

The Great Pretender:
A Psychobiography of Freddie Mercury

by

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Photograph of Freddie Mercury



Retrieved from <https://metrouk2.files.wordpress.com/2016/08/88426684->

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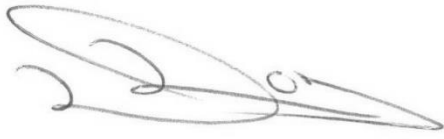
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Abstract

This study entails a psychobiography of the entertainer, Freddie Mercury (1946 – 1991). Mercury was known for his theatrical stage persona and fearless expression of his sexuality. As many other performers, Mercury became *the great pretender* in front of audiences, compensating his own inner desires for the satisfaction of his music fans. The workings of the mind of this musical genius with his multi-layered personality continue to intrigue music fanatics around the world. The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe the psychosocial development of Mercury within Erikson's conceptualisation. By using a single-case psychobiographical research design, Erikson's theory was employed to uncover and reconstruct Mercury's life.

Mercury was selected as the subject for this study by means of a non-probability purposive sampling procedure. He was undoubtedly one of the most successful music legends in entertainment history and was selected as the subject based on the interest value and unique background during his early years. 24 November 2016 marked the 25th anniversary of Mercury's death, and numerous biographers and music historians have captured and celebrated Freddie Mercury's life. However, Mercury's personality development has not been analysed or documented before. In addition, a psychobiographical approach has not been employed with regard to Mercury.

Various available published writings about Mercury as a world-renowned celebrity exist in the public domain. To assist in uncovering Mercury's life history, the biographical data were collected systematically, analysed and interpreted for this psychobiography. Six distinguishable historical life periods were identified, and prominent themes in the biographical data were identified and extracted for further analysis by using Alexander's model. Furthermore, a conceptual matrix that presented the guided analysis and discussion of the

findings was compiled. The secondary aim of this study was to test the proposed psychosocial personality development theory and its principles, as stated by Erikson by means of analytical generalisation.

The findings of this study suggest that Mercury to a large extent navigated through the second, third and seventh psychosocial stages successfully, while he did not resolve the crises confronted with in Erikson's first, fourth, fifth and sixth stages. In addition, the unsuccessful resolution of earlier crises affected further development negatively, as proposed by Erikson's theory. The study also supports the applicability and relevance of the psychosocial personality development theory for providing a systematic psychological understanding of Mercury according to Erikson's psychosocial personality developmental theory, within a psychobiographical study.

Keywords: Freddie Mercury, Farrokh Bulsara, Queen, Erikson, psychosocial personality development, psychobiography

Chapter 1

Introduction and Problem Statement

1.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter provides an introduction and overall orientation to the study. Firstly, the rationale and problem statement of the study is provided, followed by a discussion of the research aim and theoretical orientation. Finally, the chapters of this study are highlighted briefly.

1.2 General Orientation to the Study

This study is a psychobiography of the life of lead vocalist of Queen, Freddie Mercury (1946 – 1991). In an attempt to explore and describe the psychosocial development of Mercury, the researcher investigated the psychosocial development of his personality. Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1964, 1968, 1977) theory was used to explore the psychosocial development of Mercury, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

A single-case psychobiographical study across Mercury's life span was employed as the research design. To present an illuminating psychological life story of Mercury, Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) psychosocial personality development theory was utilised to explore and describe his life. The biographical data that were collected for analysis consisted primarily of several biographies, audio-visual documentaries, and other published materials such as media articles and interviews. Next, the rationale and problem statement of the study are discussed.

1.3 Rationale and Problem Statement

McAdams (2006) argued that a psychobiographical study utilises psychological (especially personality) theory systematically to present and transform a subject's life into a comprehensive and illuminating narrative. The intention and questions asked with regard to a psychobiography are psychological in nature. Thus, the emphasis is on the individual's inner world and the influence his or her experiences have on his or her behaviour and functioning (Schultz, 2005).

Celebrities are especially challenging to understand in the 21st century, as traditional and social media present a sensational view of the individual to their audiences. In addition, stage performers and vocalists are often characterised only by their music or career achievements, and in many cases, little is known about the individual's private life. These high-profile celebrities are idolised frequently to an extent where an unrealistic picture of them is presented to the world. Therefore, an in-depth life narrative can bring forth a more accurate understanding of these superstars and how their life histories inform their daily (or sometimes controversial) behaviour and functioning. As a result, this approach can portray famous 'hyped-up' celebrities as ordinary human beings who excelled in their profession, without isolating only their strengths (professional achievements) and weaknesses (often misinterpreted and sold by the media as sensation).

Schultz (2005) mentioned that psychobiography has progressed slowly, despite promising expectations, because too few researchers have worked in the field. According to him, most research psychologists prefer nomothetical (universal) problems and much more rigorous methodology, resulting in limited engagement with psychobiography, which is softer and idiographic in nature. Hurlburt and Knapp (2006) emphasised the importance of balancing between nomothetic and idiographic approaches for the science of psychology in general.

Unfortunately such balance has not been maintained, however, and psychobiography, as well as idiographic approaches, remains neglected by researchers (Schultz, 2013).

In South Africa, psychobiography has been evolving rapidly over the past few decades, although it has not reached its full potential (Fouché, 2015). To encourage the ongoing development of institutionalised academic psychobiography in South Africa, Fouché and Van Niekerk (2010) suggested that interest and passion for the field of active academic social engineering, as well as the incorporation of psychobiography with the academic curriculum, should be facilitated. Furthermore, psychobiographers should also focus on significant females and African individuals as chosen subjects (Fouché, 2015). Fouché (2015) also argued that an increase in current celebrities psychobiographies could assist in triggering the interest of the younger generation in this research field. Psychobiography not only presents logistical and administrative value, but also provides comprehensive academic benefits for the theoretical development of South African psychology (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

Fouché and Van Niekerk (2010) stated that psychobiography could also contribute to longitudinal research and theory, amongst others in the fields of health psychology, career psychology, developmental psychology, personology, and positive psychology. Psychologists could also benefit from the value of psychobiography by becoming biographers (Elms & Song, 2005). Psychological knowledge, as well as conceptualisation and methodological skills, could be utilised and applied. In addition, new nomothetic hypotheses could be tested to encourage the development of new theories. Finally, the understanding of a personality could be approached as a goal in itself, and add to the existing body of psychobiographical research.

The researcher's choice of a subject for a psychobiographical study is based predominantly on the subject's significance or interest (Howe, 1997). According to Elms (1994), it is advised that the subject chooses the researcher and not the other way around. Freddie Mercury was

selected as the subject for psychobiography because of his significant life story and interest value. Mercury was a vocalist and stage performer, known for being the frontman of the music group Queen. Born as Farrokh Bulsara in 1946, he lived in Zanzibar until he was sent to India to attend boarding school at the age of eight years (Jones, 2012). As an emerging adult, he moved with his family to England, where his music career catapulted him into stardom. Mercury was diagnosed with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in 1987 and died from bronchial pneumonia related to acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) at the age of 45 in 1991 (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Mercury's life was characterised by promiscuity, unstable romantic relationships and a deep desire to soothe his emotional void. A comprehensive literature search of available published materials conducted online (including Ebscohost and Psycinfo) and offline (including biographies such as *Freddie Mercury: The Definitive Biography* by Jones, 2012, and *Somebody To Love* by Richards and Langthorne, 2016) revealed that no psychobiography had been done on Freddie Mercury to date.

The study also sheds some light on psychosocial personality development with regard to the applicability and relevance of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory. This study may contribute to the existing available South African and international psychobiographies and assist in the further refinement of principles of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory. Finally, this research contributes to better psychological understanding of Freddie Mercury's life. In the next section, the research aim is discussed.

1.4 Research Aim

The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe the psychosocial development of Freddie Mercury. The study specifically analysed and described Mercury's psychosocial personality development to help understand his psychological underpinnings and individual functioning. Noteworthy is that this study did not attempt to generalise the findings to a greater

population through statistical generalisation. Instead, the secondary aim that guided this study was to test the principles of the psychosocial theory by means of analytical generalisation (Yin, 2014). This entails that the research findings were compared solely to the proposed expected outcomes of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory utilised in this study. To facilitate this comparison, a dialogue was created between the exploratory-descriptive findings and the applied theoretical principles and propositions of Erikson's theory of development. In the next section, the theoretical orientation is discussed.

1.5 Theoretical Orientation

Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) psychosocial theory was employed to explore and describe Mercury's psychosocial personality development. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) proposed an epigenetic principle whereby developmental outcomes are influenced by genetic/biological and environmental/social factors. Psychosocial development is predetermined by a genetic "fundamental plan" (Erikson, 1963, p. 65) and unfolds chronologically in eight stages, while the individual is confronted with societal demands in each stage. The individual's personality develops and acquires ego strengths as he or she successfully integrates the opposing forces confronted with in each stage and navigates the psychosocial stage successfully. According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977), if integration fails during early stages, it will affect the individual's future development negatively. An overview of the study is provided in the following section.

1.6 Overview of the Study

This study consists of eight chapters. The first chapter overviews the introduction and the problem statement. Chapters 2 to 4 are discussions with regard to literature review. A concise but thorough historical description of the most important aspects of Freddie Mercury's life is

provided in Chapter 2. This is followed by a comprehensive discussion of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory of psychosocial personality development in Chapter 3. A theoretical overview of psychobiography and case research is given in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 entails a detailed discussion of the preliminary methodological and ethical considerations with regard to the psychobiographical approach. Chapter 6 focuses on the research design and methodology of this study.

Chapter 7 presents the results and findings related to Mercury's psychosocial personality development. Chapter 8 provides a conclusion of the study and a discussion of the limitations, value of the study, and recommendations for future research. In conclusion, the researcher's general reflective remarks about this study are provided.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has given the reader a general orientation to the study, including the rationale and problem statement. In addition, the research aim and the theoretical orientation of the study have been presented. This introductory chapter has also given an outline of the chapters of the study that follow. Chapter 2 provides a concise historical overview of Freddie Mercury's life.

Chapter 2

The Life of Freddie Mercury

2.1 Chapter Preview

In this chapter, a thorough historical overview is provided of the life of Freddie Mercury, presented over six historical periods ranging from his birth in 1946 until his death in 1991. In addition, the major themes and events in each of these periods are also incorporated.

2.2 Historical Periods in the Life of Freddie Mercury

Six periods of development are revealed in the literature review on the life of Freddie Mercury. These six periods are categorised according to Mercury's physical location during his early years (Zanzibar, India and England), as well as significant life events occurring during adulthood (his career development, identity expression, and HIV diagnosis). These periods, although distinguishable, are also interrelated, and combine the salient biographical components that are reviewed in the following subsections.

2.2.1 Zanzibar (1946 – 1953).

Farrokh Bulsara was born on 5 September 1946 in Zanzibar, Tanzania (Jones, 2012). Bulsara was the family's first-born son and a healthy boy, weighing 3.1 kg (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Jones (2012) mentioned that his parents, father Bomi Bulsara and mother Jer Bulsara, named him Farrokh, which was one of the limited options available in their Parsee religion. The Parsees were modern adherents from the monotheistic Zoroastrian faith, who immigrated to India to avoid religious persecution by the Muslims. Orthodox Zoroastrians support the suppression of homosexuality, declaring it as not only sinful, but also devil worship (Jones,

2012). Farrokh grew up in a spacious stone-stained flat, overlooking the sea (Jackson, 2012). Jones (2012) classified the family as one with middle to high socio-economic status, as both parents worked for the local British government. The Bulsara household had servants who maintained the residence and assisted looking after the children, while both parents regularly attended work and social events (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Bulsara was cared for primarily by his nanny and his niece during this time (Jones, 2012). As a child, he received neither much corporal punishment nor much affection from his parents, who were always busy (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Young Bulsara first encountered the world of fame during his first year, when his baby photo won the local “Photo of the Year” competition (Jones, 2012).

In 1951, at the age of five, Bulsara went to the Zanzibar Missionary School (Szabelski, 2012). There he was taught by Anglican nuns and reportedly enjoyed painting and drawing (Jackson, 2012). According to Jones (2012), Bulsara was painfully shy and developed the ability to be very precise with regard to his schoolwork and artwork. His mother and sister remember him as a child who enjoyed listening to a variety of music, including British artists. According to Bulsara’s sister, Kashmira Bulsara, Zanzibar was not very exciting for children, as there were few activities to keep them busy (Jones, 2012). Bulsara walked to school every day and enjoyed visiting the harbour where ships, filled with spices, left the docks for the big ocean (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Jones (2012) noted that Bulsara grew up in an environment where he was allowed to explore the streets, rub shoulders with the local fishermen, and keep himself busy by drawing or painting. During his time in Zanzibar, Bulsara was well aware of the rigid religious constraints regarding homosexuality, while Tanzanian laws supported the suppression of sexual acts between same-sex individuals (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). As a young boy, he was ceremoniously accepted into the Zoroastrian faith by undertaking a cleansing bath, symbolising clarification of mind and soul (Jones, 2012). During later years, Bulsara recalled his time in Zanzibar as calm and peaceful (Freestone & Evans, 2001). He would often

escape to the tranquillity of Zanzibar in his own mind, especially when he felt overwhelmed by life's stressors (Jackson, 2012).

2.2.2 Panchgani (1954 – 1958).

Jones (2012) noted that educational services for boys were not of a high standard in Zanzibar. Bulsara's parents sent the eight-year-old boy to a boarding school in India. On 14 February 1955, he enrolled at the St Peter's Church of England School in Panchgani, in the Indian state of Maharashtra (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). According to Jones (2012), Bulsara's journey from Zanzibar to Panchgani included eight weeks of travelling by ship and bus. During these travels, Bulsara experienced homesickness. He worried about his sister's emotional well-being, as she was severely distressed when he had to leave Zanzibar. In addition, Bulsara was anxious about what awaited him in India. Bulsara saw his parents only once a year, and his relationship with them grew distant (Szabelski, 2012). During his first few years in India, he felt alone and harboured deep resentment towards his parents for sending him away (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). As he recalled during later interviews, he viewed himself as "a bit clingy" and cried himself to sleep at night (Jones, 2012, p. 45). During this time, seeking for solace, Bulsara befriended three other boys in the school. They became inseparable and slept close to each other in the dormitory (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). During the school's half-term breaks, Bulsara preferred visiting his maternal aunts in India, instead of his parents and sister in Zanzibar (Jackson, 2012). Reportedly, Bulsara was very hesitant to talk about his Zanzibar background and African roots (Jones, 2012). According to Jones (2012), Bulsara's peers and schoolteachers struggled to pronounce his name the traditional Persian way. They quickly adopted a more Western approach and began calling him Freddie, a change in identity Bulsara gladly welcomed.

During his time in Panchgani, where Bulsara observed poverty for the first time, he came to the realisation how privileged he was (Thomas, 2012). According to Jones (2012), the St Peter's Church of England School was known for its authoritarian and rigid discipline. Only cold water was available for baths, and although all faiths were respected, attendance of Sunday Catholic ceremonies was compulsory. Bulsara was a shy boy and quickly realised that he would have to hold his own and stand up to the school bullies, which at first proved to be a steep learning curve for him (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Other boys easily bullied him, and he occasionally was caught up in fights with them. Bulsara was punished by cutting his hair short, something that devastated him (Jackson, 2012). At the age of 10, he began to display an aloof streak (Jones, 2012). Jones (2012) mentioned that Bulsara was not a team player and preferred one-to-one activities, like table tennis, chess, and drawing. His favourite subject was art and he would spend his spare time sketching and painting pictures for his aunt and grandparents in Bombay. He also took on piano lessons and sang in the choir (Thomas, 2012). Bulsara excelled in everything he did. He was the table tennis champion of the school. At the age of 12, he won the Junior All-rounder award, and in the following year received the prize for Academic Prowess (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000).

2.2.3 Darlings (1959 – 1963).

During the 1950s and 1960s, Bombay enjoyed a cosmopolitan shift when Eastern cultures met with Western influences (Jones, 2012). This allowed Western pop and rock music to take hold in India. Bulsara enjoyed the exposure to classical music while studying the piano, but adored the contemporary styles even more (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). He would often play the lead roles in school musicals and was known for portraying several female characters on stage (Jones, 2012). Bulsara formed his first band, called *The Hectics*, and the boys started

performing at school concerts (Jackson, 2012). The shy boy came out of his shell behind the keyboard as he thrived on the attention he received during performances on stage (Jones, 2012).

During adolescence, Bulsara became aware of his imperfections. His nickname was “Bucky” because of his protruding teeth (Jones, 2012, p. 48). Janet Smith, one of the school’s teachers, described Bulsara as “extremely polite and generous” and mentioned that he had the habit of calling everyone “darling” (Jones, 2012, p. 49). According to Smith, that gave her a clear indication that Bulsara was homosexual. Nevertheless, Bulsara was attracted to Gita Bharucha, a local 15-year-old girl he met when the neighbouring girl’s school joined them for choir practice (Jones, 2012). Although it is rumoured that Bulsara was sexually active from the age of 14, Bharucha denies and strongly doubts these claims (Jones, 2012). According to Bharucha, she and Bulsara were particularly close, but not serious; they would hold hands, but were not intimate (Jones, 2012).

During Bulsara’s Grade 10 year, he lost interest in his studies and failed his last examination (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). He left for Zanzibar in 1963 and finished his last two school years at the Roman Catholic St. Joseph’s Convent School (Jones, 2012). Back in Zanzibar, Bulsara referred to himself as British and did not desire to return to India (Thomas, 2012). A former local policeman, Bonzo Fernandez, remembered Bulsara as a good cricket player and someone who always dressed smartly (Jones, 2012). During his adolescence spent in Zanzibar, Bulsara and friends enjoyed swimming in the ocean and cycling around the island (Jones, 2012).

2.2.4 The Great Pretender (1964 – 1974).

In 1964, during the Zanzibar Revolution, the Bulsara family feared for their safety and fled to Feltham Middlesex, London. Jones (2012) mentioned that Zanzibar would have been too constraining for a restless spirit like Bulsara. Bomi Bulsara, his father, had a British passport

and got a job as a cashier in England (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Bulsara, then 18 years old, was still financially dependent on his parents in London. According to Thomas (2012), if Bulsara had a choice, he would have been born only at 21 years of age in London. Bulsara enjoyed the anonymity of the city and the diversity of individuals who all dressed differently (Brooks & Lupton, 2008). This gave him the courage to grow out his hair. He was motivated and determined to succeed on his own. During his first few months in London, he set up a second-hand clothing store and worked in a container warehouse at London Heathrow Airport (Jones, 2012). Bulsara's co-workers frequently teased him for his feminine hands and flamboyant persona, to which he responded that he actually was a musician (Jones, 2012).

Jer Bulsara wanted her son to be a lawyer, but he was determined to become a professional illustrator instead (Jackson, 2012). According to Jones (2012), Bulsara studied at Isleworth Polytechnic School from 1964 until 1966, when he attained an A-level qualification in Art. He then joined the Ealing College of Art in 1966 to study graphic design and illustration and graduated with a diploma at the age of 23. Art school taught Bulsara to become very fashion conscious, and he would spend hours in front of the mirror (Jones, 2012). He lived like a gypsy and idolised American rock artist Jimi Hendrix's flamboyance and sense for fashion. These new influences caused Bulsara to become restless and rebellious, as he strived to be a step ahead with regard to fashion and music (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000).

Bulsara was a fan of several local music bands and would follow them to performances, enjoying their music (Jones, 2012). After the lead singer of the band *Smile* had left, Bulsara joined the remaining members, Brian May on guitar and Roger Taylor on the drums (Jones, 2012). Bulsara was open to experiment and enjoyed the unique identity every band member had. In 1970, Bulsara announced to May and Roger that he had decided to change his surname to *Mercury*, a reference to "God to the fans" (Jones, 2012, p. 84). Later, May stated that the

old Bulsara was still present, but he would present himself to the public as this god (Jones, 2012). Bulsara, now Mercury, would offer numerous suggestions to the band to reinvent their style and recommended they adopt a much more theatrical approach (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). The band changed their name to *Queen*, an attempt to avoid any known connotations, which allowed them the necessary creative freedom (Jones, 2012). However, Mercury admired the regal quality of the name and was well aware of the homosexual association attached to it (Jones, 2012). In addition, John Deacon joined the band as bassist in the early 1970s. Queen would continue to become one of the greatest musical groups of the 20th century, with 18 number one albums and estimated record sales of 300 million copies (Queen, 2016).

May noted that Mercury's attention span was extremely short, as he could not focus on a task for longer than 90 minutes without experiencing boredom (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). He had a permanent restlessness inside him. According to Jones (2012), Mercury was impulsive and constantly had to be active, do something, or seek out excitement, often channelling a childish energy. During later years, as the band grew more successful, Mercury would go on lavishing shopping sprees, admitting that it made him feel good (Jones, 2012). Mercury experienced immense boredom while standing next to the rest of the band on-stage. Therefore, he decided to take on a more central position in front of the band, where he could have freedom to perform and project his energy into the audience (Brooks & Lupton, 2008). Mercury stated his desire to be seen and, referring to his strut when walking on stage, claimed, "I'm a peacock!" (Jones, 2012, p. 5).

Mercury enjoyed the different layers of his personality and found his own camp and flamboyant persona amusing (Brooks & Lupton, 2008). He projected supreme confidence on stage, as the lights and movement disguised his dark eyes and imperfect teeth (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). David Freestone, Mercury's personal assistant from 1979 until 1991, noted

that Mercury felt compelled to go out and act in a way that would entertain people (Freestone & Evans, 2001). However, Mercury was a fish out of water when not performing. May recalled that his shyness got the better of him when he had to talk to fans after performances (Jones, 2012). Mercury was painfully self-conscious about his lack of height, teeth, skin, and whispery, lisped voice (Jones, 2012). Freestone and Evans (2001) remembered Mercury as someone who desired to blend into the background and felt safe only when entering a crowded room accompanied by a close friend.

Mercury's sexuality was questioned and a topic of debate throughout his career. Until the 1970s, Mercury dated women, but had a passion for meeting men (Jones, 2012). Although he was interested in men, the insecure Mercury never had the confidence to act upon it (Thomas, 2012). According to some, Mercury considered himself heterosexual until his middle 20s (Jones, 2012). He was afraid of the possibility of being homosexual and especially the disappointment and shock it would bring to his parents and sister (Thomas, 2012). Until his death, he never openly spoke to his family about his sexual preferences (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). According to Jones (2012), Mercury created a bold theatrical stage persona, which allowed him to express his true self without feeling exposed and vulnerable. However, in his private capacity, friends often noticed Mercury being self-conscious, retreating in his shell and at times even coming across as being depressed (Freestone & Evans, 2001).

Mercury met Mary Austin in the early 1970s (Jackson, 2012). Jones (2012) noted that Austin was a shy girl coming from a poor background. Mercury mentioned that he had a very special emotional bond with Austin and would refer to her as the love of his life (Jones, 2012). They had many things in common: Both were estranged by their parents and both had "tip of the iceberg" personalities that tended to reveal little of their true selves (Jones, 2012, p. 91). Some refer to Austin as the mother figure in Mercury's life (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Austin was

shy and soft spoken and presented a stable temperament that Mercury desired in himself (Jones, 2012). Dr Cosmo Hallstron, a consulting psychiatrist, refers to Austin as Mercury's idealised mother (Jones, 2012). She was highly sexual but accepted his living a promiscuous lifestyle separate from her, and she always waited patiently for his return (Jones, 2012). Mercury had an honest transparent relationship with Austin, something he never had with his own biological mother. Their sexual relationship lasted six years before they decided to move in together. Mercury promised Austin that he would one day marry her, and his parents wanted Austin to be the mother of his children. However, Austin noticed that Mercury was uncomfortable with himself. Governing his conflicting needs has taken its toll on Mercury (Freestone & Evans, 2001). During Christmas in 1976, Mercury gathered the courage to tell Austin that he was bisexual, which she denied, responding to Mercury that he was actually homosexual (Jones, 2012). Austin supported his homosexuality, as she was fascinated by seeing him at peace. Austin and Mercury continued their close emotional relationship, but she allowed Mercury to date and have sexual encounters with other men. According to Hallstron, Mercury would always feel guilty for letting Austin down, and compensated by taking care of her financially and making sure she would never have to work a day in her life, even after his death. Mercury's feelings of guilt toward Austin fuelled his creativity – in essence, he needed her to be successful (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000).

2.2.5 I want to break free (1975 – 1984).

One of Queen's greatest hit songs, *Bohemian Rhapsody*, a musical masterpiece of 5 minutes and 57 seconds, was written by Mercury and released in 1975 (Thomas, 2012). Freestone, Mercury's personal assistant, considered *Bohemian Rhapsody* as Mercury's way of revealing his homosexuality (Jones, 2012). According to Freestone, Mercury used *Bohemian Rhapsody*

to say goodbye to his old version and come to terms with his homosexuality, also acknowledging the consequences it might have (Freestone & Evans, 2001).

“Mama, just killed a man
Put a gun against his head
Pulled my trigger, now he's dead
Mama, life had just begun
But now I've gone and thrown it all away”
(Mercury, 1975, track 11)

From 1975 onwards, Mercury dated several men and women, progressing from one relationship to the other (Jackson, 2012). Mercury, then in his 30s, still perceived his sexuality as something private, and never made it public. He enjoyed keeping the public and media in suspense, often portraying himself as mysterious to keep their interest in him (Jones, 2012). Responding to journalists questioning his sexuality, Mercury said, “I sleep with men, woman, cats – you name it! I’ll go to bed with anything! My bed is so huge, I can comfortably sleep six. I prefer my sex without any involvement!” (Jones, 2012, p. 314). Mercury would be energised and intrigued by partners who challenged him. Freestone and Evans (2001) noted that these interpersonal conflicts brought excitement for Mercury and fuelled his creativity.

Mercury said, “I generate a lot of friction, I'm not the easiest person to have a relationship with. I try too hard. In one way I am greedy, I just want it all my own way. I demand a lot, but I do give a lot in return” (Jones, 2012, p. 191).

During the late 1970s, Mercury decided to update his look and adapt his image for the new decade (Jones, 2012). He adopted an image dominated by leather trousers and jackets, which were perceived as much harder than before. He did not want to dress “*crazily*” anymore, and felt that the world had changed, demanding an image more casual and direct. In the early 1980s,

Mercury changed his image again, adopting a fashion statement known as the *clone look*. It involved a moustache (speculated to cover Mercury's teeth), closely cropped hair, a muscular upper body, and tight-fitting denim jeans (Thomas, 2012). The clone look was a well-known homosexual identity that portrayed the idealised working-class man in the 1970s and 1980s (Jackson, 2012).

During the period of 1975 to 1985, Mercury became rebellious and enjoyed hosting big parties and frequently visiting gay clubs around New York, Munich, and London (Thomas, 2012). Sexually transmitted diseases were not taken seriously by the public during this time and only became a public concern in the 1980s. According to Jones (2012), BBC disc jockey Paul Gambaccini recounted running into Mercury at a London club one night in 1984. In a film documentary directed by Thomas (2012), Gambaccini asked Mercury if AIDS had changed his attitude about free-ranging sex, to which Mercury replied, "Darling, my attitude is 'fuck it'. I'm doing everything with everybody". Mercury would frequently meet men during his parties and have sexual encounters with them. At one stage, Mercury dated Winnie Kirchburger, Barbara and Jim Hutton, and would have sexual encounters with all three partners simultaneously in one bed (Jones, 2012). During social events, Mercury and his partners would use cocaine to create an instant high and enhance his libido. According to Jim Hutton, Mercury's boyfriend from 1983 to 1991, Mercury never became addicted to cocaine, and stopped using it easily if he wanted to (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Despite his promiscuous behaviour, he did not trust people easily (Jones, 2012). He exhibited true emotional connection solely with friends he could really trust, including Austin, Freestone, and Hutton (Freestone & Evans, 2001). Mercury said the following:

Excess is a part of my nature, dullness is a disease. I'm definitely a sexual person. I love to surround myself with strange and interesting people - make me feel me more alive. Straight

people bore me - I like freaky people. My nature, I'm restless and highly strung. Deep down I'm a really emotional person, a person with a lot of extremes. That's often distracting both to myself and others. (Jones, 2012, p. 294)

Mercury started dating an Austrian actress, Barbara Valentin, in the early 1980s (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Valentin was known for her big breasts and strong personality (Jones, 2012). Mercury and Valentin shared similar status and fame. According to Valentin, Mercury never viewed homosexuality as something driven by biological influences, but rather perceived being gay as a choice. She noted that being gay was a role Mercury preferred to play, that was exciting and seen by him as forbidden fruit. Nevertheless, Valentin mentioned that Mercury admitted to her that his parents would never have accepted his being gay (Jones, 2012).

Mercury was known for being a painstaking perfectionist, often throwing tantrums directed at his fellow band members or management to demand he got his way (Freestone & Evans, 2001). During the recording of *Another One Bites the Dust*, Mercury was so into the music and committed to perfect the vocal take that he sang until his vocal chords started bleeding (Jones, 2012). In addition to having terrible mood swings, he also had a great fear of flying or riding in elevators, and would never go somewhere on his own (Thomas, 2012).

2.2.6 Love Kills (1985 – 1991).

It is unclear when Mercury officially found out he was HIV positive (Jones, 2012). Tests in the early 1980s were still unreliable, and multiple HIV testing had to be conducted to obtain a clear diagnosis. Some close colleagues speculated that Mercury already could have known in 1983, although no evidence is on record that Mercury was tested at the time (Jones, 2012). May noted that Mercury showed symptoms during Queen's controversial concert tour in Sun City, South Africa (Thomas, 2012). Mercury had a lingering throat infection that caused him to lose his

voice, resulting in several performances being cancelled. Some friends thought he had a liver problem from too much alcohol use (Jones, 2012).

Mercury started the recordings of his first solo album in Munich during 1983, when producer Reinhold Mack noted how Mercury enjoyed staying in a house where everyone felt like family to him (Thomas, 2012). According to Mack, Mercury never experienced being part of a close family as a child. In 1984, Mercury released his first solo single, *Love Kills*, which would be followed up by the release of his first solo album in 1985, *Mr Bad Guy*. Mercury named the album that after telling journalists that he was Mr Bad Guy (Jones, 2012). The album did not sell, and Mercury's record label viewed it as a failure. Very disappointed in his first solo initiative, Mercury reacted by moving on to other projects immediately (Thomas, 2012). According to Hutton, Mercury was diagnosed with HIV in 1987, although Mercury still denied any health-related concerns to the media (Thomas, 2012). Hutton mentioned that Mercury was not ashamed of contracting the virus, but rather annoyed by the stigma attached to it (Jones, 2012). Mercury got tired of the rock and roll style and found it more challenging to present his larger-than-life persona to the world (Richards & Langthorne, 2016).

Mercury's version of *The Great Pretender* was released in 1987. Although not his final recording, many acknowledged it as Mercury's farewell song, as the music video portrayed a summary of his career with referrals to Mercury's previous recordings, costumes, and fashion statements (Thomas, 2012). *The Great Pretender* and *Bohemian Rhapsody* stand as a testament to the tormented soul behind the rock star (Jones, 2012). Mercury associated closely with the lyrics of *The Great Pretender*, stating that his career was just an act:

“Oh yes, I'm the great pretender

Pretending that I'm doing well

My need is such I pretend too much

I'm lonely but no one can tell”

(Ram, 1987, track 1)

According to Taylor, Mercury was obsessed with classical music and operas, and had great admiration for the Spanish soprano Montserrat Caballé (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Freestone went to numerous operas with Mercury and recalled how fascinated Mercury was with the vocal control classical singers exhibited (Thomas, 2012). Freestone noted how nervous Mercury was the first time he met Caballé; he was chain smoking one cigarette after another (Freestone & Evans, 2001). According to Tim Rice, Mercury viewed Caballé as the best vocalist in the world (Jones, 2012). Rice believed it was one way of Freddie having love for women which he could really express and indulge in (Thomas, 2012). May stated that the classical music style was not something that Queen would allow Mercury to experiment with (Thomas, 2012). Not knowing much about the classical genre, Mercury composed music for him and Caballé on the piano, which gave him some control over the process, as he felt competent in playing the piano (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Knowing his HIV status, he was motivated to work hard and produce a successful album, according to Freestone (Freestone & Evans, 2001). Mercury’s duet album with Caballé was released in 1987, including the hit single *Barcelona* pre-released the previous year (Jones, 2012).

By 1987, at the age of 41, Mercury’s health deteriorated and his symptoms progressed (Jones, 2012). According to Jones (2012), he completely lost his libido and stopped having sex. Mercury said, “I lived for sex. I was extremely promiscuous, but AIDS changed my life” (Jones, 2012, p. 301). Mercury developed sores all over his body, including on his right foot, making it more challenging for him to walk (Thomas, 2012). He retreated from the public eye and indulged in renovating his house in Kensington, named *Garden Lodge* (Jones, 2012). Freestone recalled how much Mercury enjoyed renovating his properties and stated that he

wanted to leave behind his own little piece of paradise (Freestone & Evans, 2001). Mercury adored cats and sought comfort in them as his illness progressed (Jones, 2012). In 1988, Queen started working on their next album, and Mercury was committed to continue as usual. He officially told the other band members about his illness, but demanded that he would like to continue working until he dropped dead (Thomas, 2012). May noted that Mercury worked tirelessly in the studio and wanted to leave as much behind as he could (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Hutton said, "Working helped him to have the courage to face his illness. If he didn't have the music, he wouldn't have lasted." (Jones, 2012, p. 307). Mercury's energy levels were diminishing, and he often had to sit down while recording. The album, *The Miracle*, was released in 1989, but the band was not able to tour due to Mercury's poor health. In addition, Queen also released their last album with Mercury in 1991, *Innuendo*. May recalled how special those recording sessions were (Thomas, 2012). They were a close-knit family, enjoying each other's company and reliving their youth (Jones, 2012).

According to Freestone, Mercury resigned to the fact that he was going to die, and did not become depressed (Freestone & Evans, 2001). At Garden Lodge, in Kensington, Mercury started drawing and painting again, something he had not done since being in college (Jones, 2012). In 1990, Mercury told his sister, Kashmira, and her husband, "What you have to understand, my dear Kash, is that what I have is terminal. I am going to die" (Jones, 2012, p. 322). His 45th birthday, on 5 September 1991, was spent quieter than in previous years. According to Hutton, Mercury did not want people to see him so distressed and preferred to be remembered as the old Freddie (Thomas, 2012). Ten days before Mercury passed away, Queen's manager, Jim Beach, visited Mercury to discuss the future. Mercury said to Beach, "You can do anything you like with my music, my image, but never make me boring!" (Thomas, 2012). In October 1991, Queen released the single *The Show Must Go On* (Richards & Langthorne, 2016).

Mercury was losing his sight (Richards & Langthorne, 2016). He ordered the household staff to stop giving him medication, except for pain killers (Jones, 2012). According to Freestone, Mercury was going to decide when he was going to die (Freestone & Evans, 2001). He did not want the illness to control his life – as soon as it did, he took control again by ceasing his treatment (Jones, 2012). The only regret he had was that there was so much more music inside him (Freestone & Evans, 2001). According to Jones (2012), Mercury’s parents and sister visited him and they drank tea in his bedroom. Mercury entertained them, still pretending there was nothing to worry about. Mercury was surrounded by close friends during his final months alive, including Freestone, a previous boyfriend and the house chef, Joe Fanelli, Austin, and Hutton (Thomas, 2012). At 20:00 on 23 November 1991, after approving the final version to Beach, Mercury released a press release:

Following enormous conjecture in the press, I wish to confirm that I have been tested HIV-positive and have AIDS. I felt it correct to keep this information private in order to protect the privacy of those around me. However, the time has now come for my friends and fans around the world to know the truth, and I hope everyone will join with me, my doctors and all those worldwide in the fight against this terrible disease. (Gilmore, 2014)

Twenty-five hours later, on 24 November 1991, the 45-year-old great pretender, Freddie Mercury, passed away (Jones, 2012).

2.3. Chapter Summary

This chapter explored and described the most important personal and socio-historical events in the life of Freddie Mercury. Mercury’s life span was discussed over six historical periods that ranged from his birth in 1946 to his death in 1991. In the next chapter, a thorough theoretical overview of Erikson’s theory of psychosocial personality development is provided.

Chapter 3

Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Personality Development

3.1 Chapter Preview

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the psychosocial developmental theory of Erik Erikson. Firstly, Erikson is introduced to the reader, followed by an elaborated discussion on the viewpoints Erikson had on psychology, personality development, and psychoanalysis. His proposed theory, its contents, and the eight psychosocial stages of development are explained. This section is followed by a discussion of the potential forms of psychopathology that result in the unsuccessful resolution of the respective life stages. Furthermore, the ninth stage, a proposed additional stage of Erikson's theory, is overviewed briefly. The relationship between Erikson and psychobiography, as well as the applicability of his theory for this study, is also discussed. Finally, the researcher examines the criticism against Erikson's theory and applies its relevance for this study.

3.2 Erik Erikson

Erik Homburger Erikson, born in 1902, was a prominent forerunner for human development and psychoanalysis and an accredited Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award winner (Friedman, 2000). He is known for his coined term, *identity crisis*, and his innovated proposed eight stages of psychosocial development. The ninth stage was added later. Erikson's personal subjective experience seemed to influence and guide his work. His Danish Protestant father and Danish Jewish mother separated before he was born, which resulted in his being brought up by his mother and stepfather, Theodore Homburger, a German Jewish paediatrician (Coles, 2001). Erikson never knew anything about his biological father, and his mother kept all

information regarding his birth a secret. Erikson was given his biological father's surname, Salomonsen, at birth, but later he adopted his stepfather's surname, Homburger. This identity confusion, in addition to other factors, probably sparked Erikson's interest in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis, which inevitably led to the instigation of the theory of psychosocial development (Paranjpe, 2000). Erikson passed away in 1994 (Friedman, 2000).

3.2.1 Erikson's prospect of psychoanalysis.

During the 20th century, Freudian principles developed further and surpassed consciousness into the social world and later the complete life span (Hoare, 2005). Erikson was influenced by the revolutionary thinker, Sigmund Freud, especially by his proposed psychoanalytic theory. In brief, Freud hypothesised that humans are shaped by their earliest experiences and driven by unconscious inner motives and emotional conflicts (Hall, 1954). He coined the three components of the personality, namely the id, the ego and the superego. Freud (1938) associated the id with our reservoir of unorganised instinctual drives, which are already present at birth and mainly unconscious. "Simply put, the ID wants what it wants when it wants it" (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010, p. 42). In opposition to the id, the superego acts as a rigid conscience that internalises rules, morals and guidelines of the individual's world. Furthermore, the ego could be seen as the mediator between the id and the superego. The superego is the executive organ of the psyche that manages motility, perception, reality testing, and modulation and delay of drive expression (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

In addition to Freud's (1930, 1936, 1938) hypothesis of personality, he also proposed a theory of psychosexual development. His five psychosexual stages include the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages through which all humans develop (Blatt & Levy, 2003; Freud, 1930, 1936, 1938). The oral stage (0 to 18 months) revolves around the mouth, also known as the erotic zone, as it soothes the child by eating and sucking (Carver & Scheier, 2000;

Freud, 1930). The need for gratifications shifts from the oral stage to the anal stage when the child finds social pleasure in impressing his or her parents and physical enjoyment in the emptying of the bowel (18 to 36 months) (Fiske, 1988; Freud, 1936). The phallic stage (3 to 5 years) is known for the child's exploration and enjoyment of the genitals, as well as his or her unconscious sexual desires for the parent of the opposite sex (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Freud, 1930, 1936). During the latency stage (5 years to puberty), the child's sexual drives are shifted to the background and become less important when social interest increases (Blatt & Levy, 2003; Freud, 1930). Freud's psychosexual development concludes with the final genital stage (puberty onwards) when sexual drives escalate and the individual develops a mature adult sexual identity that allows him or her to engage in intimate and sexual relationships (Carver & Scheier, 2000; Freud, 1938).

Erikson agreed with Freud's proposed theory of infantile sexuality and instinctual development. Erikson further agreed that the inner dynamics of personality plays an important role, but added to the theory that personality evolves through systematic stages of development. In his book, *Childhood and society*, Erikson (1950) stated the importance of societal influences in each of the psychosexual stages. Erikson proposed a matching phase for each psychosexual stage, each presenting with a mode of behaviour. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) emphasised the rational ego and its adaptive powers, and placed less focus on the sexual urges as the drivers of development, as well as on the unconscious, irrational id. He further emphasised that the development of the ego is more than the result of intrapsychic needs or inner psychic energies. He expanded his proposed concept of the ego to include self and identity and stated that the ego develops over the course of a lifetime. Furthermore, Erikson noted the importance of social influences and the reciprocal regulation between individuals and the culture and traditions of society with regard to development.

3.2.2 Erikson and personality development.

According to Erikson, the study of human development reflects the interdependence of people at all ages. This is notable in a human cycle where children become adults and where adults guide and nurture children. An individual moves on from the experience of being competent in each life stage in order to master the challenges of the next stage (Newman & Newman, 2006).

Meyer and Moore (2008) defined personality as the constantly changing but nevertheless relatively stable organisation of all physical, psychological, and spiritual characteristics of the individual that determine his or her behaviour in interaction with the context in which the individual finds him- or herself. Furthermore, Sigelman and Rider (2009) defined human development as the systematic changes and continuities that are present in a person from conception to death. This description entails that development involves changes that are systematic, patterned, and relatively stable, while continuities or ways in which the individual remains the same are also present. To conceptualise a life span approach to human development, moulds of transition and transformation from one era of life to another need to be identified, while the intergroup differences and individual diversity in groups need to be acknowledged.

For early theorists like Freud, the developmental process is concluded by late childhood or adolescence (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) pioneered the principle of life span development. Contrary to other psychodynamic theorists, he took on a positive view of humanity and saw humans as active and rational participants in their own development. In addition, he proposed that the human experience of life is the result of the engagement and modification of three prominent systems, namely the biological, psychological, and societal systems (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977).

Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1963, 1977) theory was rooted in the concepts of epigenesis, which originated from embryology. Epigenesis claims that the personality unfolds systematically in relation to the sociocultural and environmental setting (Capps, 2004). This unfolding of development happens in predetermined, sequential, and predefined stages, each of which must be resolved satisfactorily for development to advance efficiently (Capps, 2004; Coles, 1970, 2001). The principle of epigenesis also states that the unsuccessful resolution of any specific stage has a domino effect on all remaining stages. This effect on subsequent stages could take on the form of emotional, social, cognitive, or physical maladjustment (Elkind, 1970). Therefore, the success of a particular stage partly depends on the individual's success or failure in all preceding stages (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977).

3.3 Psychosocial Theory

The psychosocial theory aims to uncover the inner experiences that result from interactions between biological, psychological and societal systems. The reciprocal dynamics between the three systems means that any change in one of the systems will bring about changes in the others. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) proposed that each one of the three systems could be explored for patterns of continuity and evolvement over a lifetime. These systems have adaptive capacities that are responsive towards societal demands and can be modified by the individual's own choices. These integrative dynamic systems of biology, psychology, and society result in a malleable and complex view on human thought, behaviour and, inevitably, personality (Carver & Scheier, 2000).

3.4 Eight Stages of Psychosocial Theory

Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) did comprehensive research for 15 years and proposed the eight psychosocial stages of ego development, which he coined the Eight Ages of Man. He

hypothesised that within these eight stages, the individual has to find a new orientation towards himself or herself and towards his or her social environment. As the individual is introduced to a new stage, a new dimension of social interaction opens up. Each interaction involves the engagement with him- or herself, as well as with his or her social world (Elkind, 1970). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) referred to the conscious sense of self as ego identity, which develops only through social interaction. This ego identity is malleable and is constantly modified as the individual is exposed to new experiences and information through daily participation with his or her social environment.

The eight stages of ego development indicate markers along a continuum in which sexual, physical, cognitive and instinctual changes merge to initiate an inner crisis or conflict (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Resolving these crises or conflicts results in either psychosocial regression or growth and the development of specific virtues also known as ego strengths or inherent strengths (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). Erikson referred to this crisis or conflict as a significant turning point in development because during the crisis, the possibility for both individual growth and failure is at its greatest. Each of these stages, during which a healthy balance between these extremes or terms of conflict must be achieved optimally, is dichotomous (Coles, 2001). During this process, the individual is exposed to positive and negative aspects of the crisis. Both these aspects are integrated into the psyche, and as a result, the crisis is resolved successfully and equilibrium is reached (Capps, 2004; Coles, 2001; Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). Although Erikson placed the crises on a particular timeline along the life span continuum, he also allowed space for individual spontaneity and flexibility during these conflicting times (Sneed, Whitbourne, & Culang, 2006). The eight stages are predetermined, but can potentially present themselves during any point in the life span as a function of specific psychosocial forces, or what Erikson coined as “hazards of existence” (Erikson, 1963, p. 274). In turn, earlier stages can be revisited later in life, and later stages can reach pre-eminence much

earlier than expected. Therefore, all psychosocial crises can come forth at any age during the life span (Coles, 1970, 2001). Although Mercury never reached the chronological age associated with the last stage, all of Erikson's eight stages will be discussed in this chapter to provide a thorough overview of his theory.

3.4.1 Stage 1: Basic trust versus basic mistrust (0 to 1 year).

The first stage of psychosocial development, basic trust versus basic mistrust, is considered the most fundamental stage of life. Erikson and other theorists (Blatt & Blass, 1996; Mahler, Pine, & Bergman, 1975) claimed that the development of a basic sense of trust in infancy is a significant cornerstone for any further healthy personality development. Erikson (1968, p. 96) described trust as “the most fundamental prerequisite of vitality” and “a capacity for faith”. According to him, trust is the fundamental element, rooted at the very core of a person's sense of identity, which shapes or hinders all other aspects of personality development (Boon & Holmes, 1991).

The stage of basic trust versus basic mistrust starts at birth and usually extends throughout the first year of life (Elkind, 1970). The conflict the child experiences revolves around whether or not he or she is able to depend on other people to be responsive to his or her needs. Infants are dependent on their primary caregivers to feed them, soothe them, respond to their gestures, and return their smiles and babbles to develop a sense of trust. Therefore, the caregiver's overall responsiveness is crucial for later development, according to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). Furthermore, mistrust is established when caregivers neglect, reject, or behave inconsistently to the infant (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). Conversely, infants who develop secure attachment to a trustworthy and nurturing caregiver are more able to develop healthy, close, and trusting relationships later in life (Hook, 2002; Louw & Louw, 2014; Maier, 1988; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

Simultaneously, as infants resolve the psychosocial crisis of basic trust versus basic mistrust, they also come to the realisation that they are separate from their caregivers (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). As an infant develops trust, he or she also begins with the internal process of self-definition (Blatt & Blass, 1996). Thus, infants begin to experience themselves as separate from others and, as a result, a sense of self starts flourishing. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) noted that an infant needs to develop trust in this first stage in order to establish a sense of self, or ego identity.

During this first year of life, the infant experiences life through his or her senses – the eyes, mouth, ears, and touch. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) named this social modality the infant utilises, *to get*. Thus, the infant learns to receive what is offered and to provoke what is desired (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). In addition, another social modality is prevalent, which entails the *taking and holding on* to things. This is elicited when the infant actively starts to reach out and grasp at his environment instead of being passively receptive to stimuli (Sigelman & Rider, 2009).

Only if these social modalities are fulfilled, they can contribute successfully to the resolution of the associated conflict (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). By providing the infant with objects *to get* and to *take and hold on* to, he or she will be able to master this stage and gain the ego strength of **hope**. In addition to the social modalities, social institutions defend the ego strengths that emerge during each stage (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). For Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977), religion is the aspect of society that contributes greatly to this stage and safeguards the trust and hope that have been gained. The first stage also sets up infants to feel safe enough to extend their array and miscellany of experiences required to develop a sense of autonomy in the following stage (Hamachek, 1988).

3.4.2 Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt (1 to 3 years).

After toddlers have resolved the first stage and gained a sense of trust, they enter the next stage of psychosocial development, namely autonomy versus shame and doubt. This crisis comes forth during the first to third years of life when the child develops new mental and motor abilities (Elkind, 1970). During this life period, children develop muscular and sphincter control, experiment with new behaviour, and test the boundaries, while learning new skills. The toddler's sense of self is reinforced through these activities, resulting in the expression of their own will (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977).

The toddler develops a sense of control when his or her caregiver acknowledges the child's competence in what he or she is doing at his or her own pace (Hook, 2002; Sigelman & Rider, 2009). This sense of autonomy is developed when the toddler realises that he or she is able to control muscles, impulses, themselves, and their surroundings. Toddlers that are allowed to learn from their mistakes without being embarrassed or reprimanded, and given the opportunity to attain independence, have greater potential to grow up as competent, self-confident, and independent adults (Steinberg, Elmen, & Mounts, 1989). In contrast, if children are exposed to caregivers who are overcritical, overprotective, impatient or harsh, the toddler will develop a sense of shame and doubt about his or her own ability to act independently (Corey, 2016; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). Erikson summarised the aforementioned as follows:

“This stage can be decisive for the ratio between ... the freedom of self-expression and its suppression. From a sense of self-control without loss of self-esteem comes a lasting sense of autonomy and pride; from a sense of ... loss of self-control, and of parental overcontrol comes a lasting sense of doubt and shame.” (Erikson, 1968, pp. 70-71)

In this stage, the toddler exercises two sets of social modalities simultaneously, namely *holding on* and *letting go*, according to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). Toddlers experience

their first encounter with ego strength, or **will**, as they explore their muscular and sphincter control. The social institution believed to safeguard will is law and order, a legal system which provides parameters for the privileges and limitations of autonomy (Massey, 1986). By trusting their surroundings and gaining the necessary autonomy to engage with their world, children are more able to engage with the attitude of initiative in Stage 3 (Hamachek, 1988).

3.4.3 Stage 3: Initiative versus guilt (3 to 6 years).

The third stage focuses on initiative versus guilt (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). This stage, dedicated to ages three to approximately six years, is known for children's ability to explore and master their bodies (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Improved gross and fine motor skills, along with the development of language and imagination, give the child the ability to do activities like riding a tricycle, running, and using scissors to cut. Children in this stage utilise directive play and interpersonal interactions to assert their power and control. Thus, various activities are initiated rather than being a mere response to or an imitation of another's action (Elkind, 1970).

These abilities acquired during this stage allow children to intrude on the boundaries of the adult world. Therefore, the stage is also coined as the stage of intrusion (Linn, Fabricant, & Linn, 1988). Parents play a significant role in determining whether the child will resolve the stage successfully (Baron & Spear, 1989). It is also important that the child form attachments with parents of both genders and identify with the parent of the same gender (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). Initiative is reinforced when parents give children the opportunity and freedom to initiate motor play. In addition, intellectual initiative is established when parents answer children's verbal questioning respectably. In contrast, guilt is fostered when parents scrutinise motor activity, respond to questions as being an annoyance and play or fantasy as absurd (Elkind, 1970).

The social modality of this stage is described as *being on the make* (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) described initiative as the most important governor of the child's conscience, which is established firmly during this stage. The child's conscience is the core of self-regulation, self-observation, and self-punishment and is internalised from social and parental authority (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). This conscience is critical and inflexible at first, but sets up the foundation for the development of morality at a later stage (Sigelman & Rider, 2009).

Children that successfully resolve this stage develop initiative that allows them to approach bigger tasks and proceed in life (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). By pursuing bigger plans and taking pride in the accomplishments of goals, the ego strength of **purpose** is acquired. By not resolving this stage, a sense of guilt and a confused or pessimistic view of self are generated (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). The social institution associated with the third psychosocial stage is that of economic endeavour (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). Early childhood dreams transform into potential and realistic aspirations in adulthood. The social institution of economic endeavour gives children the opportunity to make the transition from fictional counterparts to living adult heroes whose achievements could be pursued. The acquired initiative and sense of purpose provide the necessary building blocks for success when primary school children face the conflict of industry versus inferiority in Stage 4 (Louw & Louw, 2014).

3.4.4 Stage 4: Industry versus inferiority (6 to 12 years).

The child's period in primary school is also known as Stage 4, namely industry versus inferiority. According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968), the child is exposed to learning well and doing well during these years, which, if accomplished successfully, will generate a sense of competence, or industry. Conversely, failure to perform tasks leads to inferiority. The concept of industry is the dominant theme of this stage, in which the child explores how things are made,

how they work, and what they do (Elkind, 1970). Evans (1981, p. 26) defined this curiosity as “a wish to learn, a wish to know”. By producing things, the child learns that he or she gains recognition (Carver & Scheier, 2000). Children establish a sense of industry only when their efforts are encouraged, they are given the opportunity to finish tasks, and their outcomes are praised. However, when children’s efforts are viewed as unruliness or mischief, a sense of inferiority is established (Elkind, 1970).

As mentioned in previous sections, parents contribute greatly to whether children will master stages successfully. The first three stages are resolved in the social context of children’s primary caregivers and immediate family. As children enter the fourth stage, they are exposed to new environments, predominantly the system of formal education, where the focus is shifted towards teachers and the broader societal evaluation, judgement, and appraisal (Baron & Spear, 1989). Therefore, the child’s sense of industry versus inferiority is influenced by his or her school experiences (Carver & Scheier, 2000). For example, a child seen as popular by his peers would consider him- or herself as industrious, whereas a bullied child would feel inferior when he or she compares him- or herself with other peers (Sigelman & Rider, 2009).

During the fourth stage, the child masters social and cognitive skills. Children evaluate their own competence in primary school and often engage more in social comparisons than they do in previous stages. They are likely to acquire a sense of industry if those comparisons are positive (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). In turn, the sense of competence will reinforce academic and social skills. Healthy development in this stage involves success in the academic and social fields (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). Children also master new working habits, increased productivity, and are able to meet more complex challenges (Baron & Spear, 1989). Children who master these abilities are more responsible and resilient during adulthood (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

If this stage is resolved successfully, the ego strength of **competence** is established (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). Furthermore, children discover the significance of technology and instruments as they utilise basic utensils and tools in school (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). The social institution that shapes and facilitates participation in productivity is technology (Massey, 1986). The first four stages lay the groundwork for young people entering the next phase, Stage 5, in which an identity is established (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

3.4.5 Stage 5: Identity versus role confusion (12 to 18 years).

The fifth stage, identity versus role confusion, is also the stage for which Erikson is most recognised. In the past, numerous historians studied identity in depth. From as early as the 17th century, the broad meaning of identity has been explored by the curiosity of John Locke, Robert Langbaum, and David Hume (Gleason, 1983). According to Erikson (1980), clarifying the term is challenging, because its core is rooted in both the individual and the communal cultures. The identity could be described as a reciprocal interaction between the workings of the individual personality and the acquiring of a sense of selfhood that arises from participating in society, internalising its cultural values, acquiring a variety of statuses, and acting out numerous roles (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1980).

After Erikson had tried out several career options, including art, his concept of identity stemmed mainly from his psychoanalytical work, which was predominantly with children (Friedman, 2000). His life as a European refugee, someone who travelled often, especially in the United States, and who was acquainted with prominent social scientists of that time, also influenced and enhanced his view on identity (Coles, 1970). According to Gleason (1983), Erikson first started using the term *identity* against the background of World War II. During the period of Erikson's development of identity, the rise of World War II and Adolf Hitler

further intrigued him to study the interaction between historical events and personality development.

Adolescents predominantly become preoccupied with identity as they experience the variety of physiological and social changes accompanying the onset of puberty (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). During this period, they aim to define themselves in terms of how they fit into society, what their life goals are, as well as the identification with their sexuality, religion and career, to name a few (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). As adolescents experiment as part of their exploration process, they often re-invent and revolutionise their outward appearance, school subjects, relationships, and group memberships. During adolescence, the challenge of merging previously cultivated roles and skills with current prototypes becomes the primary concern (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). Although the adolescent is still unequipped to become an adult, previous childhood fantasies and roles are no longer suitable (Sigelman & Rider, 2009).

During this stage, adolescents become more self-conscious, as others' evaluation of them as individuals gain more importance as opposed to how they see themselves. Therefore, developing a defined ego identity requires congruence between confidence in one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity, and the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others (Erikson, 1980). Therefore, role confusion stems from a discrepancy between one's own sense of self and the sense of self ascribed to one by others, which is also coined as identity diffusion – an unclear sense of self and confusion about one's place in the world (Montgomery, 2005; Sigelman & Rider, 2009). According to Montgomery (2005), if an individual has developed a clear sense of identity that is true to the self, it would also match the identity that others perceive one to have.

If the individual attains a clearly focused *identity*, it will result in the acquisition of the ego strength of **fidelity** (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1980). This represents faithfulness

to the promising self-definition as well as to an ideology that provides a version of self-in-world (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). The ideology consists of a preferred set of societal ideals and values that becomes the social institution that presents the imagery required for establishing a positive psychosocial identity (Massey, 1986). For Erikson, successfully resolving the stage of identity versus role confusion was an essential precondition for overcoming the crisis faced in early adulthood, namely intimacy versus isolation, in Stage 6. Individuals should have a clear identification of self before they can truly love and accept another person (Baron & Spear, 1989; Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1978, 1980; Montgomery, 2005).

3.4.6 Stage 6: Intimacy versus isolation (18 to 40 years).

Erikson proposed that psychosocial growth continues throughout the adult years. Stage 6, intimacy versus isolation, roughly includes the period of courtship and early family life that ranges from late adolescence to the beginning of middle age (Elkind, 1970). Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) term of intimacy implied much more than only sexual intercourse. Intimacy also refers to the ability to share and care for another person without fear of losing oneself in the process. Therefore, in order to resolve this stage successfully, it is essential that the individual should have acquired a solid sense of his or her own identity in the previous stage (Hook, 2002). Stage 6 largely depends on the successful resolution of prior stages and, thus, if previous crises were unresolved, they are likely to reoccur during this stage (Craig, 1996; Hook, 2002).

In contrast to previous stages, parents do not contribute directly to the outcome of this stage. Instead, they contribute indirectly, as they played an important role in the child's resolution of the earlier stages (Elkind, 1970). However, the social environment in general still advances or hinders the establishment of a sense of intimacy. As mentioned previously, intimacy need not

involve sexuality only, as it also includes relationships between friends (Corey, 2016; Hook, 2002).

A strong ego is required to fend off the fear of ego loss threatened by close friendships, like in the case of inspiration by teachers, in the orgasms of sexual union, and all other close affiliating collaborations. The primary concern during this stage is protecting the integrity of the ego and prevent it from being lost or transformed into something or someone else. For Erikson, a healthy functioning adult is able to establish a mature love while expressing an overall work productiveness that does not undermine his or her being a loving person (Elkind, 1970).

During this time of courtship, the successful resolution of the crisis of intimacy versus isolation prepares the person to form, participate in, and commit to long-term relationships (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978). If Stage 6 is resolved, the individual has acquired the ego strength of **love**. If the individual fails to resolve the crisis, a sense of isolation develops and the individual ends up alone without anyone to share or care about. The social institution associated with this stage is an 'ethical sense', which nurtures a relationship with a loved partner (Massey, 1986). Stage 6 sets up the crises that will be faced in the next stage for middle-aged adults, namely generativity versus stagnation.

3.4.7 Stage 7: Generativity versus stagnation (40 to 65 years).

Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) referred to generativity as the inauguration and guidance of the next generation. If the individual has resolved previous life crises, he or she now has the freedom to direct his or her attention to help others (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). Also known to this stage, is a sense of community or willingness to direct one's energy, without a hidden agenda, to the solution of social concerns (Corey, 2016). In addition, the individual

comes to terms with reality and the discrepancy between his or her dreams and the goals actually achieved (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

If individuals successfully resolve this middle-age crisis of generativity versus stagnation, they acquire a sense of having produced something that will be sustainable and outlive them. Establishing this sense of having been generative is the result of activities such as parenting, mentoring, leading, and teaching (De St. Aubin, McAdams, & Kim, 2004; Slater, 2003). Furthermore, researchers affirmed that an achieved sense of generativity is more likely for middle-aged adults than it is for younger populations (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). This confirmed Erikson's proposed theory that this stage is most suitable for the middle-age years. Individuals who achieve this sense of generativity tend to be compassionate people, committed caregivers, productive employees, effective mentors, and community workers (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010).

According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978), the ego strength of **care** is acquired in this stage. If the individual fails to resolve this crisis, it often results in stagnation (Corey, 2016). This leaves individuals feeling disconnected from and uninvolved with their community and results in a struggle to contribute effectively to society (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). Individuals who fail to resolve this stage are often preoccupied with themselves and predominantly gain pleasures through self-indulgence (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978). The broad spectrum of social institutions, including religion, politics, recreation, education, and medicine, contributes to fostering generativity (Massey, 1986). As the adult progresses through the various psychosocial stages, he or she reaches the eighth stage, namely integrity versus despair.

3.4.8 Stage 8: Integrity versus despair (65 years and onwards).

Stage 8 of the psychosocial cycle resembles roughly the living years when people's major accomplishments and efforts are approaching completion and when energy is directed to reflection (Elkind, 1970). The crisis that elderly adults face is integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1978). As the life span nears completion, an important challenge at this stage of development is dealing with the fear of death (Craig, 1996). If this crisis is resolved efficiently, adults will experience a sense of meaning in their lives that will assist them in coming to terms with the inevitability of death (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). As the individual navigates through the previous seven stages, integrity is gained (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1978). As the young adult constructs a life story or narrative identity, accepting his or her life the way it unfolded as the only life he or she could have lead becomes the focal concern for the elderly (McAdams & Adler, 2006)

A sense of integrity is gained as the individual reflects on his or her life with contentment. According to Erikson, Erikson and Kivnick (1986), this sense of integrity is attained by most adults. By resolving this crisis, the ego strength of wisdom can be acquired and passed on through an integrated heritage (Massey, 1986). If the eighth stage is unresolved, it is the result of reflecting back on one's life as a sequence of missed opportunities and life paths. The realisation that it is too late to start over leads to a sense of despair at what might have been (Elkind, 1970). To be successful in this stage, to a certain extent, all previously mentioned ego strengths must have been developed and all preceding psychosocial crises resolved. However, Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) pointed out that each culture requires a particular combination of the resolved crises. To achieve integrity, individuals should engage and participate, to a greater or lesser degree, in the social institutions (e.g., science, arts, technology, politics, and religion) that are essential to their home culture (Massey, 1986). In the following

section, the researcher will discuss the aspects pertaining to the unsuccessful resolution of Erikson's proposed developmental crises. In addition to specific unfavourable outcomes, the forms of resulting psychopathology will also be overviewed.

3.5 Psychopathology

While successful resolutions of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development results in favourable outcomes, including the acquisition of ego-strengths, unsuccessful resolution of the stages could just as easily result in unfavourable outcomes (Blatt & Levy, 2003). Although the failure of specific stages often results in the acquisition of the dysfunctional opposite of each stage, such as mistrust, shame, or guilt, other psychopathological symptoms or complete disorders might also develop (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). Although this study aimed to explore the diagnostic or psychopathological traits of the subject, the following section will help illuminate and explain any dysfunctional symptoms with which Mercury presented throughout his life span. To help understand Mercury's personality in Eriksonian terms (see Chapter 7), the following section proved to be of assistance.

3.5.1 Basic mistrust.

The acquisition of mistrust stems from the unsuccessful resolution of Erikson's first stage of psychosocial development. Persons with this sense of mistrust view and experience others and the world they live in as being untrustworthy and threatening (Lewicky, 2006). This lack of trust developing during the early years of an individual's life could result in the development of numerous psychopathological disorders in adulthood (Greene, Graham, & Morano, 2010). The individual's belief that other people are unreliable or even harmful to them could predispose them to develop disorders characterised by a paranoid or persecutory nature, including paranoid personality disorder, delusional disorder, and schizophrenia. Furthermore,

the pessimistic view that these individuals have of others, their social relationships and the world, could lead to secondary disorders such as depressive disorders, social anxiety, and schizoid personality disorder. Lastly, in an attempt at self-nurturance and satisfaction, substance-related disorders could develop (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

3.5.2 Shame and doubt.

When the failure of the second stage of psychosocial development results in the sense of shame and doubt, the individual could lack self-confidence and view him- or herself as a failure (Linn et al., 1988). If a toddler experiences inappropriate shaming during toddlerhood, he or she might feel obnoxious, unwanted, and filthy. This often results in misbehaviour later in life. Children internalise their experience and evaluation of others of them and develop an attitude that acts in accordance with what they believe others think of them (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). Furthermore, rigorous and inflexible parenting during toddlerhood could lead to feelings of being controlled and inhibited. In turn, this could predispose a child to develop paranoid personality disorder or persecutory delusions as an adult. Conversely, impulse control disorders might result from an individual's refusal to be inhibited or restrained, including obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and conduct disorder (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

3.5.3 Guilt.

If a child's initiative is punished inappropriately during Stage 3, the child will be overcome with a sense of guilt. This build-up of feelings of guilt often results in the child overcompensating by striving for perfection (Dunkley, Zuroff, & Blankstein, 2006). The child tries to avoid future punishment by trying to be perfect in everything he or she does. Individuals who are driven by this inappropriate guilt and the fear of disappointing others' expectations

might develop psychosomatic disorders or obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (Linn et al., 1988; Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Sadock and Sadock (2014) further argued that excessive prohibitions or punishment during the third stage could possibly produce sexual inhibitions, such as erectile disorder or impotence. The overarching sense of guilt inevitably could result in the development of other mood disorders, including major depressive disorder (Sadock & Sadock, 2014).

3.5.4 Inferiority.

If a child's efforts at attaining its goals are thwarted in Stage 4 of psychosocial development, a sense of inferiority develops (Baron & Spear, 1989). These feelings of incompetence and inadequacy could affect an individual's motivation and willingness to engage in work as an adult, which could lead to work inhibitions (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). Conversely, the adult might compensate by reaching for money, power, and status to fend off any feelings of inferiority (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). Although such accomplishments could mask the sense of inferiority, it will not necessarily produce a sense of industry. As mentioned in the previous stage, the sense of guilt and beliefs of inadequacy are highly associated with depressive disorders (Allan & Gilbert, 1997; Gilbert & Allan, 1998; Gilbert, Allan, Brough, Melley, & Miles, 2002).

3.5.5 Role confusion.

If the fifth stage of psychosocial development is unresolved, role confusion will leave individuals with an unintegrated identity and a disturbed image of self (Sneed et al., 2006). In most cases, the individual is disturbed primarily by the confusion of his or her occupational and sexual identity (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1980). The confusion about one's role is linked to a variety of psychopathology during the period of adolescence, including disruptive,

impulse-control and conduct disorders, gender dysphoria disorder, and psychotic disorders (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). In addition, the person could develop the inability to separate from caregivers, and prolonged dependence could occur, resulting in the development of dependent personality disorder and separation anxiety disorder (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

3.5.6 Isolation.

If Stage 6 of psychosocial development is resolved unsuccessfully, it could result in the pathological outcome described as *distantiation* – a term coined by Erikson meaning to isolate or distance oneself (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978). If an individual distances him- or herself or shut others out, the person will be unable to form meaningful relationships or become intimate with partners (Linn et al., 1988). This lack of capacity to express and receive love, as well one's isolation from others, is known to develop schizoid or avoidant personality disorders (Sadock & Sadock, 2014).

3.5.7 Stagnation.

Failure of generativity could lead to excessive stagnation in Stage 7 of psychosocial development (Timmer, Bode, & Dittmann-Kholi, 2003). Consequently, the individual might try to escape this sense of stagnation with compensatory behaviour, like indulging in alcohol and drugs or engaging in sexual infidelities (Hoare, 2005). Furthermore, as middle-aged adults start to review their lives, individuals that feel stagnated and feel disappointed with their accomplishments thus far, could be more prone to depressive disorders (Sadock & Sadock, 2007).

3.5.8 Despair.

If Stage 8 is resolved unsuccessfully, a sense of despair develops. These individuals find it challenging to accept their lives as they are and experience feelings of hopelessness, which could result in severe depressive disorders, including suicidal ideation (Charles, Reynolds, & Gatz, 2001). As individuals reflect on their lives with panic as they realise that time has run out and chances are used up, anxiety disorder could develop because of their being concerned about the future (Sadock & Sadock, 2014; Whitbourne & Whitbourne, 2017).

3.6 The Additional Ninth Stage

Erikson's wife, Joan Erikson, continued with his earlier work, *The life cycle completed* (Erikson & Erikson, 1998), and added an additional ninth stage. The married couple confronted their ageing selves only in their late 80s and 90s, which led Erikson's wife to believe that development beyond the eighth stage is possible (Brown & Lewis, 2003). During this proposed last stage, the individual completes the full circle and is confronted by the same issues with which he or she was born. The key component of the ninth stage is to gain hope and trust, while the elderly is simultaneously losing strength, autonomy, and control. Therefore, this stage mirrors the crisis of the very first stage of psychosocial development (Haber, 2006). Navigating him- or herself through the last few years of life, individuals are challenged to persevere and be as fully alive as possible until the inevitable experience of death (Verbraak, 2000).

3.7 Erikson, Psychobiography, and Applicability of his Theory for the Study

According to Noland (1977), some of the best psychobiographies of the time were the two produced by Erikson, namely *Young Man Luther* (1958) and *Ghandi's Truth* (1969), where his practice and method contributed immensely to writing a good psychobiography. Erikson acknowledged both normal and abnormal ego development while maintaining a focus on the

interaction of the individual human ego with a facilitating or non-facilitating environment at every stage of the human life cycle (Noland, 1977). This gave Erikson the opportunity to explore both the individual and communal components of a life. As discussed in Chapter 4, considering the individual in his or her communal context is an important characteristic of psychobiography. Furthermore, Erikson could make inferences about early experience without reducing a life to a few unconscious, repressed infantile themes (Noland, 1977). As discussed in Chapter 5, interpreting a life solely based on early experience or infantile wishes is one of the criticisms against psychobiography.

Erikson (1993) stated that descriptions and interpretations of a subject's life are inevitably connected with deeper psychological conceptualisations and assumptions. According to Bertaux (1981) and Capps (2004), Erikson is viewed as a passionate predecessor with regard to psychobiography and the studying of lives. In addition, Erikson's work was considered for use as a general prototype in psychobiography (Noland, 1977). Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) psychosocial theory allowed the researcher to analyse Mercury from a life span approach, from birth until death. In addition, it enabled the researcher to merge moment and sequence in Mercury's life and his community into one integrated structure that connects inner experience and outer reality. The findings and discussion of Erikson's theory as applied to Mercury are provided in Chapter 7.

3.8 Critical Reflection

Over the years, Erikson's theory has been scrutinised by various critics. These criticisms include that the theory is too idealistic and optimistic (Hook, 2002). Although Erikson indeed proposed that growth continues in adulthood and that adults are capable of constructive change (Douvan, 1997), he also emphasised the negative outcomes for every unsuccessful resolution of each life stage in his theory. Thus, this criticism does not seem to bear significant weight,

and its relevance for this study, in which both normal and abnormal development received equal attention, is limited.

The psychosocial theory has also been subject to various criticisms of general psychoanalytic theory. Hoare (2005) and Welchman (2000) argued that the psychosocial theory is difficult to operationalise due to its limited scientific rigour, with regards to the ambiguous labelling of the crucial developmental concepts. Criticism scrutinize the theory's ability to explain the developmental delays and their effect on future development accurately (Marcia, 2002; Raskin, 2002; Weigert & Gecas, 2005). In his defence, Erikson (1974, 1975) noted that the idiographic nature inherited in development hinders absolute descriptions. Therefore, the idiosyncratic manner in which each subject investigates and manages their psychosocial crises, differs significantly depending on the individual's own development.

Erikson was also criticised that his theory reflects a male bias and is unhelpful to explain female development (Douvan, 1997; Hook, 2002). If this accusation on this theory were true, it would not be relevant for this particular study, as the subject is indeed male. According to Hook (2002), Erikson's theory represents 20th-century capitalistic values of a Western society and therefore, could not have been culturally sensitive. Although this might be a hypothesis, Erikson also never explored the cross-cultural applicability of his theory (Brown & Lewis, 2003). Nevertheless, Mercury's father was working for the British government, and the family moved to England when Mercury was still young (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Mercury was exposed mainly to the context of the Western society. Thus, this criticism does not influence the study negatively in this regard.

Louw and Louw (2014) mentioned that the psychosocial theory of personality development fails to acknowledge crucial developmental domains, including an individual's cognitive development and limited inferences to emotional development. With regard to the study, the

researcher did acknowledge all relevant developmental indicators from the collected data, but focused predominantly upon how the environment interacts with the subject's personality development, as proposed by the psychosocial theory.

3.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which was discussed and explained. The researcher introduced Erik Erikson to the reader, as well as his theoretical outlooks and theory. The context of Erikson's theory was approached and explored by analysing both normal and abnormal development. Finally, the specific applicability of the theory for the study was discussed, and a critical reflection of the theory was given.

Chapter 4

Psychobiography and Case Study Research: A Theoretical Overview

4.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter provides a discussion and better understanding of psychobiographical and case study research. The relationship between psychology and biography will be discussed first, followed by an elaborate description and definition of psychobiography. Next, a variety of other related concepts such as autobiography, biography, life history, life story, psychohistory, historical psychology, historiography, and personality assessment will be discussed in an attempt to differentiate them from psychobiography. Psychobiography as case study research will be analysed, and light will be shed on its related concepts, namely case method, case research epistemology, case research objective, case research design, and case research method. Finally, it is important to discuss the history of psychobiography, the trends it followed, as well as the value when following such an approach.

4.2 Psychology and Biography

In essence, the term *psychobiography* is interdisciplinary, as it is constructed from two individual words: psychology and biography (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Roberts (2002) suggested that life history and life stories are both in the interest of psychologists and biographers, who include biographical data in their research. The difference between these two disciplines lies in the interpretation thereof, and the degree to which biographical data are interpreted by the use of psychological theories (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Howe (1997) indicated that the term *psychology* refers to a scientific discipline. It is dependent on reliable evidence and incorporates conceptual models to make sense of development, personality, and

behaviour. Biography is an approach that is more individualised, subjective, and intuitive and underscores the uniqueness rather than the shared similarities among individuals (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Psychobiography is not purely idiographic, though, as the shared commonalities between individual lives are used to enrich psychobiographical storytelling. Furthermore, psychology draws its data from conceptual paradigms, where biography uses arts, literature, and intellectual tools of history to outline an individual's development (Howe, 1997).

Jacobs (2004) indicated that academic psychology is theory-centred. It incorporates the development of general conceptual and theoretical analyses of a variety of psychological phenomena including biographical, abnormal, cognitive, personality, developmental, and social psychology (Jacobs, 2004). McAdams (1994) noted that, prior to modern psychology, psychologists neglected to consider the study of individual lives as part of their conceptualisation of psychological theory. Thus, such research did not contribute to the development of general truths (Rosenwald, 1988). Theorists like Simonton (2003) were of the opinion that, in their pursuit to produce universal scientific knowledge, psychology researchers tend to use participants who share a similar historical and social context as that of the researcher. Simonton (2003) further argued that the use of historical data, as a substitute, would produce information about human behaviour that is far more diverse in terms of culture. Such a process would result in a better understanding of unique individual lives (Simonton, 2003).

Strouse (1988) defined a biography as the telling of a life story by investigating events and experiences. Alternative definitions include those of Cole and Knowles (2001), who described a biography as a structured account of life written by another, which is written typically according to fictional conventions. In the past, most biographers rarely utilised psychological theory to make sense of their subjects' lives (McAdams, 1994). To explain individuals' lives within their specific structural and cultural settings, biographers utilise alternative interpretive

methodologies (Roberts, 2002). Schultz (2005) envisioned the biographer's role as one that informs the reader about an individual's entire life, which in most cases has ended. Thus, according to Howe (1997), a biography could be depicted as the study of an individual's life throughout an entire life span.

Runyan (1984) criticised biographies, stating that the biographical methodology is seen as being too subjective with a shortage of structure to be viewed as scientific. Smith (1998) further elaborated on the subjectivity of biographers, requesting them to be cognisant of the doubts and value discrepancies that may come forth in writing about a person's life. To map the progressive course of an individual's life, biographers rely on history, literature, and art, which are often criticised (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). When analysing the uniqueness and complexity of the methodology, it is clear that this process or observatory skill is insufficient and requires to be viewed more theoretically. In defence, McAdams (1994), who was in favour of the biographical sphere, highlighted that (a) critics of the single-case method hold a very limited stance on research; (b) well-written biographies are greatly enriching; and (c) their intellectual responsibility is neglected by psychologists who dismiss biographical research in the study of individual lives.

Elms (1994) described the connection between psychology and biography as an uneasy alliance. The root of this relationship lies in the noticeable different methodological approaches utilised by these disciplines (Elms, 1994). Psychology often contains biography, and *vice versa*, which further blurs the boundary between them (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005). Traditionally, the biographical approach has been a controversial topic in the field of psychology, filled with uncertainty about its status (Anderson, 1981; Runyan, 1982). Although personality psychologists have not identified themselves as being biographers in the past (Elms, 1994), others like McAdams (1994) suggested a psychologically informed biography as the ideal

means with which to encapsulate a human life situated in time. Although psychobiographical research has been criticised as non-scientific, ongoing efforts by social scientists and personality psychologists contributed to valuable life history research (Elms, 1994; McAdams, 1988). Elms (1994) stated that both disciplines can be identified by their controversial alliance with reciprocal benefits – as much as psychology adds to biography, biography contributes to psychology. Over the last century, psychobiographical research has gained greater appraisal, respect, and recognition due to the increasing number of psychobiographical studies that have been conducted (Schultz, 2005). Psychobiography has gained momentum and continues to attract the interest of scientists and lay audiences alike (Ponterotto, 2013a, 2015).

4.3 Psychobiography: Definitions and Descriptions

Psychobiography is described as “a biographical study in which psychological concepts, methods, and findings play a major role” (Bromley, 1986, p. 9). Schultz (2005) related to this description, defining psychobiography as “the analysis of historically significant lives through the use of psychological theory and research” (p. 14). According to Runyan (1988), “psychobiographical research concedes an in-depth study of the whole person in time and context through the narrative of individual experience” (p. 219). For both social sciences and psychology, the rise and advancement of making sense of fascinating individual lives, is becoming increasingly significant (Perry, 2012).

McAdams (1994) stipulated that the aim in doing research on individual lives is to identify the core latent story that animates a person’s life. The researcher’s focal point is on a single facet of a life or one mysterious inquiry (Schultz, 2005). To achieve this, psychobiographers would undoubtedly incorporate biographical data (McAdams, 1988). To classify psychobiography as biography would be inaccurate, however, as it strives to make both fictional and psychological sense of the individual under study (Roberts, 2002). The curiosity about and

investigation into motives make psychobiography both interpretive and explanatory (Schultz, 2005, 2013). By utilising scientific psychological theory as well as research, psychobiographers interpret and explain individual lives under study (Runyan, 2002). Thus, psychobiography could be regarded as the systematic use of psychological personality theory to reconstruct a life into a comprehensible and enlightening story (McAdams, 1994).

A qualitative narrative case study could also be used to contextualise psychobiography, which is concerned with exemplifying and understanding the stories people tell about their lives (McLeod, 1994). Psychobiography as an engaging discipline seeks to make sense of the ever changing experiences and perspectives of individuals and accentuates the significance of subjective accounts individuals give to their past, present and future (Roberts, 2002). To gather information about life stories, sources like letters, journals, diaries, and biographical material could be used (Runyan, 1982; Willig, 2013). To eliminate irrelevant data, emphasis is placed upon personal documents that construct a biographical sketch of the individual in a historical, social, and psychological context (McLeod, 1994; Plummer 1983). Thus, psychobiography essentially serves to illuminate inner, subjective experiences and the connection between life and theory (Schultz, 2005). Ponterotto (2012, 2013b) mentioned that psychobiography is not merely a biographical sketch of the person's identity and accomplishments in a particular field, but also exposes the inner life of the subject as well as the motivation and psychological concepts that underlie the individual's cognitive processes, emotions, and behaviour. Despite its comprehensive descriptive dimensions, McAdams (1994) summarised the core of psychobiography as "the study of an entire life, from birth to death, with the aim to discern, discover, and formulate the central story of the entire life, a story structured according to psychological theory" (p. 12). Because of the unique and holistic nature of psychobiography, it elicits a better opportunity for the study of personality than traditional longitudinal research does (Carlson, 1988; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). In addition, an understanding of how

individuals reform their past and construct their present, future, and interpersonal relationships could be obtained from psychobiography (Hones, 1998; Roberts, 2002).

Van Niekerk (2007) proposed the following five universal characteristics shared by numerous descriptions of psychobiographical research:

1. Making use of qualitative data.
2. The focus on life span research as opposed to studying separate individual historical episodes.
3. The non-mysterious identification of the research subject, as opposed to the anonymous label attached to most quantitative research participants.
4. Making use of biographical data collected by mostly researchers, including biographers and historians.
5. The preference for a well-known, commendable or perplexing research subject based on psychological and historical significance of their life story, instead of gathering data with the sole purpose to solve pre-formulated research questions.

With these proposed characteristics in mind, the following section aims to elaborate on some of the concepts related to the field of psychobiography.

4.4 Psychobiography and Related Concepts

To add to the defining components of psychobiography, it is important to clarify the vast similarities between various related concepts in the field, which include autobiography and biography, life histories and life stories, psychohistory, historical psychology and historiography, as well as personality assessment.

4.4.1 Autobiography and biography.

Autobiography refers to the story of an individual's life, or a section thereof, written by the subject of the story (Bertaux, 1981; Bromley, 1986). It can be regarded as the documentation of an individual's life by the same person (Biggs, 2007). The perspective from which an autobiography is written is subjective; therefore, it tends to be biased and selective while referring to objective facts and records (Roberts, 2002). Autobiography still shares elements of biography, as it also utilises a variety of sources, like in the case of biography (Bromley, 1986; Roberts, 2002).

Biography illustrates a systematic account of a life by another, in most cases according to legitimate conventions (Cole & Knowles, 2001). For Howe (1997), good biography formulates an individual's life through the incorporation of literature, history and art, which trace the individual's progress through life. Schultz (2001) commented that, in most biographies, concrete ungrounded psychological conclusions seem to appear out of thin air, with obscure or poorly examined theory and research. When comparing autobiography and biography with psychobiography, the former two lack scientific methodology and a psychological viewpoint on the individual (Runyan, 1984; Schultz, 2003). The definite and intended introduction of psychology into writing about someone's life would expose the researcher's findings to scrutiny and an assessment of their efficacy or appropriateness, ultimately producing a more satisfying story in which the intention behind the subject's behaviour could be understood better (Schultz, 2001).

4.4.2 Life histories and life stories.

In life histories, patterns and relationships among several lives are examined, and objective and subjective data obtained from multiple sources are utilised (McAdams, 2006; Yin, 2014).

According to Bromley (1986), life history can be described as a “scientific reconstruction and interpretation based on the best evidence available, of major formative, critical and accumulative episodes in a person’s life” (p. 8). Life histories aim to elicit the commonalities between the various subjects under study, as opposed to focusing on the uniqueness of an individual life, as observed in psychobiography (Rosenwald, 1988).

Life stories entail biographical accounts of individual lives (Bujold, 1990; McAdams, 1994; Runyan, 1982). Although a life story usually provides a thorough description of an individual’s life, the most significant aspects thereof are highlighted (Atkinson, 1998; Roberts, 2002). Thus, the subjectivity of the author’s personal thoughts, feelings, and intentions are illuminated by this necessary key feature (Fouché, 1999). Howard (1991) commented that life stories place less emphasis on facts and more on meanings. While life histories are interpretive and the presentational work of the researcher, the author of life stories commonly applies them to narrated stories (Stroud, 2004).

4.4.3 Psychohistory, historical psychology, and historiography.

Psychobiography can be viewed as a subdivision or component of a broader psychohistory (Ponterotto, 2013b). In essence, psychohistory is a historical exercise that utilises formal psychological theory in an attempt to interpret social, political, and cultural events historically (Berg, 1995; Loewenberg, 1983; Runyan, 1988; Schultz, 2005). There is underlying tension between the disciplines of history and psychology, which makes the scope and definition of psychohistory considerably confusing (Runyan, 1988; Schultz, 2005). According to Runyan (1988), the relationship dynamics between these two disciplines are identified not only by the recognition and cooperation of mutual interest, but also by a degree of suspicion, occasional hostility, and misunderstanding.

Historical psychology refers to the history of psychological phenomena and/or the history of thought about psychological development and important formative and cumulative influences on the course of life (Runyan, 1988). Historiography is primarily past orientated and aims to shed light on present-day questions of interest about the historical past (Anderson, 1988; Simonton, 2003). Data sources from the past are studied intensely to reconstruct past data into a meaningful array of historical explanations (Berg, 1995; Denzin, 1978). These data sources may include artefacts, confidential reports, government documents, photographs, newspaper editorials, films, and public records (Berg, 1995).

4.4.4 Personality assessment.

Personality assessment can be described as being related to the measurement and evaluation of lives in progress (Fouché, 1999). Various psychological assessments and instruments are employed to analyse the influences that have shaped the individual in terms of behaviour and other personal characteristics (Aiken, 1997; Fouché, 1999). It looks into the individual's way of being in the present and analyses forces such as values, traits, modes of thinking, and identity that epitomise and differentiate the person from other individuals (Claasen, 2006). Similar to psychobiography, it calls for a psychological description of what the individual is like at specific points on a timeline, and a set of connectors that relate the individual to the influences that led to that particular configuration (Alexander, 1990; Cohen & Swerdlik, 2005; Pieterse, 2009; Swart, 2010). However, the two disciplines are different in that psychobiography does not require an element of prediction, as in the case with personality assessment (Alexander, 1990). Psychobiography is concerned directly with the problem of understanding and allows the researcher to track human development in a manner that exceeds static personality assessment of clinical case studies (Alexander, 1990; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005).

4.5 Psychobiography as Case Study Research

Case study research can be described as an intensive investigation of a singular unit such as a person, group, or organisation bound within a specific time and contextual setting (Runyan, 1982; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Psychobiography and life history research are viewed as good examples of specialised case study research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Cozby, 1997). Although case study research is related to other forms of research, such as action research, field study, and ethnographic study, it is differentiated because of certain characteristics (Cavaye, 1996). In the following section, an overview of these characteristics is provided in terms of the case research epistemology, case research objective, case research design, and case research method.

4.5.1 Case research epistemology.

The term *epistemology* entails the researcher's belief about the method by which knowledge is constructed (Willig, 2013). Contrasting views of reality, including the interpretive and positivistic paradigms, rely on differing ideas about the nature of knowledge and need alternative approaches to the research (Hart, 1998). The interpretive paradigm seeks to explain how people attribute meaning to their circumstances, and how they develop and make use of rules that govern their behaviour. The positivistic paradigm emphasises the power of sensorially apprehended or valid, observed knowledge to solve practical problems (Candy 1989; Willig, 2013). Case study research is particularly versatile and can be used in both traditions (Willig, 2013). For psychobiography, case research fits best within a qualitative framework as an attempt to extract meanings from complex social behaviours and to understand the nature of a phenomenon (Struwig & Stead, 2004; Yin, 2014). In contrast, case research could lend itself to be used within a quantitative paradigm where predetermined variables would be measured according to predefined measures (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Willig, 2013). A single-case experimental research design is an example of this (Yin, 2014). Furthermore,

psychobiography is an interpretive practice, utilised not to elaborate on human behaviour in terms of universal laws, but rather to interpret and understand intentions and meanings that could underlie everyday human actions in their context (Willig, 2013).

Case studies arose from the need to understand complex social phenomena, which opens the door for the investigation of meaningful and holistic characteristics of real-life events (Yin, 2014). In addition, case studies place emphasis on development and change (Willig, 2013) and take on a holistic approach that welcomes the development of idiographic insight (i.e., distinctive understanding) into the phenomenon under study (Stake, 2005).

4.5.2 Case research objective.

Case study research may be used to construct theory, describe phenomena, and test existing theoretical relationships and concepts (Fouché, 1999; McLeod, 1994; Willig, 2013). In case study research, the construct of analytical generalisation mostly prevails and describes the generalisability of case studies to theoretical propositions (Yin, 2014). Instead of computing statistical frequencies, case studies could be generalised to theoretical propositions similar to when a scientist generalises from a single experiment to theory (Yin, 2014). In addition, case studies could also help facilitate conceptual refinement of emerging theoretical formulations or result in the exploration of new insights into psychological and social processes, from which new theoretical hypotheses and foundations could be formulated (Willig, 2013).

According to Neuman (2003) and Willig (2013), case research can be described as a process of conceptualising phenomena. For conceptualisation to occur, hypotheses are generated and explanations developed for observed relationships (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). The groundwork for constructing theory is provided by these statements about relationships, as proposed by Bromley (1986) and Cavaye (1996). According to Cooney (2010) and Glaser and

Strauss (1967), grounded theory is a formalised approach to inductive case research. Therefore, it is suggested that, as the researcher gathers and interprets information regarding a phenomenon, the theory emerges (Neuman, 2003).

By utilising a natural science model, authentication or disconfirmation of existing theory is an inferential process whereby cause-and-effect relationships are tested (Yin, 2014). Propositions are tested by collecting and relating data from the observed reality with logical predictions or hypotheses derived from theory (Colborn, 1996). In psychobiography, either or both deductive and inductive case research could be facilitated, as the research objectives might include the exploration and/or testing of theory (Bromley, 1986; Fouché, 1999).

4.5.3 Case research design.

Research design may be described as a logical series that connects data to the original research questions and subsequent findings of the study (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Kagee, 2008; Yin, 2014). Each research design brings about multiple complexities, with some designs involving the study of a single case, and others include the study of multiple cases (Bless et al., 2008). A phenomenon in a single-case study can be investigated in depth and provide a rich description thereof (Cavaye, 1996). A single-case study also enables theory construction through the development and refinement or confirmation and refutation of concepts against existing data (Yin, 2014). In a multiple-case study, data from various cases might be analysed, providing the researcher the opportunity to verify that findings are not merely the result of a single, unique research setting (Bromley, 1986; Cavaye, 1996).

For the use of psychobiography, a single-case study design is commonly relied on. However, this is not absolute, and a multiple-case design could be employed at times. An example of a multiple-case psychobiography includes *Leading the latter-day saints: Psychobiographical*

studies of Mormon prophets (Saccaggi, 2015). The method selected for Saccaggi's (2015) study was a multiple subject psychobiography where the lives of two subjects were investigated. By adopting a multiple-case design, the researcher would conduct comparative biographical studies of subjects by bringing exploratory, intensive interviews into conversations with one another (Rosenwald, 1988). Bujold (1990) found that such designs have proven useful in the biographical study of career development, while Gronn (1993) used this approach in the comparative study of significant leaders.

4.5.4 Case research method.

The case research method allows researchers to systematise observation as manipulation of variables, and explicit control is absent in this approach (Neuman, 2003; Struwig & Stead, 2004). The case method adopts an idiographic understanding of the case under study (Hart, 1998; Willig, 2013) and incorporates multiple techniques and tools for analysis and data collection (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005; Willig, 2013). In addition, it draws the focus to relative data through a holistic approach to various dimensions of the case and adds to knowledge by relating findings to generalisable theory (Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) further stated that case research is ideally suited for situations where separation of the variables of the phenomenon from its context is not possible.

The researcher needs to select methods of analysis and data collection delicately to produce appropriate materials for the study (Yin, 2014). For data collection, the two types of methods are (a) quantitative or nomothetic methods based on numerical data and (b) qualitative or idiographic methods based on linguistic data (Bromley, 1986; Yin, 2014). Mostly, a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods is used in case research (Willig, 2013). In qualitative research, the assumption of various realities exists, whereby the world may be viewed as a subjective function of personal perceptions and interactions (Willig, 2013).

Furthermore, qualitative researchers describe, explore, and comprehend phenomena in their context with the aim to attribute meaning to them (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In aiming for contextual understanding in qualitative research, in-depth and direct knowledge of the research setting is pivotal. Therefore, qualitative case methods are associated with observation, verbal data, and interviews (Stake, 1995). In contrast, outcomes of case research with a quantitative research dimension are determined with procedural measures such as indices, checklists, or questionnaires (McLeod, 1994). The findings in these studies are reflected in the form of numerical ratings or indicators such as frequencies over time (Willig, 2013; Yin, 2014).

A variety of sources of information are used in case study research, which might include interviews, documents, observations, artefacts, archival records, and photographs (Struwig & Stead, 2004). The two most prominent sources of data used by historical researchers are primary and secondary data sources (Berg, 1995). Primary data sources, including excerpts from interviews, are materials generated directly by the subject under study (Strydom & Delport, 2005). Secondary data sources, including biographical literature on the subject's life, consist of material that is taken from someone else (Woolums, 2011). Qualitative evidence, for instance diaries, personal documents, letters, and recorded data, is used primarily in psychobiography (Alexander, 1990; Simonton, 2003).

The purpose of this section was to provide an overview of psychobiography as case study research and the underlying features and characteristics commonly shared by both approaches. The next section takes a glimpse at the history and trends in psychobiography.

4.6 History and Trends in Psychobiography

Before the 20th century, literary biographers rarely employed psychological concepts when interpreting their subjects' lives (McAdams, 1994). This may have been partly due to

researchers' tendency to glorify their subjects by relinquishing accuracy and in-depth studying of the ancient rulers' lives (McAdams, 1994). This desire to glorify significant individuals caused biographers to neglect their subjects' imperfections, failures, desires, feelings, and fantasies (McAdams, 1994).

As psychoanalysis came to the foreground and gained popularity, more focus was placed on the consequences of childhood desires and frustrations for adult life (Runyan, 1982). In 1910, Freud published *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his Childhood*, which sparked the first true affiliation between literary biography and psychology. Freud's work was viewed as the first authentic psychobiography, which, according to Elms (1988), presented multiple guidelines for psychobiographical research. Some of them include rejection of both idealisation and pathography and the avoidance of both, along with arguments built upon a single cue, and conclusions based upon inadequate data (Elms, 1988). Although the guidelines were clear, Freud violated them in the very work in which they were proposed. His endeavour to illustrate the dynamics underlying creativity proved problematic because his argument that Da Vinci's creative images originated primarily from an infantile wish was difficult to prove (McAdams, 1988; Scalapino, 1999). Still, despite his flawed methodology, Freud's work proved influential, as it redefined the aim of biography and psychology as applied psychoanalysis (Elms, 1994; McAdams, 1988).

The number of psychoanalytic biographies escalated during the 1910s and 1920s; thus, numerous elicited criticisms of the method surfaced, with reductionism taking precedence (Runyan, 1988). Despite being criticised, psychobiography prevailed, and early works such as Prince's (1915) *Psychology of the Kaiser: A study of his sentiments & his obsessions* and Hall's (1917) *Jesus the Christ, in light of psychology*, were attempted. Other noteworthy studies continued during the 1920s and 1930s including works on Darwin, Lincoln, Caesar, Napoleon,

and Nietzsche (Runyan, 1988). During the 1940s, a decrease was seen in the study of individual lives, but interest slowly caught on again during the 1950s when a renewed production of psychobiographies were sparked (Runyan, 1988). Notably among them was Erikson's (1958) *Young man Luther: A study in psychoanalysis*. Psychobiography matured and accelerated throughout the 1960s, as evidenced by Erikson's (1969) related follow-up study, *Gandhi's truth: On the origins of militant non-violence*.

Since 1970, psychobiographical publications have increased, according to Runyan (1988). Furthermore, psychology and biography contributed greatly to the understanding and deciphering of individual lives (Elms, 1994). Despite rosy beginnings, Schultz (2005) noted that psychobiography progressed slowly due to the lack of researchers in the specific field. He added that psychologists in the academic sphere usually preferred to pursue rigorous methods and nomothetic, thus quantitative, problems, thereby neglecting to make use of idiographic/qualitative scholarship like psychobiography. Schultz (2005) added that limited psychobiographical work was found in institutionalised academic psychology, where the endowment of formal academic training in psychobiography was regarded as unusual. Although psychobiographies may be outnumbered by nomothetic and quantitative research, there has been an increase in formal training lately, especially in the United States, and researchers nationally and internationally attempt to produce more in the field of psychobiography (Ponterotto, Reynolds, Morel, & Cheung, 2015; Schultz, 2013).

International psychobiographies that have been written recently include *A psychobiography of Bobby Fischer: Understanding the genius, mystery, and psychological decline of a world chess champion* by J. G. Ponterotto (2012); *Identity formation and the transformation of symbolic loss: A psychobiography of Ralph Waldo Emerson* by J. M. Kramp (2012); *The genius and madness of Bobby Fischer: Understanding his life from three psychobiographical lenses*

by J. G. Ponterotto and J. D. Reynolds (2013); *Psychobiography and Virginia Woolf* by M. Humm (2015); *C. G. Jung's dream of Siegfried: A psychobiographical study* by Z. Kovary (2015); *Isak Dinesen: A psychobiographical study of a woman's life span from a Jungian perspective* by L. A. Befera (2016); and *John F. Kennedy, Jr. and the Torn Self: A Psychological Portrait* by J. G. Ponterotto (2017).

The first psychobiography in South Africa was written in 1939, but psychobiography was officially initiated as a research project at the University of Port Elizabeth (now Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University) only in 1995. Since then, an increasing number of studies at master's and doctoral level have examined the lives of sporting, religious, political, and literary figures (Perry, 2012). In South Africa, most psychobiographical works have been supervised by Roelf van Niekerk and Paul Fouché at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein, Rhodes University in Grahamstown and Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth (Fouché, Smit, Watson, & Van Niekerk, 2007). An outline of some completed psychobiographies conducted in the South African context is presented in Table 4.1. (Perry, 2012), including additions.

Table 4.1

South African Master's and Doctoral Level Psychobiographies

Subject	Researcher	Degree	Year
Cornelius Jacobus Langenhoven	Burgers, M. P. O.	M.A.	1939
Louis Leipoldt	Burgers, M. P. O.	D. Litt.	1960
Ingrid Jonker	Van der Merwe, L. M.	Ph.D.	1978
Jan Christiaan Smuts	Fouché, J. P.	D.Phil.	1999
Helen Martins	Bareira, L.	M.A.	2001
Bantu Stephen Biko	Kotton, D.	M.A.	2002
Balthazar John Vorster	Vorster, M. S.	M.A.	2003
Wessels Johannes (Hansie) Cronje	Warmenhoven, A.	M.A.	2004
Mother Theresa	Stroud, L.	D.Phil.	2004
Albert Schweitzer	Edwards, M. J.	M.A.	2004
Cornelius Jacobus Langenhoven	Jacobs, A.	M.A.	2005
Karen Horney	Green, S.	M.A.	2006
Wessels Johannes (Hansie) Cronje	Warmenhoven, A.	Ph.D.	2006
Chris Barnard	Van Niekerk, R.	M.A.	2007
Ray Charles	Biggs, I.	M.A.	2007
Hendrik Verwoerd	Claasen, M.	M.A.	2007
Melanie Klein	Espinosa, M.	M.A.	2008
Herman Mashaba	McWalter, M. A.	M.A.	2008
Isie Smuts	Smuts, C.	M.A.	2009
Helen Keller	Van Genechten, D.	M.A.	2009
Jeffrey Dahmer	Chezé, E.	M.A.	2009
Emily Hobhouse	Welman, C.	M.A.	2009
Ralph John Rabie	Uys, H. M. G.	M.A.	2010
Ernesto "Che" Guevara	Kolesky, C.	M.A.	2010
Frans Martin Claerhout	Roets, M.	M.A.	2010
Alan Paton	Greiff, M.	M.A.	2010

Subject	Researcher	Degree	Year
Paul Jackson Pollock	Muller, T.	M.A.	2010
Christiaan de Wet	Henning, R.	Ph.D.	2010
Bram Fischer	Swart, D. K.	M.A.	2010
Brenda Fassie	Gogo, O.	M.A.	2011
Olive Schreiner	Perry, M. J.	Ph.D.	2012

Note. Adapted from *The life of Olive Schreiner: A psychobiography* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation) (p. 130), by M. J. Perry, 2012, University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.

In addition to previously mentioned writings, other academic psychobiographies and articles produced in the South African context at the time of this study include *The life of Helen Suzman: A psychobiographical study* by C. Nel (2013); *Richard Trenton Chase: A Psychobiography of the “Dracula Killer”* by Hanlie Nel (2014); *Winston Churchill’s ‘Black Dog’: A Psychobiographical Case Study for Depressive Realism* by S. Human (2015); *Roald Dahl: A psychosexual developmental trajectory study illustrated within psychobiography* by J. P. Fouché and T. Holz (2015); *The career development of Christiaan Neethling Barnard: A psychobiography* by R. van Niekerk (2015); *Jeffrey Lionel Dahmer: A Psychobiographical study of the “Milwaukee Killer” illustrated through the Schahriar Syndrome Model* by S.E. Pretorius (2015); *John Lennon: A Psychobiography* by Dayana Osorio (2016); *The life of Steve Jobs: A Psychobiographical Study* by Ruvé du Plessis (2016); and *The Faith Development of the Antiapartheid Theologian Beyers Naudé: A Psychobiography* by P. Fouché, B. Burnell, R. Van Niekerk and N. Nortjé (2016). Despite the increase of psychobiographical studies, Fouché (2015) proposed some suggestions to increase the quality and output of psychobiography in South Africa. To develop institutionalised academic psychobiography in South Africa, he suggested that active academic engagement, the establishment of psychobiography as a curriculum-driven field and researchers’ passion for the genre, as well as more extensive

networking between national and international psychobiographers, are required. Furthermore, Fouché (2015) emphasised the need for more studies of significant female and African individuals as chosen subjects. To continue the development of psychobiography in South Africa, more current celebrity psychobiographies need to be undertaken to trigger the interest of the younger generation in research in the field (Fouché, 2015). In addition to considerable logistical and administrative value, psychobiography adds greatly to the theoretical development of South African psychology (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Other professionals in the field of psychology advocate the enriching value of psychobiography for the testing and ongoing development of theories related to individual development (Fouché, 1999). To improve the quality of psychobiography in South Africa, Fouché and Van Niekerk (2005) suggested that national academic institutions incorporate psychobiography as a methodology and research design in the study of individual lives more frequently.

4.7 Value of Psychobiographical Research

As mentioned previously, psychobiography adds significant value to various spheres of psychology and human development. Below is a detailed discussion of these aspects.

4.7.1 Individual case within the whole.

Psychobiographical research follows a holistic approach that allows the researcher to investigate and produce a unique description of the individual in the subject's entire socio-historical context (Carlson, 1988; Elms, 1994). This gives the researcher the opportunity to study the whole personality and identify individualised patterning processes rather than singular components (Elms, 1994). Therefore, the researcher has the flexibility to compile a holistic picture of individuals as an interconnected organism.

4.7.2 Subjective reality.

Psychobiography reveals the subject's inner experiences and an in-depth description thereof (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). The way in which reality is interpreted subjectively, namely subjective reality, is more valuable than objective reality, according to Corey (2016). Being knowledgeable about the subject's subjective reality enables the researcher to relate with the subject, which facilitates an emotionally compelling retelling of the subject's life story (Runyan, 1984).

4.7.3 Socio-historical context.

Psychobiography takes into account the individual's entire context, which fosters a holistic understanding of the subject under study (Roberts, 2002). By exploring life materials, the cultural influences on human development come to the foreground, as the individual subject can be viewed within the vastness of his/her entire socio-historical context (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005, 2010). Because of this, both larger contextual and sub-contextual contributions on human development are uncovered (Fouché, 1999); therefore, acknowledging the individual's social and historical contexts (Goodson & Sikes, 2001).

4.7.4 Process and pattern over time.

Psychobiographical research is conducted on finished lives with the sole purpose of tracing patterns of behaviour and development that can be identified across an individual's entire life span (Carlson, 1988), thus providing an integrated and comprehensive overview of human development so that a thorough understanding of personality is formed (Fiske, 1988; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). One advantage for the researcher is that this process presents a complete representation of human development within the particular time setting (Alexander, 1990).

4.7.5 Theory testing and development.

The material on a life history gathered by the researcher for a psychobiography provides the ideal platform to test and develop theories of human development (Carlson, 1988). The theory used guides the identification of design and objectives in data collection and can be used as a template for generalisation. As stated previously, analytical generalisation is utilised to compare any findings of the study with current existing theory to test, extend, or develop it (Yin, 2014). Thus, these insights gained from psychobiographical research could draw attention to conceptual complexities in the understanding of individual lives that prompt research and refinement of theory (Schultz, 2005). Academic fields in which psychobiography has proven valuable in the testing and development of theory include ageing and gerontology, personality development, leadership development, human potential development, human health development, and career development (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; McAdams, 1994).

4.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter shed light on the various characteristics and approaches that are shared between psychobiography and many other related fields. These subtle differences between the various concepts often result in confusion. Furthermore, the alliance between psychology and biography that gave birth to psychobiography became clearer. Although the advantages of psychobiography were discussed, the design and methodology of this approach are often criticised (Runyan, 1982). To get a better understanding, the criticism of the psychobiographical method, some recommendations to minimise these challenges, and important ethical considerations are discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Preliminary Methodological and Ethical Considerations

5.1 Chapter Preview

In this chapter, the core methodological issues and challenges that might influence the quality of the psychobiographical study are discussed. Furthermore, the researcher highlights the strategies that were implemented to eliminate these obstacles and/or minimise their effect. In conclusion, a summary of the primary ethical considerations known to the psychobiographical approach, as well as the important ethical guidelines and suggestions followed by the researcher to ensure that the study was ethically sound, are discussed.

5.2 Methodological Considerations in Psychobiographical Research

Although the psychobiographical approach has numerous advantages and significant value, it has also received much criticism (Anderson, 1981; Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1988; Schultz, 2005). According to observed transgressions of scientific psychology and/or history, the existence of such criticism has been justified by even the most loyal advocates of psychobiographical research (Anderson, 1981; Elms, 1994; Fouché, 1999). For a psychobiography to qualify as an ideal approach, the researcher needs to be aware of current criticisms and frequent obstacles known to psychobiography and should attempt to surmount them, or at least mitigate their effect (Schultz, 2005). In the next section, the primary limitations and hindrances inherent to psychobiographical methodology, as well as the current methods available to govern them, as stated in the writings of Fouché (1999), Anderson (1981), Runyan (1988), Elms (1994), Schultz (2005), and Yin (2014), are discussed.

5.2.1 Researcher bias.

5.2.1.1 *Researcher bias explained.*

When qualitative research is conducted, the presence of subjectivity on behalf of the researcher is unavoidable (Flick, 2006; Morrow, 2005). This statement supports that absolute objectivity and neutral engagement in the life of the individual under study are unfeasible, as reported by many psychobiographers (Anderson, 1981; Elms, 1994; Meissner, 2003; Schultz, 2005).

Ponterotto (2014) stated that psychobiographers are often drawn to their subjects because of a long-time fascination with the specific individual. Intense emotional responses towards the subject, including countertransference, are often evoked in the researcher, which only intensifies given the in-depth and timely nature of psychobiographical study (Meissner, 2003; Stroud, 2004). Contrasting emotional reactions might occur when times of idealising the subject are muddled by alternate times of disparaging him or her (Anderson, 1981). Researcher bias has an effect not only on the outcome of the study, but also in terms of data collection, extraction, and analysis. Due to psychobiographers' strong interest in their subjects, it is recommended that they describe their relationship to the individual and declare their biases and expectations, a process also known as "bracketing" (Morrow, 2005). The psychobiographer can pen down his or her emotions regarding the subject and include the information in the methodology section of the research (Ponterotto, 2014). Ponterotto (2014) mentioned that this information could also serve as a form of triangulation. According to Erikson (1958, 1969, 1993, 1994), psychobiographers could reflect on the effect of emotions, perceptions, and personal history and apply a level of *disciplined subjectivity* to recognise the subjective nature of interpretation that inevitably is linked with qualitative psychobiographical research. Willig (2013) coined the term *personal reflexivity*, which involves the researcher reflecting upon ways in which his or her own beliefs, political views, values, experiences, interests, personal long-

term life goals, and social associations have shaped the research. Furthermore, reflexivity could relate to how researchers think about how the study may have affected and possibly changed us as individuals and as psychobiographers (Willig, 2013).

5.2.1.2 Researcher bias managed.

The following strategies were implemented to minimise and prevent the criticism of researcher bias. First, the researcher chose a subject about whom he felt considerably inconclusive. While gathering and reading information about Mercury, the researcher found it challenging to bind himself to either absolutely approve or disapprove of his behaviour or functioning. This uncertainty serves as a means to prevent premature assumptions and conclusions. Although the researcher neither approved nor disapproved of Mercury's behaviour and functioning, he attempted to understand and make sense thereof throughout the study. Thus, as a secondary strategy, the researcher maintained a sufficient degree of empathy for Mercury, which buffers against possible denigration of the subject (Anderson, 1981; Elovitz, 2003; Fouché, 1999). Finally, the researcher was aware of his feelings towards Mercury throughout the research and reflected on these emotions by having his supervisor, Prof. Fouché, review the case study draft. By employing this method of "bracketing" (Morrow, 2005), a thorough evaluation of the researcher-subject relationship and the validity of data on which the case was based could be enhanced.

5.2.2 Reductionism.

5.2.2.1 Reductionism explained.

Psychobiography as a qualitative approach significantly emphasises the holistic analysis of human development and personality. However, when compared with quantitative methods, the criticism of reductionism seems to bear pronounced importance (Runyan, 1984). Possible

reductionism can exist in various areas. Overemphasis is often placed on infantile and early childhood experiences and how those factors shape personality, as stated by Anderson (1981), Runyan (1988), Wallace (1989), Elms (1994), and Howe (1997). Schultz (2005) supported the importance of childhood influences on personality development, but did not approve of it as the only considerable contributor. Furthermore, Erikson (1993, 1994) used the term *originology*, which cautioned psychobiographers against such practice. Erikson (1993) referred to *originology* as “the reduction of every human situation to an analogy with an earlier one, and most of all to that earliest, simplest and most infantile precursor which is assumed to be its origins” (p. 18).

Psychobiography has also been criticised for excessive emphasis placed on psychopathology at the expense of normalcy and well-being (Alter, 2002; Anderson, 1981; Elms, 1994; Fouché, 1999). Terms referring to such a tendency include *overpathologising* (McAdams, 1994) and *pathography* (Schultz, 2005). This type of reductionist error might mislead the researcher to reduce an entire life to a neurotic tendency (Meissner, 2003; Scalapino, 1999) with inflexible diagnostic or psychopathological criteria or symptoms (Runyan, 1988). Finally, the researcher should be cautious to another form of reductionism that involves the application of a static psychological theory and overemphasis on psychological variables, which could cause other important external social, historical, and cultural factors to be left out, and thus an inaccurate analysis of the subject’s life (Capps, 2004; Runyan, 1988).

5.2.2.2 *Reductionism managed.*

Elms (1994) suggested that the researcher distances him- and/or herself from reductionism and move towards complexity. In an attempt to do so, the researcher employed several strategies. First, a developmental theory was applied in which the subject’s entire life span was studied. This allowed the researcher to avoid limiting the study to a particular developmental period and

succumbing to the reductionist error or originology. Secondly, the researcher consciously considered a developmental psychological explanation and understanding of Mercury's experiences and actions, instead of pathologising the subject. Thirdly, as suggested by Fouché and Van Niekerk (2005), the researcher conveyed a holistic view of Mercury's life by conducting a thorough literature study and including various sources of data. To assist the researcher in understanding the subject's socio-historical context, the relevant socio-historical literature related to Mercury's life period was also reviewed (Howe, 1997). Finally, to make this research more approachable to readers from outside the psychological profession, the use of psychological jargon and complex terminology was minimised (Anderson, 1981).

5.2.3 Cross-cultural differences.

5.2.3.1 Cross-cultural differences explained.

Cross-cultural criticism scrutinises the applicability of psychological theories and concepts to the individual's life under study due to the difference in the researcher's and subject's cultural contexts (Anderson, 1981; Stroud, 2004). Psychobiographers have often been reprimanded for forcing such applications to work (Runyan, 1984). To limit the effect of cross-cultural incompatibility, Anderson (1981) and Neuman (2003) advised to employ a culturally empathic understanding of the individual under study.

5.2.3.2 Cross-cultural differences applied.

The researcher conducted an extensive literature study to acquire an understanding of Mercury's socio-historical context and develop an appropriate frame of reference (Brooks & Lupton, 2008; Freddie Mercury, 2016; Freestone & Evans, 2001; Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012). The data were utilised in reviewing the historical, social and cultural information regarding

Mercury's life. In addition, the psychological theory and approach employed in this study acknowledge the significance of historical, social, and cultural effects on the individual.

5.2.4 Analysing an absent subject.

5.2.4.1 Analysing an absent subject explained.

Psychobiographers are often perceived as deprived in their efforts to analyse an individual with whom restricted or no contact is possible (Anderson, 1981; Izenberg, 2003; Meissner, 2003; Runyan, 1988; Schultz, 2005). This limits the researcher with regard to including the subject by questioning him or her and obtaining his or her view on suggested hypotheses. The researcher is compelled to compile a picture of the subject from the available primary and secondary sources, which could contain less information than what might have been available from direct contact with the subject (Anderson, 1981; Runyan, 1988).

In contrast, analysing an absent subject could have several advantages. Anderson (1981) and Elms (1994) stated that, in most cases, various sources of information are available to the psychobiographer covering the subject's entire life span. This gives the researcher the opportunity to distance himself from the subject, which results in a more objective and accurate view of the individual's life. In addition, the researcher is not bound to ethical therapeutic requirements, such as informed consent (Carlson, 1988) or confidentiality (Elms & Song, 2005), which redirects the focus from solely maladaptive behaviour to a more balanced description (Anderson, 1981; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005).

5.2.4.2 Analysing an absent subject managed.

The researcher conducted a thorough literature search to reduce the limitations caused by the absence of the subject under study. Various biographical data on Mercury were gathered and

reviewed, among which were books such as *Freddie Mercury: The Definitive Biography* (Jones, 2012) and *Freddie Mercury: His Life in His Own Words* (Brooks & Lupton, 2008), as well as various interview excerpts, audio-visual documentaries, and magazine and published newspaper articles. The total collection of materials is summarised in Chapter 6 and included in the reference list.

5.2.5 Elitism and easy genre.

5.2.5.1 Elitism and easy genre explained.

According to Stroud (2004), psychobiography has been scrutinised for being elitist and easy. Runyan (1988) stated that elitism tends to ignore the lives of ordinary individuals and instead focuses on rulers, leaders, and privileged members of society. In defence, Runyan (1988) described psychobiography as applicable to individual lives from any social status, as the focus should be placed on being *human* and primarily development of personality. Therefore, subjects should be selected based on their individual characteristics, irrespective of social status or popularity. Furthermore, to minimise elitism, the psychobiography should not offer interpretations that predominantly elevate the subject. Thus, elitism depends not only on the individual selected, but also on the interpretations employed by the qualitative psychobiography (Runyan, 1988).

As psychobiography is often characterised as predictable (e.g., it involves the analysis of a life from birth to death), it has been criticised as easy (Runyan, 1988). Runyan (1988) and Elms (1994) agreed that writing a superficial biography would indeed be easy, but conducting a satisfactory in-depth psychobiography would require of the biographer notable effort, perseverance, and thoroughness. In addition, Schultz (2005) described a well-written psychobiography as a cogent and comprehensive narrative of viable and consistent information.

The complexity of psychobiography is demonstrated in its demands to utilise various sources, employ in-depth psychological understanding, and employ considerable literary competence (McAdams, 1994; Runyan, 1988).

5.2.5.2 Elitism and easy genre managed.

Mercury was selected as the subject of the study primarily because of his unique personality characteristics and behaviour. He only became known during young adulthood and was considered a regular individual born into a middle socioeconomic class family (Jones, 2012). Furthermore, Mercury's stardom did not exempt him from challenges faced during normal development, such as his own identity exploration during adolescence and his struggle with terminal illness (Brooks & Lupton, 2008). Thus, the criticism of elitism, only as a selection criterion for the subject analysed, does not appear justified in this study.

Conducting a holistic picture of Mercury's life and personality was an exceptional challenging task, which is far removed from criticism of the study as being within an easy genre. The thorough literature review conducted to understand Mercury's cultural and socio-historical contexts made the study even more complex. The life span theory employed demanded broader data collection and analyses as well as an integration of findings. In addition, the numerous constructs related to the study, for example Mercury's secrecy regarding his health diagnosis and sexual orientation, further made the study more challenging.

5.2.6 Inflated expectations.

5.2.6.1 Inflated expectations explained.

Psychobiographers should be attentive to two particular limitations with regard to inflated expectations. Firstly, any psychological interpretations of the subject's life should be viewed

as supplementary to already existing explanations. Thus, psychological interpretations do not replace economic, political and historical explanations, among others, but add to them (Anderson, 1981; Stroud, 2004; Vorster, 2003). Secondly, all explanations should be regarded as speculative, rather than definitively factual or conclusive (Anderson, 1981; Elovitz, 2003; Meissner, 2003).

5.2.6.2 Inflated expectations applied

The case study of Mercury was carried out mainly from a psychological point of view, as recognised by the researcher. The interpretation was limited to the one theory discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, the researcher cannot and does not claim to have unravelled the complete complexity of Mercury's life and personality development. No psychological theory can be regarded as completely predictive or unmistakably definitive; therefore, the researcher admits that the purpose of the study was to sketch a possible psychological understanding of Mercury within the framework of the psychosocial theory of Erikson, rather than an attempt to propose any absolute conclusions about his life.

5.2.7 Infinite amount of biographical data.

5.2.7.1 Infinite amount of biographical data explained.

The competent handling of biographical material in psychobiography is an important methodological issue, according to Simonton (2003). Psychobiography involves an overwhelming amount of information from which only relevant data should be extracted (Elms, 1994; Fouché, 1999). Therefore, it is a challenging task for a psychobiographer to manage data in such a way that significant information is revealed (Alexander, 1988). A method proposed by Alexander (1988, 1990) assists in the reduction of biographical data, and the identification of salient data requiring further enquiry. Firstly, to provide a framework from which the large

amount of data could be organised, Alexander (1988, 1990) proposed questioning the information. Secondly, he devised the following nine indicators of salience the psychobiographer could employ for further extraction and organisation of important data (see detailed discussion in section 6.7.1):

1. Primacy
2. Frequency
3. Uniqueness
4. Negation
5. Emphasis
6. Omission
7. Error or distortion
8. Isolation
9. Incompletion

5.2.7.2 Infinite amount of biographical data managed.

The researcher gathered a large amount of publicised and available data on Mercury. This made it possible to cross-reference information and allowed the researcher to engage with the data throughout the study. A variety of published materials were available to the researcher, including concert video footage of Mercury, newspaper articles, lyrics written by Mercury, existing biographies, and interviews with the subject, his family and acquaintances. Finding

archival data that were accessible or retrievable was somewhat challenging, although most information was already condensed or compiled into many of the existing published materials.

The strategies suggested by Alexander (1988, 1990) were utilised to reduce the available data gathered to a manageable amount and to extract the relevant and important information. Firstly, the researcher was guided by specific questions rooted in the psychological theories employed in the study, according to which the data was organised. Secondly, the above-mentioned nine indicators of salience were used to identify information that required further enquiry. The strategies utilised to reduce and organise the unlimited amount of biographical data are discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

5.2.8 Validity and reliability criticisms.

5.2.8.1 Validity and reliability criticisms explained.

One of the most prominent criticisms against the psychobiographical approach includes concerns about its validity and reliability (Fouché, 1999; Yin, 2014). These scepticisms relate to the trustworthiness of the psychobiography and the quality of the methodology and research design. Some specific mentions that are of concern include (a) the validity of retrospective and introspective data, which errs towards being subjective; (b) the ability of the method to test proposed hypotheses; (c) the internal validity of the approach, as alternative explanations regarding the individual often already exist; and (d) the external validity of the research method, as findings of the case study cannot be generalised safely (Howe, 1997; Runyan, 1988; Schultz, 2005). Yin (2014) proposed that the same four tests common to all social science research methods can be used to measure the quality of any case study. These tests are (a) internal validity; (b) external validity; (c) construct validity; and (d) reliability. These tests are often referred to and known in qualitative research as (a) credibility; (b) transferability; (c)

confirmability; and (d) dependability (Yin, 2014). The tests and their applicability to the study are discussed in the next section.

5.2.8.1.1 *Internal validity or credibility.*

Internal validity relates to establishing a causal relationship between conditions and is considered more relevant to explanatory or causal studies than exploratory or descriptive studies are (Neuman, 2003; Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), credibility in psychobiography concerns the accuracy of inferences, which is rooted in the accuracy of the data gathered. To examine such accuracy, the psychobiographer has to be aware of all other existing understandings and alternatives. To relate with this statement, psychobiographers should also beware of drawing final conclusions from insufficient information. Krefting (1991) and Rudestam and Newton (2014) suggested that the researcher spend enough time with the data to increase in-depth exposure and sufficient submersion, allowing any distortions and repeated themes to be investigated and validated further. In addition, researcher bias could pose as another threat to the credibility of a qualitative psychobiographical study (Fouché, 1999). Researcher bias might result from the researcher's enthusiasm for a specific theoretical orientation or interpretation and/or his or her subjective perception of the preferred individual (Elms, 1994). The strategies utilised to surmount researcher bias are discussed in section 5.2.1.

To enhance the credibility of case study research such as psychobiography, the process of triangulation has been suggested (Willig, 2013). Triangulation stems from the idea that merging of various perspectives result in shared confirmation of data to clarify themes or theory and to ensure that all related components of the phenomenon are explored (Flick, 2006). Cross-checking data by using triangulation limits the possible distortion from a single source and minimises the risk of a biased researcher (Tindall, 1999). Patton (2014) indicates four types of triangulation that could be utilised for case study research. Firstly, *data triangulation*

maximises the variety of data sources that the researcher uses to compile the same questions. *Researcher triangulation* relates to the interpretation of data by involving different evaluators, thus providing various perspectives. *Method triangulation* involves the use of multiple methods of enquiry, while *theory triangulation* refers to the use of different theories to interpret the same set of data. Triangulation not only enhances the trustworthiness of a psychobiography, but also affects its confirmability and dependability positively (Yin, 2014).

5.2.8.1.2 *External validity or transferability*

External validity relates to the applicability of the findings to different contexts and whether the findings of the study can be generalised beyond the immediate case study (De Vos, 2005; Yin 2014). Runyan (1988) cautioned psychobiographers not to aim at generalising their findings beyond their study, as it is questionable and controversial to propose that a subject is representative of a larger population. Furthermore, single cases provide an insufficient framework for generalising conclusions (Yin, 2014). Yin argued for a distinction between *statistical generalisation*, where the sample is intended to generalise to the larger population (as in quantitative survey research), and *analytical generalisation*, where a particular set of results is generalised to a broader theory (as in qualitative case study research). Consequently, in psychobiography, where findings are considered fundamentally descriptive, transferability is a less important criterion (Fouché, 1999; Stroud, 2004). For the purpose of this study, *analytical generalisation* is employed.

5.2.8.1.3 *Construct validity or confirmability.*

Construct validity and confirmability relate to the formation of (a) the appropriate operational measures for the concepts under study; and (b) neutral findings based completely on the information and ideas of the theoretical frameworks and literature and not on the researcher's

preferences and characteristics (De Vos, 2005; Yin, 2014). Yin (2014) proposed that all considered data, constructs and variables could be traced by producing a chain of evidence. The utilising of data triangulation (i.e., multiple data sources) would assist with the process (Krefting, 1991). Furthermore, according to Fouché (1999) and Yin (2014), a conceptual matrix could be employed to ensure transparent presentation of the operational definitions and the variables of the study. In addition, an auditor could be helpful in observing the progression of the study, comprehending the nature of the interpretations and the decision-making process, and deciding whether other researchers would draw similar deductions from the data (Flick, 2006; Krefting, 1991; Yin, 2014). This study was anchored theoretically within Erikson's theory of psychosocial personality development (Ponterotto, 2014). Erikson's (1958, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory and constructs were employed to guide, structure and anchor this study theoretically.

5.2.8.1.4 Reliability or dependability.

Dependability refers to whether the findings, conclusions, and recommendations are consistent with the presented data (Krefting, 1991). Yin (2014) argued that, in order to allow another researcher the opportunity to arrive at the same findings and conclusions if the same case study was conducted, dependability aims to limit biases and errors in the study. Therefore, for the study to be reliable, a good fit between the research question, data collection, and analysis procedures is vital. To make this plausible, the research process should be documented thoroughly in detail (Flick, 2006). Yin (2014) proposed the development of a case study database and the use of a case study protocol, which can serve as helpful.

5.2.8.2 Validity and reliability criticisms managed.

The following strategies were applied to address issues regarding validity and reliability:

5.2.8.2.1 Internal validity or credibility.

To minimise Yin's (2014) issue regarding internal validity, it was important for the researcher to maintain credibility by making general inferences while conducting this study. Credibility was deemed important, as the researcher's aim was solely to investigate and describe the life of the subject in the context of a psychological theory and not to conclude a cause-and-effect relationship. Firstly, credibility was achieved through extensive and prolonged exposure and engagement with the biographical data on Mercury's life, which involved thorough exploration and analysis of all available data. Secondly, the researcher applied data triangulation and researcher triangulation. By making use of data triangulation, the researcher investigated and cross-referenced multiple sources of data. Researcher triangulation was achieved by discussing analyses and methodology with the researcher's supervisor. Theory triangulation was not employed, as only the psychosocial developmental theory was used in this study. However, this did not affect the internal validity or credibility of the study negatively, as the aim of this psychobiography was solely to investigate Mercury's life through an Eriksonian lens. To minimise researcher bias, an evaluation of the researcher-subject relationship was obtained (see 5.2.1.2).

5.2.8.2.2 External validity and transferability.

The issue of transferability was not an important concern in this study, as the aim of the research was not to generalise conclusions to a broader population through statistical generalisation. In contrast, Mercury was selected as a complex and unique individual whose life and personal development were followed closely and publicised by the media. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to compare the findings with the propositions of the psychosocial personality development theory discussed in Chapter 3, also known as analytical generalisation.

5.2.8.2.3 Construct validity and confirmability.

To ensure confirmability, the researcher clearly identified the concepts and stages under study, as well as their operational measures. To inform this conceptualisation, available literature on the theory was utilised. The conceptual framework for the theory and the data analysis matrix are discussed in detail in Chapter 6. Furthermore, the researcher presented this study to his supervisor for input and feedback, as discussed previously.

5.2.8.2.4 Reliability or dependability.

To ensure dependability, the researcher employed a systematic and consistent approach to data selection and analysis. The formulating system consisted of a conceptual matrix, in which the relevant salient data were organised and examined. The matrix was rooted in the constructs of the psychosocial personality development theory and guided by Alexander's (1988, 1990) guidelines for identity and organising of salient data. The matrix is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

Section 5.2 elaborated on the numerous methodological considerations inherent in the psychobiographical research approach, recommended strategies to minimise these challenges, and examined their relevant applications in this study. In addition to methodological considerations, the researcher had to consider specific ethical considerations that could be crucial in the psychobiographical process (Fouché, 1999; Stroud, 2004). The following section illuminates the ethical considerations most prominent to psychobiography and provides a discussion of the strategies employed by the researcher to ensure that the study was conducted ethically.

5.3 Ethical Considerations in Psychobiography

5.3.1 *Ethical considerations explained.*

According to Haverkamp (2005) and Ponterotto (2010, 2014), qualitative research methods involve some unique ethical dilemmas, such as informed consent and confidentiality. For the psychobiographer, issues like privacy and confidentiality are of utmost importance as the researcher delves deep into and investigates the individual's personal world (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1988). Elms (1994) stated that the issue of whether the subject under study is a living or deceased individual is important in psychobiography. Furthermore, other issues that may arise include the information allowed to be used and whether the findings of such a private life are presented sensitively and authentically when publicised (Fouché, 1999).

According to Elms (1994), there is a lack of involvement of the American Psychological Association in psychobiographical and psychohistorical research, which creates a strong demand for clearly stated ethical guidelines in psychobiography research. When the American Psychiatric Association's (1976) guidelines regarding *Assessments* and *Research and Publication* are reviewed, it is clear that the focus is placed primarily upon ethical dilemmas geared toward psychologists working in clinical settings where clients are evaluated. Most psychobiographers study deceased subjects and never had face-to-face interaction with the individuals before (Elms, 2007). Conversely, in 1976, the American Psychiatric Association assembled a task force that established two ethical guidelines for psychobiography (Runyan, 1988). According to these guidelines, psychobiographies may be conducted only on (a) deceased subjects, preferably without any surviving family members who likely may be influenced negatively by unfavourable findings; and (b) living subjects who have given informed consent (American Psychiatric Association, 1976). These guidelines did not make specific mention of respect and confidentiality, but Elms (1994) recommended that all private

information of subjects be treated accordingly. In addition, Ponterotto (2013a) stated that psychologists in the role of psychobiographers maintain a responsibility to declare the context of their psychological evaluations and illuminate the possible consequences and limitations of their assessments.

A basic tenet of psychological practice is the principle of informed consent, especially with regard to research and publication (American Psychological Association, 2002). Psychobiographers should inform individuals under study about their right to withdraw from the study at any time during the research process or decline participation right from the beginning (American Psychological Association, 2002). This complicates ethical scenarios for psychologists who study deceased subjects. However, the ethical codes of the American Psychological Association (2002) make provision that permits exemption from the normal informed consent process when the research would not likely cause any harm or distress to the subject and when already existing data are utilised, and where the outcome would not place the individual in any legal turmoil or harm his or her financial standing.

Furthermore, Elms (1994) stated the significance for researchers to self-reflect on their own ethical work and ensure that their study is at least ethically justified to a certain degree.

5.3.2 Ethical considerations managed.

This study was conducted as an academic exercise and in an academic context and therefore posed fewer ethical challenges. The researcher chose to study the deceased subject, Freddie Mercury, who passed away more than 20 years ago, which eliminates the requirement of informed consent. During the process of the study, the researcher constantly worked to triangulate the data sources before offering any psychological interpretations or opinions. The information gathered of Mercury involved existing published materials that were already in the

public domain and freely accessible by anyone. This limited any possible embarrassment, legal or financial risks for Mercury's surviving family members and acquaintances. In addition, reporting on archival information poses minimal risk of civil or criminal liability brought against the subject. A variety of positive and negative media coverage about Mercury as a public figure was published. Still, throughout the study, the researcher maintained the necessary level of respect for the individual, despite the intention of the sources from which the data were gathered. It is the psychobiographer's responsibility to ensure that the research was thorough, while maintaining a balanced perspective. The researcher chose not to make any contact with Mercury's living family members (his mother and sister) or any other personal acquaintances. Lastly, using the standard qualitative technique of "bracketing" (Morrow, 2005), the researcher was able to write down and set aside his own impressions of Mercury as well as any personal biases (see section 8.5). This allowed the researcher to consult with the data throughout the research process and monitor researcher bias.

5.4 Chapter Summary

The chapter brought the most significant methodological challenges in psychobiographical research to the foreground and discussed the researcher's attempts to overcome and reduce them. The section was then followed by a brief discussion of the prominent ethical considerations involved in psychobiographical research, including the relevance thereof to this particular study. In the next chapter, the research design and methodology of the study are discussed.

Chapter 6

Research Design and Methodology

6.1 Chapter Preview

This chapter focuses on the design and methodology of the study. Furthermore, the selected research subject is presented, and thereafter the research objectives, research method, data collection, extraction, and analysis procedures are discussed. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study is discussed, and the management of the ethical dilemmas relevant to this research are examined.

6.2 Research Design

The study on the life of Freddie Mercury could be described as life history research (Plummer, 1983; Runyan, 1982) with a qualitative single-case research design (Yin, 2014). In life history research, the collection and course of experiences in the subject's life are followed (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). A single-case study design is utilised to test, clarify, and challenge proposed theories against a specific individual case (Yin, 2014). Fouché (1999) stated that the research design can be defined as a single-case psychobiographical study over a life span. In the design, psychological theory is used systematically to reconstruct and rediscover the subject's life and, as a result, present an illuminating narrative that adds to construction of theory and knowledge (McAdams, 1994).

According to Edwards (1990), the qualitative psychobiographical study is both exploratory-descriptive and descriptive-dialogic in its essence. Being exploratory-descriptive allows the researcher to provide a precise and rich description of the psychological development of the subject's personality over his life span; thus, the subject's life is better understood in its socio-

historical context (Fouché & De Vos, 2005; Neuman, 2003). In addition, the descriptive-dialogic approach of the study assists the researcher in providing an accurate picture and description of a phenomenon, as well as in testing and elucidating the aspects and content of specific models and theories (Edwards, 1990; Martin, 1996; McLeod, 1994). In this study, the researcher specifically refers to Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) psychosocial theory of personality development that was discussed in Chapter 3.

6.3 Subject under Study

The selection criteria of a subject for psychobiographical study are based primarily on the individual's significance and interest (Howe, 1997). According to Elms (1994), psychobiographers should allow themselves to be chosen by the subject and not the other way around. Farrokh Bulsara, better known as Freddie Mercury (1946 – 1991), served as the single case whose life history was explored in this psychobiography.

Mercury was selected as the research subject for this case study by means of a non-probability sampling procedure known as purposive sampling. Purposive sampling makes use of the psychobiographer's judgement to clarify the characteristic traits required and to ensure richness of data (Strydom & Delport, 2005). Furthermore, Neuman (2003) praised purposive sampling in conjunction with case study research as effective when the aim of the study is to achieve in-depth understanding of a particular individual and when the case is unique or part of a specialised population. In addition, the subject was also selected based on theoretical sampling. Theoretical sampling is the process of selecting data based on the intention to formulate, apply, evaluate, or enhance theory (Bagnasco, Ghirotto, & Sasso, 2014). It compliments purposive sampling and enhances data collection as the researcher pursues conceptual ideas instead of general information.

Mercury was undoubtedly one of the most successful music legends in entertainment history (Richards & Langthorne, 2016) and was selected as the subject of this study based on the interest value, his unique personality dynamics, and his significant contribution to the international music industry. An initial literature review (both online and offline) revealed that a significant body of information on Mercury exists (Brooks & Lupton, 2008; Freestone & Evans, 2001; Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012) allowing an in-depth and comprehensive investigation into various psychosocial aspects of his life. In addition, none of the existing publications have a conceptualised psychological outlook, and no psychobiographical study has been conducted on Mercury to date (EbscoHost, 12 January 2017).

6.4 Research Objectives

The primary objective of the study was to explore and describe the psychosocial development of Freddie Mercury. The focus was specifically on exploring and describing the life of Mercury according to Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) psychosocial theory of personality development. The theory was used as a framework to conceptualise Mercury's life stages and to indicate how each stage and crisis influenced his personality, relationships, career, achievements, and challenges. Specific focus is placed on Mercury's unique identity development, as Erikson focused on the influence that culture and society exert on identity formation (McLeod, 1994). This primary objective is demonstrative of an inductive approach and represents the exploratory-descriptive nature of the study because it involves in-depth understanding and a thick description of an individual case situated in a specific socio-historical context (Edwards, 1990; Yin, 2014).

As a secondary objective of the study, the content and components of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) psychosocial theory was tested. By testing the theory, the deductive approach and the descriptive-dialogic nature of the study were reflected. The descriptive-dialogic nature

entails a process through which theoretical propositions and conceptualisations are validated or refuted by comparing research findings with expected outcomes or theoretical models (Edwards, 1990; Fouché, 1999). Therefore, a dialogue between the exploratory-descriptive findings and the theoretical concepts and propositions was facilitated (Edwards, 1990). To test the theoretical model, analytical generalisation was utilised (Cavaye, 1996; Yin, 2014).

6.5 Research Method

A qualitative-morphogenic approach was employed as the psychobiographical research method for this study. This method conceptualises the subject within both the nomothetic and idiographic paradigms (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1983), as discussed in section 1.3. Hugo Munsterberg's 1898 writings defined *idiographic* as the characteristics of a unique individual, whereas the term *nomothetic* reflects universal characteristics (Hurlburt & Knapp, 2006). This research method, with the complementary single-case design integrated, focuses on the holistic qualitative description and interpretation of a single, time-bound, socio-historical case (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005).

6.6 Data-collection Procedures

To collect data on the life of Freddie Mercury, a comprehensive search on the World Wide Web, the information system services online, at the SASOL Library of the University of the Free State, and in bookstores was conducted. Data from primary and secondary sources were used. As previously discussed (see section 4.5.4.), primary sources are produced directly by the individual under study (Strydom & Delpont, 2005), and secondary sources about the subject are generated by someone else (Woolums, 2011). The information collected were used as the basic units of analysis in accordance with the primary objective of the study.

All data were extracted by utilising Alexander's (1988, 1990) nine principles of salience, as discussed in section 6.7.1.2. Primary sources that were examined for analysis included audio-visual footage from interviews with Mercury produced during video documentaries, archival concert footage, as well as music videos and creative work produced by Mercury himself, including music lyrics, poems, and letters. Secondary sources used included several biographies produced before and after Mercury's death (such as *Somebody to Love: The Life, Death and Legacy of Freddie Mercury*, by Matt Richards and Mark Langthorne (2016); *Freddie Mercury: The Definite Biography*, by Lesley-Ann Jones (2012); *Freddie Mercury*, by Peter Freestone and David Evans (2001); and *Freddie Mercury: The Biography*, by Laura Jackson (2012)), newspaper and media articles on his personal life and career, and publicly available interviews with Mercury's family and friends.

All data sources used are documented in the reference list. Documenting all data thoroughly is believed to benefit the trustworthiness of the study and to provide a collection of information for other researchers to access and retrieve for future use (Fouché, 1999; Yin, 2014). One of the most challenging tasks for the psychobiographer is to examine, extract, categorise, and analyse the gathered materials (Alexander, 1990; Fouché, 1999; McAdams, 1994; Schultz, 2005). Therefore, data extraction and analysis is discussed in the following section.

6.7 Data Extraction and Analysis

In qualitative research, data in textual narrative form are analysed by extracting themes or prominent constructs (Cresswell, 1994; Schurinck, 1998). With the psychobiographer's effort, the surplus of fact and opinion in data should be sorted to accurately identify information that is irrelevant from privileged data (Schultz, 2005). After the data have been collected, one of the challenges the psychobiographer has is to organise the data in such a manner that the data a source contains are revealed (Alexander, 1990). This serves the aim of a psychobiography to

illuminate salient experiences and events of the subject's life and use psychological theory to sort the information into a rich narrative. To analyse psychobiographical data, Alexander (1988, 1990) proposed two strategies for the extraction, organisation, prioritisation and analysis of information. The model is discussed in the following section.

6.7.1 Alexander's model.

According to Alexander (1988, 1990), two strategies are used to extract core-identifying units from gathered biographical materials: firstly, by questioning the data, and secondly, by letting the data reveal itself. The researcher utilised Alexander's model, and both strategies were employed in the study. These strategies are discussed in the following section.

6.7.1.1 Questioning data.

Initially, the collected materials were approached by means of the first strategy, *questioning the data*. This strategy was employed by extracting and organising the information carefully into the stages of personality development. This helped with the sorting of the excess data to answer operationalised questions within the theory applied and elucidate important information about the individual under study (Alexander, 1988, 1990). To stay true to the real objectives of the study when extracting units of analysis, the researcher adhered to the following guidelines while approaching the data:

6.7.1.1.1 First objective.

Which of the data in the collected material would enable and facilitate the exploration and description of Mercury's psychosocial personality development? To answer the first question, the researcher conceptualised Mercury's life history in terms of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory of psychosocial personality development, as discussed in Chapter 3. Only data

relevant and applicable to the proposed theoretical orientation and conceptualisation of the psychological framework were selected for extraction. This process also demonstrated the exploratory-descriptive nature of the study, as previously mentioned in the chapter.

6.7.1.1.2 Secondary objective.

To what extent does the content of the applied theory (Erikson's psychosocial theory) relate to, compare with, or match the milestones of psychosocial development observed in the extracted data and vice versa? The interaction and dialogue between the exploratory-descriptive findings and the psychological framework used assisted the researcher to make comparisons between the proposed theory and conceptualisations of the psychological framework. This gave the researcher the opportunity to test the content and propositions of the theory, which reflected the descriptive-dialogic nature of the study.

6.7.1.2 Letting the data reveal itself.

Alexander's (1988, 1990) second strategy employed to extract data is known as *letting the data reveal itself*. The aim of this strategy is to reduce the overwhelming amount of data to more manageable quantities and to assist the researcher in selecting and marking data for further investigation of possible underlying conscious and unconscious intent (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Alexander (1988, 1990) proposed nine principles of salience that guide the researcher in extracting salient data. The researcher followed these principles orderly and consistently to select data and themes that were relevant and important in terms of the study.

6.7.1.2.1 Primacy.

Data presented first in a text could have psychological significance and should be investigated closely (Schultz, 2005). Elms (1994) also agreed that information presented first is perceived

as most significant or foremost in mind. This principle is also reflected in psychotherapy sessions where the initial few minutes between a client and his therapist are fundamental for what will follow (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Therefore, during data extraction, the researcher would pay closer attention to information such as introductory statements, first experiences, and childhood memories.

The following examples demonstrate the principle of *primacy* of the data: Most early encounters with Mercury as a child recalls him as being painfully shy and withdrawn (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012). Mercury experienced his first encounter to fame as a baby when his mother entered his photo into a local “Baby Photo of the Year” competition, which he won (Jones, 2012). Mercury and his younger sister used to listen to rock and roll music on English radio stations when they were young, and Mercury enjoyed singing songs with his friends (Jackson, 2012). Mercury’s mother recognised his special music talent from an early age, and the family encouraged him to take piano lessons during his first years in school (Richards & Langthorne, 2016). Mercury was a versatile learner at school, practising sport, music, and art (Jones, 2012). One of Mercury’s earliest musical influences was the Indian Bollywood star, Lata Mangeshkar (Jackson, 2012). After arriving in India as a young adolescent, Mercury took the first step to transform his identity when he began referring to himself as “Freddie” (Jones, 2012). Shortly after, he formed his first school band, “The Hectics” experienced attention from the loving audiences (Jackson, 2012). Brian May, the lead guitarist of what would later on be known as the band *Queen*, remembers his first encounter with Mercury and vividly recalls Mercury’s “flamboyance” (Szabelski, 2012).

6.7.1.2.2 *Frequency.*

Recurrent patterns, themes, communications, events, obsessions, or symbolic representations represent frequency (Schultz, 2005). Alexander (1988, 1990) stated that such repetitions or

obsessive reference to a theme, event, or message points to an increased certainty regarding its significance. Although Elms (1994) cautioned that such monotony could decrease awareness or perceived importance of a message, he was of the opinion that the significance thereof should not be underestimated.

Frequency is most evident in Mercury's ambitious determination to succeed in the music industry. He was known to proclaim from a young age that he would one day become a famous pop star (Jones, 2012). Later, as a student in England, he declared to one of his friends that he would not only become a pop star, but instead would transform into a legend in the near future (Jones, 2012). His perseverance and determination to succeed as an artist was also prevalent by the number of failed music bands of which Mercury was part, before having a breakthrough with Queen (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012). Furthermore, the data reveal that Mercury continuously explored and experimented with his own identity, including his sexual identity. Arriving at his school in India, he changed his own name and continued reinventing himself throughout the years. Later he also changed his surname and engaged with numerous different musical styles and fashion statements (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Richards & Langthorne, 2016).

6.7.1.2.3 *Uniqueness.*

This salient indicator relates to aspects in the collected data that are unusual or singular and therefore worthy of closer inspection (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994). These may include incidents such as special memories or information selected by the subject as being unprecedented or unique (Schultz, 2005). According to Alexander (1988, 1990), unexpected or unexplained outcomes in a sequence of events also indicate uniqueness. In addition, the researcher should be cognisant of normal development and recognise the more subtle signs of

uniqueness, such as any deviations from generally accepted language or cultural expectations (Alexander, 1988).

Uniqueness presented itself frequently in Mercury's life. One of the most unusual series of events was Mercury's exposure to different cultural and religious contexts early in his life when the family moved from Zanzibar to India and finally to England. This greatly influenced his identity development, and contributed to his love for fashion, art, unconventional styles of music, and his willingness to experiment with different stage personas (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Richards & Langthorne, 2016). In addition, Mercury's untimely death, as well as his illness, was unprecedented and unexpected. Mercury died of AIDS-related bronchial pneumonia at age 45 (Jones, 2012). Finally, he preferred to keep his illness private and away from the public eye until the day before he passed away (Jones, 2012).

6.7.1.2.4 *Negation.*

This relates to that which is denied or turned into its opposite (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994). Elms (1994) stated that an individual's perception about himself is as significant as the emphasis on who he is not. Repressed or unconscious material is often an indication of negation statements (Alexander, 1988; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2005). Elms (1994) viewed such statements as truths that the individual wants to believe or wants others to believe of him or her. According to Schultz (2005), the subject protests excessively against a biographical or psychological fact, and this refutation could indicate the confirmation of the opposite.

Negation could be observed in Mercury's resistance in accepting his mortality and revealing his struggle with HIV to the world. Although he already tested HIV positive in 1987, he refuted the rumours numerous times when confronted by others, even after developing a frail appearance during his last few years (Jones, 2012). Mercury's desire to present himself as the

legend that he believed he was, was still prevalent in the last few weeks of his life (Jackson, 2012). Mercury released a press announcement revealing his illness only a little more than 24 hours before he passed away (Freestone & Evans, 2001). Although it is not believed Mercury was in denial of his illness, he protected his fearless and unbeatable persona until the very end (Brooks & Lupton, 2008).

6.7.1.2.5 *Emphasis.*

Alexander (1988) proposed three types of emphasis of which the researcher must take note, namely over-, under-, and misplaced emphasis. Overemphasis occurs when an incident, considered by the reader as mundane, is emphasised excessively. Underemphasis relates to seemingly significant information such as major life events being underscored. When emphasis is misplaced, irrelevant information is emphasised with unwarranted force because the outcome is not credibly linked to the stated or implied means (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005).

The literature review indicates that Mercury's introverted personality traits were *underemphasised*. Jim Hutton, his personal assistant and last romantic partner, referred to Mercury as being reserved and quiet (Freestone & Evans, 2001). He stated that Mercury was "an average Joe" in his private interaction with him (Jones, 2012). This resulted in an *overemphasis* on Mercury's bold stage persona. Furthermore, emphasis on Mercury's love for and attraction to women was *misplaced*. It is widely documented and assumed that Mercury had several romantic relationships with other males and that he therefore was homosexual (Richards & Langthorne, 2016). However, an intensive literature review reveals that his sexual orientation could be described more accurately as bisexual. Mercury dated several women during his life span and was in a long-term relationship with Mary Austin, whom he described as *the love of his life* (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012). Mercury started seeing other men mostly

after his intimate relationship with Austin ended, but he would always refer to Austin as his true love (Freestone & Evans, 2001). Mercury left a significant portion of his estate for Austin in his final will (Jones, 2012). In addition, Mercury was also romantically involved with Austrian actress Barbara Valentin (Richards & Langthorne, 2016).

6.7.1.2.6 *Omission.*

This entails the absence of expected content, or the information that is missing (Alexander, 1988; Schultz, 2005). *Omission*, which is also referred to as the Sherlock Holmes rule, implies that a vital clue in the subject's life might be revealed only when questioning what is missing from a picture (Elms, 1994). In addition, Alexander (1988) points out that, by favouring rich descriptions of events and actions, the subject's affect is most often omitted.

Omission, especially rich description and explorations about his personal life before he became famous as the music icon, is evident in Mercury's life. After Mercury had become involved with the rock band Queen, he received vast attention from the media and curious music journalists (Jones, 2012). Therefore, most materials available are writings of Mercury as lead singer of Queen, and not of his early childhood and adolescence (Richards & Langthorne, 2016). Fortunately, although a comprehensive description of Mercury's upbringing is omitted, biographers successfully compiled a timeline of his life by collecting data primarily from his mother, sister, and acquaintances (Brooks & Lupton, 2008; Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Richards & Langthorne, 2016). Details of Mercury's life are provided in Chapter 2.

6.7.1.2.7 *Error or distortion.*

Schultz (2005) noted that the principle of salience inevitably involves the presence of mistakes, most often regarding times, people, and places. According to Alexander (1988), distortions or

errors could be an indication of significant hidden motives or conflicts that could be missed easily.

When considering Mercury's biographical background as a child, several *distortions* are prevalent with regard to specific dates, timelines, and age (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Freestone & Evans, 2001). Most biographers do not agree regarding the specific timeline of events during his childhood and adolescence, which results in some *errors* (Brooks & Lupton, 2008; Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Richards & Langthorne, 2016). Although the accuracy of specific dates and periods connected to these events are speculative in essence, most biographers do agree that the incidences indeed occurred (Freestone & Evans, 2001; Jones, 2012). Examples include some biographers disagreeing on Mercury's exact age when he started attending school as a youngster in Zanzibar (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012).

6.7.1.2.8 *Isolation*

Isolation relates to a specific section of information that stands out from the material or does not fit (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Schultz, 2005). This raises the question of how the data logically make sense in the presented context (Elms, 1994). These noticeable associations or comments that are out of place could illuminate the hidden meaning of the isolated fragment of the unconscious (Alexander, 1988; Schultz, 2005).

Mercury's desire to break away from Queen and release music as a solo artist could be interpreted as an act of *isolation* and a disruption in his career pattern (Jones, 2012). This intention could have been driven by his medical diagnosis at that time (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012). As he fell ill and approached the end of his life, he became much more withdrawn and private, possibly reflecting on his own life and pondering on existential dilemmas, as discussed in Chapter 2 (Jackson; 2012; Jones, 2012).

6.7.1.2.9 *Incompletion.*

What is unfinished or incomplete is essentially an indication of a topic that is introduced but dismissed without closure (Alexander, 1988; Elms, 1994). It points to the subject's failure to conclude a story which might be evident in him abruptly, ending a sequence before its closure, using distraction without a return to the original sequence, or completing a means-end sequence without an explanatory means-end relationship (Alexander, 1988). Schultz (2005) interpreted incompleteness as the avoidance of specific actions or thoughts that elicit associated negative emotions.

The most significant example of *incompletion* is Mercury's untimely early death at the age of 45 (Jones, 2012). This not only ended a music career of a legend, but also left the public shocked around the world, causing fans to even desire Mercury's talent more (Jones, 2012).

The researcher was able to utilise Alexander's model to reflect on the information systematically and consistently (Alexander, 1988; Fouché, 1999). In addition, the model aligns with Yin's (2014) proposed strategies for case study analysis. One of Yin's (2014) strategies involves data analysis guided by theoretical frameworks, objectives, and propositions. By combining the theoretical orientation and the research objectives, the researcher could identify salient data in the material for which Alexander's guidelines proved useful.

Yin (2014) proposed a second strategy to formulate a case description, namely to make use of a descriptive framework to organise and integrate case information. To succeed in this goal, the researcher compiled a conceptual matrix that facilitated data extraction and categorisation. The conceptual matrix is discussed in the following section.

6.8 Conceptual Matrix

A data analysis matrix (Fouché, 1999; Yin, 2014) was applied to this psychobiographical research study. The researcher categorised the data collected in the conceptual matrix, which was utilised as a screening grid during data analysis. This matrix was developed according to the framework of the psychological theory applied in this study. The *Matrix of Psychosocial Personality Development over the Historical Lifespan of Freddie Mercury* (see Table 6.1 on p. 108) was produced to organise data in the frameworks proposed by the psychosocial developmental theory.

In Table 6.1, the periods of historical development in Freddie Mercury's life (as discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2) are presented in seven rows on the left. These periods range from birth (age 0) to death (age 45). The seven columns at the top of the matrix represent the psychosocial developmental theory of Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) in terms of the seven psychosocial stages that Mercury underwent. Attention was paid specifically to the developmental crises that corresponded with Mercury's psychological and social development during the collection, extraction and analysis of the salient biographical material related to Mercury's psychosocial development. Regarding Mercury's historical development, the first historical period of 0 to 7 years represented Erikson's first, second and third stages, the second historical period of 8 to 12 years represented Erikson's fourth stage, the third period of 13 to 17 years represented Erikson's fifth stage, the fourth period of age 18 to 28 represented Erikson's sixth stage, and the fifth period of 29 to 38 years and the sixth period of 39 to 45 years represented Erikson's seventh stage. Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory of psychosocial personality development is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

The matrix in Table 6.1 assisted the researcher in analysing and organising the biographical data collected on Mercury's life consistently and systematically. In doing this, the research

succeeded in producing a longitudinal portrait of each of the stages of psychosocial personality development. The results and findings of the theory as applied to Mercury's development over his life span are discussed in Chapter 7.

6.9 Ensuring Rigour and Trustworthiness

Various criticisms surround the validity and reliability of the psychobiographical research design and its methodology (Fouché, 1999; Yin, 2014). These limitations known to psychobiographical research, as well as the proposed strategies employed to reduce the possible threats to dependability, confirmability, transferability, and credibility, are discussed in Chapter 5 (see section 5.2.8).

The strategies employed in this study to ensure rigour and trustworthiness involved the following:

1. Lengthy and continuous comprehensive *engagement* with the biographical data on the individual.
2. *Triangulation* of data and researcher (Yin, 2014).
3. Analysing the *researcher-subject relationship* (Ponterotto, 2014).
4. Aiming for *analytical generalisation* rather than statistical generalisation (Yin, 2014).
5. Establishment of the necessary guidelines for the organisation of information by employing clear *operational measures* (Ponterotto, 2014), coding schemes, and a *conceptual matrix* (Yin, 2014).
6. Making the researcher aware of the subject's *cultural and sociohistorical contexts* (Ponterotto, 2014).

7. Utilising a conceptual matrix in which *all historical periods* of the individual's life were incorporated (Yin, 2014).
8. Acknowledging all findings as tentative (Yin, 2014).

In addition to being aware of the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher also recognised the ethical considerations posed by the study. The ethical considerations inherent to psychobiographical research were discussed in section 5.3. The management of these considerations by the researcher is discussed in the following section.

6.10 Ethical Considerations

To limit ethical considerations, the researcher opted for a deceased individual as the subject for this psychobiography. Some concerns related to this study included possible invasion of the subject's family's privacy and potential embarrassment to the individual's surviving relatives and acquaintances. To compensate for this ethical dilemma, the researcher collected information that already existed in the public domain for this study. This limited the chances of invading privacy and the possibility of embarrassment. Furthermore, all collected data were already publicly available, to minimise any harm done to the subject's reputation, his legacy or his family members. Lastly, this psychobiography was approved by the Departmental Research Committee of the Department of Psychology at the University of the Free State.

6.11 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the research design and methodology were discussed. The chosen subject, the research objectives, and the data collection procedures were discussed. In addition, the techniques utilised to extract and analyse relevant data were described. This entails Alexander's model and his proposed strategies of *questioning data* and *letting the data reveal itself*, as well

as some examples of how these techniques were applied. Furthermore, the development and the use of a conceptual matrix were discussed. To conclude this chapter, the strategies used to ensure trustworthiness, as well as a reflection on the ethical considerations, were provided.

Table 6.1

The Matrix of Psychosocial Personality Development over Freddy Mercury's Historical Life Span

Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development								
Historical Periods in Mercury's Development	Trust versus Mistrust (0-1)	Autonomy versus Shame (1-3)	Initiative versus Guilt (3-6)	Industry versus Inferiority (6-12)	Identity versus Role Confusion (12-18)	Intimacy versus Isolation (18-40)	Generativity versus Stagnation (40-65)	
1946 – 1953 Zanzibar (0 – 7 years)								
1954 – 1958 Panchgani (8 – 12 years)								
1959 – 1963 Darlings (13 – 17 years)								
1964 – 1974 The Great Pretender (18 – 28 years)								
1975 – 1984 I Want to Break Free (29- 38 years)								
1985 – 1991 Love Kills (39 – 45 years)								

Chapter 7

Findings and Discussion: The Psychosocial Personality Development of Freddie Mercury

7.1 Chapter Preview

In this chapter, Freddie Mercury's psychosocial personality development is discussed. Firstly, an outline is provided to conceptualise the presentation of the findings. Following the conceptual outline, the findings are presented across the relevant seven psychosocial stages proposed by Erikson (1963) as they relate to the historical periods of Mercury's life. The researcher concludes the chapter by providing a reflection on the key findings relating to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development as applied to Mercury's life.

7.2 Conceptual Outline to the Presentation and Discussion of Findings

An exploratory-descriptive approach was followed to analyse the research findings in this chapter. Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1963, 1980) was used as the psychological theoretical framework by which the collection, extraction, analysis, and presentation of salient biographical data with regard to Freddie Mercury were conducted. The theory of psychosocial development was utilised as the framework within which Mercury's psychosocial development was described.

Mercury's life spans seven stages of the life cycle proposed by Erikson (1963). The findings related to the psychosocial development of Mercury throughout his life span are presented in the following section and discussed in terms of Erikson's proposed psychosocial stages, developmental conflicts and ego development (as discussed in Chapter 3). Biographical examples of Mercury's life, which relate to the developmental aspects relevant to the specific

stages of psychosocial development, are presented, whereby the collected data are described by means of the Eriksonian theoretical framework. As discussed in the previous chapter, a conceptual matrix (see Table 6.1) was used to assist in categorising the data.

7.3 Mercury's Psychosocial Development throughout his Life Span

The following sections present the findings of the six historical periods of Mercury's life within the framework of Erikson's theory. For every psychosocial stage, the theoretical propositions specific to that stage are summarised, followed by an investigation of the relevant historical periods, as laid out in Table 6.1. In addition, the data described under a particular psychosocial stage are limited to the time span within that historical period that is relevant to the specific developmental stage. The following is discussed in each section: (a) Mercury's development and resolution with regard to the primary psychosocial crisis in the relevant stage of Erikson's theory, and (b) the ego strength and its development relevant to the specific stage. To support the findings and discussion of each psychosocial stage, examples and reported evidence from the biographical data are provided.

7.3.1 Stage 1: Basic trust versus basic mistrust – Hope (0 to 1 year).

According to Erikson (1963), an individual faces his or her first psychosocial crisis during the first year of life. Hamachek (1990) indicated that the approximate period of this stage could even be extended from birth to 18 months. The baby is confronted with opposing forces that need to be integrated, which involves unconscious beliefs of *trust* or *mistrust* towards the world and oneself (Erikson, 1963, 1980). If the infant resolves the first psychosocial crisis and succeeds in integrating these subconscious attitudes, he or she develops a sense of basic trust in the world, including in his or her own ability to cope, which allows the ego qualities of *hope*

and faith to emerge (Erikson, 1963; Erikson & Erikson, 1998). This psychosocial stage occurred during the first historical period of Freddie Mercury's life.

7.3.1.1 Zanzibar (1946 – 1953).

Section 2.2.1 contains the biographical data related to this period in Mercury's life. Mercury was the first-born son of Bomi and Jer Bulsara (Jones, 2012). Mercury was named Farrokh, a very fashionable name in the Parsee religion during that time. Although a popular name, it was also a very generic name (Jones, 2012). Erikson (1963) emphasised the *quality* of relationship between an infant and his or her primary caregiver as a requisite for the successful resolution of this crisis. Erikson (1963) further emphasised the importance of the emotional bond between the infant and his mother. Jer Bulsara, who passed away at the age of 94 years on 13 November 2016 during the writing of this chapter, can be described as a friendly, warm and motherly individual (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Data collected from primary sources containing interviews with Jer Bulsara indicated a healthy relationship between her and her son, Farrokh (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). However, the researcher acknowledges that the data collected from Mercury's mother could be biased and possibly unreliable; therefore, it cannot be analysed without considering the triangulation of other data sources.

Mercury's parents could afford servants that maintained the household (Jones, 2012). The staff included nannies that looked after Mercury when his parents were away attending frequent social gatherings and religious festivities at the Fire Temple in the city (Thomas, 2012). It is reported that his niece also took over as caregiver on some occasions (Jones, 2012). Mercury's parents were not very strict, but he also did not receive much affection from them (Jones, 2012). Jones (2012) described in her biography of Mercury, "When the family still lived in Zanzibar, their children were cared for day to day by their nanny, Sabine. While neither Freddie nor

Kashmira was chastised with beatings, they were never cuddled much either” (p. 41). The literature does not indicate that Mercury was physically or emotionally neglected during his first year, but it is unclear who his primary caregiver was and with whom he formed an attachment, if any. The researcher also noted that, as Mercury grew older, he never referred to his nanny or niece again, which might indicate that no emotional bond was established between either one of them during infancy. Furthermore, very limited data are available about Mercury’s relationship with his father, Bomi Bulsara, and Mercury rarely commented about his father during his life.

In general, Mercury had a good relationship with his parents over his lifetime and often sent them postcards or invited them for dinner at his home in London (Jones, 2012). His parents taught him always to have respect for them, and he acted accordingly throughout his life. Although the literature indicates frequent communication and contact between Mercury and his parents, the researcher questions the *quality* of the relationship. During later years, Mercury never felt comfortable enough to share or discuss his sexuality and social lifestyle with his parents and sister (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Even when Mercury was diagnosed with HIV, he waited until being gravely ill before revealing his illness to his sister (Jones, 2012). Instead, Mercury preferred to open up towards his devoted friends, including Austin, Freestone, and Hutton (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Thus, it appears that the quality of Mercury’s relationship with both his parents was ‘shallow’, although his respect for them maintained their relationship throughout the years. Erikson (1963) noted that the extent to which infants learn to trust their environment depends predominantly on the quality of the relationship between the mother and child, and not the quantity of food or expression of love.

According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977), the unsuccessful resolution of the first stage of psychosocial development results in the acquisition of *basic mistrust*. This acquired belief presents itself throughout the individual's life and is recognisable in exhibited behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Lewicky, 2006). The sense of *mistrust* alters how individuals function and conduct themselves in their daily lives, as well as in their perception of themselves, others, and the world (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977; Lewicky, 2006). In addition, maladaptations during this stage manifest in sensory distortions (Erikson, 1963). When Mercury's future behaviour is analysed, the following examples indicate that he had a sense of *mistrust* rather than trust. Mercury was known for smoking, using alcohol and cocaine, and engaging in promiscuous sexual behaviour (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Richards & Langthorne, 2016). Sadock and Sadock (2007) interpreted such behaviour as an attempt at self-nurturance and satisfaction. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) elaborated that inadequate parental nurturing in the first stage, a prerequisite for the development of a sense of trust, could result in the desire to self-nurture in the future. Substance-dependent personalities have strong oral-dependency needs and use chemical substances to soothe themselves, because they view human beings as untrustworthy and unreliable (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). Furthermore, it is well documented that Mercury did not trust people easily (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Infants who do not develop a secure attachment to a nurturing and trustworthy caregiver may find it challenging to be able to develop solid, intimate and trusting relationships later in life (Hook, 2002; Louw & Louw, 2014; Maier, 1988; Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). Such maladaptation in development will manifest itself in interpersonal relationships in the form of insecurity (Corey, 2016). Reportedly, Mercury was observed as very aloof at the age of 10 years and preferred individual activities like drawing and chess (Jones, 2012). As a successful musician, he especially disliked journalists, as he hated talking to people that he did not know (Jones, 2012). He distrusted people who were involved in the

music industry and did not like attending events where industry professionals and the media were present (Jones, 2012). In addition, Mercury's contact with partners was predominantly limited to sexual acts, as he struggled to allow deep emotional bonds to form, with the exception of Austin and Hutton (Thomas, 2012). Mercury said, "The more I open up, the more I get hurt. I'm riddled with scars and I just can't take it anymore" (Jones, 2012, p. 56).

When the subject's life is explored, it appears that Mercury did not acquire the virtues of *hope and faith*. Erikson (1963, 1977) mentioned that *hope* is an important component for the development of care, competence, purpose, will, fidelity, and love due to its inherent orientation towards the *future*. Mercury's outlook on life was not specifically future orientated, and he was known for being impulsive, living in the now and savouring the present moment (Richards & Langthorne, 2016). Although his tendency to be mindful of the present possibly enhanced his creativity, it also resulted in his avoiding reality. Mercury shut himself off emotionally from his illness and its inevitable future consequences (Jones, 2012). He prohibited his friends and staff members to mention anything about his illness (Jones, 2012). Freestone noted that Mercury never presented with any depressive symptoms or hopelessness (Jones, 2012), but biographical data suggest that Mercury was inclined to avoid or suppress any unpleasant emotions (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Richards & Langthorne, 2016). His inclination for substance use could also have been an attempt to escape reality. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) regarded *religion* as the social modality that safeguards the acquired ego strength of *hope and faith*. Mercury grew up in a religious family and went to Catholic schools in Panchgani and Zanzibar (Jones, 2012). However, Mercury did not commit himself to any religious paradigm later in life (Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012), which could have been the result of not acquiring the ego strength of *hope and faith* during the first psychosocial stage.

With a generic family name and no specific caregiver from whom to receive attention or emotional feedback, it is possible that Mercury felt invisible and unimportant growing up in the Bulsara household. The researcher speculates that this would have contributed to Mercury's lifelong desire to be bold and to be noticed by the world. When considering the above-mentioned biographical data of Mercury, the researcher hypothesises that Mercury did not resolve the first stage of *basic trust versus basic mistrust* successfully, which resulted in his acquiring a sense of mistrust in himself, the people around him and the world. Consequently, Mercury did not acquire the virtues of *hope and faith*. According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977), the failure to navigate the most fundamental psychosocial stage, would have had an adverse effect on the development of Mercury's personality.

7.3.2 Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt – Will (1 to 3 years).

According to Hamachek (1990), Erikson's second stage is relevant for the child between the approximate ages of 18 months and three years. The child learns to gain control over his or her body as physical maturation occurs (Elkind, 1970). The toddler is confronted with balancing the forces of *autonomy* versus those of *shame and doubt* (Erikson, 1963). *Autonomy* protects the individual against loss of self-esteem and is associated with the general sense of pride, will, self-control, and goodness (Erikson, 1963; Freiberg, 1985). Conversely, in opposition, *shame* indicates self-consciousness, and *doubt* points to fearing the unknown (Erikson, 1963). Caregivers who allow their children to practice their new abilities at their own pace encourage the development of *autonomy* (Hook, 2002). However, if these new attempts to act independently are punished harshly, a sense of *shame and doubt* is fostered (Corey, 2016). If this crisis is resolved successfully, the ego strength of *will* is acquired. The first historical period of Freddie Mercury's life also relates to the second stage of Erikson's psychosocial development.

7.3.2.1 Zanzibar (1946 – 1953).

Biographical data on this stage of Mercury's development, which still forms part of the first historical period (as seen in section 2.2.1), are sparse. Erikson (1963) noted that, as the young child reaches out to explore his or her environment, caregivers should strike a delicate balance between being restrictive and being permissive. Graves and Larkin (2006) regarded clear boundaries as crucial, as this allows the toddler to explore his or her curiosity without crossing the boundaries into unsafe territory or socially inappropriate behaviour.

In the Bulsara household, it appears that nannies and Mercury's niece predominantly took care of him during the early years (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Mercury's parents were known for being neither strict nor too permissive with Mercury and his sister, Kashmira (Jones, 2012). According to Jer Bulsara, young Mercury would entertain guests on occasion by singing songs for them, possibly fostering his feeling of pride and happiness (Kokozej, 2013). Although it is unclear to what specific age Jer Bulsara referred when these events occurred, it appears that Mercury was encouraged and allowed, by at least his mother, to explore his own abilities and exhibit them to others. Surely, this would have helped Mercury foster a sense of autonomy, as he received attention and praise from others when he entertained them. Children who are allowed to attain independence and learn from their wrongdoings without being reprimanded or shamed are likely to become self-confident, independent, and competent adults (Steinberg et al., 1989).

The Bulsaras lived in a spacious "stone town flat overlooking the sea" (Jones, 2012, p. 31). Zanzibar, a small island off the coast of Tanzania, has fair weather and temperatures ranging between 22 and 33 degrees Celsius throughout the year (Stone Town, 2016). The town is safe for children to roam, as the alleys are too narrow for cars to commute. The limited photos available of Mercury during early childhood, are pictures taken of him being outdoors,

including a picture taken with his mother on a carriage pulled by a local man (Macaskill, 2016). The researcher thus hypothesises that Mercury was not restricted or prohibited by his caregivers in exploring the environment. Furthermore, the literature does not indicate in any way that he was punished for any specific wrongdoings or exploration attempts during this historical period in Zanzibar.

Excessive and inappropriate shaming as a child often leads to the development of delinquent behaviour as an adolescent or adult (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). The literature does not indicate any delinquency with regard to Mercury's behaviour as a child or during later years. In addition, Mercury was never accused of breaking the law or viewed as being oppositional defiant. Therefore, the favourable conditions during this period of Mercury's life suggest that he did overcome the crisis presented and acquired a sense of autonomy.

The researcher proposes that the social institution of *law and order* could have had an influence on Mercury's development. The Tanzanian laws during this historical period set defined parameters with regard to homosexuality, and prosecuted any sexual acts between same-sex individuals (Jones, 2012). Furthermore, the Bulsaras, who practised Zoroastrianism, brought Mercury up in a highly religious environment that strongly condemned homosexuality (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). In addition, Mercury's religious upbringing continued with his enrollment at three different Catholic schools situated in Panchgani and Zanzibar over the course of childhood and adolescence (Jones, 2012). Sadock and Sadock (2014) noted that extreme inhibition and control during childhood could result in the individual acting in exactly the opposite way, often presenting with rebellious behaviour. Although it appears that Mercury acquired the overall sense of autonomy by resolving this psychosocial crisis, the researcher proposes that he did react rebelliously towards the immense restrictions religion and governing laws placed upon him with regard to his future sexual

behaviour. As Mercury explored the more liberal western cultures of London, New York, and Munich during adulthood, it appears that he rebelled against previous religious constraints. Ironically, he utilised his acquired sense of autonomy and free will to express his sexual fluency fearlessly by indulging in the homosexual social culture in the 1970s and early 1980s. Children from the age of two years begin to develop a gender identity, as they begin to differentiate between males and females (Allan & Gilbert, 1997). However, children do not yet have a sense of sexuality or sexual preferences at this young age, as it only develops much later. Therefore, the researcher does not suggest that Mercury was aware of his sexual preferences during this historical period between the ages of 1 and 3, but rather proposes that specific *values against homosexuality* were communicated and instilled by his social environment. These values would be reinforced throughout Mercury's childhood and adolescence, inevitably influencing future behaviour.

It appears that Mercury acquired the ego strength of *will*. Erikson (1958, 1993) regarded the acquisition of *will* as a prerequisite for future self-discipline and a sense of responsibility, especially when engaging in rebellious behaviour. There is no evidence from the available data to suggest that Mercury did not develop willpower during this stage. He was known for being an above-average academic achiever at school, as well as a high achiever in sport, which won him numerous awards in Panchgani (Jones, 2012). His autonomous ability to exercise free will is reflected in his commitment as recording artist in the studio during later years. Mercury was known for being very particular, often perfecting vocal takes until his vocal chords bled (Thomas, 2012). He presented with the necessary self-discipline and responsibility to act on his professional goals. Mercury used cocaine at social events (Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). However, Freestone and Valentin mentioned that Mercury never appeared to be addicted to the substance, and was able to exercise the necessary willpower to stop using it when he decided to (Jones, 2012).

Owing to the favourable conditions to which Mercury was exposed during this stage, it appears that he successfully resolved the psychosocial crisis of *autonomy versus shame and guilt*. As a result, Mercury acquired the virtue of *will*. The successful emergence of autonomy and free will enables children to reinforce the beliefs associated with initiative in the next stage (Hamachek, 1988).

7.3.3 Stage 3: Initiative versus Guilt – Purpose (ages 3 to 6).

According to Erikson and Erikson (1998) and Hamachek (1990), the ages between three and six years confront the pre-school child with the third psychosocial crisis, *initiative versus guilt*. A sense of morality is instilled during this period, which guides the individual towards what is permissible and allows his or her imagination to envision what is possible (Erikson, 1963). During this period, the child begins to initiate various activities instead of just imitating what is perceived from others (Elkind, 1970). With enhanced motor and cognitive potential, children can manipulate and provoke reactions from people, which may cause them to experience a sense of *guilt* about their initiated behaviour (Welchman, 2000). If the young child is able to balance and integrate the opposing forces of *initiative versus guilt*, a sense of *purpose* emerges as the acquired ego quality. This stage occurs during the first historical period of Freddie Mercury's life.

7.3.3.1 Zanzibar (1946 – 1953).

Biographical data related to this time in Freddie Mercury's life are presented in section 2.2.1. Seligman and Reichenberg (2010) regarded the identification with the same-sex parent as an important component of this stage. "Bomi was neither a dominant role model nor macho hero to his son" (Jones, 2012, p. 41). Mercury was more comfortable in the presence of the matriarch of the family and never showed any inclination to follow in his father's footsteps with regard

to Bomi's occupation as a government employee (Jones, 2012). As discussed in the first stage, the literature does not indicate a particular special attachment between Mercury and his father (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Thomas, 2012). Other important events during this historical period included the birth of Mercury's sister, Kashmira Bulsara, when he was five years old, possibly limiting the attention he was used to receive (Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). This lack of paternal modelling and parental praise easily could have thwarted Mercury's initiative in Stage 3. However, with an already well-established sense of autonomy and possibly a sense of mistrust in his parents, the researcher speculates that Mercury compensated by setting his own standards and quickly learnt to function independently. It appears that Mercury initiated activities such as drawing and painting, and enjoyed listening to music by himself (Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). During his later years in India, Mercury would often send drawings he had made to his aunts, indicating that he did have a sense of mastery with regard to his artwork (Richards & Langthorne, 2016). The researcher proposes that Mercury's independent functioning might have been a coping mechanism during this time of perceived invisibility. Future behaviour would also indicate Mercury's acquired sense of initiative.

Erikson (1963, 1980) argued that a sense of initiative is a prerequisite for every learning experience or action a person undertakes. Initiative also serves as a surplus of energy, which assists the individual in dealing with failures effectively and pursuing goals with improved effort (Erikson, 1980). Mercury's sense of initiative is prevalent throughout his life span. Apart from being an above-average academic student, he engaged in various activities during his time in Panchgani, including boxing, table tennis, chess, choir, and art (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Also as an entertainer, he was well known for initiating change within the musical sphere and experimented with his presented stage persona over the course of his career (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). In addition, Mercury seemed to overcome failures and setbacks quite easily, as is evident by his immediate effort to move on to the next project

when his solo album sales did not live up to the record label's expectations in 1985 (Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012).

The unsuccessful resolution of the propositional forces of initiative versus guilt is likely to instil a sense of *guilt* in the individual (Erikson, 1963). Mercury presented with guilt feelings in adulthood, especially towards Austin after he had revealed to her that he was bisexual (Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). However, the researcher hypothesises that Mercury's guilt feelings were not the result of the unsuccessful navigation of the third psychosocial stage specifically, but rather due to continuous moral contradiction with which Mercury was confronted. During this stage of development, children listen to stories that provide them with cultural templates for initiatives and goals they may pursue some day (Stevens, 2008). In the Bulsara household, Mercury's caregivers read to him various fables and legends, including *The Arabian Nights*, to initiate him into the Parsee culture (Kokozej, 2013). At the age of five, Mercury attended the Zanzibar Missionary School, where he was taught by Anglican nuns (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012). There he apparently enjoyed drawing, painting and modelling and developed the ability to work precisely (Jones, 2012). The effect a heightened sense of morality during this stage and exposure to different religions and cultures must have had on the young Mercury is questionable. The Catholic school he attended must have brought up questions for Mercury with regard to the validity and truthfulness of his own Zoroastrian and Parsee background. A few years later, Mercury was ceremoniously accepted into the Zoroastrian faith in Zanzibar at the age of eight, just a few months before he left for India to attend another Catholic school in Panchgani (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Richards & Langthorne, 2016). This could have elicited guilt feelings for Mercury being confronted with contrasting religious paradigms and cultural traditions. Mercury was not known for being religious later in life (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). The researcher further speculates that, apart from mistrust in them, contrasting religious values could have been the reason why

Mercury distanced himself from his own family during middle childhood, in an attempt to avoid the guilt feelings associated with disappointing them.

Fuelled by religious reinforcement in his early years, Mercury possibly felt immense guilt after revealing his homosexuality to Austin, as he felt he had disappointed her after initial promises of marrying her (Jones, 2012). Despite referring to her as the love of his life, his sense of guilt would inevitably stay with him forever, as is evident by his continued efforts to include her in his life by employing her as his personal secretary, buying her property close to his own home, and by leaving the biggest part of his estate to her after his death (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012).

A sense of guilt also could have contributed to Mercury's perfectionism. Erikson stated that parental and societal authority are internalised as the child's conscience, driven by the super-ego, gives rise to the ability to self-observe, self-regulate, and self-punish (Sadock & Sadock, 2007). The researcher speculates that the lack of authoritative feedback Mercury experienced made him rely on his independent self-regulation. This could have increased guilt feelings during later stages, as well as the desire to perfect everything in order to avoid self-punishment.

Despite the lack of ideal parental feedback or support for his initiatives during the third stage, Mercury seemed to have acquired a sense of initiative because nobody ever scrutinised or punished his attempts. In addition, his successful navigation of the previous stage, and the emergence of the sense of autonomy, resulted in the necessary independence to help him cope and continue functioning on his own. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) argued that individuals yield the ego strength of *purpose* when they devise bold plans and take pride in their achievements. With the successful resolution of this stage, and relevant evidence of Mercury's professional achievement over his lifetime, it seems that he did acquire the ego strength of *purpose*. This virtue allows the individual to embark upon ambitious projects and progress in

life (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977). Mercury's determination to be a successful musician was evident throughout his professional career. He was known for suggesting bold plans to his fellow band members, often leaving them speechless with his controversial ideas with regard to the reinvention of their music and fashion statements (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) proposed *economic endeavour* as the social institution for this stage. During this time, children's imagination and dreams become attached with tangible goals in adulthood. Therefore, their fictional counterparts are replaced with actual adult heroes. Mercury was introduced to pop stars during this psychosocial stage, as the Bulsara family enjoyed listening to British music at their house. This would have given Mercury the opportunity to admire their talents and establish life goals for himself (Jackson, 2012; Jones, 2012).

It appears that the third stage resulted in the acquired sense of *initiative*, as is evident by behaviour Mercury initiated in the future. However, Mercury presented with an underlying sense of guilt fostered by cultural and religious confusion during his childhood, as well as overcompensated self-regulation. Furthermore, it seems as if Mercury did acquire the ego strength of *purpose*, to assist in preparing for Stage 4, namely industry versus inferiority.

7.3.4 Stage 4: Industry versus inferiority – Competence (ages 6 to 12).

Erikson proposed that the fourth stage spans the child's life from approximately the age of six until the age of 12 (Erikson & Erikson, 1963; Hamachek, 1990; Shaffer & Kipp, 2013). During this time, the child usually enters a more formalised educational environment, such as primary school, and develops a sense of industry when he or she is able to work with tools, produce things to satisfaction, and adapt to the rules of cooperation inherent to the structured tasks facing him or her (Erikson, 1963). If the child's efforts are criticised for being inadequate or viewed as mediocre while their peers are recognised and praised, the child can be at risk for developing

a sense of failure or inferiority (Erikson, 1963). If the stage of industry versus inferiority is navigated successfully, he or she develops the ego strength of competence and feels equipped to handle the tools and utensils of adults in collaboration with others (Erikson, 1963). This stage occurred during Mercury's second historical period.

7.3.4.1 Panchgani (1954 – 1958).

The biographical data during this historical period of Mercury's life were discussed in section 2.2.2. Baron and Spear (1989) noted that the child's social context expands during this stage, and other influences, such as the school environment, teachers and peers, become increasingly important. Numerous events occurred during this historical period in Mercury's environment. Probably the most significant was Mercury leaving Zanzibar. At the age of eight years, Mercury's parents sent him to India to attend the St Peter's Church of England School in Panchgani (Jones, 2012). His parents were not satisfied with the level of education available to boys in Zanzibar and decided to send him to India, where Mercury's aunts also stayed nearby, in Bombay (Thomas, 2012). This was an emotional time for Mercury, as he had to travel alone by ship and train for eight weeks to reach the school (Jones, 2012). Not only was Mercury's social environment expanded, but he also was completely cut off from his previous support. Mercury recalled how distressed he was, being away from Zanzibar and worried about his one-year-old sister's emotional well-being without him (Jones, 2012). Kashmira remembered how angry she was at Mercury for leaving her (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Mercury, referring to himself as "a bit clingy" (Jones, 2012, p. 45), would cry himself to sleep at night, angry with his parents for rejecting him and disillusioned by the new, strange environment. Mercury grew distant from his parents during this period, often visiting his aunts in India once a year during half-year breaks, instead of reaching out to his parents in Zanzibar (Szabelski, 2012). Mercury sent letters to his parents, but these writings were described as rather "unemotional" attempts

to keep contact with them (Jones, 2012, p. 42). Although the child's social context is broadened, Elkind (1970) noted that perceived negative evaluation or punishment from parents could contribute to a sense of failure and inferiority during this stage. The researcher also hypothesises that Mercury's acquired sense of mistrust during the first stage was again reinforced during this historical period when his parents sent him away. Mercury could have perceived this as not being a good enough son, or as not being loved by his parents. Nevertheless, this would certainly affect his functioning later in his life.

During his visits to his aunt, Bomi's sister, Jer, in Bombay, Mercury learnt to play the piano (Jones, 2012). Jer was a kind lady and was used to caring for smaller children (Jones, 2012). It is possible that Mercury preferred the company of Aunt Jer, as he received the love and care that he was craving for from his own family during these visits.

At school, Mercury was suddenly surrounded by an environment dominated by testosterone and alpha-males. To soothe his separation anxiety, he met three boys and found comfort in his relationship with them (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012). They became inseparable and stayed close together in the dormitory (Jones, 2012). Occasionally, other boys in the school bullied Mercury. Mercury always was a skinny boy, and he was self-conscious of his lack of height (Thomas, 2012). His size could have made him more susceptible for being bullied during this period. Sigelman and Rider (2009) mentioned that children begin to compare themselves with their peers during Stage 4 and are likely to acquire a sense of inferiority if those comparisons turn out unfavourably. Such confrontational events can assist the child in learning the necessary social skills to utilise in adulthood (Sadock & Sadock, 2014), although this does not seem to be the case with Mercury. Although Mercury mentioned later that his initial years at the boarding school had taught him assertiveness, he would react by withdrawing from the crowd. Boeree (2006) argued that the common pathology of inertia, also known as an

inferiority complex, can develop due to the unsuccessful resolution of this stage. At the age of 10, Mercury began to display a “very aloof, somewhat condescending streak” (Jones, 2012, p. 46). He avoided team sports and preferred solo and one-to-one activities such as chess, sprinting, boxing, and table tennis (Jones, 2012). In addition, he would keep himself busy by painting and producing drawings (Richards & Langthorne, 2016). Despite these adversities, Mercury won the Junior All Rounder prize at age 12, followed by the prize for Academic Prowess the following year (Jones, 2012). That was not the last time Mercury would rely on his natural talents to hide his emotional distress.

Several events in the biographical data indicate that Mercury presented with a sense of *inferiority*. Freestone mentioned that, as an adult, Mercury was a shy and insecure individual (Thomas, 2012). Although he could hide behind the bold stage persona, he was uncomfortable talking to people he did not know (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). Even after successful performances, Mercury would ask his band members or personal assistants how they thought he performed on stage (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). It is well documented that Mercury was self-conscious about his physical features (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Furthermore, Mercury was unable to enter a room full of strangers without being accompanied by a close friend, and he was very private about his personal life (Jones, 2012). Mercury referred to himself as a boring, ordinary individual who always felt compelled to entertain people in an attempt to hide his own insecurities (Thomas, 2012). Shapiro and Fromm (2000) mentioned that feelings of inferiority often manifest through compensatory behaviour later in life. During young and middle adulthood, in an attempt to overcome his inferiority, Mercury would develop the drive for power, prestige, and money, by becoming addicted to fame and referring to his entertaining persona as legendary (Jones, 2012; Sadock & Sadock, 2007). Even with Queen by his side, Mercury would later mention that he was the only member without an impressive post-graduate qualification, indicating a possible low self-rating

(Thomas, 2012). His lifelong search for true love, although primarily driven by a lack of affection as an infant, could also be interpreted as compensatory behaviour to fend off his sense of not being good enough.

The above literature indicates that Mercury did not resolve the fourth psychosocial stage and acquired a sense of *inferiority* as a result. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) considered the ego strength of *competence*, related to this stage, to emerge from the ability to use tools, such as utensils at school, and excel in producing things. However, Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) also argued that the development of virtues or ego strengths is not possible without navigating the psychosocial stage successfully. Despite Mercury's vast input in producing creative work such as drawings, paintings and music, it appears that he was haunted by feelings of insecurity about his work. He was known for being perfectionistic and self-critical during vocal recordings in studio (Thomas, 2012). In a 1982 interview with Mercury, he expressed his constant dissatisfaction about Queen's performances, always trying out new songs and technical changes (such as new stage lighting) for every concert (Freddie Mercury, 2016). Therefore, it appears that he did not acquire the virtue of *competence*.

The findings pertaining to the fifth stage of psychosocial development are discussed in the following section.

7.3.5 Stage 5: Identity versus role confusion – Fidelity (ages 12 to 18).

The life stage between 12 and 20 years, which lasts through adolescence into emerging adulthood, introduces the opposing forces of *identity and role confusion* (Erikson, 1963; Hamachek, 1990). Erikson's theory of psychosocial development refers to the sense of identity as the individuals' conscious sense of his or her uniqueness, as well as his or her unconscious striving towards continuity of experience (Stevens, 2008). If this stage is navigated

unsuccessfully, it often leads to *role confusion*, which results in the uncertainty about one's sense of self and the imitation of others (Freiberg, 1985). If this stage is resolved successfully, the outcome of the adolescent's navigating through this period is *fidelity* (Erikson, 1980). This involves the ability to commit and be loyal towards one's chosen roles, beliefs and affiliations despite the inevitable confusions and contradictions presented by alternative value systems (Stevens, 2008). This developmental stage spans the historical period of *Darling* (section 7.3.5.1).

7.3.5.1 *Darling* (1959 – 1963).

Biographical data related to this time in Freddie Mercury's life are presented in section 2.2.3. During this period, Mercury was still enrolled at the St. Peters Church of England School in Panchgani (Jones, 2012).

Numerous biographical data are relevant with regard to Mercury's identity. Mercury was always very reserved about his background in Zanzibar (Freestone & Evans, 2001; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). However, his African-Asian roots were not something from which he could distance himself, as he had very particular physical Persian features (Jones, 2012). During the 1950s and 1960s, India enjoyed the Western influences with popular icons such as Elvis Presley and Cliff Richard (Jones, 2012). Mercury, shying away from his Persian roots during late adolescence, would call himself British, referencing his father's connection with the British Government. The first occurrence of Mercury manipulating his identity occurred soon after he had arrived in India. The local boys struggled with the correct pronunciation of his name, Farrokh, so Mercury started calling himself Frederick, a much more acceptable English name (Jones, 2012). He was soon pleased when teachers and peers adapted the new name even further, calling him Freddie. During this period, Mercury joined a school band, *The Hectics*, although only as the "boogie-woogie piano-playing style" keyboard player (Jones, 2012, p. 47).

The Hectics soon became the talk of the town and Mercury learnt how to behave to impress the screaming neighbouring schoolgirls in front of their stage (Jones, 2012). The reserved Mercury, described as “extremely polite and well-mannered” during his time in India, turned into a flamboyant performer behind the keyboard (Jones, 2012, p. 49). During that time, he gained the nickname “Bucky” because of his protruding teeth. Erikson (1963) mentioned that, apart from developing an individual identity, adolescents also desire a social identity as they become aware of how they are perceived by others. Brian May mentioned that Mercury felt comfortable on the stage, as he thought the stage lights and distance between him and the audience disguised his physical imperfections (Thomas, 2012). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that Mercury was popular among his peers, and therefore would have had the opportunity to construct a social identity. Mercury, who once won academic awards, lost interest in his studies and failed grade 10 (Jones, 2012). The researcher hypothesises that, until then, Mercury’s sense of mastery was rooted in his academic achievement and artwork. However, as soon as he began receiving recognition as a stage performer, his focus shifted towards the activity from where he could get his sense of approval. Being an entertainer would give him the false sense of love, recognition, and approval that he had never received as a child.

Erikson noted the importance of ideology for young adolescents as they are presented with different beliefs and social values to explore in developing their own identities (Erikson, 1963; Stevens, 2008). With a well-established sense of autonomy and free will, the researcher hypothesises that Mercury already showed his first signs of rebellion against his religious and Parsee upbringing by adopting the controversial Westernised lifestyle of rock and roll.

Stage 5 of psychosocial development typically is a time of experimentation during which adolescents, in search for their identities, transform their appearance, relationships, major subjects and group memberships (Seligman & Reichenberg, 2010). This historical period also

gave Mercury the opportunity to experiment with his sexual identity. Mercury's relationship with the school girl Gita Bharucha was short-lived and could be described as a good friendship, rather than a romantic relationship (Jones, 2012). Maybe it was another attempt to find motherly love, instead of a girlfriend. During this time, Mercury increasingly presented characteristics of a feminine nature. The biographical data reveal that Mercury participated in several school musicals, often playing female characters with ease (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Janet Smith, whose mother taught Mercury the subject of Art, was convinced of his homosexuality and mentioned that he had the habit of calling others *Darling* (Jones, 2012). "It was very much inside of him, a fundamental part of him. I couldn't help feeling sorry for him, as the others would make fun of him. Funny thing was, he didn't seem to mind" (Jones, 2012, p. 49). Biographical data provide inconsistent evidence of Mercury's sexual preferences during this period, with some claiming that he was sexually active with other boys in Panchgani, while other sources suggest Mercury said he was heterosexual until his late 20s (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Freestone & Evans, 2001; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Nevertheless, as this was a time of identity exploration, this historical period exposed Mercury to confront his own sexuality.

According to Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1974, 1977, 1980), an adolescent ceases experimentation when the integrated identity is formed. With the acquired knowledge of who they are and where they fit into society, individuals no longer require trialling of different roles. Thus, the continuation of self-experimentation could indicate that the individual is still searching for his or her identity. Numerous pieces of evidence suggest that Mercury never achieved a true identity, and the researcher speculates that he prioritised the development of his public persona to compensate for his own inferiority. Mercury's public persona was the extreme opposite of himself, an attempt to keep interest from others into his own personal life as far away as possible. Throughout Mercury's life span, the restless spirit experimented with

different so-called *identities*, including the *leather look* with the characteristic moustache in 1979, the *clone look* at the beginning of 1980, as well as breaking away from Queen to create a *solo identity*, and the drastic musical shift in genre from rock and roll to classical music with Caballé in 1987 (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas & Lupton, 2011; Thomas, 2012). In addition, further self-exploration is prevalent with regard to Mercury's bisexual relationships and his use of substances like cocaine, nicotine, and alcohol (Jones, 2012). Without his self-created persona, Mercury was vulnerable and always had to be supported by close friends, personal assistants, and trusted staff (Freestone & Evans, 2001; Jones, 2012).

After failing grade 10, Mercury went back to Zanzibar in 1963 to complete his last two years of school (Jones, 2012). Biographical data indicate a strong desire from Mercury to forget about India and move on (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). In addition, Mercury never had contact with any of his previous friends in India again (Jones, 2012). Jones (2012) mentioned that Mercury's time in India was a period of confusion with regard to his sexuality, and that his creative pursuits drove him to reach for goals that were more glamorous (p. 49). When the Zanzibar Revolution broke out and threatened the safety of the Bulsaras, the family fled to England in 1964 (Szabelski, 2012). It appears that Mercury's exposure to different countries and cultures during his early years would bring years of inspiration for Mercury's creativity and musical expression, but would also leave him drifting in search of his true self.

With a lack of self-definition, the researcher hypothesises that Mercury did not navigate the fifth stage successfully, resulting in *role confusion*. Consequently, he did not acquire the ego strength of *fidelity*, which would make it difficult for Mercury to commit to a specific role, belief, or sexual affiliation (Erikson, 1968). Failing to resolve the psychosocial crisis in reaching an integrated identity, along with his prior unresolved crises, would prove to make it challenging to navigate the next stage of intimacy versus isolation.

7.3.6 Stage 6: Intimacy versus isolation (18 to 40 years).

The first developmental crisis that plays out exclusively on adulthood, *intimacy versus isolation*, occurs approximately between the ages of 18 and 40 years (Hamachek, 1990). Erikson argued that young adults who successfully navigated through the stage of identity versus role confusion have the desire to merge their secure identity with that of others (Erikson, 1963). When the individual develops the capacity for *intimacy*, while maintaining his or her need for some isolation, he or she is able to love another person and accept love from others (Erikson 1989). Conversely, *isolation*, as the opposite of intimacy, involves distancing oneself from social contact or forces that are perceived as threatening to one's unstable sense of identity (Erikson, 1963). The successful resolution of this stage gives rise to the ego strength of *love* (Erikson, 1989). The developmental stage spans the historical periods of *The Great Pretender* (section, 7.3.6.1) and *I Want to Break Free* (Section 7.3.6.2).

7.3.6.1 *The Great Pretender (1964 to 1974).*

This developmental stage corresponds with the entire historical period of *The Great Pretender* (as discussed in section 2.2.4). During the historical period under discussion, Mercury moved with his family to Feltham, Middlesex, England, in 1964 (Jones, 2012). After the unsuccessful navigation of the previous stage, identity versus role confusion, Mercury continued his search for self-clarification and social association (Erikson, 1963, 1989).

Mercury enjoyed a sense of anonymity in the big city of London (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). The researcher hypothesises that this could have reminded him of his childhood in Zanzibar, where he always functioned below the radar without receiving much attention from his social environment. This protected the shy, sensitive, and introverted young adult from exposing his vulnerabilities, but still did not satisfy his desire to belong, love, and be loved.

During this historical period, we see Mercury further defining a persona that would be far from the real Farrokh Bulsara. In an attempt to possibly clarify some sort of identity, he grew his hair and changed his surname to *Mercury* in 1970 (Jones, 2012). According to biographers, the surname, *Mercury*, could have indicated his desire to be a god-like, powerful person who would win the approval of others (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000).

The literature indicates that Mercury never had the courage or self-confidence to be a solo artist in early adulthood. Before 1985, Mercury collaborated only with other musicians who had existing bands (Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). May noted that the bold Mercury was hesitant and shy to talk to audiences between songs (Jones, 2012). With a sense of inferiority and a possible fear of exposing himself, it appears that Mercury felt comfortable being supported by other musicians. His insecurities, including his awareness of his own physical imperfections, would have made it difficult for him to carry a performance by himself. In addition, the environment in which he was with other musicians also might have felt like a loving family to him. This could have soothed his childhood experiences of perceived rejection and feelings of not being loved. Thomas (2012) mentioned that Mercury enjoyed staying with his colleagues in the same house during recordings in Munich in the 1980s, as he never had the experience of a compassionate, close family in his childhood.

In 1970, Mercury met Austin (Jones, 2012). Biographical data point out that both were estranged from their parents during childhood, and both hid their multi-layered personalities from the outside world (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012). Austin was described as Mercury's idealised mother – someone who provided him with all the love he desired, but also approved of his promiscuous and rebellious behaviour that would never have been accepted by his biological parents (Jones, 2012; Szabelski, 2012; Thomas, 2012). During this historical period, Mercury lived the lifestyle of a heterosexual male (Jones, 2012).

7.3.6.2 I Want to Break Free (1975 to 1984).

Biographical data on this historical period are presented in section 2.2.5. During this period, Mercury travelled the world with Queen, which gave him access to expressing his rebellious and promiscuous side.

The biographical data are unclear about when exactly Mercury became aware of his sexual attraction to men. Although he revealed his sexual preference to Austin in 1975, when he was 29 years old, he would most likely already have reflected on his sexuality much earlier (Jones, 2012). The researcher hypothesises he had a confused sense of self and guilt feelings towards disappointing his parents and himself, which kept him from revealing (or facing) his sexuality earlier. A secure identity not only assists the individual in establishing a sense of intimacy with a partner, but also helps in forming a comfortable relationship with oneself (Erikson, 1980). Erikson (1963) regarded identity as the ability to commit oneself to a relationship with another despite the inevitable personal sacrifices and compromises it would entail. For Mercury, this would have proved to be too difficult to sustain his relationship with Austin, while suppressing his sexual desires for men.

Mercury and Austin remained devoted friends until his death. Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) mentioned that prior unresolved crises are likely to resurface again during the stage of intimacy versus isolation. The researcher hypothesises that Mercury's impaired sense of trust in others and himself, his heightened sense of guilt, and his confused self and social identity made it impossible for him to commit to an exclusive long-term relationship with Austin or anyone else. However, driven by guilt, fear of rejection, and a desire for love, he could never distance himself from Austin completely. She would always act in his best interest as a loyal friend and an accepting mother figure (Jones, 2012).

This historical period was driven by a few key factors with regard to Mercury's psychosocial personality development. Firstly, his *role confusion* would continue his search for an identity by adopting the leather look during the late 1970s, the clone look in 1980, creative experimentation with different musical genres, and an attempt at being a solo artist (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012).

Secondly, Mercury's desire for love and acceptance would continue during this stage. His excessive use of alcohol and cocaine during social events could be regarded as an attempt at self-soothing (Sadock & Sadock, 2014). Furthermore, Mercury mentioned that his lavishing shopping sprees lifted his mood and made him feel good (Jones, 2012). Mercury was known for having one-night stands during this time, and his inconsistent relationships with partners emphasise his inability to be intimate. His relationships from this historical period and onwards include David Minns (1975 – 1978), Joe Fanelli (1978 – 1979), Thor Arnold (1980), Bill Reid (1982), Winnie Kirchberger (1983 – 1985), Barbara Valentin (1982 – 1984) and Jim Hutton (1985 – 1991) (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Freestone & Evans, 2001; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). The researcher views Mercury's various romantic endeavours as indicative of his continuous search for love and affection, as well as for some sort of identity, emotional connection, or association. Biographical data also indicate that Mercury often engaged in infidelity, sometimes dating partners without the awareness or consent of the other. The individual's *ethical sense* acts as the social institution in Stage 6 and can be acquired only if intimacy is valued and nurtured in a relationship (Massey, 1986). Mercury's relationship with the majority of his partners was primarily of a sexual nature, with 'shallow' emotional depth (Jones, 2012). Thus, Mercury apparently had difficulty to be emotionally intimate in these relationships, which could be a result of his mistrust in others and an impaired capacity to accept and tolerate such commitments along with their compromises (Erikson, 1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978).

According to Hutton:

Freddie would ponder from time to time whether the lack of affection during his early childhood was what led to a disproportionate obsession with physical love in adulthood... a craving that all too often manifested itself in meaningless sex, because he couldn't get the one without the other. Sex was never the substitute for the thing he wanted most, which was affection... proof that he was loved. He was quite childlike about it. All the petting and stroking which he lavished on his cats, for example: it was what he wanted for himself. (Jones, 2012, pp. 41-42)

Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) noted that the capacity for intimacy also applied to other partnerships and relationships, such as acquaintances, family and friends. Mercury's relationship with his parents and sister continued to be distant during this historical period (Jones, 2012). Although Mercury's parents would often visit him at his home, he would compartmentalise his life, keeping the family separate from his social endeavours (Jones, 2012). Mercury would often introduce his boyfriend, Jim Hutton, as "the gardener" during his parents' visits, in fear of revealing his sexual preference (Freestone & Evans, 2001). Erikson (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977, 1978) stated that *isolated* individuals keep themselves distant from any situation or contact that would be deemed threatening to their personality.

When the abovementioned biographical data are analysed, it seems that Mercury did not navigate the stage of intimacy versus role confusion successfully. His previous unresolved crises made it challenging for him to solve the propositional forces in this stage. It appears that, with a sense of isolation, mistrust, inferiority, and a confused self, Mercury did not acquire the ego strength of *love*.

7.3.7 Stage 7: Generativity versus stagnation – Care (40 to 65 years).

Erikson's longest stage, *generativity versus stagnation*, beginning at approximately age 40 until retirement, is his longest proposed stage in the life cycle for most individuals (Hamachek, 1990). During this stage, the individual finds him- or herself in the position of having to guide his or her own offspring through the stages of psychosocial development (Erikson & Erikson, 1998). Individuals acquire a sense of *generativity* outside their immediate family to act as productive members of their communities (Erikson, 1963; Erikson & Erikson, 1998). During this period, the individual becomes less self-centered and begins to assist in the teaching, guidance, and encouragement of children or younger protégés, consequently developing the ego strength of *care* (Graves & Larkin, 2006). According to Erikson and Erikson (1998), previously acquired ego strengths (i.e., hope, will, purpose, fidelity, and love) are essential for guidance through Stage 7, as the individual promotes these ego virtues to the next generation. This crisis was relevant for the last period of Freddie Mercury's life and spanned the historical period of *Love Kills*, which lasts until his death in 1991 (section 7.3.7.1).

7.3.7.1 *Love Kills (1985 to 1991).*

The biographical data on this historical period are presented in section 2.2.6. After spending some time in Munich, Mercury settled with his partner, Jim Hutton, in their new house in Kensington, England, in 1985 (Jones, 2012). Mercury was diagnosed with HIV in 1987, and he started withdrawing from the social nightlife he was used to during his 20s and 30s (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Freestone & Evans, 2001; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). He also stopped being sexually active, in fear of spreading the HIV virus further. Mercury described sex as an integral part of his life (Jones, 2012), and the researcher hypothesises that it was a way for him to express his love to others, and to experience some affection from them. Mercury's physical condition deteriorated quickly and he was soon unable to attend tours with Queen (Jones, 2012).

According to Erikson (1963), when ego interests are not expanded during this stage, *stagnation* occurs, which inevitably leads to regression to past crises as seen through the occurrence of pseudo-intimacy, self-indulgence, or the lack of a sense of faith or hope in humankind. *Stagnation* most probably occurred for Mercury when he lost the opportunity to pursue previously unresolved crises and ego strengths during this historical period.

The successful resolution of this middle-age crisis involves the individual acquiring a sense of having produced something that would outlive him or her (Erikson, 1998). This sense of being generative usually evolves from activities such as mentoring, teaching, and parenting (De St. Aubin et al., 2004; Slater, 2003). With his time running out, the biographical data indicate that Mercury made several attempts to foster generativity and leave something behind that would last, even when he was gone.

Firstly, the researcher hypothesises that Mercury fostered generativity through his music. After announcing his illness to the other members of Queen, he mentioned that he would continue working until he dies (Thomas, 2012). During the late 1980s, Mercury made several attempts to do as many recordings and creative projects as possible (Jones, 2012). These included more albums with Queen – *The Miracle* and *Innuendo* – as well as endeavours he never pursued before, such as producing and performing a classical album with opera star Caballé (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). As a successful artist, Mercury could have known that his music would continue satisfying music lovers all over the world for years to come. Secondly, Freestone mentioned that Mercury enjoyed renovating Garden Lodge during this time, as he believed Mercury wanted to leave something behind that would be meaningful to those he loved (Freestone & Evans, 2001).

Problematic development in this psychosocial stage could lead to over-emphasised concern and care about people and interests that are beyond the capacity of the individual (Erikson &

Erikson, 1998). After Mercury's death, in an attempt to provide for the generations to come, Mercury left a big portion of his wealth to his parents, his sister, Hutton, Freestone, Joe Fanelli, and Terry Giddings (Mercury's bodyguard and driver) (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000). In a last attempt to suppress his guilt feelings towards Austin, Mercury left her fifty percent of his estate, including his house, Garden Lodge (Jones, 2012; O'Casey, 2011; Thomas, 2012).

Corey (2016) argued that the seventh stage involves a sense of community for the individual with the intention to have an effect with regard to social issues. Mercury never had children of his own and did not consider himself to be a suitable family man (Jones, 2012). Erikson emphasised that individuals are as dependent on their children as their children are on them, due to the "need to be needed" (Erikson, 1963, p. 258). However, the researcher speculates that Mercury focused his generativity on his inner circle of friends, including his partner, Jim Hutton. With Mercury's longing for love and fear of being alone, he surrounded himself with friends by offering them jobs to work for him. During this historical period, most of Mercury's close friends were employed by him (Thomas, 2012).

Ironically, although the seventh stage is characterised by the acquisition of the ego strength *care*, Mercury received care and love from those who devoted themselves to him (Erikson & Erikson, 1998; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). Failing to achieve a sense of generativity often leads to stagnation (Corey, 2016). Furthermore, when individuals struggle to contribute to their community, they might feel uninvolved and disconnected from their social environment (Sigelman & Rider, 2009). Mercury's immobility, due to his illness and being bedridden, most certainly exacerbated the distance between him and society during this historical period. Mercury passed away at the age of 45, only five years into the proposed seventh stage. Therefore, it is impossible to conclude whether Mercury would have resolved this stage successfully, had he lived longer. However, in the light of the biographical data discussed

above, the researcher is of opinion that Mercury did try to reach out to his closest friends during his final years and expressed care and generativity by leaving financial contributions and his musical legacy.

7.4 Conclusion: Freddie Mercury's Psychosocial Development

When Freddie Mercury's life is analysed, certain important findings with regard to the application of the theory of psychosocial development, as described by Erikson (1963, 1968, 1980), can be highlighted. These important aspects are associated with the similarities between and points of departure from different components of Erikson's theory and Freddie Mercury's life, namely (a) the proposed seven conflicts that confront every individual during his or her psychosocial development; (b) the emergence of ego strengths as a result of the synthesised opposing polarities with regard to these psychosocial conflicts; and (c) the timing of Erikson's proposed psychosocial stages in the life span.

The task of the ego to integrate specific oppositional forces is the first component of Erikson's psychosocial theory that is applied to Freddie Mercury's biographical data. As presented in Table 6.1, several pieces of evidence of problematic development during Mercury's psychosocial stages were found in the biographical data. Mercury managed to a large extent to navigate successfully only through the second, third, and seventh stages, *autonomy versus doubt*, *initiative versus guilt*, and *generativity versus stagnation*. The remaining four stages relevant to Mercury's life appear to have been resolved unsuccessfully during the proposed historical periods (Erikson, 1963).

The analysed biographical data on Freddie Mercury's life were sufficient to assist the researcher's inferences of successful or unsuccessful integration of opposing forces. However, biographical data on some stages were much richer with regard to a specific pole, with data

often lacking for the opposite pole. Mercury's first three stages in childhood were often described from subjective views of family members or friends. This frequently led to a polarised view, with limited data on Mercury's own experience of that historical time. Therefore, the researcher triangulated the biographical data of a stage with data from future behaviour and navigated stages, and consequently made inferences on what Erikson proposed successful or unsuccessful navigation would predict, instead of just analysing the limited data available in the given historical period. The stages in which both sides of the dominant psychosocial conflict were illuminated to a greater extent occurred later in Mercury's development, with *intimacy versus isolation* and *generativity versus stagnation* being the two stages with the richest biographical data from which conclusions could be drawn. The findings presented on these two stages (see sections 7.3.6 and 7.3.7) offered rich descriptions of both opposing forces; thus, the process of their synthesis was understood in greater depth than were those of the preceding psychosocial conflicts.

The second component of Erikson's psychosocial theory applied to the biographical data on Freddie Mercury relates to the ego strengths that emerged once integration of the abovementioned opposing forces had taken place successfully. Based on the biographical data analysed, Mercury only to a large extent navigated successfully through three psychosocial crises, namely stages 2, 3, and 7. When Mercury's life span is explored, it appears that he did acquire the ego virtues of *will*, *purpose*, and *care*. The successful synthesis of these virtues does not fit the proposed epigenetic nature of Erikson's conceptualisation (as discussed in Chapter 3) whereby individual development is viewed as cyclical with every stage of the cycle integrating the earlier ego strengths in order to resolve the current conflict (Erikson, 1963; Erikson & Erikson, 1998). According to Erikson (1963; Erikson & Erikson, 1998), the failure of earlier psychosocial stages would make it impossible for Mercury to acquire *generativity* and the virtue of *care* in the seventh stage.

Thirdly, the timing of the developmental stages proposed by Erikson's theory seems to correlate well with Freddie Mercury's life span. In general, the findings on Mercury's life cycle, as discussed in section 7.3, are consistent with the interrelatedness of Erikson's psychosocial conflicts. However, the findings also illuminate some deviation from the psychosocial theory in Mercury's life, with regard to the specific timing of Mercury's experience of some of the developmental conflicts.

As discussed in section 7.3.4, Mercury was sent away to India and experienced bullying at school during the crisis of *industry versus inferiority*. In addition, numerous pieces of evidence from the biographical data suggest that Mercury portrayed a sense of *inferiority* throughout his life. However, his sense of *inferiority* could have been fostered in Stage 1 already when he experienced his family as emotionally distanced and was given a generic name that would suppress his desires to stand out. In addition, Mercury's feelings of guilt could have been the reason why he felt inferior as a child, not only towards others but also towards the powers the religious society enforced on him. Thus, it is plausible that his sense of guilt developed much earlier as he was exposed to religious values, and not only during the crisis of *initiative versus guilt*. Also in Stage 3 of psychosocial development, the biographical data indicate that Mercury acquired not only initiative, but also a sense of guilt. This contradicts Erikson's theory that only one polarity is dominant during a crisis.

The researcher ponders about Erikson's theory and the criticism with regard to its bias towards white male development (Hamacheck, 1990). In addition to Mercury's feminine characteristics, he also preferred the company of women in his family during infancy (Jones, 2012). Furthermore, Mercury did not pursue the stereotypical male role and rejected any influence his father had on him during childhood. This correlates with the notion that Mercury was sensitive and possibly more in touch with his emotional self in comparison with other boys

of his age. Studies by Ochse and Plug (1986) indicated that white women seemed to face the crisis of *identity versus role confusion* and *intimacy versus isolation* sooner than white men did. Mercury enrolled at St Peter's Church of England School when he was eight years old. The researcher speculates about the influence the all-male school had on Mercury during that traumatic time when he felt betrayed by his parents. It is possible that his exploration of identity, including his sexual identity, began earlier than Erikson's proposed timing of *identity versus role confusion*. If this was indeed the case, it could explain his aloofness at the age of 10 years, as well as his limited intimacy with Gita (Jones, 2012; O'Casey, 2011).

Erikson (1950, 1969, 1977) proposed that all psychosocial crises could emerge sooner or at a later time in an individual's life. The timing of Erikson's last stage, *integrity versus despair*, still could have been relevant to Mercury's life cycle. Mercury had a terminal illness and faced several years knowing that the HIV virus would inevitably cause his death. Elkind (1970) described this eighth stage as a period of reflection, after most life accomplishments have been achieved. As the life span nears completion, the individual is faced with the task of dealing with the fear of death (Craig, 1996). As a driven and ambitious individual, Mercury most certainly must have thought about his time lived and reflected on his untimely illness. Although Freestone mentioned that Mercury showed no signs of depression and did not seem to have any despair, the biographical data show that Mercury regressed to previous unresolved crises. Living outside the spotlight away from the public, Mercury seemed to become more congruent and let go of his stage persona to which he had held on his whole life. In a way, Mercury dealt with his true identity, which was present all along, and came to terms with it. He appeared to resemble the seven-year-old boy, Farrokh Bulsara, who lived in Zanzibar: He was quiet and soft spoken, preferred to function on his own, started painting and drawing again in Garden Lodge, and was close to his loved ones and his cats. Mercury regressed to experience what he always wanted: to be loved. In addition, as proposed by Joan Erikson (1989), Mercury

confronted the forces of the ninth stage, where the individual is reintroduced to the crisis *trust versus mistrust*. During the last few years of Mercury’s life, he was confronted with gaining hope and trust, while experiencing the inevitable loss of autonomy, strength, and control. Although Mercury trusted his devoted caregivers during his last days, he took matters into his own hands and ironically rejected the treatment that kept him alive and died on his own terms. Therefore, the researcher supports Erikson’s proposed idea that crises of each psychosocial stage are not limited to one specific stage, but can be experienced by the individual at any age during the life span. Mercury faced the crises of the eighth and ninth stages much earlier than proposed by Erikson (1950, 1969, 1977).

Table 7.1

Summary of Freddie Mercury’s Psychosocial Development

Stage	Crisis	Acquired	Ego Strength
Stage 1	Basic Trust versus Mistrust	Mistrust	Hope not acquired
Stage 2	Autonomy versus Doubt	Autonomy	Will acquired
Stage 3	Initiative versus Guilt	Initiative	Purpose acquired
Stage 4	Industry versus Inferiority	Inferiority	Competence not acquired
Stage 5	Identity versus Role Confusion	Role Confusion	Fidelity not acquired
Stage 6	Intimacy versus Isolation	Isolation	Love not acquired
Stage 7	Generativity versus Stagnation	Generativity	Care acquired

7.5 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the findings and discussion of the psychosocial development of Freddie Mercury throughout his life span were presented. The seven stages of the life span as proposed by Erikson (1963, 1980) were presented and discussed. In conclusion, the applicability of Erikson's theory to Freddie Mercury was touched on, including the relevance of Erikson's proposed eighth and ninth stages. In the following and final chapter, the conclusions and limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research, are presented.

Chapter 8

Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

8.1 Chapter Preview

This is the final chapter and concludes the study. The chapter points out some possible limitations of the study and touches on recommendations for future research. Thereafter, the value of the study is discussed, followed by a final reflection by the researcher, through the process of personal reflexivity.

8.2 Conclusion

This research project provided a psychobiographical description of the great pretender, Freddie Mercury (1946 – 1991). In an attempt to achieve the primary objective of the study, the psychosocial development of Freddie Mercury was explored and described. This objective was realised by analysing Mercury's psychosocial development by using Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory. Rich biographical data of Mercury's life, to which the theory could be applied, served as a prerequisite for the objective.

As a secondary objective of this study, the applicability and relevance of the proposed content of the psychosocial theory were tested. To achieve this, a comparison of the research findings with Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) proposed conceptualisations and propositions had to be conducted. To facilitate the attainment of these two objectives, the exploratory-descriptive and descriptive-dialogic nature of the psychobiographical study were utilised (see section 6.4).

The respective findings, as related to Erikson's theory, were provided in Chapter 7. With reference to the study, the following conclusions with regard to Mercury's psychosocial

development might be drawn: Firstly, according to the findings, Mercury's navigation through the first, fourth, fifth and sixth psychosocial stages was to a large extent unsuccessful. Secondly, the findings of this study support the use of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory to gain some insight into Mercury's psychological functioning as an individual. Thirdly, it appears that Mercury's unsuccessful navigation of the first crisis, *trust versus mistrust*, largely affected his future development negatively and had a significant effect on his overall psychological functioning throughout his life. Fourthly, it seems that Mercury revisited the first stage, trust versus mistrust, at the end of his life cycle before he passed away.

The following section proposes some limitations of the study as well as accompanying recommendations for future research.

8.3 Limitations of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

8.3.1 Psychological framework used.

Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory posed to be a limitation to the study with regard to the proposed timeline. Although the specific age parameters serve as an effective guideline for the operationalisation of the psychosocial personality theory, it consequently led to more rigid application of the stages than Erikson originally intended. Erikson and Erikson (1998) stated that human development is flexible and that age specifications could not be validated for every stage independent of social criteria and pressures. Furthermore, Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory posed to be a limitation to the study with regard to the insufficient and vague explanatory structure of most of its constructs. The psychosocial theory provides some plausible aetiological explanations for the attainment of specific outcomes during certain stages (e.g., initiatives that are scrutinised or punished could result in a sense of guilt for the individual). Except for general pathological markers, the theory neglects to give specific

criteria that would result in such an outcome. An example includes the sense of industry that an individual will acquire if Stage 4 is navigated successfully. The acquisition of industry refers to the ability to work with *tools* to produce things of which others will approve. However, the theory does not clarify the nature of these tools, or what kinds of things the child has to produce to resolve the crisis successfully. Therefore, any tools, whether school utensils, musical instruments, or even social skills, as well as any produced thing, such as paintings, a piece of music, or an established friendship, could be interpreted as representative of a sense of industry. In addition, it is unclear if a sense of *inferiority* is fostered only by the failure to produce *tangible* things, or also by other aspects that could foster feelings of worthlessness. In this light, the researcher was confronted by the question whether Mercury's ability to produce artwork could produce a sense of industry and therefore compensate for any feelings of inferiority.

The limited differentiation between the two opposing outcomes of each crisis and their consequences proves to be another limitation of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory in this study. Mercury perceived himself as invisible (unseen and unheard) during his early years and consequently developed the sense of autonomy to continue functioning independently. However, these outcomes might as well have been interpreted as compensatory behaviour for an acquired sense of shame or doubt. Similarly, Mercury presented with some signs of generativity, by creating timeless music, renovating his house, and leaving wealth to his devoted friends and family. However, this behaviour could also be seen as compensatory efforts to soothe Mercury's sense of *stagnation*, as he did not have a family of his own or children that could continue the family name.

8.3.2 Subject of the study.

Although numerous sources were utilised to collect biographical data of Freddie Mercury, most sources lacked rich descriptions of the subject, or presented a repetition of Mercury's well-

known facts. Most biographies and documentaries also contextualised Mercury only as a member of Queen and not necessarily formed a personal perspective that described Mercury's life solely. Consequently, the researcher had to rely strongly on Jones (2012), Thomas (2012) and Dolezal and Rossacher (2000), as these biographies focused primarily on in-depth descriptions and detailed encounters of Freddie Mercury's life span. Furthermore, although most biographies attempted to provide some biographical data on Mercury's childhood, the researcher often found the literature on his early years vague and inconsistent. Consequently, the researcher explored only the most dominant themes and data that could be triangulated with other sources and evidence. Therefore, it must be clarified that this study is only a representation of the current available biographical data on Mercury's life. It is recommended that future psychobiographers choose subjects on whom a vast amount of biographical material is available.

As mentioned, the researcher often questioned the accuracy and objectivity of the biographical data and sources, which serve as another limitation of this study. Although numerous sources reflected on Mercury, most of the authors were family members, colleagues, or close friends of Mercury. This clouded the objectivity and agendas of the sources and had to be considered by the researcher. Various sources reported inconsistently on some facts, including dates and periods, which made it difficult to compare the biographical data with the proposed timings of the psychosocial stages. Nevertheless, it appeared that the minor inconsistencies in the biographical data did not affect the primary findings concerning Mercury, including his sense of mistrust, inferiority, and role confusion.

8.3.3 Psychobiographical research.

In Chapter 5, the methodology of psychobiographical research and the important considerations that must be attended to are discussed. This section elaborates on some additional limitations that were relevant to the psychobiographical approach in this particular study.

This particular study has a low external validity, as the findings regarding Mercury's psychosocial development and psychological functioning cannot be generalised to a larger population. However, as discussed in sections 5.2.8 and 6.4, statistical generalisation was not the aim of this study, but rather analytical generalisation. Thus, the findings with regard to Mercury's development were compared with Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) psychosocial personality development theory, and not with other subjects or the general population.

Another limitation of this study is its low validity with regard to a causal relationship. However, the intention of this study was to explore and describe Mercury's life in the context of a psychological framework, and not to conclude a cause-and-effect relationship. This did not thwart the credibility of the study, however, as credibility was achieved through continuous and in-depth engagement with the biographical data on Mercury's life. As discussed in sections 5.2.8.2, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9, this was achieved by means of exploration and analysis of collected data, as well as researcher triangulation and data triangulation.

Various other frameworks and psychological theories can be used to explore and describe the life and functioning of Freddie Mercury; therefore, the findings and discussion of this study relate only to Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory of psychosocial personality development. The findings in this study should not be viewed as the only explanation of Mercury's development, but rather as an alternative explanation and understanding of Mercury's psychosocial functioning.

The qualitative character and narrative aspect of a psychobiography makes it a lengthy, comprehensive, and time-consuming endeavour (Fouché, 1999; Stroud, 2004). The researcher acknowledges that the preparation, research, analysis, and discussion of the findings demanded comprehensive documentation and a great deal of time. Psychobiographers who are considering doing a research study should be well aware of the comprehensive and tedious nature of the psychobiographical approach. In this light, the value of the study, including the recommendations for future research, is discussed in the following section.

8.4 Value of the Study and Recommendations for Future Research

8.4.1 Psychological framework used.

Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1968, 1977) theory has been recommended for use in psychobiography due to its significance (Noland, 1977). The researcher was well acquainted with the theory and could associate with it, as the researcher has an interest in psychodynamic influences. In addition, the theory allowed the researcher to explore the life of Mercury holistically and longitudinally across the entire life span. The fact that the researcher could also explore the influence that Mercury's environment and social context had on his inner experiences and development makes the theory useful.

Apart from this study, mental health professionals worldwide use Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory to assist them in conceptualising their clients and inform their therapeutic treatments accordingly (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2011; Kivnick & Wells, 2013). In this study, the theory assisted in gaining psychological understanding of the subject, which seems to promote the applicability and relevance of the theory for future research. However, mental health professionals are always encouraged to hold on lightly to any theory or proposed model with which they engage in their work with patients (Greene & Kropf, 2011). Furthermore, the

uniqueness of each individual should never be overshadowed by the rigid application or enforcement of theories, their proposed constructs, and outcomes (Berzoff et al., 2011). Simultaneously, the application of Erikson's (1950, 1963, 1968, 1977) theory in this study demonstrated the importance of a flexible and open 'mind set' as adopted by the researcher. An example of this is how Mercury's sense of guilt emerged from his religious environment and not solely from the unsuccessful navigation of Stage 3. In addition, Mercury's occupation as an entertainer was also considered, as it is not abnormal for stage performers to have a well-defined, bold stage personality. However, the biographical data indicated that Mercury's persona was not only suited for entertainment purposes, but also to compensate for his insecurities.

8.4.2 Subject of the study.

The subject of this study was the front man and flamboyant performer of Queen, Freddie Mercury (Jones, 2012). Mercury is often referred to as the best vocalist of the century, and many consider him the ultimate showman of rock and roll (Dolezal & Rossacher, 2000; Jones, 2012; Thomas, 2012). As much as Mercury was popular for his charismatic persona, he was also considered mysterious and known for protecting his privacy (Jones, 2012). In this light, this study might contribute to the existing body of knowledge regarding Mercury and provide some insight into the psychological functioning of the world-renowned superstar.

Most biographical data focused on Mercury's adult life, after Queen had achieved success in the international music sphere. Thus, Mercury's life as a musician is well explored with regard to his vocal ability, his masterful compositions and his contribution to Queen's star power. However, none of the available biographies had an exploratory-descriptive nature on the subject, and data on Mercury as a human being with intense emotional experiences were lacking. This study took a longitudinal approach by considering Mercury's life span from birth

until death, also considering the influences his social context had on him, as conceptualised by the psychosocial theory. Therefore, this study did not strive to understand what made Mercury a successful entertainer, but rather focused on his overall individualised psychosocial development. This introduced a new dimension to Mercury's life and shed light on him as an individual, rather than a celebrity.

However, the significance of Mercury's life cannot be ignored. He was selected based on interest value, his unique achievements, and his exotic upbringing that helped shaped his life. The fact that Mercury formed part of a specialised population, namely rock and roll legends, increased the effectiveness of purposive sampling (Neuman, 2003) and thus made Mercury a suitable subject for the study.

8.4.3 Psychobiographical research.

In Chapter 4, section 4.7, the value to psychobiographical research was overviewed. Next, the value of this approach is highlighted.

The psychosocial personality development of Freddie Mercury was analysed and discussed in the study, providing a much more novel and alternative description of Mercury's life than had been attempted previously. Furthermore, to gain psychological understanding of the subject's development and functioning, a psychological framework was applied to the rich biographical account of Mercury's life. This illuminated not only the value of biography for psychology, but also the value of psychology for biography (Elms & Song, 2005; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). In addition, the significance of contextual factors, such as religion, communities, culture and family, and their influence on individual development and functioning were highlighted. Owing to the psychosocial theory, the researcher was forced to also interpret the personality development of Mercury against the relevant socio-cultural and

contextual background extracted from the biographical data. Finally, the study contributes to the already existing body of psychobiographies in South Africa and adds to the growing field in academic psychology. The next section provides some general personal reflections regarding the study.

8.5 Reflective Remarks

Ponterotto (2014) stated that psychobiography entails a very personal endeavour for the researcher. A process called personal reflexivity proves to be useful to illuminate the psychobiographer's personal intentions and motivations (Kóváry, 2011). Willig (2013) mentioned that personal reflexivity relates to how the research was influenced and shaped by our "own values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments, wider aims in life, and social identities" (p. 10). Furthermore, it might entail reflecting about how the study influenced, affected, and possibly changed us as individuals and as researchers (Willig, 2013). These elements, which could also be unconscious, contribute to the research approach, whether we acknowledge them or not. In accordance with these statements, the researcher elaborates on his relationship to the subject and "bracket out" (Ponterotto, 2014, p. 83) any personal biases or expectations.

One of the strongest incentives for having undertaken this study was the researcher's own background and experience in the South African music industry. As a musician and vocalist himself, the researcher was intrigued by Mercury's raw talent and his fearlessness expressed during performances. Apart from the researcher's admiration for Mercury's creative abilities, he also has empathy for the various forms of stereotyping, discrimination, stigmas, performance anxiety, and professional pressure to which any prolific stage performer is often exposed. As an entertainer, one often put the expectations and needs of an audience before you own, and easily lose your perspective on your own desires and uniqueness. In addition, it becomes more

and more difficult to distinguish your stage persona from your core self, as these two often become entangled with each other – resulting in role confusion in itself. These are aspects of Mercury with which the researcher could associate well. To describe Mercury as a *musical prostitute* would not be an overstatement – in the end, all the record labels, managers and even so-called devoted friends milked his fame and earning ability, while all Mercury wanted was to experience real love. Therefore, with curiosity, admiration, empathy, and pity, the researcher wanted to know more about the man who desired *somebody to love*.

Secondly, as an (often unrealistic “pathological”) optimist, the researcher has particular interest in positive psychology, including human development. Although deviations, including psychopathology, are inevitably part of psychology in general, the researcher’s interest in constructs like resilience, perseverance, and motivation drew him closer to the life of Mercury. Mercury went through numerous adversities in a historical period when bisexuality was taboo and HIV was stigmatised as an illness among homosexuals. Despite these events, including a lonely childhood and social anxiety, Mercury always had the resilience to stay strong and pursue his dreams. Although Mercury had some insecurities, the researcher finds it fascinating how Mercury still exhibited a sense of optimism and a vibrant energy. This is certainly a characteristic that the researcher found inspiring.

Finally, the researcher would like to point out that, as an aspiring counselling psychologist, he was still in the initial stages of his psychology career when this study was conducted. Ironically, the researcher compiled this reflection on the evening of 24 November 2016, exactly 25 years after Freddie Mercury passed away. The researcher thus cannot ignore the coincidence that a life long gone inspires the dream of another. Through this psychobiography, the researcher gained experience in conceptualising an individual’s behaviour, perceived reality and adversities holistically across the life span. This will most certainly assist the researcher in

his future professional and personal psychological journey. In conclusion, the researcher leaves the reader with his favourite lyrics from Mercury:

*“Too much love will kill you
Just as sure as none at all
It’ll drain the power that’s in you
Make you plead and scream and crawl
And the pain will make you crazy
Too much love will kill you every time
Too much love will kill you
It’ll make your life a lie
Yes, too much love will kill you
And you won’t understand why
You’d give your life, you’d sell your soul
But here it comes again
Too much love will kill you
In the end, in the end...”*

(May, Musker, & Lamers, 1996)

8.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter concluded this study and stated the limitations and recommendations for future research. The value of the study and additional recommendations were then presented. Finally, the chapter was concluded with the researcher’s personal reflective remarks about the study.

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