addressing difficult current challenges using existentialist positive psychology theories (Mayer, 2021, 2022).

This section discussed the development and increasing prominence of psychobiography as a research field, which has attracted significant national and international attention. The works of various authors such as Elms (1988, 1994, 2007), Kasser (2017), Mayer and Kőváry (2019), Mayer et al. (2022), Mayer et al. (2023), Ponterotto (2015, 2017), Runyan (1997), and Schultz and Lawrence (2017) have contributed to this area of study. In addition to its global popularity (Fouché, 2015; Mayer & Maree, 2017; Van Niekerk, 2007), psychobiography is thriving as a discipline within South Africa, to the extent that the country is considered a leading academic hub in this field (Basson, 2020; Ponterotto, 2015; Mayer et al., 2021; Van Reenen, 2022). The next section is focused on psychobiography within the South African context.

4.3.4 Psychobiography in the South African Context

Psychobiographical profiling is a widely recognised and utilised research method and theoretical approach in South Africa (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Van Niekerk, 2007; Van Niekerk et al., 2016). In 1939, South African Cornelis Jacobus Langenhoven was the subject of the first academic psychobiographical study in South Africa (Fouché, 2015; Van Niekerk, 2007). In 1960, Burgers concluded an additional autobiography devoted to the poet Louis Leipoldt of South Africa. In 1978, as part of Van Der Merwe's doctoral research, a psychobiographical work was finalised concerning Ingrid Jonker, an additional South African poet (Fouché, 2015; Van Niekerk, 2007). Manganyi published a psychobiographical study on the renowned South African painter Gerard Sekoto in 1996, approximately 20 years after the research conducted on Ingrid Jonker (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Fouché conducted a psychobiographical study on General Jan Smuts in 1999 as part of his doctoral research. This study laid the foundation for a multitude of academic psychobiographies at tertiary education institutions, including Rhodes University (RU) and Nelson Mandela University (NMU) (Van Niekerk, 2007).

At the turn of the century, the discipline of psychobiographical research in South Africa began to flourish, following a period of gradual development. Psychobiographical studies have been conducted on a wide range of individuals, including personalities from around the world (Van Niekerk, 2007). Various regional autobiographies examined different facets of the lives of individuals who played influential roles during the apartheid era in South Africa (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). For instance, scholarly investigations have been conducted on anti-apartheid activists Steve Biko (Kotton, 2002), Alan Paton (Greeff, 2010), and Bram Fischer (Swart, 2010). Furthermore, psychobiographical research has been conducted on apartheid-era statesmen's lives, including that of Hendrik Verwoerd and B.J. Vorster (Claasen, 2007; Hugo, 2020; Vorster, 2003).

A systematic review of psychobiographical research in South Africa from 1995 to 2004 was performed by Fouché et al. (2007). The review elucidated local trends that were prevalent throughout that time frame. According to the review, the most widely used theory was Levinson's model (Levinson, 1986), which was followed by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963) and the Five-Factor Model (Digman, 1990). The current study's application of Adler's theory of Individual Psychology to Houston's life may contribute novel insights and theoretical frameworks to the field of psychobiographical research in South Africa. Additionally, the review underscored the fact that the overwhelming majority of psychobiography subjects were White males, with Sekoto and Biko being the only Black subjects of the era. Mother Theresa and Helen Martins were the only women investigated in that era (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Fouché et al., 2007). Furthermore, it is worth noting that the majority of regional psychobiographies published during that time were conducted as components of postgraduate research projects, with South African political figures comprising the majority of the subjects selected (Fouché et al., 2007).

The psychobiographical approach has gained academic institutionalisation due to its incorporation as a critical research focal area in numerous local psychology departments (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Knight, 2024). The increase in postgraduate master's and doctoral degrees earned in this field of study indicates that South African academic institutions have rekindled their interest in psychobiography. At present, a considerable number of South African universities, including the University of the Free State (UFS), University of Johannesburg (UJ), Nelson Mandela University (NMU), and Rhodes University (RU), engage in the production of academic postgraduate psychobiographies (Fouché, 2015; Hugo, 2020; Knight, 2024). A compilation of South African psychobiographies at the master's and doctoral levels is presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2*South African Master's and Doctoral Level Psychobiographies*

Subject	Researcher	Degree and Year	University
Cornelis Jacobus Langenhoven	Burgers, M.P.O.	M.A. (1939)	WITS
Louis Leipoldt	Burgers, M.P.O.	DLitt. (1960)	WITS
Ingrid Jonker	Van der Merwe, L.M.	PhD. (1978)	UFS
Jan Christiaan Smuts	Fouché, J.P.	DPhil. (1999)	UPE
Helen Martins	Bareira, L.	M.A. (2001)	UPE
Bantu Stephen Biko	Kotton, D.	M.A. (2002)	UPE
Balthazar John Vorster	Vorster, M.S.	M.A. (2003)	UPE
Marika de Klerk	Kretzmann, L.	M.A. (2003)	UPE
Salvador Dali	Shankland, T.	M.A. (2003)	UPE
Johannes Balthazar Vorster	Vorster, T.	M.A. (2003)	UPE
Wessel Johannes (Hansie) Cronjé	Warmenhoven, A.	M.A. (2004)	UPE
Mother Teresa	Stroud, L.	DPhil. (2004)	UPE
Albert Schweitzer	Edwards, M.J.	M.A. (2004)	UPE
Diana Spencer	Oosthuizen, K.	M.A. (2004)	UPE
Cornelis Langenhoven	Jacobs, A.	M.A. (2005)	UPE
Karen Horney	Green, S.	M.A. (2006)	RU
Wessel Johannes (Hansie) Cronjé	Warmenhoven, A.	PhD. (2006)	RU
Aileen Wournos	Gouws, J.	M.A. (2006)	UPE
Christiaan Barnard	Van Niekerk, R.	M.A. (2007)	SUN
Ray Charles	Biggs, I.	M.A. (2007)	RU
Hendrik Verwoerd	Claasen, M.	M.A. (2007)	NMU
Jim Jones	Vermonti, S.	M.A. (2007)	NMU
Melanie Klein	Espinosa, M.	M.A. (2008)	RU
Herman Mashaba	McWalter, M.A.	M.A. (2008)	UJ
Ted Bundy	Meyer, S.	M.A. (2008)	NMU
Isie Smuts	Smuts, C.	M.A. (2009)	NMMU
Helen Keller	Van Genechten, D.	M.A. (2009)	NMMU
Jeffrey Dahmer	Chéze, E.	M.A. (2009)	NMMU
Emily Hobhouse	Welman, C.	M. Soc. (2009)	UFS
Mahatma Gandhi	Pillay, K.	M.A. (2009)	NMMU
Kurt Cobain	Pieterse, C.	M.A. (2009)	NMMU
Ralph John Rabie	Uys, H.	M.A. (2010)	NMMU
Ernesto "Che" Guevara	Kolesky, C.	M.A. (2010)	NMMU
Frans Martin Claerhout	Roets, M.	M. Soc. (2010)	UFS
Alan Paton	Greeff, M.	M. Soc. (2010)	UFS
Paul Jackson Pollock	Muller, T.	M.A. (2010)	NMMU
Vincent van Gogh	Muller, R.	M.A. (2009)	NMMU
Christiaan de Wet	Henning, R.	Ph.D. (2010)	RU
Bram Fischer	Swart, D.K.	M. Soc. (2010)	UFS
Desmond Tutu	Eliastam, L.M.	M.Soc.Sci (2010)	UFH
Brenda Fassie	Gogo, O.	M. Soc. (2011)	UFS
Olive Schreiner	Perry, M.	PhD. (2012)	UFS
Winston Churchill	Moolman, B.A.	M.A. (2012)	NMMU
Friedrich Nietzsche	Booyesen, D.D.	M.A. (2012)	NMMU
John Wayne Gacy	Pieterse, J.	M.A. (2012)	NMMU
John Winston Lennon	Kitching, P.H	M.A. (2012)	NMMU
Francis Bacon	Kerr, N.	M.A. (2012)	NMMU
Josephine Baker	Eckley, S.	M.A. (2012)	NMMU
Rev James 'Jim' Jones	Baldwin, G.A.	M.A. (2013)	NMMU
Martin Luther King	Twaku U.	M.A. (2013)	NMMU
Ellen Kuzwayo	Arosi, Z.	M.A. (2013)	NMMU
Helen Martins	Mitchell, D.	M.A. (2013)	RU
William Wilberforce	Daubermann, B.P.	M.A. (2013)	NMMU

Subject	Researcher	Degree and Year	University
Helen Suzman	Nel, C.	Ph.D. (2013)	UFS
Beyers Naude	Burnell, B.	Ph.D. (2013)	UFS
Steve Jobs	Ndoro, T.	M.B.A. (2013)	RU
Antwone Fischer	Wannenburg, N.	M.A. (2013)	RU
Michael Jackson	Ruiters, J.	M.A. (2014)	RU
Richard Tenton Chase	Nel, H.	M. Soc. (2014)	UFS
Martin Luther King	Pietersen, S.	M.A. (2014)	NMMU
Steve Jobs	Moore, N.	M.A. (2014)	NMMU
John Henry Newman	Mitchell, G.P.	M.A. (2014)	NMMU
Roald Dahl	Holz, T.	PhD. (2014)	UFS
Pope John Paul II	Pillay, K.	PhD. (2014)	NMMU
Glenda Kahlenberg	Connelly, R.E.	PhD. (2014)	NMMU
Woodruff & Hinckley	Saccaggi, C.F.	D. Lit. (2015)	UJ
Winston Churchill	Human, S.C.	M.A. (2015)	UNISA
Charlize Theron	Prenter, T.	M.A. (2015)	RU
Marie Curie	Roets, E.	M.A. (2015)	RU
Bashar al-Assad	Kerrin, C.K.	M.A. (2015)	UJ
Brand Pretorius	Harwood, C.S.	M.Comm (2016)	NMMU
Steve Jobs	Du Plessis, R.	M. Soc. (2016)	UFS
Temple Grandin	Wannenburg, N.	PhD. (2016)	RU
Robert Hansen	Rogers, C.	M. Soc. (2016)	UFS
John Lennon	Osorio, D.	M. Soc. (2016)	UFS
Milton Erickson	Ramasamy, K.	PhD. (2017)	NMMU
Ellen Johnson Sirleaf	Manana, S.	M.Com (2017)	NMMU
John Wayne Gacy	Coetsee, E.	PhD. (2017)	UFS
Freddy Mercury	Louw, D.	M. Soc. (2017)	UFS
Coco Chanel	Verwey, L.	M.A. (2018)	UJ
Amy Winehouse	Hoque, A.	M.A. (2018)	UJ
Arnold Schoenberg	De Bruin, G.	M. Soc. (2018)	UFS
Joan Rivers	Nel, W.	M. Soc. (2018)	UFS
Clive Staple Lewis	Oosthuysen, G.	M. Soc. (2018)	UFS
Corrie Ten Boom	Counihan, D.	M.A. (2019)	UJ
Robert Mugabe	De Jagaer, E.	M.A. (2019)	UJ
Foucault	Subermoney, N.	M.A. (2019)	UJ
Sylvia Plath	Panelatti, A.	PhD. (2019)	UFS
Ingrid Jonker	Rust, B.	M. Soc. (2019)	UFS
Sol Plaatje	Welman, C.	M. Soc. (2020)	UFS
Eugene Nielen Marais	Hugo, Q.	M. Soc. (2020)	UFS
Philip Kindred Dick	Basson, M.	PhD. (2020)	UFS
Frida Kahlo	Joubert, L.	M. Soc. (2020)	UFS
Elie Wiesel	Grindler, Y.	M.A. (2021)	UJ
Jane Austen	Botha, T.	M. Soc. (2021)	UFS
Gertrude Bell	Van Reenen, K.	M. Soc. (2022)	UFS
Andrei Chikatilo	Segal, M.	M. Soc. (2022)	UFS
Joe Slovo	Vorster, T.	M. Soc (2023)	UFS

Note. Adapted from Knight (2023). Communicated to Prof Paul, J.P. Fouché in 2023, after an analysis was done by Prof Zeldia Knight from UJ.

The list demonstrates that the majority of academic psychobiographies done in South Africa have occurred within the last 10 years. However, this is not a complete list as it does not include postgraduate Psychobiographies completed in 2024. The *South African Journal of Psychology* has published a considerable number of articles on psychobiography, coinciding with the rise in academic institutions' psychobiographical research (Fouché & Van Niekerk,

2010). Similarly, a special edition of the *Journal of Psychology* in Africa was devoted to the field of psychobiography, with Fouché (2015) serving as the guest editor. Similarly, in August 2018, a special edition of the *Indo-Pacific Journal of Phenomenology* was published, combining psychobiography and phenomenology, with Carol du Plessis and Graham du Plessis as guest editors (Van Niekerk et al., 2019).

The increasing prevalence of psychobiography in South Africa can be attributed to the following factors: (a) the practical benefit its methodology provides in postgraduate degree programmes; (b) the migration of psychobiographical research supervisors to different local universities; (c) the academic establishment of psychobiography as a recognised research field; (d) the necessity for more theory-driven research; (e) the acknowledgement of notable South Africans; and (f) the incorporation of the Positive Psychology perspective into psychobiography (Fouché, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

Given the considerable attention given to psychobiography on a national and international level, it is unsurprising that numerous scholars have acknowledged its merits (Carlson, 1988; Du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 1994; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Kőváry, 2011, 2018, 2019; Mayer, 2017; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Mayer et al., 2023; McAdams, 1988, 1994; Ponterotto, 2012, 2014, 2017, 2018; Runyan, 1984, 1988a; Schultz, 2005a). Following this, an overview of the value of psychobiographical research is provided.

4.3.5 Value of Psychobiographical Research

In numerous ways, psychobiography has advanced the field of psychology (Schultz, 2005a). It is a pragmatic and thoughtfully designed teaching tool that offers numerous advantages to aspiring psychology students (Kőváry, 2011, 2018). Kőváry (2018) argued that the implementation of this approach “could alleviate some major intellectual contradictions between university training and clinical practice, and it could also contribute to the

development of psychology as a rigorous science” (p. 1). By conducting an examination of life narratives and attaining an understanding of human behaviour (Kőváry, 2011), the case study method provides psychology students with the opportunity to develop profound insights into the individuals under investigation while also nurturing their empathetic capabilities and self-awareness (Kőváry, 2011), which are fundamental qualities for effective psychologists. Additionally, counsellors who are already established in their professions can benefit from psychobiography as a tool for professional development (Ponterotto, 2017). Psychobiographies have the potential to offer a comprehensive and all-encompassing analysis and elucidation of the subject in their totality, contributing significantly to the knowledge of the human condition (Fouché, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Nel, 2013; Saccaggi, 2015). Furthermore, psychobiography serves as a framework for confirming, refuting, and refining established psychological theories and is therefore driven by theory (Carlson, 1988; Schultz, 2005a). More precisely, the advantages and contributions of using the psychobiographical approach are evident in five areas, which are discussed next.

4.3.5.1 The Uniqueness of the Individual Case within the Whole.

Psychobiographical research is valuable because it offers in-depth insights into individual lives (Saccaggi, 2015). This has been considered a significant advantage by some scholars in the field, as it emphasises the uniqueness and individuality of the subject (Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1988a). Psychobiographical research has a *morphogenic* nature, which involves studying the unique patterns in an individual’s personality (Elms, 1994), permitting the researcher to thoroughly analyse and provide a comprehensive account of the subject (Hugo, 2020; Human, 2015). Hugo Münsterberg introduced the idiographic/nomothetic distinction to psychology in 1898 (Hurlburt & Knapp, 2006), establishing himself as a key figure in this field. The *idiographic* approach emphasises the unique characteristics of an individual case, while the *nomothetic* approach aims to identify general laws and apply

psychological findings to a broader population. This approach is commonly used by positivists and statisticians (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Hermans, 1988; Hevern, 1999). The idiographic approach focuses on the (a) uniqueness of individuals, (b) the organisation of human processes, and (c) the identification of patterns in individual lives that combine to transform a case into an intelligent narrative (Chéze, 2009; Fouché, 2015). However, the conflict between the nomothetic and idiographic approaches has faced significant criticism because the binary classification fails to adequately explain the individuality of a person as a whole (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005, 2010; Schultz & Lawrence, 2017). Münsterberg, Gordon Allport, and William Stern all advocated for integrating both the idiographic and the nomothetic approaches in psychological science (Hurlburt & Knapp, 2006). Allport sought to address this inconsistency by employing the term “morphogenic” (Elms, 1994). He enhanced the field of personality theory, particularly trait theory, by incorporating the idiographic/nomothetic distinction and significantly elevating the discussion surrounding this distinction (Hurlburt & Knapp, 2006).

According to Schultz (2001b), examining a single life history allows one to delve into the intricacies, abundance, and subtleties of an individual’s lived experience, thereby reconnecting with the field of psychology. He defined psychobiography as a radical remedy for the shortcomings of psychology, such as reductionism, triviality, irrelevance, and scientism (Kőváry, 2011, 2019; Schultz, 2001b). Psychobiography enhances psychological theory by presenting it in a more relatable human context, allowing for a deeper understanding of one another. By gaining a deeper comprehension of others, one consequently enhances one’s understanding of oneself (McCarron, 2017). Schultz (2005b) argued that psychobiography provides insights into the uniqueness of the subject. This is significant because the selected individuals, by one’s increased understanding of them, can offer exceptional value. “These are the figures who define the limits and the architecture of

the human mind, in all its horror or magnificence. We must know them because to know them is to know ourselves” (Schultz, 2005c, p. 4). Psychobiographical research is often considered the preferred method for studying individuals of great significance or importance (Segal, 2022). Furthermore, investigating the factors that led to failures in individual lives is emphasised as a contributing element of psychobiography. Such studies can lead to the creation of interventions in education and psychology that promote human growth and improve the quality of life (Kőváry, 2011). Ultimately, multiple scholars emphasise that examining individual lives provides insights into the wide range of human personality traits and enhances the evolutionary and adaptive capacities of human beings (Howe, 1997; Ponterotto, 2015; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013a).

4.3.5.2 The Socio-Historical Context. It is impossible to isolate individuals from their environment. Psychobiography seeks to comprehend the subject within its overall context, in addition to offering a distinctive and holistic description of the subject (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Mayer & Van Niekerk, 2024). This enables a greater understanding of the subject and offers an in-depth examination of how cultural influences have impacted the subject’s psychological development (Carlson, 1988; McAdams, 1994; Panelatti, 2018; Runyan, 1984). Thus, psychobiography is commonly classified as a form of transhistorical and cross-cultural research (Ponterotto, 2014). In order to obtain an appropriate framework of reference for interpreting the significance of specific behaviours and actions, the psychobiographer aims to examine the historical and social context of the subject (Mayer & Van Niekerk, 2024). The researcher can gain a deeper understanding of the subject’s socio-historical context and the impacts it has had by utilising life history material, which emphasises the cultural and subcultural effects on development (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Ponterotto et al., 2015). Additionally, it provides the researcher with a more comprehensive contextual framework to illustrate the socio-historical family history and

socialisation processes of the subject (Basson, 2020; Coetsee, 2017). McAdams (1994) noted that theorists, including Henry Murray (1893-1988), Alfred Adler (1870-1937), and Erik Erikson (1902-1980), argued that capturing a life in its historical context is the most effective method. Because theories are invariably constrained by the socio-cultural and historical period in which they were developed, this difficulty is exacerbated when examining historical figures who may have lived decades or even centuries before the researcher (Anderson, 1981; Ponterotto, 2014, 2015, 2017). Fundamentally, the psychobiographer is required to develop expertise in the political science, history, cultural anthropology, and sociology of the relevant era (Mayer & Van Niekerk, 2024; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019). Subsequent psychobiographers stand to gain as well since psychobiographical training for students instils in them a foundation in conventional psychological theories and historical knowledge, fostering the growth of research capabilities and underscoring the significance of socio-cultural-historical contexts in comprehending the experiences of individuals (Basson, 2020; Elms, 1994; Fouché, 2015; Ponterotto, 2015). Therefore, by comprehending the socio-cultural and historical milieu of Whitney Houston's era, one can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the external influences that contributed to the formation and progression of her personality. This, in turn, will paint a holistic picture that facilitates a more profound comprehension of her development when viewed through an Adlerian lens.

4.3.5.3 Process and Pattern over Time. According to Hugo (2020), psychobiography is generally a non-invasive method for the study of deceased individuals. By having complete access to the subject's life course, the researcher can identify and delineate recurring patterns of human behaviour and development throughout the subject's entire life. Therefore, by analysing processes and patterns in the context of time, the psychobiographical method can be utilised (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Segal, 2022). This is beneficial because the researcher is examining the entirety of the subject's life course, as

opposed to just fragments (Carlson, 1988; Welman, 2020). This is feasible when the researcher focuses on a person's entire life, allowing for a thorough account of their development from birth to death (Basson, 2020; Hugo, 2023). Adopting a longitudinal approach provides a deeper understanding of the individual's personality and how it functions in different situations. This approach provides a holistic and cohesive depiction of personality development over time and personality in action, permitting the potential for theory development within psychobiographical research (Alexander, 1990; Fiske, 1988; Schultz & Lawrence, 2017).

4.3.5.4 Subjective Reality. The psychobiographical approach utilises phenomenological and hermeneutical frameworks to enable the researcher to describe and express the subjective reality, inner experiences, thoughts, and emotions of the research subject more effectively (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Knight, 2019). Subsequently, this fosters the formation of empathy and understanding towards the subject, culminating in creating a captivating and eloquent autobiography (Runyan, 1984; Schultz, 2003). This level of deep understanding serves as the foundation for crafting an emotionally engrossing and evocative narrative of the life of the subject (Chéze, 2009; Kőváry, 2019). Moreover, a psychobiography contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject because it significantly emphasises the subject's inner motives (Itzkowitz & Volkan, 2003; Ponterotto, 2017).

4.3.5.5 Theory Testing and Development. Conducting a psychobiographical study offers researchers a safer and ethically sound approach to formulating hypotheses and testing new theoretical guidelines (Carlson, 1988; Fouché, 2015; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). Although theory development or critique does not constitute the principal objective of psychobiographical research, it does emerge as an unavoidable consequence. Consequently, by employing Adler's theory, this study can provide an evaluation of the theory's utility and

propose several hypotheses for future studies (Saccaggi, 2015). Case research relies heavily on theory for the following reasons: (a) it directs the identification of objectives and design in data collection; (b) it provides guidance for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of case data within the framework of theoretical concepts; and (c) it serves as a template for generalisation (Yin, 2018). Hypotheses that are formulated based on speculations derived from a solitary case study have the potential to be validated on a more extensive population (Schultz, 2005c). This is advantageous because it provides psychobiography with a context within the broader domain of personality research and has the potential to inspire the formulation of theories by scholars investigating specific phenomena or themes (Nel, 2013; Ponterotto, 2014; Saccaggi, 2015). Kramer (2002), for instance, suggested that a psychobiography could be particularly beneficial in the study of suicide. Through a psychobiographical examination of the lives of individuals who have taken their own lives, a researcher can construct an understandable narrative of an unfinished life (Kramer, 2002). He added that psychobiography is an appropriate research methodology due to its sensitivity to the particularities of each case (Kramer, 2002).

The main objective of psychology is to further fundamental personality theory, and in contrast to the limitations of clinical, longitudinal research, examining individual personality development through a psychobiography is a far more viable approach (Carlson, 1988; Ponterotto, 2014, 2015). Thus, it is a valuable tool for the production of knowledge. Life history materials provide an optimal environment for formulating and evaluating fundamental personality theories (Carlson, 1988; Panelatti, 2018). Furthermore, by judiciously selecting materials, researchers can examine various socio-historical contexts, circumvent the complexities associated with obtaining informed consent, and obtain a level of consensual validation that extends well beyond clinical case studies (Carlson, 1988). Furthermore, the psychobiographical approach provides the chance to assess the applicability of contemporary

psychological theories and concepts (Mayer, 2017; Nel, 2013). The process of generalising from a particular case to a larger theory is referred to as *theoretical generalisation* (Yin, 2018). In cases where a particular construct of a theory fails to adequately account for psychological phenomena, it is possible to modify or reevaluate the concept or theory. In such situations, a psychobiographical study may be utilised to temporarily validate or invalidate specific aspects of the theory (Schultz, 2005c).

This section underscored several of the primary contentions put forth by advocates of psychobiography. However, these perspectives have been criticised due to the considerable ambiguity surrounding the investigation of lives in mainstream psychology (Mayer & Maree, 2017; Rosenwald, 1988). The overall psychobiographical endeavour has been deemed unsatisfactory by critics (Runyan, 1984, 2005). The following section discusses the main criticisms that have been directed against psychobiography.

4.3.6 Critical Analysis of the Psychobiographical Research Design

Many scholarly articles have discussed the problems regarding the study methodologies and assumptions commonly present in current psychobiographies (Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005b). The majority of criticisms have been directed against psychobiographies that were poorly conducted. Belzen (2010), however, contended that the presence of poor psychobiographies does not negate the valuable insights that well-executed psychobiographies offer to study. Schultz (2005a, 2005b) emphasised that poor psychobiographies should serve as a cautionary signal for researchers to avoid certain errors. Addressing the challenges and limitations associated with psychobiographical research will advance the “science of psychobiography” (Ponterotto, 2015, p. 2).

The progress of psychobiography as a scientific endeavour has also been hindered by methodological limitations (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013a). For example, psychobiography

is frequently challenged for its questionable rigour (Houghton et al., 2013). Furthermore, it has faced criticism for excessive dependence on qualitative research methods (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019) and an overreliance on single theoretical models, notably the psychodynamic approach, which tends to obscure the complexities of an individual's life. The approach also places significant emphasis on 'originology' (Erikson, 1969) by assigning excessive value to particular early childhood experiences. Furthermore, it tends to be pathography-oriented, focusing on mental illness and/or character faults while neglecting the positive attributes of individuals (Erikson, 1969). Psychobiography's idiographic aspect has faced criticism for impeding the generalisability of its findings (Burnell, 2013; Eisenhardt, 1989; Runyan, 1984; Winter, 2015; Yin, 2018). The aforementioned concerns are discussed in greater depth below.

4.3.6.1 Methodological Limitations and Concerns. The progress of psychobiography as a scientific pursuit has often been impeded by its methodological limitations and questionable rigour (Houghton et al., 2013; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019). The absence of a systematic framework for data collection has been regarded as lacking scientific rigour (Edwards, 1998). Insufficient rigour and disregard for a methodical research approach, coupled with the incorporation of unclear evidence or subjective perspectives, might result in multiple potential interpretations of the conclusions (Yin, 2018). This results in a discernible lack of accuracy and precision regarding psychobiographical methods (Schultz, 2003). Thus, there are reservations regarding the internal and external validity of the study methodology due to the existence of alternative explanations, subsequently constraining the capacity to generalise the research findings (Burnell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Runyan, 1982, 1984). Runyan (1988b) contended that the argument regarding the generalisability of psychobiographical findings is inconsequential since

psychobiographers are inclined to choose subjects who had a significant impact on history or had a notable interest for the researcher.

The process of deriving meaning from biographical data and the methods employed in this process have also faced criticism. Qualitative research is sometimes critiqued for its impressionistic and subjective nature (Cypress, 2017; Hugo, 2020). This encompasses the idea that qualitative findings mostly depend on the researcher's subjective perspectives of what they consider to be significant or insignificant (Bryman, 2012, 2016). The unstructured data collection method used in psychobiography has been criticised for being unscientific, which also hampers its effectiveness (Hugo, 2023).

Psychobiographers typically depend on the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. During the process of discovery-oriented research, the psychobiographer relies on emerging facts to guide them, particularly when planning the next stages of the inquiry (Ponterotto, 2014). Data collection and analysis occur simultaneously in this paradigm. To improve the quality and reliability of their findings, psychobiographers must incorporate the concept of rich description. This means providing clear, logical, and extensive examples of how they collected, analysed, and interpreted the data (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). However, due to the absence of standardised processes and the unorganised manner in which data is collected, researchers frequently have to depend on their resourcefulness. Consequently, accurately reproducing the findings becomes nearly impossible (Hugo, 2023; Walsh, 2015). The technique has also faced criticism for failing to empirically examine the ideas it generated (Burnell, 2013; Runyan, 1984; Winter, 2015). When a researcher acts hastily and fails to adhere to a systematic research procedure or allows ambiguous evidence and biased views to influence the results, the research findings may become challenging to interpret (Yin, 2018). This can result in inaccuracies and a lack of precision in the psychobiographical methodology. This leads to diminished internal and external validity as alternative

explanations impede the generalisation of study findings (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Ponterotto, 2005; Runyan, 1982, 1984).

Runyan (2003) emphasised that the validity of psychobiography is frequently challenged because it relies on retrospective and introspective data, as well as subjective reports. The excessive dependence on historical data in psychobiography often puts it at a disadvantage due to the weaker trustworthiness of this sort of data compared to more often used sources (Simonton, 2003). According to Simonton (2003), historical records may have missing or incorrect information that might negatively impact any analysis, regardless of whether it is qualitative or quantitative in nature. Consequently, the psychobiographer must take extra steps to organise and examine their material, rendering psychobiography a notably intricate research undertaking. Thankfully, some authors (Du Plessis, 2017; Ponterotto, 2013a, 2015; Schultz, 2005c) have offered explicit guidelines on this procedure and recommended the most effective research methods. Thus, psychobiographers should acknowledge the presence of diverse data analysis techniques and recognise that the selected approach influences the character of the interpretation.

4.3.6.2 Reductionism. *Reductionism* is the tendency to describe the nature of a subject mainly based on childhood experiences, therefore overemphasising the influence of infancy on the development of personality and behaviour throughout one's life (Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 1984). This flawed practice is known as '*originology*', a word coined by Erikson (1969), which entails assigning excessive significance to specific early life experiences. Another concept associated with reductionism is the '*critical period fallacy*', which occurs when a study overturns the focus from the subject's development to a single pivotal moment in time (Runyan, 2019). Similarly, '*eventism*', which involves placing excessive importance on a solitary critical event in a subject's life as if indispensable for understanding the subject as an adult (Ponterotto, 2014), is akin to reductionism. Although

specific elements such as critical events and formative experiences contribute to the comprehension of the subject matter, they should not be the exclusive determinants in a psychobiography (Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 2019). As with psychoanalytically oriented psychobiography, researchers who approach their subject from a clinical-diagnostic perspective with the intention of pathographising are considered reductionistic (Elms, 1994; Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 1988b).

The reductionistic fallacy of an excessive emphasis on psychopathology, according to Kőváry (2018), could cause the researcher to overlook normalcy and originality. The objective of the psychobiographer is to simplify interpretations of the intricacies of human life; however, this is frequently met with excessive enthusiasm and inadequate self-control (Elms, 1994). Elms (1994) posited that the objective of modern Western psychology, founded on positivism, is focused on the “goal of reducing human complexities of thought and emotion to simplicities of cognition and neurology” (p. 11). As a result, psychology has veered towards reductionism, neglecting to provide exhaustive and comprehensive depictions of the lives of its subjects (Ponterotto, 2014, 2017).

4.3.6.3 Application of a Single Theory. Psychobiography is sometimes criticised for relying too much on qualitative research methods and for relying too heavily on singular theoretical models (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2013a). During the early 20th century, the field of psychobiography was closely intertwined with the psychoanalytic approach to the point where it was commonly referred to as “applied psychoanalysis” (Ponterotto, 2014, p. 81). According to Nel (2013), the prevalence of Freudian interpretations in psychobiography may be ascribed to psychoanalysis’s capacity to offer potential explanations for a wide range of emotional concerns fundamental to numerous individual life stories. Despite their widespread acceptance, the foundational elements of psychoanalytic explanations have undergone oversimplification and obsolescence (Elms, 1994). Furthermore, this has put an undue

emphasis on negative personality traits or attributes to adverse social consequences (Mayer et al., 2021). Internal validity is compromised in these types of psychobiographies as alternative explanations for human behaviour that do not involve psychoanalytic interpretations are possible (Ruiters, 2014). This criticism was also emphasised in Ponterotto's (2014, 2015) articles "*Best practices in psychobiographical research*" and "*Psychobiography's past, present, and future progress*". Psychobiographies that integrate psychoanalytic theories have faced criticism for potentially constructing interpretations upon inadequate evidence and theorising or reconstructing childhood experiences in cases where empirical evidence is scarce (Ponterotto, 2015). Fortunately, psychobiography has shifted its focus from psychoanalytic theories to other psychological perspectives over the past few decades (Androutsopoulou et al., 2019; Fouché, 2015; Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2005a). Current proponents of psychobiography, including Schultz (2014), argue in favour of employing more empirically validated frameworks. These frameworks consist of script theory (Tomkins, 1987), attachment style theory (Mikulincer et al., 2003), and the Big Five Personality Trait Model (Soldz & Vaillant, 1999). Utilising these theories as foundations for future psychobiographies would impose the same methodological restraints applied to other branches of research psychology. Although psychanalytic psychobiographies may offer insights and amusement, a considerable number of the conceptual frameworks that support these theories are not supported by empirical evidence (Ponterotto, 2015).

Pathologising biographies that account for the life of the subject have also been subject to rigorous criticism (Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; McAdams, 1988; Ponterotto, 2015). To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of their subjects' lives, psychobiographers are advised to incorporate positive psychology and character strength models into their analyses (Mayer, 2017; Ponterotto, 2014, 2015). Within the field of contemporary psychobiography, it is generally accepted that the selection of a theory should be predicated on its capacity to

most effectively emphasise the salient features of the subject's life that are beneficial to the psychobiographer (Du Plessis, 2017; Hugo, 2023).

4.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter commenced with a discussion of qualitative research as a methodology, followed by a review of case study research and its influential factors. Case study research is a methodical tool that concentrates on singular or multiple cases and encompasses all the shared characteristics of several case studies. An investigation was conducted to determine the various stages of the research process in case studies and to establish the specific process to be followed. Furthermore, the concept of psychobiography as a type of case study research was elucidated, and it was established that psychobiographies might employ either inductive or deductive methodologies in conducting case research. This chapter additionally presented the definitions and explanations of psychobiography and examined other concepts to avoid any potential confusion. The discussion revolved around the international advancement of psychobiography and the current patterns in psychobiographical research. Additionally, it was emphasised that psychobiography is a burgeoning research field in South Africa, gradually acquiring more traction within the local context. The psychobiographical research endeavour has demonstrated the advantages of this approach, such as enabling the examination of an individual's distinctiveness, exploring their subjective experience within their socio-historical context, and providing a comprehensive understanding of the processes and patterns in their life. Moreover, psychobiography has been demonstrated to be advantageous for formulating and testing theories. Finally, the critique directed towards the approach was addressed, encompassing concerns about its questionable rigour, inability to generalise the findings to a broader population, the tendency to reduce an individual's entire life to specific childhood experiences or pathology, and excessive dependence on a single theory. Furthermore, ideas

were briefly mentioned to circumvent the most prevalent criticisms. Chapter 5 provides the reader with a discussion of this study's research design and methodology.

Chapter 5: Research Design and Methodology

5.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter provides the reader with a description of the research design, methodology, and aims. It also includes an explanation of the sampling and selection process of the psychobiographical subject and psychological theory. Additionally, a discussion of the procedures utilised to collect, extract, and analyse the data is provided. The chapter concludes with an overview of how trustworthiness, reflexivity and bracketing, as well as the ethical considerations were addressed in this study.

5.2 Research Design and Methodology

The research design utilised in the psychobiographical study of Whitney Houston's life is described as a qualitative, longitudinal, single-case, morphogenic research design. The nature of this qualitative study is characterised as both exploratory-descriptive and descriptive-dialogic (Edwards, 1990). The study's exploratory-descriptive and descriptive-dialogic nature involved an in-depth exploration and description of the triangulated data on Houston's life history and biographical data on her life within a socio-historical context. This approach is commonly referred to as "thick description" (Denzin, 1989; Ponterotto, 2006, 2014). A single-case research design was utilised to facilitate an in-depth examination and comprehensive portrayal of the subject (Yin, 2018). The use of a single-case study approach facilitates the researcher in testing theoretical constructs by investigating an individual case. This can aid in theory development and the refutation of notions, as well as identifying and addressing limitations in the theory or model employed and establishing a sound understanding of constructs (Ponterotto, 2015; Yin, 2018). In this study, this design applied Adler's (1958, 1970) theory of Individual Psychology to diligently reconstruct the life of Houston, resulting in a coherent psycho-historical picture. Furthermore, the research design

was longitudinal, aligning with case study research principles. This approach involves describing and exploring the subject throughout their life to produce interpretations that illustrate consistent and inconsistent trends over time (Burnell et al., 2019; Fouché et al., 2014; Segal, 2022). Houston's psychobiography details her sociohistorical and biographical life from birth until her death, enabling interpretations of her behaviour and personality development with the constructs utilised in the study.

Psychobiographical research's qualitative-morphogenic nature enables a comprehensive description and interpretation of the subject using both nomothetic (i.e., general) and idiographic (i.e., specific) approaches (Burnell et al., 2019; Elms, 2007; Hugo, 2023; Runyan, 2019). Münsterberg's (1899) idiographic approach was used in this psychobiography to comprehend the uniqueness of Houston. Moreover, this psychobiography utilised a psycho-historical reconstruction of Houston based on an interpretivist-epistemological paradigm (Kőváry, 2011; Mayer et al., 2021; Ponterotto, 2014).

5.3 Research Aim and Objectives

Ponterotto (2015, p. 379) defined psychobiographical research as "the intense lifespan study of an individual of historic significance in socio-cultural context using psychological and historiographic research methods and interpreted from established theories of psychology". The primary aim of this psychobiography was to explore and describe the life of Whitney Houston through a comprehensive, life-spanning study employing Adler's (1929, 1952, 1956, 1958) theory of Individual Psychology. The exploratory-descriptive nature of the inductive approach utilised in this study is evident in the primary aim of this psychobiography, which entailed a comprehensive investigation and portrayal of the subject's life history and biographical data on her life within a socio-historical milieu through triangulated evidence in the form of "thick description" (Denzin, 1989; Panelatti, 2018; Ponterotto, 2014). A secondary objective of this psychobiography was to investigate the

relevance of the psychological theory to the study of Houston. The descriptive-dialogic nature of the deductive approach employed in this study is reflected in the secondary objective, which entailed assessing the psychobiographical research findings against the anticipated results of theoretical frameworks to validate or refute established theoretical constructs and propositions (Basson, 2020; Edwards, 1990; Fouché, 1999; Yin, 2018). This study used Adler's Individual Psychology theoretical constructs, including the inferiority complex, life task, lifestyle, social interest, striving for superiority, schema of apperception, and sense of inferiority. By employing the descriptive-dialogic approach, a discourse was initiated between the exploratory-descriptive results and the theoretical constructs and propositions of the implemented theory (Burnell, 2013; Chéze, 2009; Edwards, 1990; Hugo, 2020). The evaluation of the chosen psychological theory and its constructs was operationalised using *analytical generalisation* (Cavaye, 1996; McLeod, 2001; Yin, 2018). According to Yin (2018), analytical generalisation does not derive population-based conclusions from data but compares data to an existing theory (Yin, 2018).

5.4 The Psychobiographical Subject

According to Du Plessis (2017) and Kőváry (2019), the initial step in any psychobiographical study is to select the subject of the study. Psychobiography utilises purposive sampling instead of quantitative research methods that use random sampling of subjects (Kőváry, 2011, 2019; Ponterotto & Moncayo, 2018). Houston was chosen as the subject for this study through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which the researcher exercises discretion in selecting desired attributes or characteristics to be investigated and ensure the depth of data (Basson, 2020; Strydom & Delport, 2005). Elms (1994, p. 19) advocated, "Let your subject choose you", suggesting that psychobiographers base their selection process on the degree of enthusiasm they possess for a particular subject. When selecting a subject, several factors should be

considered, including the subject's contemporary, historical, or theoretical significance, the availability of sufficient information on the subject, and any ethical concerns that may arise, such as whether they are alive or deceased (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019; Saccaggi, 2015). Psychobiographical studies are largely influenced by the researcher's passion for the subject; thus, it is crucial to clarify one's motivations for selecting a subject (Erikson, 1974).

Ponterotto and Moncayo (2018) advised that psychobiographers must uphold a position of controlled empathy towards their subjects, refraining from idealising or vilifying them to prevent bias in the resulting psychobiography. In order to ensure the study's rigour and quality, it is necessary to acknowledge guidelines when choosing a subject (Elms, 1994, 2007; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Ponterotto, 2014; Runyan, 2019). The initial guideline is personal reflexivity, which involves the researcher's recognition of motivations for selecting a particular subject. Personal reflexivity is necessary to protect the study from potentially biased judgement by the researcher (Dodgson, 2019; Du Plessis, 2017; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019). The second guideline relevant to this psychobiographical study involves the notion of ambivalence, which Elms (1994, 2007) considered crucial in addressing potential subjectivity and bias. The notion of ambivalence refers to the coexistence of opposing attitudes or feelings toward a subject, which can create internal conflict and complexity in understanding an individual's motivations and actions (Elms, 2007). Elms (1994, 2007) emphasised that recognising ambivalence helps address potential subjectivity and bias by allowing researchers to present a more balanced and comprehensive view of their subjects rather than oversimplifying or pathologising their behaviours and experiences.

Although there are numerous advantages to selecting a relatively unknown subject, Mayer and Kőváry (2019) highlighted the potential challenges that may arise as a result. These challenges include (a) the gathering of a suitable pool of subjects from which the final subject could be selected and (b) the psychobiographer's judgement of the likelihood of

potential subjects adapting their life stories to the eugraphic approach. Additional recommendations from experts in the field involve assessing the degree of interest others may have in the chosen topic, formulating specific questions about the subject, and evaluating the educational significance of the psychobiography for educators, mental health professionals, administrators, and policymakers (Basson, 2020). Moreover, a significant guideline to adhere to is the ethical considerations related to a psychobiographical study (Du Plessis, 2017; Mayer & Kóváry, 2019; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019).

The American singer and actress Whitney Houston (1963-2012) was selected for this study based on her notable contributions to the music industry. The decision to choose Houston as the subject was partly based on the researcher's interest in music and celebrity lifestyle. Chapter 2 comprehensively described the biographical and historical data of Houston's life. Additionally, Houston was an eligible subject for a psychobiography for the following reasons:

- A literature review using EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, and KovsieCat indicated that Houston's life has not been the subject of any academic psychobiography. Therefore, the researcher believes that conducting a study of Houston's life would significantly contribute to the field of psychobiography.
- Numerous researchers in the field of psychobiography have underscored the significance of studying greatness and shedding light on the lives of extraordinary individuals (Elms, 1994; Howe, 1997; Ponterotto, 2015; Simonton, 1999, 2003). The researcher found sufficient information about Houston's life and career, indicating Houston's historic significance and suitability for a psychobiographical study.
- Du Plessis (2017) suggested that the theory chosen by the researcher should effectively describe the significant features of an individual's life in a psychobiography. The researcher selected Adler's (1958, 1970) Individual Psychology

since it was relevant to Houston's life. Adler's personality constructs, particularly the inferiority complex, apply to Houston's life, as demonstrated by her drug misuse. The strive for superiority is demonstrated through her creative endeavours, including singing and acting, to address her profound feelings of inferiority. Adler's (1958, 1970) personality construct of social interest can also be applied to Houston's life because of her strong focus on family and her significant contributions to society in music, acting, and philanthropy (Houston, 2013). In addition, Adler's theory is mainly, but not exclusively, based on Western constructs of human personality, which are relevant to studying Houston, who grew up and lived in Western society.

5.5 Data Collection

In psychobiography, identifying sufficient data on the subject is a crucial methodological guideline (Du Plessis, 2017; Hugo, 2023; Saccaggi, 2015). Despite the availability of translation tools and the internet, Ponterotto and Moncayo (2018) asserted that modern psychobiographers are still obligated to seek the most accurate sources regarding their subjects and the historical era and culture in which they existed. For this reason, the researcher utilised the information-system services of the SASOL Library at the University of the Free State, the World Wide Web, and the EBSCOhost search engine to locate and compile data sources. Collecting a significant amount of data from diverse sources is crucial for enhancing the accuracy of a study and decreasing the potential impact of misinterpretations, biases, or other inaccuracies on the results (Du Plessis, 2017; Schultz, 2014; Yin, 2018). The use of various data sources promotes the triangulation process of the study by facilitating the identification of converging lines of inquiry (Fouché, 1999; Willig, 2013; Yin, 2018). Moreover, it increases the research findings' credibility and transferability, guiding the selection of data supporting the same evidence regarding the subject (Hugo, 2023; Yin, 2018).

Generally, historical data can be categorised into two types: primary sources, which consist of documents produced by the subject itself, and secondary sources, which comprise works authored by others that also centre around the subject (Basson, 2020; Du Plessis, 2017; Saccaggi, 2015; Simonton, 2003). Diary entries, personal documents, interviews, recorded items, films, literary works, and autobiographies are all examples of primary sources (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Saccaggi, 2015). On the other hand, secondary sources consist of textbooks, second-hand reports, articles, biographies, oral histories, and hearsay (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Saccaggi, 2015). The data collected should comprise a combination of primary and secondary sources (Hugo, 2020). In addition, the data should possess characteristics that permit it to provide valuable insights into various psychological facets of the subject's functioning (Du Plessis, 2017; Saccaggi, 2015). Consequently, primary and secondary sources of data were collected to support this study. Moreover, the researcher intentionally incorporated a combination of primary and secondary sources, ensuring that all data was publicly available. According to Du Plessis (2017), the researcher must gather data on contextual factors such as social, political, religious, and historical influences that may have affected the subject's psychological development. Neglecting these factors could result in an inadequately developed psychobiography (Schultz, 2005c). This study included primary and secondary sources and information about Houston's socio-historical context (see Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Primary and Secondary Sources utilised in the study of Whitney Houston

Title	Author	Publication Date	Publisher/Journal	Genre	Source Type
Whitney Houston Interview	Houston, W. E.	1993	American Broadcasting Company	Interview	Primary

Title	Author	Publication Date	Publisher/Journal	Genre	Source Type
Whitney Houston Interview with Diane Sawyer	Houston, W. E.	2002	American Broadcasting Company	Interview	Primary
Whitney Houston Interview with Oprah Winfrey	Houston, W. E.	2009	The Oprah Winfrey Show	Interview	Primary
The Life and Death of Whitney Houston	Hudson, K.	2012	Hyperink	Biography	Secondary
Remembering Whitney: My Story of Love, Loss, and the Night the Music Stopped	Houston, C.	2013	Harper Collins	Biography	Secondary
Whitney: Can I Be Me	Broomfield, N.	2017	BBC UK	Documentary	Secondary
Whitney	Macdonald, K.	2018	Altitude Film Distribution	Documentary	Secondary
A Song for You: My Life with Whitney Houston	Crawford, R.	2019	Dutton	Biography	Secondary
Whitney Houston: As I Am	Bald, F.	2021	Entertain Me Productions	Documentary	Secondary
Didn't We Almost Have It All: In Defense of Whitney Houston	Kennedy, G.	2022	Abrams	Biography	Secondary
Whitney Houston: I Wanna Dance with Somebody	McCarten, A.	2022	Sony Pictures Releasing	Biographical Film	Secondary

5.6 Data Extraction and Analysis

Psychobiographies offer broad perspectives into an individual's life by examining their social, cultural, and historical contexts (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 2005; Schultz, 2014). This is frequently caused by the substantial amounts of data required to reach data saturation, which occurs when no new data is acquired during data collection (Hugo, 2020; Segal, 2022). According to Hugo (2023), managing a significant amount of data can be challenging for psychobiographers when it comes to analysing, extracting, categorising, and thematically integrating material. Thus, the researcher should acknowledge that including or excluding specific data may impact the type of psychobiography created (Du Plessis, 2017). Qualitative analysis typically involves analysing textual narratives to identify emergent themes or constructions (Creswell, 2002). Basson (2020) argued that an advanced psychobiography involves extracting pertinent material and applying it to suitable theories. Themes and

constructions are identified from the narratives to comprehensively explain the subject's life (Alexander, 1990; Du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 2007; Runyan, 2019). Yin (2018) outlined general analytical strategies that may be implemented to achieve psychobiographical sophistication. Firstly, the analysis needs to be informed by the case study's research objectives and theoretical constructs. The aforementioned strategy was implemented by employing Alexander's (1988, 1990) indicators of salience to screen for salient or significant data that needed to be extracted from historical and biographical sources and then categorised. Secondly, a case description was formulated utilising a psycho-historical conceptual matrix. By employing these strategies, a psychobiographer can discern psychologically salient information amidst the vast quantity of gathered data and sources (Anderson & Dunlop, 2019; Basson, 2020; Saccaggi, 2015). The psychobiographer's progression from collecting all relevant evidence and sources to achieving a comprehensive understanding of the subject can be delineated through various strategies, as suggested by Schultz (2005, 2011, 2014), Runyan (1988, 2005, 2019), Alexander (1990, 2005), and Demorest (2005).

5.6.1 Evaluating Interpretations

Mayer and Kőváry (2019) posited that there are no definitive or universal approaches when determining how to interpret the data and sources collected by a researcher. Runyan (2005, 2019) supported the idea of choosing various interpretations and acknowledged that there is not one true interpretation. Nevertheless, there are multiple methods for determining which interpretations are significant. Runyan (2005) outlined criteria for evaluating explanations and interpretations, including (a) their logical soundness, (b) their comprehensiveness in addressing various puzzling aspects of the events in question, (c) their ability to withstand falsification tests, (d) their consistency with all relevant evidence, (e) their alignment with broader knowledge about human behaviour or the subject in question,

and (f) their credibility compared to other explanatory hypotheses (Basson, 2020; Hugo, 2023).

According to Basson (2020), logical soundness refers to the coherence between the story and interpretations, ensuring they are free of inconsistencies. The comprehensiveness or cogency of the results is referred to as persuasiveness (Cara, 2007; Schultz, 2005b, 2014). Additionally, the various sources should demonstrate data convergence by providing ample data to substantiate the diverse interpretations. Furthermore, a thorough and logical narrative structure is crucial in adjunct to having a large amount of data (Schultz, 2005b, 2014). Therefore, the interpretations and conclusions formed from the narrative should be logical and well-established. Instant coherence can be attained by the cogency, comprehensiveness, and structure of the narrative (Cara, 2007). Schultz (2005b, 2014) maintained that interpretations that have overcome the critique of experts on the subject should be regarded as valid. This is akin to the consensus that interpretations must be understandable to co-researchers, colleagues, and peers (Basson, 2020; Cara, 2007).

5.6.2 *Irving Alexander's Indicators of Salience*

Irving Alexander's (1988, 1990) indicators of salience aid the psychobiographer in arranging and prioritising data and sources collected, particularly evidence from personal interviews and first-person records (Ponterotto, 2014). Alexander (1988, 1990) developed his indicators by drawing from techniques in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis to identify key units that, with closer examination, provide insight into the fundamental aspects of an individual's personality (Hugo, 2023; Schultz, 2005b). The indications can be elucidated through means-end sequences and schemas, aiding the researcher in uncovering the subject's subjectivity of the world (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Panelatti, 2018; Welman, 2020). This study utilised Alexander's (1988, 1990) saliency indicators to analyse and present a detailed investigation of significant facts related to Houston. These nine indicators include (a)

primacy, (b) frequency, (c) uniqueness, (d) negation, (e) emphasis, (f) omission, (g) error or distortion, (h) isolation, and (i) incompleteness. Utilising Alexander's saliency indicators improved the trustworthiness of this study by allowing for analytical generalisation by comparing data, propositions, and constructions of the psychological theory (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Yin, 2018). The following sections will describe and illustrate the nine indicators and their application to Whitney Houston.

The *primacy* indicator posits that early events significantly shape personality development (Basson, 2020). When writing, especially in psychobiographies, paying attention to the data presented at the beginning of a text is crucial, as it may convey something important to the reader (Alexander, 1990, 2005; Schultz, 2011, 2014). In psychoanalytic thought, primacy is crucial, as therapists frequently use introductory sessions to guide subsequent ones. Thus, the psychobiographer considers early memories, initial experiences, and autobiographical introductory statements as crucial (Elms, 1994, 2007). An example of primacy in Houston's life is her earliest childhood memories, where she sang in the church and worked alongside her mother as she pursued her dream of becoming a professional singer (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018).

Frequency comprises recurring relationship patterns, scenes, themes, events, obsessions, conflicts, and means-end sequences (Alexander, 1990, 2005; Schultz, 2005b; 2014). Generally, increased data frequency signifies significance and can escalate to the point where it becomes obsessive (Hugo, 2020; Schultz, 2005b; Segal, 2022). Its importance is heightened by increasing the frequency or repetition of a significant thought. Contrary to expectations, frequently appearing themes may be regarded as repetitive, diminishing the researcher's consciousness or perceived significance of a given message (Elms, 1994). Although frequency is frequently conveyed via strong conscious value schemas, it may unveil less conscious sequential consistencies when analysed in conjunction with another

indicator of salience (Schultz, 2005b, 2014). When multiple units of materials or data can be isolated, the researcher emphasises frequent or repetitive sequences (Alexander, 1990, 2005). Houston continuously demonstrated determination in pursuing her goal as a professional singer, beginning in childhood and continuing through her youth and adulthood. Examples include her commitment to developing her vocal abilities from a young age and frequently collaborating with established musicians before her debut (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). Throughout her career, Houston remained involved in music, producing multiple albums, contributing to film soundtracks, and engaging in charitable work through music (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022).

Uniqueness applies to information that is unparalleled or distinctly singular, serving as the basis for the uniqueness indicator (Schultz, 2005b, 2014). The subjects themselves highlight the uniqueness as a framework for the unit of communication (Alexander, 1990, 2005). Uniqueness can be conveyed by deviations from spoken language, cultural expectations, and discrepancies in the subject's typical language, emotional expression, or behaviour (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Moreover, this indicator is evident when anticipated outcomes are replaced with unprecedented responses (Elms, 1994, 2007). It is crucial to consider the baseline used while applying the uniqueness indicator, particularly concerning cultural expectations and established standards (Alexander, 1990; Basson, 2020). Houston frequently defied racial and gender norms, breaking barriers for African American women in the entertainment industry (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). Notably, she became one of the first African American women to grace the cover of *Seventeen* magazine, a significant achievement during a time of limited representation (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). She also achieved unprecedented success as an African American woman in the predominantly White pop music genre, with her debut album becoming one of the best-selling albums by a female artist (McCarten, 2022).

The *negation* indicator is derived from Freud's work in 1957, highlighting the significance of repressed, unconscious material surfacing into consciousness, often concealed by unlikelihood or impossibility. This principle involves the person adamantly denying, often through vocal objections, factual information (Schultz, 2005b, 2014). Statements expressed negatively should be marked for additional research without immediately assuming their significance (Alexander, 1990). It is important to pay close attention when individuals deny certain aspects of themselves, as these denials may reveal hidden truths that they wish others to believe or want to believe about themselves. Houston often responded defensively or denied questions about her personal life, including the nature of her close relationship with Robyn Crawford, her struggles with drug use, and her tumultuous marriage with Bobby Brown (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2002).

The *emphasis* indicator sustains that a psychobiographer should deem a particular experience psychologically salient if a biographical subject goes to great lengths to emphasise it (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005b). However, Alexander (1988, 1990) cautioned that emphasised revelations from subjects do not inherently contain material worthy of investigation and that psychobiographers should avoid making automatic assumptions based on such information. Therefore, greater emphasis should be placed on more nuanced forms of emphasis that the subject may not overtly express but which are deemed significant by the psychobiographer. This can occur through underemphasis, overemphasis or misplaced emphasis (Alexander, 1990, 2005; Coetsee, 2017; Schultz, 2005, 2014). Overemphasis occurs when an ordinary or mundane concept is given an excessive amount of emphasis. On the contrary, underemphasis occurs when critical information is lightly highlighted or brushed over. Finally, misplaced emphasis occurs when the announced outcome is unrelated to the implied means. Therefore, an unwarranted emphasis on irrelevant details can result in a superfluous emphasis on a crucial occurrence (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Elms, 1994, 2007). An example of overemphasis

was the media's relentless focus on Houston's personal struggles, often sensationalised to the point of overshadowing her artistic achievements and philanthropic contributions (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013).

Omission can be defined as the exclusion of content that was expected based on logical and cultural expectations or because the subject matter suggests particular comparison standards (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994). Elms (1994, p. 246) coined the term "Sherlock Holmes rule" to describe the concept of focusing on omissions that may provide insight into unlocking the mystery surrounding a subject's entire existence (Panelatti, 2018). According to Alexander (1990, 2005), the most notable form of omission is not cognitive but rather affective. Thus, excluding affective experiences would necessitate the researcher to conduct additional research to identify the particular circumstances that give rise to these experiences, along with the consequences they entail (Schultz, 2005b, 2014; Segal, 2022). For example, Houston omitted information regarding the depth of her relationship with Robyn Crawford (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022).

Error or distortion refers to errors or flaws of judgment committed by the subject, frequently concerning people, time, and place (Schultz, 2005b, 2014). This indicator draws inspiration from Freud's (1938, 1957) writings, positing that numerous errors, including slips and distortions, are considered significant indicators of hidden motives. There are instances where the subject may become aware of the error, prompting the researcher to bring it to their attention (Alexander, 1990, 2005). Although these errors might otherwise go unnoticed, they ought to be regarded as significant psychological indications (Elms, 1994, 2007; Hugo, 2023; Schultz, 2005b). For example, Houston distorted public narratives around her marriage to Bobby by often portraying their relationship as loving and stable despite reports of conflict and domestic violence (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013).

Isolation was defined by Alexander (1990, p. 21) as instances in which the reader is compelled to question, “Where did that come from?”. The reader may distinguish a portion of the information that contrasts with the surrounding material during isolation (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Coetsee, 2017; Segal, 2022). This phenomenon was dubbed a “sore thumb” criterion by Schultz (2005b), who further suggested that investigating it could aid in comprehending unconscious content. Elms (1994, p. 247) argued that it was a “come again” moment, leaving the reader perplexed about why the isolated content surfaced then and how to interpret it in context. Isolation, a defence mechanism in psychoanalysis, entails isolating the connections between particular thoughts or behaviours and the rest of the subject’s life or other thoughts (Schultz, 2005b).

This defence mechanism aims to isolate an idea and remove its association with suppressed, unconscious content to prevent it from evoking memories that are preferred to be forgotten (Alexander, 1988; Schultz, 2005b). While a seemingly irrelevant association in a logically structured account of an experience may indicate that the subject is pondering something significant, Alexander (1988) cautions that more nuanced expressions of this phenomenon may go unnoticed because observers sometimes fill in the missing connections to understand a subject’s inconsistent communication sequences (Panelatti, 2018). Thus, for isolation to function as a reliable indicator for identifying and disclosing more profound significance, the researcher ought to re-establish the association between isolated concepts and the network of unconscious content they symbolise (Alexander, 1990, 2005; Schultz, 2005b; Welman, 2020). An instance of isolation occurred when, following her divorce from Bobby Brown, Houston was romantically linked to R&B singer Ray J (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). This relationship was unexpected and seemed at odds with her public image due to Ray J being significantly younger and known more for controversies (Kennedy, 2022).

Incompletion occurs when a subject starts telling a story but does not finish it or deliberately avoids mentioning specific details (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994). The subject may be conscious of this occurrence and choose to persist despite the potential emotional distress (Schultz, 2005b, 2014). Thus, incompletion might be viewed as a mechanism for avoiding feelings of anxiety and guilt (Basson, 2020; Hugo, 2023). Incompletion can occur when interruption disrupts the narrative flow or when the subject abandons a topic and returns to the initial train of thought (Alexander, 1990, 2005). Additional instances include incomplete artistic creations and periods of writer's block, which, in certain situations, demonstrate a form of incompletion that requires further examination (Schultz, 2005b). Houston frequently resisted fully addressing enquiries about her personal life, often sidestepping conversations or giving vague responses to avoid the subject (Houston, 2002).

5.6.3 Questioning the Data

Alexander's (1988, 1990) second strategy involves asking the data precise questions. The researcher approaches the data by formulating specific questions that align with the study's aim and objectives. This strategy aims to manage the growing volume of data by pinpointing particular questions relevant to the study's research objectives (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Du Plessis, 2017; Hugo, 2020). Du Plessis (2017) emphasised that the researcher's questions should always relate to specific parts of the subject's life. Additionally, the researcher should consider that the questions asked about the data are influenced by the psychological theory selected, as the questions may pertain to certain aspects of the chosen theory (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Du Plessis, 2017; Elms, 1994; Nel, 2013). The researcher in this study posed questions about the data relevant to Adler's (1929, 1958, 1970) theory. Alexander's (1988, 1990) guideline assisted the researcher in identifying and extracting data by answering specific questions derived from the theory, which revealed crucial information

about the subject being studied. For this study, the researcher analysed the gathered data about Houston's life with the following general questions:

1. "Which data sources in the collected material might help explore and describe Houston's psychological development across her lifetime?"

To address this question, the researcher conceptualised Houston's life history according to Adler's (1929, 1956, 1958) Individual Psychology theory, discussed in Chapter 3. Therefore, in accordance with the chosen theoretical framework, the researcher obtained data, thereby validating the exploratory-descriptive nature of the study.

2. "How will the researcher establish a comparative dialogue between the exploratory-descriptive data collected on Houston's life and the content of Adler's theory of Individual Psychology?"

To answer this question, the researcher applied analytical generalisation (Yin, 2018) by conducting a critical comparison between the data gathered pertaining to Houston and specific theoretical constructs of Adler's theory. Using the descriptive-dialogic method, the researcher conducted an informal test of the theoretical content comprising Adler's theory. These questions and Alexander's (1988, 1990) indicators of salience provided an understanding of the research aims, as well as the notions and constructs of the chosen psychological framework (Fouché, 1999; Hugo, 2020; Saccaggi, 2015; Yin, 2018). By employing Alexander's (1988, 1990) strategies, a methodical and reliable analysis of the data was possible. Yin (2018) utilised Alexander's methodology to extract, analyse, classify, and reassemble data in case studies. Moreover, Yin's (2018) suggested methodologies for case description corresponded with Alexander's (1988, 1990) model. Yin (2018) utilised two strategies: (a) data analysis based on theoretical constructs, methodologies, and aims, and (b) a case description.

The first strategy was achieved by utilising the psychological theory to identify and focus attention on significant data in the collected material. According to Yin (2018), to gain a deeper understanding of the study's objectives and the content of the psychological theory used, the researcher was required to ask questions that would yield salient information. This approach, accomplished through the application of Alexander's (1988, 1990) model, is known as *psychological anchoring* and was instrumental in sustaining the study's primary aim (Ponterotto, 2014). The second strategy focused on developing descriptive conceptual approaches to arrange and integrate data about Houston's life. Utilising a psycho-historical conceptual matrix helps organise and interpret important themes, making it a good descriptive method for this strategy (Fouché, 1999; Van Niekerk et al., 2019). The conceptual matrix utilised in this study will be further examined in the following section.

5.7 Conceptual Framework and Matrix

The researcher constructed and implemented a psycho-historical matrix in the present study, emulating the frequent use of data analysis matrices in psychobiographical research (Fouché, 1999). A psychohistorical matrix was constructed to classify the collected data, which functioned as a screening grid throughout the data analysis process (Hugo, 2020). The matrix comprises a system for categorising and reducing data, which aids in case conceptualization and data analysis (Perry, 2012; Yin, 2018). Furthermore, utilising the matrix facilitated the researcher's process of organising and structuring the collected biographical and archival data, as well as enabled the identification of psychologically salient information, which contributed to the systematic and meaningful interpretation of the data (Du Plessis, 2017; Mayer & Kőváry, 2019; Morrow, 2005).

A data analysis matrix was used in this study to organise the data based on the theoretical constructs of the psychological framework, which aided in data analysis. The matrix facilitated the organisation of vast amounts of data, offered a structure for categorising

data, and aided in revealing psychologically significant information (Huberman & Miles, 2002). The psycho-historical matrix (refer to Table 5.2) was developed in accordance with Adler's theory of Individual Psychology to classify data within the framework. The theoretical constructs of Individual Psychology, illustrated in the horizontal columns of Table 5.2, are schematically represented in correlation with the historical periods comprising Houston's lifespan, presented in the vertical columns. Individual Psychology's theoretical constructs consist of the following: inferiority complex, life task, lifestyle, social interest, striving for superiority, schema of apperception, and sense of inferiority (as discussed in Chapter 3). Houston's life spans five historical periods, commencing with her birth in 1963 and concluding with her death in 2012. These periods include *Early Childhood and Youth* (1963-1983), *Breakthrough and Fame* (1984-1991), *Marriage and Motherhood* (1992-1999), *Trials and Tribulations* (2000-2005), and *The Final Performance* (2006-2012). The conceptual matrix is presented below.

Table 5.2

A Psycho-historical Conceptual Matrix of the Historical Life of Whitney Houston and Alfred Adler's Theory of Individual Psychology

Historical Periods over the Life of Whitney Houston						
Adler's Individual Psychology: Theoretical constructs		Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983)	Breakthrough and Fame (1984-1991)	Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999)	Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005)	The Final Performance (2006-2012)
	Inferiority complex					
	Life task					
	Lifestyle					
	Social interest					
	Striving for superiority					
	Schema of apperception					
	Sense of inferiority					

5.8 Trustworthiness and Rigour

Qualitative research has traditionally utilised scientific methods, particularly those derived from quantitative methods, even though the validity and reliability of qualitative research have faced significant criticism (Anderson & Dunlop, 2019; Du Plessis, 2017; Fouché, 1999; Ponterotto, 2014). To address these concerns, trustworthiness and rigour are deemed an appropriate way to evaluate the professional standards and quality of the psychobiographical methodology (Segal, 2022; Yin, 2018). Trustworthiness and rigour are divided into four criteria for assessing quality in psychobiography and other qualitative research (Coetsee, 2017; Nel, 2013; Yin, 2018). These four criteria are credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Fouché, 1999; Gunawan, 2015). Firstly, credibility refers to the level to which a study may be trusted (Moon et al., 2016). It involves confirming that the data is accurately assessed and analysed to determine the credibility of the research (Maree, 2019). Transferability refers to the extent to which the results of a study can be applied to theory, practical applications, and future research (Moon et al., 2016). Furthermore, a study has transferability when the results can fit into other contexts, and readers can identify connections or similarities between the data and their own experiences (Yin, 2018). Confirmability pertains to developing suitable operational measurements for the constructs under investigation in the study (Yin, 2018). Confirmability focuses on researchers demonstrating that their findings are derived from the data and not influenced by personal biases (Hugo, 2020; Shenton, 2004). Lastly, dependability pertains to the degree to which a research study can regularly generate dependable results and conclusions (Ponterotto, 2014). Hugo (2020) noted that a study is considered dependable if it provides a clear and traceable decision-making process at each stage of the research, allowing another researcher to replicate the process and reach similar conclusions.

The researcher implemented the following strategies to improve the study's trustworthiness:

- The use of triangulation, including data and observer triangulation, enhances the study's credibility and confirmability.
- In-depth exploration of Houston's socio-historical and biographical data, together with the political, economic, and social factors that influenced her development. This aimed to address the study's credibility and confirmability.
- Enhancing the researcher's knowledge and understanding of Houston's socio-historical and cultural contexts by analysing relevant literature.
- Houston's functioning and development were analysed longitudinally and eugraphically, applying Adler's Individual Psychology theory to provide a holistic account of her existence.
- Implementation of a lifespan approach in which Houston's historical periods were considered.
- Improving procedural rigour by following established guidelines for organising data and utilising explicit operational measures, coding schemes, and a conceptual matrix to strengthen confirmability and dependability.
- Striving for analytical generalisation (Yin, 2018) over statistical generalisation to improve transferability.
- Reflexivity and bracketing (further discussed in the following section) were used to monitor subjectivity and reduce bias, thereby improving credibility.
- Acknowledgement that the findings are not conclusive but rather speculative, contributing to the existing body of information on Houston.

- Acknowledgement of the close relationship between methodological competence and ethical considerations in psychobiography, as suggested by Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017).

5.9 Reflexivity and Bracketing

Ponterotto and Reynolds (2019, p. 69) highlighted, “researchers themselves are the instruments of research”. Psychobiographical inquiry, like all qualitative research, is predicated on the researcher’s active participation, which must be acknowledged at every stage of the process (Du Plessis, 2017; Ponterotto & Moncayo, 2018). This is especially evident in psychobiographical research, where maintaining an entirely neutral emotional stance is impossible for the researcher (Kőváry, 2011). To ensure an accurate interpretation of the subject, the psychobiographer must uphold a degree of objectivity and balance (Ponterotto & Moncayo, 2018; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). Moreover, according to the qualitative methodology, the researcher must reflect on the approaches and biases that influence their research (Medico & Santiago-Delefosse, 2014). Consequently, reflexivity constitutes a fundamental component of qualitative research (Stainton-Rogers & Willig, 2017). To mitigate subjectivity and bias, researchers are urged to engage in reflexive analysis regarding their assumptions, values, and beliefs, in addition to their personal history and political stances, as well as the potential influence that these may exert on the study (Morrow, 2005; Stroud, 2004; Willig, 2008, 2013). Willig (2013) identified two distinct categories of reflexivity: (a) epistemological reflexivity and (b) personal reflexivity.

Haverkamp (2005, p. 152) defined epistemological reflexivity as “professional reflexivity”, which refers to the heightened consciousness of one’s professional role and the ethical implications that arise from it. Thus, methodological competence, including experience, training, and knowledge, is a prerequisite for ethical and professional conduct in qualitative research, much like it is in psychological practice (Elms, 1994, 2007; Haverkamp,

2005; Hugo, 2023; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017, 2019). On the other hand, personal reflexivity pertains to the researcher's reflection regarding the potential influence of their personal beliefs, assumptions, values, interests, goals, political perspectives, and life experiences on the research process. This reflection aims to assist in managing subjectivity and bias during the study, given that such factors can hinder the achievement of an accurate understanding of the subject (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Hugo, 2020; Morrow, 2005; Willig, 2008). When selecting a subject for a psychobiography, the researcher needs to engage in personal reflexivity by acknowledging and clarifying their own motivations (Du Plessis, 2017; Mayer & Kóváry, 2019). The researcher can mitigate personal reactions to and concerning the assessment of the subject by engaging in personal reflexivity (Dodgson, 2019; Ponterotto, 2014). A method employed to guarantee personal reflexivity is bracketing, where the researcher records their own subjective experiences and personal responses to the subject and their life story (Ponterotto, 2014).

5.10 Ethical Considerations in Psychobiography

The value of adhering to the best ethical standards throughout the research process has been emphasised over the past decade (Ponterotto & Moncayo, 2018; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). Psychobiographies require clear and explicit ethical guidelines due to their unique ethical challenges, demanding the researcher's unwavering attention throughout the whole research endeavour (Du Plessis, 2017; Morrow, 2005; Ponterotto, 2014, 2015; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019). These ethical challenges include potential embarrassment to the subject, risks to privacy, concerns about obtaining consent, and harm to one's reputation (American Psychiatric Association & Hofling, 1976; Fouché, 1999). Additionally, psychobiographers must consider legal factors, including using privileged health records, confidentiality, and the right to privacy, even after death (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017, 2019). In the last decade, some psychobiographers have made progress in enhancing ethical standards in

psychobiography and have underscored the best ethical guidelines to adhere to (Ponterotto & Moncayo, 2018; Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017, 2019).

To ensure adherence to ethical principles, the researcher addressed ethical considerations both before and during the study of Houston. Firstly, a research proposal was submitted to the Departmental Research Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State and the Social Sciences Research Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities. Ethical clearance to continue with the research project was granted by the General Human Research Ethics Committee (UFS-HSD2023/1187). Furthermore, the researcher took measures to ensure that the data collection was handled responsibly. Ponterotto (2014, 2015) recommended that psychobiographies should be conducted on deceased individuals who have limited surviving relatives. However, he also cautioned the researcher to maintain the confidentiality and privacy of the deceased subject (Ponterotto, 2013, 2017). Subsequently, exclusively publicly available data was utilised, reducing the potential for privacy infringement or the disclosure of potentially sensitive information about Houston, her surviving family members, acquaintances, or colleagues. Consequently, this meant that there was no need to obtain informed consent (Burnell & Nel, 2021; Ponterotto, 2013), as the subject's reputation was not significantly at risk due to the use of publicly accessible "archival" information (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017). In addition to implementing data triangulation to enhance the credibility and dependability of the data, the researcher endeavoured to interpret the accessible information in a manner that was objective, careful, respectful, and transparent.

Although the Ethics Code for Psychological Writings (American Psychiatric Association, 2016) does not explicitly address the ethical considerations of a psychobiography, psychobiographical research is guided by several general ethical principles and standards (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2017, 2019). These ethical standards and general

principles consist of beneficence and nonmaleficence, fidelity and responsibility, integrity, justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of people (Mayer & Kőváry, 2019). Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017, 2019) developed a six-step ethical decision-making model centring on ethically significant moments in psychobiographical research. Later, this six-step model for making ethical decisions was expanded to a ten-step counsellor's guide that also comprised reflective questions for psychobiographers (Ponterotto, 2017). The researcher implemented the six-step ethical decision-making model proposed by Ponterotto and Reynolds (2017, 2019):

- The implementation of professional reflexivity resulted in increased awareness of ethical dilemmas that required appropriate resolution.
- Ethical dilemmas that arose were assessed in accordance with established principles and guidelines, such as methodological best guidelines (Elms, 2007; Ponterotto, 2014; Schultz, 2014).
- The researcher declined to collaborate with an interdisciplinary team, which the six-step model suggested as an option. Nonetheless, the researcher was under the guidance of a supervisor who assessed her results and participated in her supervision.
- The researcher determined the most suitable method for addressing ethical concerns by implementing trustworthiness, rigour, reflexivity, and bracketing.
- The researcher continuously examined the factors of trustworthiness, rigour, and reflexivity.
- Although debriefing was an option, it was not provided for enhancing the professional development of other professionals and students. This was because the study was archival in nature, and debriefing was deemed unnecessary.

5.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the research design, methodology, and primary and secondary objectives. The chapter additionally addressed the strategy of selecting the research subject, the chosen psychological theory, and the methods employed to collect, extract, and analyse the data. The indicators of salience developed by Alexander (1988, 1990), which were utilised to identify and extract valuable information from the collected data, were discussed, including the psycho-historical conceptual matrix (Table 5.2) to categorise the extracted salient data. The chapter concluded with a discussion on trustworthiness, rigour, reflexivity, bracketing, and ethical considerations in psychobiographical research.

Chapter 6: Research Findings and Discussion

6.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of Whitney Houston's personality development using Adler's (1929, 1930, 1958, 1982) theory of Individual Psychology. As discussed in Chapter 3, Adler's theoretical constructs were key to evaluating Houston's life. This enabled the researcher to achieve a psychological understanding of Houston's life within her socio-historical context by utilising Adlerian constructs and a psychobiographical approach. The chapter begins with a brief discussion of Houston's birth order and familial dynamics, followed by a description of the conceptual framework or matrix utilised in this psychobiography. The researcher employed a psycho-historical conceptual matrix (see Table 6.1) to structure and categorise Houston's biographical and historical lifespan data. Thereafter, the five historical periods of Houston's life (e.g., Early Childhood and Youth: 1963-1983, Breakthrough and Fame: 1984-1991, Marriage and Motherhood: 1992-1999, Trials and Tribulations: 2000-2005, The Final Performance: 2006-2012) were analysed using

Adler's theoretical constructs as discussed in Chapter 3 (i.e., the inferiority complex, life task, lifestyle, social interest, striving for superiority, the schema of apperception, and sense of inferiority). This chapter concludes with reflections and a brief overview of the crucial findings related to Adler's Individual Psychology theory as applied to Houston's biographical lifespan and historical periods.

6.2 Houston's Birth Order and Familial Dynamics

6.2.1 *Houston's Birth Order*

Adler (1929, 1930) believed that an individual's birth order was important to fully comprehend their development since it influences the personality of the individual (Eckstein & Kaufman, 2012). Nevertheless, he maintained that the individual's psychological interpretation of the birth order is more significant than the birth order itself (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Corey et al., 2021). Moreover, Adlerians posit that specific birth orders may correspond to particular behavioural patterns. Therefore, before examining Houston's life from an Individual Psychology perspective, the researcher deemed it essential to explain Adler's views of birth order and the potential influence that Houston's birth order may have had on the development of her personality throughout her lifespan. Houston was the youngest child in her family, with two elder brothers, Gary Garland and Michael Houston (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). According to Adler (1929, 1930), the youngest children perceive themselves as smaller and inferior, leading to a strong motivation to demonstrate their abilities to others. Furthermore, they frequently acquire a dependent lifestyle due to being too pampered. However, they tend to develop in extraordinary ways (Adler, 1958; Human, 2015). Adler (1927, 1952) classified the youngest children into two categories: (a) those who outperform their siblings in accomplishments and excel in all their endeavours, and (b) those who strive to be the most skilled family member but lack ability and self-esteem, primarily because of their competitive relationships with their older siblings. Consequently, the latter

category will go to great lengths to evade tasks and responsibilities, even though they still possess significant ambition (Adler, 1958; Boeree, 2006). Essentially, both categories of youngest children lack the quality of selflessness required to be a virtuous member of society (Adler, 1927, 1958).

The researcher believes Houston exhibited the first category (i.e., those who outperform their siblings in accomplishments and excel in all their endeavours). Houston possessed a great deal of talent, especially regarding her singing abilities (Bald, 2021; Hudson, 2012). She had a profound passion for singing and performing, demonstrating a desire to become a professional singer. This is evident from the fact that Houston began singing at a young age, joining the New Hope Baptist Church church choir in Newark at five years old (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Moreover, by the age of 12, she confidently declared her intention to pursue a professional singing career (Macdonald, 2018). Soon after making her decision, Houston began working closely with her mother while undergoing professional training (Houston, 2013; McCarten, 2022). However, the researcher believes that Houston's birth order increased the likelihood of her being pampered by her family throughout her childhood. Not only was Houston the youngest child in her family, but she was also the only daughter (Crawford, 2019). Houston was regarded as the baby of the family, a princess to her father and her mother perceived her as a sweet and innocent child (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). There was an incident when Houston experienced bullying from her peers at school, which resulted in her mother and brothers confronting them on her behalf (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). "She was the baby of the family, and her brothers and I were going to get up in there and protect her" (Houston, 2013, p. 71). Adler (1958) strongly believed that the youngest children are often pampered and, thus, have a greater tendency to become troublesome children. Houston seems to have possibly exhibited troublesome behaviours during her childhood. For example, Houston occasionally got away

with mischievous behaviours compared to her brothers, mostly due to her parents' perception of her as innocent (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). Adler (1927) believed that younger children are likelier to experience intense feelings of inferiority and a lack of independence. Houston likely experienced a sense of inferiority throughout her life and hid behind feelings of inferiority. She possibly misused drugs as a means of coping with her feelings of inferiority.

Houston started using drugs, including nicotine, marijuana, and cocaine, during her adolescence (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). She likely began using drugs as a way to cope with her home environment, which was marked by her parents' constant fighting and arguing, eventually leading to their separation (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). Individual Psychology theory suggests that Houston's birth order position likely contributed to her dependence on others and lack of readiness to handle life's problems, such as her parents' separation. Although birth order does not determine specific outcomes, it does enhance the probability of individuals having particular experiences (Adler, 1952; Orgler, 1963). For instance, the youngest child in a family may exhibit competitiveness toward their older siblings. Nonetheless, the most important factor is the individual's perception of their position within the family. The youngest children are frequently spoiled and pampered, which can result in the development of a helpless role (Adler, 1927, 1952). Moreover, young children tend to follow their interests and often progress in ways that no one else in the family has attempted. They may consequently surpass all others. The impact of birth order on adult social interactions is widely recognised. People develop a specific manner of engaging or establishing connections with others, transmitting this behaviour to their contacts in adulthood (Corey et al., 2021).

6.2.2 *Houston's Familial Dynamics*

When a child is born, they rely on their parents for survival. According to Adler (1958), the role of both parents is crucial for fostering cooperation in their children's development. Houston had a close yet complex relationship with both of her parents, Cissy and John Houston, throughout her life. Given the parental roles in the Houston household, Cissy Houston was frequently involved in recording and touring due to her successful music career, making her the primary breadwinner (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). She also assumed the role of disciplinarian, while John Houston frequently remained at home to care for the children and manage the household (Houston, 2013). Adler (1958) believed that how parents fulfil their roles significantly influences a child's perception of relationships, social roles, and their place in the family. Therefore, the parental roles Houston's parents played likely influenced her earliest understanding of gender roles and influenced her expectations and behaviours in her relationships. The involvement of parents is crucial as children's first exposure to cooperation stems from their parents (Adler, 1958). If parents fail to exhibit effective cooperation, they are unable to instil cooperative behaviour in their children. Moreover, a child brought up in an unhealthy family environment may adopt an unhealthy lifestyle and perceive life as devoid of meaning (Adler, 1929, 1958). Houston's parents constantly disagreed and argued in front of her during her childhood and youth (McCarten, 2022). Furthermore, the possible pampering she received from her parents during her childhood may have had an adverse impact on her development of cooperation. Children who are pampered are deprived of the will to take initiative and become independent, and they may acquire a parasitic view of the world (Adler, 1958; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Pampered children cannot operate independently since they rely on others and do not acquire the necessary skills to live a healthy life (Boeree, 2006; Stein & Edwards, 1998). Such people are unsuitable for occupation, love, and marriage because they prioritise their welfare above

all else (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). These attitudes can lead to disappointment later in life when individuals are placed in a demanding society uninterested in satisfying all their goals (Perry, 2012).

6.3 Conceptual Outline for the Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The analysis of research findings in this chapter was facilitated through the exploratory-descriptive and descriptive-dialogic approaches taken in this study. According to Ponterotto (2015), psychobiographical research entails the lifespan study of an individual of historic significance, using biographical material examined against the backdrop of the individual's socio-cultural context and interpreted through the lens of an established psychological theory. Adler's (1929, 1930, 1958, 1982) theory of Individual Psychology provided the framework within which Houston's personality development was explored and described. The most significant historical evidence of Houston's life was reconstructed within five historical periods, which are discussed in relation to the Adlerian constructs outlined in Chapter 3. These important constructs proposed by Adler (1929, 1958) include the sense of inferiority, the pursuit of superiority, the life goal, the style of life, the schema of apperception, social interest, and the inferiority complex. The five historical periods of Houston's life include: (a) Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983); (b) Breakthrough and Fame (1984-1991); (c) Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999); (d) Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005); and (e) The Final Performance (2006-2012). A psycho-historical conceptual matrix (Table 6.1) comprising Adler's (1929) theoretical constructs and Houston's historical life periods was utilised to integrate, categorise, and assist in interpreting the key findings.

Table 6.1

Psycho-historical Conceptual Matrix over the lifespan of Whitney Houston

Historical Periods over the Life of Whitney Houston
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Adler's Individual Psychology: Theoretical constructs		Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983)	Breakthrough and Fame (1984-1991)	Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999)	Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005)	The Final Performance (2006-2012)
	Inferiority complex	6.4.1.1	6.4.2.1	6.4.3.1	6.4.4.1	6.4.5.1
	Life task	6.4.1.2	6.4.2.2	6.4.3.2	6.4.4.2	6.4.5.2
	Lifestyle	6.4.1.3	6.4.2.3	6.4.3.3	6.4.4.3	6.4.5.3
	Social interest	6.4.1.4	6.4.2.4	6.4.3.4	6.4.4.4	6.4.5.4
	Striving for superiority	6.4.1.5	6.4.2.5	6.4.3.5	6.4.4.5	6.4.5.5
	Schema of apperception	6.4.1.6	6.4.2.6	6.4.3.6	6.4.4.6	6.4.5.6
	Sense of inferiority	6.4.1.7	6.4.2.7	6.4.3.7	6.4.4.7	6.4.5.7

6.4 Houston's Adlerian Personality Development Throughout Her Lifespan

6.4.1 *Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983)*

6.4.1.1 Inferiority Complex. Adler considered the sense of inferiority a stimulus for creativity rather than a disadvantage (Corey et al., 2021). However, this feeling of inferiority can result in despair and the belief that one cannot handle life's responsibilities or make valuable contributions to society (Adler, 1930, 1958). This is what Adler referred to as an inferiority complex. While a sense of inferiority can motivate individuals to strive for superiority, an inferiority complex occurs when feelings of inferiority overwhelm a person, leading to a pervasive belief in their inadequacy (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017). The development of an inferiority complex can be attributed to an individual's self-perception and understanding of the world, as opposed to being a product of genetic or environmental influences (Perry, 2012). Individuals with an inferiority complex are extremely preoccupied with how others view them than with dealing with issues. Moreover, individuals with an inferiority complex tend to be passive and withdrawn, which Houston was at times during this period of her life. Houston withdrew from her family due to the ongoing conflicts between her parents (Houston, 2013). Furthermore, individuals with an inferiority complex tend to engage in acts of exaggeration or deceit (Watts, 2013). There were occasions when Houston disclosed false information regarding her identity, background, and

romantic relationships (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). This may indicate Houston's attempts to compensate for her perceived sense of inferiority and enhance her self-concept.

Furthermore, Houston began to engage in drug use during this period (Macdonald, 2018). Adler believed that individuals afflicted with an inferiority complex may resort to substances to compensate for their feelings of inferiority (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Boeree, 2006). Furthermore, he believed that factors such as familial dynamics and the social environment contribute to the development of an inferiority complex. Houston's early exposure to drug usage, both in her neighbourhood and within her family, particularly witnessing her older brothers using drugs, likely influenced her drug use (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). During her youth, Houston began using drugs alongside her two elder brothers in their home (McCarten, 2022). She frequently engaged in smoking cigarettes, marijuana, and cocaine, both in solitude and in the company of her close friend, Robyn Crawford (Crawford, 2019). Thus, the researcher believes that Houston possibly used drugs as a way to compensate for feelings of inferiority from a young age.

6.4.1.2 Life Task. Adler believed that individuals must effectively accomplish three fundamental life tasks: social tasks, love and marriage tasks, and occupation tasks (Adler, 1929, 1958). Bitter (2007) noted that these tasks necessitate cultivating psychological skills related to friendship and belonging, contribution, self-worth, and cooperation. The social task involves establishing personal connections with others and actively participating in collaborative endeavours to benefit society (Carlson & Johnson, 2016). The researcher believes Houston possibly performed the social life tasks during this period. This is illustrated in how Houston often shared her personal belongings with other children in her neighbourhood (Houston, 2013), which indicates care for the welfare of others. She also actively engaged at her church, New Hope Baptist in Newark, New Jersey and sang in the

church choir from a young age. Additionally, Houston worked at a community development centre around her neighbourhood during her adolescence (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022).

The love and marriage task encompasses the involvement of two individuals who are committed to their partnership. Adler (1958) posited that the successful fulfilment of love and marriage can be achieved when both partners have a genuine interest in one another rather than solely focusing on themselves. Upon commencing her duties at the community development centre, Houston met Crawford and formed a friendship with her (Crawford, 2019). Houston and Crawford spent significant time in each other's company, moved in together, and formed an emotional and sexual connection (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022). However, their romantic relationship was kept secret from the public mostly due to how being in a homosexual relationship would impact Houston's promising career as a singer (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). Other reasons Houston decided to keep their relationship a secret were Houston's parents' disapproval, her Christian faith, and her aspirations of having children in future (Bald, 2021; Crawford, 2019). Houston's choice to keep her relationship with Crawford hidden likely reflected her awareness of societal attitudes on homosexuality at the time, suggesting a desire to maintain social interest. The occupation task entails the need for individuals to generate an income and actively contribute to the overall well-being of society (Adler, 1958). Houston decided to pursue a career in singing. She had opportunities to work actively towards her lifelong goal during her youth. For instance, she appeared on other singers' albums as a background vocalist and also worked as a model for fashion magazines (Kennedy, 2022). Houston performed the occupational life task during this period, given her active pursuit of singing professionally.

6.4.1.3 Lifestyle. The concept of lifestyle encompasses a person's manner of living, problem-solving approach, and interpersonal interactions (Boeree, 2006). An individual's lifestyle significantly influences their self-image, perception of others, and worldview,

ultimately moulding their personality (Corey et al., 2021). Thus, lifestyle is related to the distinct manners in which individuals attempt to compensate for feelings of inferiority and strive for superiority (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Siedlecki, 2013). Individual Psychology asserts that inconsistent behaviour is non-existent and that thoughts, emotions, and behaviours are all focused on achieving a certain objective and serving a singular intention (Siedlecki, 2013). Consequently, it is reasonable to assert that every action Houston performed during her lifetime had a clear intention and held significant value to her. All of her actions were directed towards attaining a particular goal. Thus, her chosen approach to attaining this self-created goal might be described as her lifestyle. Adler posited that an individual's philosophy of life is formed during the initial six years of life (Adler, 1970). Each person bears the responsibility for their own identity and behaviour. People create their goals and approaches, a capability that renders human behaviour inherently unpredictable unless one possesses an exhaustive understanding of the individual's self-created goals and the methods employed to achieve them (Watts, 2009, 2013, 2015). Thus, an individual's personality development is not merely predetermined by genetics or the environment. On the contrary, an individual's development is determined by how they perceive and interpret their environment and heritage (Carlson & Johnson, 2016). This interpretation compels the individual to decide whether to lead a socially useful or socially useless lifestyle (Maniaci & Sackett-Maniaci, 2019). Therefore, the researcher believes Houston likely chose her lifestyle intentionally.

During this period, Houston was exposed to music from a very young age through her mother, a gospel and backup singer, and her cousins Dionne and Dee Warwick (Houston, 2013). She began performing in her church choir alongside her mother when she was about eight years old and often travelled to her recording sessions with well-known artists like Aretha Franklin and Luther Vandross (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). Houston continued to

hone her vocal skills by practising singing with her mother and often performed at various venues and talent shows (McCarten, 2022). At 12 years old, she pursued music professionally and worked as a backup singer alongside her mother (Kennedy, 2022). Houston also engaged in modelling during her teenage years and appeared in numerous top magazines, such as *Seventeen*, which put her among the first African American women to appear on the magazine's cover (Kennedy, 2022). She continued modelling activities, worked alongside her mother and performed at gigs during her youth. These activities constitute an aspect of Houston's lifestyle focused on her self-created goal of becoming a professional singer. Thus, the researcher believes Houston may have demonstrated a socially useful lifestyle (see Chapter 3, Section 3.4.3.4).

6.4.1.4 Social Interest. Adlerian theory is characterised by its emphasis on relationships. The theory suggests that humans are deeply connected to society, and their well-being and success are mostly influenced by their degree of social connectedness (Carlson & Johnson, 2016; Watts, 2013). Social interest encompasses a person's understanding of their membership in the broader human community and their approach to engaging with social aspects of life (Corey et al., 2021; Perry, 2012). It encompasses empathy, compassion, and the ability to cooperate and make meaningful contributions. Social interest emerges in childhood, and while it is inherent, it still needs to be learned, developed and used (Corey et al., 2021). Adlerians consider social interest to be the most important indicator of mental health, given that individuals with social interest tend to lead healthy and productive lives. As opposed to seeking personal gain, social interest is expressed through collaboration with others for the betterment of society (Adler, 1930, 1964). Individual development of social interests correlates with one's level of psychological maturity. Immature individuals are self-absorbed, lack social interest, and seek personal power and superiority over others (Adler, 1930). On the contrary, individuals in good health show

genuine concern for others and strive for success in a way that encompasses the welfare of every individual (Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017).

During this period, Houston displayed a keen interest in the community. Houston frequently extended invitations to her friends and the children living in her neighbourhood, welcoming them into her house and sharing her belongings with them (Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018). Furthermore, her upbringing took place in a devout Christian household, where she actively participated in church and gospel singing at church. Given that African American Christianity is known for fostering a sense of community (Avent & Cashwell, 2015), the researcher suggests that Houston may have developed a socially useful lifestyle and exhibited social interest during this time. Social interest refers to a sense of community that includes empathy, care, participation, and cooperation (Bitter, 2012). Houston worked in a community development centre during her youth, where she met her friend Crawford, with whom she formed a close friendship (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). The researcher believes that Houston demonstrated a degree of social interest, particularly in developing and maintaining friendships and actively participating and contributing to her community.

Several early childhood experiences might have negatively impacted Houston's social interest. Houston, being the youngest sibling, might have been pampered by her parents, considering her perceived innocence and status as the baby of the family (Houston, 2013). Furthermore, the conflict and separation experienced by Houston's parents may have unfavourably shaped her perspective on love, family, and marriage. Houston lived in a neighbourhood characterised by violence and drug activity (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013). She also experienced racism from her peers while attending a predominantly White Catholic private school (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). These events may have influenced Houston to have decreased social interest in others during this stage of her life.

6.4.1.5 Striving for Superiority. The human tendency to strive for superiority is an innate desire to move from a perceived unfavourable state to a perceived favourable one (Watts, 2009, 2013). Thus, striving for superiority is the primary motivating force underlying individual development. Striving for superiority is initiated by a sense of inferiority that emerges during early childhood, motivating individuals to engage in compensating efforts to overcome feelings of inferiority (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Adler highlighted that striving for superiority occurs within a relational framework and can manifest in either a socially useful or useless manner (Adler, 1927, 1929). A person's efforts of striving, especially their behaviours, are thus influenced by their social interest. Moreover, the striving for superiority is achieved through various means, as each individual possesses their unique life goal (Siedlecki, 2013).

Houston's striving for superiority during her childhood and youth is most evident in her efforts relating to her life goal of being a professional singer. Houston participated in daily singing rehearsals with her mother, performed solos in the church choir on Sundays, and competed in singing competitions (Hudson, 2012). Moreover, she decided to pursue singing professionally and spent her youth honing her skills while working closely with established acts such as her mother, her cousin Warwick, and Franklin (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). Furthermore, the researcher believes that Houston's striving or superiority was possibly connected with social interest. This is illustrated in how she started singing at church, worked with her mother, and contributed background vocals for numerous musicians, including Chaka Khan (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012)—upon witnessing Houston's performance at a nightclub in New York City, Clive Davis, the president of Arista Records, recognised her potential to become a superstar (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). Houston signed a contract with Arista Records in 1983, and she and Davis began producing her debut album (McCarten, 2022).

6.4.1.6 Schema of Apperception. The schema of apperception refers to an individual's perception and understanding of themselves, the world, and others, which is shaped by their experiences (Adler, 1929, 1930, 1958). During childhood, children develop their attitudes and construct their understanding of themselves and the world, forming their goals based on these perceptions (Perry, 2012). Therefore, a lifestyle is formed as a child advances towards the predetermined goal. The researcher believes that during this period, Houston may have held a schema of apperception in which she perceived herself as inferior—compared to her elder brothers, Houston received much attention from her parents while growing up. She was perceived as being the baby of her family, which may have made her likely to experience intense feelings of inferiority and a lack of independence. Houston had decisions made on her behalf by her family, including what to wear and which record label to approve once she debuted (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). Houston often expressed to Crawford how insecure her family made her feel and the pressure she experienced to meet their expectations (Crawford, 2019). Furthermore, Houston experienced bullying and racism during her childhood (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022), which may have influenced her perception of being inferior.

Houston may have also held a schema of apperception in which she perceived herself as being Christian and having a talent for singing. Houston's Christian faith and passion for singing were greatly influenced by her family, who were devout Christians and actively engaged in performing gospel music at their church (Houston, 2013). Houston spent a significant portion of her early years attending church and began singing at church, where she joined the choir. She also expressed her faith by praying before performances and sharing biblical stories with her friends (Crawford, 2019).

6.4.1.7 Sense of Inferiority. Adler (1958) maintained that every individual experiences a sense of inferiority from a young age. Feelings of inferiority are a common and

natural part of the human condition, and they serve as the driving force behind all human efforts. Adler presented multiple explanations for the origin of this innate feeling of inferiority, including (a) children regarding themselves as physically smaller and mentally or socially less competent than adults, (b) feelings of inferiority stemming from inherent or acquired physical deficiencies that individuals may possess due to inherited illnesses, disorders, or injuries, and (c) the influence of parenting styles, particularly those characterised by pampering or neglect (Meyer & Viljoen, 2008). Therefore, an individual's lifelong goal is to compensate for the sense of inferiority. This sense of inferiority can manifest itself in several ways, such as a striving for superiority. Adler identified two styles of striving for superiority. The first style includes individuals who demonstrate creative and courageous responses and a genuine interest in society when faced with life's obstacles and a sense of inferiority. As a result, these people are considered to be well-functioning (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The second style consists of individuals who lack courage, and if they respond without social interest, they become disheartened and may establish an inferiority complex (Watts, 2013). Therefore, some people utilise their inferiorities and strive towards achieving psychological well-being and a productive lifestyle, whilst others engage in excessive compensation and are compelled to repress or withdraw from social interactions, which may result in an inferiority complex (Adler, 1929; Meyer & Viljoen, 2008).

Houston experienced her childhood during the Civil Rights Movement (Macdonald, 2018), a time that likely heightened her awareness of racial inequalities and her perceived inferior status as an African American, contributing to her sense of inferiority. Furthermore, Houston was the youngest child and only daughter in her family. The researcher believes that her birth order made her more likely to be pampered by her parents, which might have contributed to her sense of inferiority. Houston was born into a family of talented and established singers, including her mother and cousins, which may have further influenced her

feelings of inferiority. Houston was eight years old when she began singing in the church choir and performed solos (Hudson, 2012). By age 12, she had decided to pursue a career as a professional singer (Houston, 2013; McCarten, 2022). These endeavours to become a professional singer reflect Houston's attempt to compensate for her feelings of inferiority by striving for superiority. Moreover, the researcher believes that Houston's involvement in the church choir demonstrated a degree of social interest. Participating in communal singing experiences may have provided her with a sense of belonging and purpose, aiding to alleviate feelings of inferiority.

6.4.2 Breakthrough and Fame (1984-1991)

6.4.2.1 Inferiority Complex. Houston's debut marked the beginning of her breakthrough in the music industry (Houston, 1993; Hudson, 2012). However, it was also a period characterised by significant family involvement in her career. Houston's father served as the CEO of her company, Nippy Inc., while her brother Michael and friend Crawford acted as her assistants (Broomfield, 2017; Kennedy, 2022). This reliance on her family for support could indicate a reinforced sense of inferiority. Moreover, as part of her staff, Houston's family and friends accompanied her on tours, where they provided her with drugs and indulged in drug use together (Crawford, 2019). Thus, the researcher believes that Houston's dependence on her close circle may be due to feelings of incompetency to confront the pressures of her career independently, suggesting an underlying inferiority complex.

Houston kept her drug use a secret from her parents and the public during this period (Houston, 2013), possibly indicating her inferiority complex. By using drugs, she may have been attempting to cope with problems and feelings of inferiority. Her parents became aware of her drug use throughout this time and, along with Crawford, confronted and urged her to stop (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). Houston often responded by dismissing their concerns and downplaying her drug use (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022), suggesting that she

possibly felt embarrassed or ashamed of her dependence. In addition, Houston often denied questions about the romantic nature of her friendship with Crawford, which she maintained as a secret from her family and the public (Kennedy, 2022). This denial of their relationship illustrates that she possibly feared judgment, further highlighting her feelings of inferiority and a strengthened inferiority complex. It is also important to note that Houston lived in a time when homosexuality was widely stigmatised in society, and most individuals who were openly gay often experienced prejudice and discrimination (Crawford, 2019). Lying was a prominent theme in Houston's life during this time (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013) and thus formed part of her lifestyle. This is exemplified through her consistent efforts to conceal aspects of her personal life, including her drug use and the nature of her relationship with Crawford, from both her family and the public.

The researcher is of the opinion that Houston used lying as a way to protect her public image and avoid confronting her insecurities. In addition, Houston occasionally exhibited arrogance during this time, potentially stemming from her successful career and fame (Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). For example, Houston asserted her authority as the head of the staff within her company when they voiced their opposition to her demands (Crawford, 2019). This behaviour illustrates that she possibly adopted a superiority complex as a way to mask her deep-seated feelings of inferiority. Lundin (2017) posited that the superiority complex develops out of the inferiority complex and can be viewed as an extension of feelings of inadequacy. Houston may have exhibited superiority through arrogance to protect herself from criticism and uphold her public image as a professional.

6.4.2.2 Life Task. Houston continued to actively pursue her self-created goal of being a professional singer, demonstrating her commitment to the occupation task. During this period, Houston released three albums that garnered both financial success and critical acclaim, establishing her status as an influential figure in the music industry (Broomfield,

2017; Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). Furthermore, her participation in choosing songs and producers, particularly on her third album (Kennedy, 2022), suggested her dedication to her work and her advancement as a professional. Houston received multiple accolades and awards at this stage in her career, potentially affirming her efforts and reinforcing her pursuit of excellence in her occupation. Houston pursued the social task through her charity work and significant contributions to the music industry. She was actively involved in various philanthropic endeavours and supported causes such as children's welfare, education, and social injustices (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013). Additionally, as an African American female artist, Houston broke significant barriers in the music industry, paving the way for greater diversity and representation (Kennedy, 2022). Houston exemplified a strong sense of social interest and community engagement through her contributions and trailblazing achievements.

Houston also pursued the love and marriage task through her personal connections and romantic relationships during this period. Despite repeatedly denying their relationship's romantic nature, Crawford continued offering Houston significant emotional support and companionship (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). Additionally, Houston was in a brief romantic relationship with well-known musician Jermaine Jackson, who was older and married at the time (Bald, 2021). This indicates Houston's ongoing pursuit of love and marriage tasks, possibly reflecting the complexity observed in her parents' relationship, where her father was married to another woman when he met her mother. Furthermore, Houston met Bobby Brown in 1989 and expressed attraction to him (Broomfield, 2017; McCarten, 2022). Brown was six years younger than Houston, and the two began dating and developed a romantic relationship. Houston and Brown eventually got engaged and began arranging their wedding during this period (Crawford, 2019; Macdonald, 2018). Houston

openly acknowledged her relationship with Brown, which attracted significant public interest and possibly indicated her desire for a committed partnership with him.

6.4.2.3 Lifestyle. During this period, Houston's endeavours were largely centred on her development as a professional singer. This is evident in how, after signing a record deal with Arista Records, she began working on her debut album, made appearances, and performed at various events (McCarten, 2022). After releasing her debut album, *Whitney Houston*, in 1985, Houston embarked on a concert called the *Greatest Love World Tour*, where she performed in various cities around the world (Houston, 2013). Houston produced two albums between 1987 and 1990 titled *Whitney* and *I'm Your Baby Tonight* and engaged in numerous appearances and concerts (Houston, 2013; McCarten, 2022). Houston's efforts to strive for superiority as a professional singer began in her youth and continued during this period of her life, possibly indicating her lifestyle. Furthermore, Houston performed at a benefit which raised money for the United Negro College Fund in 1988 (Hudson, 2012), possibly indicating that her lifestyle was also connected with social interest.

Houston started using drugs during her youth, and her drug use continued during her adulthood (Crawford, 2019). Houston frequently used drugs while on tour in the United States of America (USA) and across the world, which were mostly provided by her brothers, who formed part of her entourage as her assistants (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). Houston possibly used drugs as a way to cope with the immense pressures and internal conflicts she faced during this period. Her decision to use drugs indicates that she possibly chose a socially useless way of confronting life's challenges. Becoming addicted to drugs gradually became part of her lifestyle, and she used it as a possible way to escape from her responsibilities.

6.4.2.4 Social Interest. Houston's activities in her professional and personal life indicated that she possessed a degree of social interest. Houston worked closely with Davis, who played a pivotal role in selecting songs and producers that highlighted her vocal talents and commercial appeal (McCarten, 2022). Their collaboration was instrumental in Houston producing albums that resonated with a wide audience. Houston's albums achieved monumental success, breaking records and topping the charts (Houston, 2013). Moreover, her success not only increased her fame in the music industry but also showcased her ability to transcend racial and genre boundaries (Kennedy, 2022). Houston's cooperation with Davis resulted in music that appealed to diverse audiences, thus indicating her fulfilment of the occupation task and a degree of social interest. Houston was an African American female artist, so her professional success broke significant barriers in the predominantly White pop music¹² industry (Kennedy, 2022). Her accomplishments undeniably inspired generations of African Americans, women, and aspiring singers to pursue their goals regardless of societal expectations (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018).

During this period, Houston established Nippy Inc. and hired many people, including her family members and close friends, to work for the company (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). By actively fulfilling her occupational duties and cooperating with her personnel, Houston's efforts were able to generate income for employees under Nippy Inc. (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022), possibly indicating a level of social interest. Furthermore, Houston was actively engaged in various charity activities at this time. She often participated in benefit concerts and events, using her talent to generate awareness and funding for significant causes, such as the apartheid government in South Africa (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Houston founded her nonprofit organisation in 1989 called *The Whitney*

¹² Popular music (Kooijman, 2014).

Houston Foundation For Children, which supported homeless children and children with chronic and terminal illnesses and offered scholarships for tertiary education (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Houston's sense of social interest was evident in her philanthropic contributions towards the welfare of others. Her influence undoubtedly transcended her music, as she resonated with people's conscience by shedding light on injustice and embodied empowerment for marginalised communities (Kennedy, 2022).

Houston performed the USA national anthem at the Super Bowl in 1991 amidst the Gulf War, receiving widespread acclaim and marking a significant event in her career (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). The researcher believes that with this performance, Houston illustrated her connection to her country and her ability to evoke a strong sense of community feeling. Moreover, as previously mentioned, Houston met Brown during this period of her life, and they established a romantic relationship (Crawford, 2019; Macdonald, 2018). Houston's relationship with Brown suggests that she attempted to pursue the life task of love and marriage. This demonstrates a potential level of social interest associated with Houston's desire for love and marriage.

6.4.2.5 Striving for Superiority. In 1963, Houston approved a record deal with Arista Records and began the production of her debut album while participating in music collaborations, making appearances on television programmes, and engaging in interviews (Kennedy, 2022). This exemplifies Houston's strive for superiority and dedication to the occupation task during this period. At the age of 21, Houston released her debut album titled *Whitney Houston* in 1985 (Houston, 2013). The album primarily featured pop and R&B¹³songs, including *Saving All My Love for You*, *How Will I Know*, and *Greatest Love of All* (Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). Her pursuit of superiority is evident in her participation in

¹³ Rhythm and Blues (Nehad & Traibi, 2018)

tours, concerts, and music video productions to promote her first album. Furthermore, Houston's pursuit of superiority is exemplified by the quality of her performances. Houston's self-titled album achieved great success by selling 25 million copies worldwide (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). It also made history as the first debut album by a woman to have three number-one hit singles (Houston, 2013). Houston's fame expanded as her debut album achieved acclaim, and in 1986, she received her first Grammy award for Best Pop Vocal Performance (Kennedy, 2022; Macdonald, 2018). In addition, on the same night that Houston received her first Grammy award, she delivered a performance of one of her popular songs from her album *Whitney Houston*, which subsequently earned her an Emmy award (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). In 1986, Houston received her first MTV ¹⁴Video Music Award for the song *How Will I Know* and became one of the first African American artists, along with Michael Jackson, to have their music featured on MTV channels (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). Through the success of her debut, Houston likely experienced a sense of superiority in her profession.

In 1987, Houston's second album, *Whitney*, became the first album by a woman to reach the top position on the charts (Hudson, 2012; Kennedy, 2022). Her third album, *I'm Your Baby Tonight*, was released in 1990 and had significant commercial success, selling millions of copies worldwide (Houston, 2013). This may exemplify Houston's consistent and unwavering pursuit of superiority. Houston's albums achieved significant milestones for African American and female artists, highlighting her fulfilment of the social task and the possible connection between her striving for superiority and social interest. In addition, Houston performed the USA national anthem at the 1991 Super Bowl (Houston, 2013). This

¹⁴ Music Television (Kennedy, 2022)

may indicate her sense of patriotism as an American citizen, thus displaying her degree of social interest.

6.4.2.6 Schema of Apperception. Houston's schema of apperception is evident in her work and contributions as a professional singer. After her debut, Houston frequently expressed a sense of assurance regarding her abilities as a performer, expressing a lack of pressure despite her burgeoning career (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). The researcher believes that Houston perceived herself as a skilled performer. This is illustrated in Houston's artistry as she mainly released pop music despite her background in gospel music and her heritage as an African American (Kennedy, 2022). This reflects her self-perception as it indicates her confidence in her abilities to excel in a genre traditionally dominated by mainstream, predominantly White artists. Houston received criticism for her image as an African American pop artist (McCarten, 2022), which may have possibly caused internal conflicts regarding her identity.

Additionally, Houston viewed herself as a Christian and an African American woman, which likely influenced her perspective on societal norms regarding sexuality. This is evident in Houston's decision to maintain the secrecy surrounding her romantic relationship with Crawford, which she perceived as shameful and sinful (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). In addition, Houston was possibly aware of how society viewed homosexuality during this period and was scared of potential judgment and exclusion. Houston often expressed wanting to have a family and children (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013; Macdonald, 2018), possibly indicating that she perceived marriage and motherhood as life tasks she strived to achieve as an African American woman with Christian values. Moreover, her self-perception as a public figure and the potential scrutiny from the media may have contributed to her decision to maintain the privacy of her drug use and relationship with Crawford. The researcher is of the opinion that the discrepancies between Houston's private life and public persona may have

contributed to the development of an antithetical schema. An antithetical schema of apperception is a perspective of the world that differs from common sense and contradicts reality (Adler, 1956; Perry, 2012).

6.4.2.7 Sense of Inferiority. After joining Arista Records, Houston worked closely with Davis while producing her albums. Davis was responsible for selecting songs that Houston sang, as well as the producers and songwriters who contributed to her debut album (McCarten, 2022). Davis aimed to make Houston a musician who could appeal to both pop and R&B audiences without being perceived strictly as an American American artist (Kennedy, 2022). Houston's parents were also heavily involved in her management and often made decisions on her behalf during this period (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019). These experiences may have led to Houston experiencing feelings of lack of independence, which could have fostered a sense of inferiority. When Houston released her debut album, it was met with success and accolades and provided breakthroughs for the African American community. However, Houston received much criticism about her image and the music she was making, particularly from African American listeners who felt she was not Black enough and nicknamed her "whitey" (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). The amount of criticism she experienced may have exacerbated her insecurities about her authenticity and acceptance within the Black community. In 1989, Houston attended the Soul Train Awards, in which the mention of her name got booed by the audience due to perceptions that her image and genres did not represent the African American community (Kennedy, 2022). This incident possibly made her feel rejected by her community, contributing to feelings of inferiority. Moreover, public rejection at such a high-profile event possibly took an emotional toll on Houston, impacting her self-esteem and confidence in fulfilling her occupation life task.

People cope with their weaknesses and feelings of inferiority in three ways: compensation, sensitivity, and overcompensation (Adler, 1930, 1958). Compensation is a healthy reaction to feeling inferior, as it is an attempt by the individual to make up for their shortcomings. Following criticism of her music and image, Houston began working on her third album, and for the first time in her career, she made decisions on the song selections, songwriting, and production of her album (Kennedy, 2022). By taking charge of the song selections, songwriting, and production for her third album, Houston may have sought to compensate for her limited decision-making in her previous album productions. This may also illustrate professional development by Houston asserting her vision, thereby indicating striving for superiority. Houston also recruited African American artists who mostly wrote and produced R&B and Hip Hop music, including Vandross, Babyface and LA Reid, to work on her album (Houston, 2013). Her efforts may demonstrate compensation for the perceived cultural disconnection and seeking acceptance and validation from both mainstream and African American communities. In addition, Houston was already using drugs as a way to possibly compensate for the intense public pressure and feelings of inferiority before fame and during this period (Crawford, 2019). Sensitivity and overcompensation are both regarded as unhealthy responses to feelings of inferiority. Sensitivity is the state of being preoccupied with one's own weaknesses to the point where any mention of them might easily upset the individual (Adler, 1927). Overcompensation refers to the excessive focus on one's strengths as a way for individuals to compensate for their inadequacies (Anbascher & Ansbacher, 1956). Houston was particularly sensitive to enquiries from reporters regarding her drug use and the romantic nature of her friendship with Crawford (Kennedy, 2022). This sensitivity was so significant that it may have prompted her to respond defensively to potentially shield herself from criticism. Houston also demonstrated overcompensation by excessively emphasising her vocal abilities and success as a performer to potentially conceal her

perceived weaknesses. Consequently, the researcher believes that Houston did not engage in a healthy form of compensation to manage feelings of inferiority; rather, she decided to respond with overcompensation and sensitivity, particularly hypersensitivity. Hypersensitivity is an exaggerated sensitivity to perceived criticism, rejection, or failure used to safeguard low self-esteem and cope with feelings of inferiority (Adler, 1956).

6.4.3 Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999)

6.4.3.1 Inferiority Complex. An inferiority complex can develop when an individual's feelings of inferiority become overpowering, manifesting in maladaptive ways (Adler, 1927; Ferguson, 2020). During this period, Houston's inferiority complex is evident in her persistence in keeping certain aspects of her life hidden, such as her drug use and possible bisexuality (Broomfield, 2017; Kennedy, 2022). Adler (1930, 1958) believed that several factors can influence the development of an inferiority complex, including family dynamics and the social environment (Adler, 1930, 1958). Houston's possible fear of judgment and societal expectations likely contributed to her need to maintain a socially acceptable public image while secretly engaging in behaviours that conflicted with this image. Houston entered a relationship with Brown, and the couple got married in 1992 (Houston, 1993; McCarten, 2022). Brown had a bad reputation, marked by his provocative behaviour and legal disputes, which differed from Houston's image (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). The researcher believes that Houston's decision to be in a relationship with Brown was a manifestation of her inferiority complex. By associating with someone who openly defied societal norms, their relationship may have provided her a way to express hidden aspects of her life. Furthermore, their relationship might have also been an attempt for Houston to seek validation from Brown, thus compensating for her feelings of inferiority.

Houston's union with Brown drew considerable scrutiny and criticism from the media and those close to Houston (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018). Houston's family were

vocal about her disapproval of the couple's relationship due to Brown's reputation (Houston, 2013). Similarly, Crawford (2019), who had been Houston's close friend and assistant for years, also expressed her reservations about Brown. The criticism Houston experienced regarding her relationship with Brown likely contributed to her sense of inferiority and maintained her inferiority complex. Houston was well aware of Brown's reputation and had experienced infidelity during their relationship before she chose to marry him (Bald, 2021; Houston, 1993; McCarten, 2022). When asked about Brown, Houston once described him by saying they both wanted the same things, such as commitment, loyalty, security, and trust and defended Brown's reputation as a womaniser (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 1993). Houston's defensiveness regarding Brown likely suggests that she responded with sensitivity and overcompensation. According to Adler (1927, 1929), sensitivity and overcompensation are maladaptive reactions to feelings of inferiority. Houston's defensiveness was likely an attempt to counteract criticism of their union. Moreover, despite the challenges within their relationship, she possibly attempted to project an image of security within their marriage, both to herself and the public.

Houston's relationship with Brown was characterised by dysfunction, including instances of infidelity and many private and public disputes, some of which escalated to physical altercations (Crawford, 2019; Macdonald, 2018). The researcher believes that the perceived power dynamics within Houston and Brown's relationship may have also contributed to some of their conflicts. Houston was significantly more famous and successful than Brown, which occasionally threatened Brown's status as her husband (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013). This is illustrated by how Brown was often referred to as 'Mr Whitney Houston' (Kennedy, 2022). This nickname reflected the media's perception of his inferiority in their marriage. It likely influenced Houston's sensitivity to how their partnership was perceived. Houston sometimes publicly declared her marital status as Mrs Brown and

promoted her husband's accolades when people minimised his celebrity status (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). Houston's efforts possibly were attempts to compensate for feelings of inferiority within their relationship. She likely attempted to combat the public's perception of her dominance in their marriage while protecting their union from criticism.

Houston's inferiority complex during this period is also evident in her drug use. Houston persisted in using drugs throughout her marriage to Brown as the couple engaged in excessive use of various drugs (Houston, 2002; Broomfield, 2017). Houston's drug use was possibly her way of coping with feelings of inferiority. This was possibly influenced by the increasing demands stemming from her personal and professional life. Houston misused drugs, as evidenced by her vocal abilities and the quality of her performances deteriorating during this period (Crawford, 2019; Kennedy, 2022). Her health and professional life suffered greatly, which likely intensified her inferiority complex and reinforced her reliance on drugs as a coping mechanism. Houston's increasing reliance on drugs, despite their detrimental effects on her health and career, highlights the extent of her internal struggle. Adler (1930, 1958) argued that individuals with an inferiority complex might develop neurotic behaviours or engage in self-destructive activities as a way to cope with their perceived deficiencies. Houston overdosed on cocaine while making the film *Waiting to Exhale* in 1995 and survived (Broomfield, 2017; Kennedy, 2022). The research is of the opinion that this incident was possibly a manifestation of her inferiority complex.

6.4.3.2 Life Task. Houston and Brown married and welcomed their first and only child as a couple, Bobbi Kristina Brown, in 1993 (Houston, 1993; Macdonald, 2018). Adler (1929, 1958) believed that the love and marriage life task incorporates an individual's committed partnership with another individual with a common goal of procreation. This period was characterised by Houston's pursuit of the love and marriage task, as evidenced by her union with Brown, which likely indicated her commitment to their partnership. In

addition, the couple's pregnancy and the birth of their daughter possibly indicated their decision to have a child and a degree of social interest. Houston often expressed her profound love for her daughter and took her along on tours and trips (Bald, 2021; Crawford, 2019). Her daughter was often indulged as a result of Houston's wealth and fame, allowing Houston to provide her daughter with a comfortable life (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013). According to Adler (1958), the only child receives undivided attention from their parents and is subjected to being pampered. The researcher believes that Houston's parenting style towards Bobbi Kristina was pampering. Her parenting style was likely influenced by the possible pampering she received from her parents during her upbringing. Furthermore, Houston was confronted with problems within her task of love and marriage, including public scrutiny, infidelity, drug misuse, and frequent disputes (McCarten, 2022). Adler posited that successful partnerships encompass mutual respect, emotional intimacy, shared goals, effective conflict resolution, and commitment (Adler, 1927; Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). The problems in Houston's marriage likely hindered her achievement of a harmonious and fulfilling partnership. These conditions may have also created an inconsistent family environment and adversely impacted her daughter's emotional and psychological development.

Houston continued to show her commitment to fulfilling occupational and social life tasks during this period. She began her debut in acting, as evident in her role in *The Bodyguard*, followed by roles in *Waiting to Exhale* and *The Preacher's Wife* (Bald, 2021; Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). Adler (1958) emphasised that an individual's fulfilment of the occupation life task is indicative of a striving for superiority and personal excellence. By taking on diverse roles in significant films, Houston likely demonstrated her competence in her new occupation as an actress and a drive to excel and prove her capabilities beyond the music industry. Houston additionally contributed to all three of the film's soundtrack albums (Kennedy, 2022), possibly indicating her dedication to her career and pursuit of the

occupation task. During this period, she also released an album titled *My Love is Your Love* and engaged in concert tours (Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). Houston received multiple accolades and awards for music and acting during this period, potentially affirming her efforts to strive for superiority and reinforcing her sense of fulfilment in her occupation. Adler (1929, 1958) underscored the importance of social interest and community involvement as part of an individual's journey toward overcoming feelings of inferiority and striving for superiority. During this period, Houston was involved in various charitable activities (Houston, 2013), possibly indicating her fulfilment of the social life task. For example, *The Whitney Houston Foundation for Children* continued to operate throughout the 1990s by supporting children with chronic illnesses, homelessness, and other challenges (Hudson, 2012). Houston's foundation also provided scholarships and educational opportunities (Broomfield, 2017), possibly reflecting her commitment to using her success to uplift and support vulnerable populations.

6.4.3.3 Lifestyle. Adler (1958, 1982) believed that lifestyle plays an important role in shaping an individual's personality. During this period, Houston's fame continued to grow as she embarked on acting as a career and travelled across numerous states in the USA while shooting films such as *The Bodyguard*, *Waiting to Exhale*, and *The Preacher's Wife* (Houston, 2013). Houston also produced music albums alongside acting (Kennedy, 2022), which influenced her lifestyle and may indicate an attempt to achieve superiority. After the film's release, Houston embarked on *The Bodyguard World Tour*, a promotional tour that involved performances of singles from the film's soundtrack (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 1993). Houston's career mostly involved frequent music and film production, as well as promotional work, including concerts and attending events, suggesting a lifestyle characterised by a commitment to her career.

Following their marriage, Houston and Brown went on their honeymoon in Italy and also took frequent trips within and outside the USA (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022). This suggests that Houston lived a life of leisure and luxury. In addition, Houston purchased a house worth several million dollars during this period (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013), indicating that her professional achievements afforded her to enjoy a luxurious lifestyle, thereby reflecting her lifestyle. Motherhood was also a crucial aspect of Houston's life during this time. Adler (1952) believed that lifestyle is interlinked with the life tasks of occupation, love and marriage, and social tasks. Houston frequently brought her infant daughter with her throughout most of her professional endeavours, including her *My Love is Your Love Tour* (Houston, 1993; Macdonald, 2018). This suggests that Houston's lifestyle involved integrating her maternal duties with her career, thus fulfilling her life tasks. Houston performed concerts that raised money for charities during her career (Hudson, 2012), indicating that her lifestyle was possibly connected to fulfilling social tasks and contributing to others' welfare.

Houston's drug use became a part of her lifestyle, and it became excessive over this period of her life (Crawford, 2019; Broomfield, 2017). The researcher is of the opinion that Houston's drug misuse significantly impacted her personal and professional life. For example, Houston's marriage was characterised by mutual drug use and conflicts (Hudson, 2012; Kennedy, 2022), which may have contributed to a chaotic and unstable home environment. In addition, Houston's lifestyle, characterised by drug misuse, had a detrimental impact on her health, resulting in occasional vocal problems (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). Her drug misuse also interfered with her professionalism, particularly her vocal abilities and image as a performer (Kennedy, 2022). Houston's vocal abilities deteriorated in this timeframe, negatively impacting the consistency and quality of her records and live performances (Broomfield, 2017). Consequently, Houston's active drug use resulted in

repeated cancellations of scheduled performances (Broomfield, 2017; Macdonald, 2018). Her health issues, worsened by drug misuse, likely made it challenging for her to meet the demands of her career.

6.4.3.4 Social Interest. Adler (1930) maintained that social interest is an important marker for assessing an individual's worth and mental health. Houston demonstrated a well-rounded degree of social interest throughout her earlier years, which continued during this period. Houston's social interest is evident through the continued operation of *The Whitney Houston Foundation for Children*, which she founded in 1987 (Kennedy, 2022). The foundation provided donations and support to children experiencing adversity (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013), which possibly demonstrated Houston's commitment to improving the lives of those in need. Houston's anti-apartheid stance may also be viewed as an indicator of her social interest. Houston had been strongly against apartheid since her youth, and in 1995, she performed concerts in post-apartheid South Africa to honour the newly elected president, Nelson Mandela (Crawford, 2019; Hudson, 2012). Additionally, Houston donated the proceeds from these concerts to South African charities (Hudson, 2012), further highlighting her commitment to using her influence on social causes, thus indicating her degree of social interest.

Houston's involvement in the film *Waiting to Exhale* also demonstrated her social interest. With a cast of African American women in leading roles, the film achieved a milestone by debuting at number one at the box office (Hudson, 2012; Kennedy, 2022). This achievement represented a notable breakthrough for the African American community, showcasing diverse narratives and promoting representation in the film industry. In addition, while producing the film's soundtrack, Houston extended invitations to many emerging African American singers to collaborate and contribute (Crawford, 2019; Houston, 2013). Houston provided a platform for these artists and likely demonstrated her interest in

supporting new talent in the African American community. Thus, the researcher is of the opinion that Houston practised a considerable amount of social interest during this period of her life. Her philanthropic activities and contributions to groundbreaking films have shown her commitment to making a meaningful impact on society.

6.4.3.5 Striving for Superiority. Houston's fame continued to grow during this period, leading her to venture into acting (Houston, 1993; McCarten, 2022). She made her debut as an actress in 1992 when she starred in the film *The Bodyguard*, playing the role of a famous singer and actress (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 1993). Houston's step into acting proved to be successful, as evidenced by the film's sales and critical acclaim given to her portrayal in *The Bodyguard* (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2018). Additionally, Houston was involved in the production of *The Bodyguard* soundtrack album, which sold millions of copies worldwide and featured her well-known rendition of Dolly Parton's "I Will Always Love You" and many other songs (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). Adler (1930, 1958) posited that individuals are motivated by an inherent desire to surpass feelings of inferiority and to attain self-mastery and superiority. The researcher believes that Houston's pursuit of music and acting was a manifestation of her striving for superiority by compensating for any feelings of inferiority she might have experienced in her personal life. The film's soundtrack and Houston's debut into acting may suggest that she was trying to compensate for her feelings of inferiority and assert her position in the broader entertainment industry. Houston achieved several music and acting awards for her performance in *The Bodyguard* and the soundtrack (Hudson, 2012; McCarten, 2022), likely reinforcing her striving for superiority.

Adler (1958, 1963) believed individuals are motivated to overcome their perceived shortcomings through personal achievements and success in their occupational tasks (Orgler, 1963). Houston actively fulfilled her occupation tasks during this period, as evidenced by her various acting and musical endeavours. Houston possibly reinforced her striving for

superiority in the entertainment industry by continuing her acting endeavours when she starred as a lead actress in the 1995 film *Waiting to Exhale* (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). She also contributed to the production of the film's soundtrack (Kennedy, 2022). Houston released her fourth studio album, titled *My Love Is Your Love*, in 1998 (McCarten, 2022). The album garnered widespread critical acclaim and sold millions of copies worldwide (Hudson, 2012). The success of Houston's films and albums likely reinforced her sense of superiority within the entertainment industry.

6.4.3.6 Schema of Apperception. The schema of apperception refers to an individual's subjective perceptions shaped by their experiences, beliefs, and feelings of inferiority (Manaster & Corsini, 1982; Watts, 1999). Houston's persistent involvement in the music and film industries during this period indicated her perception as an artist. Houston's albums continued to be successful during this period (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022), likely contributing to increased pressure to maintain her status and public image. The researcher believes that Houston possibly held the belief that she needed to constantly prove herself. This may likely have been exacerbated by the constant criticism she received from the media, maintaining her inferiority complex and heightening her sensitivity to potential judgment. During an interview, Houston once discussed the influence of fame on a person, stating that it increased her paranoia (Broomfield, 2017; Kennedy, 2022). She further objected to common perceptions that celebrities lead flawless lives and never experience hardship as a result of their success (Broomfield, 2017). Houston was facing a lot of personal challenges, including her drug misuse, tumultuous marriage, and health issues, which impacted her career during this period. Despite widespread media speculation and concern from her close circle, Houston often downplayed or outright denied her substance abuse issues and marital issues, insisting she was in control (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2002; Macdonald, 2018). Her pattern of defensiveness suggests that Houston likely viewed the world as a critical and judgmental

place where her struggles could be used against her, potentially tarnishing her image.

Houston possibly believed she must maintain a perfect public image to be accepted and valued. Although Houston and Brown's public images were different, they shared similar backgrounds and struggles, such as drug misuse (Broomfield, 2017; Kennedy, 2022).

Houston's marriage with Brown and their shared misuse of drugs possibly provided a sense of understanding and acceptance that she felt was lacking from the world.

6.4.3.7 Sense of Inferiority. Houston and Brown were in a romantic relationship during this time (Macdonald, 2018). Houston was widely perceived as having a positive image, whereas Brown was perceived to have a negative reputation stemming from his rough background and promiscuous lifestyle (Houston, 2013; McCarten, 2022). The public and media's relentless scrutiny of their relationship and disapproval from her family and close friends (Crawford, 2019; Broomfield, 2017) likely exacerbated Houston's feelings of inferiority. The researcher is of the opinion that Houston felt pressure to uphold a virtuous image, which may have intensified her sense of inferiority when her personal choices, such as her relationship with Brown, conflicted with these expectations. Furthermore, it may be possible that the dynamics of her relationship with Brown contributed to her sense of inferiority. For example, an incident occurred in which Brown was unfaithful to Houston by impregnating the mother of two children he had before his relationship with Houston (Kennedy, 2022; McCarten, 2022). Brown's previous relationships, his existing children, and his acts of infidelity may have contributed to Houston's feelings of inferiority, particularly when it came to her desire for marriage and having children.

Houston's decision to marry Brown, despite disapproval from her family and his reputation, may suggest that Houston attempted to compensate for her feelings of inferiority by asserting her independence and affirming her choices. Houston became pregnant and experienced a miscarriage during this time (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2013). This event likely

reinforced her feelings of inferiority. The researcher is of the opinion that Houston's endeavours in music and acting during this period may have been a way for her to overcome feelings of inferiority stemming from her personal life. Nevertheless, Houston became pregnant again, experienced a successful pregnancy, and gave birth to her daughter with Brown (Houston, 1993). This achievement possibly served as a means for Houston to overcome her feelings of inferiority by fulfilling her desire for a family and motherhood.

6.4.4 Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005)

6.4.4.1 Inferiority Complex. Houston was scheduled to perform at the Academy Awards but was dismissed from performing due to singing the wrong songs and behaving bizarrely during rehearsals (Broomfield, 2017). This incident reflects how her drug misuse and the resulting erratic behaviour were possibly a manifestation of her inferiority complex. Houston's drug misuse was becoming more apparent to the public during this period as her health and reputation in the entertainment industry continued to deteriorate (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). For example, Houston's appearance changed drastically, as she looked extremely thin and unkempt while performing at Michael Jackson's 30th anniversary special in 2001 (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). This drastic change in her appearance was possibly a consequence of her poor lifestyle choices, potentially driven by her sense of inferiority. When asked about the changes in her appearance in an interview, Houston displayed aggressiveness and declared that she was not sick, that she had always been a thin girl, and that she would never become fat (Houston, 2002). The researcher believes that her aggressiveness was likely a sign of heightened sensitivity, which Adler (1964, 1970) described as safeguarding tendencies. Safeguarding tendencies refer to behaviours that individuals perform to protect themselves against possible threats, including physical harm, negative evaluations from others, and a loss of self-esteem (Adler, 1964).

Houston (2002) denied allegations of using crack cocaine, stating that it was cheap and that she made too much money ever to smoke it. She concluded her argument with her infamous line, “Crack is whack” (Houston, 2002; Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018), highlighting an attempt to maintain a sense of superiority. The aggression in her response was likely a manifestation of a superiority complex. Adler (1930, 1958) posited that individuals develop a superiority complex to compensate for deep-seated feelings of inferiority. Houston’s defensive responses were likely attempts to maintain a superior public image despite the evident signs of personal struggles. Houston discovered that her father had been mismanaging her finances during this period, leading him to file a lawsuit against her for millions of dollars (Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). According to Adler (1930), family dynamics play a crucial role in shaping an individual’s inferiority complex. Houston trusted her father from a young age, and experiencing betrayal from him likely exacerbated her feelings of inferiority. Houston decided to cut ties with her father and did not attend his funeral when he passed away in 2003 (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2002; McCarten, 2022). Her response to her father’s betrayal was likely an attempt to protect herself from further feelings of inferiority, thereby indicating her persistent use of safeguarding tendencies. In addition, the betrayal from her father possibly increased her misuse of drugs as a way to deal with her overwhelming feelings of inferiority.

Houston continued to face challenges in her marriage to Brown during this period (Macdonald, 2018), highlighting her inferiority complex. Houston’s marriage was characterised by mutual misuse of drugs with Brown (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2002), which was likely a misguided attempt to feel a sense of unity or acceptance despite the destructive nature of their actions. Their marriage was also characterised by regular fights between the couple, resulting in Houston contacting police to report domestic violence by Brown (Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). Despite previously denying conflict in her marriage, Houston’s

decision to call the police possibly indicated the impact of her marital dynamics on her feelings of inferiority.

6.4.4.2 Life Task. Houston experienced ongoing marital issues during this period, as evidenced by her and Brown's fights and mutual misuse of drugs (Bald, 2021; Hudson, 2012). An event occurred in which Houston and Brown were detained at an airport for carrying marijuana in their luggage, leading to Brown's imprisonment for one month (Houston, 2013). The couple's co-dependency on drugs likely complicated their relationship and hindered Houston's ability to fulfil her task of love and marriage effectively. Despite enduring abuse within their marriage and Brown's conflicts with the law, Houston remained committed to him and demonstrated support during his trials (Houston, 2002; Macdonald, 2018). Adler (1958) posited that children develop their attitudes towards love and marriage by observing the dynamics in their parents' relationship. As mentioned before, Houston's parents often had disputes throughout her upbringing. The researcher believes that Houston's experiences of her parents' relationship possibly influenced her approach to the life task of love and marriage. Houston possibly internalised a conflicted and unstable view of marriage, which manifested in her marriage. Moreover, Houston's more established career compared to Brown's reflects the dynamic observed in her parents' relationship, where her mother was the primary breadwinner and her father took on a supportive role.

Houston and her prepubescent daughter, Bobbi Kristina, starred in Brown's reality show, *Being Bobby Brown*, which was televised in 2005 (Bald, 2021). The show depicted the reality of the Brown family and showcased the couple's aggressive and unpredictable behaviour (Hudson, 2012; Kennedy, 2022). Their daughter was seen observing her parent's tumultuous relationship, marked by drug misuse and ongoing disputes (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017). The modelling of destructive behaviours and an unstable marriage by Houston and Brown may have negatively impacted their daughter's social interest and

perception of love. Houston persisted in carrying out her occupation task despite the increasing publicity around her troubles, which negatively impacted her career during this time. Houston directed her efforts to produce music and subsequently released two albums, *Just Whitney* and *One Wish: The Holiday Album* (Houston, 2013). She also engaged in interviews to promote her music and re-released her recording of the USA national anthem in remembrance of the victims of 9/11 (Hudson, 2012; Kennedy, 2022), indicating the performance of both her occupation and social tasks.

6.4.4.3 Lifestyle. Drugs formed a part of Houston's lifestyle and continued to do so during this period, evidenced by numerous incidents of erratic behaviour and missed professional engagements (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017; Hudson, 2012). Houston's continued drug misuse during this period may be seen as part of her adopted lifestyle, characterised by the ruling type. This type involves a ruling attitude with a tendency to dominate or control, often accompanied by a disregard for the welfare of others (Adler, 1958, 1982; Boeree, 2006). Houston's drug misuse had a profound negative impact on both her personal and professional life. Health-wise, her vocal abilities and appearance declined (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2002). Such physical deterioration was possibly a consequence of her poor lifestyle choices, possibly driven by the need to escape life challenges through drug use. Professionally, Houston's drug use led to erratic behaviour at events and frequent cancellations of performances (Macdonald, 2018). Crawford, Houston's longtime friend and assistant, expressed concerns about her lifestyle and resigned from her position as assistant (Broomfield, 2021; Crawford, 2019). Houston's lifestyle as the ruling type is further evidenced by her failed attempts at receiving rehabilitation for her drug use throughout this period (Bald, 2021; Hudson, 2012). Her persistence in misusing drugs suggests that her actions were motivated by the desire to assert control over her life in destructive ways, without concern for her own or others' well-being.

6.4.4.4 Social Interest. Houston's drug misuse during this period became increasingly apparent, affecting her health, relationships, and professional career (Broomfield, 2017). Her choice to misuse drugs may indicate a decreased sense of social interest. Houston displayed erratic behaviours at gigs, alongside her missed or cancelled appearances, which impacted her reputation in the entertainment industry (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). Individuals who engage in self-destructive behaviour are ill-equipped to manage life tasks as they are prone to forsake their responsibilities (Ansbacher, 1992). Houston's lifestyle of drug use undermined her ability to engage constructively with the three life tasks. Concerns about Houston's drug misuse and its impact on her were often expressed by the entertainment industry, as well as her family and friends (Houston, 2013). She often responded defensively by denying her drug misuse and claiming to have things under control (Houston, 2002; Macdonald, 2018). Adler (1929, 1930) believed that psychologically well-adjusted individuals live in such a manner that their actions benefit the community. Houston's defensiveness may suggest a lack of social interest as it prevented her from cooperating and accepting support from those who cared for her.

Houston faced a profound betrayal during this period when she learned that her father had been mismanaging her finances and filed a lawsuit against her (Houston, 2002; McCarten, 2022). This betrayal by a close family member likely contributed to her feelings of inferiority and mistrust, thus influencing her sense of community and belonging. Nevertheless, the researcher believes that Houston displayed moments of social interest. Following the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Houston rereleased her renowned recording of the USA national anthem in remembrance of the victims and donated the proceeds (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). This likely indicated her desire to contribute positively to her community and support those affected by the tragedy. Furthermore, Houston went into rehabilitation twice during this period to improve her life (Broomfield, 2017). These attempts to seek help may

indicate efforts to reconnect with her sense of community and responsibility towards herself, her family, and her career. Unfortunately, Houston was unable to maintain sobriety (Macdonald, 2018), which was possibly influenced by her feelings of inferiority and union with Brown, marked by shared drug misuse.

6.4.4.5 Striving for Superiority. Despite challenges in her personal life, a compilation album titled *Whitney: The Greatest Hits* was released in 2000 and sold millions of copies worldwide (Hudson, 2012; Macdonald, 2018). Houston renewed her contract with Arista Records in 2001 and began working on her fifth studio album, *Just Whitney*, which was released in 2002 (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). The following year, she released her sixth album, *One Wish: The Holiday Album* (Hudson, 2012). Adler (1958) viewed striving for superiority as a fundamental aspect of human motivation to overcome feelings of inferiority. Houston possibly used her career to strive for superiority, highlighting her resilience to overcome adversities. Furthermore, Houston continued to produce music and perform during this period (McCarten, 2022), likely indicating a drive to maintain her status as an esteemed performer.

Houston underwent rehabilitation for her drug misuse for the first time in 2004 (Macdonald, 2018). The researcher believes that Houston's decision to go for rehabilitation was a manifestation of her striving for superiority. This decision was likely informed by concerns about her health, career, and the well-being of her family, which contributed to feelings of inferiority. Houston's first attempt at rehabilitation was unsuccessful, and she returned to rehab the following year (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022). Her repeated efforts may highlight the severity of her struggles and the persistent nature of her addiction. Despite the initial setback, Houston's return to rehabilitation possibly indicated her continued striving for superiority and efforts to claim responsibility for her life.

6.4.4.6 Schema of Apperception. The researcher is of the opinion that Houston's schema of apperception was shaped by her life experiences and a sense of inferiority, influencing her behaviour during this period. For example, she maintained a commitment to Brown even though their marriage was plagued by dysfunction (Bald, 2021). Additionally, she continued to misuse drugs (McCarten, 2022), which may suggest that she had a negative perspective of her ability to confront life's challenges head-on.

6.4.4.7 Sense of Inferiority. The researcher believes that Houston's sense of inferiority was influenced by the hardships she faced in her personal and professional life. The occurrence of her father mishandling her finances and taking legal action against her (Houston, 2013), probably intensified her sense of inferiority and mistrust towards others. Furthermore, Houston's sense of inferiority may have been influenced by her tumultuous marriage to Brown, which was marked by a shared addiction to drugs and domestic violence (Kennedy, 2022). Houston's drug use may suggest her misguided efforts to alleviate feelings of inferiority. Houston's image became stained by her displays of unpredictable behaviour and declining vocal prowess (McCarten, 2022). Houston's personal problems contributed to the deterioration of her reputation, possibly influencing her self-perception as a highly regarded artist. In addition, Houston faced ongoing criticism and was under significant pressure to meet high expectations (Broomfield, 2017), which may have further reinforced her sense of inferiority.

6.4.5 *The Final Performance (2006-2012)*

6.4.5.1 Inferiority Complex. Houston made numerous attempts to overcome her drug misuse by attending rehabilitation programmes (Macdonald, 2018). Despite these efforts, she continued to struggle with drugs (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013). Houston's continued drug misuse, despite her publicised attempts at recovery, was possibly a manifestation of her inferiority complex. The nature of her addiction could indicate her inability to address the

underlying issues contributing to her addiction fully. Houston's last world tour in 2011 was marked by significant criticism from both fans and the media. Reports indicated that she appeared intoxicated, struggled to hit her iconic high notes, and often forgot lyrics (Bald, 2021; Broomfield, 2017). Her struggles in maintaining her previous level of performance likely heightened her sense of inferiority, leading to further drug use. In the days leading to her death, Houston was in Beverly Hills to perform at Davis's pre-Grammy party (Macdonald, 2018; McCarten, 2022). She spent these days misusing drugs and engaging in heavy partying (McCarten, 2022). This behaviour was possibly a manifestation of her inferiority complex, where the pressure to reclaim her status may have heightened her insecurities and led to self-destructive actions.

Houston's last performance was an impromptu rendition of "Jesus Loves Me", which she performed at her friend and colleague Kelly Price's event (Bald, 2021; Kennedy, 2022). The selection of the song and her emotional condition while performing may indicate a cry for help and a manifestation of her inferiority complex. On February 11, 2012, Houston was discovered dead in the bathtub of her hotel room in Beverly Hills on the same day as Davis' party (Broomfield, 2017; Crawford, 2019). The cause of her death was accidental drowning, with additional aspects of heart disease and drug abuse playing a role (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). The researcher believes that Houston's inability to overcome her inferiority complex, despite her attempts at rehabilitation and recovery, ultimately resulted in her premature death.

6.4.5.2 Life Task. Adler emphasised that the life task of love and marriage involves forming a deep, cooperative relationship that contributes positively to both partners' personal growth (Adler, 1927; Carlson et al., 2006). In 2006, Houston separated from Brown, and they divorced in 2007, with Houston retaining sole custody of their daughter (Bald, 2021). In an interview with Oprah Winfrey, Houston admitted to some of the issues in her marriage,

including their drug misuse, Brown's jealousy towards her, and the abuse she experienced (Houston, 2009). The couple's marriage was dysfunctional, likely creating an environment where mutual respect and cooperation could not thrive. Divorce, in this case, was possibly Houston's acknowledgement that her union with Brown failed to achieve the life task of love and marriage. Houston began dating singer Ray J, who was 18 years younger than her during this period (Houston, 2013; Kennedy, 2022). Houston was likely seeking support and companionship during a vulnerable period in her life. Although Houston experienced difficulties with the task of love, she persevered within the task of occupation. Houston released albums at this stage of her life and engaged in her first major tour since her 1999 *My Love is Your Love World Tour* (Bald, 2021; Macdonald, 2018). She also fulfilled her career as an actress in this period (Houston, 2013). Houston also demonstrated moments of fulfilling the social task through her return to rehabilitation and her efforts to rebuild her life and career (Houston, 2009).

6.4.5.3 Lifestyle. Adler maintained that lifestyle encompasses the unique ways individuals strive to overcome feelings of inferiority and achieve personal significance (Carlson & Johnson, 2016). Houston's lifestyle was characterised by her attempts at recovering from drug misuse and her efforts to rebuild her life and career during this period. Despite her struggles, Houston went to rehabilitation various times and admitted to a lifestyle of drug use, including crack cocaine, which she had previously denied using (Bald, 2021; Houston, 2009). She released an album which marked a significant comeback, leading to her making numerous appearances, conducting interviews, and going on a world tour (Houston, 2013). These activities likely demonstrate how her lifestyle was focused on reviving her career. However, drug misuse continued to form part of Houston's lifestyle during this period (Macdonald, 2018). Houston engaged in partying and drug misuse days before she was

pronounced dead (Broomfield, 2017). Her choice to lead a lifestyle of drug misuse likely contributed to her death.

6.4.5.4 Social Interest. Houston ended her marriage to Brown during this period (McCarten, 2022). This decision may suggest that Houston had a degree of social interest, as leaving a tumultuous and harmful relationship indicates an effort to restore harmony and well-being in her life and that of her family. She also sought out support for her drug misuse by attending rehabilitation and attempting to recover (Houston, 2009; Macdonald, 2018), possibly indicating social interest. Through seeking rehabilitation, Houston was likely attempting to improve her well-being, which would possibly affect her ability to care for and support her daughter. However, despite these efforts, Houston continued misusing drugs (Bald, 2021), possibly suggesting a complex relationship with social interest. The researcher believes that her decision to use drugs suggests a decline in social interest as it ultimately harmed her ability to fulfil her responsibilities. Houston passed away at the age of 48 due to accidental drowning in the bathtub, with heart disease and drug usage identified as contributory factors (Broomfield, 2017). Her death had a profound effect on both her relatives and fans (Kennedy, 2022). Through persistent drug misuse, which contributed to her untimely death, Houston undermined her position as a mother and role model, possibly suggesting that her feelings of inferiority overshadowed her social interest.

6.4.5.5 Striving for Superiority. Houston and Brown divorced in 2007 after years of a turbulent marriage (Houston, 2009). By ending the marriage, Houston was possibly striving for personal well-being. Adler believed that individuals compensate for feelings of inferiority by working towards a better position in life (Carlson & Englar-Carlson, 2017). Houston released the sixth and final album of her career, titled *I Look To You*, in 2009 (Bald, 2021). The album's themes of resilience and recovery reflected her struggles, possibly indicating her desire to strive for superiority. Following the release of her album, Houston embarked on the

Nothing But Love World Tour (Houston, 2013). Her efforts at making a comeback in her career likely suggest her drive to overcome her feelings of inferiority and prove her significance to herself and the world. In addition, Houston embarked on acting during this period, as evidenced by her role in the 2012 film *Sparkle* (Houston, 2013; Hudson, 2012). Her continued endeavours as an actress possibly demonstrate an effort to strive for superiority and significance in her career.

6.4.5.6 Schema of Apperception. Houston's schema of apperception, which was likely characterised by negative views about herself, others, and the world, was influenced by her life experiences and sense of inferiority. Despite her attempts to reestablish her career and pursue recovery (Bald, 2021; McCarten, 2022), her negative self-perception possibly contributed to her ongoing drug misuse and, ultimately, to her death.

6.4.5.7 Sense of Inferiority. Houston's marriage to Brown was riddled with abuse, infidelity, legal disputes, and mutual drug misuse (Houston, 2009; Macdonald, 2018), which likely reinforced her sense of inferiority. By ending the marriage in 2007 (McCarten, 2022), Houston possibly attempted to regain a sense of control and address these feelings of inferiority. Moreover, her sense of inferiority possibly influenced her decision to enter rehab to address her drug misuse. Houston's performances during her 2010 *Nothing But Love World Tour* received significant criticism as fans and critics noted her weakened voice (Kennedy, 2022). In addition, many fans walked out of her concerts (Bald, 2021), likely contributing to her feelings of inferiority. In response to these reinforced feelings of inferiority, Houston may have turned to drug use as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Despite seeking treatment multiple times, Houston continued to struggle with drug addiction (Broomfield, 2017; Houston, 2013). Her continued drug misuse was possibly an indicator of a deeper inferiority complex, as each failure to maintain sobriety likely reinforced her sense of inferiority, leading to continued drug abuse.

6.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter aimed to explore and describe Whitney Houston's individual psychological development throughout her lifespan, therefore attempting to provide an understanding of her life from an Adlerian perspective. The researcher used a psycho-historical conceptual matrix (see Table 6.1) to facilitate the organisation of the data. Initially, the chapter briefly discussed Houston's birth order and familial dynamics. Next, all of Houston's historical life periods (i.e., Early Childhood and Youth: 1963-1983, Breakthrough and Fame: 1984-1991, Marriage and Motherhood: 1992-1999, Trials and Tribulations: 2000-2005, The Final Performance: 2006-2012) were analysed using Adler's theoretical constructs as discussed in Chapter 3 (i.e., the inferiority complex, life task, lifestyle, social interest, striving for superiority, the schema of apperception, and sense of inferiority). This was carried out throughout Houston's historical periods.

The analysis of Houston's biographical and historical data through an Adlerian lens revealed significant themes, including her sense of inferiority, striving for superiority, lifestyle, and social interest. Houston's early display of singing talent suggests she experienced inferiority and sought to compensate by excelling in music. This sense of inferiority may have been influenced by her position as the youngest child and observing the musical success of her family. Houston's striving for superiority manifested in her ambition to become a professional singer, highlighting her aspiration to overcome perceived shortcomings. Her ambition in music was not limited to her early years but remained a defining aspect of her life as she continuously sought to excel in her career. Houston's drug misuse can also be interpreted as a response to feelings of inferiority, as Adler (1929, 1930) posited that individuals may turn to substances to cope with feelings of inferiority.

The researcher believes that Houston's striving for superiority was closely linked to her lifestyle and social interest, as her actions often focused on advancing her musical career

and contributing to the broader community. Furthermore, she likely exhibited Adler's (1982) socially useful lifestyle type, which encompasses high social interest and high activity. Houston's social interest was evident from a young age, as she was actively involved in church activities, including singing in the choir, which nurtured her musical talents and her connection with others. Raised in a Christian household, she was imbued with values of community, which later translated into her charitable contributions and support for various social causes. Houston made significant contributions to the music industry, particularly in elevating the representation of African Americans and women. Moreover, her commitment to her roles as a wife and mother also reflected a degree of social interest, as she endeavoured to foster a family environment despite the challenges she faced in her personal life.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by summarising the key and significant findings, as well as discussing the study's values and limitations. The chapter also includes recommendations for future psychobiographical research and offers a concluding reflection on the researcher's journey.

Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks, Limitations and Future Recommendations

7.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter concludes the study by reviewing the research aim and summarising the key and significant findings. Following that, the value and contribution of the study, study limitations and recommendations for future research are discussed. Lastly, the chapter presents a brief reflection on the researcher's personal passage, concluding thoughts and remarks relating to this study.

7.2 Reviewing the Research Aim

This study aimed to explore and describe the life and personality development of the acclaimed American singer and actress Whitney Elizabeth Houston (1963-2012) within her socio-cultural and historical context. The study's exploratory-descriptive nature followed an inductive research approach, analysing Houston's life through the lens of Adler's Individual Psychology theory (1929, 1930, 1956, 1958). Furthermore, within a deductive framework, the descriptive-dialogic nature of the case study facilitated the assessment of the applicability and relevance of Adlerian constructs to Houston's life and psychological development.

7.3 Summary of the Research Findings

Whitney Houston's life was explored and described from the viewpoint of Adler's (1929, 1930, 1952, 1958) theory of Individual Psychology. The main research findings on her Adlerian personality development were discussed in Chapter 6, Section 6.4. For this reason, these findings will only be summarised in this section. During Early Childhood and Youth (1963-1983), Houston recognised her singing talent and set a goal of becoming a professional singer, which reflected her striving for superiority. She began developing her skills by singing in her church choir and performing at local venues, shaping her lifestyle at the time. Her mother, Cissy Houston, a respected gospel singer, was pivotal in nurturing her talent. This

environment provided Houston with early exposure to professional opportunities, such as singing backup for prominent artists. Her striving for superiority can be understood as a response to feelings of inferiority, which may have stemmed from her position as the youngest child and the pampering she received from her parents. Additionally, being born into a family of successful musicians, including her mother and cousins, may have intensified her sense of inferiority. Furthermore, growing up during the Civil Rights Movement likely heightened her awareness of racial inequalities, which may have contributed to her sense of inferiority as an African American.

Houston started using drugs during her youth (Crawford, 2019; McCarten, 2022), which may have reflected her sense of inferiority and a maladaptive way of coping with the struggles she faced in her life. Despite these challenges, Houston demonstrated social interest in her childhood and youth through her involvement in church and community activities. Her participation in the church choir possibly nurtured her musical abilities, connected her to her community, and instilled in her a sense of belonging. During the historical period titled *Breakthrough and Fame* (1984-1991), Houston continued striving for superiority by releasing multiple successful albums, engaging in extensive world tours, and maintaining a prominent presence in the entertainment industry. Her drive for success was likely connected to her social interest, as she achieved significant milestones for African American and female musicians, breaking barriers in the music industry while giving back to her community. An example of her social interest was the establishment of the Whitney Houston Foundation for Children. Furthermore, Houston's performance of the national anthem at the Super Bowl became a unifying moment of pride for Americans, further solidifying her influence on both a national and global scale.

Houston also focused on fulfilling her life tasks through success in her occupation, community involvement, and developing personal relationships, notably her union with

Bobby Brown. However, she continued to deny the sexual nature of her friendship with Robyn Crawford, which likely reflected her awareness of societal attitudes toward homosexuality at the time, suggesting a sense of inferiority, as well as a desire to maintain social interest (see Chapter 6, section 6.4.2.1). Houston faced intense scrutiny over her musical style, with critics often questioning her authenticity and “Blackness”, which likely exacerbated feelings of inferiority. As she continued to grapple with pressures in her professional and personal life, she continued to use drugs, possibly as a means of coping with the growing demands.

During the historical period of Marriage and Motherhood (1992-1999), Houston continued to demonstrate striving for superiority by releasing successful albums and her acting debut in *The Bodyguard*, followed by subsequent films. She further attempted to fulfil her life tasks by committing to her marriage and embracing motherhood with the birth of her daughter. Houston achieved success in both her music and acting careers, and her fame continuously flourished. Her lifestyle was luxurious and consistently featured global tours, concerts, and public engagements. Houston also exhibited a degree of social interest during this time through her charitable donations to various causes and her contributions to the music and film industries. However, she faced continued criticism regarding her personal life and professional choices. She often responded by overcompensating, striving to maintain her public image despite growing personal challenges. Questions surrounding her drug use and her turbulent relationship with Brown were often met with denial, possibly indicating an inferiority complex and her struggle to reconcile her public image with her private realities (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4.3.1).

During the historical period of Trials and Tribulations (2000-2005), Houston faced numerous challenges that significantly affected both her professional and personal life. Her marriage was characterised by dysfunction, including public scandals and reports of domestic

violence. At the same time, her escalating drug use began to severely impact her career. These difficulties likely exacerbated Houston's feelings of inferiority, reinforcing her internal struggles and possibly contributing to her ongoing battle with addiction. Despite these challenges, Houston exhibited signs of striving for superiority through her music profession, as well as attempting to seek rehabilitation for her drug abuse. However, her efforts at recovery were largely unsuccessful, as she cycled in and out of rehabilitation. Houston's behaviour during this period suggested a decreased sense of social interest, as her repeated failed attempts to recover from addiction demonstrated a struggle to prioritise her well-being despite the toll it was taking on her family and career. On the other hand, she portrayed moments of social interest during this tumultuous period, such as the re-release of her iconic performance of the US national anthem in remembrance of the 9/11 victims (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4.4.4). The researcher believes that Houston's behaviours during this time reflected her striving for superiority, desire to maintain social interest and deep-seated feelings of inferiority.

During the historical period of *The Final Performance* (2006-2012), Houston strongly strived for superiority in several aspects of her life. Her divorce from Brown may have been an attempt to regain control and address her sense of inferiority. She made a comeback in music and acting, reflecting her determination to overcome setbacks. In addition, Houston appeared to attempt to fulfil the life task of love and marriage through a brief romantic involvement after her divorce. Houston also made efforts to return to rehabilitation during this period, suggesting some degree of social interest and desire for self-improvement (see Chapter 6, Section 6.4.5.2). However, despite these efforts, her continued drug abuse, which negatively impacted her health and career, could be viewed as a manifestation of an underlying inferiority complex.

The researcher believes that striving for superiority, social interest, life tasks (occupation, social, love and marriage), and a sense of inferiority was evident throughout all historical periods of Houston's life. Houston's sense of inferiority fuelled her ambition to excel as a singer and actress, leading to groundbreaking achievements and enabling her to use her achievements to contribute to society. However, while these feelings of inferiority propelled her striving for superiority, they also contributed to significant struggles in her personal life. These included her battle with drug abuse, strained relationships, and the pressure of living under constant public scrutiny. Despite these challenges, Houston demonstrated a persistent effort to overcome her difficulties, continually trying to rise above the personal and professional obstacles she faced.

7.4 Value and Contribution of the Study

One of the values of this study lies in providing an in-depth psychological exploration and description of an influential figure in popular culture. While much of the existing data on Whitney Houston focuses on her drug addiction, marriage to Bobby Brown, or her professional achievements, none offers an in-depth psychological perspective of her life. This study addressed this gap by offering a reinterpretation of Houston's life story through a psychological lens, contributing to the growing body of psychobiographical research. Moreover, this study enriches the academic field of psychobiography in South Africa, particularly by addressing the need for greater diversity in psychobiographical subjects. As noted by Mayer et al. (2022), there has been a historical focus on extraordinary White males in psychobiographical studies, often neglecting gender and racial diversity (Mayer, 2022; Mayer et al., 2022; Wegner, 2020). By focusing on Houston, an African American woman with a significant cultural impact, this study broadened the scope of psychobiographical research, promoting inclusivity and deepening our understanding of the psychological development of women and individuals of African ancestry.

The exploration of Houston's life offered an opportunity to informally assess the relevance and applicability of Adler's theory of Individual Psychology to a single life. By employing Adler's (1929, 1930, 1958) theory, this study effectively interpreted various facets of Houston's life, demonstrating the theory's cross-cultural appeal through constructs like social interest, lifestyle, and striving for superiority, which is universally applicable. Adler's theory also provided a holistic understanding by emphasising the significance of the socio-cultural and historical context on an individual's development. From a theoretical perspective, Individual Psychology proved valuable due to its research-generating potential and ability to structure the subject's biographical and historical life history data into a psycho-historical matrix. Adler's focus on the holistic functioning and development of individuals provided a comprehensive lens through which to explore and describe the life of Houston. Additionally, Adler's non-reductionistic approach was especially useful in understanding Houston's struggles with drug use, as it prevented the researcher from oversimplifying her drug use as the sole explanation for her actions.

From a research design and methodological approach, the study benefited from specific strategies such as Alexander's (1988, 1990) nine saliency indicators (see Section 5.6.2 of Chapter 5), which were crucial in extracting, organising, and categorising the vast amount of data on Houston. The use of specific research questions (see Section 5.6.3 of Chapter 5) facilitated the identification of relevant analysis units, while a psycho-historical conceptual matrix (see Section 5.7 of Chapter 5) ensured systematic categorisation and consistent analysis of Houston's biographical and historical lifespan data.

Additionally, the mutual value between biographical research and psychology was illustrated in this study. Biographical materials provide rich insights into human development and personality from a developmental psychological perspective, while psychology offers robust conceptual models for conducting biographical research (Fouché, 1999). This

intersection underscores the importance of integrating psychological frameworks into biographical studies to deepen our understanding of individual lives.

7.5 Limitations of the Study

Like all research, this study has its limitations. The inherent challenges of the psychobiographical design and method were thoroughly addressed in Chapters 4 and 5, along with the steps taken to address these issues. The following sections will specifically discuss the limitations related to the psychobiographical subject and the psychobiographical research method.

7.5.1 *The Psychobiographical Subject*

In Chapter 5, the limitations of the selected psychobiographical subject for this study were explored, including challenges such as researcher bias, reductionism, and the complexities of cross-cultural and temporal differences. To achieve a more scientifically grounded approach in psychobiographical research, Ponterotto (2015) recommended the following: (a) utilising empirically validated and testable psychological theories, (b) employing more rigorous historiographic research methods, potentially incorporating quantitative approaches, and (c) adhering to ethical guidelines throughout the planning, execution, and reporting stages of the study.

Consistent with Anderson's (2003, 2011) perspective, the psychological interpretations provided in this study were intended to complement, rather than replace, other interpretations and explanations of Houston's personality development and behaviours. These interpretations were speculative and non-definitive, meaning the study's findings are not a conclusive account of Houston's Adlerian personality development, nor do they substitute interpretations from other fields of research. Future psychobiographical research on Houston's life would benefit an understanding of her life by exploring her life and personality

from alternative theoretical models. Theories such as Erikson's psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950, 1968, 1974, 1980) and Levinson's lifespan development theory (Levinson, 1977, 1986, 1996) would be particularly well-suited for psychobiographical studies.

7.5.2 *Psychobiographical Research Methodology*

The various critiques of the psychobiographical research method (Kövényi, 2011, 2019) were discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, along with the strategies used to address these criticisms. This section highlights additional limitations related to the psychobiographical approach used in this study. The first limitation concerns the psychobiography's relatively low external validity and transferability (Ponterotto & Reynolds, 2019; Runyan, 1984). The specific findings of Houston's Adlerian personality development cannot be easily generalised to a wider population due to her unique socio-historical context and personal factors such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and identity. Despite this, analytical generalisation (Yin, 2018) was employed to extend the research findings to the psychological framework itself, allowing the researcher to (a) assess the relevance of Adlerian theory in understanding Houston's personality development and (b) identify potential areas for refinement within the framework.

The study's limited capacity for establishing causal explanations is a second limitation. The goal of this research was not to identify cause-and-effect relationships but rather to explore and describe Houston's life within the context of a psychological framework. However, to enhance the internal validity of the study, several strategies were implemented, including the following: (a) thorough analysis of biographical and historical data about Houston, (b) data triangulation (Yin, 2018), and (c) reflexivity. The third limitation relates to the tentative nature of the study's findings, contextualised within the psychological framework used. As such, the conclusions should not be seen as definitive but as complementary to the understanding of Houston's life. Alternative psychobiographical

interpretations are encouraged, as they enhance the diversity of idiographic analysis (Runyan, 2019). Finally, the mostly qualitative nature of psychobiography poses a challenge due to the narrative-driven and time-intensive nature of the research process (Fouché, 2015). This challenge, discussed in Chapter 5, is compounded by the extensive biographical and historical material available.

7.6 Future Recommendations

The life of Whitney Houston in this study was explored and described through Adler's (1958, 1970) theory of Individual Psychology, making it suitable for psychobiographical research. While this theory provided valuable insights into Houston's life, the researcher recommends incorporating alternative theoretical perspectives in future studies. Doing so could yield more nuanced interpretations and capture aspects of Houston's life beyond this study's scope.

Psychobiographical research holds great potential for refining psychological theories by offering in-depth analyses of individual lives across the lifespan. The researcher encourages future researchers to apply this method to advance psychological theory and expand the diversity of subjects under study. As Mayer et al. (2023) noted, most psychobiographical research has traditionally focused on WEIRD (Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic) individuals and contexts (Heinrich, 2020; Mayer & Van Niekerk, 2024). Therefore, broadening psychobiographical research to include non-WEIRD individuals is essential for enriching the field with more diverse perspectives.

7.7 Concluding Thoughts and Remarks on the Researcher's Personal Journey

The decision to pursue this psychobiographical study of Whitney Houston was largely influenced by the researcher's interest in psychobiography as a field of research. Furthermore, the researcher was drawn to Houston due to an appreciation for her music and

the lasting impact of her legacy. Houston's life history also fascinated the researcher, who has a longstanding interest in learning about historical figures and their life history. As a result, exploring Houston's life in greater depth offered a unique opportunity to merge these personal passions with academic inquiry. Considering that Houston lived in times different from the one in which this study was conducted, it was necessary to do a thorough literature review to gain a deeper understanding of the political, social, historical, and cultural context of her time. This approach ensured sensitivity to the specific contextual factors relevant to Houston's life and highlighted important differences and similarities between the researcher and the subject. Recognising these distinctions helped the researcher prevent potential subjectivity and researcher bias.

While Houston's life experiences were shaped by Western culture, the researcher found commonalities with her in religion, race, and gender, which helped to establish a more personal connection. Recognising these differences and commonalities enabled the researcher to engage with the data cautiously while being sensitive to the necessity of avoiding biased interpretations. Besides the time, effort, and resources that a postgraduate study of this nature demands, the researcher found the journey intellectually thrilling and personally meaningful. Studying Houston's life was a pleasurable opportunity and an emotional and reflective process. It provided the researcher with a more human perspective on Houston, leading to a profound respect for her resilience and achievements and her contributions to society. In addition, this study enriched the researcher's knowledge and experience of psychobiography, offering invaluable insights that will hopefully benefit future research endeavours.

7.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter concluded the psychobiographical study of Whitney Houston, revisiting the research aims and summarising the key findings. It also explored the study's value and contribution, acknowledged its limitations, and provided recommendations for future

research. Finally, the researcher offered a personal reflection on her journey whilst undertaking the study. As the first psychobiographical study on Whitney Houston, this work contributes to the existing academic and psychological knowledge of her life. However, much still remains to be uncovered and understood about Houston's life and career. The researcher hopes this study will inspire further research into her extraordinary life.

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