

# **APPLYING LIFE-DESIGN COUNSELLING TO YOUNG ADULTS EXPERIENCING UNMASTERED DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS**

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**Philosophiae Doctor**

(Educational Psychology)

in the

Department of Educational Psychology

Faculty of Education

University of Pretoria

**Supervisor**

Prof J.G. (Kobus) Maree

October 2024

## DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

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I, Zelda Pollard, declare that this dissertation: “**Applying life-design counselling to young adults experiencing unmastered developmental tasks**”, is submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor at the University of Pretoria. I declare that this dissertation is my independent work and that I have not previously submitted it to another institution of higher education. All sources cited or quoted in this research paper are indicated and acknowledged in a comprehensive list of references.



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Zelda Pollard (student)

October 2024



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DEGREE AND PROJECT

PhD

Applying life-design counselling to young adults  
experiencing unmastered developmental tasks

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APPROVAL TO COMMENCE STUDY

01 September 2022

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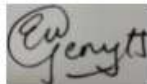
## EXTERNAL DECODER DECLARATION

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I hereby confirm that I acted as external coder for Ms Z. Pollard in her PhD research, titled: *Applying life-design counselling to young adults experiencing unmastered developmental tasks*.

I reviewed and verified her data analysis and concur with the findings. According to my view, the themes and sub-themes identified in her study were reported accurately.

Sincerely



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# DECLARATION FROM LANGUAGE EDITOR

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25 September 2024

## Statement by Language Editor

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## ABSTRACT

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A great number of people present with unresolved traumatic experiences and/or unmastered developmental tasks and it has been suggested (McLeod, 2018; Maree, 2021a) that problems during the developmental stages may have a negative influence on personality, thus exerting a significant psychological impact on individuals' career trajectory and their career adaptability. The resolution or reconstruction of these unmastered tasks into meaningful experiences was expected to contribute to enhanced career adaptability, psychological growth, and positive developmental change (Maree, 2021b). This study aimed to answer the primary research question, 'How does life-design counselling influence young adults' (between the ages of 17 and 29) mastery of unresolved developmental tasks and enable them to flourish in their career lives?'. A qualitative, mixed-methods case study research design was implemented and constituted identical pre- and post-intervention data-gathering phases as well as an adapted life-design counselling intervention which included the *Career Interest Profile Version 7* (Maree, 2017a) and life-design intervention strategies (Savickas, 2015) such as structured and semi-structured interviews, career genograms, collages, and lifelines. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) was applied to analyse the data along with the assistance of *Atlas.ti* (v23) software. Results demonstrated significant positive psychological change for the majority of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks. Participants furthermore demonstrated increased application of metacognitive skills, increased awareness of their internal psychological characteristics and well-being, and they were able to identify the external factors which supported and influenced their psychological well-being and career trajectories post-intervention.

**Key terms:** life-design counselling; career construction; developmental tasks; psychosocial development; career adaptability.



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# CHAPTER 1: ORIENTATION

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Heraclitus<sup>1</sup>, a Greek philosopher in ancient times, is credited with the saying that “change is the only constant in life” while the readers of Ecclesiastes, one of the so-called ‘Wisdom’ books of the Christian Old Testament, are admonished that “there is also no new thing under the sun” (English Standard Version Bible, 2016, Eccles. 1:9). Both statements tacitly refer to the timeless but unspoken awareness of the dynamic and infinite interaction between the individual and their unique context – to gain homeostasis as described by the systems theory (Donald et al., 2006). Even though change is ubiquitous, humankind has managed to find a way to conquer and construct meaning from it (Maree, 2020a), sometimes in dire situations (Frankl, 2004) and often through their occupations (Chen, 1998). Despite the overwhelming sense that the world of work is rapidly changing – especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and coinciding with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) – Maree (2020a, 2020e) notes that several careers are here to stay. It is therefore not farfetched to imagine that the responsibility to adapt and improve amidst change (significant as it may be) falls largely on the shoulders of the career facilitator, who must ensure that the career-facilitating process remains relevant for the individual and addresses the needs of the future work environment. The developing world has outgrown the trait-factor approach (Maree, 2022a; 2022d) and is yearning for the implementation of an adaptable career facilitation process which can be implemented across cultural borders (Busacca, 2016), life stages (Super, 1980) and socio-economic levels (Busacca, 2016; Maree, 2022a).

Whereas career counselling initially used to focus primarily on fitting the individual in an appropriate and available career context, the past 120 years have seen a change toward incorporating the individual’s unique intra- and interpersonal characteristics and experiences into an appropriate career (Maree, 2021b). Even though most children start considering possible occupational choices from a young age, they approach the task with far more gravity in middle adolescence when they take into consideration their interests, abilities, strengths, values, and personalities to make career-related decisions (Albion & Fogarty, 2002). They often tend to neglect – quite unintentionally – the crucial early formation years and the rich tapestry of developmental experiences of their younger selves in this decision-making process. How people function as adults

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<sup>1</sup> Heraclitus was active about 500BCE in Turkey. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/heraclitus>

is largely related to the interaction between their unique genetic composition and the experiences they have had from the moment they were conceived. This relates to genetic expression (epigenetics) and structural formations in the brain *in utero* (Maté, 2008; Siegel, 1999) as well as to the physiological and psychosocial developmental stages through which they progress after birth. The ability to manage stress during development also plays a crucial role in the individual's functioning (Steenkamp, 2018). The Psychosocial Developmental Theory of Erikson (1968) emphasises the importance of mastering the proposed eight psychosocial developmental challenges<sup>2</sup> to lead an "integrated, fulfilled and meaningful" life (Maree, 2021a; Maree, 2021b). According to Maree (2021a; 2021b), many people present with unresolved traumatic experiences and/or unmastered developmental tasks and it has been suggested (Maree, 2021a; McLeod, 2018; Louw & Louw, 2014) that problems during any of these developmental stages may have a negative influence on personality and subsequently affect the integration of the underlying factors, thus having a significant impact on the identity formation and career decision of the individual. On the other hand, the integration of the brain structures that became disconnected as a result of traumatic experiences can contribute to helping people to "live fully and securely in the present" (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 73).

Even though the individual can theoretically proceed to the next developmental stage – despite having experienced trauma and without necessarily having mastered the crisis – it is suspected that these unmastered developmental tasks could potentially resurface as challenges later in life (Maree, 2020a; Savickas, 2003; Waterman, 1993). Building on Freud's opinion (1963), Maree (2022a) emphasises that pathology may be ascribed to the repetition of trauma when the latter is left unmastered or unresolved. On the other hand, resolving these unmastered tasks may contribute to better adaptability, enhanced growth, and positive developmental change (Waterman, 1993). Without disregarding the contribution of strengths and successes from the individual's life story, it is evident that a career decision made without considering the potential impact of unresolved developmental tasks may contribute to a less fulfilling career life, frustration, and potential mental illness.

Addressing unmastered developmental tasks and trauma are considered essential for individuals in order to adapt to personal and occupational challenges, and to flourish in their career lives (Maree, 2021b; Maree, 2022a; Waterman, 1993). Contextualised career construction counselling (whether individual or in group contexts) as an intervention to resolve unresolved

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<sup>2</sup> The eight psychosocial developmental challenges will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter 2.

assignments or master unmastered developmental assignments has been linked with promising results in this regard (Maree, 2020a; Maree, 2022a; Savickas, 2018) since it allows for the expression of significant subconscious recollections and micro-stories which often revolve around challenges or unmastered developmental tasks. The uncovering and subsequent enactment of individuals' life themes serve as catalysts for a healing process during which individuals are allowed to clarify their identity, recognise their goals, and become aware of their life purpose (Maree, 2022a).

Despite a general consensus among researchers that the construction of the individual's career and life purpose is intricately connected to their unique developmental trajectory (physiologically and psychosocially) and starts from a young age, insufficient research has been conducted on the topic (Maree, 2018a; Watson et al., 2015). Since the possible relationship between unmastered developmental tasks and career life frustrations lies close to my heart, I<sup>3</sup> was motivated to explore the effect of the application of a life-design counselling process as an intervention on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks. In the following section, I provide some background information about this study.

## 1.2 BACKGROUND TO THIS STUDY

Children dream about their future. Already from a very young age, they have a vision of becoming 'something' and/or someone – a parent, a prince or princess, a teacher, a pilot or a fireman, to name but a few. In my practical and professional experience as an educational psychologist in private practice, I have worked with several clients from a variety of contexts who presented with challenges that negatively impacted their career lives and, by their own admission, kept them from reaching their full potential and dreams. Most of them could recall positive images of a future self when they were younger, but their present career decision and life challenges were far removed from the conviction with which they regarded those initial visions. My curiosity was tweaked regarding explanations for this discrepancy and true to the psychological approach, my attention was first drawn to trauma-related possibilities.

The effect of adverse childhood experiences (ACE) and trauma during the early developmental years, as well as their impact on coping styles and general well-being, is well documented (Maté, 2008; Parks & Hernandez, 2019; Siegel, 1999). However, clients often deny

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<sup>3</sup> In consultation with my supervisor, I decided to use the first person to refer to myself in this thesis. Standard UP protocol in this regard dictates that students may choose between

- i. using the more subjective first person (I, me), or
- ii. third person (the researcher, she)

to refer to themselves.

significant trauma or ACEs despite experiencing challenges and feeling discontent. Furthermore, they do not necessarily want to commit to long-term psychotherapy when their presenting issues are perceived to be career related. While researching career indecision and the underlying factors influencing it, I stumbled upon articles on the Psychosocial Developmental Theory of Erik Erikson (Maree, 2021a; Munley, 1975). The possible relationship between career-life frustration and unmastered developmental tasks explained more about what I was observing than mere career indecision or negative career experiences. Several developmental tasks such as attachment, work performance, sense of purpose, career transitions, interpersonal relationships and work-life issues have been related to career well-being and effectiveness (Kidd, 2008; Maree, 2022a; Pace & Zapulla, 2009; Wright & Perrone, 2008) and the successful accomplishment of developmental tasks resulted in fewer psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2020). The successful mastering of developmental tasks is therefore considered to hold significant long-term benefits for the individual.

Maree asserts (2021b) that people learn from and are reminded of their strengths and successes when they look into the past and acknowledge the transitions and challenges they have managed to navigate and overcome. These ‘crossroads’ are seldom isolated in being related purely to career or personal life. In the present study, I aim to implement the life-design counselling process (Savickas, 2015) as an intervention to explore the influence on unmastered developmental tasks and/or other challenges that might emerge. The process of life-design counselling is discussed in more detail later in this study. However, it is important to mention at this early stage the underlying essence that life-design counselling entails integrating individuals’ career- and self-construction with the unique contextual factors that affect them during a specific life stage (Campbell & Ungar, 2004). According to Maree (2017a), life-design counselling aims to enhance individuals’ adaptability, employability, and purposeful living. Life-design counselling is therefore considered to be an appropriate intervention to be applied in the present study, as it can facilitate expected change and the mastery of previously unmastered developmental tasks, especially since the process of identity formation constitutes the fulfilment of an important developmental task and is expected to be front and foremost during this study (Maree, 2017a).

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

In this study, I focused on the influence of life-design counselling as an intervention to address unmastered developmental tasks and to help young adults make sound career-related decisions and flourish in their selected career paths.

### 1.3.1 The rationale for undertaking this study

My motivation for undertaking this study stems from both a personal and career facilitator's background. Despite having been raised in a privileged environment and having had access to formal career counselling, I did not practice my initial career choice and changed my tertiary field of study several times before eventually pursuing my current career. When I look back on my career path, I recognise how I attempted to make significant career decisions at pivotal junctions in my life. My attention was not on the presenting decision but subconsciously drawn to developmental challenges and related emotions from my past. A personal intervention in the form of my Master's degree – which I conducted under a highly competent, compassionate and wise supervisor – guided me to revisit some of my own unmastered developmental tasks. The experience gained in this process led me to realise that some patterns in an individual's life could be linked to unmastered developmental tasks and that the subsequent behaviours repeat themselves in the hope of healing or resolving the underlying issue (Maree, 2020a; Steenkamp, 2018). Unmastered developmental tasks, therefore, have the potential to influence career decisions and career satisfaction, since individuals' views of themselves and their self- and career identity are authenticated by their mastery of these challenges (Maree, 2021c; Savickas, 2003).

Providing fitting and beneficial career counselling in a country like South Africa, where employment opportunities are currently limited due to challenging macroeconomic and political factors, and where a mental health crisis is looming (Pretorius & Padmanabhanunni, 2021), can be challenging. From a career facilitator's perspective, it is crucial to examine the underlying factors and processes that affect people's career decisions, growth and development as costly career changes can be avoided in this way. Subsequently, clients can find meaning and fulfilment when they are assisted to resolve their underlying, unmastered developmental tasks and to rewrite their career narratives.

Through the implementation of a life-design counselling process, I aimed to facilitate the deconstruction and reconstruction of young adults' unmastered developmental tasks.<sup>4</sup> In the process, I hope to have contributed to their ability to make purposeful decisions, improve their adaptability and flourish in their career pursuits.

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<sup>4</sup> See Section 1.6, p. 13 for a clarification of concepts.

### 1.3.2 The need for addressing unmastered developmental tasks in life-design counselling

Human development proceeds according to a fairly predictable process. Experiencing highs and lows in any given context should be expected and will contribute to the development of resilience, which according to Steenkamp (2018) is influenced by the quality of attachment in the first year of life. One only has to note the history of the past century to realise that many children silently suffered adversity and atrocities. Yet, despite having endured trauma, many individuals exhibit remarkable resilience and an ability to flourish during and after even horrific experiences (Masten, 2013). This phenomenon (thriving even in dire circumstances) raises interesting questions regarding resilience and the mastering of developmental tasks in individuals and emphasises not only the unique response of the individual to contextual factors but also the influence on their psychological well-being.

Unmastered developmental tasks have the potential to influence individuals throughout their lives, or until such tasks become resolved or reconstructed as meaningful experiences and purpose (Maree, 2021a). Certain early experiences, such as attachment, are essential for healthy brain development and are viewed as indicators of significant and enduring influences on the individual's neurobiological development and their ability to regulate themselves (Maté, 2008; Siegel, 1999). These experiences are considered to play a role in decision-making, whether consciously or subconsciously, as well as in interpersonal relationships (Steenkamp, 2018, p. 49). For infants and young children, the environment in which they develop consists mainly of attachment relationships (Siegel, 1999) and the dynamic interaction in this relational space influences their mastery of psychosocial developmental tasks. Steenkamp (2018, p. 77) suggests that “[c]hildhood trauma that disrupts the development trajectory of attachment is seen as *the* pathogenic factor in the causation of later-life trauma”.

Depression has also been linked to unmastered developmental tasks, separation challenges, difficulty with identity formation and the development of the true self (Norton, 2010). Moreover, unmastered developmental tasks can be reactivated in parenthood when the parent is confronted by similar challenges that the child is facing and is then unable to respond appropriately to the child since the parent acts from their own unmet needs as a result of interrupted nurturance and attachment (Critchley, 1982). In this way, the pattern can repeat itself. It should be noted that human experiences are subjective and what could be considered quite ordinary for one individual could be memorable or even traumatic for another.

Given the unique brain and holistic development that each individual experiences within their own context, it makes little sense to try and fit<sup>5</sup> an individual within a specific career environment. Maree (2021b) argues that although test scores provide career facilitators with the necessary information regarding academic potential and interests, the qualitative data obtained through revisiting challenges experienced by the individual during relevant developmental stages and listening to their stories provide the colour, depth and context that portray the individual as unique. According to Maree (2021c), Career Construction Theory (CCT)<sup>6</sup> (Hartung, 2011b; Maree, 2020a; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2018) manages to integrate the differential approach (trait-factor theory), the career development theory, as well as the psychodynamic approach into a career counselling process that consolidates the challenges to be faced during transitions experienced in early childhood. Through increased narratability of the individual's life story, they can realise specific goals, construct personal meaning, and design purposeful lives (Maree, 2018a).

### **1.3.3 Justification for doing this research**

Monitoring children's attainment of physiological milestones plays a central role in early childhood development and most parents religiously visit healthcare professionals to confirm whether their children are developing within expected parameters. In contrast, healthy psychological development receives little attention and is presumed to happen naturally, most probably because psychological development is not necessarily clearly visible and parents' points of reference for what psychological challenges should present as, differ. Yet, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) do happen. Its incidence has been linked to genetic and molecular modifications in children (Boullier & Blair, 2018) as well as to physical and psychological conditions (Kalmakis & Chandler, 2015). Less prominent issues during development, such as unmastered developmental tasks, have however not received much attention. Despite the rejected attempt to include Developmental Trauma Disorder (DTD) in the DSM, clinical practitioners (Steenkamp, 2018; Van der Kolk, 2014) remain adamant that developmental trauma is a hidden pandemic, and it is important to consider the reasons behind the skewed or insufficient development of a person over time. Steenkamp (2018) includes "subtle trauma" (less intense) as part of developmental trauma and provides examples such as belittling children, or a parent's inability to regulate the child's emotions in stressful circumstances. He adds that conditional acceptance can be an equally traumatic experience for the child and may lead to feelings of unworthiness (Steenkamp, 2018, p. 81).

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<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 2 where the matter of "fitting people" into occupations will be elaborated.

<sup>6</sup> See the section 1.6, p. 16 for a clarification of concepts.

The presence of unmastered developmental tasks could be compared to the wind: even though it is largely invisible, its effect is palpable. It is for this reason that I wish to investigate the influence of a life-design counselling process on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks. While unmastered developmental tasks might not be the presenting need when an individual requires self- and career construction, the impact of their presence is considered to be significant enough to have a long-term effect on career and life satisfaction, and on purpose.

## **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

To direct the focus of this study, the following research questions are presented.

### **1.4.1 Primary research question**

The primary research question as established from the purpose and rationale for this study is as follows:

How does life-design counselling influence young adults' mastery of unresolved developmental tasks and enable them to flourish in their career lives?

### **1.4.2 Secondary research questions**

The secondary questions that were addressed in this study were the following:

#### **1.4.2.1 Descriptive questions**

- ❖ How can life-design counselling inform interventions to assist 10 young South African adults with unmastered developmental tasks?
- ❖ Which factors contribute to unmastered developmental tasks among these individuals?<sup>7</sup>

#### **1.4.2.2 Exploratory questions**

- ❖ What were the main differences between the pre- and post-intervention themes that emerged from the narrative data?
- ❖ How were young adults' unmastered developmental tasks influenced by the life-design counselling process?

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<sup>7</sup> Even though "10 young South African adults" are not used again, it should be assumed.

## 1.5 ASSUMPTIONS AND OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY

### 1.5.1 Assumptions

The key assumption in this study is that many people have unmastered developmental tasks of which they are mostly unaware, but that influence the quality of their career decision-making. I am furthermore of the opinion that when these unmastered developmental tasks are ignored, they have the potential to contribute to less-than-optimal career-life decisions and may lead to repetitive career behaviour and feelings of frustration and unfulfillment. I assume that it is possible to identify these issues during the 'young adult' life stage through a process of life-design counselling and that this career and self-construction process can enhance the individual's career decisiveness and sense of purpose.

### 1.5.2 Objectives

Some of the objectives pursued in this study are to facilitate young adults to:

- ❖ create awareness of and insight into repetitive patterns of career-related behaviour and their consequences;
- ❖ discover covert motivations for career decisions;
- ❖ investigate and identify unmastered developmental tasks through exploration of early recollections;
- ❖ discover the additional potential within the individual and their career contexts;
- ❖ experience increased focus and agency about career goals and decision-making;
- ❖ construct meaning about the individual and their careers;
- ❖ design a meaningful career life and pursue its purpose;
- ❖ determine the extent to which focusing on unmastered developmental tasks can assist in life design.

People's occupations are intricately related to their ego and personality (Steenkamp, 2018, p. 120). The latter (ego and personality) are influenced directly by the reality that has been shaped through the interaction between their genetic composition and the environment they find themselves in (Siegel, 1999; Steenkamp, 2018). In this dynamic system, individuals induce change in the environment when they change, and the changing environment facilitates change in individuals in an interdependent relationship (Heard et al., 2012). The life-design counselling process has the potential to meet individuals in their particular life stage, deal with the unique challenges and

unmastered developmental tasks they experience, and facilitate meaning-making through a process of career and self-construction (Maree, 2022a; Savickas, 2018).

## **1.6 CLARIFICATION OF TERMINOLOGY USED**

In this section I define the main terms used in this study:

### **1.6.1 Life-design counselling**

According to Collin and Guichard (in Maree, 2020a, p. 54), the aim of life-design counselling can be deconstructed into three distinct components. They assert that this process primarily enables the identification of the individual's main life themes. Secondly, life-design counselling enhances the individual's subjective understanding of their occupation's "role and meaning in their career lives" and, thirdly, it assists individuals to identify and utilise key perspectives that contribute to the construction of meaning and spark "a sense of positivity and hope" to lead purposeful lives.

Savickas (2015) provides an elaborate description of life-design counselling in terms of the functionality of the process. According to this author's definition, life-design counselling comprises a creative and dynamic process of career construction applied within the individual's unique context and aimed at incorporating specific career and personal challenges and concerns, as well as interpersonal relationships to create a meaning-making journey. Instead of using a rigid framework, Savickas (2015) proposes that the process acknowledges the significant needs and reality of individuals, deconstructs their narratives, allows for the meaningful reconstruction of career and life stories, and facilitates the crystallisation of personal purpose. The process, which is continuously influenced by individuals' reflections on their stories and the subsequent meaning-making of it, is underpinned by self-construction and career construction theories. Life-design counselling is considered to be "life-long, holistic, contextual, and preventative" (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 6).

In this study, life-design related counselling was implemented as the mode of intervention to evaluate its effect on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks.

### **1.6.2 Unmastered developmental tasks**

Developmental tasks refer to a task or challenge (related to physiological, psychological, or social development) that becomes prominent in a certain period of an individual's life. Successful accomplishment of these tasks contributes to happiness and efficacy when dealing with subsequent tasks, while failure may lead to unhappiness, feelings of uncertainty and sometimes disapproval by society (Havighurst, 1948; Shek, 2017; Van der Kolk, 2014; Waterman, 1993). Links have been

established between the mastery of developmental tasks and the predictability of future success in young adults (Roisman et al., 2004). Erikson (1968) proposed that all individuals move through eight subsequent developmental stages<sup>8</sup> throughout their lifespan and that accomplishment of these challenges contributes to “integrated, meaningful and fulfilled lives” (Maree, 2021a, p. 6). For the purposes of this study, unmastered developmental tasks will refer to any specific personal challenge related to psychological, social, or occupational development that hinders the individual from reaching their full potential or prohibits them from leading a meaningful life.

### **1.6.3 Young adulthood**

In this study, young adulthood refers to individuals between 17 and 29 years of age (Arnett, 2015a; Davis & Olson, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2010; Scales et al., 2015; Zhong & Arnett, 2014). It is considered to be a more gradual stage of biological and psychological maturation and change than that associated with childhood and adolescence. However, individuals’ navigation through challenges as well as the choices that are made during this period have significant implications for their future in terms of their “economic security, health and well-being” (Bonnie et al., 2015, p. 1). According to Erikson’s psychosocial developmental stages<sup>9</sup> (Erikson, 1968), young adults face the main developmental crisis of Intimacy vs Isolation, while Havighurst (1948) proposed achievement of autonomy, the establishment of identity, development of emotional stability, establishment of a career, finding intimacy, becoming part of a group or community, ensuring a residence, and becoming a parent as the main developmental tasks confronted during young adulthood.

### **1.6.4 Career adaptability**

Individuals will experience change throughout their life and develop career adaptability<sup>10</sup> to effectively manage challenges and transitions related to their careers (Bocciardi et al., 2017; Hartung et al., 2008; Savickas, 1997; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012, Tladinyane & Van der Merwe, 2016). Maree (2017a; 2018a) asserts that how individuals utilise their coping styles to manage developmental tasks and career-related transitions illustrates their career adaptability. Savickas (in Hartung et al., 2013, p. 46) describes career adaptability as a process that includes the development of attitudes, beliefs, and competencies so as to be able to plan careers, investigate career-related options, solve problems effectively and make optimal career decisions. Adaptive individuals can be described as being concerned about their future, believing that they have some control over their

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<sup>8</sup> Please refer to section 1.7 for an elaboration on Erikson’s eight development stages.

<sup>9</sup> See Section 1.7.1 p 20, where this matter is further elaborated on.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 2 for a more detailed description of this term and its dimensions.

lives, being curious about career possibilities, and reasonably confident that they will be able to achieve their future goals (Savickas, 2005).

### **1.6.5 Career construction counselling**

Career construction counselling<sup>11</sup> (CCC) relates to measuring people's traits (using psychometric tests), explores how these traits can be developed to enhance people's adaptive behaviour, and elicits their central life themes (Hartung, 2007; Maree, 2020a; Savickas, 2018). Seen from this perspective, CCC aims to promote people's narratability, facilitate autobiographicity, and bolster people's adaptability (J.G. Maree, personal communication, 13 April 2022). Ultimately, Cardoso et al. (2019) contend that CCC strives to bring about change in people's career lives by helping them to construct and enact strategies that elaborate on their career-life themes and help them to clarify (reconstruct) their narrative identity to strengthen its coherence and promote continuity in the life story (Savickas, 2005). From this perspective, careers do not come about by happenstance, but rather develop as the individual adapts to change and makes decisions while responding to life experiences (Arastaman, 2019). Career construction should therefore be seen as a dynamic and holistic process that blends the psychodynamic approach towards career counselling with the differential and developmental approaches (Maree, 2018a; Savickas, 2005).

### **1.6.6 Self-construction**

According to Guichard and Pouyaud (2020), the individual's self is constructed through the integration of sociological (identity offer, social category, social fields and habitus) and cognitive psychology (cognitive frame, script for action and self-schema) contributions. Since the individual fulfils a variety of roles in different environments, Self-Construction Theory<sup>12</sup> describes individual identity as multiple and dynamic. These multi-dimensional identities which exist in multiple social settings are integrated through the construction of future expectations in the form of a narrative about the self and in response to the question "What could be meaningful to my life?" (Di Fabio, 2020, pp. 214-215; Guichard & Pouyaud, 2020, p. 263; Maree, 2022a; Maree, 2022b). The main goal of self-construction can therefore be summarised as the cognitive creation of the self through the integration of different identity elements from the social environment (Schwartz, 2006). Maree (2018b, p. 438) explains that the process of self-construction promotes "self-understanding and clarifies the individual's sense of self" and enables the individual to find meaning and purpose in

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<sup>11</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2 for a detailed description of the concept and its dimensions.

<sup>12</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2 for an elaboration of this term and its dimensions.

life. The latter is considered relevant to resolve unmastered developmental tasks (specifically about identity formation) through the implementation of a life-design counselling process.

### **1.6.7 Epigenetics**

Epigenetics<sup>13</sup> is defined as the way in which experiences and the environment influence the individual expression of genes without changing the DNA sequence (Masterpasqua, 2009; Siegel, 1999; Steenkamp, 2018). Research suggests that the epigenome can be changed by environmental and psychosocial factors and that some of these changes can be passed down to the next generations. The goal of the changes in gene expression is to enhance the adaptability of the individual to their environment (Masterpasqua, 2009; Kinoshita, 2009; Schiele & Domschke, 2018; Steenkamp, 2018). Erik Erikson referred to his proposed eight stages of psychosocial development as the “Epigenetic Principle” as these stages continuously and reciprocally influence one another (Peedicayil, 2012). Epigenetics is deemed a noteworthy concept in the proposed study because of its expected influence on the life-design counselling process of young adults when unmastered developmental tasks and their impact on purposeful living are investigated.

## **1.7 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

A conceptual framework tentatively illustrates the links between central concepts and principles in a broad and explanatory manner (Maree, 2019a) so as to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Jabareen, 2009).

To pursue a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the implications of unmastered developmental tasks for the career lives of young adults, several theories were utilised and integrated into my study. In addition, the life-design counselling process was implemented to determine the extent to which this integration of career and self-construction processes can promote the construction of meaning and resolve unmastered developmental tasks to contribute to young adults’ flourishing in their career lives.

The four main theories comprising the conceptual framework of my study are discussed next:

### **1.7.1 Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1950)**

Erik Erikson (1968) was intrigued by human development across the lifespan and consequently elaborated on Freud’s Psychoanalytic Theory (in Range, 2005). He maintained that ego strength (personality) develops as individuals mature and move through different, subsequent

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<sup>13</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2 for an elaboration on this concept.

developmental stages while in continuous relationships with others and the environment. Successful navigation through each of these stages of development contributes to people living integrated, meaningful and fulfilled lives, whereas unmastered developmental tasks may threaten the integration of personality development (Erikson, 1968; Gerson, 2014; Louw & Louw, 2014; Maree, 2021a). Other developmental theories, such as the Attachment Theory, are also enveloped in this model (Benoit, 2004; Knight, 2017). The eight stages of Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory across the individual's lifespan are summarised in Chapter 2.<sup>14</sup>

The sample population used in this study falls mainly within the sixth stage (Intimacy vs Isolation) and this developmental stage is therefore considered to be of special significance here. During this stage, emerging and young adults are actively exploring potential intimate and reciprocal relationships that can be initiated and maintained. Successful mastering of this developmental task (striking a balance between connectivity and segregation) is expected to lead to the next stage of adulthood. The earlier developmental stages (one to five) can however not be ignored, since the quality with which individuals have mastered the preceding stages is expected to influence their success in each subsequent developmental task (Louw & Louw, 2014; Maree, 2021a).

### **1.7.2 Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988)**

John Bowlby (1988) considered the development of attachment between a parent and their vulnerable offspring as a matter of security and survival, which could be considered the motivation for physical and emotional closeness (Maté, 2003; Maté, 2008; Siegel, 2015; Steenkamp, 2018).<sup>15</sup>

In this study, insecure attachment may present as an unmastered developmental task in Erikson's first stage of psychosocial development since it occurs in the first 12 months of childrens' lives. The influence of the life-design counselling process on this unmastered task will be explored.

### **1.7.3 Life-Design Counselling (comprising the Career Construction and Self-Construction Theories) (Savickas et al., 2009)**

Savickas et al. (2009) proposed the Life-Design Counselling framework as a collaborative and innovative response to the career development challenges individuals face in a rapidly changing global work environment. Since human development and career development take place across the lifespan as well as simultaneously in a variety of contexts, life-design counselling is considered to be

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<sup>14</sup> See Chapter 2 for a description of Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory's eight stages.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 2 for an elaboration on Attachment Theory.

a “life-long, holistic, contextual and preventative process” (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 239) and aims to enhance individuals’ adaptability, narratability, activity and intentionality (Savickas et al., 2009).

Life-design related counselling served as the primary form of intervention in my study. I investigated whether the implementation of this process could assist young adults with the resolution of unmastered developmental tasks. I also adopted a narrative approach during which young adults could construct meaning from their life stories and unmastered developmental tasks. Life-design counselling is comprised of Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005) and Self-Construction Theory (Guichard, 2005), and these concepts are discussed in that order next.

### **1.7.3.1 Career Construction Theory**

Career Construction Theory (CCT) (Savickas, 2005) emphasises the uniqueness of individuals in terms of their psychodynamic motivations, developmental tasks and coping styles, as well as their different traits (Maree, 2019b). From this perspective, individuals actively construct meaning and derive direction with regard to their career lives by reflecting on their lived experiences and subjective views (Hartung et al., 2008).

In this study, the theory of career construction found expression within the life-design framework and young adults had the opportunity to construct meaning about their career life stories, which were elicited in the process.

### **1.7.3.2 Self-Construction Theory**

Guichard’s (2005, 2009) theory of self-construction asserts that individuals are autonomous beings, and they construct themselves and their careers cognitively through their relationships with others in society. They are continuously engaged in active self-reflection and construct meaning through enacting these multiple relational roles and by engaging in dialogues. The constructed meaning and purpose enhance individuals’ understanding of their sense of identity (Maree, 2019b) and the self subsequently becomes an “inner compass to deal with future transitions” (Maree, 2016a, p. 173).

The Psychosocial Development Theory, Attachment Theory and Life-Design Counselling (comprised of career- and self-construction theories) play out against the backdrop of Donald Super’s Life-Span Life-Space Theory, which will be discussed next.

### **1.7.4 Life-Span Life-Space Theory (Super, 1980)**

Super’s Life-Span Life-Space Theory describes career development across individuals’ lives and careers as the “combination and sequence of roles played by a person during the course of a

lifetime” (Super, 1980, p. 282) and proposes that individuals move at least once through the different career stages in the course of their lives. These stages can be revisited when change prompts individuals to do so. From a developmental perspective, Super’s theory (similar to Erikson’s psychosocial developmental model (1950)) asserts that the successful completion of all tasks associated with each stage will contribute to the individual’s future adaptability and success and minimise difficulties in the subsequent stages (Hartung, 2007; Savickas, 1997).

Since the sampling population of my proposed study consisted of young adults (17 to 29 years old), these individuals positioned themselves within the exploration stage of Super’s Life-Span Life-Space Theory (investigation and implementation). Furthermore, given my focus on unmastered developmental tasks, the preceding growth stage and the extent to which individuals’ self-concept has been developed were considered vital.

## **1.8 PARADIGM**

A paradigm represents the lens or worldview through which research is conducted and presented and its outcomes are interpreted. It comprises the set of beliefs and assumptions that the researcher holds about reality, guides their investigation and action, and informs the interpretation and meaning making of research data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

My study employed an INTERPRETIVIST-positivist paradigm, which combines both QUALITATIVE and quantitative approaches (QUALITATIVE-quantitative – in which the uppercase emphasises the heavier weight ascribed to the qualitative components in the proposed study) in a complementary manner. Such an approach aims to understand the research problem more comprehensively and is described as mixed-methods research (Migiro & Magangi, 2011). The interpretivist paradigm, which considers reality to be socially constructed rather than objectively measured (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a), is considered appropriate for this particular study.<sup>16</sup>

## **1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design can be described as the strategy to be adopted to enable the researcher to answer the research questions. It therefore acts as a framework for the selection of participants, the data-gathering methods to be employed, and the data analysis to be done (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a). The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in a mixed-methods research design provides the opportunity to understand a phenomenon from various angles and at greater

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<sup>16</sup> Refer to Chapter 3 for a comprehensive description of the Interpretivist-positivist paradigm.

depth than from a single approach. A mixed-methods approach enables subjective interpretations and the flexible use of various methods to answer the research questions (Ivankova et al., 2019).

In this study, I aimed to investigate the implementation of a life-design related counselling process for young adults who have unresolved developmental tasks utilising a mixed-method case study research design. Pre- and post-intervention data were gathered using the same quantitative measures before and after the following interventions: *MCM*<sup>17</sup> (Maree & Taylor, 2016); *MEPSI* (Darling-Fischer et al., 1988); and the *CAAS-SA* (Maree, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative methods were utilised to gather in-depth and subjective information from the participants whilst serving as an intervention in the form of life-design counselling over a period of six to eight weeks. During the intervention stage, semi-structured interviews, observations, and the *CIP Version 7*<sup>18</sup> (Maree, 2021c) were used.

## **1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **1.10.1 Sampling**

Both purposive and snowball sampling were considered appropriate non-probability sampling techniques for this study, mainly because their subjective nature was considered compatible with a qualitative case study. Purposive sampling focuses on the specific knowledge that is required and allows the researcher to deliberately choose participants according to the qualities they possess (Etikan et al., 2016) and is considered fitting for research with a specific purpose (Maree, 2019a) – such as in this study that aimed to explore the implementation of life-design counselling with young adults.

### **1.10.2 Data-gathering methods**

As stated previously, the emphasis of this study will be on gathering qualitative data. The qualitative data will play a central role in establishing themes and sub-themes, whereas quantitative data served a secondary, complementary function and constituted only a small part of the process of data gathering.

#### **1.10.2.1 Qualitative data-gathering techniques**

Nieuwenhuis (2019b) contends that case study research is driven by a need for a closer or in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon set within a certain context. Qualitative assessment

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<sup>17</sup> The *Maree Career Matrix* will be discussed later under the section pertaining to quantitative assessment.

<sup>18</sup> The *Career Interest Profile Version 7* will be discussed in more detail under the section regarding qualitative assessment.

instruments (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b) that were considered suitable for investigating the application of life-design counselling as an intervention for young adults who have not mastered all the relevant developmental tasks, include observations, interviews, documents and questionnaires (e.g. *CIP Version 7* (Maree, 2017a), conversations, and educational psychological interventions (life-design counselling techniques such as the genogram, lifeline and collage).

### **1.10.2.2 Quantitative data-gathering methods**

Quantitative data, as mentioned earlier, can be defined as objective and measurable, and it allows for findings to be generalised (Maree & Pietersen, 2019). In this mixed-methods study, quantitative data was obtained before and after the intervention which allowed for comparison and illustrated the effect that the life-design counselling process had on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks. The *Maree Career Matrix* (MCM), the *Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory*<sup>19</sup> (MEPSI) (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988) as well as the *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale*<sup>20</sup> (CAAS) (CAAS-SA; Maree, 2012) were considered appropriate quantitative measures to be used in this study and their inclusion enriched the confirmation and integration of themes and sub-themes identified from the qualitative data.

## **1.11 PLANNING FOR QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

Qualitative data analysis entails the process through which data (obtained from observations, interviews, documents, conversations, quantitative data-gathering instruments, and educational psychological interventions) is managed to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. It is best achieved through reflexive analysis, which allows for significant themes to emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Flick, 2014; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). The matter of reflexive data analysis will be elaborated on in Chapter 3.

## **1.12 RIGOUR OF THE STUDY (QUALITY ASSURANCE AND TRUSTWORTHINESS OF QUALITATIVE DATA)**

Due to the subjective and descriptive nature of qualitative research, it is challenging to attain the measurable reliability and validity objectives incorporated in quantitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), it is more realistic to pursue trustworthiness<sup>21</sup> (Nieuwenhuis, 2019c) as a benchmark in qualitative research as indicated by the confidence readers have in the quality and

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<sup>19</sup> Refer to Chapter 3 for a discussion regarding the Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory.

<sup>20</sup> Refer to Chapter 3 for a discussion regarding the Career Adapt-Abilities Scale.

<sup>21</sup> Refer to Chapter 3 where Trustworthiness will be addressed in its complexity.

rigour of the researcher, the data-gathering instruments and processes, data analysis, and findings (Loseke, 2017; Nieuwenhuis, 2019c). Trustworthiness is a complex concept that is clarified when broken down into the criteria (credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability) deemed essential to pursue it (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### **1.13 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

The researcher plays a pivotal role in qualitative research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), the researcher is viewed as a data-gathering instrument in the process, while Maree (2019a) describes the researcher as a partner who collaborates with the participants. In this study, I gathered and analysed data, while also acting as an observer and facilitator who made fieldnotes and generated additional questions while delving deeper into the phenomenon under investigation (Maree, 2019a).

### **1.14 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Maree (2019a) contends that the most important principle in research, which should be at the heart of every phase, is to uphold the best interests (i.e. welfare and safety) of all participants. Given the subjective and personal nature of the mixed-methods research design applied in the proposed study, it was vital for me as a researcher to be aware of ethical challenges that could arise during the process. Qualitative data revolves around the subjective and personal experiences of participants about life events and experiences (Sanjari et al., 2014) and I consider it a great privilege to have been invited and allowed into their stories. I took the utmost care to handle this valuable and sensitive content with the respect that it deserves.

### **1.15 OUTLINE OF THE CHAPTERS**

**CHAPTER 1:** Introduction and background to the study

**CHAPTER 2:** Literature review

**CHAPTER 3:** Research design and methodology

**CHAPTER 4:** Findings of the research

**CHAPTER 5:** Relating my findings to the existing literature on the application of life-design(-based) counselling on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks

**CHAPTER 6:** Summary, findings, and recommendations



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

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### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The young adult developmental stage is considered a vulnerable transitional phase between late adolescence and adulthood that marks the period when the majority of individuals make decisions regarding their future careers (Johnson et al., 2005). This stage is characterised by challenges and changes in individuals as well as the mastering of developmental tasks, such as identity formation, which commenced in previous developmental stages (Brockman, 2011; Johnson et al., 2005; Maree, 2020a). Despite being a somewhat physically less obvious transformation, the associated uncertainty which accompanies the significant cognitive, emotional, and social shifts individuals experience during this phase may become overwhelming (Rogers & Maytan, 2012) and could have an unfavourable effect on the mastering of their developmental tasks, having lasting implications on career-life decisions (Greve & Seidel, 2014; Maree, 2020a).

As developmental challenges are faced and experiences are woven together, significant “psychic footprints or life themes” (Maree, 2020a, p. 30) develop which become important when consolidated into work-life identities. These identities influence individuals’ ability to manage challenges and transitions in their occupational lives (Maree, 2020a; Savickas, 2015). Engaging in career<sup>22</sup>- and self-construction<sup>23</sup> (and life-design counselling<sup>24</sup>) from a young age can enhance the mastery of developmental tasks and the development of stable work-life identities which, in turn, can contribute to individuals’ career adaptability (Maree, 2020a).

As individuals develop over their life span, they have to continually reconsider, construct, and adapt to their environment as challenges arise. Since career and self-construction theory focuses on and enhances the integration of individuals’ unique developmental processes, personal characteristics, and life themes (Maree, 2013), life-design counselling (which is comprised of self- and career construction) was considered a fitting approach for this study.

In this chapter, I initially provide an overview of Career Construction Theory (CCT) and Self-Construction Theory (SCT). These theories inform life-design related counselling - the chosen intervention implemented in this study. Thereafter, I touch on life-design counselling, its goals, as

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<sup>22</sup> Career construction theory will be described in more detail in section 2.2

<sup>23</sup> Self-construction theory will be elaborated on in section 2.3

<sup>24</sup> Life-design counselling will be addressed in detail in section 2.4

well as the broad framework of the intervention process that was utilised. Developmental tasks pertaining to young (emerging) adulthood and the connection with self- and career construction are discussed next and time is spent on the literature that sheds light on career counselling for young adults in the South African context, specifically regarding the current South African occupational climate and challenges individuals face in terms of career decision-making and access to career counselling. The benefits of career construction counselling are reviewed whereafter emphasis is put on career adaptability as the aim of life-design intervention. I conclude with the conceptual framework which informs the chosen life-design intervention techniques of this study.

## **2.2 CAREER CONSTRUCTION THEORY (SAVICKAS, 2005)**

Career Construction Theory (CCT) describes the subjective processes through which individuals' selves,<sup>25</sup> the direction of their vocational behaviour, and the meaning they ascribe to their careers, are constructed, and integrates three traditional career counselling approaches (Savickas, 2012a). First, the differential approach (Parsons, 1909) aims to fit individuals objectively into suitable occupational environments through the implementation of quantitative assessment measures. Second, the developmental approach (Super, 1980) emphasises the different roles individuals fulfil in different contexts and during different life stages, the subjective meaning they attach to these roles, and the adaptive processes they engage in as they progress through life stages. Third, the psychodynamic ('storied') approach focuses on the emergence of life themes and patterns, as well as the subjective meaning individuals ascribe to their experiences (Hartung, 2011b; Maree, 2022d). From the career construction theory perspective, individuals are viewed as complex, multi-dimensional, and continuously changing as they progress through developmental stages and incorporate unique and subjective psychodynamic processes as well as social experiences into their constructed career identities (Maree, 2020a).

Career construction theory is comprised of three domains which are discussed next: vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes.

### **2.2.1 Vocational personality**

Within the career construction theory framework, vocational personality pertains to personality development as well as individual differences in terms of values, abilities, needs and interests (Hartung, 2011b; Savickas, 2005). From this perspective (CCT), individuals' personalities are initially shaped by the family of origin and their childhood context whereafter they have the opportunity to

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<sup>25</sup> From the Career construction perspective "self" includes but is larger than identity (Savickas, 2018, p. 18).

develop their personalities in roles they fulfil in school or community contexts (Hartung, 2007). Vocational personality is not merely a one-dimensional concept which contributes to the person-environment fit, but from the career construction perspective, it is perceived as a subjective and continuous construction process (Hartung, 2007). The expression of consolidated personality styles takes place within the occupations individuals eventually choose, providing individuals with the opportunity to perform roles as social actors on the stage of their choosing (K. Maree, personal communication, September 6, 2022). According to Savickas (2012a), these traits (interests, values, abilities, and needs) also represent dynamic and fluid adaptive coping strategies which can be implemented in social contexts when deemed necessary. Given the central role of change in career construction and development, career adaptability will be discussed next.

### **2.2.2 Career Adaptability**

Savickas (1997) elaborated on Super's (1980) life-span life-space concept of career adaptability from a career construction perspective and defined it (career adaptability) as the psychosocial readiness (comprised of attitudes, behaviours, and competencies) to handle expected and unpredictable tasks, challenges, and traumas which may arise in the workplace (Bocciardi et al., 2017; Ebberwein et al., 2004; Hartung et al., 2022). Even though the aforementioned definition appears applicable mostly to adults, career development commences in childhood as future selves are constructed through imaginary play, curiosity, fantasies, and interests (Hartung et al., 2022).

Individuals negotiate transitions from a young age – whether from one context to the next or from earlier developmental stages to the following – and this movement and growth foster adaptability (Hartung et al., 2008). Career adaptability, which functions as a set of self-regulating strategies, enhances individuals' ability to implement their self-concept within occupational roles (Savickas & Porfeli, 2011) and has been linked positively to career success (Bocciardi et al., 2017). Career adaptability consists of four functional dimensions, namely (career) concern (consider life from a stance of hope and optimism), (career) control (in terms of self-regulation and the potential to influence and assert control in a situation), (career) curiosity (about the different selves and potential in different contexts which motivate investigation), and (career) confidence (to be convinced of one's point of view and goals despite possible obstacles) (Hartung, 2011b; Savickas, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2011; Walden et al., 2022). This concept (career adaptability) is therefore closely related to identity development (Rossier et al., 2014). As individuals progress through different life stages, patterns and themes are bound to emerge. Life themes, the third domain of career construction theory, will be discussed accordingly.

### **2.2.3 Life themes**

The life theme component of career construction theory addresses the reasons for individuals' occupational directions and emphasises the motivation that impresses meaning on vocational behaviour (Hartung, 2011b; Hartung & Vess, 2016; Zacher, 2020). Individuals' stories regarding their career development tasks, transitions, successes, and traumas illustrate patterns and themes that give cohesion to occupational roles in their lives (Di Fabio, 2012; Hartung, 2011b; Hartung & Vess, 2016; Maree, 2014). When individuals' present understanding and insight are connected with knowledge from the past through elicited life themes, it can assist them in handling future challenges and transitioning successfully (Maree, 2020a). Emerging life themes also hold significance for the development of stable identities which enhance meaning-making and purposeful living (Maree, 2020a).

Career construction theory can be summarised as the life-long, active construction of subjective meaning around individuals' past experiences, current realities, and future objectives into evolving life themes (Maree, 2015b) which influence the experience of meaning and purpose in their career lives. Identity development plays a central role in career construction theory (as part of vocational identity) and is the main objective of self-construction theory (Bangali et al., 2014; Guichard, 2009) which is discussed in more detail below.

## **2.3 SELF-CONSTRUCTION THEORY (GUICHARD, 2005)**

Self-construction theory does not necessarily include career construction although its influence on career construction as a result of its impact on identity formation cannot be ignored (Maree, 2019b). Self-Construction Theory (SCT) predominantly focuses on individuals' life-long identity development and the active construction of meaningful lives through social interactions, conversations, and communication (Guichard, 2005; Rossier et al., 2014; Maree, 2019b; Maree, 2020a). These social interactions, along with individuals' past memories and present realities, contribute to the construction and re-construction of fluid identities into more stable and consistent identities (Guichard, 2009; Hartung, 2013; Hartung & Taber, 2014) which enhance personal meaning-making and fulfilment (Maree, 2020a). Self-construction integrates the sociological, cognitive, and dynamic approaches (Bangali et al., 2014; Guichard, 2009) which will be addressed next.

### **2.3.1 Sociological perspective**

The sociological perspective maintains that self-construction occurs within structured, societal structures and attempts to describe the influence of individuals' environments on their

development (Guichard, 2005; Guichard, 2009). Within each society, individuals are given a specific “identity-offer” which comprises the (1) social categories they can identify with (belonging to a certain culture or religion, practising a specific career, belonging to a social class) and (2) modes of relating to oneself (within a certain context such as work, school, or home) (Guichard, 2009). Individuals construct meaning from the interactions between the collection of small, medium, and long-term connections within their contexts as well as from past memories and future hopes (Maree, 2022a; Maree, 2022b). According to self-construction theory, the subjective meaning created during self-construction is processed cognitively, which necessitates a discussion regarding the cognitive perspective in the next section.

### **2.3.2 Cognitive perspective**

According to the cognitive approach, individuals actively come to know a unique internal and external social world from the contexts in which they communicate and interact (Guichard, 2005; Guichard, 2009). The interaction between different social categories (stereotypes) leads to the development of cognitive identity frames (Guichard, 2009) which are organised in hierarchical or opposing order into multi-dimensional systems. Individuals can, for example, see themselves as a “young adult”, “female”, “engineer”, and so forth. Some identity forms (Subjective Identity Forms) receive priority and play a central role concerning self-construction since they describe individuals’ way of being and interacting within a specific context. These Subjective Identity Forms (SIF) are attributed certain values and become a way of identifying with the self and the development of identity (Di Fabio, 2014; Guichard, 2009). However, the importance of specific Subjective Identity Forms (SIF) might change or become obsolete during individuals’ developmental trajectories, as explained by the dynamic nature of the self-construction process (Guichard, 2009), as discussed in the next section.

### **2.3.3 Dynamic perspective**

The dynamic nature of the self-construction process originates from the tension between the I-me reflexivity and the I-you reflexivity as explained by Guichard (2005). The I-me reflexivity comprises individuals’ processes of becoming a unified whole, whereas the I-you reflexivity describes the continuous process of integrating the experiences and feedback from others obtained during social interaction into the self-construction process. The tension between passively becoming who I am meant to be (I-me) as opposed to the continuous adaptation through the integration of feedback from social interaction (I-you), keeps this self-construction process dynamic and never-ending.

In summary, self-construction theory holds that individuals actively construct meaning through the integration of different social interactions within unique societal contexts and their internal compilation of past memories and experiences as well as present realities. By continuously executing their different Subjective Identity Forms (SIFs) (roles) within the dynamic tension of the I-me reflexivity and I-you reflexivity, individuals develop and construct themselves. During this self-construction process, individuals also construct meaning and find purpose in their lives (Maree, 2022a, 2022b), which contributes to their understanding of their identity<sup>26</sup> (Hartung & Taber, 2014; Maree, 2020a; Maree, 2022a). Self-construction theory and career construction theory complement one another when integrated within life-design counselling (Maree, 2013; Savickas et al., 2009). Life-design counselling will therefore be discussed in the following section.

## **2.4 LIFE-DESIGN COUNSELLING (COMPRISING THE CAREER CONSTRUCTION AND SELF-CONSTRUCTION THEORIES) (SAVICKAS ET AL., 2009)**

Savickas et al. (2009) proposed the Life-Design Counselling framework as a collaborative and innovative response to the career development challenges individuals face in a rapidly changing global work environment. This approach (life-design counselling) is based on the following presuppositions regarding individuals and their work lives: “contextual possibilities, dynamic processes, non-linear progression, multiple perspectives and personal patterns” (Savickas et al., 2009, p. 239) and recognises that social interaction leads to the construction of individuals’ knowledge and identities through discourse. Language and communication contribute to the co-construction of meaning and practically illustrate the theories of career construction (Savickas, 2005) and self-construction (Guichard, 2005). Life-design counselling is considered to be a life-long, holistic, and contextual process which proactively aims to prevent insufficient self- and career construction (Maree, 2017a; Savickas et al., 2009). This model of intervention aims to enhance individuals’ adaptability, narratability, activity, and intentionality and each of these goals (Savickas et al., 2009) is described below.

### **2.4.1 Goals of life-design counselling**

The goals of life-design counselling are the following:

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<sup>26</sup> Identity will be elaborated on as part of developmental tasks.

#### **2.4.1.1 Adaptability**

The life-design counselling framework utilises postmodern narratives to enhance individuals' self-awareness regarding their behaviour within different relationships and contexts. In this way, individuals get the opportunity to design flexible and adaptive responses to developmental tasks, vocational traumas, and transitions, all of which lead to improved career adaptability (Maree, 2017a; Hartung, 2011b; Savickas et al., 2009).

#### **2.4.1.2 Narratability**

People construct meaning in their life occurrences by telling their stories (Di Fabio, 2016; Savickas et al., 2009). This dynamic dialogue, which occurs within relationships with others, helps to integrate separate events into a meaningful whole and enhances an overall sense of purpose for the individual (Hartog et al., 2017; Maree, 2020a). Life-design counselling involves the construction of the self through the integration of evolving multiple identity forms in various contexts (Guichard, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009). Some of these identity forms will become central, while others will be peripheral according to the meaning attached to them through a process of reflection. Career construction remains part of the life-design counselling process since the work role relates to the person's future expectations (Savickas, 2005).

#### **2.4.1.3 Activity**

Even though meaning is constructed through discourse, the evolution and development of meaning take place through individuals' behaviour (action). Individuals get the opportunity to explore which abilities and strengths they prefer to utilise, and self-efficacy develops as a result of reflection on these behaviours. Without the active exploration of constructed meaning, significant changes in the life story are unlikely (Maree, 2018a; Savickas et al., 2009).

#### **2.4.1.4 Intentionality**

Intentionality within the life-design counselling process is seen as the focused action-taking that demonstrates the meaning constructed around vocational behaviour through past memories, present realities, and future expectations (Hartung, 2011a; Maree, 2018a). Individuals' construction of meaning from multiple experiences is integrated into a meaningful life theme, which enables and guides individuals through career-related transitions and challenges (Cohen-Scali & Erby, 2021; Hartung, 2011a; Savickas et al., 2009; Savickas, 2011, 2018).

The aforementioned goals of adaptability, narratability, activity, and intentionality indicate that life-design counselling considers individuals' unique, contextual needs and demands to be significant and aims to enhance their adaptability when they are confronted with changing interests, needs, and life experiences (Hartung, 2011a; Maree, 2015a; Savickas, 2018). Since young adulthood as a developmental stage is characterised by cognitive, emotional, and behavioural changes with significant influence on individuals' long-term trajectories (Bonnie et al., 2015), life-design counselling was considered a suitable intervention for this study as my focus fell on young adults who found themselves facing challenges and transitions in the form of unmastered developmental tasks (such as career indecision, self-esteem difficulties, and so forth).

In this study, a narrative approach was adopted to enable young adults to construct meaning and purpose from their multiple micro-life stories and unmastered developmental tasks (Maree, 2020a) and to allow them to actively master what they have passively suffered (Maree, 2020a; Savickas, 2005; Savickas et al., 2009). I investigated whether life-design counselling could enhance the resolution of unmastered developmental tasks in young adults since life-design related interventions have been linked to the resolution of developmental and transitional challenges such as career indecision (Di Fabio & Maree, 2012; Maree, 2016a, 2020b, 2020d), change in career-life stories and enhanced career action (Maree, 2015b), improved psychosocial coping strategies (Cohen-Scali & Erby, 2021), promoting reflexive action (Hartung & Vess, 2016), improved sense of self and career-identity (Maree & Che, 2020; Maree, 2019b, 2020b), as well as increased career certainty (Cardoso et al., 2016a).

The life-design intervention strategy implemented in this study is described in short<sup>27</sup> below.

#### **2.4.2 Life-design counselling as an intervention strategy**

As discussed previously,<sup>28</sup> life-design counselling is considered to be a lifelong, holistic, contextual, and preventative intervention process (Savickas et al., 2009) that practically implements the theories of self- and career construction (Maree, 2020a; Savickas, 2012b). This intervention's (life-design counselling) general aim is to promote meaningful activities which can enhance individuals' self-construction, identity formation, and the construction of a career (Savickas, 2012b). In short, life-design counselling entails the (a) construction of micro-stories, (b) deconstruction and (c) reconstruction of micro-stories into meaningful narratives, and (d) co-construction of identified intentions into an integrated, action-orientated future narrative (Savickas, 2012b). The resulting

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<sup>27</sup> Please refer to Chapter 3 for an in-depth step-by-step explanation of the adapted life-design intervention process followed in this study.

<sup>28</sup> See Chapter 1, section 1.6. for the introductory discussion regarding life design.

integration is considered to enhance individuals' adaptive and coordinated functioning (Siegel, 1999).

In this study, I implemented a six-step adapted life-design intervention framework to guide the intervention process and provide a flexible structure which allowed me to maintain focus on the objectives of each step but still adapt to the subjective needs and context of the participants. A short description of each intervention session is summarised in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1**

*Summary of the Adapted Life-Design Counselling Intervention*

STEPS	DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVE	DATA-GATHERING TECHNIQUES
<b>Step 1</b>	Define the problem and identify possible goals from past patterns and contexts.	Initial interview <i>Career Interest Profile (CIP) Version 7</i> <sup>29</sup> (Maree, 2020f) Part 1: Background information and Part 2: Career-related questions.
<b>Step 2</b>	Explore the participants' current system of subjective identity forms (SIF).	<i>CIP Version 7</i> (Maree, 2020f) Part 3: Career preferences and Part 4: Career narrative, as well as narration of the participants' stories.
<b>Step 3</b>	Open perspectives from implicit to explicit and in the process allow them to become obvious and objective. Encourage participants to view their stories from a distance.	Establish a clear sense of self by writing a life story and using headings and subheadings as described in the <i>CIP Version 7</i> (Maree, 2020f) Part 4, Question 13 Identify repetitive patterns and reflection of the participants' own words through dialogue about role models to enhance the crystallisation of the self, its strengths, and interests. Refer to CIP Part 4, Section B, Questions 1 – 7.
<b>Step 4</b>	View the problem from a new perspective by placing it in a new narrative.	Integrate the new life story with identified interests, strengths, characteristics, and dreams obtained from the aforementioned narratives (interviews, <i>CIP</i> , lifeline, and other postmodern techniques) to co-construct a purposeful and meaningful career life.

<sup>29</sup> The *CIP* will be discussed thoroughly in Chapter 3.

STEPS	DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVE	DATA-GATHERING TECHNIQUES
<b>Step 5</b>	Plan activities to experiment and actualise new-found identities through purposeful action.	Identify activities utilising dialogue in which participants are allowed to experiment with and experience strengths and interests that they have identified through the co-construction of meaning in the previous steps.
<b>Step 6</b>	Conduct follow-up consultations with participants (short-term and long-term follow-up).	The researcher undertakes follow-up consultations with each participant.

*Note.* Adapted from Savickas et al. (2009)

To fully grasp the rationale behind each step in the adapted life-design intervention process implemented in this study, it is necessary to spend some time on the significant developmental deeds faced during the developmental years (specifically young adulthood) as well as its relationship with self- and career construction theory. Developmental tasks and their relevance to individuals' self- and career construction will be discussed next.

## 2.5 DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Developmental tasks can be described as specific biological, psychological, and social challenges that arise during certain developmental periods. The successful completion of these tasks is expected to influence individuals' emotional well-being and success in subsequent developmental stages, whereas failure to master the challenges could contribute to unhappiness, disapproval by society, and difficulty concerning the mastery of subsequent developmental challenges (Erikson, 1968; Havighurst, 1948; Knight, 2017; Maree, 2021a; Sugarman, 2004).

Human development does not take place in isolation and is continuously affected by various internal and external factors such as the changing context in which individuals function (Jones et al., 2019; Osher et al., 2020). Macroeconomic conditions and global economic insecurity have, for example, been shown to influence adolescents' transitioning to young adulthood, whereas social relationships and adequate support have exhibited a counter-effect of buffering the perceived negative impact (Ranta et al., 2012). Furthermore, traumatic experiences can be suppressed to favour the presenting developmental tasks during any specific developmental stage, and then re-appear in subsequent developmental stages with a significant delayed impact (Corr & Balk, 1996) – as maintained by the psychosocial developmental theory (Erikson, 1968; Maree, 2020a; Maree 2022a; Maree, 2022b).

To structure the following section, I will take a cursory glance at some of the major developmental approaches and their respective developmental tasks. I start with Havighurst's view on developmental tasks (1948), whereafter I focus on Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory (1968) and the proposed developmental challenges it comprises. Lastly, I discuss Arnett's Theory of Emerging Adulthood (2000, 2007, 2016) and the significant characteristics and normative features (resembling developmental tasks) it holds.

### **2.5.1 Havighurst's view on developmental tasks (1948)**

Havighurst (1948) proposed that developmental tasks arise from (a) physical maturation, (b) personal values, and (c) pressure from society, and divided individuals' developmental tasks into six age-specific groups. Central to Havighurst's model (1948) was the view that each developmental stage allows for a sensitive time period during which individuals experience optimal conditions to acquire certain age-specific skills (Adler-Tapia, 2012). Havighurst (in Kretschmer et al., 2018, p. 42) described the developmental tasks of young adulthood as "the need to select a romantic partner, manage a home, rear children, find a social group, take on civic responsibility, get started in an occupation, and adjust to one's feminine or masculine role". However, tasks which were considered normative a few decades ago are now delayed, such as marriage and childbearing (Arnett, 2000), and their contemporary alternatives were suggested to be "educational attainment, work, financial autonomy, romantic involvement (Barzeva et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2018), peer involvement, substance abuse avoidance, and citizenship" (Kretschmer et al., 2018, p. 42). Havighurst's proposed developmental skills are specifically focused on physical, personal, and social development and overlap to a certain extent with Erikson's psychosocial theory (1968).

### **2.5.2 Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory (1968)**

Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory (1968) views individuals as developing beings who are influenced by internal psychological and external social factors (Heckhausen, 2000; Sugarman, 2004). From Erikson's perspective (1968), underlying psychosocial demands are present throughout individuals' lifespans although they become more prominent during specific developmental periods (Sokol, 2009). In addition, the resolutions of previously mastered tasks can be questioned during each new developmental stage (Sugarman, 2004). Failure to master developmental tasks is considered to leave a residue which may interfere with future challenges (Sugarman, 2004; Maree, 2021a). Erikson's (1968) proposed eight stages across individuals' lifespans are summarised below since every psychosocial developmental stage and its outcome influence individuals throughout their lives.

### **2.5.2.1 The eight developmental stages proposed by Erikson (Heckhausen, 2000):**

- i. Basic trust vs Mistrust (birth until 2 years)
- ii. Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt (early childhood, 2-4 years)
- iii. Initiative vs Guilt (preschool age, 4-5 years)
- iv. Industry vs Inferiority (school age, 5-12 years)
- v. Identity vs Role Confusion (adolescence, 13-19 years)
- vi. Intimacy vs Isolation (early and emerging adulthood, 20-40 years)
- vii. Generativity vs Stagnation (adulthood, 40-65 years)
- viii. Ego-integrity vs Despair (maturity, 65+years)

### **2.5.3 Arnett's Theory of Emerging Adulthood (2000, 2016)**

The third developmental theory considered significant in this study is that of emerging adulthood. Arnett (2000, 2007, 2015a, 2015b, 2016) proposed the presence of a transitional period between adolescence and young adulthood (18-25 years old) which he called “emerging adulthood”. Rather than keeping rigidly to the age boundaries of this group (some studies refer to emerging adults as between 17 – 29 years old (Arnett & Padilla-Walker, 2015; Zhong & Arnett, 2014)), the emerging adulthood developmental stage is characterised by the presence of five prominent features (Arnett, 2016) which resemble developmental tasks. Arnett described these features as (a) identity exploration (the making of critical decisions regarding the formulation and crystallisation of individuals’ identities in adulthood), (b) instability (participating in a variety of educational and occupational activities before settling on a particular course of action and exploring multiple romantic partners before identifying the preferred qualities in a long-time partner), (c) self-focus (the search for who one is and what one wants with a sense of responsibility), (d) feeling in between (not belonging in either the adolescence or young adulthood stages), and (e) optimism regarding future possibilities (being hopeful that things can change for the better) (Arnett, 2016; Burt & Masten, 2010; Cronce & Corbin, 2010). Burt and Masten (2010) summarised Arnett’s emerging adulthood features into two central developmental tasks that young adults in Western cultures face: the establishment of vocational identities and intimate relationships.

### **2.5.4 The relationships and distinctions between Havighurst’s developmental model, Erikson’s psychosocial developmental theory, and Arnett’s theory of emerging adulthood**

Whereas Havighurst’s (1948) and Erikson’s (1968) developmental theories share the view that individuals’ development stretches over their lifespan, Arnett’s theory (2000, 2016) on emerging

adulthood is limited to the transitional period between adolescence and young adulthood.<sup>30</sup> Adolescence in this study refers to the transitional stage of physical and psychological development which starts with the onset of puberty and precedes young adulthood (approximately ages 12-18 years) (World Health Organization [WHO], 2014). However, in this study, young adulthood is defined as the developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood (ages 17-29 years) during which individuals are confronted with developmental challenges that may have a significant impact on their future economic security, health, and well-being (Davis & Olson, 2014; Reynolds et al., 2010; Scales et al., 2015). Although some of the proposed developmental tasks (as described in the aforementioned developmental approaches) that surface within certain age ranges overlap, the emphasis of the three theories differs slightly (refer to Table 2.2). Since I worked with individuals between the ages of 17 and 29 years in this study, I used Erikson's sixth psychosocial developmental stage (during which the crisis of intimacy vs isolation is prominent) as a broad framework and also utilised the features identified by Arnett (2000) specifically pertaining to the emerging adulthood development stage. However, one must remain cognisant of previous developmental challenges and their outcomes as experienced by individuals, as well as the possibility that former outcomes could resurface during subsequent psychosocial developmental stages. In the following section, I will therefore provide an overview of the connection between various developmental tasks from birth up to young adulthood and self- and career construction, whereafter I will focus on the specific developmental tasks of young adulthood.

### **2.5.5 The relationship between certain developmental tasks and self- and career construction**

Although not explicitly, the basic tenets of self-construction theory (Guichard, 2005, 2009) and career construction theory (Savickas, 2005), have been linked to a variety of developmental research studies (Bertels & Bolte, 2020; Marcia, 1993; Roisman et al., 2004; Williams & Savickas, 1990). In the following section, I discuss the relationships between these self-construction and career-construction principles and relevant developmental tasks.

#### **2.5.5.1 Attachment and self- and career construction**

According to Kerpelman and Pittman (2018) and Pittman et al. (2011), trust vs mistrust, the first psychosocial developmental crisis according to Erikson (1968), overlaps to a large extent with attachment theory<sup>31</sup> (Bowlby, 1988). Attachment emphasises the necessity of securely bonding with a primary caregiver as a survival skill and is one of the first psychosocial developmental tasks infants

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<sup>30</sup> Please refer to section 1.6.3 in Chapter 1, p. 15 for a more elaborate definition of young adulthood in this study.

<sup>31</sup> Refer to Section 1.7.2 in Chapter 1

are confronted with. It has been suggested (Lelek & Klikovac, 2021) that securely attached adolescents are generally more successful in resolving other psychosocial challenges when compared to their insecurely attached peers. Following, are some self-construction and career construction aspects which have been linked with attachment (as a developmental task).

*i. Career development*

Attachment extends to career development (Wright & Perrone, 2008) since secure attachment allows individuals to venture into the world and develop self-awareness, empathy, impulse control, and self-motivation, all of which enable them to contribute to society (Siegel, 1999; Van der Kolk, 2014).

*ii. Contribution to society*

Secure attachment contributes to individuals' self-concept and self-esteem (Kawamoto, 2020). One of the main aims of self- and career construction (Maree, 2022d; Savickas et al., 2009) is to link individuals' personal purpose (related to self-concept and identity) with the needs of others within their communities (Maree, 2020a). In this manner, individuals construct meaning through the expression of their purpose and simultaneously meet the needs of society.

*iii. Personal and occupational relationships*

Secure attachment furthermore provides the template for future personal and occupational relationships (Maté, 2008; Siegel, 1999; Van der Kolk, 2014), and contributes to healthy interpersonal relationships which include friends, romantic partners, and parents (Scharf et al., 2004), and allows individuals to communicate their emerging selves in terms of interests, preferences, and goals (Van der Kolk, 2014) – important features which are respectively associated with self-construction theory (Guichard, 2005) in the form of multiple subjective identity forms (SIF's) and with career construction theory (Savickas, 2005) in the form of vocational identity (Guichard, 2009; Maree, 2020a; Savickas, 2012a). Subjective identity forms entail the variety of identities individuals develop as a result of self-construction through different interactions in multiple contexts (Guichard, 2009), whereas vocational identity comprises individuals' career identity with the specific interests, abilities, and values inherent to it (Hartung, 2011b; Savickas, 2005). Vocational identity can be described as a subjective identity form which takes preference in terms of career.

*iv. Exhibition of academic and career effectiveness*

According to Wright et al. (2014), secure attachment contributes to individuals' exhibition of academic and career effectiveness – career effectiveness being a general outcome of career construction (Savickas, 2012a).

*v. Competency, adaptability, and coping*

Secure attachment has furthermore been linked with the development of an internal locus of control, which in turn contributes to competency and adaptability (Van der Kolk, 2014), and is seen to add to a problem-focused approach toward coping (Scharf et al., 2004). Adaptability is linked to self- and career construction (Guichard, 2009; Savickas, 2012a). Secure attachment has also been linked to improved stress responses (Engel & Gunnar, 2020).

**2.5.5.2 Benefits of the successful completion of general developmental tasks**

*i. Emotional, relational, and career well-being*

Kidd (2008) maintained that individuals' emotional and career well-being is related to the completion of developmental tasks such as career transitions, interpersonal relationships, relationships with the organisation, work performance, sense of purpose, learning, development, and work-life issues. Furthermore, Hartung et al. (2022), Pinguart and Pfeiffer (2020), as well as Gonzalez Avilés et al. (2020) associated emotional well-being (related to self-construction) with the successful accomplishment of developmental tasks (access to a peer group, building friendships, preparing for the future, body acceptance, as well as developing a personal identity, a value system, socially acceptable behaviour, and romantic relationships). Xia et al. (2018) reported more effective problem-solving skills and less violent romantic relationships (also a developmental task) when adolescents perceived their family environment as positive. The mastering of developmental tasks seems to have a significant impact on individuals' emotional, relational, and career well-being and thus enhances their self- and career construction (Hartung et al., 2022).

Since an adapted life-design counselling intervention (comprised of self- and career construction) was implemented on young (emerging) adults with unmastered developmental tasks, I address the relevant developmental tasks that young adults face in the next section.

**2.5.6 Developmental tasks faced in young or emerging adulthood**

As discussed previously, the young adulthood developmental stage can easily be perceived by young adults as overwhelming due to the combination of new or novel developmental tasks, uncertainties

(academic, occupational, intrapersonal, interpersonal, financial, and role-related), and continuous change (from the secondary education system to tertiary education to chosen occupations) and has been linked with the onset of depression and/or anxiety (Burt & Masten, 2010; Hartung et al., 2022; Heckhausen, 2000).

Identity development does not end when adolescents proceed into young adulthood. Arnett (2000, 2016) identified five prominent developmental features individuals are faced with during this action-packed developmental stage (i.e. young adulthood), which are all considered significant in this study. Arnett (2000, 2015b, 2016) points out that young (emerging) adults continue to engage in exploratory behaviour to investigate and sort through different aspects of their identities (values, abilities, beliefs, interests, and goals) to eventually identify the set of aspects they can accept and consolidate into stable identities (Johnson et al., 2011). He calls this feature *identity exploration*. Identity exploration in itself suggests change and sets the stage for other developmental features of young adulthood identified by Arnett (2000; 2016), namely *instability*, *self-focus*, *feeling in-between*, and *future possibilities* (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2016). *Instability* describes young adults' inconsistent decision-making patterns as a result of identity exploration and their participation in a variety of activities and relationships before committing to work and love decisions. *Self-focus* comprises young adults' emphasis on self-sufficiency and independence without necessarily being considerate of others (Arnett 2015a, 2015b, 2016) and *feeling in-between* entails young adults' experience of not yet having attained the milestones of taking responsibility for themselves, independent decision-making, and becoming financially independent (Hill et al., 2015). Despite the uncertainty and continuous change that emerging adults experience, as described by the theory of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), most individuals who find themselves in this developmental stage still perceive their future trajectories through rose-coloured glasses and have the experience that life is full of *future possibilities*; the last developmental feature proposed by Arnett (Arnett, 2016; Burt & Masten, 2010; Crouce & Corbin, 2010). The features presented by Arnett take centre stage in this study, against the backdrop of Erikson's sixth developmental stage, intimacy vs isolation (Erikson, 1968). According to Erikson, intimacy entails the yearning to commit oneself to a meaningful relationship (with a friend, loved one, and/or oneself), whereas the counterpoint, i.e. isolation, denotes a state of either being solitary or in relationships which lack warmth and connection (Arnett, 2015b).

Table 2.2 provides a summary of the three discussed developmental theories and developmental tasks pertaining to the developmental stage of young adulthood.

**Table 2.2**

*Summary of the Developmental Theories Utilised in this Study and the Developmental Tasks pertaining to the Young Adulthood Developmental Stage*

<b>PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENTAL THEORIES</b>		
<b>Havighurst's (Contemporary) Developmental tasks (Kretschmer et al., 2018)</b>	<b>Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Stages (Heckhausen, 2000)</b>	<b>Arnett's Normative Features of Emerging Adulthood (2016)</b>
Educational attainment	Intimacy vs Isolation	Identity exploration
Work		Instability
Financial autonomy		Self-focus
Romantic involvement		Feeling in-between
Peer involvement		Optimism regarding the future
Substance use avoidance		
Citizenship		

Coghill (2009) states that no single developmental theory has succeeded in completely explaining the complexity of individuals' development and Table 2.2 is by no means considered an exhaustive list. However, using developmental theories aids researchers' understanding of aspects of human development. As mentioned previously, Arnett's normative features can be summarised as two main developmental tasks, namely (1) the development of vocational identity and (2) the establishment of romantic relationships (Burt & Masten, 2010). From the literature, several other developmental tasks of young adulthood emerged, such as career indecision (Cardoso et al., 2016a; Di Fabio & Maree, 2012; Maree, 2016a), career identity (Maree & Che, 2020; Maree, 2019b), career action (Maree, 2015b), a sense of self (Maree & Che, 2020), romantic involvement (Barzeva et al., 2021; Xia et al., 2018), peer involvement, and psychosocial coping (Cohen-Scali & Erby, 2021).

Since this study revolved around the application of an adapted life-design counselling intervention on young adults experiencing unmastered developmental tasks, I was conscious of suggestions and emerging themes from gathered data that could relate to developmental tasks and/or features (see Table 2.2). I aim to clarify the relationship between Arnett's developmental

features and career construction theory constructs (which form part of the earlier discussed life-design counselling<sup>32</sup>) next.

### 2.5.7 Developmental features of young adulthood and its relationship with the constructs of career construction theory

While studying the three constructs of career construction theory<sup>33</sup> (vocational personality, career adaptability, and life themes), I noticed some links between these domains and aspects of the developmental features identified by Arnett (2015a, 2015b, 2016). The role these features play in individuals' career construction (and therefore life design) requires specific attention and will be addressed in the following section at the hand of Table 2.3

**Table 2.3**

*Normative Features of Emerging Adulthood and its Relation to the Constructs of Career Construction Theory*

CAREER CONSTRUCTION THEORY CONSTRUCTS	NORMATIVE FEATURES OF YOUNG ADULTHOOD CONTRIBUTING TO EACH CONSTRUCT			
Vocational personality	Identity exploration			
Career adaptability	Identity exploration	Instability	Self-focus	Feeling in-between
Life themes	Identity exploration			Future possibilities

*Note.* Adapted from Del Corso et al. (2011b); Hartung et al. (2008); Maree (2020a)

#### 2.5.7.1 Normative features related to vocational personality

Chávez (2016) contends that the integrated psychosocial developmental experiences (developmental tasks) from birth to adolescence (pre-adult) contribute to the development of individuals' vocational personalities. From a career construction perspective, vocational personality comprises individuals' values, abilities, needs, and interests specifically related to careers (Hartung, 2011b; Savickas, 2005). Identity exploration, a general developmental task of young (emerging) adulthood, can therefore be seen as a contributing factor toward the development of individuals' vocational personality. Individuals' vocational personalities are expressed once they function within their chosen occupational fields and get the opportunity to explore the implementation of their

<sup>32</sup> See Section 2.4, p. 20

<sup>33</sup> Refer to Chapter 2, Career construction theory

values, abilities, needs, and interests (Maree, 2022d). Identity exploration and its influence on the construction of vocational personality is seen as a continuous, life-long process which contributes to individuals' future decision-making and transitions (Del Corso et al., 2011b).

### **2.5.7.2 Normative features linked to career adaptability**

The developmental features of *identity exploration*, *instability*, *self-focus*, and *feeling in-between* (Arnett, 2000, 2016) contribute to the development of career adaptability (Bynner, 2005), the second CCT construct. Career adaptability can be described as the ability to continuously adapt to developmental challenges and transitions as the need arises during individuals' lives (Di Palma & Reid, 2019; Hartung, 2011b; Savickas, 2013).

Career adaptability is seen to develop as a result of an array of personal developmental experiences (as described by identity exploration, instability, self-focus, and feeling in-between) which influence individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and competencies (Career ABC's) and is related to career planning, career choice, and career adjustment (Hartung et al., 2008).

In this study, I facilitated a life-design counselling intervention which allowed individuals to identify the specific attitudes, beliefs, and competencies they need as they become *concerned* about future career opportunities, experience a sense of career *control*, become *curious* and become *confident* about their career choices (K. Maree, personal communication, 6 September 2022).

### **2.5.7.3 Normative features and their connection with life themes**

As mentioned before, young adults remain hopeful about what life has in store for them as described by the normative feature of *future possibilities* (Arnett, 2016; Burt & Masten, 2010; Crouce & Corbin, 2010). This optimism regarding the future is related to individuals' life themes as the third domain of career construction theory. Life themes "animate the movement to become complete in one's life story" and to be of significance (Del Corso et al., 2011b, p. 335; Maree, 2013).

Life themes communicate the unresolved traumas and developmental tasks individuals experienced earlier in their lives (Maree, 2022d) and motivate career behaviour (why individuals move in a certain direction) and the construction of identity (Del Corso et al., 2011b; Maree, 2013). Eliciting micro-stories from the multiple social and occupational experiences young adults have engaged in (especially in emerging or young adulthood), as well as facilitating its resolution from an *actively master what has been passively suffered approach* (Maree, 2020a; Savickas, 1997), has been linked to identity formation, identification of possibilities for the future, as well as the uncovering

of purpose in individuals' lives (Maree, 2022d). The myriad of trial-and-error attempts young adults engage in during the developmental stage of emerging adulthood (facing identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and future possibilities) as well as evolving patterns from their pre-adult development all contribute to significant life themes which crystallise into a meaningful and purposeful career life through the process of career construction (Del Corso et al., 2011b; Savickas, 2012a).

In this study, young adults were given the opportunity to identify their significant life themes<sup>34</sup> and to recognise the influence of possible unmastered developmental tasks that were being processed (either consciously or subconsciously) at the time. In addition, I aimed to help individuals clarify the values (such as power, significance, and security) they consider significant and which guide their career behaviour (possible career goals) by making the connection between role models and individuals' "ideal selves"<sup>35</sup> (K. Maree, personal communication, 6 September 2022).

The relationship between individuals' unique development, whether the developmental tasks faced were mastered or not, and their career construction has been explained above. Current career counselling practices in South Africa will be reviewed next to investigate whether this kind of intervention (career counselling) can facilitate the mastery of developmental tasks.

## **2.6 CAREER COUNSELLING FOR YOUNG ADULTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

### **2.6.1 The current South African occupational context**

South Africa has not been untouched by recent global economic challenges, technological change, advances in knowledge, globalisation, social trends, pandemics, and political circumstances (Maree, 2013; Maree, 2020a; Pillay, 2021; Schreuder & Coetzee, 2016) and the current occupational climate presents significant challenges for the aspiring career constructor. Statistics South Africa (SSA, 2022) reported an expanded unemployment rate (which includes the officially unemployed, discouraged work seekers, and individuals not seeking for other reasons) of 44.1% for the second quarter of 2022. The effect of unemployment and job loss on the psyche of the families affected is considered significant. Posel et al. (2021) report that for a sample of adult South African individuals, there was a significantly higher vulnerability regarding mental well-being for those individuals who had lost their jobs or had been furloughed as a result of the COVID-19 lockdown and the concomitant restricted economic activity. Posel et al. (2021) concluded that the lack of support for mental well-

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<sup>34</sup> Refer to the adapted life-design counselling intervention on p. 18 for more detail regarding the specific tasks used to elicit this information.

<sup>35</sup> Please refer to Chapter 3 where I elaborate on each session of the life-design counselling process.

being in South Africa is concerning, especially since individuals who are depressed lack both confidence and motivation to persevere in their search for alternative employment options. Individuals' mental well-being is closely related to their employment (Posel et al., 2021) as the latter has, among others, been shown to improve quality of life, mental health, social networking, social inclusion (Evans & Repper, 2001), and overall well-being (Modini et al., 2016).

Over and above the aforementioned difficulties, disadvantaged learners in South Africa experience challenges on the macro level (educational institutions and policy), mesolevel (inadequately trained educators), and micro-level (lack of individual support and basic needs such as a safe environment, running water, electricity, and food), all of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and contributed to even bleaker futures for these individuals (Jäckel-Visser et al., 2021; Maree, 2022a; Morris-Paxton et al., 2017; Pillay, 2021; Rawatlal, 2021).

## **2.6.2 Individual challenges**

### **2.6.2.1 Career decision-making**

Most disadvantaged learners and refugees only focus on securing occupations which can help them survive instead of being granted the opportunity to choose or construct a career in which they can express themselves and find meaning and purpose (Maree, 2022a; Nyabvudzi & Chinyamurindi, 2019) and these poorly informed career decisions have lasting implications for individuals' economic and psychological well-being (Pillay, 2020). Individuals' (advantaged and disadvantaged) execution of appropriate career decisions is furthermore dependent on the availability of appropriate subjective and objective information (Maree & Beck, 2004), resources which are often lacking in rural communities and their school libraries (Jiyane & Jiyane, 2019).

### **2.6.2.2 Access to career counselling**

The majority of people from developing countries do not have access to any form of career counselling (Jäckel-Visser et al., 2021; Maree 2013b; Morris-Paxton et al., 2017; Setlhare-Meltor & Wood, 2016) and find formal career counselling, still the preferred method in developing countries, insufficient to meet their underlying needs (Setlhare-Meltor & Wood, 2016). The need for an alternative approach to career counselling has been stated explicitly by researchers (McMahon & Watson, 2012a; Maree, 2021b). To assist individuals in their adaptation to the ever-changing demands of the world of work, researchers (Hartung, 2013; McMahon, 2018; Savickas, 2018) observe a worldwide tendency for career counsellors to increasingly implement narrative career counselling to enhance intrapersonal stability in a progressively complex and unstable external

world. Narrative career counselling integrates individuals' subjective experiences of their unique contexts and challenges into the construction of meaningful life stories (Cardoso et al., 2019; Hartung, 2013; Reid et al., 2016; Scharf, 2013). McMahon et al. (2012b) contend that the implementation of constructivist (narrative) career counselling enhanced reflection, connectedness, meaning-making, learning, and agency and it was furthermore observed that career construction and narrative career counselling was an appropriate approach for the increasingly diverse population (McMahon & Watson, 2012a). Maree (2022c; 2020a) added that even individuals from disadvantaged settings could benefit from an integrative QUALITATIVE-quantitative career counselling process (merging subjective stories with objective test scores), which emphasises people's uniqueness rather than the similarities, and may enhance their career trajectories.

In the past three decades (Maree, 2020a), more and more career counsellors in the Global North have started to incorporate elements of career construction counselling with positive outcomes. Findings of similar studies conducted in the developing South are discussed next.

### **2.6.3 Current research findings on the possible benefits of career construction counselling in South Africa**

Finding appropriate and recent research studies which could shed light on current career counselling trends in South Africa proved to be quite challenging. In Table 2.4 below, the outcomes of career construction (including life design) interventions implemented in recent years in South Africa, are summarised.

**Table 2.4**

*Outcomes of Career Construction Counselling (Life Design) Interventions in South Africa between 2000 and 2022*

IMPROVED ASPECTS	STUDY
Career development	(Beukes & Taylor, 2019; Chinyamurindi, 2012; Cook & Maree, 2016; Maree, 2019b; Maree, 2016b; Maree & Crous, 2012; Maree et al., 2019; Maree et al., 2022; Ruiters & Maree, 2022; Setlhare et al., 2017)
Career adaptability and transitions	(Beukes & Taylor, 2019; Cook & Maree, 2016; Le Grange & Maree, 2022; Maree, 2019b; Maree & Crous, 2012; Maree et al., 2019; Maree et al., 2022; Maree & Nortjé, 2023; Maree et al., 2022; Setlhare et al., 2017)
Life satisfaction after in-person and online counselling	(Maree & Symington, 2015; Nota et al., 2016; Wessels & Diale, 2017)
Action-orientated career behaviour (non-dependent on emotional and socio-economic factors)	(Maree & Crous, 2012; Maree et al., 2019)
Career curiosity	(Jude et al., 2023)
Career decision-making	(Maree & Magere, 2023)
Career indecision	(Maree, 2016a; 2020b; 2020d)
Career resilience	(Le Grange & Maree, 2022; Maree, 2020c; Venter & Maree, 2020)
Sense of meaning and purpose (even with intellectual disability)	(Maree, 2017b; Maree, 2019b; Maree 2019c; Ruiters & Maree, 2022)
Career direction	(Jäckel-Visser et al., 2021; Maree, 2017b)
Narration of improved future (for disadvantaged learners)	(Maree et al., 2010; Setlhare-Meltor & Wood, 2016)
Career construction	(Wessels & Diale, 2017)
Academic self-construction	(Maree & Maree, 2021)
Sense of self	(Maree & Nortjé, 2023; Maree et al., 2018)
Interpersonal relationships	(Hall & McMahon, 2018)

It is clear from Table 2.4 that adapted life-design counselling interventions (varying slightly in approach, content, and procedure) were found to benefit career development, career adaptability, career transitions and life satisfaction; career curiosity; career decision-making; career resilience; a sense of meaning, purpose, and direction; career construction; academic self-construction; a sense of self; and interpersonal relationships. These life-design counselling interventions were applied individually and in groups, in-person and online, across a diverse population, and with individuals from different cultural, socio-economic, and intellectual backgrounds. Since these studies were not

replicated or executed over an extended period, it was suggested by some researchers to recreate the single case studies with groups and to consider longitudinal studies to confirm the consistency of the findings.

After an extensive literature search, I was unable to find any previous research applying an adapted life-design counselling intervention with young adults experiencing unmastered developmental tasks. However, my literature review up to this point illustrated that individuals' mastery of developmental tasks could have a significant influence on their life design<sup>36</sup> (self- and career construction) and career trajectories and my research, therefore, aimed to address this identified gap in the literature. In the following section, I explain how the measures and interventions included in this study aim to increase career adaptability as one of the goals of life-design counselling.

## **2.7 CAREER ADAPTABILITY AS AN AIM OF THIS ADAPTED LIFE-DESIGN INTERVENTION**

Life-design counselling entails the mobilisation of career adaptability and career identity (Cohen-Scali et al., 2017; Cooper & Kramers-Olen, 2021) – two meta-competencies of career development (Cadaret & Hartung, 2021). Career adaptability is a “psychosocial structure that demands coping strategies and resources to accomplish developmental tasks and overcome transitions and traumas in occupational fields” (Cooper & Kramers-Olen, 2021; Mmako & Letsoalo, 2020, p. 117) and identity formation, also a psychological process, entails the personal construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of the self to align it (identity) with who individuals want to become (Cohen-Scali et al., 2017). Career adaptability and vocational identity develop throughout the lifespan as individuals adapt to circumstances and the development of vocational identity is already initiated during early childhood (Bowlby, 1988; Eagle, 2013; Hartung et al., 2008). In this study, I utilised the construct of career adaptability (one of the goals of life-design counselling) as an indicator of significant change that could be related to this intervention.

Being career-adaptable means that individuals have the capacity to plan, direct, explore, and shape their careers (Hartung et al., 2022; Santilli et al., 2019). It (career adaptability) furthermore enhances individuals' employability, career decidedness, and career identity formation (Coetzee & Harry, 2015; Maree & Che, 2020; Mmako & Letsoalo, 2020; Savickas & Porfeli, 2011) – career decidedness and career identity formation are also viewed as developmental tasks of young

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<sup>36</sup> For the remainder of this document, I only use the term “life-design counselling” since it has been established that life design comprises Self- and Career construction.

adulthood – and consists of four aspects: Career concern, career control, career curiosity and career confidence (Cadaret & Hartung, 2021; Mmako & Letsoalo, 2020; Savickas & Porfeli, 2011).

- i. **Career concern** entails a person's capacity to evaluate their future options and feel optimistic about them.
- ii. **Career control** comprises individuals' ability to regulate themselves in terms of responsible career decision-making and taking responsibility for future career trajectories.
- iii. **Career curiosity** refers to self- and environmental exploration with the aim of discovering career opportunities which can be incorporated into career trajectories.
- iv. **Career confidence** develops when individuals believe in their own ability to handle career-related challenges.

The inclusion of the *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (SA)*<sup>37</sup> (Maree, 2012), both before and after the adapted life-design intervention, allowed me to establish whether there had been a significant increase in individuals' career adaptability (comprising career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence).

Even though the research design and methodology are only discussed thoroughly in Chapter 3, I shortly review the data-gathering instruments and interventions included in this study to illustrate how they contribute to the development of career adaptability (and therefore to the life-design process). A mixed-methods case study research design<sup>38</sup> (Leavy, 2017; Nastasi & Hitchcock, 2016), which included qualitative and quantitative data gathering and intervention instruments, was employed in this study.

### **2.7.1 Quantitative data gathering instruments and their connection to career adaptability**

Individuals were requested to complete three quantitative assessment instruments<sup>39</sup> (*Maree Career Matrix (MCM)*; *Modified Erikson Psychosocial Index (MEPSI)*; and *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (SA) (CAAS-SA)*) prior to and after the intervention. The results of these quantitative measures were interpreted and compared qualitatively, which allowed these instruments to be used as natural interventions since completing and discussing the content of the questionnaires enhanced individuals' self-awareness and therefore contributed to life design.

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<sup>37</sup> The CAAS-SA is described shortly in the next section and thoroughly in Chapter 3.

<sup>38</sup> Refer to Chapter 3 for detail regarding Research methodologies.

<sup>39</sup> Chapter 3 contains a section where the constructs and validity of these instruments will be discussed.

### **2.7.1.1 The Maree Career Matrix (MCM)**

The *Maree Career Matrix (MCM)* yields interest-confidence combinations for each career field and provides ample opportunity for a qualitative investigation into whether individuals have had sufficient exposure to occupations in which they present with high or low confidence and/or interest levels, the motivation behind higher and lower interest and confidence levels, as well as individuals' perceptions of their own abilities.

Unmastered developmental tasks were expected to manifest in the *MCM* in the form of career indecision and a lack of career confidence (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2020; Wright & Perrone, 2008). Career confidence is identified as one of the four psychosocial constructs which contribute to career adaptability.

### **2.7.1.2 The Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (MEPSI)**

The *Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (MEPSI)* (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988) is used to explore the progression of individuals through the eight psychosocial developmental stages of Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory. The inclusion of the *MEPSI* in this study allowed the researcher to establish a quantitative indication of the participants' psychosocial development, both before and after the life-design counselling intervention. In addition, the thought processes and reasoning around the questions included in this questionnaire were expected to contribute to increased self-awareness regarding psychosocial challenges and transitions, and subsequently to career adaptability and life design.

### **2.7.1.3 The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)**

The South African *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS-SA)* (CAAS-SA; Maree, 2012) was included as a quantitative and qualitative data gathering and intervention instrument.

Inclusion of the *CAAS* before and after the intervention conducted in this study enriched the qualitative understanding of the influence on and the extent of change regarding individuals' career adaptability (and the underlying components) as a result of the adapted life-design counselling intervention on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks.

## **2.7.2 Qualitative data gathering and intervention instruments' contribution to career adaptability**

The qualitative data-gathering instruments simultaneously served as intervention techniques in this study since they promoted self-awareness.

### **2.7.2.1 Participant observation and in-depth interviewing**

Participant observation and interviewing (structured and semi-structured interviews, and conversations which were transcribed) facilitate life-design counselling in this study. Life-design counselling emphasises that individuals co-construct meaning through social interactions, personal experiences, and interactions with the environment. In this study, communication boosted career control and career curiosity (career adaptability), as well as individuals' narratability.

### **2.7.2.2 Career Interest Profile (CIP)**

The *Career Interest Profile Version 7* (Maree, 2017c) allows for life design (career construction and self-construction) to be facilitated through the subjective and unique stories elicited from discussions about individuals' interests and passions, strengths, and successes. The *CIP* has been linked to enhanced self-awareness, increased experiences of meaning and purpose (Beukes & Taylor, 2019), assisting individuals with career indecision (Maree, 2020d), and promotion of career adaptability (Cook & Maree, 2016; Maree, 2020b) –all of which relate to the developmental tasks faced in young adulthood and the goals of life design.

### **2.7.2.3 Educational psychological interventions**

The lifeline, collage, and genogram were included as interventions in this study since they allowed for significant themes and sub-themes to emerge and were seen to contribute to individuals' life design, thus contributing to career adaptability, narratability, action, and intentionality.

From the discussion above, it is apparent that each of these instruments (*MCM*, *MEPSI*, *CAAS*, participant observations and in-depth interviews, *CIP*, and educational psychological interventions) elicited unique information from individuals in a variety of ways and therefore contributed to a multi-faceted view of participants' career adaptability and, subsequently, their life-design processes. The conceptual framework is discussed in the following section to illustrate the connections between the different theories and concepts that informed this study.

## **2.8 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

A conceptual framework aims to show and explain how significant concepts and principles are related (Maree, 2019a) so as to aid an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Jabareen, 2009). The five main theories that inform the conceptual framework of this study are discussed below.

### **2.8.1 Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1950)**

Sigmund Freud, in his Psychoanalytical Theory (in Range, 2005), viewed life experiences as largely motivated by the subconscious. According to this theory, the ego (conscious) attempts to manage the id (subconscious) and the life forces that mainly originate from biological drives. The latter are not directly accessible to the ego. Since Freud's theory focused largely on the meaning of lived experiences, the influence of the external environment and relationships was neglected (Piotrowski, 2005). Erik Erikson (1968) built on Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory by contending that individuals' personalities develop through social and interpersonal interaction as they master eight subsequent psychosocial developmental challenges in different stages.<sup>40</sup> The extent to which individuals will be able to find meaning and fulfilment in their lives depends on the resolution of the crises faced in each stage of development (Erikson, 1968; Maree, 2021a).

### **2.8.2 Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988)**

Attachment can be described as an adaptive response which promotes the safety and survival of the vulnerable young (Bowlby, 1988; Eagle, 2013). The need for physical and emotional closeness is seen as the motivation for proximity-seeking behaviour (Maté, 2008). Nutrition, physical security, and consistent emotional nurturance are essential for optimal human brain development and the quality of emotional nurturance is influenced by "the parent's mood and stress levels" (Maté, 2008, p. 199).

Secure attachment to a primary caregiver has been proven to protect the individual against future stressors and is associated with (inter alia) leadership abilities (Prior & Glaser, 2006). In contrast, avoidantly attached babies tend to be avoided by peers, while ambivalent attachment correlates with anxiety in children. When children are attached to their caregiver(s) in a disorganised manner, they often have difficulty with emotional regulation and find social interaction challenging (Prior & Glaser, 2006; Siegel & Hartzell, 2004). Research has shown that individuals can move from insecure attachment to sense-earned security in adulthood through a relational meaning-making process (Siegel & Hartzell, 2004). It is therefore possible to integrate the past, present, and future through nurturing relationships which have the potential to enhance levels of self-knowledge to "heal from old wounds and transform defensive approaches to intimacy" (Siegel & Hartzell, 2004, p. 135).

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<sup>40</sup> Refer to section 2.5.2 on p. 30 for the Erikson's eight Psychosocial developmental stages.

### **2.8.3 Arnett's Theory of Emerging Adulthood (Arnett, 2000; 2015a; 2016)**

Social and economic changes in industrialised societies contributed, amongst others, to delayed marriage and parenthood and led to the proposal of a new life stage to describe the transitioning period between adolescence and adulthood (18-25 years) (Arnett, 2000; 2016). Emerging adulthood is characterised by five defining features: (1) Identity exploration (the search for meaning in work, relationships, and ideologies), (2) instability (the tendency to make changes), (3) self-focus (focus on the self without obligations), (4) feeling in-between (feeling like an adolescent and not quite like an adult, and (5) future possibilities (viewing the world as exciting and full of options) (Arnett, 2016; Branje et al., 2014; Gilmore, 2019; Knight & Miller, 2017). Identity (role) exploration is closely related to identity formation and is expected to have lasting implications on individuals' mental health (Erikson, 1968; Gilmore, 2019).

### **2.8.4 Life-Design Counselling (comprising the Career Construction and Self-Construction Theories) (Savickas et al., 2009)**

Life-design counselling aims<sup>41</sup> to enhance individuals' career adaptability (comprising career concern, career confidence, career curiosity, and career control), narratability, activity, and intentionality (Hartung, 2011b; Maree, 2017a; Maree et al., 2022; Savickas et al., 2009; Sovet et al., 2017) and can be seen as the practical expression of self- and career construction theories that depict career behaviour and development (Maree, 2017a). The life-design process, comprised of self- and career construction theories, is continuous, life-long, and holistically incorporates people's unique needs and contexts (Savickas et al., 2009).

### **2.8.5 Career Construction Theory (Savickas, 2005)**

Career construction includes a differential, developmental, and dynamic perspective on vocational behaviour and takes place within a therapeutic environment where the individual and counsellor are considered equal, active participants (Rudolph et al., 2019). Career construction theory is made up of three interrelated parts: Vocational personality (what individuals do), career adaptability (how individuals do what they do), and life themes (why individuals do what they do) (Del Corso et al., 2011b). Interests and strengths (part of vocational personality) are considered to be fluid, subjective and socially constructed and they demonstrate the psychosocial and dynamic nature of the individual's interaction with the environment (Glavin & Berger, 2012). During the career

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<sup>41</sup> Please refer to Section 2.4.1 for the goals of life-design counselling.

construction process, significant stories are elicited and reflected on so as to allow the individual to construct meaning around life themes which hold the motivation for career choices (Busacca, 2016).

### **2.8.6 Self-Construction Theory (Guichard, 2005; 2009)**

From a self-construction perspective, individuals are considered to have multiple, dynamic, individual identities which develop from the different roles they fulfil in a variety of contexts (Di Fabio, 2020). Self-construction entails the integration of individuals' past, present, and expected subjective identity forms (SIF's) through a continuous process of construction and reconstruction (Athanasou & Perera, 2020) which draws from sociological and cognitive psychology approaches. Some of the subjective identity forms are considered more relevant than others. The process of self-construction allows individuals to become more self-aware and to clarify a sense of self which can include but is not limited to their vocational identities (Maree, 2018a).

### **2.8.7 Life-Span Life-Space Theory (Super, 1980)**

The Life-Span Life-Space Theory includes careers as an integral aspect of life that cannot be seen in isolation. According to this theory, the majority of individuals will temporarily fulfil different general roles – that of a child, sibling, student, employee, parent, pensioner, etc. – while less common roles, for example, that of lover or criminal, will feature to a lesser extent. Both the time that individuals spend playing a role and their emotional commitment to such a role, differ (Super, 1980). Super's proposed developmental career stages are summarised as follows (Hartung, 2007):

#### *i. Growth*

The growth stage of career development (initial stage, approximately ages 4 – 13) has the formation of a realistic self-concept as its main aim. The self-concept is seen to comprise a depiction of an individual's strengths, limitations, interests, values, abilities, personality, and talents, and it contributes to the individual's ability to envision a future in a variety of roles that vary in importance.

#### *ii. Exploration*

Career exploration, the second stage (approximately 14-24 years old), involves investigating the occupational world, gathering information about the self and exploring possible occupations to make a suitable career choice. During this stage, individuals have the opportunity to investigate fields of interest, experiment with the implementation of the self-concept within a career, as well as to identify career alternatives. The cyclical investigation of the aforementioned aspects is expected to enhance career maturity.

### *iii. Establishment*

The third stage, establishment (approximately 25-44 years old), revolves around the crystallisation of the self-concept within a chosen occupational role in order to integrate the individual's inner self with the external context. This stage would aim to make a suitable and sustainable career choice that has the potential to provide for and add meaning to the individual's life. The establishment stage furthermore provides an opportunity for the refinement of the self-concept, as individuals experience security within their employment.

### *iv. Management*

During the management or fourth stage (approximately 45-65 years old), individuals focus on maintaining what has been achieved, while also projecting energy toward the improvement and development of their knowledge and skills set. During the management stage, individuals also develop and grow within their occupational positions, and they consider the possibility of staying in a career role or exploring new opportunities. The latter will lead to the revisiting of new exploration and establishment cycles.

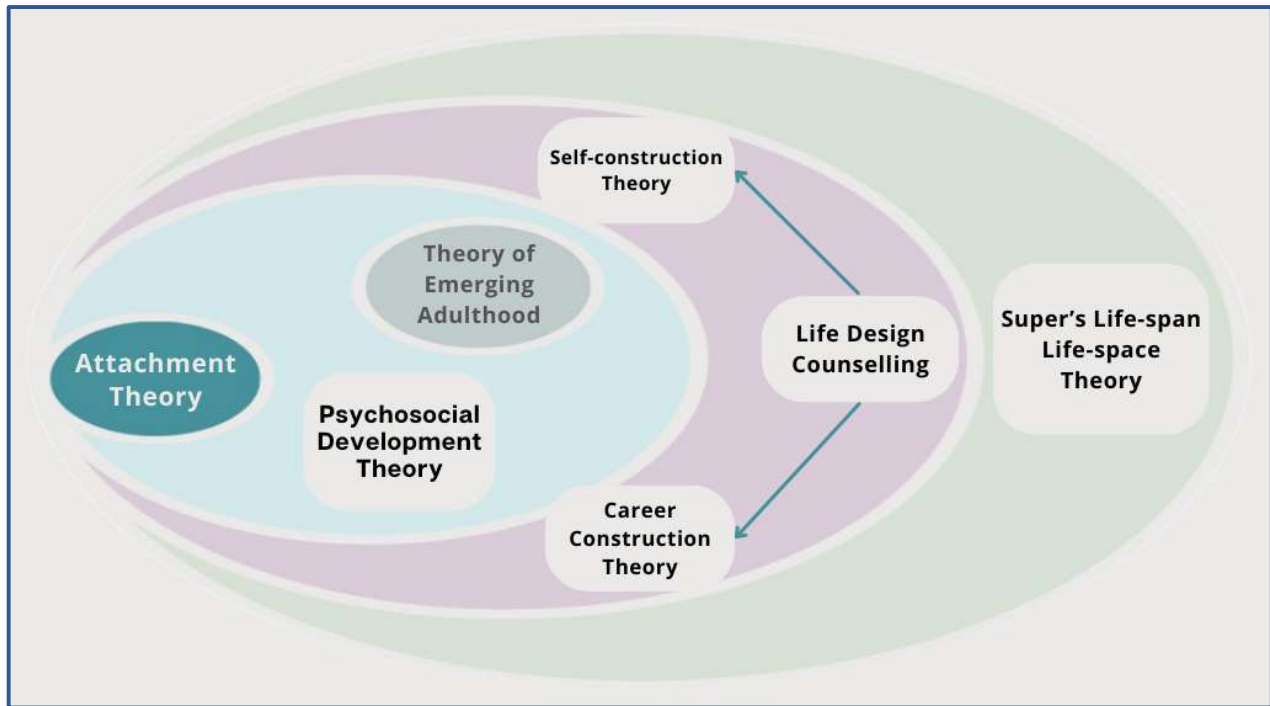
### *v. Disengagement*

Career disengagement, the last or fifth stage (approximately 65 years and older), describes the process during which individuals loosen ties with their work roles to generate more energy and time for additional and alternative roles in different contexts. This stage is characterised by a decrease in productivity and work-related activities, while attention is focused more on retirement and the generation of meaning in a post-occupational life.

Figure 2.1 illustrates the theories underlying the conceptual framework of this study.

**Figure 2.1**

*Graphical Representation of the Conceptual Framework of the Study*



*Note.* Adapted from Arnett (2000, 2015a); Bowlby (1988); Erikson (1968); Guichard (2005); Savickas et al. (2009); Super (1980).

Figure 2.1 shows that Super's Life-Span Life-Space Theory (Super, 1980) is considered to be the background against which the Attachment Theory, the Theory of Emerging Adulthood, and the Psychosocial Development Theory play out. The individual's life-design counselling process, informed by Guichard's (2005) Self-Construction Theory and Savickas's (2005) Career Construction Theory, is expected to be affected by the quality of their attachment to at least one significant caregiver (Bowlby, 1988; Siegel & Hartzell, 2004), their progression through the psychosocial developmental stages (Erikson, 1968), and the mastery of developmental challenges. Figure 2.1 furthermore demonstrates that the Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988), Theory of Emerging Adulthood (Arnett, 2000; 2015a), Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1950) and Life-Design Counselling (Savickas et al., 2009) (also comprising the Career Construction Theory and Self-Construction Theory) are intricately connected and dynamic, and (at least to a certain extent) they reciprocally interact with one another.

## **2.9 CONCLUSION AND REFLECTION**

Human development (in all its complexities) is a genetically driven and spontaneous process which takes place without individuals necessarily being consciously aware of it and regardless of external

factors such as social, economic, and political influences (Jain, 2020). As they develop, individuals' perceptions, emotions, cognition, and relationships are shaped (Marmeleira & Duarte Santos, 2019), and differential exposure to opportunities or constraints during a life cycle (such as adversities) influences the process (Engel & Gunnar, 2020; Jain, 2020). Life-design counselling features a co-constructive process during which the threads of subjective experiences and developmental challenges individuals have passively endured are woven together into meaningful and integrated career lives (Hartung & Santilli, 2018; Savickas et al., 2009). Schreiber et al. (2020, p. 53) add that successful career development depends on individuals' "self-making, identity shaping, and career construction".

In this chapter, I initially aimed to provide the reader with a concise theoretical foundation of the adapted life-design intervention applied in this study. The theories of self- and career construction and their underlying constructs were discussed as they inform the life-design process, whereafter the goals of the adapted life-design intervention (narratability, adaptability, action, and intentionality) were described.

Life-design counselling is a life-long preventative and holistic process which is influenced by developmental psychology (Santilli et al., 2019). As such, three developmental theories, namely Havighurst's theory of developmental tasks (1948), Erikson's Psychosocial Developmental Theory (1968), and Arnett's Theory of Emerging Adulthood (2000; 2016), were included to place the focus of this study on the underlying processes which could contribute to young adults' development. Society has changed significantly over the past 70 years (consider, for instance, careers that shifted from hand labour to machine operation and technological advances such as methods of communication). Since some of the initial proposed developmental tasks of young adulthood (Havighurst, 1948) are observed to be delayed (such as rearing children), they were replaced by more relevant developmental tasks for individuals currently in the young adult developmental stage (Barzeva et al., 2021). From my literature review, it became apparent that several psychosocial developmental tasks individuals faced from infancy to young adulthood were found to contribute<sup>42</sup> to career-related behaviour. For instance, attachment, related to the trust-mistrust developmental crisis as discussed by Erikson (1968), was linked to individuals' career development, contributions to society, personal and occupational relationships, the exhibition of academic and career effectiveness, as well as competency, adaptability, and coping. It was established from my literature

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<sup>42</sup> Refer to section 2.5.5 for more detail.

review that the entire psychosocial developmental process contributes to (identity) integration, and the meaning individuals ascribe to their (career) lives (Erikson, 1968; Maree, 2020a).

Moreover, I noted connections between the normative features proposed by Arnett (2000, 2015a) and developmental tasks individuals faced as well as links between the normative features and the following three fundamental CCT-related constructs: vocational personality (Chávez, 2016; Del Corso et al., 2011b), career adaptability (Bynner, 2005; Hartung et al., 2008), and life themes (Del Corso et al., 2011b; Savickas, 2012a). I concluded that individuals' psychosocial development influences their career trajectories.

South African participants who found themselves in the young adult developmental stage with its characteristic developmental features (Arnett, 2000; 2015a) were the focus group of this study and I, therefore, investigated literature related to career counselling for young adults in the South African context including the current South African occupational climate, individual challenges such as career decision-making and access to career counselling. Several benefits<sup>43</sup> of career construction counselling applied in South Africa over the past 20 years (such as improved career adaptability, sense of self, decision-making, and so forth) were identified and discussed.

Lastly, promoting career adaptability (one of the key aims of the adapted life-design intervention implemented in this study) was examined as a point of reference to establish whether the change that occurred in this study was a result of the intervention. I emphasised the aspects of career adaptability (career concern, career control, career curiosity, and career confidence) and shortly touched on the chosen quantitative<sup>44</sup> and qualitative data gathering and intervention instruments utilised in this study in order to illustrate the manner in which they (instruments) could contribute to individuals' life design. I concluded with the conceptual framework of this study which includes Erikson's psychosocial developmental theory (1950), Bowlby's attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood (2000; 2015a), life-design counselling (comprised of self- and career construction theories), and Donald Super's life-span, life-space theory.

The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology used in the study.



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<sup>43</sup> Please refer to Table 2.4 for a complete list.

<sup>44</sup> Quantitative data was interpreted qualitatively in this study.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

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### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I aim to provide the reader with a comprehensive description of the research process and methodology that was followed to gather data which contributed to a deeper understanding of young adults' (with unmastered developmental tasks) experiences with regard to the implementation of an adapted life-design intervention. I start with a short discussion pertaining to this study's aims and objectives, after which an overview of the interpretivist-positivist paradigm is provided. The mixed-methods (QUALITATIVE-quantitative) case study research design employed in this study is described next as it was a defining factor in participant selection, data gathering methods (qualitative and quantitative), as well as methods of data analysis. Aspects that enhance this study's trustworthiness are described along with the relevant ethical considerations that were continuously adhered to during the research process. I conclude with the role of the researcher (as an active participant in this qualitative research).

### 3.2 RESEARCH AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary goal of this research was to investigate the influence of an adapted life-design intervention on the mastery of developmental tasks (such as career decision-making, career adaptability, career development, and career identity), and whether the life-design intervention implemented in this study could enhance the mastery of developmental tasks and/ or progression to subsequent developmental stages. In order to address the research questions, a mixed-methods (QUALITATIVE-quantitative)<sup>45</sup> case study approach was followed, allowing for a comprehensive and subjective understanding of participants' experiences during the adapted life-design intervention process. Gathering quantitative data<sup>46</sup> before and after the completion of the intervention allowed me to establish an initial point of reference for each participant in terms of their career adaptability, psychosocial development, and career interests and career confidences and the information gathered from the aforementioned instruments also served as a guide during intervention discussions. The adapted life-design intervention implemented in this study was tailored to suit young (emerging) adults and included conversations and tasks relevant to this developmental stage since the research intended to enhance participants' self-awareness concerning behavioural

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<sup>45</sup> The capital "qualitative" denotes the greater weight ascribed to this approach.

<sup>46</sup> The CAAS-SA, MEPSI, and MCM is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

patterns, underlying psychosocial and emotional needs, unmastered developmental tasks, and their influence on individuals' career lives.

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

### **3.2.1 Primary research question**

The primary research question emerged from the purpose and rationale of this study and is as follows:

How does life-design counselling influence young adults' mastery of unresolved developmental tasks and enable them to flourish in their career lives?

The secondary research questions, descriptive and exploratory, evolved from the primary research question and are stated below.

### **3.2.2 Secondary research questions**

#### **3.2.2.1 Descriptive questions**

- ❖ How can life-design counselling inform interventions to assist 10 young South African adults with unmastered developmental tasks?
- ❖ Which factors contribute to unmastered developmental tasks among these individuals?<sup>47</sup>

#### **3.2.2.2 Exploratory questions**

- ❖ What were the main differences between the pre- and post-intervention themes that emerged from the narrative data?
- ❖ How were young adults' unmastered developmental tasks influenced by the life-design intervention process?

The paradigm from which this research was conducted is elaborated on in the next section.

## **3.3 OVERVIEW OF INTERPRETIVIST-POSITIVIST PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE**

A paradigm consists of four elements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), namely epistemology (the nature and acquisition of knowledge and how it can be communicated to others), ontology (the underlying assumptions that guide the process of meaning-making), methodology (research design, methods, approaches, and procedures) and axiology (ethical issues) (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a). The paradigm or belief system which directed this research (Pickard, 2017) found expression

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<sup>47</sup> The exact words "10 young South African adults" are not repeated but should be assumed.

in a combination of the interpretivist and positivist (INTERPRETIVIST<sup>48</sup>-positivist) paradigms which included QUALITATIVE and quantitative research methods in a mixed-methods research design.

The interpretivist paradigm (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a) describes realities as multiple, subjective, socially constructed, holistic, rooted in context, influenced by time and role-players (participants and researchers), and as continuously changing (Pickard, 2017). Since individuals interpret similar experiences differently and construct unique meanings around their experiences, the aim of the researcher who works from the interpretivist paradigm is to understand and explain social reality through the multiple lenses of the participants by becoming involved in the research process (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a). My interest in the subjective experiences of young adults who faced developmental challenges, how these individuals socially constructed meaning from their contextual realities, as well as the possibility that the adapted life-design intervention implemented in this study could promote individuals' mastery of such developmental tasks through the construction of meaning, motivated the implementation of the interpretivist paradigm. The inclusion of the positivist paradigm emerged from the need to establish the progress and/or mastery of developmental challenges that followed from the adapted life-design counselling intervention, both before and after the study. The positivist paradigm views social research as objective, measurable, as well as free from bias and emotional attachment, and it emphasises that the hypothesis should be empirically validated (Du Plessis & Majam, 2010).

### **3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design of a study facilitates the movement of a research process from being purely theoretical toward the practical execution of the components (participant selection, data gathering, and data analysis) (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a). In this study, a mixed-methods case study design was implemented with the aim of answering the research questions.

#### **3.4.1 Mixed-methods case study design**

Whereas quantitative research allows the researcher to identify patterns and relationships between variables with the goal of generalising the findings, qualitative research aims to find a comprehensive and deep understanding of a phenomenon or individuals' experiences (Ivankova et al., 2019). Combining quantitative (numerical information) and qualitative methods (information in text format) in a mixed-methods design is assumed to contribute to a more comprehensive analysis and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Doyle et al., 2016; Ivankova et al., 2019;

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<sup>48</sup> The use of capital letters illustrates the weight and dominance of the interpretivist paradigm in comparison with the positivist paradigm.

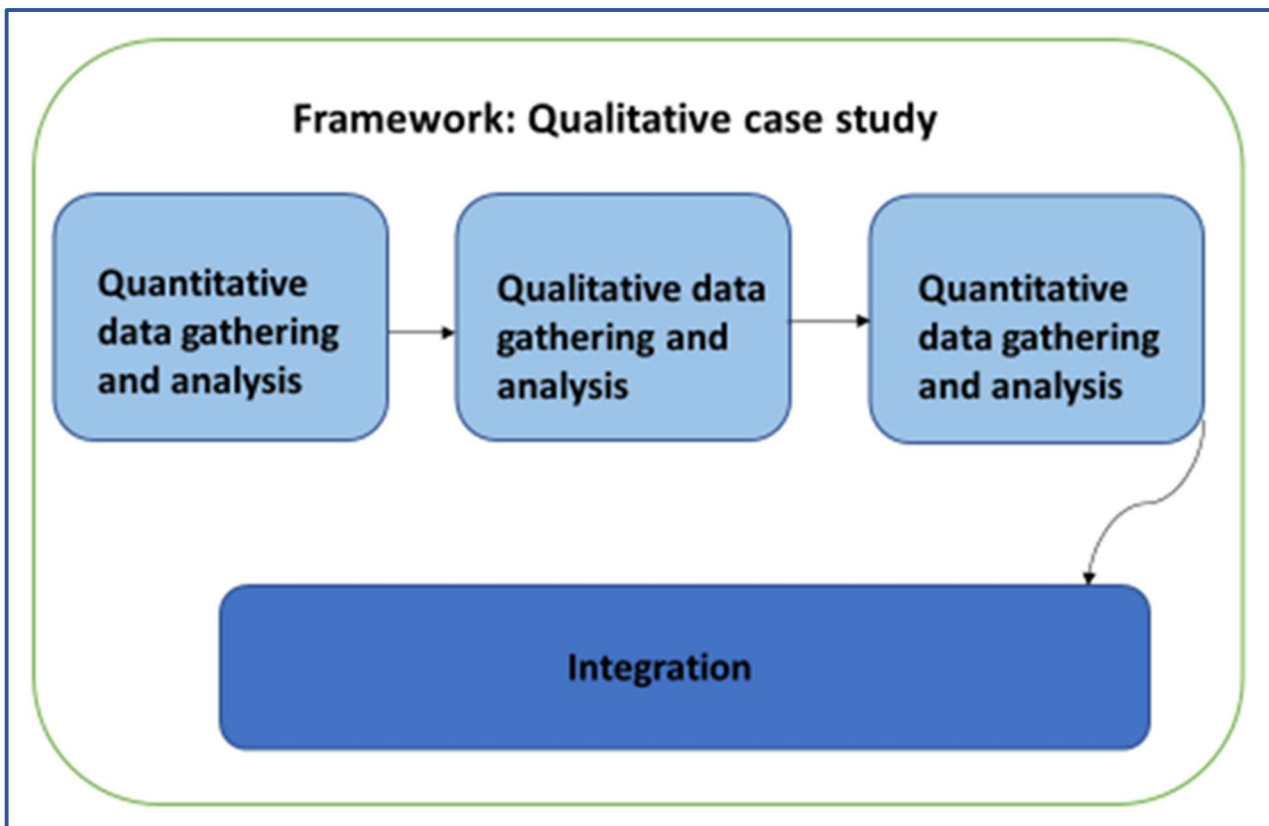
Kahwati & Kane, 2020). Mixed-method research studies, as is the case in this research, are implemented to enhance (1) *triangulation* (using multiple methods to investigate the same phenomenon contributes to the credibility of the research), (2) *complementarity* (the use of quantitative and qualitative data contributes to a deeper understanding of the research problem), (3) *development* (using the results of one method to inform the other method), (4) *initiation* (contradictions or questions can emerge from the findings which may lead to the initiation of other studies), and (5) *expansion* (aiming to expand the reach of the study by incorporating different methods) (Hesse-Biber, 2010).

Within a mixed-methods case study design, the case study provides a qualitative framework wherein the collection, analysis, and integration of qualitative and quantitative data can be executed (Ivankova et al., 2019). My study was a qualitative dominant mixed-methods study (QUALITATIVE-quantitative). As such, the qualitative data was considered the most important and the inclusion of the quantitative data allowed me to triangulate, complement, develop, and expand the findings (Hesse-Biber, 2010). The QUALITATIVE-quantitative mixed-methods case study research design enriched my understanding of the participants' subjective experiences as they pertained to the research questions. The quantifiable data which was gathered complemented the process by establishing a preliminary point from which the data could be analysed, and findings could be generalised (Ivankova et al., 2019). The mixed-methods case study design, therefore, facilitated the enactment of the specific intent of the study (provided essential contextual information), allowed for concurrent and/or sequential timing, and provided opportunities to mix and integrate data (through decisions, data gathering, analysis and interpretation) within the chosen qualitative framework (Ivankova et al., 2019).

Figure 3.1 illustrates the research design of this study.

**Figure 3.1**

*Complex mixed methods case study design*



According to Figure 3.1, the pre-intervention quantitative data-gathering assessment, together with the qualitative data-gathering and intervention, took place during individual sessions with participants.

A post-intervention group session was offered to all participants, but since their individual processes did not take place simultaneously, such a session was difficult to orchestrate. As such, individual post-intervention quantitative data-gathering assessments, facilitated by me, occurred **after** the completion of the qualitative data-gathering and intervention. The objectives of the pre- and post-quantitative assessments were (1) to establish qualitatively whether individual participants' scores on measures had changed from pre- to post-test assessment, and (2) to facilitate discussion of the participants' views concerning their experience of changes (or lack thereof) undergone. Interpretation and integration of quantitative and qualitative findings were performed after the final post-test assessment. The majority of data were obtained through qualitative assessment and data-gathering methods such as observations, individual semi-structured interviews, and the *CIP Version 7*<sup>49</sup> (Maree, 2017c). A substantial amount of data was also gathered

<sup>49</sup> The *Career Interest Profile Version 7* will be discussed in more detail under the section regarding qualitative assessment.

using quantitative techniques such as the *MCM*<sup>50</sup> (Maree & Taylor, 2016), *MEPSI* (Darling-Fischer et al., 1988) and the *CAAS-SA* (Maree, 2012). The specific qualitative and quantitative intervention measurements which were used in this study are discussed in the research methodology section to follow.

### 3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology involves the systematic approach and methods chosen by the researcher to implement in answering the research questions (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a). The following subsections will describe the different methodological aspects of this study.

#### 3.5.1 Sampling

I utilised purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique, in this mixed-methods case study which enhanced the probability of obtaining the goals and objectives of this study from a relatively small but specific sample of participants. This method (purposive sampling) furthermore ensured a manageable amount of data which benefitted the rigour and trustworthiness of the data and results (Ames et al., 2019; Campbell et al., 2020; Etikan et al., 2016). The criteria I adhered to when purposefully choosing participants were adapted from Nieuwenhuis (2019b) and are listed below:

- i. The sample was relevant to the conceptual framework and research questions asked.
- ii. The sample was likely to generate rich, subjective information with regard to the phenomenon under investigation.
- iii. The sample was expected to enhance the transferability of the findings.
- iv. The sample was likely to provide credible descriptions and explanations.
- v. Ethical preconditions were considered.
- vi. The sample was feasible in terms of money, time, and accessibility.

I selected 10 participants for participation in my study who were expected to benefit from the life-design counselling intervention. The selection criteria included the following:

- ❖ An invitation to participate in a life-design counselling process was extended to young adults between the ages of 17 and 29.
- ❖ Participants' positive responses to the invitation were seen as a need for career counselling and were considered a possible indication of unmastered developmental tasks in them as young

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<sup>50</sup> The *Maree Career Matrix* will be discussed later under the section pertaining to quantitative assessment.

adults. This study did not include individuals who were not willing to and/or capable of communicating about their personal unmastered developmental tasks.

- ❖ Participants were expected to be enrolled as students at either a secondary or tertiary educational institution in Stellenbosch and/or residing in Stellenbosch since the location was convenient for the researcher and participants.
- ❖ Participants needed to be literate and have sufficient verbal ability to contribute constructively to and also to benefit personally from the study.
- ❖ Participants needed to commit themselves to participate in the proposed study for between eight and 10 weeks.
- ❖ Participants were responsible for their transportation to a suitable venue where the contact sessions took place.

Table 3.1 provides the description of each participant.

**Table 3.1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Participants*

PARTICIPANT	DESCRIPTIVE					
	Age	Gender	Mother tongue	Ethnicity	Highest qualification	Occupation
Participant 1	22	Female	Afrikaans	Caucasian	Grade 12	Student
Participant 2	29	Male	Afrikaans	Caucasian	Grade 12 as well as certificates in IT	Software developer
Participant 3	29	Male	Afrikaans	Caucasian	Diesel Mechanic	Diesel mechanic and farm hand
Participant 4	24	Female	English	Caucasian	BA Psychology (Hons)	Au pair Lay counsellor
Participant 5	24	Male	English	Caucasian	BA Psychology (Hons)	General worker
Participant 6	19	Female	Afrikaans	Caucasian	Grade 12	Student ballet dancer
Participant 7	17	Female	Afrikaans	Coloured	Grade 11	Learner
Participant 8	22	Male	Afrikaans	Coloured	Grade 12 and Diploma in Creative Design	Unemployed
Participant 9	21	Female	English	Caucasian	Grade 12	Unemployed
Participant 10	26	Female	Afrikaans	Caucasian	BTech (Hons)	Student

The next section discusses the data-gathering process that was followed.

### 3.5.2 Data-gathering process

Table 3.2 illustrates the data-gathering process implemented in this study with the aim of exploring the implementation of an adapted life-design counselling intervention for young adults with unmastered developmental tasks.

**Table 3.2**

#### *Data-Gathering Process*

DATA GENERATION SEQUENCE	PLANNED ACTIVITIES
Session 1 (individual)	Orientation and welcome Completion of <i>CAAS-SA, MEPSI, MCM</i>
Session 2 (individual)	Administration of CIP Part 1 and 2 and related discussions
Session 3 (individual)	Administration of CIP Part 3 and 4 and related discussions
Session 4 (individual)	Lifeline
Session 5 (individual)	Genogram
Session 6 (individual)	Collage
Session 7 (Individual)	Completion of <i>CAAS-SA, MEPSI, MCM</i> and informal feedback
Session 8 (Individual)	Follow-up

### 3.5.3 Data-gathering methods

The mixed-methods case study research design utilised in this study implies a predominantly qualitative focus, allowing for themes and sub-themes to emerge primarily from qualitative data. Quantitative data contributed in terms of the depth and richness of the data.

#### **3.5.3.1 Qualitative data gathering**

The manner in which qualitative data were gathered is summarised in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3**
*Qualitative Data-Gathering Techniques and Instruments Utilised in this Study*

DATA-GATHERING TECHNIQUES	INSTRUMENTS	MOTIVATION
Observations	Field notes Researcher's journal Audio-recordings	Non-verbal communication is an essential part of communication and necessitated the recording of participants' appearance, behaviour, mannerisms, significant or repetitive non-verbal cues, tone of voice, and speaking rhythms with the aim of triangulation with data gathered from other instruments.
Interviews and conversations	Audio-recordings Verbatim transcriptions	Recordings and transcriptions were used as qualitative data sources for the identification of categories, themes, and sub-themes during data analysis and to confirm the accuracy of the data in reflective conversations with the participants.
Questionnaires	<i>Career Interest Profile</i> version 7 <sup>51</sup> ( <i>CIP v7</i> ) (Maree, 2017c; 2020f)	Participants' responses from the <i>CIP</i> were used as a guideline for gathering additional qualitative data during interviews. This ensured that conversations remained focused on the life-design counselling process and distractions were minimised. Categories, themes, and sub-themes identified from the gathered qualitative data were utilised to enhance the triangulation of data and contributed to a deeper and richer understanding of the participants' subjective experiences during the life-design counselling intervention.
Educational psychological interventions (life-design counselling techniques)	Lifeline Collage Genogram	<p>Life-design counselling techniques comprise a variety of post-modern career counselling methods as well as the techniques included in the <i>CIP Version 7</i> (Maree, 2020f). Records were kept of all methods used and the visual and written data were used to identify categories, themes, and sub-themes, which enhanced triangulation during data analysis.</p> <p><b>Lifelines</b> assist individuals in ordering their personal history in terms of significant positive and negative events (or prominent people) from birth to the present day so that they can identify developmental tasks, strengths, successes, and themes that emerge from their lives (Cook &amp; Maree, 2016; Fritz &amp; Van Zyl, 2015). These significant experiences were discussed, and participants were encouraged to reflect and take note of emerging patterns and/or themes.</p> <p><b>Collages</b> assist individuals in generating and constructing life stories and/or elaborating on aspects of their inner stories (Amundson &amp; Smith, 2015) – thus influencing individuals' narratability and, subsequently, life design. Participants were requested to make a collage of "I am..." on one A4 sheet of paper using pictures, textures, words, or colours.</p> <p><b>Genograms</b> (Stead &amp; Davis, 2015, p. 23) portray information regarding individuals' "families, life experiences, histories, environmental barriers, and backgrounds". The rationale of this three-generation diagram is that individuals' understanding of their pasts contributes to increased self-awareness in the present, and then influences the construction of future selves and career trajectories (Di Fabio, 2015; Shefer &amp; McMahan, 2018; Wood &amp; Scully, 2016) – thus contributing to career adaptability, narratability, action and intentionality.</p>

*i. The Career Interest Profile (CIP) as a qualitative questionnaire*

The *Career Interest Profile (CIP) Version 7* (Maree, 2020f; 2021b) was developed in South Africa from the developmental, differential, and storied approaches (Maree et al., 2022) and is a semi-structured, qualitative interview grounded in career construction theory (Savickas, 2005). This instrument (*CIP v7*) allows individuals to reflect and meta-reflect on their interests, dislikes, values, and life stories, and to become aware of themes and patterns in their lives through which they can co-construct a new narrative with the insights they have gained during their career construction process (JvR Africa Group, 2023; Maree, 2020f; 2022). The sub-sections (Parts 1 to 4) have been compiled in such a manner that individuals are able to identify their primary career-life themes, career interests, issues, and concerns and so that their inner wisdom regarding the challenges they are experiencing is likely to emerge (Di Fabio & Maree, 2013; Maree, 2019c). The career interests offered in the *CIP* are considered relatively stable over time and the career categories included in this instrument correlate well with the categories from other career interest questionnaires (Beukes & Taylor, 2019). The *CIP* contents are summarised below in Table 3.4.

**Table 3.4**

*Description of the Career Interest Profile (CIP) version 7*

PART	NUMBER OF QUESTIONS	INFORMATION GATHERED	CAREER COUNSELLING PARADIGM	THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
1	Four	Biographical details Family influences Working details	Career education	Developmental
2	Five	Three most preferred career choices and reasons. Three least preferred career choices and reasons.	Vocational guidance	Differential
3	One	A maximum of six preferred career categories (in order of preference) from a total of 19 career categories.	Vocational guidance	Differential
4	Section A (one) Section B (13) Section C (two)	Narrative questions focussed on the elicitation of themes from individuals' personal life and career stories.	Career counselling	Differential and storied

*Note.* Adapted from Di Fabio and Maree (2013); Maree (2019c, 2021b).

Although the general steps employed to enhance the trustworthiness of this study are only discussed in section 3.6, the suitability of the *CIP* as a trustworthy qualitative instrument is explained in Table 3.5.

**Table 3.5**

*Strategies Implemented to Enhance the Trustworthiness (comprised of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) of the CIP version 7*

ENHANCING THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE <i>CIP</i>		
CRITERIA	STRATEGY	DESCRIPTION
Credibility	Extended fieldwork, literature reviews, and observations	The <i>CIP</i> was the product of extensive research and literature reviews pertaining to the career life story. This instrument continues to be adapted as new information or needs arise.
	Member check	Pilot studies emphasised necessary adaptations to the language and phrases included in the questionnaire as well as whether the career categories were appropriate.
	Triangulation	The <i>CIP</i> was distributed for local and international implementation and feedback from these sessions and expert opinions were incorporated into the adaptation of narrative questions.
Transferability	Avoidance of subjective interpretation	The researcher aimed to be as objective as possible during data gathering and analysis.
	Detailed and thick descriptions	The participants and the data-gathering contexts were thoroughly described in order to enhance the evaluation of the findings.
	Avoided conclusions	The researchers were cautious to avoid generalisations.
Dependability	Peer examinations	Colleagues were requested to confirm the congruence between the data and the findings.
	Audit trail	The research process included a thorough account of the data-gathering process, identification of themes, and decision-making.
	Triangulation	Data was gathered from multiple sources.
Confirmability	Evaluation and validation by participants	The participants were requested to review the information obtained from interviews as well as data analysis throughout the process.
	Avoidance of researcher's bias	The researchers were conscious of possible researcher bias and attempted to represent the participants' responses and avoid their own projections.

*Note.* Compiled from Di Fabio and Maree (2013); JvR (Maree, 2017c); Maree (2019c, 2021b)

### 3.5.3.2 Quantitative data gathering instruments

The data gathered from the quantitative instruments implemented in this study were included to complement the qualitative data and were therefore interpreted qualitatively. The following three questionnaires were considered appropriate quantitative measures to be used before and after the intervention.

#### i. *Maree Career Matrix (MCM)*

The *Maree Career Matrix (MCM)* is a South African interest inventory based on trait-factor theory, developmental theory, and social learning theory grounded in social cognitive career theory (Maree, 2019c). This instrument (*MCM*) measures individuals' interest in career fields, as well as their self-estimation of confidence in their aptitude for specific career fields (Ferreira & Morgan, 2019; Maree & Taylor, 2016) and consists of 19 career categories which offer eight careers in each category to render a total list of 152 occupations (Maree, 2019c). The development of the *MCM* was the culmination of a more than decade-long investigation comprising six application phases into career categories which were considered representative of the world of occupations. An extensive literature review was initially conducted on career interests and career categories, pilot studies were subsequently executed, and feedback from local and international university experts was requested before this instrument was administered for standardisation purposes. It was only after the sixth application phase that the data could be analysed and interpreted (Ferreira & Morgan, 2019; Maree & Taylor, 2016). The reliability of the *MCM* was established through its administration to a diverse population of 1106 Grade 11 learners from Gauteng, Mpumalanga, and North-West provinces. All of these participants had an English or Afrikaans proficiency of at least Grade 9 level and slightly more girls than boys completed the questionnaire. Although most individuals who completed the questionnaire were either first-language Setswana, English, Sepedi or Afrikaans speakers, other languages spoken in South Africa were represented (Maree & Taylor, 2016). The concurrent validity of the *MCM* was demonstrated by the administration of the *CIP* and the *Rothwell-Miller Interest Blank (RMIB)* (Miller et al., 1994) along with the *MCM* (Ferreira & Morgan, 2019). A few years later, Ferreira and Morgan (2019) investigated the administration of the *MCM* to a sample of 117 adults and the results from this study provided support for the *MCM*'s validity and reliability when administered to adults.

The *MCM* was included in this research because it comprises an inventory of contemporary career interests and categories, is easily administered individually or in groups, is time efficient,

standardised, and renders valid and reliable results for relatively diverse groups of people (adolescents, adults, language, culture) (Beukes & Taylor, 2019; Ferreira & Morgan, 2019; Maree & Taylor, 2016). Upon completion, this inventory provides a unique profile for the individual involved, as it distinguishes between careers associated with the following interest and confidence levels: high interest-high confidence; high interest-low confidence; low interest-high confidence; low interest-low confidence. In addition to the interest-confidence combinations for each career field, this profile provides ample opportunity for a qualitative investigation into whether individuals have had sufficient exposure to occupations in which they present with high or low confidence and/or interest levels, the motivation behind higher and lower interest and confidence levels, as well as individuals' perceptions of their own abilities. The *MCM* was considered fitting to establish a starting point for my study since unmastered developmental tasks were expected to manifest in career indecision and a lack of career confidence (Pinquart & Pfeiffer, 2020; Wright & Perrone, 2008). The pre-test and post-test profiles were compared to each other qualitatively, and changes between participants' pre- and post-test interest-confidence levels were documented and used to confirm themes and sub-themes as well as to triangulate with other quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the process.

ii. *The Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (MEPSI)*

The *Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (MEPSI)* (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988) is an 80-item self-report questionnaire designed to explore the progression of adults through the eight psychosocial developmental stages of Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory. The *MEPSI* utilises a rating system on a point scale of 1 to 5 (Barnfather & Ronis, 2000). Higher points (4 and 5) are associated with more positive attributes and successful psychosocial maturation while lower scores (1 and 2) are indicative of negative attributes and a lack of psychosocial mastery (Barnfather & Ronis, 2000). Research has shown this psychosocial development inventory (*MEPSI*) to be reliable (aggregate scores of between 0.89 – 0.99), valid, and relatively stable across diverse populations (adolescents, young adults, adults, LGBT issues, adults with chronic illnesses, parents) and fields (such as nursing, psychology, social work, criminal justice, and religious studies) (Darling-Fisher, 2019; Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988; Leidy & Darling-Fisher, 1995; Nassida, 2019) and was therefore considered a fitting instrument to measure the psychosocial development of the diverse young adult South African population. To my knowledge, the *MEPSI* has not been implemented in the South African context to this date, which could be a limitation of this study. The inclusion of the *MEPSI* in this study allowed the researcher to obtain a quantitative indication of the participants'

psychosocial development, both before and after the adapted life-design counselling intervention. The results were once again used qualitatively to determine whether a change occurred or not, and the information gained enhanced the researcher's understanding of the influence of the life-design counselling intervention on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks.

### *iii. Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS)*

The third quantitative instrument included in this study was the South African *Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS-SA)* which measures career adaptability - a psychosocial construct which refers to the psychosocial resources that influence individuals' social integration when they are confronted with developmental tasks, transitions, and traumas related to their vocations (Nye et al., 2018). This instrument was standardised by Maree (2012) and found appropriate for implementation in the South African context after some adaptation to the questionnaire, instructions, and layout (Albien et al., 2019; Maree, 2012). The *CAAS-SA* has since been used extensively in South Africa (Albien et al., 2019; Maree, 2019c; Beukes & Taylor, 2019). The *CAAS* is a 24-item multi-factoral self-measuring instrument which measures career adaptability on a Likert-type scale from 1 (not strong) to 5 (strong). This instrument (*CAAS*) was developed in collaboration with a team of psychologists and is comprised of four scales consisting of six questions each that respectively measure (career) concern, (career) control, (career) curiosity, and (career) confidence (Cook & Maree, 2016; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). The *CAAS* was validated in 13 countries (including the United States, Belgium, France, and China). The instrument was standardised for use on South African populations by Maree (2012). Maree's (2012) sample yielded excellent reliability (the subscales correlated with the adaptability total score from 0.79 to 0.93), satisfactory factor structure, internal consistency estimates for the four subscales, and adequate cross-national measurement equivalence (Albien et al., 2019; Beukes & Taylor, 2019; Maree, 2012, 2019; Mazahreh et al., 2019; Nye et al., 2018; Prasad et al., 2021; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

As mentioned above, the *CAAS* provides separate measures for each of the four career dimensions (concern, control, curiosity, and confidence) (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012) and was therefore used as a pre-test instrument to evaluate participants' initial career adaptability with regard to these dimensions as well as a post-test evaluation to establish any possible influence or the effect of the adapted life-design intervention.

The inclusion of the aforementioned quantitative measures enriched the data gathered qualitatively and enhanced the integration of themes and sub-themes that emerged while also

allowing for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences during the intervention. The process of data analysis is unpacked in more detail in the following section.

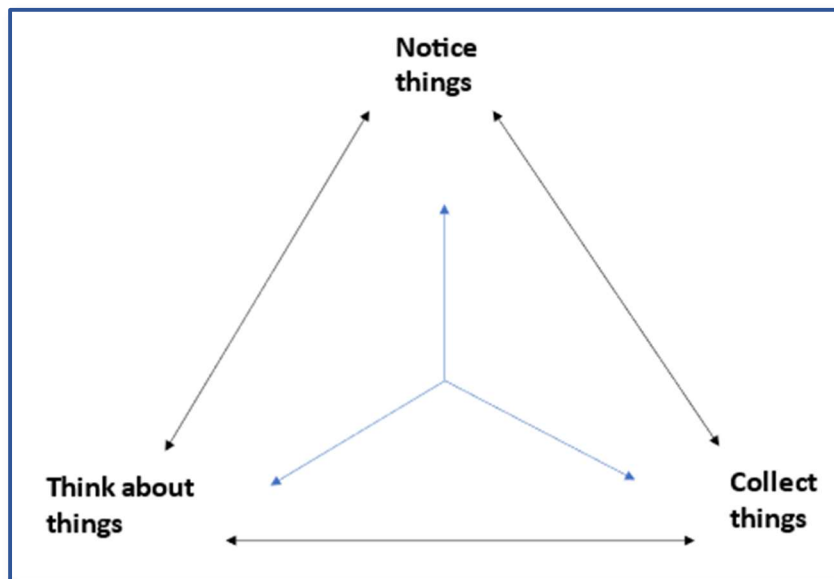
### 3.5.4 Data analysis

#### 3.5.4.1 Qualitative data analysis

Since the focus of this qualitative research was to obtain a comprehensive, subjective, and holistic understanding of young adults' (with unmastered developmental tasks) experiences of an adapted life-design intervention, data gathering, processing, analysis, and reporting were interwoven, ongoing, and non-linear rather than sequential in nature (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). As the researcher, I revisited data (quantitative and qualitative) throughout the research process and re-engaged and reflected along with participants whenever uncertainties or new themes arose from the analysis and from the data gathered. Figure 3.2 illustrates the qualitative data analysis process (Seidel, 1998) I implemented in this study.

**Figure 3.2**

*The data analysis process*



*Note.* Adapted from Seidel (1998)

Figure 3.2 demonstrates the interrelated data analysis process I followed in this study. At the onset of the study, I was mainly concerned with developmental theories regarding unmastered developmental tasks and the possible influence of these tasks on young adults' career development. Interventions which could potentially facilitate the resolution of these developmental challenges also intrigued me. I subsequently planned and employed a complex mixed-methods case study

design<sup>52</sup> and gathered quantitative and qualitative data in order to provide a broad and deep understanding of my interest in this topic. During initial data gathering, I noticed behavioural patterns and coping styles that participants employed when confronted with conversations regarding their personal and career development. The observations I made stimulated more thoughts regarding connections and motivations between unmastered developmental tasks, contexts, and career development and motivated me to return to participants and gather more data. This process repeated itself throughout the intervention phase of my study and I only stopped gathering data when no new themes and sub-themes emerged. To improve the quality of data analysis in this study, I used the general steps proposed by Nieuwenhuis (2019b, pp. 134-143) as summarised in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6**

*Qualitative Data Analysis Steps Followed in this Study*

DATA ANALYSIS STEPS	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES
Step 1: Preparation of data	<p>I described the sample and participants in detail (including their age, gender, occupation, education, marital status, and context) without compromising their anonymity and confidentiality.</p> <p>The data were organised systematically. Participants and the data gathered from them were identified and marked by unique pseudonyms. The data gathered from participants were stored individually in marked files.</p> <p>All data gathered from audio recordings and conversations were transcribed verbatim by me to ensure that it was complete and that non-verbal behaviours were included. Transcriptions simplified access to information. Afrikaans conversations were translated into English<sup>53</sup> with the assistance of ChatGPT.<sup>54</sup></p> <p>I familiarised myself with the data by reading through it several times and listening to audio recordings of the interactions repeatedly and systematically to immerse myself in the information. Continuously engaging with the data allowed me to make notes of my impressions (memoing) which supplemented my researcher's journal as new thoughts, insights, or ideas surfaced.</p>

<sup>52</sup> Please refer to Figure 3.1 on p. 58 for a diagrammatical representation of the research design implemented in this study.

<sup>53</sup> Although the translated versions of the transcriptions differed slightly from the original text, great care was taken to retain the original meaning.

<sup>54</sup> The University of Pretoria allows students to use ChatGP for language editing and related purposes.

DATA ANALYSIS STEPS	DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES
<p>Step 2: Coding the data</p>	<p>As I studied the data, meaningful units of information emerged and were marked with a unique code, colour, and label (emergent coding). All the meaningful units were also listed on a master list. Coding the data enhanced retrieval and collection of text and data associated with themes or sub-themes.</p> <p>Themes and units of information which were shared by participants but seemed unrelated to the study were put in a separate folder as it could possibly shed light on certain aspects of the study.</p> <p>Axial coding was employed to make sense of the connections between the different categories which emerged from the different data sources, and which could enhance my understanding of the phenomenon studied. I requested an external coder to ensure that my inferences were valid and to enhance stability (intra-coder reliability) and reproducibility (inter-coder reliability).</p>
<p>Step 3: Establishing categories, themes, and sub-themes</p>	<p>The main categories (commonality in content) which emerged from the coded data were identified and named.</p> <p>From the main categories, themes and sub-themes that emerged were identified and each category, theme, and sub-theme was defined to simplify data analysis and interpretation. The categories (along with the themes and sub-themes) were placed in a hierarchical system to illustrate the strengths, patterns, and relationships between the themes and sub-themes.</p>
<p>Step 4: Interpreting the data</p>	<p>I made sense of the data by following the rule of essential sufficiency in finding the simplest way to describe the phenomenon fully.</p> <p>In order to enhance the credibility and enrich the understanding of the findings, I employed reflexivity by describing the contexts in which the relationships between participants and myself intersected (Dodgson, 2019; Flick, 2014).</p> <p>I identified emerging patterns, relationships, concepts, and explanations from qualitative and quantitative data and connected them with existing theories to enhance my understanding of the phenomenon.</p> <p>The multiple data-gathering instruments, methods, theories, and combinations of research activities included in this study provided a richer picture and explanation of the phenomenon through triangulation.</p> <p>The data gathered in this study was validated by a thorough and transparent trail of research decisions and interpretations.</p> <p>I used the findings from the integrated data as well as triangulation with my literature review and the conceptual framework of this study to reach conclusions.</p>

*Note.* Adapted from Nieuwenhuis (2019b)

Analysing the data qualitatively allowed the researcher to make sense of the participants' collective experiences during this study. Several patterns emerged and the themes and sub-themes that were identified were justified by the data. In an attempt to enhance the systematic analysis

and transparency of this qualitative data analysis process, Atlas.ti<sup>55</sup> version 23.3.1 (Atlas.ti, 2023) software was utilised and is described shortly in the next paragraph.

#### **3.5.4.2 Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS)**

Atlas.ti is Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) which has been shown to support in-depth data analysis and stimulate thoughts and reflections about data (Niedbalsk & Slezak, 2021; Paulus & Lester, 2016). Atlas.ti was not used as the primary tool for data analysis in this study but merely aided the process by improving the management of the data, contributing to a transparent audit trail, enabling the researcher to easily revisit codes and become aware of co-occurring themes, and identifying links between different codes and themes (Silver & Lewins, 2014).

Anonymous data gathered from the participants (verbatim transcripts and images of collages, genograms, and lifelines) were uploaded to the software, whereafter suitable codes were allocated to data sections (called quotations) (Dr USP, 2024). The code allocation, defined by specific inclusion and exclusion criteria,<sup>56</sup> allowed the researcher to establish themes and sub-themes from the codes and code groups, the latter of which emerged from the codes. The data documents were separately categorised into document groups which enabled the analysis of session-specific and participant-specific themes (Dr USP, 2024).

In the following section, I elaborate on the strategies which were implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

### **3.6 RIGOUR OF THE STUDY (TRUSTWORTHINESS AND QUALITY ASSURANCE)**

It was essential to establish reliability and validity across the quantitative and qualitative data sets gathered during this study. Reliability refers to the achievement of similar or consistent results when an instrument is used in different contexts with different participants, whereas validity entails the extent to which an instrument measures what it is intended to (Pietersen & Maree, 2019). The attainment of reliability and validity in quantitative and qualitative data differ and is discussed below.

#### **3.6.1 Reliability and validity of quantitative data**

Although I utilised three quantitative measures in this study namely the *Maree Career Matrix (MCM)*, the *Modified Erikson Psychosocial Inventory (MEPSI)*, and the *Career Adapt-abilities Scale*

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<sup>55</sup> ATLAS.TI stands for 'Archiv für Technik, Lebenswelt und Alltagssprache' (Archive for Technology, te Life World and Everyday Language. The extension 'ti' stands for 'text interpretation.' (Friese, 2019, p. xvi)

<sup>56</sup> The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the themes which emerged from this data will be described in Chapter 4.

(CAAS-SA), the results obtained from these measures were analysed qualitatively with the sole purpose of enhancing my understanding of young adults' (with unmastered developmental tasks) experiences of an adapted life-design intervention. The *MCM*, *MEPSI*, and *CAAS-SA* were deemed appropriate for implementation in the diverse South African context as a result of their excellent reliability and validity (as discussed in depth in section 3.5.3.2) and were used as standardised pre-intervention and post-intervention measurements to establish qualitatively whether a change occurred in terms of individuals' career interests- and confidences (*MCM*), psychosocial developmental stage (*MEPSI*), and career adaptability (*CAAS-SA*).

### **3.6.2 Trustworthiness of qualitative data**

Since qualitative research is subjective and descriptive in nature, reaching measurable objectives in terms of reliability and validity is close to impossible. Pursuing trustworthiness in qualitative research has been offered as an alternative (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b) to establish whether readers can be confident about the quality and rigour of the researcher, the data-gathering instruments and processes, data analysis, and findings (Loseke, 2017; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). The criteria that contribute to the trustworthiness of a study are briefly discussed next.

#### **3.6.2.1 Credibility**

Qualitative research is considered credible when the research findings are perceived to be accurate and believable. The assumption that underlies credible findings is that the entire research process can be trusted, which includes the implementation of a suitable research design, a sound theoretical framework, and well-established research methods (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b).

#### **3.6.2.2 Transferability**

Since qualitative research focuses on the broader understanding of participants' subjective experiences of a phenomenon, it is very difficult for qualitative findings to be generalised to other settings, as is the case in quantitative research (Connelly, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) contend that the allure of the transferability of qualitative findings lies in the commonalities and connections that exist between the reader and the participants, as well as the usefulness of the findings for individuals in other settings (Connelly, 2016).

### **3.6.3 Dependability**

Dependability can be described as the consistency of data over time as well as over the conditions of the study (Connelly, 2016), which will ensure that others can follow my reasoning as a researcher and that the study can be repeated (Chowdhury, 2015).

### **3.6.4 Confirmability**

Although the researcher's contribution is considered essential during the construction of meaning in qualitative research, it is necessary to establish that the data gathered, and the conclusions drawn are as neutral as possible and have been discussed with and clarified by the participants. Confirmability entails the neutrality of the data and ideally excludes any bias, motivation, or interest from the researcher (Chowdhury, 2015; Connelly, 2016; Nieuwenhuis, 2019c). Qualitative researchers acknowledge that they are subjectively involved in their research since their experiences are in fact considered research resources (Holloway & Biley, 2011). The challenge for qualitative researchers remains to be aware (mindful) and sensitive to their involvement and the feelings that may be elicited internally (Collins & Cooper, 2014) in order to present evidence-based and meaningful research (Holloway & Biley, 2011) rather than to become encompassed by the intensity of the participants' experiences. Emotional reflexivity, the process of critically reflecting on one's "biases, theoretical predispositions, and preferences", can aid the research process by facilitating the researcher's implicit experiences to be communicated explicitly (Collins & Cooper, 2014, p 89) and enrich the data which is communicated.

The strategies that were employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the qualitative data gathered in this study are explained in Table 3.7.

**Table 3.7**
*Methods Implemented to Enhance the Trustworthiness of the Qualitative Data Gathered in this Study*

TRUSTWORTHINESS	METHODS TO BE APPLIED	DESCRIPTION
Credibility	Participants' review of their interaction with the researcher	The reflective journal, which is a record of my interactions, observations, and experiences with the participants, served as a reference for readers to understand my reasoning as a researcher (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). Participants were offered the opportunity to comment on these comments and inferences in order to confirm the accuracy of my perspectives (Connelly, 2016; Chowdhury, 2015).
	Verbatim accounts	All verbal interactions were transcribed, and thus offered an authentic account of the participants' responses (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b).
	A clear statement of limitations	The limitations of this study were discussed beforehand to enhance the participants' understanding of what the research entailed.
	Auditing and checking of coded data	As a researcher, I obtained the assistance of an external coder to ensure intercoding reliability <sup>57</sup> (i.e. the coded data is a true representation of the raw data (O'Conner & Joffe, 2020)).
Transferability	Inferences were made only when there was sufficient evidence to substantiate claims	I aimed, as a researcher, to provide rich and detailed descriptions of the context, location and the participants being studied, as well as a transparent data analysis process (Connelly, 2016; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b). These descriptions enhanced the coding process, which in turn provided support for the findings.

<sup>57</sup> Intercoding reliability (ICR) refers to a numerical measure of agreement between different coders regarding the coding of the same data (O'Conner & Joffe., 2020).

TRUSTWORTHINESS	METHODS TO BE APPLIED	DESCRIPTION
Dependability	<p>A verbatim recording of responses</p> <p>Specialist checking</p> <p>Triangulation</p> <p>External coder</p>	<p>All qualitative information gathered was included, as data and verbal interactions were transcribed verbatim.</p> <p>To enhance critical interpretation, the analysed data was checked by my supervisor, Professor J.G. Maree (internationally acclaimed researcher).</p> <p>Multiple data-gathering instruments were incorporated into this study as discussed in section 3.5.3.</p> <p>An external coder (a registered psychologist with many years of experience) was used to re-check the data and to safeguard against bias.</p>
Confirmability	<p>Journals</p> <p>Mechanical recording of data</p> <p>Expert evaluation</p> <p>Extended fieldwork</p> <p>Triangulation of findings</p> <p>Acknowledgement of the researcher's beliefs and assumptions</p>	<p>All the data gathered and interpreted was documented comprehensively.</p> <p>Audio recorders were utilised during all data-gathering sessions and interventions to provide a detailed account of research events.</p> <p>Professor J.G. Maree, my supervisor, was consulted as an expert during all phases of this study.</p> <p>The study was conducted over an extended period of between two and three months.</p> <p>The use of several data-gathering instruments (quantitative as well as qualitative) enhanced the triangulation of findings.</p> <p>My beliefs and assumptions as well as their influence on data gathering and data analysis were discussed in order to limit any bias (Chowdhury, 2015; Connelly, 2016).</p>

### 3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Maree (2019a) contends that the most important principle in research, which should be at the heart of every phase, is to uphold the best interests (i.e. welfare and safety) of all participants. Given the subjective and personal nature of the mixed-methods research design applied in this study, it was vital for me as the researcher to be aware of ethical challenges that could arise during the process. Ethical principles that were adhered to in this study are the following (Maree, 2019a; Sanjari et al., 2014):

- ❖ **Obtaining informed consent:** All participants in the study were requested to provide informed consent. The informed consent document clearly indicated the goals of the research, the nature of the procedures and intervention, possible advantages, and disadvantages of participation in the study, as well as provided my credentials as a researcher. This information was explained in plain language and at a level understandable to all participants.
- ❖ **Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality:** The real identity of the participants was kept confidential and not revealed to any unauthorised person during any phase of the research or thereafter. Codes and descriptive pseudonyms were used instead.
- ❖ **Guaranteeing the right to withdraw:** All participants were informed about their right to withdraw from the research at any stage should they wish not to continue.
- ❖ **Managing the researcher's influence on the participants:** Every possible precaution was taken to ensure participants' autonomy, promote their well-being, and avoid any possible harm. To ensure this, I needed to be aware of the different roles that I played and have regular contact sessions with my supervisor for guidance.
- ❖ **Displaying the utmost respect and consideration:** I followed standard procedures in detail, informed participants about the usage and safekeeping of their data and destroyed any unused data. The participants' journals were returned to them, and their data was communicated to them to ensure the accuracy of my interpretation and avoid the misinterpretation of qualitative data.
- ❖ **Managing the potential impact of the research on the participants:** In the event of adverse reactions or the discovery of controversial events in participants' lives, I handled the situation with due compassion and sensitivity. When deemed necessary, and after consultation with the participant, I referred them to a registered psychologist with many years of experience situated in Stellenbosch (Ms Tania du Toit (Med Educational Psychology)) for therapeutic intervention.

- ❖ **Ensuring social value:** I will strive to use the research findings in a way that benefits and promotes the best interests of society.

Qualitative data revolves around the subjective and personal experiences of participants about life events and experiences (Sanjari et al., 2014). I consider it a great privilege to have been invited and allowed into their stories and took the utmost care to handle this valuable and sensitive content with the respect that it deserves – keeping the aforementioned guidelines in mind.

### **3.8 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER**

The researcher plays a pivotal role in qualitative research. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2003), the researcher is viewed as a data-gathering instrument in the process, while Maree (2019a) describes the researcher as a partner who collaborates with the participants. Not only does the researcher gather and analyse data, but they are also observers and facilitators who make fieldnotes and generate additional questions while delving deeper into the phenomenon under investigation (Maree, 2019a). It is therefore essential to take note of any significant assumptions, biases, expectations, or experiences of researchers, all of which may contribute to and/or influence the data-gathering process and study findings (Simon, 2011).

In this study, I performed the following important tasks:

- ❖ I planned the research thoroughly to minimise distractions and avoid unwanted stressors for the participants and myself.
- ❖ I ensured that I was well-prepared and competent with regard to the various data-gathering instruments implemented in this study and able to engage fully with the process and participants.
- ❖ I was transparent about the process and purpose of the study and my role as a researcher.
- ❖ I obtained informed consent from the participants and emphasised that sessions would be recorded.
- ❖ I created a comfortable and emotionally safe environment that was conducive to therapeutic intervention so that participants could focus on the questionnaires and interactions and share their thoughts and experiences freely.
- ❖ I administered and analysed quantitative psychometric instruments as well as qualitative data-gathering instruments.
- ❖ I prepared and conducted qualitative interviews in a competent and professional manner.

- ❖ I analysed and interpreted the data according to prescribed methods while remaining aware of my personal bias through reflexive<sup>58</sup> analysis.
- ❖ I provided opportunities for the participants to review the data, clear up misunderstandings, and ensure the correct interpretation of findings.
- ❖ I ensured that a strict ethical standard (as set by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) and the ethical guidelines stipulated in the Ethics and Research Statement of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria) was maintained throughout the research process.

### 3.9 CONCLUSION

The research design and methodology of a study provide a road map towards the researcher's ultimate goal which, in this study, was to obtain a richer and more nuanced understanding of young adults' (with unmastered developmental tasks) experiences of an adapted life-design intervention. In this chapter, the aims and objectives of the research were examined by addressing the research questions posed. The reader was introduced to the interpretivist-positivist paradigm which provided the direction for this study. The mixed-methods (QUALITATIVE-quantitative) case study research design implemented in this study was subsequently described in terms of its influence on participant selection, the data gathering process, methods implemented to gather data (qualitative and quantitative), and data analysis. I elaborated on the strategies that were utilised in this study to enhance the reliability and validity (quantitative data) as well as trustworthiness (qualitative data) of the data gathered. The ethical considerations adhered to in ensuring that the participants' best interests were kept in mind at all stages were discussed, whereafter the role of the researcher (myself) as an active participant in this study was described. In the following chapter, a detailed and critical analysis of the data is provided.



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<sup>58</sup> Please refer to section 3.6.4 for a short explanation of emotional reflexivity.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter comprises a systematic discussion of the data gathered from a purposeful sample of 10 young adults who reportedly experienced unmastered developmental tasks and completed the adapted life-design counselling intervention described in Chapter 3. First, I summarise relevant biographical details as well as the unmastered developmental tasks identified qualitatively for each participant from the instruments they completed before the intervention. The data analysis process is summarised and the applicability of the themes and sub-themes on the research questions are clarified. After that, the focus shifts to the data gathered from the qualitative data sources (*CIP*, lifeline, genogram, collage, and reflection) used to facilitate the adapted life-design counselling process. The themes and sub-themes which emerged from the qualitative data analysis process are discussed individually. Lastly, the themes and sub-themes identified from the post-intervention data instruments are discussed. First of all, I describe the pre-intervention participant profiles.

### 4.2 PARTICIPANTS

Participants were purposefully selected according to the inclusion criteria<sup>59</sup> described in Chapter 3. All participants provided their informed consent to participate in this research and indicated that they, as young adults<sup>60</sup>, were experiencing unmastered developmental tasks.<sup>61</sup> To ensure the participants' anonymity and simplify data gathering and analysis, participants were ascribed numbers and are therefore referred to as participants #1 to #10 in Chapters 4 and 5. Descriptive statistics of the 10 participants can be found in Chapter 3, Table 3.1, but a summary of their biographical details is provided in Table 4.1.

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<sup>59</sup> Please refer to Section 3.5.1 for the inclusion criteria adhered to during the selection process.

<sup>60</sup> Young adults in this study refers to individuals between the ages of 17 and 29.

<sup>61</sup> Please refer to Section 1.6.2 for a clarification of the "unmastered developmental tasks" in this study.

**Table 4.1**

*Summary of Participants' Biographical Details*

BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS		NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
Language	English	3
	Afrikaans	7
Ethnicity	Coloured	2
	Caucasian	8
Qualification	None	1
	Grade 12	9
	Tertiary	6
Occupation	Learner or student	4
	Unemployed	2
	Employed	4

Table 4.1 illustrates that seven (7) of the participants were Afrikaans-speaking, three (3) were English-speaking, two (2) participants were coloured, and eight (8) participants were Caucasian. Of the ten participants, only one (the scholar) had not yet obtained a Grade 12 certificate and six (6) reported a tertiary qualification (certificates and/ or degrees). At the time of this study, four (4) participants were students, four (4) were employed, and two (2) were unemployed.

All the participants demonstrated intentionality towards the adapted life-design counselling intervention and responded to an invitation<sup>62</sup> to participate by personally contacting me and arranging their appointments. Their commitment to the process was furthermore demonstrated by their dedication to attending and preparing for sessions. All of the participants completed the intervention.

#### **4.2.1 Pre-intervention participant profiles**

The data analysis process implemented in this study was tailored according to the descriptive and exploratory research questions<sup>63</sup> and to provide a qualitative point of reference, all participants were requested to complete three questionnaires<sup>64</sup> (*MEPSI*, *CAAS-SA*, and *MCM*<sup>65</sup>) along with Part 4 Section A of the *CIP*<sup>66</sup> "How can the counsellor be of help, use, or value to you?", before the

<sup>62</sup> An invitation to participate in the research was initially circulated by distributing it to fellow psychologists and on social media platforms. Two participants were referred by participants (snowball sampling).

<sup>63</sup> Please refer to section 3.2.1 for the research questions.

<sup>64</sup> Please refer to section 3.5.3.2 for detailed descriptions of the questionnaires incorporated in this study.

<sup>65</sup> The results obtained from the *MCM* are discussed as part of the post-intervention assessment.

<sup>66</sup> The *CIP* is discussed in section 3.5.3.1.

intervention. A summary of the themes which were identified from these instruments is provided in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2**

*Pre-Intervention Participant Profiles*

THEMES	SUB-THEMES	PARTICIPANT									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Psychosocial developmental tasks<sup>67</sup></b>	Trust vs mistrust	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	Autonomy vs shame/doubt	*	*		*	*	*	*		*	*
	Initiative vs guilt	*			*	*		*	*		*
	Industry vs inferiority	*	*		*	*		*	*	*	*
	Identity vs role confusion	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	Intimacy vs isolation		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
	Generativity vs stagnation	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*
	Ego integrity vs despair	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>Occupational developmental tasks</b>	Career concern	*	*		*		*	*	*	*	*
	Career curiosity				*		*				
	Career control	*	*		*		*	*			*
	Career confidence	*			*					*	*
	Career indecision	*	*					*	*	*	
<b>Metacognitive skills</b>	Reflection		*			*	*				*
	Self-awareness	*	*		*	*	*	*			

The observations documented in my field notes suggested that all the participants presented with initial nervousness before the completion of the questionnaires. However, at the end of the first session, the majority were calm and relaxed. One participant presented with significant anxiety symptoms throughout the research process whereas another participant's initial anxiety seemed to diminish as the research process progressed. Another participant presented with despondency which seemed to fluctuate independently of what the sessions entailed.

Most of the participants' responses indicated that they experienced the majority of Erikson's psychosocial developmental challenges at the time of the initial assessment. Of special significance

<sup>67</sup> Scores ≤ 3.9 are considered low, while scores > 4.0 are considered high (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988).

was the indication that all of the participants identified Trust vs Mistrust as an ongoing developmental challenge. Other prominent psychosocial developmental challenges that were identified were Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt, Industry vs Inferiority, Identity vs Role confusion, Generativity vs Stagnation, and Ego Integrity vs Despair. Furthermore, the majority of the participants indicated verbally<sup>68</sup> that they experienced career concern, career control, career confidence, and career indecision as significant occupational developmental challenges. Reflection and self-awareness were identified as metacognitive skills which about half of the participants demonstrated during the pre-intervention assessment.

### **4.3 PROCEDURE FOR IDENTIFYING THEMES AND SUB-THEMES**

In this study, the researcher was viewed as a subjective participant with personal perspectives and biases who contributed to the data gathering and data analysis processes (Warner et al., 2022). An inductive approach was followed in which the researcher became familiar with the data over an extended period to allow for the eventual emergence of meaning through the identification of codes and themes from the data (Seers, 2012). Reflection, rigour, and a systematic and reflexive approach to the data analysis contributed to the quality of the results (Byrne, 2021; Nicmanis, 2024). A qualified psychologist<sup>69</sup> was available to assist any participants who experienced adverse reactions which were triggered as a result of the intervention process and an experienced external coder, Dr Erna Gerryts, evaluated the identified themes not only to verify the accuracy but also to contribute to further reflection and thoughtful engagement with the data and the ongoing analysis process (Byrne, 2021).

As mentioned before,<sup>70</sup> I intimately engaged with the data by personally transcribing the conversations, listening to the voice recordings several times and also reading and rereading the transcripts to ensure that all the non-verbal reactions and nuances of the conversations were captured along with the verbal communications. Listening to the recordings also allowed me to become aware of my non-verbal communication with each participant. The data was read and reread several times and I used thematic analysis to identify themes and sub-themes from the participants' narratives (data), moving back and forth between the themes and the data. As was expected, the initial codes and themes were adapted as the analysis progressed and themes and sub-themes became more prominent. Some themes overlapped and had to be merged to avoid

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<sup>68</sup> Only participants 4 and 10 presented with below-average scores on the Career concern construct (CAAS-SA), suggesting inadequate concern about their occupational future.

<sup>69</sup> Mrs Tania du Toit, a registered educational psychologist and EMDR-therapist was available to assist participants.

<sup>70</sup> Please refer to section 3.5.4.1 for a detailed description of the data analysis process that was followed in this study.

duplicity and irrelevant themes were eventually discarded when it became apparent that they did not hold significance in terms of the research questions. I also incorporated Atlas.ti (Atlas.ti, 2023) Computer-Assisted Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS), to assist me with my data management as well as to simplify the search for possible co-occurrences of themes and to identify connections between themes.

#### **4.4 IDENTIFIED THEMES AND THEIR APPLICABILITY TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The identified themes provide the means to argue the research questions and the research questions which shaped this study are as follows:

##### **4.4.1 Primary research question**

How does life-design counselling influence young adults' mastery of unresolved developmental tasks and enable them to flourish in their career lives?

##### **4.4.2 Secondary research questions**

###### **4.4.2.1 Descriptive questions**

- ❖ How can life-design counselling inform interventions to assist 10 young South African adults with unmastered developmental tasks?
- ❖ Which factors contribute to unmastered developmental tasks among these individuals?<sup>71</sup>

###### **4.4.2.2 Exploratory questions**

- ❖ What were the main differences between the pre- and post-intervention themes that emerged from the narrative data?
- ❖ How were young adults' unmastered developmental tasks influenced by the life-design intervention process?

Finding the relationships between the identified themes and sub-themes, which were interconnected and interrelated, and the research questions was quite a challenging process. Hence, the researcher had to ensure that the themes and sub-themes were adequately defined and distinguished from each other in such a manner that the research questions could be addressed.

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<sup>71</sup> The exact words "10 young South African adults" are not repeated but should be assumed.

## 4.5 IDENTIFYING THE SOURCE OF A QUOTE

### 4.5.1 Qualitative<sup>72</sup> data analysis using Atlas.ti (Atlas.ti, 2023)

I employed a three-digit coding system (e.g. 1; B; 15) to describe the source of specific qualitative codes, demonstrated by Table 4.3, which is comprised of each participant's specific number (1-10), the data source, and the paragraph number as ascribed by Atlas.ti when documents were imported into the software. The nine data sources are indicated by an alphabet letter (A-I) as a way to refer to a specific data source. The *CIP* questionnaire<sup>73</sup> is represented by A, the transcribed *CIP* conversation by B, the lifeline by C, the career genogram by D, the collage by E, and the participants' final reflections by F. In the example 1; C; 15, participant #1's words will be found in document C, which refers to the lifeline, and paragraph 15 of that document. The only exception is source A, the *CIP* questionnaire, in which case there will be referred to page numbers and not paragraph numbers. Participants' verbatim responses (transcriptions) can thus be found using the coding system.

**Table 4.3**

*The Three-Digit Coding System used to Reference Data (transcriptions)*

PARTICIPANT NUMBER	DATA SOURCES	PAGE OR PARAGRAPH NUMBER
#1	A – <i>CIP</i> -questionnaire	Page numbers on the questionnaire
#2	B – <i>CIP</i> transcribed conversations C – Lifeline	Paragraph number as indicated by Atlas.ti (e.g. 15)
#3	D – Career genogram	
#4	E – Collage	
#5	F – Participant reflection	
#6	G – Observations	
#7	H – Process notes	
#8	I – Researcher's reflections	
#9	J – Genogram image	
#10		

<sup>72</sup> The Atlas.ti is a qualitative technique that indeed calculates themes and the like more mechanically (statistically). For this reason, I refer to qualitative data analysis in the heading.

<sup>73</sup> The *CIP* (v7) questionnaire was completed by hand and is considered a separate source from the transcribed *CIP* conversation during which the participants' responses were discussed.

An explanatory example of the aforementioned three-digit coding system would be the code 1; B; 40: “I would like to farm on weekends, I like the idea of it, but I think I am too extroverted for that”. In this example, the number 1 refers to Participant #1, the letter B refers to the *CIP* transcriptions, and the number 40 indicates that the quotation can be found in paragraph 40 as ascribed by Atlas.ti.

The themes and sub-themes which emerged from the data analysis are described next.

#### **4.6 PRESENTATION OF THE THEMES AND SUB-THEMES**

The themes, sub-themes, sub-sub-themes, and sub-sub-sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented in Table 4.4 to provide the reader with some context. However, only significant themes and sub-themes will be discussed later in this chapter.

**Table 4.4**
*A summary of the identified themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes*

MAIN THEME	SUB-THEMES	SUB-SUB-THEMES	SUB-SUB-SUB-THEMES	
<b>THEME 1: UNMASTERED DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</b>	<b>1.1 Intrapersonal</b>	1.1.1 Trust vs Mistrust 1.1.2 Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt 1.1.3 Initiative vs Guilt 1.1.4 Industry vs Inferiority 1.1.5 Identity vs Role Confusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abilities</li> <li>• Interests</li> <li>• Values</li> <li>• Goals</li>   <li>• Career concern</li> <li>• Career curiosity</li> <li>• Career confidence</li> <li>• Career control</li> </ul>	
	<b>1.2 Interpersonal</b>	1.2.1 Intimacy vs Isolation		
	<b>1.3 Occupational</b>	1.3.1 Career indecision		
		1.3.2 Career adaptability		
		1.3.3 Future possibilities		
		1.3.4 Feeling in-between		
	<b>THEME 2: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES</b>	<b>2.1 Microsystem</b>		2.1.1 Family 2.1.2 Education 2.1.3 Sport 2.1.4 Peers
		<b>2.2 Mesosystem</b>		2.2.1 Significant events 2.2.2 Traumatic experiences
				<b>2.3 Exosystem</b>

MAIN THEME	SUB-THEMES	SUB-SUB-THEMES	SUB-SUB-SUB-THEMES
	<b>2.4 Macrosystem</b>	2.4.1 South African economy 2.4.2 COVID-19	
<b>THEME 3: INTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROCESSING OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</b>	<b>3.1 Personal attributes</b>	3.1.1 Adaptability	
		3.1.2 Compassion	
		3.1.3 Dedication	
		3.1.4 Interpersonal skills	
		3.1.5 Honesty	
		3.1.6 Humour	
		3.1.7 Perseverance	
		3.1.8 Resilience	
		3.1.9 Self-efficacy	
	<b>3.2 Metacognitive skills</b>	3.2.1 Self-awareness	
		3.2.2 Self-knowledge	
		3.2.3 Reflection	
		3.2.4 Self- and career construction	
	<b>3.3 Coping mechanisms</b>	3.3.1 Positive coping	
		3.3.2 Destructive coping	
	<b>3.4 Intrapersonal climate</b>	3.4.1 Mental health	
3.4.2 Physical health			
3.4.3 Spirituality			

## **4.7 INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA**

Significant constructs and codes contained in the data were evaluated according to a set of specific inclusion and exclusion criteria before they were included as themes, sub-themes, or sub-sub-themes during thematic data analysis. Table 4.5 aims to clarify the specification criteria for each sub-theme, sub-sub-theme, and sub-sub-sub-theme.

**Table 4.5**
*Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria Linking Data to Themes, Sub-Themes, Sub-Sub-Themes, and Sub-Sub-Sub-Themes*

<b>THEME 1: UNMASTERED DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</b>				
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Sub-sub-theme</b>	<b>Sub-sub-sub-theme</b>	<b>Inclusion criteria</b> Comments made by participants referring to...	<b>Exclusion criteria</b> Comments made by participants <u>not</u> referring to...
<b>Intra-personal</b>	Trust		... trusting and feeling emotionally safe with others in relationships.	...trusting and feeling emotionally safe with others in relationships.
	Mistrust		... hesitancy to trust others as well as a need for safety and predictability in relationships are communicated.	... hesitancy to trust others as well as a need for safety and predictability in relationships are communicated.
	Autonomy		... the development of a sense of personal independence and control, including direct references to autonomous and intentional action and decisions.	... the development of a sense of personal independence and control, including direct references to autonomous and intentional action and decisions.
	Shame/ Doubt		... hiding parts of themselves from social relationships, engaging in avoidant or defensive behaviour, or mentioning self-doubt and the need for affirmation.	... hiding parts of themselves from social relationships, engaging in avoidant or defensive behaviour, or mentioning self-doubt and the need for affirmation.
	Initiative		... asserting power and control over the world through interactions and enterprise.	... asserting power and control over the world through interactions and enterprise.
	Guilt		... experiencing shame over failing to complete a task successfully or feeling embarrassed over attempting something, resistance to trying new things for fear of failing.	... experiencing shame over failing to complete a task successfully or feeling embarrassed over attempting something, resistance to trying new things for fear of failing.
	Industry		... the demonstration of the acquisition of new skills, feeling useful and developing a sense of self-worth.	... the demonstration of the acquisition of new skills, feeling useful and developing a sense of self-worth.

## THEME 1: UNMASTERED DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Sub-themes	Sub-sub-theme	Sub-sub-sub-theme	Inclusion criteria Comments made by participants referring to...	Exclusion criteria Comments made by participants <u>not</u> referring to...
	Inferiority		... the failure to master new skills and experience a sense of worthlessness or inferiority.	... the failure to master new skills and experience a sense of worthlessness or inferiority.
	Identity		... a strong sense of self that remains over a lifetime through the experiences, relationships, beliefs, values, and memories that make up the participant's subjective sense of self.	... a strong sense of self that remains over a lifetime through the experiences, relationships, beliefs, values, and memories that make up the participant's subjective sense of self.
	Role Confusion		... being unsure of who they are and where they belong, drifting from one job or relationship to another, and feeling disappointed and confused about their place in life.	... being unsure of who they are and where they belong, drifting from one job or relationship to another, and feeling disappointed and confused about their place in life.
	Identity Exploration		...exploration of specific identity-related aspects referring to...	...exploration of specific identity-related aspects not referring to...
		Abilities	...the physical or mental power or skill needed to do something.	...the physical or mental power or skill needed to do something.
		Interests	...wanting to give attention to something or of wanting to be involved with and to discover more about something.	...wanting to give attention to something or of wanting to be involved with and to discover more about something.
		Values	...personal beliefs about what is right and wrong, what is most important in life that controls their behaviour.	... personal beliefs about what is right and wrong, what is most important in life that controls their behaviour.
		Goals	...definitive direction in the field of choice.	...definitive direction in the field of choice.

## THEME 1: UNMASTERED DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Sub-themes	Sub-sub-theme	Sub-sub-sub-theme	Inclusion criteria Comments made by participants referring to...	Exclusion criteria Comments made by participants <u>not</u> referring to...
<b>Inter-personal</b>	Intimacy		... the formation and experience of intimate and loving relationships (closeness, honesty, love) with others (romantic and peer).	... the formation and experience of intimate and loving relationships (closeness, honesty, love) with others (romantic and peer).
	Isolation		... struggling with intimacy, feelings of loneliness and isolation, a lack of social connections, poor or unhealthy social relationships, and a lack of social support.	... struggling with intimacy, feelings of loneliness and isolation, a lack of social connections, poor or unhealthy social relationships, and a lack of social support.
<b>Occupational</b>	Career indecision		... uncertainty regarding suitable career trajectories.	... uncertainty regarding suitable career trajectories.
	Career adaptability	Concern	...demonstrating concern for the future through activated awareness, engagement in planning and preparation for a career.	...demonstrating concern for the future through activated awareness, engagement in planning and preparation for a career.
		Curiosity	... an inquisitive attitude, actively exploring self-knowledge and occupations and possessing knowledge of personal abilities, interests, values, and about different occupations.	... an inquisitive attitude, actively exploring self-knowledge and occupations and possessing knowledge of personal abilities, interests, values, and about different occupations.
		Control	...showing decision-making ability through being assertive, disciplined, and intentional in unpredictable situations.	...showing decision-making ability through being assertive, disciplined, and intentional in unpredictable situations.
		Confidence	... a sense of self-efficacy to overcome career obstacles and implement career goals.	... a sense of self-efficacy to overcome career obstacles and implement career goals.

THEME 1: UNMASTERED DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS				
Sub-themes	Sub-sub-theme	Sub-sub-sub-theme	Inclusion criteria Comments made by participants referring to...	Exclusion criteria Comments made by participants <u>not</u> referring to...
	Future possibilities		... perceiving future trajectories through rose-coloured glasses and having the experience that life is full of future possibilities.	... perceiving future trajectories through rose-coloured glasses and having the experience that life is full of future possibilities.
	Feeling in-between		... not yet having attained the milestones of taking responsibility for themselves, independent decision-making, and becoming financially independent.	... not yet having attained the milestones of taking responsibility for themselves, independent decision-making, and becoming financially independent.

THEME 2: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES				
Sub-theme	Sub-sub-theme		Inclusion criteria Comments made by participants referring to...	Exclusion criteria Comments made by participants not referring to...
Microsystem	Family		...how their families internally function to navigate cognitive, social, and emotional events, their adaptability, communication, problem-solving, decision-making, planning, values, expectations, and support.	...how their families internally function to navigate cognitive, social, and emotional events, their adaptability, communication, problem-solving, decision-making, planning, values, expectations, and support.
		Education	...the influence of the educational system (including teachers or lecturers as role models, content, demands, expectations) on decision-making and perspectives.	...the influence of the educational system (including teachers or lecturers as role models, content, demands, expectations) on decision-making and perspectives.
		Sport	...the influence of sports achievements, injuries, and rejection.	...the influence of sports achievements, injuries, and rejection.

## THEME 2: EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

Sub-theme	Sub-sub-theme	Inclusion criteria Comments made by participants referring to...	Exclusion criteria Comments made by participants not referring to...
	Peers	... the influence (support or conflict with) of people who are the same age or have the same social position or the same abilities as other people in a group.	... the influence (support or conflict with) of people who are the same age or have the same social position or the same abilities as other people in a group.
<b>Mesosystem</b>	Significant events	...important or noticeable events.	...important or noticeable events.
	Traumatic experiences	...severe and lasting emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience.	...severe and lasting emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience.
<b>Exosystem</b>	Economic status	...sufficient or insufficient income.	...sufficient or insufficient income.
	Technological influence	...social media, gaming, anime, the internet, movies, series, and related characters and/or interactions having an impact on their behaviour and/or mood.	...social media, gaming, anime, the internet, movies, series, and related characters and/or interactions having an impact on their behaviour and/or mood.
<b>Macrosystem</b>	South African context	...the influence of the South African context (economic, social, or political) on perceived opportunities and lifestyle.	...the influence of the South African context (economic, social, or political) on perceived opportunities and lifestyle.
	COVID-19	...the perceived effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions.	...the perceived effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions.

### THEME 3: INTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROCESSING OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Sub-theme	Sub-sub-theme	Inclusion criteria Comments made by participants referring to...	Exclusion criteria Comments made by participants <u>not</u> referring to...
<b>Personal attributes</b>	Honesty	...being truthful and transparent.	...being truthful and transparent.
	Compassion	... the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation; the wish to help others.	... the ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation; the wish to help others.
	Dedication	...the willingness to give a lot of time and energy to something because it is important.	...the willingness to give a lot of time and energy to something because it is important.
	Interpersonal skills	...the ability to understand personal emotions as well as the emotions of others and also to act appropriately on it.	...the ability to understand personal emotions as well as the emotions of others and also to act appropriately on it.
	Resilience	...the ability to be happy, successful, etc. again after something difficult or bad has happened.	...the ability to be happy, successful, etc. again after something difficult or bad has happened.
	Perseverance	...the continued effort to do or achieve something, even when this is difficult or takes a long time.	...the continued effort to do or achieve something, even when this is difficult or takes a long time.
	Humour	...the ability to find things funny.	...the ability to find things funny.
	Adaptability	...the ability or willingness to change in order to suit different conditions.	...the ability or willingness to change in order to suit different conditions.
	Self-efficacy	...the belief that they can be successful when carrying out specific tasks.	...the belief that they can be successful when carrying out specific tasks.
<b>Metacognitive skills</b>	Self-awareness	...the presence of self-awareness, evaluation and the organisation of thought processes and strategies to learn and solve problems.	...the presence of self-awareness, evaluation and the organisation of thought processes and strategies to learn and solve problems.

### THEME 3: INTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROCESSING OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Sub-theme	Sub-sub-theme	Inclusion criteria Comments made by participants referring to...	Exclusion criteria Comments made by participants <u>not</u> referring to...
	Self-knowledge	...demonstrating clear and confident knowledge about the self.	...demonstrating clear and confident knowledge about the self.
	Reflections	...serious and careful thought.	...serious and careful thought.
	Self- and career construction	...the integration of social interactions in different contexts with past and present experiences to construct personal and occupational meaning and purpose.	...the integration of social interactions in different contexts with past and present experiences to construct personal and occupational meaning and purpose.
<b>Coping mechanisms</b>	Positive coping skills	...actions and strategies that reduce stress without being harmful in the long term.	...actions and strategies that reduce stress without being harmful in the long term.
	Destructive coping skills	...actions and strategies which do not resolve issues and may be harmful in the long term.	...actions and strategies which do not resolve issues and may be harmful in the long term.
<b>Intrapersonal climate</b>	Physical health	...the influence of physical conditions on daily functioning.	...the influence of physical conditions on daily functioning.
	Mental health	...the presence of disturbances in cognition, behaviour, or emotional regulation.	...the presence of disturbances in cognition, behaviour, or emotional regulation.
	Spirituality	...a particular system of faith and worship which is followed with devotion and a search for deeper meaning and purpose.	...a particular system of faith and worship which is followed with devotion and a search for deeper meaning and purpose.

## 4.8 RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

In the following sections, I provide a theme-by-theme discussion of the qualitative data analysis findings.

### 4.8.1 Introduction to Theme 1: Unmastered developmental tasks

The adapted life-design counselling intervention implemented in this study was structured to allow for a logical flow of conversation, moving gradually from general, uncomplicated, and non-threatening conversations to more complex, specific, and profound topics related to self- and career construction. As was expected, a variety of developmental tasks<sup>74</sup> emerged from all of the data sources utilised in this study and without necessarily being consciously aware of the presence of these developmental challenges, participants gave voice to the internal processes they were navigating.

The unmastered developmental tasks which emerged from the data revolved around three sub-themes. The first, intrapersonal<sup>75</sup> developmental tasks, comprised the first five psychosocial developmental stages proposed by Erikson (1950) and included identity exploration (with the sub-sub-themes abilities, interests, and values) (Arnett, 2000) as part of the Identity vs Role confusion stage. Although I expected some reference to unmastered developmental tasks that remained from childhood years, I was surprised how often the participants referred to intrapersonal developmental tasks in the present, such as with this example of the sub-sub-theme Mistrust:

*You don't know what proper love and compassion and all that is because it is really unpredictable. You don't feel safe. The one day you know they will be like this and the next day they will be somebody else. And that is not a nice feeling for anyone to experience. (4; B; 439)*

The second sub-theme, interpersonal developmental tasks, referred solely to the sixth psychosocial developmental stage identified by Erikson (1950) and confirmed by Arnett (2000), namely Intimacy vs Isolation. According to age guidelines from the literature<sup>76</sup>, Intimacy vs Isolation was expected to be a prominent developmental task for young adults along with occupational developmental tasks, the third emerging sub-theme. The latter (occupational developmental tasks) consisted of the sub-sub-themes career indecision, future possibilities, as well as the career adaptability constructs

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<sup>74</sup> Please refer to section 2.5 for the definition of developmental tasks utilised in this study.

<sup>75</sup> Intrapersonal developmental tasks refer to developmental tasks revolving around the individual's personal psychosocial development.

<sup>76</sup> Please refer to section 2.5.2.1 for age guidelines.

namely career concern, career curiosity, career confidence, and career control. The findings from Theme 1 are discussed in the sub-themes, sub-sub-themes and sub-sub-sub-themes below.

#### **4.8.1.1 Sub-theme: Intrapersonal**

Developmental tasks focus on the individual's internal experience of psychosocial development.

##### 4.8.1.1.1 Sub-sub-theme: Trust vs Mistrust

Trusting and feeling emotionally safe with others in relationships vs experiencing hesitancy to trust others as well as a need for safety and predictability in relationships.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating trust vs mistrust:

*Can I feel safe around you? (4; B; 277-279)*

*My partner loved me and accepted me for who I am. That is something I don't think many people have done in my life. They have always had an issue whether it's my appearance or the way I behave. She just really cared unconditionally in that regard. (5; B; 200)*

*Trusting people. I don't trust people. That's how it is. I can talk to everyone, but there are certain things I don't want to share with everyone. (7; B; 306-308)*

##### 4.8.1.1.2 Sub-sub-theme: Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt

A sense of personal independence and control vs the need to hide parts of themselves from social relationships, engaging in avoidant behaviour, and mentioning self-doubt.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating autonomy vs shame/doubt:

*Then last year I moved out. Big thing. Moved out of the childhood home. (4; C; 205)*

*I am generally not a very independent person. That is a personal thing, but I sometimes feel like I depend on people. (4; B; 157)*

*I struggle to do something purely by myself. I always find something and ask someone if I am doing it right, am I doing OK here? I am always looking for reassurance, or you are doing fine and something like that. (5; B; 112)*

##### 4.8.1.1.3 Sub-sub-theme: Initiative vs Guilt

Being able to assert power and control over the world vs experiencing shame and doubt over failing to complete a task successfully.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating initiative vs guilt:

*I learned quickly and always followed my own path. I was inquisitive and on a mission of my own. I wanted to see how something worked. (3; C; 19)*

*I always sat alone and didn't try to make friends. (8; C; 43)*

*I feel like a failure all the time, and I feel guilty. (10; B; 363)*

*Almost everything I have ever tried has failed. It's, I have never had success. And when I have had success, I was never awarded, I think. (9; C; 40)*

#### 4.8.1.1.4 Sub-sub-theme: Industry vs Inferiority

Demonstrating the acquisition of new skills, feeling useful and developing a sense of self-worth vs the failure to master new skills which may lead to the development of a sense of worthlessness or inferiority.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating industry vs inferiority:

*I would also say there were a lot of ups and downs. And victories in small things. I have a lot of random things that I now get right. (1; B; 441)*

*...and it felt so good for me. I felt I proved to myself that I can go to university, and I can achieve things. (4; B; 367)*

*It feels as if some of the people know everything now. (1; B; 205)*

*My father was the first person to instil that self-doubt and that disbelief like I'm not really capable of things because, as I said, it started with when I had to do math homework and if I took too long and he lost his patience and his response I still remember it very clear: 'You are a stupid child and you will not get anywhere.' (4; B; 239)*

#### 4.8.1.1.5 Sub-sub-theme: Identity vs Role Confusion

A strong sense of self that remains over a lifetime through the experiences, relationships, beliefs, values, and memories that make up a person's subjective sense of self vs being unsure of who you are and where you belong.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating identity vs role confusion:

*Afrikaans is my foundation; my principles and morals come from there. (2; E; 5)*

*You're creating this mask on top of who you are, and then you still have to pretend that you're not actually like how you really are. I think, my parents and sisters are experiencing it more now because I just think differently from them. And I won't stay silent if I feel something is wrong, and then I'll rather tell them what I think. Like when I first told them that I didn't believe in God. (8; B; 199-203)*

*Who am I? (8; B; 327)*

*I am not very good with people my age or younger. (10; B; 416)*

#### 4.8.1.1.5.1 Sub-sub-sub-theme: Abilities

The physical or mental power or skill needed to do something.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating abilities:

*Netball, horse riding, and academics. (1; B; 329)*

*I would say creativity and problem-solving. (2; B; 156)*

#### 4.8.1.1.5.2 Sub-sub-sub-theme: Interests

Wanting to give attention to something or wanting to be involved with and discover more about something.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating interests:

*I enjoyed languages like English and Afrikaans a lot in primary school. So when I had to choose a second language in grade 8, I chose French because I wanted... it's because there are many ballet terms in French. (6; B; 33)*

*I like to help children and spend time with them. (7; E; 6)*

#### 4.8.1.1.5.3 Sub-sub-sub-theme: Values

Beliefs people have, especially about what is right and wrong and what is most important.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating values:

*I'm so proud of what my dad has done. I would love to be a man like him. (2; D; 132)*

*If you're close enough to see something's wrong, you're close enough to do something about it. (3; E; 11)*

#### 4.8.1.1.5.4 *Sub-sub-sub-theme: Goals*

What people aim to achieve.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating goals:

*That was my goal initially when I got into university. When I heard that I could write a thesis it was also my goal to try and show gaming in a different light. (5; C; 208)*

*I want to help women, I want to assist women that have been raped.' I know how to provide help for women. I don't really want to work with men. My goal is to help women. To help the female gender. (7; B; 228)*

From the aforementioned quotes, it is clear that the participants were aware of and gave intentional thought to their internal psychological processes and experiences. They seemed to enjoy the discourse revolving around themselves, including the investigation of personal characteristics, psychological experiences, and underlying motivations. Although direct and indirect mention was made of the initial stages of psychosocial development during early childhood (trust vs mistrust, autonomy vs shame/doubt, initiative vs guilt), often reflectively, more frequent references were made to the psychosocial stages of industriousness vs inferiority and identity vs role confusion. The majority of participants communicated feelings of inferiority and not feeling good enough, sometimes based on their analysis of experiences and sometimes as the result of comparison with their peers. In terms of identity, all of the participants shared substantial information regarding their personal abilities, interests, and values, and especially the latter (values) featured prominently throughout all the data sources and across a variety of topics.

#### 4.8.1.2 *Sub-theme: Interpersonal*

##### 4.8.1.2.1 *Sub-sub-theme: Intimacy vs Isolation*

Forming and experiencing intimate and loving relationships with others (romantic and peer) vs experiencing feelings of loneliness and isolation, a lack of social connections, poor social relationships, and a lack of social support.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating intimacy vs isolation:

*...last year was when I really connected with the friends I have now. We started getting together more, getting more engaged. Now I see them more frequently. The one I see nearly every week. (4; C; 209)*

*... we made a little group, music evenings, where each person would pick an album and we would sit down and cook dinner and listen to each other's music. (5; B; 82)*

*So, I was teased by everyone, by the skater boys and popular guys who spoke English because I was a nerd, but also by the Afrikaans rugby guys because I didn't enjoy that kind of stuff so much. (2; B; 250)*

*The loneliness seems to be a real challenge for this participant. He appears to have an intense need to connect with people and will trigger individuals online just to get a reaction. (2; G; 1)*

*And love, it has been a massive thing. When I was younger it was a chase, a blind chase at times. (5; C; 102)*

The interpersonal psychosocial developmental stage of intimacy vs isolation was a central theme in this study. All participants spontaneously mentioned their experiences around the need for intimacy, feelings of isolation and the development of authentic relationships or lack thereof. For a few participants, the need for intimacy directed their actions and decision-making. The need for romantic relationships appeared to be overshadowed by the need to belong to a peer group and experience intimate and loving friendships.

#### **4.8.1.3 Sub-theme: Occupational**

##### 4.8.1.3.1 Sub-sub-theme: Career Indecision

The demonstration of uncertainty regarding suitable career trajectories.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating career indecision:

*Perhaps I can form a sane, cohesive narrative for my future, eliminating self-doubt would be very empowering. (2; B; 146)*

*And then, Grade 9 was also when I had to choose subjects for the next year, and that's when my whole drama of what am I going to do with my life started... (6; C; 117)*

*I think I have some sort of an idea of where I want to be, but I still have... I won't say fears, but there are these questions that arise. Can I do it? How will I turn out? And all the things I think tie into how I see myself. (8; B; 160)*

#### 4.8.1.3.2 Sub-sub-theme: Career Adaptability

##### 4.8.1.3.2.1 Sub-sub-sub-theme: Career Concern

Concern for the future employing activated awareness, engagement in planning and preparation for own career.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating career concern:

*I want to know more about myself or to understand more about why I don't grasp and love the subjects of my course as easily as everyone else who studies with me. And if I'm on the completely wrong path, or if I might have another way to approach it. (1; B; 253)*

*...if I go into teaching now, I forever have to be a teacher. If I do open my own psychology practice I forever have to practice. That does feel quite daunting... and limiting. (4; F; 41)*

##### 4.8.1.3.2.2 Sub-sub-sub-theme: Career Curiosity

An inquisitive attitude by means of actively exploring self-knowledge and occupations.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating career curiosity:

*But any type of AI research would be super cool for me. I enjoy it a lot. (2; B; 27)*

*A Youtuber or online content creator. Growing up I loved watching Youtubers, and I have always been interested in that creativity, flexibility, sharing and also receiving. (5; 2; 31)*

##### 4.8.1.3.2.3 Sub-sub-sub-theme: Career Control

Showing decision-making ability through being assertive, disciplined, and intentional in unpredictable situations.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating career control:

*I made a rep (representative) of myself by contacting farmers in the area, asking them if I could come and see them. I asked them what kind of oils their tractors used, what they needed, and if they wanted to open an account. So that I could just come out (of the office). (1; B; 186)*

*...everything I might have lacked at the other place in experience, I learned. I took people on tours, did guide work, and we managed. I helped with the physical rhinos with the veterinarians, conducted physical cross-surveys, but yes. I ran the expo and organised it with*

*my own money, printed things for us and did everything. I did quite a lot and learned. It was a positive. (10; C; 19)*

#### 4.8.1.3.2.4 Sub-sub-sub-theme: Career Confidence

A sense of self-efficacy to overcome career obstacles and implement career goals.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating career confidence:

*I have worked for 6 or 7 different startups. Most of them are successful now. I don't think there is one that disappeared. They've all either changed or grown a lot and most of them have also gone overseas. (2; B; 17)*

*I emailed them myself and came up with proposals myself and did the research myself, took photos myself. I think that self-reliance or independence that I experienced for the first time, just to feel I can do something if I don't just say I want to do it but make the effort to see what it will take. (8; B; 291)*

#### 4.8.1.3.3 Sub-sub-theme: Future possibilities

Perceiving future trajectories through rose-coloured glasses and having the experience that life is full of future possibilities.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating future possibilities:

*If you are a writer, you can also work with your own content which is appealing but also very daunting. (4; B; 87)*

*...It is why I kind of want to go abroad with the TEFL to Japan. I feel like, just having that independence. No attachment, no nothing. I think that would just really force that growth. We will see if that is next year. Otherwise, it will be a research master's at Stellenbosch. (5; B; 296)*

#### 4.8.1.3.4 Sub-sub-theme: Feeling in-between

The experience of not yet taking responsibility for themselves, independent decision-making, and financial independence.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating feeling in-between:

*...it has to go somewhere and become something unique because I don't know what's going to happen next. (2; C; 136)*

*... not to sound repetitive, but just to get an income and not... not be around... not be around my family, not be around people who feel they need me there. (8; E; 47)*

Four participants' quotes revealed that experiencing career indecision tended to overwhelm them and were often accompanied by feelings of anxiety. Career indecision was related to unmastered intrapersonal developmental tasks such as doubt and role confusion. Career concern and career curiosity featured prominently and dominated conversations related to identity as all participants tended to refer to and reflect on their interests and values during career-related discussions. Most participants were cautiously optimistic about their futures. However, the participant who presented with depressive symptoms had trouble identifying future possibilities.

#### **4.8.2 Introduction to Theme 2: External influences**

As mentioned previously, human development (and therefore the processing of developmental tasks) does not take place in isolation and is continuously influenced by the dynamic interaction between internal and external factors. The influence of external factors emerged as the second theme from this data.

Four sub-themes, representative of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), were identified.

##### *i. Microsystem*

The microsystem included sub-sub-themes or spheres which emerged and in which participants played an active role (Drakenberg & Malmgren, 2013; Park et al., 2024) such as family, education, sport, and peers. It was clear that participants' active engagement in these spheres directly and indirectly influenced the negotiation of unmastered developmental tasks. References to family members often related to values that they portray which were either copied or avoided by participants in their identity formation processes. Most participants mentioned family members as role models as demonstrated by the following statements:

*My father because he is the most hard-working person I know and is always patient with others. (1; A; 7)*

*My father is a strong, good man who stands by his principles. (2; A; 7)*

*My granny never stopped learning, had a curious mind, and never gave up. She was also very kind. (4; A; 7)*

*My mother, because she can do so many things at the same time and always gives 100%. (6; A; 7)*

The family dynamic also influenced four participants' occupational developmental tasks as demonstrated by the following:

*...it was the time of the divorce, and my parents were arguing about money. There was a lot... money was a big factor. (5; C; 136)*

*My mother was diagnosed with cancer a year ago and that diagnosis affected the family. (8; B; 99)*

Support from their families motivated the majority of participants to persevere and achieve in general, but also influenced their career control and career confidence:

*My parents are the ones who always look for opportunities for me and support me all the time, like with the violin and ballet performances. They always wanted to open all the opportunities for me, as many as they could, and they financed as much as they could. (6; E; 101)*

*My father said 'Get out of here. Forge the family elsewhere.' (5; D; 31)*

The educational system, comprised of educators, academic content, and institutions visibly influenced five participants' self- and career construction:

*The French teacher was quite fond of me. I am one of her favourite students and she was quite happy that I was learning French. (4; B; 53)*

*My lecturer said 'No, you must write about it. Follow your passion...' (5; B; 184)*

*When I went to Cape Town (tertiary institution), I met people who had a very different... not worldview, but a different idea of... we're trying to do good. We're trying to improve ourselves. (8; C; 54-56)*

Participation and achievement in sports also featured as a significant influence in three participants' lives as it influenced their success experiences and opened or limited future occupational possibilities:

*That whole thing of when I was accepted at the ballet school made me decide that, okay, I really want to do it. (6; B; 41)*

*We had to qualify. And then we didn't qualify for the Youth Olympics. (1; C; 44)*

Peer involvement did not necessarily guide participants in a specific direction, but it was clear that having trustworthy friends made life significantly more enjoyable.

ii. *Mesosystem*

Significant events and traumatic experiences were the two prominent sub-sub-themes which emerged from the mesosystem sub-theme in this study. The mesosystem sub-theme can be described as the system in which two or more microsystems interact with one another. Significant events provided learning experiences for all the participants and influenced their values and, subsequently, identity formation as well as self-construction. Examples of significant life events follow below:

*...my bad relationship... it took too much of my time. (1; B; 447)*

*I will always regret not visiting Grandpa more when I heard he was sick. I heard he was sick, but I was too busy with work. (2; D; 10)*

Traumatic experiences were found to have a lasting impact on all the participants and influenced their perspectives, emotional well-being, as well as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational development:

*...it was a bit unsettling for me to have to stay with other people at that age (8 years). It's something that stuck with me and stayed with me. (3; C; 70)*

*Another challenge which is horrible for any child is living in a state where both your parents are unemployed ... I can't live in this uncertainty anymore. Will we have money tomorrow or next year? That is a horrible situation to be in for anyone. (4; B; 445)*

*...quite a dark zone. Lots of being the outsider, being bullied. I remember lunches... I remember having to relocate where I used to spend my break because kids would try to find me and bully me. It was almost like a strategy game of survival. Where am I going to hide next... where am I going to lose their trail? (5; C; 40)*

### iii. Exosystem

The exosystem sub-theme, defined as a subsystem independent from participants but influencing them (Drakenberg & Malmgren, 2013; Park et al., 2024), included economic status and technological influences as significant sub-sub-themes from this study. Economic status influenced the occupational opportunities that five of the participants were offered and the development of their values:

*Every day, even though it wasn't my fault, she would complain about the petrol when driving to school. (9; C; 32)*

*... I grew up poor. My parents fought and worked for everything they had, and they built a life over time to give my brother and me the best future, but I really can't say that I had a bad childhood. (3; C; 22)*

Five of the participants' quotes indicated that different forms of technology (anime, gaming, movies, series, as well as social media) had a significant influence on their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational development. Fictional characters were described as role models who contributed to participants' value and identity development. Three participants demonstrated aspects of career curiosity and career construction as they described technological interests in detail:

*Strategy warfare and cooperative experiences because that is like the best summary of everything. Strategy on a large scale is like zone planning, it is not just in games that it counts; it is strategy. Cooperative experiences are like games where you work with other people instead of competing. It is pretty rare and is actually the most enjoyable game. (2; B; 179)*

*For a long time in games, I was what is called a 'sherpa'. That is basically when there is something very difficult in a game and I take them through it and help them. Teach them the mechanics and the roles. (5; B; 283)*

*Gaming has always been a massive passion, but also when I was younger, now that I can recognize it, it has been a form of escape. (5; E; 38)*

### iv. Macrosystem

The macrosystem sub-theme comprises the socio-cultural context of the participants. Sub-sub-themes which emerged from the data indicated two participants' concerns about the South African context and three participants mentioned the influence of COVID-19 on their career development:

*There are these constant what-ifs about how things are in South Africa. (3; B; 254)*

*Then COVID-19 struck, and I had to go back home, and we were basically there for 4 months.... That was the second year basically gone. (10; B; 119)*

The findings from Theme 2 are discussed in the sub-themes and sub-sub-themes below.

#### **4.8.2.1 Sub-theme: Microsystem**

The immediate environment which influences the individual directly daily and includes people and activities.

##### 4.8.2.1.1 Sub-sub-theme: Family

References are made to the influence of families through their unique dynamic and contexts and how they navigate cognitive, social, and emotional events, their adaptability, communication, problem-solving, decision-making, planning, values, occupations, expectations, and support.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating family:

*I would say my dad is the hardest-working person I know, and he is very patient with others. He is not... even if I don't understand something, he will explain it over and over again. Even though he is very smart, all of his employees have a lot of respect for him. (1; B; 331)*

*That's why my dad said he would rather teach at a place where he can make a difference and where there is an interest in improvement. (3; B; 12)*

*... my father was like you will have to do pure math, science, and business. In his opinion, you can't succeed in life without maths and the STEM subjects. (4; B; 31)*

*... my granny because I was very close to her and then she taught me, you know, to be kind and compassionate and she also taught me not to give up. She was also like that. (4; B; 319)*

*I think my dad sees the trap. I think he... especially when he looks at his brothers and he see them drinking away their lives and not doing anything. I think he sees that, and I think for a long time he struggled with believing in me because he couldn't believe in himself. (5; D; 73)*

*...on my dad's side almost everyone studied (tertiary). On my mom's side I know... because her mom passed away early, like my grandpa had to support five children, they all felt they had to study because they had to support themselves as soon as possible. (6; D; 97-98)*

*...people would think that she is lazy because she is a stay-at-home mom, but she is very like... I am going to do this and then this. My brother has autism, and she is teaching him to build*

*shelves and stuff for future work. My brother is almost non-verbal, and he has another disabled friend who came over and they were both working on the shelves, and they might do this together for a career. (9; D; 119)*

#### 4.8.2.1.2 Sub-sub-theme: Education

Communicating the influence of the educational system, school context, teachers and lecturers, and academic content and demands.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating education:

*Our history teacher was very good. She is interested in politics and such, so I think that is why I decided on law because she talked a lot about law and related topics in class. (1; B; 74)*

*When I went to university I flourished. I flourished. I remember my first assignment was 92% and I looked at the mark and I asked my lecturer if it was wrong. I have never seen that mark before. It was always the 60's and 70's and I realized that I didn't like the school system, but that university worked for me. That adaptive thinking, critical thinking... (5; D; 77)*

*When I think of grade 11... then I think it was just chaos and I felt completely burned out. I felt like in every aspect it was just too much. And in grade 11, it's the end of year points that go to university... (6; C; 150)*

#### 4.8.2.1.3 Sub-sub-theme: Sport

References to being influenced by and through sports participation such as achievements, rejections, and injuries.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating sport:

*I decided I wanted to start playing rugby. That is where I could join a group and feel like I was making a difference and mattered. So, at that age, I mean... now I start playing rugby and I feel I am doing well in it, and I am recognised for it. It was the best thing ever for me. (3; C; 78)*

*... the first year with the national netball team and I travelled a lot, and I missed a lot of school. It was so much fun. And horse-riding tours in between. I remember enjoying it a lot. (1; C; 23)*

*Many of the milestones that I have achieved were in ballet and violin because they taught me life skills and discipline and shaped my character. (6; B; 252)*

*...it felt like I was recognised by international people. (6; C; 151)*

*I didn't have much planned for this year. I received rejections from ballet schools and dealt with injuries and uncertainty about the year. (6; C; 175)*

#### 4.8.2.1.4 Sub-sub-theme: Peers

References to positive and negative influences from peers.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating peers:

*A lot of my friends motivate me... 'You need to do this thing. Get up. Go-go-go'. If they are not there I kind of just... (5; B; 114)*

*I did it because I made a lot of friends there. (6; C; 21)*

*Usually, when I am with her, I'm just... the two of us can lie down and talk all day. So, I do not need to smoke or drink alcohol or anything. I am just peaceful being with her. (7; B; 394)*

*...it led me to even worse things because I was hanging out with the wrong crowd. (3; C; 261)*

*...not all of them were the greatest friends and that tied in with a quote that I mentioned last time... 'we seek the love we believe we deserve. (5; C; 66)*

*A lot of fighting (with friends). (10; C; 25)*

On a microsystem level, all of the participants' quotes demonstrated that they were significantly and continuously influenced by their families and family members from a very young age and that some of these influences persist into young adulthood. Family members served as role models to the majority of participants, influencing the development of personal and career-related values, interpersonal relationships, and future decisions. Family expectations seemed to contribute to two participants' experiences of doubt, whereas support from families was associated with industriousness and confidence as quoted by seven of the participants. The educational context, sports participation and achievements, as well as peer interactions were associated with the processing of intrapersonal and interpersonal developmental tasks (industry vs inferiority, identity vs role confusion, intimacy vs isolation), occupational developmental tasks (career concern and career curiosity), and the development of personal strengths such as resilience and perseverance.

#### 4.8.2.2 Sub-theme: Mesosystem

The system in which two or more microsystems are interconnected and influence one another.

##### 4.8.2.2.1 Sub-sub-theme: Significant events

Important or noticeable events.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating significant events:

*A lot of things happened at school. A senior girl in my school committed suicide and it was a big story at our school. At the same time my best friend since I was 5 years old moved to the United States. (6; C; 158)*

*I went to high school, and I struggled again to make friends. (8; C; 39)*

*I was venting to my science teacher about how most of my friends left me and stuff like that, how I was lonely and I was telling her this during break and then during the period I was looking outside the door because I was kind of spaced out and she got so mad that she was like 'This is why you have no friends and this is why nobody wants to talk to you.' That hurt me a lot. (9; B; 192)*

##### 4.8.2.2.2 Sub-sub-theme: Traumatic experiences

Severe and lasting emotional shock and pain caused by an extremely upsetting experience.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating the influence of traumatic experiences:

*...growing up with an alcoholic father. It caused quite a lot of distress in the house and that is where a lot of the anxiety comes from because it was quite unpredictable. When he got drunk you were walking on eggshells because you were scared to make him upset. He was only physically abusive on a few occasions; he was mostly verbally abusive. (4; B; 437)*

*When I was in high school, he (father) always used to say things like I am a jellyfish and that I am just floating, I am average, I am not going to achieve anything. (5; D; 73)*

*I've been sexually assaulted before. So, I don't want... I never want someone to have that experience. (7; B; 460)*

*...physically hurting and taunting me. Then there was also verbal bullying. (3; B; 353)*

*...we had that armed robbery. (6; C; 85)*

*When I was 14, my grandfather passed away that year. And he was more like a father to me than my own father was. (7; C; 38):*

*... my friend was murdered. His family was attacked in Afghanistan. He and his brother and sister and dad were all killed, and I found out through a friend of mine who was in his class and she saw it on Facebook. I didn't even have Facebook. He was 17, and I was 18. (10; C; 15)*

*I tried to feel comfortable with friends and all the people and now we are moving again. (8; B; 374)*

All the participants acknowledged through their quotes that significant events and traumatic experiences elicited intense emotions such as loss, rejection, guilt, self-doubt, and anxiety, which contributed to identity formation and, subsequently, influenced their behaviour and decision-making. The responses (quotes) of eight participants indicated that significant events and traumatic experiences influenced their intrapersonal and interpersonal developmental tasks, but they did not directly influence their occupational developmental tasks.

#### **4.8.2.3 Sub-theme: Exosystem**

A subsystem independent from participants but influencing them.

##### 4.8.2.3.1 Sub-sub-theme: Economic status

Sufficient or insufficient income in the childhood home.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating the influence of economic status:

*I grew up poor, and I still didn't understand it, but I was teased a lot. That's when the bullying started to some extent. I still didn't understand it, and that's why it was tough for me. I didn't know what to do with it. (3; C; 60)*

*...in the back of my head, I would be like maybe I can improve it so that I can sell this piece for this much money. It is always like that in the back of my head. (9; B; 220)*

*It is a bit bizarre, but there is absolutely no zoology in South Africa. She struggled to find work in that field. (2; D; 76)*

*He hasn't been able to find work in this field given that he is overqualified and too old. (3; D: 11)*

#### 4.8.2.3.2 Sub-sub-theme: Technological influence

Social media, gaming, anime, the internet, movies, series, and related characters and/or interactions having an impact on participants' behaviour and/or mood.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating the influence of technology:

*...Goko from Dragonball Z, that is an Anime, because he never gives up no matter what challenge is thrown at him....he is like a warrior and he would train and fight, but he would like face like really difficult enemies, and he would always be able to come out of it, flourishing, and he would always work really hard... he is like really resilient and I admire that because that is how I want to be. (4; B; 311)*

*... I have never been able to really relate to a character and when I watched this when I was 16, really young, and I was like I am exactly like her and she was becoming successful, doing something and I can recognize a lot from her. (9; B; 224)*

*It feels like a live connection, you know. Social media is a new thing, but it feels like the closest thing to a live connection with people on the ground in other countries... there is less pretense on Twitter than on other media. People say what they think, there are no filters. (2; B; 294)*

*Gaming is something from the future that's been plopped into our reality. It can give you an adrenaline rush... if you're immersed in the game, it really feels like you are in a war or something. And you shoot the little guys and whatever and you get an adrenaline rush. There are a lot of people, and I think it will become more, who no longer get adrenaline rushes in real life because they are addicted and get it in these concentrated, designed forms. (2; F; 45)*

*There was a movie I watched about it one day, Candy, and it put it beautifully. It said, when you can stop, you don't want to and when you want to, you can't...that is why drugs are so addictive because they are actually a lot of fun. That feeling when it shoots through you. You're on top of the world, it is amazing. But what it takes away from you is so much more. (3; B; 289)*

*It is our choices, Harry, who show us that we really are more than our abilities. That was Dumbledore saying it to Harry. (4; B; 349)*

*Master Yoda, 'Do or do not, there is no try.' That is something that my father would repeat over and over. (5; B; 222)*

*Instagram... to see what my friends are doing. (1; B; 405)*

The exosystem's influence was reported in a variety of areas. In terms of economic status, a sub-sub-theme that emerged from the exosystem is evident in two of the participant narratives in that they reportedly developed increased resilience and awareness of their values, thus demonstrating that experiencing poverty influenced their self-construction. Limited tertiary opportunities as a result of financial limitations were indicated by five participants. However, four of the five participants exhibited career concern, career curiosity, and future possibilities, thus demonstrating the influence of low economic status on their career construction. Two participants described their experience of their parents' unemployment and insufficient income as traumatic and three participants stated that they were not able to participate in extracurricular activities as children due to the cost, one of whom started pursuing this particular hobby as a working adult after completing the research.

Technological influences, another sub-sub-theme of the exosystem, were shown to affect some aspects related to developmental tasks. Five participants identified fictional (animation and gaming) characters as their role models, specifically mentioning specific attributes and values these characters portrayed and therefore the influence on their identity formation. Technological applications and social media were shown to be useful when keeping in touch with peers and facilitating a form of connection and intimacy, indicating a relationship between interpersonal developmental tasks and technology for the majority of participants. Engaging with technology was reported as a coping style and form of escapism by five of the participants and three participants described their interest in technology as a form of career curiosity and included it as future possibilities, hence indicating an influence on occupational developmental tasks.

#### **4.8.2.4 Sub-theme: Macrosystem**

The socio-cultural influence on participants.

#### 4.8.2.4.1 Sub-sub-theme: South African Context

The influence of the South African context (economic, social, or political) on perceived opportunities and lifestyle.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating the influence of the South African context:

*I am afraid to start a business because I don't care about all those racial things... I don't even want to start a business because I just don't care about all that. I don't want to think about it. It is so gross how they (government) enforce it ( Black Economic Empowerment or BEE).*

**(2; B; 11-13)**

*It sucks a bit that I can't really talk to anyone in South Africa about anything because I am (viewed as) a coloniser, murderer, rapist, and settler who stole the land. Although I don't own any land.*

**(2; D; 106)**

*There are these constant what-ifs about how things are in South Africa.*

*It was also during 'Fees must fall'.*

*Participant 7's genogram illustration demonstrated the limited career opportunities available when parents and grandparents were raised under challenging economic circumstances.*

**(7; J)**

#### 4.8.2.4.2 Sub-sub-theme: COVID-19 influence

The perceived effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying restrictions.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating the influence of the COVID-19 influence:

*I started to enjoy it there (university) and then I had to go back to Namibia for 5 months. It was difficult to come back (to SA).*

**(1; C; 56)**

*We did the rest of the third year online... our lecturers weren't different online it was still very much the same and they kept us engaged, but I experienced a lot of negatives. My mother had COVID-19 and she has a genetic lung issue.... She was on a ventilation machine for 11 days.*

**(5; C; 130)**

*I really enjoyed it, especially from grade 10 when I started practising my violin more during the COVID time. (6; B; 49)*

*... then I decided during the lockdown, I decided that when I go back to school, I am not going back to that old group of friends. I am just going to sit with someone random. (6; C; 144)*

*Depression, anxiety, COVID. (10; C; 25)*

Participants' references to the macrosystem were surprisingly scarce, probably demonstrating that young adults tend to focus more on themselves than considering broader contextual factors. The sub-sub-theme 'South African context' was, amongst others, illustrated by a participant's responses about his personal experiences of being treated differently as a result of his race and culture. These experiences influenced his self- and career identity formation. Three participants demonstrated career concern, accompanied by underlying anxiety, in terms of future career opportunities in South Africa due to the weak economy and political influence. The influence of limited opportunities to rise from poverty in South Africa was indicated by one participant.

The influence of COVID-19 as a sub-sub-theme emerged from only four participants' responses. Two participants communicated that COVID-19 lockdown regulations contributed to career concerns as these regulations made it challenging to attain their tertiary qualifications. Another participant reported that they experienced COVID-19 personally and as traumatic when his mother fell ill and almost succumbed to the disease. The fourth participant reported having benefited from the lockdown as it provided her with much-needed time for reflection and allowed for new interests and career opportunities to emerge.

#### **4.8.3 Introduction to Theme 3: Internal factors influencing the processing of developmental tasks**

Four sub-themes emerged from the third theme. The first, personal attributes, referred to participants' self-exploration and their attempts to define themselves and explain their decisions and behaviour as demonstrated below:

*I think thinking quickly, learning, and adapting to the situation, are some of my strong points. It doesn't matter what industry or whatever I am in. I can quickly grasp the framework or situation and try to come up with a solution. (2; B; 214)*

*Other people see me as kind... kind, supportive. I am the friend people will come to for advice and emotional support. (4; B; 271)*

The second sub-theme, metacognitive skills, comprised higher-order cognitive abilities such as participants' ability to intentionally reflect on and evaluate past actions (sub-sub-theme of reflection), to be aware of present and past emotions, thoughts, and behaviour (sub-sub-theme of self-awareness), to demonstrate an honest and clear idea of oneself (sub-sub-theme of self-knowledge), and demonstrating the ability to understand and show insight into how past experiences and feelings contributed to the development of their personal and career selves (self- and career construction). A few examples are provided next:

*I think when I know what I am saying, it won't be as negative for me. (1; B; 197)*

*I like talking to people. I love it when people vent to me, because I am someone who vents only to certain people.... At school I see a psychologist...she is just so comfortable to be with... so when I leave there, it is such a relief for me, and I want other people to feel like they can talk to me. That is why I say 'psychologist'. (7; B; 61)*

*Practical-technical where you work with machinery and tools. I like working with my hands. (2; B; 133)*

*...that is why I am so passionate about young men's mental health. I have been through it. (5; B; 284)*

Coping mechanisms, the third sub-theme which emerged from Theme 3, comprised the actions and strategies participants utilised to deal with physical and psychological stress. Some of these strategies were successful and resorted under the sub-sub-theme of positive coping mechanisms, whereas detrimental mechanisms were viewed as belonging to the sub-sub-theme of negative coping mechanisms.

*I eventually reached a point where it didn't matter to me anymore. At that time, it (the loss) had a significant influence on me, I was trying to drown my emotions and feelings in every possible substance just so that I didn't have to feel them. (3; C; 213)*

*I really like to gym because it helps me with my stress, and it calms me down and puts me in a very different environment. It just makes me feel better about myself and it makes me feel confident about myself. (7; E; 64)*

Participants' intrapersonal climate, the sub-theme related to personal perspectives and attitudes which influenced their general ability to process developmental tasks and external influences, also

emerged from this theme. Three participants specifically mentioned that their mental well-being influenced their general functioning as illustrated below:

*[K]ind of a breakdown I would say. In grade 11... it almost led me to an attempted suicide. (10; C; 15-17)*

Physical health, another sub-sub-theme, was reportedly by two participants to have played a significant role in their well-being:

*... my spinal issues started acting up. The lower disc between the last two vertebrae herniated and the fluid came out and put pressure on the spinal cord. It was very, very painful. I couldn't sleep at night. It was a constant burning. (5; C; 106)*

The fourth sub-sub-theme, spirituality, was quoted by eight participants as something which influences their general well-being as indicated next:

*Both my parents, for how strong they were in their faith. (10; B; 408)*

*I feel as if I got some stuff off my chest, almost... not venting really... like I have problems, can you pray for me? (9; D; 7)*

The findings from Theme 3 are discussed in the sub-themes and sub-sub-themes below.

#### **4.8.3.1 Sub-theme: Personal attributes**

Attitudes, character traits and physical characteristics of participants.

##### 4.8.3.1.1 Sub-sub-theme: Adaptability

The ability or willingness to change to suit different conditions.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating adaptability:

*I am good at learning quickly and adapting to a situation. (4; B; 305)*

*...the idea that I was no longer so hesitant or not so apprehensive about going to a completely different environment and meeting different people... I met people who had a very different worldview. (8; C; 54-56)*

##### 4.8.3.1.2 Sub-sub-theme: Compassion

The ability to share someone else's feelings or experiences by imagining what it would be like to be in that person's situation; the wish to help others.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating compassion:

*... I like talking to homeless people and my favourite is when we have to do a church outreach. I like interacting with the homeless. I have a big heart. (1; E; 76)*

*If I see someone struggling and it is something I know I can do or understand, I will try to teach them. (2; D; 110)*

#### 4.8.3.1.3 Sub-sub-theme: Dedication

The willingness to give a lot of time and energy to something because it is important.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating dedication:

*...we had really long study sessions every holiday, every single day, sometimes two sessions of two or three hours with her (teacher) on Zoom where we did past papers and worked through them. (6; B; 47)*

*I like to fix things and do them right. I feel that if you put time and attention in... (3; E; 23)*

#### 4.8.3.1.4 Sub-sub-theme: Interpersonal skills

The ability to understand personal emotions as well as the emotions of others and also to act appropriately on it.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating interpersonal skills:

*Getting along with others, being kind and respectful and friendly. I feel like I can do that very easily and take down people's defences and allow them to be comfortable and to be themselves. (5; B; 98)*

*Other people see me as friendly; I make jokes. They say I am like the clown and very helpful, always coming up with good ideas, someone they can rely on. (7; B; 322)*

#### 4.8.3.1.5 Sub-sub-theme: Honesty

Being truthful and transparent.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating honesty:

*I would say 'easily distracted'. Focus is an issue. (taps pencil). Decision-making is the biggest one. Just making the decision. Sometimes I know which one is the best, but I just don't want to choose when I should choose and move forward. (2; B; 168)*

*Ironic, because I can't motivate myself. (laughs). (5; B; 100)*

#### 4.8.3.1.6 Sub-sub-theme: Humour

The ability to find things funny.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating humour:

*Friends have always been very important to me, actually too important! (laughs) (1; E; 22)*

*Z: So where does the monkey fall from?*

*P2: I don't know... the family tree. (laughs). (2; B; 369-370)*

#### 4.8.3.1.7 Sub-sub-theme: Perseverance

The continued effort to do or achieve something, even when this is difficult or takes a long time.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating perseverance:

*That is one thing I have been good at... perseverance. No matter what comes my way, I can still keep going. (5; C; 194)*

*A one-minute dance solo takes hours and hours of practice, and a two-minute violin solo takes months of practice. So, people only see the end product and just come to see you at the concert of something and then they don't realise how long it takes and how many things you have to push through to get there. (6; B; 150)*

#### 4.8.3.1.8 Sub-sub-theme: Resilience

The ability to be happy, successful, etc. again after something difficult or bad has happened.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating resilience:

*Beating drug addiction. (3; B; 286)*

*I had some work done (surgery) on my feet and it was a whole rehab process. This was after I twisted my ankle and couldn't practice ballet for about three months... In January I started rebuilding the amount of dance I was doing... and when I went to this new ballet school, it was a drama because my ankle was sore again. I am still very cautious, and I still can't dance with confidence. (6; C; 173)*

#### 4.8.3.1.9 Sub-sub-theme: Self-efficacy

Participants' belief that they can be successful when carrying out specific tasks.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating self-efficacy:

*I was a lecturer for a while at a design academy in Cape Town, and I am usually someone who helps everyone in the tech industry. (2; D; 110)*

*...I would like to do a PGCE and look into doing educational psychology. I would like to... I don't know if you have heard of the Delft exams, but it is the international French exam to recognise the qualification. That is the goal. (4; D; 79)*

All the participants quoted most of the aforementioned sub-sub-themes in a variety of contexts which demonstrated that they were internally focused on the processing of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks.

#### 4.8.3.2 Sub-theme: Metacognitive skills

Skills which allow participants to organise and evaluate the thought processes related to problem solving and decision-making.

##### 4.8.3.2.1 Sub-sub-theme: Self-awareness

The presence of self-awareness, evaluation and the organisation of thought processes and strategies to learn and solve problems.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating self-awareness:

*I feel that I have a soft spot for people that are treated like that, because I was kind of treated, not like a monster, but I was treated badly when I was younger, and I feel like I have a soft spot for people that are treated badly. (9; E; 69)*

*I know that I need to do something. I can't just keep them happy and not make myself happy. (8; E; 37)*

#### 4.8.3.2.2 Sub-sub-theme: Self-knowledge

Demonstrating clear and confident knowledge about the self.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating self-knowledge:

*I do not like maths or numbers. I need social interaction. I don't like desk jobs, lack of independence and then I said that I don't enjoy politics. (5; B; 60)*

*I do not enjoy repetition in a career. There is a bit of a fear that getting into a job is the same thing every day. So that is probably why I would go into psychology because that is not the same every day. Every time a client walks through your door, you don't really know what you are going to get. So it is more exciting and stimulating. I would not be able to be in an office job. (4; B; 295)*

#### 4.8.3.2.3 Sub-sub-theme: Reflection

Serious and careful thought.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating reflection:

*If more people thought critically, there would be less false information spread, and less drama between population groups because instead of assuming everything you read is true, you would think about it. (2; B; 45)*

*The things that were bad for me. I would like to leave that in the past. I don't want to carry it with me forever. And I feel, slowly but surely, I am putting that behind me. I feel that if I carry that baggage with me, with my parents' divorce, my dad, my stepdad, what they did to me and the things I gave up, I would like to do the opposite now. I don't want to feel sad about my parents' divorce anymore. There is always a reason for it and I am not the reason. (7; F; 9)*

#### 4.8.3.2.4 Sub-sub-theme: Self- and career construction

The integration of social interactions in different contexts with past and present experiences to construct personal and occupational meaning and purpose.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating self- and career construction:

*I kind of built my identity around it. If I did well in horse riding and netball, I didn't really need friends. I had friends there. I didn't need to try with this or that. I achieved something every weekend.. (1; B; 361)*

*...all these things are like... it made me who I am. So I don't see it as bad anymore. I've learned from these things, but at the same time, all of this stuff is a memory haul. It's all like pieces in my thoughts that you never go to unless you have to for a good reason. Or accidentally. (2; F; 41)*

All the participants offered numerous statements to demonstrate the application of the various metacognitive skills which emerged as sub-sub-themes. Comments demonstrating self-awareness and reflection were especially significant, with comments related to the expression of self-knowledge and self- and career construction being fewer, but still present. The utilisation of metacognitive skills during this intervention demonstrated that participants were consistently thinking and reflecting about themselves, and therefore cognitively engaging in self- and career identity formation and, subsequently, self- and career construction.

#### **4.8.3.3 Sub-theme: Coping mechanisms**

The thoughts and behaviours participants utilise to manage internal and external stressors.

##### 4.8.3.3.1 Sub-sub-theme: Positive coping

Actions and strategies that reduce stress without being harmful in the long term.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating positive coping mechanisms:

*I really like to gym because it helps me with my stress, and it calms me down and puts me in a very different environment. It just makes me feel better about myself and it makes me feel confident about myself. (7; E; 64)*

*...that's where my love for languages and poetry began, because when there were too few words and I didn't know how to express my emotions, at least I could put it on paper. (3; C; 161)*

*I saw a psychologist last year when I was going through depression. (5; B; 92)*

#### 4.8.3.3.2 Sub-sub-theme: Destructive coping

Actions and strategies which do not resolve issues and may be harmful in the long term.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating destructive coping mechanisms:

*I was in active addiction for four years... (3; B; 293)*

*...I played the game and it was so addictive from the moment I first played it, I was so addicted to it. (9; E; 55)*

*Escapism. That's how I dealt with it (bullying), I think. (2; B; 252)*

*...mostly when I put tasks off, it's because I feel like I can't do it. So it won't be a task that I can do, it will be tasks where it's challenging and requires more and then I get very overwhelmed and then I think I am going to put it off because this is difficult. (4; B; 245)*

Participants mentioned their utilisation of destructive coping strategies more often than positive or proactive strategies and all the participants expressed awareness that they presented with avoidance behaviour and procrastination to handle stressors. Five participants reported addiction (three to gaming, one to social media, and one to substances) as a coping strategy in the past and one participant expressed awareness that his gaming addiction could interfere with his overall future well-being. Three participants admitted to lying, stealing, and engaging in risky sexual behaviour while two participants' quotes demonstrated more perfectionist tendencies and three participants mentioned pleasing others to avoid conflict.

Four participants received therapeutic support to help facilitate challenging experiences in the past and two participants indicated that journaling helped them process emotional experiences. Planning and exercising were reported by only three participants to be beneficial coping strategies to reduce anxiety.

#### **4.8.3.4 Sub-theme: Intrapersonal climate**

Participants' personal perspectives and attitudes which influenced their general ability to process developmental tasks and external influences.

##### 4.8.3.4.1 Sub-sub-theme: Mental health

The presence of disturbances in cognition, behaviour, or emotional regulation.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating the influence of mental health:

*I remember being emotionless. I remember... yeah...emotionless. No sadness, no happiness... it was just.... That is where the burnout and depression started. (5; C; 134)*

*...insecurity, low self-esteem, depression, and anxiety. (7; B; 458)*

*...I also have ADHD. (3; B; 44)*

#### 4.8.3.4.2 Sub-sub-theme: Physical health

The influence of physical conditions on daily functioning.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating the influence of physical health:

*...My health and everything together became chaotic. (10; B; 392)*

*...and I lost hearing in my left ear. (5; C; 150)*

#### 4.8.3.4.3 Sub-sub-theme: Spirituality

A particular system of faith and worship which is followed with devotion and a search for deeper meaning and purpose.

The following comments and examples are from participants illustrating the influence of spirituality:

*'How completely satisfying it is to turn from our limitations to a God that has none.' I think I am very... I have limits. I can't do that... but it is comforting for me to think there are exceptions. (1; B; 385)*

*I sought solace, I sought comfort. I couldn't make sense of everything; I didn't want to make sense of it. At that point I was angry with God. I was angry with the world. I was angry with life. I felt that anyone on this earth who actually deserves to die... I just felt, Lord, you made the wrong choice. (3; C; 167)*

*I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me. (6; B; 268)*

*...we love the same God. (7; B; 396)*

Nine participants referred to the significant influence of their mental health on their general functioning in the past which the majority seemingly managed to resolve. Quotes related to

participants' experiences of their mental health issues revealed that these intensely emotional experiences hindered the processing of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks at those times as their main aim was to survive emotionally. In terms of mental health at the time of the research process, two participants initially presented with high levels of anxiety and one participant with depressive symptoms. One participant's anxiety symptoms seemed to diminish as he appeared significantly calmer at the end of the research process whereas there did not appear to be any change in the other two participants' mental health at that time.

Three participants' quotes revealed that poor physical health such as underlying injuries and chronic medical conditions influenced their mental health and general well-being, subsequently influencing their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational development.

Quotes offered by six participants indicated that they considered their spirituality to positively influence their mental well-being which was also observed by the researcher in four of the participants. The participant who identified himself as an atheist presented with depressive symptoms throughout the process despite reporting that the freedom to choose a different spiritual trajectory than that of his family benefitted his intrapersonal development. One participant reported that she continued to struggle with handling anxiety despite the belief that her faith would carry her.

The post-intervention participant profiles are discussed next.

#### **4.9 POST-INTERVENTION PARTICIPANT PROFILES**

After the conclusion of the intervention process, a short reflective session was individually facilitated. During this session, participants were offered the opportunity to review their completed *CIP* questionnaire, the lifeline, the genogram, and the collage, and to reflect on their experience of the intervention. Section C of the *CIP* was also included to facilitate the discussion. After the reflection discussion, participants were requested to once again complete the *MEPSI*, *CAAS-SA*, and *MCM*. The comparison between pre-intervention and post-intervention participant profiles is illustrated in Table 4.6, whereafter changes in the results of the *MCM* (pre- and post-intervention) are described.

**Table 4.6**
*Comparison between Pre- and Post-Intervention Participant Profiles*

SUB-THEMES	SUB-SUB-THEMES	PARTICIPANTS PRE- AND POST-INTERVENTION									
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Psycho-social</b>	Trust/mistrust	● *	● *	●	● *	●	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *
	<b>Developmental tasks</b>	Autonomy/shame	● *	● *		● *	●	● *	● *	● *	● *
		Initiative/guilt	● *			● *	●		● *	● *	● *
		Industry/inferiority	● *	● *		● *	●		● *	● *	● *
		Identity/role confusion	● *	● *		● *	●	● *	● *	● *	● *
		Intimacy/isolation	● *	● *	●	● *	●	● *	● *	● *	● *
		Generativity/stagnation	● *	● *		● *	●	● *	● *	● *	● *
		Ego integrity/ despair	● *	● *		● *	●	● *	● *	● *	● *
<b>Occupational developmental tasks</b>	Career concern	● *	● *		● *		● *	● *	● *	● *	
	Career curiosity	● *			● *		● *			● *	
	Career control	● *	● *		● *		● *	● *	● *	● *	
	Career confidence	● *			● *				● *	● *	
	Career indecision	● *	● *		● *			● *	● *	● *	
	Future possibilities	● *		● *	● *		● *	● *	● *	● *	
<b>Metacognitive skills</b>	Reflection	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	
	Self-awareness	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	
	Self-knowledge	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	
	Self- and career construction	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	
<b>Identity exploration</b>	Values	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	
	Attributes		● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	
	Interests		● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	
<b>External influences</b>	Family		● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	● *	
	Technological influence		● *							● *	
	Traumatic experiences					● *				● *	
	Peers					● *				● *	
<b>Intrapersonal climate</b>	Mental health		● *	● *		● *			● *	● *	

Pre-intervention profile	●	<i>Note.</i> ● Refers to the presence of a specific sub-theme, or sub-sub-theme before the intervention whereas * refers to the presence of a specific sub-theme, or sub-sub-theme after the intervention.
Post-intervention profile	*	

Table 4.6 differs slightly from Table 4.2<sup>77</sup> which provided the reader with an overview of the pre-intervention participant profiles. Due to the nature of this explorative, qualitative study, I was cognisant of any change (e.g. any themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes that either emerged or disappeared) that occurred between the pre-and post-intervention profiles.

<sup>77</sup> Please refer to section 4.2.

Concerning the results obtained from the MEPSI, Participant 5 showed an overall mastery of all the psychosocial developmental tasks evaluated using this questionnaire. Participant 3 demonstrated the mastery of trust vs mistrust and Participants 4, 5, and 8 indicated mastery of initiative vs guilt. Participants 4 and 5 reported mastery of identity vs role confusion although Participant 6 demonstrated a lower score when compared to the pre-intervention assessment, suggesting the presence of role confusion after the intervention. Participants 3, 5, 7, 8, and 9 demonstrated mastery of the psychosocial developmental task intimacy vs isolation.

Occupational developmental tasks, as defined for use in this study, were described in Section 2.7 as well as Table 4.5, but to ease the discussion that follows, a short definition of each construct is provided in Table 4.7 below.

**Table 4.7**

*Occupational Developmental Tasks and their Definitions*

TASK	DEFINITION
<b>Career concern</b>	Demonstrating concern for the future through activated awareness, engagement in planning and preparation for a career.
<b>Career curiosity</b>	An inquisitive attitude, actively exploring self-knowledge and occupations and possessing knowledge of personal abilities, interests, values, and about different occupations.
<b>Career control</b>	Showing decision-making ability through being assertive, disciplined, and intentional in unpredictable situations.
<b>Career confidence</b>	A sense of self-efficacy to overcome career obstacles and implement career goals.
<b>Career indecision</b>	Uncertainty regarding suitable career trajectories.
<b>Future possibilities</b>	Perceiving future trajectories through rose-coloured glasses and having the experience that life is full of future possibilities.

*Note.* Compiled by the author (cf. Arnett, 2016; Cadaret & Hartung, 2021; Knight & Miller, 2017; Mmako & Letsoalo, 2020; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012).

The majority of participants' results on the post-intervention career concern construct (CAAS-SA) were considered adequate,<sup>78</sup> demonstrating proactive and appropriate<sup>79</sup> concern for their futures. Participants 4 and 10 were the only participants who demonstrated inadequate scores (CAAS-SA) on this construct during the pre-intervention assessment, demonstrating too little

<sup>78</sup> An adequate, sufficient, or significant improvement in the context of this study refers to the post-intervention result as being at least one standard deviation higher than before when interpreted using CAAS-SA South African standardised norms (Maree, 2012). The result is used qualitatively as a point of reference to indicate whether post-intervention change occurred or not (Glavin & Berger, 2013).

<sup>79</sup> 'Appropriate' in this context means the demonstration of proactive behaviour which will enhance occupational development.

concern about their futures. However, their post-intervention scores demonstrated significant<sup>80</sup> positive change (improvement of at least one standard deviation), indicating adequate career concern post-intervention. Participant 8's performance on the career concern construct (*CAAS-SA*) demonstrated a significant<sup>81</sup> deterioration post-intervention, suggesting insufficient or a lack of career concern (lower than average). This behaviour was also observed by the researcher and could be related to the presentation of depressive symptoms which were mentioned previously.

Career curiosity as an occupational developmental task seemed to be adequately resolved post-intervention for three of the four participants who presented with this challenge pre-intervention. However, no changes were recorded for career control and career confidence post-intervention.

Of the five participants who reported career indecision during the pre-intervention assessment, one participant stated that this was no longer an issue for him post-intervention. Furthermore, the results of the *MCM* indicated career certainty<sup>82</sup> for the majority of the participants, suggesting career indecision to be mostly resolved. Another notable change was that five participants' quotes revealed that they were able to identify future possibilities after the intervention (confirmed by the post-intervention results of the *MCM*).

During the reflection session, it was observed<sup>83</sup> by the researcher, by consulting her field notes and affirmed by her perusal of the *Atlas.ti* (v23; 2023) results, that the majority of participants, quite surprisingly, utilised all of the metacognitive skills mentioned in Theme 3, without being prompted to do so. Most of the participants responded to reflective questions posed to them with more self-confidence, demonstrating an overall improvement in the application of self-awareness, self-knowledge, reflection, as well as self- and career construction. Interestingly, the only two participants who omitted any reference to their self- and career construction in the final session were participants 8 and 10 who presented with mental health issues (depressive and anxiety symptoms) throughout the intervention. Participant 8, who presented with depressive symptoms, also omitted references to self-knowledge.

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<sup>80</sup> Refer to footnote 22.

<sup>81</sup> A significant deterioration refers to a result being at least one standard deviation lower than before, resulting in at least a below-average score (when interpreted according to standardised South African norms).

<sup>82</sup> Career certainty indicates certainty regarding future career trajectories and was qualitatively identified by comparing the pre- and post-intervention "Go for it" quadrants (*MCM* p.4).

<sup>83</sup> In the field notes, the researcher referred to overall impressions and observations, such as emotional atmosphere, appearance, communication style, etc. For example, of special significance was one participant who attended the reflection session dressed like a different, more mature person with a new hairstyle and smart casual dress code. He even walked with a different gait.

Eight participants' quotes revealed an increased awareness of their values and attributes, while three participants indicated an increased awareness of their interests, suggesting enhanced overall self-awareness and the active processing of identity exploration, as well as self- and career construction. Five of the participants' quotes revealed that they were aware of their mental health and its perceived influence on their current functioning. In terms of the impact of external influences on participants, four participants mentioned the influence of their family, two participants indicated that technology influenced them, and participants 5, 9, and 10 stated that they considered past traumatic experiences and the past and present influence of their peers to have contributed to the changes they experienced during the intervention process.

A summary of the qualitative data analysis findings is discussed next.

#### **4.10 SUMMARISED COMMENTS: QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS**

The data analysis revealed that three main themes and numerous sub-themes and sub-sub-themes could be related to the objective of this study. Participants' responses demonstrated that their negotiation of underlying developmental tasks was influenced by the dynamic interaction between external influences and internal factors. A comparison of the pre- and post-intervention status of themes and sub-themes in light of the discussion above is provided in Table 4.8 below and indicates that the completion of the adapted life-design counselling intervention process benefitted the majority of participants.

**Table 4.8**

Summary of Pre- and Post-Intervention Status of Themes, Sub-Themes, and Sub-Sub-Themes

THEME	SUB-THEME	SUB-SUB-THEME	PRE-INTERVENTION STATUS	POST-INTERVENTION STATUS
<b>UNMASTERED DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</b>	<b>Intrapersonal</b>	Trust vs Mistrust	All the participants indicated through their responses on the <i>MEPSI</i> that they were still engaged in this developmental task.	Despite the absence of measurable proof that this developmental task has been mastered (except for Participant 3's responses on the <i>MEPSI</i> ), the researcher observed that participants became more comfortable with expressing their awareness of being engaged in this developmental task.
		Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt	Seven of the participants' responses on the <i>MEPSI</i> demonstrated their present engagement in this developmental task.	No change was observed regarding this developmental task.
		Initiative vs Guilt	Six participants indicated ( <i>MEPSI</i> ) that they were in the process of negotiating this developmental task.	Four of the six participants who initially reported the presence of this developmental task indicated that they had mastered it ( <i>MEPSI</i> ).
		Industry vs Inferiority	Eight participants' responses on the <i>MEPSI</i> suggested that they were involved in the negotiation of this developmental task.	One participant's responses ( <i>MEPSI</i> ) demonstrated the mastery of this developmental task. It was evident from the <i>Atlas.ti</i> (v23) codes that the focus of participants' responses shifted from feelings of inferiority (during initial conversations) to industriousness as the life-design process

THEME	SUB-THEME	SUB-SUB-THEME	PRE-INTERVENTION STATUS	POST-INTERVENTION STATUS
				<p>progressed, suggesting a positive influence in terms of mastery of this developmental task.</p>
		<p>Identity vs Role Confusion</p>	<p>Results obtained from the <i>MEPSI</i> indicated nine participants to be actively engaged in this developmental task.</p>	<p>Two participants' responses (<i>MEPSI</i>) indicated the mastery of this developmental task. Furthermore, the investigation of the <i>Atlas.ti</i> (v23) codes suggested initial conversations to have focused significantly more (double) on role confusion than on identity. Towards the end of the intervention process in the final collage activity, the focus of conversations shifted to identity formation references and during participants' post-intervention reflections, 20 references were made to identity formation whereas only one response referred to role confusion. Hence, a significant positive change in favour of identity formation was demonstrated.</p> <p>Identity explorative conversations (including discussions of abilities, interests, and values) were central to all of the life-design intervention activities and possibly contributed to participants' identity formation.</p>

THEME	SUB-THEME	SUB-SUB-THEME	PRE-INTERVENTION STATUS	POST-INTERVENTION STATUS
	<b>Interpersonal</b>	Intimacy vs Isolation	Results from the <i>MEPSI</i> indicated eight participants to be involved in this unmastered developmental task.	Post-intervention results from the <i>MEPSI</i> indicated that four participants mastered this developmental task. <i>Atlas.ti</i> (v23) code-analysis indicated that the number of references to intimacy and isolation were almost equal except for lifeline discussions which revealed an increased awareness of the positive influence of intimacy.
	<b>Occupational</b>	Career indecision	Half of the participants indicated that they experienced career indecision.	One participant indicated that his career indecision was resolved whereas <i>Atlas.ti</i> (v23) codes revealed significantly fewer references to career indecision during the reflections of participants if compared to their pre-intervention conversations. Career certainty and the ability to identify future occupational possibilities were demonstrated through conversations as well as by the post-intervention results of the <i>MCM</i> .

THEME	SUB-THEME	SUB-SUB-THEME	PRE-INTERVENTION STATUS	POST-INTERVENTION STATUS
		Career adaptability	Approximately half of the participants demonstrated inadequate levels of career curiosity, career control, and career confidence while the majority (eight participants) indicated inadequate levels of career concern.	The results from the CAAS-SA demonstrated a significant improvement in nine participants' career concern and career curiosity scores from inadequate to adequate. No change was observed in terms of career confidence and career control. As such, career adaptability improved.
		Future possibilities	No references were made to future occupational possibilities.	Increased awareness of future possibilities was identified by five participants post-intervention.
<b>EXTERNAL INFLUENCES</b>	<b>Microsystem</b>	Family	No mention was made pre-intervention.	Four participants demonstrated an increased awareness of the influence of their families on their lives in general (personal and occupational).
		Education	No mention was made pre-intervention.	No mention was made post-intervention.
		Sport	No mention was made pre-intervention.	No mention was made post-intervention.
	<b>Mesosystem</b>	Peers	No mention was made pre-intervention.	Three participants mentioned increased awareness of the influence of their peers on their lives.
		Significant events	No mention was made pre-intervention.	No mention was made post-intervention.
		Traumatic experiences	No mention was made pre-intervention.	Three participants demonstrated increased insight into the influence that traumatic experiences have had on their decisions and behaviour in the past and the present.

THEME	SUB-THEME	SUB-SUB-THEME	PRE-INTERVENTION STATUS	POST-INTERVENTION STATUS
	<b>Exosystem</b>	Economic status	No mention was made pre-intervention.	No mention was made post-intervention.
		Technological influence	No mention was made pre-intervention.	Three participants demonstrated increased awareness of the influence of technology on their well-being and general functioning.
	<b>Macrosystem</b>	South African Economy	No mention was made pre-intervention.	No mention was made post-intervention.
		COVID-19	No mention was made pre-intervention.	No mention was made post-intervention.
<b>INTERNAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE PROCESSING OF DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</b>	<b>Personal attributes</b>		No mention was made pre-intervention.	Eight participants demonstrated increased awareness of how their attributes, for example, resilience and perseverance, enable them to manage challenges they are confronted with.
		<b>Metacognitive skills</b>	Reflection	Only four participants demonstrated the use of reflection during the pre-intervention assessment.
	Self-awareness		Six participants demonstrated self-awareness pre-intervention.	All of the participants demonstrated self-awareness post-intervention.
	Self-knowledge		No mention was made of self-knowledge pre-intervention.	Nine participants demonstrated increased self-knowledge post-intervention.
	Self- and career construction		No mention was made of self- and career construction pre-intervention.	Eight participants demonstrated the application of self and career construction post-intervention.
	<b>Coping mechanisms</b>		No mention was made of coping mechanisms pre-intervention.	Two participants demonstrated insight and self-awareness into their application of coping mechanisms.

THEME	SUB-THEME	SUB-SUB-THEME	PRE-INTERVENTION STATUS	POST-INTERVENTION STATUS
	<b>Intrapersonal climate</b>	Mental health	No mention was made of mental health pre-intervention.	Half of the participants demonstrated insight into the influence of their mental health on their general well-being and functioning.
		Spirituality	No mention was made of spirituality pre-intervention.	No mention was made of spirituality post-intervention.

The information displayed in Table 4.8 reflects the most prevalent participant descriptions and demonstrates relevant themes which emerged from the data. I now proceed to a critical reflection of this chapter.

#### 4.11 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CHAPTER

This chapter reported on the qualitative data which emerged through the thematic analysis of several data sources.<sup>84</sup> The results were initially displayed in tabular format by distinguishing between the significant sub-themes and sub-sub-themes related to each of the three main themes. The inclusion and exclusion criteria which linked the data to themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes were provided, whereafter a theme-by-theme discussion followed which included examples of direct quotes from participants to demonstrate each theme, sub-theme, and sub-sub-theme.

The various themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes demonstrated participants' experiences of the influence of an adapted life-design counselling intervention on their unmastered developmental tasks. The presence of several unmastered developmental tasks, Theme 1, was demonstrated and included unmastered intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks. Unmastered intrapersonal developmental tasks which were identified included Trust vs Mistrust, Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt, Initiative vs Guilt, Industriousness vs Inferiority, and Identity (which also included identity exploration) vs Role Confusion. All the participants' responses revealed an increased awareness of these psychosocial processes as the intervention progressed, and towards the end of the intervention, there was a visible improvement (and in some cases mastery) in the areas of Trust vs Mistrust, Industriousness vs Inferiority, and Identity vs Role Confusion. Significant observable and meaningful positive progress was identified for four participants in terms of their navigation of the unmastered interpersonal developmental task Intimacy vs Isolation. Furthermore, significant statistical improvement was observed in the unmastered occupational developmental tasks of career adaptability (especially for the constructs of career concern and career curiosity), whereas significant psychological improvement was observed in the unmastered developmental tasks of career indecision and future possibilities.

Although the participants referred to several external influences, the second theme, to have had a significant psychological influence on their lives during the intervention process, only the impact of their direct family, traumatic experiences, technology, and peers were identified as key sub-themes post-intervention. The participants specifically referred to the support they received from their families, the expectations they experienced from their parents, and the family values they observed and either mimicked or discarded. Technology was reported to be a method through which to experience connection and intimacy with peers, but also as a coping style for three

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<sup>84</sup> Please refer to Table 4.3 for the data sources as well as guidelines on the identification of a source.

participants. Traumatic experiences were reflected on with maturity and insight and discussion of these experiences highlighted the attributes which developed as a result. However, for three of the participants, traumatic experiences remained painful to talk about although they exhibited self-awareness in terms of its influence on their lives and agency (one participant) to seek therapeutic assistance post-intervention. Participants reported peer influence to be both positive and negative.

The third theme, internal factors influencing the processing of unmastered developmental tasks, was comprised of personal attributes, metacognitive skills, coping mechanisms, and participants' intrapersonal climate. Eight participants' post-intervention quotes revealed an increased awareness of their attributes, which also contributed to their self-knowledge and sense of identity. They were able to reflect on how these attributes enabled them to handle situations they were confronted with and how their unique attributes contributed to their identity development (and subsequently self- and career construction). All of the participants demonstrated the application of self-awareness, self-knowledge, reflection, and self- and career construction post-intervention which indicated improved metacognitive skills. An increased awareness of the role of coping mechanisms and the influence of mental health on decisions, behaviour, and general well-being was also demonstrated by five participants post-intervention. This increased awareness and development of participants' attributes and metacognitive skills, along with their awareness of the role that coping mechanisms and mental health plays in their lives, seemed to have a significant positive psychological influence on the navigation of unmastered developmental tasks. Despite the absence of any references post-intervention about the influence of spirituality, this featured throughout the intervention process as an important positive sub-theme for about half of the participants.

In Chapter 5, the qualitative data is critically reviewed and related to the theoretical framework and literature review presented in Chapter 2.



# CHAPTER 5: RELATING MY FINDINGS TO EXISTING LITERATURE ON LIFE-DESIGN COUNSELLING AND UNMASTERED DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

“No [hu]man ever steps into the same river twice, for it is not the same river and [they are] not the same [hu]man[s]”.<sup>85</sup> This particular statement resonated with me as a researcher during the data gathering and analysis process of this qualitative study. Every time a participant and I stepped into the river of time simultaneously, we were influenced by each other’s emotional, political, and personal perspectives (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018), and every time we returned to the “river”, we entered altered by previous interactions. Qualitative research aims to understand how participants experience their unique contexts at a specific point in time and the meaning it holds for them (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Still, as is clear from the philosophical statement above, qualitative research interactions inevitably become richer and more layered as intervention progresses. During this study, I worked from an INTERPRETIVIST-positivist paradigm<sup>86</sup> and utilised a mixed-methods case study design.<sup>87</sup> The interpretivist paradigm allowed me to discover the answer to the research question by developing a rich and in-depth understanding (Barker et al., 2016; Jason & Glenwick, 2016) of young adults’ (with unmastered developmental tasks) experiences of an adapted life-design intervention process.

Chapter 5 is not only dedicated to the detailed and systematic discussion of the research findings reported in the previous chapter but also to the comparison and contextualisation of the findings when evaluated alongside the literature which addressed other studies on life-design counselling interventions and their influence on unmastered developmental tasks. I, therefore, endeavoured to compare, link, and interpret the research findings within the literature framework and the context of contemporary literature, whilst attempting to communicate trustworthy and rigorous qualitative research results transparently, keeping the implications of the results for current and future research and practice, as well as policy, in mind. It was crucial to relate my views and findings to those of others, by using the following four-fold lens:

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<sup>85</sup> This saying is credited to Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher who was active about 5000bc in Turkey.

<sup>86</sup> Please refer to section 3.3 for a comprehensive discussion regarding the Interpretivist-positivist paradigm

<sup>87</sup> Please refer to section 3.4 for a comprehensive discussion regarding the mixed-methods case study design used in this study.

- i. Do the findings of my research support previous findings? Are there any surprising results?
- ii. Which of the findings of the present study do not concur with or support previous findings?
- iii. Have some of the findings from the present study not yet been reported? Did I learn something novel from my research?
- iv. Did specific trends emerge in the findings of my study?<sup>88</sup>

## 5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS IN RELATION TO PREVIOUS STUDIES

In this section, I discuss the results obtained from the data analysis. The discussion of the findings of this study is based on the themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes identified in Table 4.4 and then related to the research questions.<sup>89</sup> Existing literature, as presented in Chapter 2, is considered together with additional research that was uncovered.

### 5.2.1 Theme 1: Unmastered developmental tasks

In this study, unmastered developmental tasks<sup>90</sup> refer to particular developmental challenges, whether psychological, social, or occupational, which keep individuals from reaching their full potential or prohibit them from leading meaningful lives. Three sub-themes emerged from theme 1 which indicated that young adults were uniquely and simultaneously engaged in intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks. Each of these sub-themes and their related sub-sub-themes and sub-sub-sub-themes is discussed next.

#### 5.2.1.1 *Intrapersonal developmental tasks*

Erikson (1968) proposed that individuals experience underlying psychosocial demands throughout their lifespan which tend to become more prominent during certain developmental stages. These developmental tasks can be described as the navigation of individual needs in the context of social demands (Uhlendorff, 2004). Erikson (1968) furthermore suggested that individuals could reconsider the resolution of previously mastered developmental tasks during subsequent developmental stages and that individuals should aim to find a balance between the two opposing values, for example, Identity vs Role Confusion, rather than focusing on only achieving the positive value (Erikson, 1968; Orenstein & Lewis, 2022; Sugarman, 2004). Leaning too much towards the positive could be

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<sup>88</sup> Finding literature which investigated young adults' navigation of psychosocial developmental tasks proved to be quite a challenge and I have to agree with Samsanovich (2021) that the vast majority of research, especially on Erikson's work (1968), proved to be conceptual (Batra, 2013; Cross, 2001; Cross & Cross., 2017; Del Corso et al., 2011b; Knight, 2017; Marcia, 2002; Maree, 2021a; Munley, 1975; Salamone & Salamone, 1993; Sekowski, 2022).

<sup>89</sup> Worldwide research data bases were scrutinised with the help of an excellent data-collection expert from the University of Pretoria.

<sup>90</sup> Please refer to section 1.6.2 for a comprehensive definition as was applied in this study.

considered maladaptive, whereas leaning too much toward the negative value, could be described as malignant (Erikson, 1968; Orenstein & Lewis, 2022).

The results from this study confirmed Erikson's theoretical stance that psychosocial developmental tasks are present throughout the lifespan (Erikson, 1968; Sugarman, 2004) as six of Erikson's psychosocial developmental challenges emerged as sub-themes from the data. Each of the sub-themes which emerged in relation to existing literature is discussed in the next sub-sections.

*i. Trust vs Mistrust*

All of the participants indicated the presence of the intrapersonal developmental task Trust vs Mistrust during the pre-intervention session and no statistically<sup>91</sup> measurable change was reported post-intervention except for one participant. Hartung (in Peila-Shuster et al., 2019) stated that secure relationships between parents and their children have been linked to enhanced autonomy, the career exploration process, the ability to identify future career possibilities, and career decision-making (Palos & Drobot, 2010). The results of this study confirm the findings of Sneed et al. (2006) that Trust vs Mistrust, a developmental task considered mainly relevant in infancy, continues to be a presenting developmental task of young adulthood (and possibly across the lifespan) as was suggested by Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1968; Maree, 2024; Rotenberg, 2010; Sugarman, 2004). Furthermore, the results are aligned with the views of Orenstein and Lewis (2022) and Zock (2018) who contended that young adults reconsider and evaluate feelings of Trust vs Mistrust as well as Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt in newly established interpersonal and intimate relationships since trust and autonomy underpin the psychosocial developmental task of Intimacy vs Isolation.

*ii. Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt*

Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt, another sub-theme, was reported by seven participants both pre- and post-intervention. These results, once again, confirm Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial stages being present throughout the lifespan (Erikson, 1994; Rotenberg, 2010; Sugarman, 2004) as well as the statements by Orenstein and Lewis (2022) and Zock (2018) that the presence of Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt, given its relation to intimacy, should be expected in young adulthood. Furthermore, the development of autonomy stands central to individuals' career control, an occupational developmental task identified in this study, and is a feature of career adaptability (Brimrose &

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<sup>91</sup> Statistically significance in the context of this study refers to a positive or negative change of at least one Standard Deviation as prescribed by the MEPSI.

Frigerio, 2019; Hartung et al., 2008). The presence of both Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt and career control as unresolved developmental tasks post-intervention therefore confirmed the findings of previous literature (Brimrose & Frigerio, 2019; Hartung et al., 2008).

At the time of this study, I was unable to obtain literature which documented possible theoretical connections and relationships between the Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt psychosocial developmental stage and the emergent adulthood features of *instability* and *feeling-in-between* (Arnett, 2000, 2015a, 2015b; Arnett & Mitra, 2020). The results from this study suggested that Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt finds expression in the emerging adulthood features<sup>92</sup> of *instability* and *feeling in-between* since young adults find themselves in a period of transition and are still dependent on their parents in terms of decision-making and financial support (Arnett & Mitra, 2020). An example from a participant's quote that demonstrates a connection between Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt and *instability* is as follows: "Then, last year, I moved out. Big thing. I moved out of the childhood home..." (4; C; 205) whereas an example of the link between doubt and *feeling-in-between* is: "...I struggle to do things by myself...I always find something and ask someone if I am doing it right." (5; B; 112).

### iii. Initiative vs Guilt<sup>93</sup>

Two-thirds of the participants who reported the presence of Initiative vs Guilt pre-intervention indicated that this developmental challenge had been resolved post-intervention despite only 10 relevant responses being documented in total during the intervention (Atlast.ti; v23). This result along with the increased self- and career construction demonstrated in this study confirms the view of Batra (2013) who noted that the resolution of Initiative vs Guilt is closely related to the development of a sense of purpose – one of the main aims of life-design counselling and self- and career construction (Hartog et al., 2017; Maree, 2020a, 2022a). The results of this study also confirmed the suggestion that initiative is closely related to career curiosity (Taber, 2019) since both initiative and career curiosity proved to be resolved post-intervention.

### iv. Industry vs Inferiority

The Industry vs Inferiority stage stands central to the development of self-confidence, competence, and a sense of purpose (Batra, 2013; Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009) and is mastered through the active

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<sup>92</sup> Please refer to section 2.5.6

<sup>93</sup> At the time of writing these results, no available literature could be found about studies investigating Initiative vs Guilt in young adults and the results of this study are considered to report some of the first on this topic.

exploration of the environment and utilisation of available assessment instruments which leads to successful outcomes. Once again, the mastery of this stage is considered to enhance the navigation of future developmental stages (Erikson, 1968; Gross, 2020). This study observed no meaningful change between the pre- and post-intervention assessments of this developmental stage except for one participant. However, the *Atlas.ti* (v23) codes revealed a shift from initial conversations which tended to revolve predominantly around inferiority to increased mention of industry towards the end of the intervention. Since there is some suggestion from the positive results of this study that young adults experiencing Industry vs Inferiority may benefit from an adapted life-design intervention, it is advised that the influence of life-design counselling on this developmental stage be explored in more detail in future research.

#### v. *Identity vs Role Confusion*

Identity vs Role Confusion is the psychosocial developmental task generally associated with the development of a coherent sense of self and is considered to be a lifelong process which takes centre stage in adolescence and continues into young adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Batra, 2013; Crocetti, 2017; Dunkel & Sefcek, 2009; Erikson, 1994; Maree, 2020a, 2024; Savickas, 2005; Schwartz et al., 2009). Identity formation has also been likened to the process of self-construction over the life span (Maree, 2024) and therefore influences individuals' career construction and career identities (Chávez, 2016; Del Corso & Rehfuß, 2011a; Savickas, 2012a). In addition, other developmental tasks of young adulthood, such as developing a sense of self and career identity (Maree, 2019b; Maree & Che, 2020) as well as the preceding psychosocial developmental stages mentioned by Erikson (1968) are closely related to the Identity vs Role Confusion stage given the interrelated and dynamic nature of human development.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, I anticipated the participants in this study to be mainly concerned with navigating Intimacy vs Isolation (Erikson, 1968) along with the emerging adulthood features as described by Arnett (2000; 2016) and career adaptability constructs (Maree, 2017a; Savickas, 1997). The extent to which the participants were engaged in Identity vs Role Confusion and identity exploration initially surprised me as it suggested that most of the participants were still in the process of establishing a coherent sense of self. As was theorised by Erikson (1968), the presence of role confusion in this study was confirmed to be related to unmastered developmental tasks in earlier psychosocial developmental stages as well as past and recent (emerging adulthood)

traumatic experiences.<sup>94</sup> My findings confirmed the results of Dereboy et al. (2018) who concluded after their study with 635 emerging adults (17-29 years of age) that traumatic childhood experiences influenced their emotional regulation and sense of identity as well as the results of Raemen et al. (2021) who concluded, after their study with 552 South African adolescents and emerging adults (ages 13 – 21), that traumatic childhood experiences were associated with increased role confusion (identity diffusion) and self-harm. My findings also confirmed those of Shalka (2019) who concluded from 12 case studies (emerging adults) that traumatic experiences during emerging adulthood influenced identity development as participants had to reconsider their sense of self. The following examples illustrate the presence of Identity vs Role Confusion in this study: “I tend to doubt myself and my capabilities... um... that is an issue that has stemmed from childhood.” (4; B; 237) and “The phase of figuring out who I want to be and then I had all of my family drama on top of that.” (4; B; 427)

The negative effect of bullying (as a traumatic experience) on self-esteem (and subsequently identity formation) during adolescence as reported in the literature (Cassidy, 2009; Tanga & Hendricks, 2019; Thornberg, 2015) was confirmed by the results of this study. Cassidy (2009) reported significant psychological distress and poor self-esteem as consequences of bullying in a large sample of 11 to 15-year-old children. Tanga and Hendricks (2019) concluded from their South African qualitative study on high school students, that bullying resulted in long-term effects such as low self-esteem, thoughts of self-harm, and maladaptive behaviour, whereas Thornberg (2015) concluded after their qualitative study involving six classes of 10 to 12-year-old children that bullying resulted in children experiencing loss of belonging, a lack of self-worth, and identity challenges. The following examples from participants in this study refer to bullying experiences during adolescence and demonstrate isolation and Identity vs Role Confusion: “...I think bullying had a significant influence on me...” (2; B; 238), “...I was bullied a lot for having a big head and being a skinny nerd.” (2; C; 34), and “...it was quite a dark zone...being the outsider, being bullied... I remember having to relocate where I used to spend my break because kids would try to find me and bully me...” (5; C; 40). The participants of my study reported the effects of being bullied during adolescence to be memorable and significant several years after it took place, indicating that traumatic childhood experiences influenced psychosocial development and identity development (as stated by Erikson (1968) and Maree (2024)).

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<sup>94</sup> The influence of traumatic experiences on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks will be discussed separately later in this chapter.

Role confusion and inadequate identity formation in this study were also related to the inability to successfully choose and implement a career trajectory as suggested by Erikson (1968) and Maree (2024) as quotes related to role confusion were often accompanied by statements about career-related uncertainties (including career indecision). One example was when a participant described their dream career in great detail only to rank the same career as a sixth preference on the following page. When asked to clarify the discrepancy, they could not explain and conceded that this occurrence was “interesting”. Another example which demonstrated a participant’s role confusion was the title of their life story “The Chaotic Masterpiece” (9; B; 283) with subsequent life chapters which were completely unrelated to the title. This particular participant did not demonstrate any post-intervention change in terms of unmastered developmental tasks which suggested that the presence of role confusion, linked to previous unmastered developmental tasks and adverse childhood experiences, hindered progress.

Identity exploration (Arnett, 2000, 2016), which contributes to the development of vocational personality (Hartung, 2011b; Savickas, 2005), was confirmed by the results of this study, as suggested by Galanaki and Leontopoulou (2017) in their study with 784 emerging Greek adults, to be a central feature of emerging adulthood as participants demonstrated the active and intentional investigation of and reflection on identity components<sup>95</sup> (values, interests, and abilities) concerning their areas of love, work, and worldviews throughout the intervention. The identity exploration observed in this research was considered to be enhanced by the creation of a safe environment, as reported by Sugimura et al. (2022) in their research on identity exploration in real time between peers. These researchers (Sugimura et al., 2022) investigated the themes of semi-structured weekly conversations between first-year students over a few weeks. They concluded, amongst other findings, that a safe and supportive environment enhanced the identity exploration of young adults. In my study, I observed that the participants enjoyed talking about different aspects of themselves in a transparent manner and often shared their (vulnerable) emotions related to certain past experiences. The findings of Lipshits-Brazilier et al. (2024) that the clarification of personal values influences individuals’ career preferences were confirmed in this study by the numerous discussions<sup>96</sup> about participants’ personal values<sup>97</sup> throughout the intervention. All of the participants frequently referred to their values, at times repeating and explaining them and other

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<sup>95</sup> Please refer to Table 4.6

<sup>96</sup> References to values were two times more than to interests and four times more than to abilities.

<sup>97</sup> Values in the context of this study refer to the unique and relatively consistent broad and motivational goals which guide individuals’ action and decision-making (Lipshits-Brazilier et al., 2024).

times reflecting on and affirming them. Participants also evaluated their family of origin's values against their own, motivating their behaviour and reflecting on the consequences of value-related decisions.

The results of this study furthermore indicated that the adapted life-design counselling intervention implemented enhanced<sup>98</sup> the identity formation of young adults. Despite the interventions not being identical, my findings confirmed the results of Schwartz et al. (2005) who reported a positive correlation between cognitively and emotionally focused interventions (which share characteristics with this life-design counselling intervention) and identity formation. In their mixed-methods quasi-experimental study with 90 young adults, the researchers (Schwartz et al., 2005) concluded after the post-intervention assessment that a combination of cognitive and emotionally focused interventions was most effective in addressing self-construction and self-discovery in influencing the identity development of emerging adults. Furthermore, the findings of this study correlated positively with literature findings on enhanced career identity and career adaptability of 69 adolescents (16-18 years) as a result of a group career construction intervention as reported by Cadaret and Hartung (2021) as well as enhanced career identity as a result of a career construction intervention with a young adult trauma survivor (Maree, 2024), a life-design intervention with an adolescent from a disadvantaged background (Maree & Che, 2020), career construction counselling with a gifted adolescent in search of meaning and purpose (Maree, 2019b), and an adult experiencing career adaptability challenges (Taber & Briddick, 2011). In addition, the enhanced identity demonstrated in this study correlated with the findings of an enhanced sense of self as reported by Maree et al. (2018) in their study, where life-design counselling was provided to a group of 24 adolescent girls, in a career construction intervention case study of an adult woman experiencing career challenges (Maree & Nortjé, 2023), in a mid-career intervention with a gay person (Maree, 2014), and in interventions involving an emerging adult who suffered parental neglect (Le Grange & Maree, 2022), a mid-career black man (Maree, 2016b), an adolescent girl who suffered from a lack of self-worth (Maree, 2020c), and an adolescent boy who suffered from Tourette's Syndrome (Maree, 2020b). The results of my study therefore confirmed Maree's (2022a, p.4) view that "narrating one's micro-stories (through life-design counselling) is central to acquiring a stable sense of self and identity".

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<sup>98</sup> Please refer to Table 4.7

### 5.2.1.2 *Interpersonal developmental tasks*

#### vi. *Intimacy vs Isolation*

Once personal identity has been established to a reasonable extent, young adults move into the Intimacy vs Isolation developmental stage whereas the failure to establish a personal identity is considered to lead to (emotional) isolation and the inability to establish lasting intimate relationships with peers and romantic partners (Brockman, 2011; Erikson, 1968; Gross, 2020). The underlying dynamic between the two psychosocial developmental stages Identity vs Role Confusion and Intimacy vs Isolation appeared to be closely related and reciprocal as indicated by results reported in the literature. According to Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke (2010), who obtained data from a 10-year longitudinal study and used the data of 93 participants from adolescence (mean age 15 years) and again in young adulthood (mean age between 24 and 25 years), and Weisskirch (2018), who analysed questionnaires completed by 232 emerging adults, the results of their studies indicated that the resolution of the preceding Identity vs Role Confusion stage contributed to the mastery of the Intimacy vs Isolation stage. On the contrary, Merriam et al. (1997) reported that intimacy and generativity enhanced the resolution and affirmation of identity and ego integrity in their qualitative study of 18 adults (under the age of 45 years) who suffered from a serious illness. Marcia (2002) concluded after two case studies (i.e. with a 53-year-old male and a 37-year-old female) that the reconstruction<sup>99</sup> of identity was to be expected after life transitions or experiences which cause disequilibrium in individuals' lives and could continue through the life span, which confirms what I have already observed in this study. The extent of my study did not cover an in-depth investigation of this particular occurrence. However, the interrelated dynamic between these two developmental tasks was clear from the participants' responses and my findings therefore confirmed the aforementioned literature. One participant who initially (pre-intervention) experienced intense feelings of isolation, exacerbated by work circumstances, described a significant relationship as follows: "The solidarity, the friendship, the fact that I can be myself and not worry for a single moment about judgement and anything close to that topic. I can be me, I can love, and I am not too much." (3; F; 27). This statement demonstrates the central role that identity (I can be myself, I can be me) plays in the resolution of intimacy. Another participant indicated the presence of a life partner to be one of the most significant influences in their life and someone who affirmed their identity: "My partner has loved me and accepted me for who I am. This is something I don't think

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<sup>99</sup> In this study, the reconstruction of identity entails the reconsideration of the inclusion or exclusion of certain traits and characteristics into a deeper and richer identity.

many people have done in my life.” (5; B; 200). My qualitative findings demonstrated enhanced Identity vs Role Confusion as well as the resolution of Intimacy vs Isolation (Erikson, 1968) since half of the participants who indicated the presence of this latter stage pre-intervention, indicated that this task was adequately resolved post-intervention. As such, the results of this study also concur with the findings of Mitchell et al. (2021) who utilised data from 1224 participants participating in a longitudinal study that emerging adults with higher identity resolution experienced higher levels of intimacy in emerging adulthood.

### **5.2.1.3 Occupational developmental tasks**

#### *i. Career indecision*

Career decision-making, the process of utilising cognitive processes to integrate self-knowledge and occupational knowledge and subsequently make suitable occupational choices, is considered a significant developmental task of young adulthood (Bian, 2023; Priyashantha et al., 2023; Stringer et al., 2012) and most young adults present with career indecision<sup>100</sup> at some point as a result of natural transitions (Di Fabio et al., 2013, 2015; Maree, 2016b, 2020d). Savickas (1995) maintained that career indecision provides individuals with the opportunity to engage in exploration and undergo change which contributes to the construction of their identities. Maree (2020d) distinguishes between the following kinds of career indecision difficulties, some of which emerged in this study: (i) insufficient career knowledge to address a need for career choice information, (ii) identity diffusion (an inadequate sense of self), (iii) trait-indecision (the inability to make a career decision), (iv) choice anxiety, and (v) disagreement with others (significant others' disapproval). Career indecision was also reported as being possibly related to emotional intelligence (Di Fabio et al., 2013) and personality (Di Fabio et al., 2015). Since life-design counselling is comprised of self- and career construction, career indecision in this study was viewed from a constructivist perspective. As such, participants' career indecision was viewed as being experienced within unique contexts and with unique meanings and emotions ascribed to them (Stead & Davis, 2015).

As mentioned before, half of the participants in this study indicated the presence of career indecision during the pre-intervention assessment as well as at the beginning of the intervention (sessions 1 and 2), whereas the results obtained during the post-intervention assessment demonstrated increased career certainty. The results of my study support the three separate case

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<sup>100</sup> Career indecision in this study refers to a developmental task which all people are expected to experience whereas career indecisiveness refers to a chronic inability to make decisions in various contexts (Di Fabio et al., 2013).

study findings of Maree (2016b; 2018b; 2020d) and the case study described by Savickas (1995) who reported that career construction counselling enhanced the resolution of career indecision for young adults (two women and two men). My findings also concurred with the results of Barclay and Stolz (2016) who conducted a life-design counselling intervention in a small group context (three young adults) and reported a decrease in career indecision and an increase in career certainty. The findings of Cardoso et al. (2016a) were also confirmed by the results of my study which indicated that life-design counselling contributed to the vocational certainty of an adolescent. As such, I agree with Maree (2018a) and Savickas (1995) that the construction of meaning and an increased sense of purpose, some of the main aims of life-design counselling, enhance the resolution of career indecision. The results of my study, however, do not concur with the findings of Che et al. (2023) who investigated the influence of life-design counselling in a group setting with 91 adolescents from resource-constrained environments and were unable to measure statistically significant resolution of career indecision.

Another relationship which emerged from this study was that enhanced identity formation correlated positively with increased career certainty and a decrease in career indecision. This finding confirmed the results of Ng and Feldman (2009) who investigated the relationship between 202 young adults' search for identity (with a focus on personality traits such as locus of control and positive affectivity and interpersonal relationships with their peers and parents) with vocational indecision over five months. These researchers (Ng & Feldman, 2009) demonstrated that increased identity formation (constructed from a variety of roles) is related to decreased levels of vocational indecision.

### *vii. Career adaptability*

Career adaptability is considered to be a multidimensional (Savickas, 2005) occupational developmental task of young adulthood<sup>101</sup> although it has been proposed that transitions and growth from childhood contribute to its navigation (Hartung et al., 2008). Career adaptability is comprised of four dimensions, namely career concern, career curiosity, career control, and career confidence (Hartung, 2011b; Savickas, 2013; Savickas & Porfeli, 2011; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Walden et al., 2022). The Career Adapt-Abilities Scale (CAAS-SA) was included in this research as a pre- and post-intervention assessment instrument to indicate whether participants reported any change in their career adaptability as a result of the adapted life-design intervention implemented.

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<sup>101</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2 for a comprehensive discussion about this topic.

In addition to this, the four constructs (concern, curiosity, control, and confidence) emerged as sub-sub-themes from the qualitative data and were allocated codes with the assistance of *Atlas.ti* (v23). The results of this research indicated significant post-intervention improvement in career concern and career curiosity and, as a result, overall career adaptability was shown to improve as is discussed next.

Available literature (investigating life-design interventions) rendered similar positive results when conducted with young adults, both for individual case study interventions and in group contexts. My findings confirmed the results obtained by Le Grange and Maree (2022) who reported increased career adaptability as a result of life-design counselling with a young adult who suffered parental neglect, the findings of Maree (2022c) who facilitated a group life-design intervention with 31 young adults (mean age = 20.28 years), and in another study with 67 young and disadvantaged adults (Maree et al., 2019) who all indicated increased career adaptability after the intervention. Maree (2022c) indicated that the biggest change was observed in terms of career concern and the smallest change in the career confidence dimensions which correlated with the results I obtained. A study conducted by Camussi et al. (2023) on the effect of an online life-design intervention with 103 young adults (18-39 years) demonstrated a similar increase in career concern and career curiosity as well as the absence of change in terms of career confidence as was found in my results, but also noted increased career control which was contradicted by my findings.

In terms of studies investigating the influence of a life-design intervention on adolescents, the findings of this study confirmed increased career adaptability as reported by Maree (2015) after they facilitated a group life-design intervention for adolescents (16-18 years) as well as the results reported by Cadaret and Hartung (2021) after a group career construction intervention with 69 adolescents (16-18 years). Enhanced career adaptability was also reported by Nota et al. (2016) after an online life-design intervention with 100 adolescents (mean age = 13 years) and Santilli et al. (2019) with a group of 108 adolescents. My findings also confirmed the results of Che et al. (2023) who reported an improvement in career curiosity after a group life-design intervention for 91 adolescents from a resource-constrained environment experiencing career indecision. The findings of this study furthermore concurred with the findings of other case studies which indicated improved career adaptability after life-design interventions with a 16-year-old adolescent (Wang & Liu, 2023), an abandoned adolescent (Maree & Crous, 2012), as well as with a disadvantaged youth (Maree & Che, 2020). The results of my study also correlated positively with the results obtained from another study conducted by Maree et al. (2022) in which a group of 116 adolescents (grade 11

learners) reported increased career adaptability after a career construction intervention. My findings furthermore confirmed the results of Cook and Maree (2016) who reported increased career concern and career curiosity after a career construction intervention with 42 grade 11 learners from two different educational settings and the findings of Cardoso et al. (2022) who applied a group-based life-design intervention with 139 grade 9 adolescents and concluded that the intervention facilitated increased their career adaptability.

On the contrary, my findings contradicted the results of Cardoso et al. (2018) who did not find any improvement in career adaptability after a life-design intervention with a group of 236 adolescents (grades 10 -12). The possible reasons for this discrepancy were not identified.

In terms of other interesting connections which emerged between the sub-themes of this study and which were not initially linked to life design, I observed a positive correlation between improved identity formation and increased career adaptability which confirmed the conclusions of Haibo et al. (2018) who noted that a strong career<sup>102</sup> identity was positively associated with increased career adaptability in a sample of 1652 Chinese (young adult and adult) employees. CCT (Savickas, 2013) proposes that vocational identity and career adaptability are two metacognitive competencies for career development and holds that a well-defined idea of individuals' interests, abilities, and values enhances their adaptability to unpredictable change and uncertainty (De Abreu et al., 2024). My findings confirmed that of De Abreu et al. (2024) who concluded that there is a significant positive relationship between vocational identity and career adaptability of 200 young adult and adult graduates (ages 20-40) as well as the conclusions of Cardoso et al. (2022) that life-design counselling (in a group context) enhances the development of vocational identity and career adaptability of grade 9 adolescents.

### *viii. Future possibilities*

Half of the participants in this study reported increased awareness of future occupational possibilities and opportunities as well as optimism about their futures during their post-intervention reflections. Despite intensive effort from the researcher, only one study could be found of a career construction intervention which aimed to explore the influence of a group life-design intervention on 108 adolescents' career adaptability, future orientation, hope, optimism, and resilience (Santilli et al., 2019). Santilli et al. (2019) concluded that increased career adaptability and future orientation

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<sup>102</sup> I did not make a specific distinction between personal identity and vocational or career identity in this study but the relationship between these concepts was implied in Chapter 2.

emerged as a result of career construction, but reported the absence of change in terms of optimism, hope, or resilience. The findings of my study therefore confirm the findings of Santilli et al. (2019) regarding young adults' increased career adaptability and enhanced future orientation and also noted increased optimism regarding the future, which confirms Arnett's (2000, 2015a) proposition that future possibilities and optimism are characteristic of emerging adulthood. A possible indirect explanation for increased post-intervention optimism was provided by the findings of Webster et al. (2018) who concluded, after a study with 298 young adults (18-25 years), that the experience of life as meaningful (one of the aims of life-design counselling) corresponds with higher self-esteem (related to identity formation) and increased optimism.

The findings of my study furthermore correlated positively with those of Bay-Cheng and Zucker (2017) who reported that 484 emerging adult women (18-22 years) presented with general optimism about their futures which were, surprisingly, unrelated to the differences in their socio-economic status. I subsequently discuss external influences which emerged as significant sub-themes and sub-sub-themes in this study.

## **5.2.2 Theme 2: External influences**

Although not included in my original conceptual framework of this study, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (1977, 1979) provided a suitable framework for discussing the external influences participants identified as significant sub-themes in this study. I attempted to be cognisant of the complex underlying dynamic and reciprocal nature of relationships between the systems, roleplayers and events.

### **5.2.2.1 *Microsystem***

All of the participants' quotes revealed that they were influenced (directly and indirectly, physically and psychologically) by their family of origin from childhood and into young adulthood in terms of their relationships, values, shared experiences, and future decisions. The participants' responses regarding family influence varied significantly, and it was subsequently difficult to identify specific trends. However, my results confirmed the findings of Chopik et al. (2021) who concluded, from a study with 572 emerging adults, that satisfactory parent-child relationships contributed to their adjustment. My results also concurred with Lee et al. (2018) who reported that parental acceptance and psychological control contributed to the well-being of emerging adults as demonstrated by a survey completed by 1362 young adult participants. One example from my study which demonstrated the influence of a positive parent-young adult relationship on career development

was: “My parents, they support me, and it was just nice to talk to them about it (career indecision)” (1; F; 7). My results also concurred with two conclusions of Oliveira et al. (2020) after their literature review of 50 studies about family dynamics in emerging adulthood. The first conclusion, that relationships between parents and children change during emerging adulthood, was demonstrated by a statement from one participant, namely “My father...growing up he was very absent, not really there emotionally. Now the divorce has happened...and I just have a much better relationship with him now. So much better” (5; B; 194). The second conclusion, that intergenerational differences exist between parents and emerging adults, was demonstrated by the same participant: “Growing up I had a lot of pressure put on me in terms of masculinity” (5; E; 102). I was unable to confirm or deny the other three conclusions Oliveira et al. (2020) reached, namely that: (i) individual and family development is grounded in the family system, (ii) feeling-in-between is an experience for the family and the young adult, and (iii) individual and family socioeconomic factors influence the family dynamic. The presence of family influence as a sub-sub-theme in my study also echoes Erikson’s psychosocial developmental theory (1950, 1968) which postulates that psychosocial development is relational.

Since approximately half of the participants in my study were still financially dependent on their parents to a certain extent, my findings confirm the views of Strom and Strom (2010), Swartz and Busse (2017), and the findings of the National Research Council (US) (2014), that young adults from Europe, America, Japan, Canada, and Australia increasingly receive physical (financial) support from their parents and also use their family of origin as a home base during emerging adulthood.

Educational contexts, sports participation and achievement, and peer relationships emerged as three microsystem sub-sub-themes in this study that influenced young adult participants’ negotiation of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks. However, given the explorative nature of this study, insufficient detail emerged to draw specific conclusions about how these factors influenced developmental tasks *per se*, and it is suggested for investigation in future research.

### **5.2.2.2 Mesosystems**

Significant events, especially traumatic experiences, emerged as sub-sub-themes which directly and indirectly influenced the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks of the majority (eight) of young adult participants in this study. This finding confirmed the results of Lee et al. (2022) who concluded that traumatic experiences during childhood had a significant effect on

young adult mental health after a quantitative investigation including 515 young adult Korean students. Not only did the participants' quotes reveal that significant traumatic events influenced their identity formation as expected, but responses toward the end of the intervention and reflection also suggested that this adapted life-design intervention facilitated the meaning-making processes of some of these experiences for participants (specifically mentioned by three participants) (Linnekaste, 2021; Maree, 2022a; Savickas, 2012a) and contributed to increased self- and career construction. The results of this research confirm the findings of Salimi et al. (2021) who concluded that increased career adaptability contributed to the management of traumatic experiences and empowerment of adolescents in their study of 266 Iranian adolescents who had lost at least one parent. My findings also confirmed the findings of Hartung et al. (2022) who referred to the questionnaire responses (affect, career adaptability, and career decidedness) of 250 young adults and concluded that emotions are related to key career aspects and processes. In addition, my results concurred with the conclusions of Stoltz et al. (2023) who emphasised the importance of trauma-informed career construction to aid participants in the construction of meaning from past experiences. My findings furthermore confirmed the results of Maree (2024) who concluded that career construction (case study) facilitated increased career identity and career decidedness with a traumatised young adult.

### **5.2.2.3 Exosystem**

Although the perceived influence of **economic status** on participants was not mentioned explicitly in the pre- or post-intervention assessments and reflection, the qualitative coded conversations revealed this sub-sub-theme as a subliminal external influence. Given the sensitivity of economic status and the experience of poverty, it can be assumed that this sub-sub-theme played a more prominent role in participants' lives than what their responses revealed in this study, especially since economic hardship was described as "traumatic"<sup>103</sup> by two participants who had been marginalised by their peers as a result. My assumption correlated with the findings of Crouch et al. (2019) who identified economic hardship or poverty as the most prevalent adverse childhood experience for children from a study of 45 287 American children and my findings concurred with the conclusions of a qualitative study conducted with 30 young South African adults (Mseleku, 2022), which reported feelings of hopelessness in terms of securing employment despite having a tertiary qualification. The participants' coded post-intervention responses demonstrated increased

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<sup>103</sup> Please refer to section 5.2.2.3 for a discussion about traumatic experiences.

meaning-making and, subsequently, enhanced self- and career construction<sup>104</sup> which they related to their experiences of economic hardship in their early years. As such, the adapted life-design intervention implemented in this study is associated with increased self- and career construction related to the exosystem and also the negotiation of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks. The influence of the adapted life-design intervention on intrapersonal factors such as self- and career construction will be discussed in section 5.2.3.

This study identified **technological influence** as a significant external influence on young adults' intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks. For example, half of the participants identified fictional characters as role models with specific attributes and values rather than real-life alternatives which suggested that young adults' identity formation is influenced by technology. My findings follow the conclusions of Cerra and James (2012) after their extensive literature review and the results of Brandtzaeg and Chaparro-Domínguez (2020) after 15 in-depth interviews with young adults who emphasised that technology use influences adolescents' and young adults' self-expression and identity development through continuous influence from social media input, celebrity role models, online evaluations by peers and colleagues, and many more. My results also concur with the conclusions of Yang et al. (2018) that identity distress can develop in 219 young adults due to competitive social media comparison. I also agree with Prado (2019) and Shibuya (2020) who proposed that social media platforms, which allow individuals to observe and be observed, contribute to the construction of ambiguous virtual identities. Participants were hesitant to admit their dependence on and possible addiction to technology. Still, three participants reported an increased awareness of the influence of technology on their daily functioning and psychological well-being during the post-assessment reflection which, given the results of enhanced identity formation in this study, confirmed the findings of Mancini et al. (2024) who concluded that a well-defined and consistent personal identity (identity formation) as well as the experience of belonging (related to attachment and Trust vs Mistrust) protected against the development of problematic gaming in a study with 675 young adult and adult Massive Multiple Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) players. Self-awareness as a sub-sub-theme will be discussed in section 5.2.3.

#### **5.2.2.4 *Macrosystem***

The current South African economic climate as well as the influence of COVID-19 were the only two sub-sub-themes which emerged as external macrosystem influences in this study, suggesting a

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<sup>104</sup> Self- and career construction will be discussed in the section pertaining to intrapersonal influences.

greater focus for young adults on the self (being self-centred) than on the indirect greater political and economic environment. Participants' responses related to the South African economy revealed experiences of discrimination and anxiety about a future in South Africa. However, given the limited number of responses around this topic, it was not possible to identify trends to compare to the available literature. The global COVID-19 pandemic was also identified by participants as an external influence on their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational development, which confirms the literature review findings of Maree (2022a, 2022b) that this pandemic influenced the psychosocial development of children and young adults. Contrary to Maree's findings (2022a, 2022b), the participants of this study did not report long-lasting negative implications at the time this research was concluded. However, unlike the focal population of Maree's literature review (2022a), none of the participants came from severely disadvantaged backgrounds.

### **5.2.3 Theme 3: Intrapersonal factors influencing the processing of developmental tasks**

#### **5.2.3.1 *Personal attributes***

In this study, personal attributes referred to participants' self-exploration, attempts to define themselves and explain their decision-making processes and behaviour. Since participants' identification of their attributes<sup>105</sup> was frequently accompanied by enhanced self-awareness, reflection, self-knowledge, and self- and career construction during the adapted life-design intervention, it (attributes) presented as closely related to intrapersonal developmental tasks<sup>106</sup> (identity exploration) and metacognitive abilities. Attributes are, therefore, included in the discussion about the enhanced application of metacognitive abilities in the following section.

#### **5.2.3.2 *Metacognitive abilities***

The post-intervention assessment and reflection sessions demonstrated substantial change regarding participants' internal cognitive and emotional processes such as self-perceptions and perspectives, also described as metacognitive abilities in this study. The findings on intrapersonal factors influencing the processing of developmental tasks of young adult participants in this study confirmed the results of Maree (2024) who concluded that online career construction with a young adult trauma survivor facilitated increased self-awareness, self-knowledge, insight, and the

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<sup>105</sup> The significant attributes participants referred to in this study were adaptability, compassion, dedication, emotional intelligence, honesty, humour, perseverance, resilience, and self-efficacy.

<sup>106</sup> Please refer to section 5.2.1.1 for a comprehensive explanation.

construction of meaning (self- and career construction). Each of the different metacognitive abilities which emerged as sub-sub-themes in this study, is discussed next.

Before the intervention, four participants demonstrated **reflection** as a metacognitive ability whereas, post-intervention, all the participants reflected on their thoughts, behaviours, and emotions, as well as on significant past experiences and the patterns they discerned in their own lives. This result concurred with the findings of Maree (2020d) who concluded that career construction with a young adult experiencing career indecision was effective in enabling her to “reflect critically on key facets of her career-life story” (Maree, 2020d, p. 11), as well as after a career construction case study with a gifted female adolescent experiencing career tension (Maree, 2022d). The findings of my research also confirmed the results of two case studies (an emerging adult and an adult female) who reported enhanced self-reflection and reflexivity following career construction counselling (Maree, 2016c) and another case study featuring a young adult female experiencing a career transition (Hartung & Vess, 2016). This study’s results furthermore concurred with the findings of a group life-design counselling intervention with 10 teachers from under-resourced schools who demonstrated enhanced self-reflection (Setlhare et al., 2017).

All the participants demonstrated the comfortable and enhanced application of **self-awareness** as a metacognitive ability post-intervention (demonstrated by six participants pre-intervention), which included emotional awareness and awareness of thoughts, behaviours, decisions, development, coping styles, mental health, and spirituality. This finding concurred with the enhanced self-awareness results of a career construction case study with a mid-career adult woman (Maree & Nortjé, 2023) and after an adapted life-design counselling intervention with an adolescent (Maree & Pollard, 2009). My results also confirmed the findings of Cardoso et al. (2018) who reported enhanced self-awareness after career construction with Portuguese adolescent focus groups (comprised of 33 participants) and the results of Maree & Twigge (2016) who concluded that life-design counselling with six emerging adults (case studies) promoted comprehensive personal development which included increased self-awareness.

**Self-knowledge and insight** as metacognitive abilities were absent during the initial intervention conversation sessions but were significantly enhanced as nine participants demonstrated this ability during the post-intervention reflection. Participants also reflectively referred to their attributes (eight participants) and the influence of their mental health (five participants) on their general well-being post-intervention. My findings supported that of Le Grange

and Maree (2022) who concluded that life-design counselling with an emerging adult who suffered parental neglect enhanced insight into past traumatic experiences. My results also concurred with Lindo et al. (2023) who reported that enhanced insight and self-concept were observed after an expressive arts career construction intervention with a group of seven adolescent girls. My findings, furthermore, correlated with Setlhare et al. (2017) who concluded that a life-design intervention enabled 10 teachers from resource-constrained schools to identify personal and professional assets (increased self-knowledge). Enhanced self-knowledge also showed a direct positive relationship with increased identity formation<sup>107</sup> and an increased sense of self in this study.

The **application of self- and career construction** by participants (insight into and the creation of meaning and purpose resulting from the integration of self- and career identity and personal experiences) was another metacognitive ability which showed significant improvement post-intervention and confirmed the results of other studies (Le Grange & Maree, 2022; Maree, 2020b, 2020c, 2018b; Ruiters & Maree, 2022). More specifically, my findings confirmed the results of Maree (2020b) who reported enhanced application of self- and career construction after a self- and career-construction intervention with an adolescent boy suffering from Tourette's Syndrome. In addition, my results confirmed the findings of a self- and career-construction intervention facilitated by Maree (2019b) with a gifted young (17-year-old) woman which resulted in enhanced self-identity and career-identity – aspects that are interrelated with self- and career construction. My findings also concurred with Maree (2018b, 2020c) who reported similar results in two case studies applying self- and career-construction interventions with 14-year-old adolescents (Maree, 2018b, 2020c). In the first case study, an adolescent boy demonstrated an increased narrative identity (closely related to self- and career construction) during the intervention (Maree, 2018b) and, in the second case study, an adolescent girl with low self-worth demonstrated an enhanced sense of self as well as the ability to construct meaning and find purpose in her future career-life (Maree, 2020c). My results confirmed the findings of Ruiters and Maree (2022) who concluded that a young adult from a vocational school setting demonstrated an increased sense of career meaning and purpose after an adapted life-design intervention. Similar to my findings, an increased sense of purpose and meaning developed following life-design counselling with an emerging adult experiencing parental neglect (Le Grange & Maree, 2022). The results of this adapted<sup>108</sup> life-design intervention (Savickas et al., 2009) broadly confirms the theoretical propositions entailed in self-construction theory (Guichard,

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<sup>107</sup> Please refer to section 5.2.1.1 for this discussion.

<sup>108</sup> Refer to section 2.4 for the literature review pertaining to life-design counselling as well as self- and career construction theories.

2005, 2009; Hartung, 2013; Hartung & Taber, 2014; Maree, 2019c, 2020a) and career construction theory (Savickas, 2005, 2012a).

### **5.2.3.3 Mental health, Coping mechanisms, and Spirituality**

The findings of this study indicated that the components related to participants' intrapersonal climate (mental health, coping styles, and spirituality) were interrelated and appeared to influence young adults' navigation of unmastered developmental tasks. The participants' quotes, sometimes accompanied by current and observable emotions as recorded in the researcher's field notes, indicated their experiences of intense emotions during periods of challenging **mental and physical health** hampered their navigation of unmastered developmental tasks and general well-being at that time as they merely focused on emotional survival. This finding confirms the conclusions of Hartung et al. (2022) after a quantitative study which investigated the relationship between emotional affect, career adaptability, career decidedness, and occupational engagement of 250 young adults. The researchers (Hartung et al., 2022) urged career counsellors and other researchers to be considerate of the effect of positive and negative emotions on career-related processes. Guichard (2016), in his commentary on life and career design dialogues, suggested that the narration of significant life stories (such as elicited in the lifeline session of this study) in which clients are emotionally invested, allows for a passage into cognition which enhances the construction of meaning. Guichard's (2016) opinion confirmed my findings and the findings of Cardoso et al. (2016b) that the investigation of the emotional experiences of four adolescents during life-design counselling enhanced their construction of meaning. At the time of this intervention, three participants presented with anxiety and depressive symptoms. Although one participant presented with lower levels of anxiety post-intervention, no change was noted for the other two participants. As such, although this life-design intervention demonstrated increased metacognitive abilities such as self-awareness, insight, and self- and career construction regarding participants' emotional experiences, it proved inadequate to address significant psychological distress.

Where **coping styles** are concerned, the findings of my study concurred with the results of Khodarahimi and Fathi (2016) who concluded, after a quantitative study with 300 Iranian young adults, that poor mental health (such as anxiety and depression) was significantly related to the use of coping styles and could lead to risk-taking behaviour. My findings also concurred with Lee et al. (2022) who reported a link between childhood traumatic experiences, poor mental health, and the utilisation of coping styles (passive and active) in 515 young female Korean students (adults). My results revealed that young adult participants in this study more often implemented destructive

coping than positive coping styles and that participants demonstrated enhanced self-awareness<sup>109</sup> in terms of the influence of their mental health on their well-being post-intervention. However, given the exploratory nature of this study, I refrained from drawing any premature conclusions regarding the underlying relationships between metacognitive abilities, mental health, and psychological coping styles.

A final interesting finding of this study pertains to the positive role of **spirituality** in general well-being and coping. Six participants mentioned and it was observed in the researcher's field notes that their spirituality appeared to benefit their mental well-being. According to participants' quotes, their spirituality eased future anxiety and was accompanied by a sense of meaning and purpose. This finding confirms that of Maree (2017b) who concluded that the meaning a mid-career adult man ascribed to his faith, enhanced the construction of occupational meaning and dispelled future anxiety during a self- and career-construction intervention. One contradiction to this conclusion was a single participant who was unable to find relief from her anxiety despite her spiritual beliefs. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the participant who voiced his freedom of religion and associated with atheism presented with despondence throughout the intervention.

### 5.3 CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON THE CHAPTER

Chapter 5 was dedicated to a careful and detailed discussion of the research results - primarily through the contextualisation of my findings in terms of available research. As mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, I attempted to adhere to a four-fold lens which required me, in short, to evaluate my findings concerning previous and available literature as (i) confirmatory, (ii) contradictory, (iii) novel, and (iv) concerning whether any specific trends had emerged. I endeavoured to discuss the results according to each theme and the subsequent sub-themes and sub-sub-themes.

One of the central areas of investigation in this study was to establish which unmastered developmental tasks were experienced by young adults and how these individuals experienced an adapted life-design counselling intervention. Theme 1 (unmastered developmental tasks) revealed that young adults experienced a variety of unmastered developmental tasks in intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational areas of their lives. Erikson's proposition that psychosocial development can be viewed as a lifelong process was confirmed by my results as the participants presented with all of the intrapersonal and interpersonal developmental tasks he proposed up to

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<sup>109</sup> Please refer to section 5.2.3.2 for the discussion around increased self-awareness and life-design counselling.

adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Significant results regarding unmastered intrapersonal developmental tasks were that all of the young adult participants experienced Trust vs Mistrust and the majority of participants experienced Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt, suggesting either that these tasks were never sufficiently mastered or, that they tend to resurface later in life when Identity and Intimacy is to be established. The findings of this study also revealed a novel relationship between Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt and the emerging adulthood features of *instability* and *feeling-in-between*. Initiative vs Guilt, which also presented in the majority of participants at the pre-intervention stage, showed a significant improvement post-intervention. Although no measurable change was observed regarding Industry vs Inferiority, qualitative change was indicated. The presence of Identity vs Role Confusion and Intimacy vs Isolation as unmastered developmental tasks pre-intervention was very prominent in the young adult participants and concurred with Arnett's theory (2000, 2015a) of emerging adulthood and prolonged identity exploration as well as the establishment of consistent and lasting intimate relationships as proposed by Erikson (1968) and Arnett (2000, 2015a). Qualitative improvements were observed between pre- and post-intervention discussions on Identity vs Role Confusion as well as Intimacy vs Isolation which suggested that life-design counselling facilitated the navigation of these core developmental tasks of young adulthood directly and indirectly through the resolution of earlier developmental tasks as well as the reflective processes which characterise self- and career construction.

Another noteworthy result from this research was the underlying relationship between intrapersonal developmental tasks and occupational developmental tasks. Often, improvement in intrapersonal developmental areas was accompanied by improvement in occupational developmental tasks. As such, the interrelatedness of human development was emphasised. Research related to the influence of self- and career construction (life design) interventions on unmastered occupational developmental tasks was more readily available and the improvement demonstrated post-intervention with regard to career indecision, career control, career curiosity, and future developmental possibilities, confirmed the findings of existing literature.

External influences which proved to influence the navigation of unmastered developmental tasks in young adults in this study were identified and confirmed by literature as the primary childhood family along with educational contexts, sports participation and achievement, and peer involvement. Traumatic events during childhood and adolescence were revealed as significant mesosystem influences, as was confirmed by literature sources. It was encouraging to observe from my results that the adapted life-design counselling intervention included in this research enhanced

the meaning-making of young adults who had been victims of traumatic experiences. Economic status and technological influences emerged as significant exosystem influences on young adults experiencing unmastered developmental tasks, especially identity development and, once again, my findings confirmed the results of previous research.

Intrapersonal factors influencing the navigation of unmastered developmental tasks were identified as personal attributes, metacognitive abilities, and the intrapersonal climate. The significant increase post-intervention in terms of participants' ability to utilise metacognitive skills confirmed suggestions from other researchers that life-design counselling facilitated the implementation of metacognitive abilities and, in this way, contributed to increased self- and career construction. Mental health, personal coping styles, and spirituality were identified as significant intrapersonal factors and confirmed by limited research sources.

The relevance of my research findings was emphasised by the positive correlation between my results and the limited existing literature, especially where unmastered developmental tasks were concerned. In Chapter 6 the research questions will be reviewed in light of my findings, and ethical considerations and limitations of this study will be explored. I will conclude with recommendations for future research as well as reflections.



# CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

“The Butterfly Effect”<sup>110</sup> is a powerful visually dynamic metaphor suggesting that small changes, such as the flap of a butterfly’s wings, can eventually cause large-scale change such as may be seen in a tornado. This metaphor, originally described by a meteorologist, can also be applied to human development and unmastered developmental challenges. Most individuals, including myself, agree that fleeting moments in this shared earthly journey sometimes contribute to altering decisions and change. The aim of this study was, however, not only to investigate the application of an adapted life-design intervention on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks and possible post-intervention change but also, amongst others, to understand why, figuratively speaking, some butterflies’<sup>111</sup> wings do not create the effect they would like to perceive.

As mentioned, existing research that was focused on developmental tasks proved to be mainly conceptual and scarce. My research, therefore, aimed to contribute to the existing body of knowledge through a qualitative, explorative investigation which could provide rich and deep descriptions related to young adults experiencing unmastered psychosocial and career-related developmental tasks. The pre- and post-intervention assessments and reflection sessions offered the opportunity to identify any changes or the absence thereof for each participant, whereas the data analysis of the coded intervention sessions allowed for the emergence of significant themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes. Throughout this process, I attempted to stay as true to the data as possible and to be aware of my role as a qualitative researcher. As was expected and not completely unironic, I also became aware of the inner flapping of my own butterfly wings.

In this final chapter, I attempt to connect and answer my research questions in the context of my research findings. I revisit the ethical considerations as outlined previously, whereafter I reflect on the strengths and limitations of the study. I offer recommendations for future research studies

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<sup>110</sup> The Butterfly Effect was credited to Edward Lorenz in 1972 (American Physical Society, n.d), a meteorologist who used this metaphor to illustrate the influence of small micro-climate changes on the larger macro-climate.

<sup>111</sup> This generalisation is used to simplify the metaphor and not to take anything away from this constructionist study which assumed that all participants were unique.

in the field and conclude with my personal reflections and illustrative post-intervention anecdotes from a few participants.

## 6.2 REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question formulated for this study is as follows:

- How does life-design counselling influence young adults' mastery of unresolved developmental tasks and enable them to flourish in their career lives?

The primary research question was subdivided into the following descriptive and exploratory secondary questions:

### Descriptive questions:

- ❖ How does life-design counselling inform interventions to assist 10 young South African adults with unmastered developmental tasks?
- ❖ Which factors contribute to unmastered developmental tasks among these individuals?<sup>112</sup>

### Exploratory questions:

- ❖ What were the main differences between the pre- and post-intervention themes that emerged from the narrative data?
- ❖ How were young adults' unmastered developmental tasks influenced by the life-design counselling process?

My study aimed to investigate the influence of an adapted life-design counselling intervention on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks and to establish whether and how this intervention enhanced their career well-being. I will now attempt to answer the above questions by drawing on the data obtained from my qualitative research study.

### 6.2.1 Descriptive questions

#### 6.2.1.1 *How does life-design counselling inform interventions to assist 10 young South African adults with unmastered developmental tasks?*

While researching possible approaches to investigate young adults' experiences of unmastered developmental tasks, I realised that the diversity and contextual uniqueness I could expect to encounter would necessitate a research design which allowed for individual complexities, variety,

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<sup>112</sup> Even though "10 young South African adults" are not used again, it should be assumed.

and expression. An adapted life-design<sup>113</sup> counselling intervention presented as the most appropriate approach as it could be tailored to the specific requirements of my study and allowed for the facilitation of self- and career construction in an emotionally safe and accepting environment. The life-design intervention implemented in this study comprised the 7<sup>th</sup> version of the *CIP*<sup>114</sup> (Maree, 2017a) and post-modern career counselling techniques.

The *CIP* (v7) (Maree, 2017a) proved itself an invaluable qualitative instrument in this study as its questions allowed for the emergence of personal and relevant subconscious information which found expression in the present and contributed to participants' self- and career construction and meaning-making. This instrument (*CIP*) laid the foundation for the reflective deconstruction and reconstruction of participants'<sup>115</sup>unmastered developmental tasks, which ranged across the spectrum of psychosocial developmental challenges (Erikson, 1968), the features of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000), and career adaptability (Savickas, 2012a). The lifeline, career genogram, and collage<sup>116</sup> (post-modern career counselling techniques) and their subsequent narrative conversations effectively facilitated further deconstruction, reconstruction and co-construction of significant themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes into meaningful future narratives. The post-modern career counselling techniques elicited conversations around relevant contextual influences and significant experiences which were, on occasion, accompanied by intense emotional expression. The latter (emotions) emphasised the influence of affect on unmastered developmental tasks and life design. As the intervention progressed, participants increasingly utilised metacognitive abilities such as self-awareness, self-knowledge and insight, reflection, and self- and career construction which also proved beneficial in their life design.

Underlying relationships<sup>117</sup> between unmastered intrapersonal and interpersonal psychosocial developmental tasks and occupational developmental tasks emerged, confirming theoretical assumptions and contributing novel information to existing literature. The findings of this study confirmed that unmastered developmental tasks were present throughout the lifespan and sometimes resurfaced as new developmental challenges and stages arose. In addition, the themes, sub-themes, and sub-sub-themes that emerged indicated that external influences, such as the family (microsystem) and traumatic experiences (mesosystem), influenced the navigation of unmastered developmental tasks, and that the application of metacognitive abilities facilitated the

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<sup>113</sup> Please refer to section 2.4 for a comprehensive discussion about life-design counselling.

<sup>114</sup> Please refer to section 3.5.3.1 for a description of the properties of this instrument.

<sup>115</sup> Please refer to section 1.6.2

<sup>116</sup> Please refer to Table 3.3

<sup>117</sup> Please refer to Chapter 5 for a discussion about the relationship between the findings and existing literature.

enhancement and resolution of certain unmastered developmental tasks and the construction of meaning through the constructivist process of life design. As postulated in theory (Erikson, 1968), improvement in some unmastered developmental tasks appeared to contribute to enhanced results in other unmastered developmental tasks. Also, the goals of life design,<sup>118</sup> which include enhanced adaptability, narratability, activity, and intentionality were qualitatively achieved which indicated that the adapted life-design intervention implemented in this study had been appropriate and effective.

#### **6.2.1.2 Which factors contribute to unmastered developmental tasks among these individuals?**

Human development is complex and interrelated with various factors and the themes which emerged from my data are, therefore, not considered exhaustive. In this study, unmastered developmental tasks were influenced by (i) other developmental tasks, (ii) external factors, and (iii) intrapersonal factors.

The mastery of **developmental tasks** depends largely on the resolution of preceding developmental challenges and, according to Erikson (1968), the primary starting point in psychosocial development is the first stage, Trust vs Mistrust, which is also linked to attachment.<sup>119</sup> My findings demonstrated that Trust vs Mistrust influenced the navigation of subsequent developmental tasks throughout childhood and adolescence and was present in young adulthood. To refer back to “The Butterfly Effect”, change (mastery, regression, or the absence of any psychological movement) in any developmental stage appeared to influence the processing of subsequent and sometimes seemingly unrelated developmental tasks. For example,<sup>120</sup> when participants deconstructed, reconstructed and co-constructed micro-stories about Initiative vs Guilt into meaningful future narratives, improvement was noted in career curiosity (an occupational developmental task). Unmastered developmental tasks were, therefore, influenced by other developmental tasks although the particular mechanism and directionality of influence was unclear.

**External influences** also emerged as a theme in this study and participants identified significant influences from the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The most prominent influences were indicated to be related to the microsystem (family) and mesosystem (traumatic and significant events). Since participants’ families served as the primary context of development, they influenced the navigation of participants’ developmental tasks by being the first

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<sup>118</sup> Please refer to section 2.4.1

<sup>119</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2.

<sup>120</sup> Please refer to Chapter 5.

and loudest ‘voices’ they continued to hear. Several family members were identified as role models for career identities. Family dynamics and relationships (positive and negative) made lasting impressions and were reflected on during the life-design intervention. These experiences and attributes were deconstructed and reconstructed, allowing for the construction of meaning from past experiences (sometimes painful) into purpose. The values that family members portrayed were discussed reflexively and participants demonstrated increased self-awareness as they identified certain familial habits and behaviours in themselves. Even in young adulthood, conflict with family members was experienced as unsettling and sometimes debilitating, once again demonstrating the continuous influence of the microsystem on young adults and the challenge of mastering the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental challenges of young adulthood. Some anecdotes related to family interactions were accompanied by authentic joy and, at times, deep-seated sadness and loss, suggesting that memorable events and developmental tasks were closely related to emotions. Family members were often roleplayers in participants’ significant life experiences and trauma, contributing to their navigation of developmental tasks even into young adulthood – again portraying The Butterfly Effect. The influence of traumatic experiences emerged, confirming literature on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE’s) and the significant long-term impact on individuals. Some participants demonstrated the construction of meaning from these events, whereas a minority still seemed to be processing their traumatic experiences.

**Intrapersonal processes** comprised the third theme which emerged as an influential factor in unmastered developmental tasks. The life-design intervention facilitated enhanced metacognitive abilities which allowed participants to consider, question and process their emotions, thought patterns, and behaviours. As such, the participants demonstrated increased awareness, self-knowledge and insight relating to their personal attributes which, in turn, enhanced their self- and career construction. Participants’ coping styles (positive and negative) featured as factors which either facilitated or hampered their navigation of unmastered developmental tasks along with their mental well-being and spirituality.

## 6.2.2 Exploratory questions

### 6.2.2.1 *What were the main differences between the pre- and post-intervention themes that emerged from the narrative data?*

The navigation of developmental tasks in this study has been likened to the wind<sup>121</sup> and The Butterfly Effect,<sup>122</sup> suggesting that it was not only important for me, as a researcher, to focus on presenting themes, but also to be aware of the significant absence thereof which could point to the possible resolution of tasks or the internal shift of attention to subsequent tasks and behaviour. Table 4.6<sup>123</sup> summarises a combination of the pre- and post-intervention assessment and narrative theme profiles for each participant. However, this section focuses on the differences between the pre- and post-intervention narrative themes.

Role confusion was identified as a significant pre-intervention intrapersonal psychosocial sub-theme which emerged from the majority (seven) of the participants' coded responses. Post-intervention, role confusion was absent and substituted by the presence of identity-related responses. Enhanced identity formation post-intervention was also motivated by the increased references to participants' attributes, values, interests, and goals. Three participants referred to inferiority and one participant to shame/doubt pre-intervention, whereas references to these sub-themes were absent post-intervention. One participant mentioned mistrust and another referred to isolation post-intervention, indicating unmastered developmental tasks being processed as well as increased self-awareness.

Insufficient career concern (eight participants) and career indecision (five participants) were the only unmastered occupational developmental task sub-themes identified pre-intervention. Post-intervention, five participants referred to career concern although the scores on the *CAAS-SA* indicated these results to be within the normative guide and indicated appropriate levels of concern. Only one reference was made to career indecision post-intervention and the absence of any other references suggested enhanced career certainty, which was confirmed by the *MCM* results.<sup>124</sup> Post-intervention, six participants referred to career control, four participants to future possibilities, four participants to career curiosity, and three participants to career confidence, all of which indicated enhanced (and adequate) career adaptability (supported by the *CAAS-SA* findings).

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<sup>121</sup> Please refer to Chapter 1.

<sup>122</sup> Please refer to Chapter 6.

<sup>123</sup> Please refer to Chapter 4.

<sup>124</sup> Please refer to Chapter 4.

Participants utilised their metacognitive abilities (self-awareness, self-knowledge, reflection, self- and career construction) more frequently and effectively post-intervention. Pre-intervention, seven participants demonstrated self-awareness and three participants applied reflection. Post-intervention references indicated that all the participants demonstrated self-awareness and reflection, nine participants demonstrated increased self-knowledge, and eight participants applied self- and career construction. Participants' increased self-awareness and self-knowledge also included enhanced understanding and insight into their coping styles as well as the influence of context, traumatic events, and their mental and physical health on their psychological well-being.

### ***6.2.2.2 How were young adults' unmastered developmental tasks influenced by the life-design counselling process?***

An old saying states "the proof of the pudding is in the eating" and I therefore referred to the reflection sessions and post-intervention assessment results to confirm the effectiveness of the adapted life-design intervention. The post-intervention findings indicated that several developmental tasks that had been identified as unmastered pre-intervention were resolved or almost resolved post-intervention, whereas participants' anecdotes (obtained approximately six weeks after the reflection session) at the end of this chapter demonstrate the medium-term influence of this particular intervention. To establish the long-term effectiveness of this adapted life-design intervention process, longitudinal research would be required.

Life-design counselling is considered a co-constructive process in which the researcher and participants commit to collaborate and the roleplayers are, therefore, mentioned in this section as being instrumental in the deconstruction, reconstruction, and co-construction of experiences and perspectives. All participants attended the contact sessions and completed the entire life-design intervention demonstrating their commitment to and need for self-development, as well as the relevance of the intervention. Initially, most participants appeared to be apprehensive and self-conscious, as was expected, but as the process continued they relaxed and shared their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours freely and transparently which confirmed the positive rapport between the researcher and participants. They appeared to enjoy the process and I was sometimes surprised by the level of preparation they went to before sessions. The adapted life-design counselling intervention implemented in this study allowed participants to communicate their psychological needs, unique contexts and experiences in an accepting and safe emotional environment. Validating responses from the researcher strengthened participants' capacity to become aware and reflect on their abilities, interests, values, goals, attributes (self- and identity exploration), themes and

patterns, and the meaning they ascribed to experiences and micro-stories (Savickas, 2015). Appropriate open-ended questions allowed for further exploration of the motivation for their thoughts, emotions, and behaviours which, in turn, contributed to increased self-knowledge and insight. This process of reflection, increased self-awareness, self-knowledge and insight contributed to self- and career construction (life design).

Reflecting on past experiences and the accompanying emotions and behaviours promoted participants' capacity to explore themselves and revisit unmastered developmental tasks. Since they, as young adults, were capable of more advanced cognitive tasks (such as abstract reasoning and noticing patterns and themes in their narratives), they ascribed deep meaning to past experiences from a different perspective with more wisdom and insight than when they were younger. Also, concerning the Butterfly Effect, small changes and insight into initial unmastered developmental tasks contributed to changes and possible resolution of subsequent developmental tasks. As mentioned in Chapter 5, although only slight changes<sup>125</sup> were observed in the pre- and post-intervention assessments of the predominantly pre-verbal Trust vs Mistrust or Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt developmental stages, an improvement was noted in Initiative vs Guilt and the psychosocial, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks that followed, indicating that the application of an adapted life-design counselling intervention had enhanced the navigation of unmastered developmental tasks.

### **6.3 REVISITING THE PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION**

To conclude the findings of this study I refer to the primary research question and summarise how life-design counselling influenced young adults' mastery of unresolved developmental tasks and enabled them to flourish in their career lives.

One of the main contributions of my study was the confirmation of existing developmental theories that developmental tasks were present throughout a person's lifespan (at least into young adulthood as demonstrated in this study) and that these tasks resurfaced in subsequent developmental stages when individuals need to reconsider their developmental statuses and identity and also when they experience significant life events which forced them to navigate through psychological and physical changes and stressors. Some psychosocial developmental tasks frequently associated with childhood (Trust vs Mistrust and Autonomy vs Shame/Doubt) were

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<sup>125</sup> When comparing the pre- and post-intervention MEPSI scores, slight changes refer to results which did not change the categorisation of the score. Scores  $\leq 3.9$  are considered low, while scores  $> 4.0$  are considered high (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988).

confirmed to be present in young adulthood, presumably because of their relation to other subsequent tasks such as Identity vs Role Confusion and Intimacy vs Isolation. The complex interrelated dynamic between Identity vs Role Confusion and Intimacy vs Isolation was confirmed and emphasised and the central role of identity exploration during young adulthood was established.

According to my findings, navigation of participants' unmastered developmental tasks was influenced by other developmental tasks, external factors (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem) and internal processes (attributes, metacognitive abilities, mental well-being, coping styles, and spirituality). These factors were identified, discussed and reflected on during the life-design intervention, allowing for the deconstruction, reconstruction and meaningful co-construction of participants' micro-stories which, in turn, enhanced the development of their metacognitive competencies (vocational identity and career adaptability) (Savickas, 2013).

Furthermore, change in one developmental area had a "Butterfly Effect" on other areas of development. The enhanced resolution of psychosocial developmental tasks subsequently influenced the navigation of interpersonal and occupational developmental tasks during this life-design intervention. The latter was confirmed by indications of qualitatively established increased career adaptability (*CAAS-SA*), career certainty (*MCM*), and optimism about the future (future possibilities) post-intervention. Although difficult to measure quantitatively, the qualitative findings of this study indicated that most of the participants had achieved the goals of life design (adaptability, narratability, activity, and intentionality) (Hartung, 2011a; Maree, 2015a; Savickas, 2018) which is expected to help them find meaning and purpose, and therefore flourish, in their career lives.

## 6.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I confirm that the following ethical considerations, as discussed in Chapter 3, were adhered to in this study:

- ❖ Before gathering the data, I applied for and obtained **ethical clearance** from the University of Pretoria's Faculty of Education Research Ethics Committee (Ethical Clearance Number EDU108/22).
- ❖ As the primary researcher, I thoroughly explained the research goals, the nature of procedures and intervention, possible advantages and disadvantages of participation in this study, and my credentials to all the participants. All participants were informed of their right to withdraw

should they wish to do so, and that they would not receive any benefits for participating. The participants provided their **informed consent** (Appendix A).

- ❖ The real identity of the participants was kept **confidential** and not revealed to any unauthorised person during any phase of the research or communication of the results afterwards. Numbers and codes were used instead to ensure that participants would remain **anonymous**.
- ❖ Transcribed interviews and results were communicated to the participants for **verification** purposes and to minimise misinterpretations throughout the research process.
- ❖ Every possible precaution was taken to ensure participants' autonomy, promote their well-being, and avoid any possible harm. To ensure **management of the researcher's role**, I needed to be aware of my different roles and have regular contact sessions with my supervisor for guidance.
- ❖ I followed standard procedures in detail, informed participants about the usage and safekeeping of their data, and destroyed any unused data. In this manner, I attempted to display the utmost respect and consideration for the vulnerable nature of the information.
- ❖ **No adverse reactions** were observed during the execution of this research. However, participants who indicated that they experienced mental health challenges at the time of the intervention were referred to a registered psychologist for therapeutic intervention.
- ❖ I strived to use the research findings in a way that benefits and promotes the **best interests of individuals and society**.

## 6.5 WHAT SHOULD I HAVE DONE DIFFERENTLY

Although I feel content with my role as the researcher and the research design of the life-design intervention implemented in this study, there are a few changes I would consider making in retrospect. First, although the lifeline discussions allowed participants to unpack and tell their stories highlighting significant positive and negative past experiences, I believe that my open-ended invitation created a platform for the transparent and openhearted sharing of deeply emotional experiences but that more defined boundaries could enhance the focus of the discussion. Some participants became very emotional during this session and, although I am deeply convinced that life design facilitates the processing and construction of emotional experiences into meaning, these experiences distracted participants from the session's goals on a few occasions. In future, I would insist that participants choose between three and five positive and negative experiences they would

describe as having a meaningful influence on their life design and possibly causing a change of direction in the past.

The collage session exceeded my expectations regarding participants' application of their metacognitive abilities. As the final intervention session, the collage proved extremely effective in facilitating the integration of participants' micro-stories. One change I would allow in future would be for participants to use digital images and even personal pictures on their smartphones (keeping anonymity and confidentiality in mind) to construct their collages. The participants who (spontaneously) utilised personal digital images to illustrate "I am...<sup>126</sup>", were more engaged in this session, which I believe could be related to having the opportunity to view themselves as active roleplayers in their memories and being closely connected to the emotions and aftermath of experiences.

The participants presenting with significant<sup>127</sup> mental health challenges were unable to benefit fully from the entire life-design process since their emotional resources were spent otherwise. Without discriminating, I would include a section in the informed consent document that the presence of significant anxiety and/or depressive symptoms may hamper their growth during this intervention and that it is recommended to engage in emotional support first before engaging in the life-design process.

Lastly, a follow-up session with participants after six to 12 months would render interesting findings on the status of developmental tasks at that time, and would help to establish whether the life-design intervention implemented in this study had indeed contributed to the long-term resolution of developmental tasks.

## **6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.6.1 Recommendations for the improvement of practice**

Life-design counselling proved a valuable intervention in enhancing the navigation of unmastered developmental tasks in young adults. Its inclusion in general career counselling practice is strongly recommended, as discussed below.

- ❖ Despite receiving a strong theoretical foundation about human development during psychological training, psychologists receive limited to no guidance into its practical utilisation.

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<sup>126</sup> The title of the collage.

<sup>127</sup> "Significant" in this context refer to symptoms hampering the effectiveness of the life-design process such as despondency or rumination.

I am convinced that being aware of clients' unmastered developmental tasks and their unique developmental processes can enhance the efficiency of therapeutic interventions and the public's psycho-education. Including instruments such as the *MEPSI*, *MCM*, and *CAAS-SA* as part of career counselling and psycho-emotional assessments can assist in identifying young adults' unmastered developmental tasks and normalising human development as a unique process.

- ❖ Identity formation presented as a key developmental task for all the participants in this study and influenced an array of subsequent developmental tasks. Career counselling and emotional intervention are expected to be more efficient when this developmental task (Identity vs Role confusion) is addressed.
- ❖ Since all the participants (17 to 29 years) in this study responded well to life-design counselling, it is recommended that the early introduction of this intervention may benefit younger individuals, like adolescents, individually and in group contexts who express the need for career guidance and counselling. The findings suggested that although external influences could not be controlled, participants could construct meaning from these experiences through enhanced metacognitive abilities and increased awareness of their mental well-being, attributes, coping styles, spirituality, and so forth. The improved navigation and resolution of developmental tasks also influenced other developmental tasks directly and indirectly, which impacted individuals' self- and career construction. Life design is considered a lifelong, holistic process. Embarking on this journey from a young age is expected to contribute to individuals' life experiences as full of meaning and purpose.
- ❖ The participants who presented with mental health challenges which hampered their ability to engage fully in life design (e.g. rumination), were not able to benefit as greatly from this intervention. I would strongly suggest that prospective life-design clients who present with prominent anxiety and/or depressive symptoms, consult with or be referred to an appropriate professional to address these issues before engaging in the process. It is also recommended that psychologists in training be exposed to various strategies to assist clients presenting with such challenges.
- ❖ Scheduling a short-term (approximately one month) follow-up session after the completion of the life-design intervention in which clients can share their progress or steps they have taken on their life-design journeys will enhance their intentionality and activity.

### 6.6.2 Recommendations for future research

The following aspects could be considered in terms of future research:

- ❖ It would benefit career counselling practice if the processes underlying the navigation of developmental tasks could be investigated further. In this regard, I suggest including structured reflection questions that participants must complete after each session which could explore the effectiveness of session-specific aspects and enhance therapeutic efficiency.
- ❖ Future research initiatives should include participants in small and larger groups, in-person and online settings, solution-focused short-term and longer-term intervention designs, and aim to investigate the experience and value of life-design counselling on individuals belonging to different age groups, demographic backgrounds, and educational levels. The life-design intervention sessions should be slightly adapted to be more accessible for younger or less educated participants.
- ❖ Participants frequently mentioned families (values, roles, support, expectations, etc.) and it was, therefore, identified as significant microsystemic influence. Since participants often referred to early childhood memories during the intervention, it could be valuable to involve significant others (such as parents, siblings, family members, or long-time friends) identified by the participants to investigate the relational dynamics and the influence of their different perspectives on the respective roleplayers (participants as well as significant others) during development. The insight that could potentially surface from such investigations could contribute to systemic interventions in future.
- ❖ The influence of technology on identity formation is currently considered a very relevant topic for children, adolescents, and young adults, and warrants focused and intentional investigation of its short- and long-term effects.
- ❖ The role of spirituality as a coping style and contributor to resilience development and psychological well-being for young adults seems to be underestimated. It should be considered in therapeutic interventions and future research.

### 6.6.3 Recommendations for theory building in Educational Psychology

Despite frequent theoretical references to individuals' psychological development in the literature, research findings on the applicability of developmental tasks are scarce. The findings of this study emphasised the importance for career practitioners to be cognisant of young adults' (and possibly other age groups) possible unmastered developmental tasks and also receive additional training in

this regard to prepare and address this aspect during career counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions. Enhancing the navigation of unmastered developmental tasks was associated with positive change in related developmental areas (Butterfly Effect). It is therefore strongly recommended that future research should aim to include the application of psychosocial developmental theory in self- and career construction theory and practice.

In addition, the adapted life-design intervention implemented in this study proved a worthy and versatile therapeutic strategy in facilitating the navigation of unmastered intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental tasks. This process (life design) can be tailored to accommodate a variety of individuals and contexts and future research should investigate and elaborate on its utilisation in related fields.

When referring back to my conceptual framework,<sup>128</sup> I am well aware of the complexity and uniqueness of individuals' life-design processes, the underlying dynamic and reciprocal influences and the different contexts in which human development and experiences occur. As such, I believe that the influence of unmastered developmental tasks on individuals' general well-being cannot be ignored during life-design counselling interventions and should be included in self- and career-construction processes. Although my research yielded noteworthy and potentially valuable findings and added to the existing body of knowledge, it is recommended that future research must endeavour to explore even more efficient ways to enable individuals to flourish in their career lives.

## **6.7 LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY**

Explorative studies aim to investigate phenomena to understand a specific topic in more detail and depth. However, when focusing on one area, peripheral information is bound to be missed and my study was no different. Below I refer to the limitations of this study.

- ❖ The participants in this study were identified using purposive and snowball sampling and consisted of only 10 individuals, which is considered a small sample. The findings can therefore not be generalised to the entire South African population.
- ❖ The participants were all Afrikaans and English mother tongue speakers who possessed at least a grade 10 secondary school qualification, which means that a significant part of the diverse South African population was excluded, further influencing the generalisability of the findings.

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<sup>128</sup> Please refer to Section 2.8.

- ❖ Subjective data sources were utilised which contributed to the rich and deep nature of the findings, but influenced the trustworthiness of the results. The methods I implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of my findings (credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability) are summarised in Table 3.4. but I acknowledge that a different researcher could have interpreted the data and themes differently.
- ❖ As the intervention progressed and participants shared personal details, the participant-researcher relationship deepened. On the one hand, trusting and transparent relationships enhanced the quality of the information gathered. However, I acknowledge my bias in this regard and, as was demonstrated in my research journal, guarded against the halo effect as much as possible in an attempt to limit biased judgements from my side.

## **6.8 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH STUDY**

Engaging in qualitative research was bound to change me, as a researcher, to some extent. I discuss my reflections in the next section by referring to findings I anticipated, results which either surprised or disappointed me, unexpected findings, and the personal meaning I take away from this process.

### **6.8.1 Findings I anticipated**

I expected the life-design intervention to be a suitable and enjoyable process for the young adult participants. I furthermore anticipated that the participants stood to benefit from the life-design intervention through their self- and career construction, which was confirmed by their post-intervention assessments and reflections. Lastly, I anticipated that the participants' experiences would be unique and that not all of them would participate in the same manner and obtain the same value from this process.

### **6.8.2 Findings that surprised me**

Due to the highly personal nature of this study, I expected to have difficulty finding suitable participants, and accepted that some might choose to withdraw from the research at some point. I was surprised when my full research capacity of 10 participants was reached and all the participants were dedicated and persevered until the end. I was astounded by the transparency and honesty the participants exhibited. They did not hesitate to share information which made them feel exposed and vulnerable. The extent to which participants experienced positive change and progress regarding their unmastered developmental tasks also surprised me. The influence of their families, mental health, and spirituality on the navigation of developmental tasks was greater than I expected, and the prominence of identity formation in young adulthood also surprised me. Lastly, I

was pleasantly surprised that participants effortlessly developed their metacognitive abilities and utilised these skills to their benefit.

### **6.8.3 Findings that disappointed me**

I was disappointed that not all of the changes individuals reported qualitatively were visible through the post-intervention assessment results and that the individuals presenting with significant mental health challenges only reported minor changes post-intervention, as I truly trusted that a life-design intervention would also provide some emotional relief for them.

### **6.8.4 Findings that I did not expect**

As I mentioned previously,<sup>129</sup> I suspected the presence of intimacy vs isolation, occupational developmental tasks, and identity exploration as unmastered developmental tasks of young adulthood. I did not expect the presence of early childhood-related unmastered developmental in young adulthood and the prominence of identity-related discussions during the life-design intervention. The participants enjoyed and often focused discussions on their abilities, interests, values, goals, and attributes. I also underestimated the significant influence of this intervention on participants' activity and intentionality (goals of life design) which I will share shortly in the section covering follow-up reflections,<sup>130</sup> which revealed that the enhanced career certainty and increased career adaptability (not excluding the Butterfly Effect of enhanced intrapersonal and interpersonal developmental tasks) resulted in clear and decisive career action.

### **6.8.5 What this study meant to me personally**

The almost imperceptible flutter of butterfly wings in my subconscious mind accompanied me for several years before it was persistent enough to be acknowledged. The dream to someday complete a purposeful PhD that would mean more than just a title (for myself) and hopefully could benefit others during the process and through the findings, first surfaced when I was introduced to life-design counselling during my postgraduate psychology training. I had the privilege to personally listen to and learn from Professors Maree and Savickas during that time, two passionate international life-design experts who both referred to Victor Frankl's contributions, one of my role models. Life-design theory refers to the process of 'actively mastering what was passively suffered,' and in my life this also proved to be true. On reflection, I realised that completing this study facilitated my self- and career construction processes and the navigation of my unmastered

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<sup>129</sup> Please refer to Chapter 2.

<sup>130</sup> Please refer to Section 6.9

developmental tasks into a meaningful and purposeful career life (Savickas et al., 2009). This PhD journey, through interactions with the participants, spending hours learning from other scholars, and receiving guidance and wisdom from my humble and extraordinary supervisor became a part of me through self- and career construction and continues to accompany me into my future roles as an individual, woman, wife, mother, daughter, friend, and professional.

As mentioned above and in my rationale<sup>131</sup> in Chapter 1, this PhD can furthermore be described as a professional calling to inspire others to find meaning and purpose in their career lives. One of the greatest moments in career counselling practice is when clients' eyes 'light up from within'. Life-design counselling has allowed me this experience on numerous occasions in my career. Investigating my personal and professional interest in unmastered developmental tasks, another theoretical approach I have had the privilege of observing in my practice (educational psychologist) and personal life (mother) in conjunction with life-design counselling, proved to be exhilarating. Not only did this PhD process create a humble awareness of the intensity and responsibility which accompanies research such as this, and a great admiration for colleagues and role models who continually strive to contribute to the world's body of knowledge, but it also increased my awareness regarding the delicate intricacies related to developmental psychology and the intensity of individuals' experiences of being human in a sometimes very harsh and unforgiving world. Experiencing my life as purposeful allowed me to view the participants and other people as individuals in the process of becoming who they truly are. Sometimes I had to wait for the timing to be just right (like Goldilocks) for the butterfly to emerge from the cocoon, finally strong enough to flutter its wings and use the resistance of the air to fly (flourish), and ultimately having a Butterfly Effect on the world.

## 6.9 CONCLUSION

All individuals face an array of developmental tasks during their lifespan and it has been proposed that the mastery of these challenges could contribute to individuals leading meaningful lives (Maree, 2021a). Even though it is generally accepted that all individuals are confronted with these similar challenges, limited research is available on the influence of unmastered developmental tasks on individuals' lives. Since young adults face significant transitions and developmental challenges, I investigated the application of an adapted life-design counselling intervention to young adults

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<sup>131</sup> Please refer to Section 1.3.1

experiencing unmastered developmental tasks with the hope that the participants would benefit from this process.

I adopted a QUALITATIVE-quantitative mixed-methods case study research design which allowed me to gather comprehensive and subjective data about participants' experiences of the life-design intervention I utilised. The quantitative measures included before and after the intervention provided a point of reference for each participant about their psychosocial developmental and occupational developmental tasks (career adaptability and career indecision) and rendered valuable information which contributed to the narrative discussions during the intervention. I employed thematic analysis, with the assistance of Atlas.ti (v23), to analyse the data.

Key findings indicated that the adapted life-design intervention implemented in this study proved a valuable and effective process to facilitate the navigation of unmastered developmental tasks in young adults and positive change (which includes the resolution of some unmastered developmental tasks) was demonstrated for the majority of their intrapersonal, interpersonal, and occupational developmental areas. Broadly, the results indicated that the navigation of their developmental tasks was influenced by the underlying and sometimes reciprocal dynamic between preceding unmastered developmental tasks, external factors (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem), and intrapersonal factors (attributes, coping styles, metacognitive abilities, and spirituality). Most participants (in some instances all) demonstrated acquisition of the metacognitive competencies of career adaptability and vocational identity and some participants exhibited forward motion (activity and intentionality) post-intervention.

It is easy to become overwhelmed by the environmental, economic, and political challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, pausing to turn inward and address unmastered developmental tasks through self- and career construction (life design), allows individuals to hear the fluttering of their butterfly wings which, through deconstruction, reconstruction, and co-construction, can find meaningful outward expression and subsequent influence in the world. Even small changes affect individuals' lives and by implication those you come into contact with, thus agreeing with the profound statement of the fictional Roman general, Maximus Decimus Meridus, in the well-known film *Gladiator* (Scott, 2000): "What you do in life echoes in eternity".

## **6.10 FOLLOW-UP REFLECTIONS**

The post-intervention and reflection sessions have already been discussed comprehensively. However, as mentioned in section 6.7.4, follow-up reflections with the participants demonstrated

increased activity and intentionality which I only realised when a few participants voluntarily sent me information on their post-intervention decision-making. Two participants, who expressed self-doubt and a lack of autonomy about their ability to function independently during the intervention, applied for occupations in other countries and are currently living abroad, while another participant who reportedly dreamt of travelling to another country for many years to experience diverse cultures, realised this dream post-intervention. These decisions and actions indicated enhanced activity and intentionality post-intervention, suggesting further positive consequences of life-design counselling. Since this information came to light after the completion of my study, I would encourage future researchers to investigate the medium- and long-term effects of this intervention process.



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# APPENDIX A – INFORMATION LETTER AND INFORMED CONSENT

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Faculty of Education

## Informed Consent

Dear Participant,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project that I will undertake in Stellenbosch. The study forms part of a PhD in Educational Psychology and is titled *Applying life-design counselling to young adults with unmastered developmental tasks*. The aim of the study is to investigate the influence of an intervention (life design counselling) on young adults who are experiencing uncertainty with regard to their current field of study, find career-related decisions challenging, or are experiencing challenges which can be related to developmental tasks which have not been mastered during childhood (for example taking initiative, self-confidence, identity).

When you agree to participate in this study, you will have the opportunity to the following:

1. You will gain insight into repetitive patterns of career-related behaviour and their consequences.
2. You will gain insight into the underlying motivations for your career decisions.
3. You will gain insight into yourself regarding who you are and what you want to achieve in the future.
4. You will gain insight into what is possibly holding you back from achieving your career dreams and goals.
5. You will gain insight into your strengths and challenges with regard to decision-making and adapting to change.
6. You will discover additional potential within yourself and your career context.

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Faculty of Education  
Fakulteit Opvoedkunde  
Lefapha la Thuto

The study will involve a pre- and post-intervention stage (which consists of three questionnaires) as well as an intervention process (which will comprise the completion of a questionnaire, a few structured activities as well as semi-structured interviews). The duration of the entire process will be between eight and 10 weeks. As the researcher, I will be an active participant in the research. As such, observations and field notes will be taken and audio recordings will be made of the entire process. Some of the sessions will be audio-recorded for research purposes. The recordings will not be made available, but the results of the sessions will be submitted to the University of Pretoria in the form of a dissertation for me to fulfil the requirements of a PhD in Educational Psychology.

All of the above will be completed during individual sessions although, with your consent after completion of the intervention process, one group session will be offered during which you will be able to interact with other participants who completed the same intervention if you would choose to do so.

The following ethical principles will apply:

1. Your participation is voluntary.
2. You may withdraw from the study at any stage if you wish to do so.
3. All information you provide will be treated as confidential and anonymous. To ensure this, pseudonyms will be used for identification purposes, and I undertake to destroy any traces that may lead to your identification.
4. The intention of this study is to cause you no harm or risk of any kind.
5. In the report following the study, no reference will be made to information that could convey personal or identifiable information.
6. You have the right to gain access to any information that was collected during the research project at any time.
7. You have the right to withdraw any data or information you wish not to be released for publication.

The findings of the study will be published in an accredited journal, but confidentiality and anonymity will be honoured. I also would like to request your permission to use your data, confidentially and anonymously, for further research purposes, as the data sets are the intellectual property of the University of Pretoria. Further research may include secondary data analysis and use the data for teaching purposes. The confidentiality and privacy applicable to this study will be binding on future research studies.

Since the project is intervention-based (life-design counselling), it is possible that an unexpected discovery might be made. In such an event, counselling and intervention will be made available by a qualified educational psychologist, Ms Tania du Toit (0722380241).

This project will be free of charge. Should you have any enquiries, you are welcome to make contact with me (Zelda Pollard, [zelda.pollard@gmail.com](mailto:zelda.pollard@gmail.com)) or my supervisor (Prof Kobus Maree, [kobus.maree@up.ac.za](mailto:kobus.maree@up.ac.za)). If you choose not to sign the letter of consent, nobody apart from the researcher will know about it and it will bring you no harm.

If you are willing to participate in the proposed research study, please complete the *Informed Consent* slip on page 4 as a declaration of your consent.

I thank you in advance.

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Zelda Pollard

(Educational Psychologist)

## Informed Consent

By signing this letter of informed consent I, \_\_\_\_\_, give my permission for the participation in the research study entitled *Applying life-design counselling on young adults with unmastered developmental tasks*. I understand and give my consent for the completion of psychological questionnaires and for the following sources of data to be released (kindly indicate your agreement to each statement by ticking in front of the appropriate statement with X).

\_\_\_ The results of psychological questionnaires.

\_\_\_ The analysis, interpretation and reporting of content as recorded during the sessions.

\_\_\_ Notes and reflections made by the researcher and participants during the research process.

\_\_\_ Use of data for future research in a confidential and anonymous way.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



## APPENDIX B – CODING EXAMPLE

30 Z: I see the main reason you provided for that is “people”?

31 K: Yes, I love people (laughs). Then, surprisingly the second interest, I know it is not an official career path, but I said Youtuber or online content creator. Growing up I loved watching Youtubers, and I have always been interested in that creativity, flexibility, sharing and also receiving, you know.

32

33 Z: The platform is just enormous.

34 K: Absolutely enormous. You’ve got your entertainers, your advisers, whatever. Just so much. It has always been an interest of mine just sitting in front of the camera, talk, or even just going out and vlogging as they say.

35 Z: Engaging with your passion for people, listening

36 K: Yes, and with the creativity... The third one I wrote was “teacher”. Education, research, teaching, all of that, again it is people. I quite like that. (laughs) I think teaching right now, in my current mindset it seems like a scary thing, because when I was the one to give a presentation in class, I was the one that was quiet and shaky (laughs, slightly nervous), so I can’t imagine standing there.

27:153 | sa...  
 ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Interests  
 ◆ Occupational Developmental tasks: Career curiosity  
 ◆ Technological influence: TI Social media

27:154 | Ab...  
 ◆ Occupational Developmental tasks: Career curiosity  
 ◆ Occupational Development...: DT Future possibilities

27:157 | think...  
 ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Interests  
 ◆ Metacognitive application: MC Self-awareness

37 Z: It grew on you... or you grew into it.

38 K: I felt like, when I look back to high school when I gave a presentation I wasn’t fond of, I was shy and timid, but when I gave a presentation I was very passionate about, all of a sudden it was a different energy. So, I really feel like my energy needs to align with my passion. The 4<sup>th</sup> one I said was “research or analyst” or something in a psychological field. Like next year I want to try and do research masters. I love research, um... working, even if it is without people although I would love to do qualitative studies with people. But research in general. Um... To know the field and get into it. Then the 5<sup>th</sup> one, I wrote “Chef”. I love food and I love cooking, I love cooking. I am not the greatest at it yet, but I am trying my hardest and I seem to be learning pretty quickly. I seem to, surprisingly, understand advanced cooking concepts naturally if that makes sense. Temperatures, time. Good feel without even reading a book I just got a feel for it. I’ve got books...

27:158 | felt...  
 ◆ Metacognitive application: MC Reflection  
 ◆ Metacognitive a...: MC Self- and career construction  
 27:159 | resea...  
 ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Interests  
 ◆ Occupational Developmental tasks: Career curiosity  
 27:160 | Chef... I lov...  
 ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Abilities  
 ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Interests  
 ◆ Metacognitive application: MC Self-knowledge  
 ◆ Occupational Developmental tasks: Career curiosity

83 Z: Captain of your own ship.

84 K: Yes. I think that is what I would love. It ties in.

85 Z: I see everything is connected in some way.

86 K: Some shape or manner. The last one, number 6 practical, creative, consumer science. So, the main reason why I wrote it there was because of the chef elements, the food, and the cooking, but also because simply like home decorations or um... designing and stuff. I love the creative elements around textures and stuff. If you saw my room, it would be very neat, everything has a place, which I think surprises a lot of people and they think young guys are messy. But mine is very meticulous.

87 Z: I am surprised that though you just said your dream career would be that of a chef it is only nr 6?

88 K: I have realised that, and I think there is a disconnect between what I believe I can do versus what I... think there is a disconnect between belief and wanting to do it. Like the interest is there, and it is immense, but I have a lot of self-doubt that keeps dragging me away from.... So... I am not really sure. It is very interesting... it is very interesting.

89 Z: We’ll see where it goes. Thank you for that. We can continue.

27:192 | practical, creat...  
 ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Interests  
 27:193 | I am surprised that t...  
 ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental ta...: DT Role Confusion  
 ◆ Metacognitive application: MC Self-awareness

82 K: Nr 3 I said research. It's simply because I love learning, I love learning new things, I love researching, and I love sharing research. One of the most engaging things I did last year was outside of the counselling rooms. All the people came in to sit at the back. Apparently, it was very quiet before I came there (laughs), but I got people talking. A lot of people did research, they were a lot older than me, and they were doing research at Stellenbosch, UWC, and I spoke to some awesome people, and I hope they find really cool stuff that I hope they can share with people and that their work gets published. Research, love learning, and would love to write as well. Nr 4, probably because I was listening to music when I did this. I said Musical. My friends know me very well and that I love music. One of... My friend and myself we made a little group, Music evenings, where each person would pick an album, and we would sit down and cook dinner and listen to each other's music. Just listen, no talking. Afterwards, we would share our thoughts about each other's music and that was 'n way to explore music. I grew up with music, my father loves music. Never played it in school, never practically did it but I think the interest is so much, so ja. That was just an interest over there. Number 5 I said Entrepreneurship, running and maintaining an own, personal business. I think this ties in with the YouTube thing and the online creator. Also, if you had to practice by yourself as a psychologist, it would tie in with that. You would have to really... you have to run your own kind of business.

- 27:1... ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Interests
- 27:1... ◆ Attributes: A EQ
- 27:190 probably because I... ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Hobbies
- 27:190 probably because I... ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: Interests
- 27:191 Entrepreneur... ◆ Occupational Developmental tasks: Career curiosity

92 K: This was actually difficult to write because I have a lot of expectations of myself and not others. So generally, when... I saw a psychologist last year when I was going through depression. And it was, funnily enough, when he asked what I would like from him, I couldn't say. I need to do the things, not you. Which is ironic... when you go to a psychologist. I think it ties in with my childhood, it's the way I was raised. Be your own man, depend on, only depend on yourself. Although in life, knowing my behaviours now, that's not the truth. I am very much dependent emotionally specifically. Um... So yeah. So, what I did write is: To help further the understanding of myself and my path. I already have a rough estimate of my interests and what I would like to do, but I feel that just needs to be refined a bit more. So obviously a very difficult and not very surface thing, but I think I need the motivation and self-belief to drive, to take action to move towards action rather than just thinking. I spend a lot of time in my head, and I don't take a lot of action. I will sit there for an hour and think these are the things I would like to do and then... when does it actually get done. I have that issue.

- 27:1... ◆ Intrapersonal climate: IP Mental health issues
- 27:1... ◆ Proactive coping: PC Therapeutic intervention
- 27:196 when yo... ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: DT Guilt
- 27:196 when yo... ◆ Metacognitive application: MC Self-awareness
- 27:197 To help further the un... ◆ Attributes: A Honesty
- 27:197 To help further the un... ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental ta...: DT Role Confusion
- 27:197 To help further the un... ◆ Intrapersonal Developmental tasks: DT Shame/Doubt
- 27:197 To help further the un... ◆ Metacognitive application: MC Reflection
- 27:197 To help further the un... ◆ Metacognitive application: MC Self-awareness
- 27:197 To help further the un... ◆ Occupational Developmental tasks: Career concern
- 27:197 To help further the un... ◆ Pre-intervention



## APPENDIX C – THEMES, SUB-THEMES, AND SUB-SUB-THEMES AS REPRESENTED IN ATLAS.TI (V23)

THEME	SUB-THEME (CODE GROUP)	SUB-SUB-THEME (CODES)
<b>1. PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS</b>	Intrapersonal developmental tasks	<div style="background-color: #f2f2f2; padding: 5px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <span style="font-size: 0.8em;">▾ ○ ◆</span> Intrapersonal Developm... 1143               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> Abilities 57</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Autonomy 6</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Guilt 6</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Identity 145</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Industry 53</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Inferiority 58</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Initiative 4</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Mistrust 18</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Role Confusion 120</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Shame/Doubt 13</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Trust 13</li> </ul> </li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> Goals 17</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> Hobbies 11</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> Interests 259</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> Values 557</li> </ul> </div>
	Interpersonal developmental tasks	<div style="background-color: #f2f2f2; padding: 5px;"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <span style="font-size: 0.8em;">▾ ○ ◆</span> Interpersonal Developm... 216               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Intimacy 122</li> <li><span style="font-size: 0.7em;">● ◆</span> DT Isolation 104</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </div>

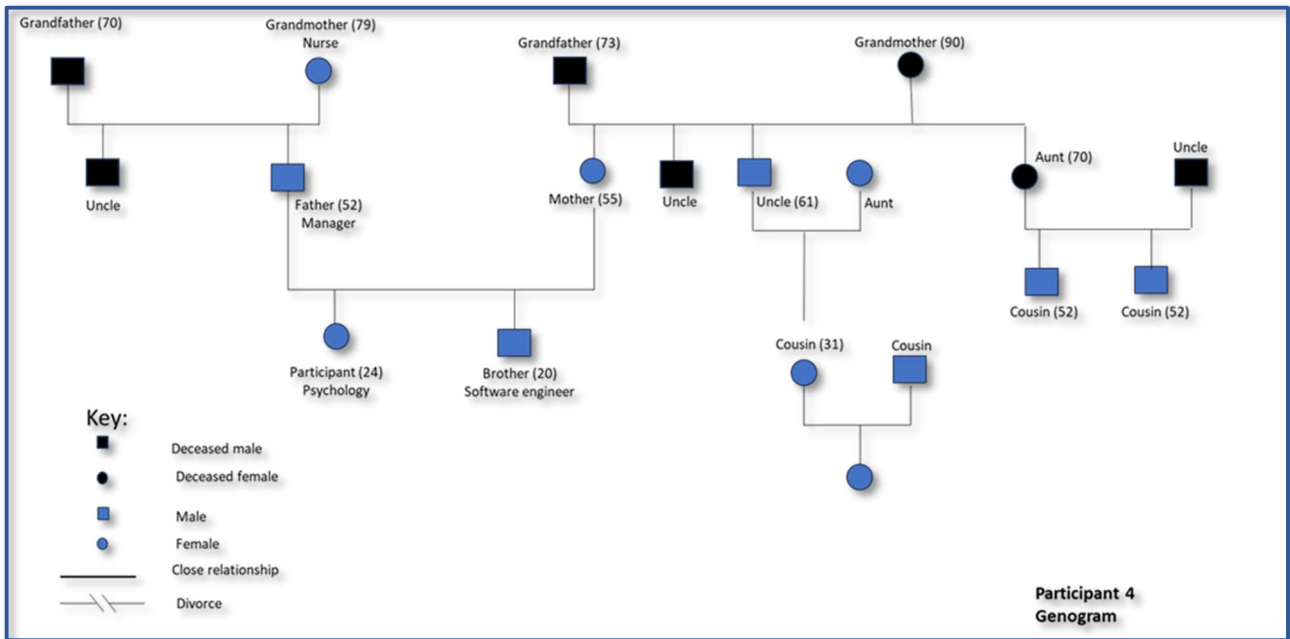
THEME	SUB-THEME (CODE GROUP)	SUB-SUB-THEME (CODES)
	Occupational developmental tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◀ ○ ◆ Occupational Developm... 342</li> <li>● ◆ Career concern 93</li> <li>● ◆ Career confidence 28</li> <li>● ◆ Career control 58</li> <li>● ◆ Career curiosity 154</li> <li>● ◆ Career indecision 31</li> <li>● ◆ DT Feeling in-between 15</li> <li>● ◆ DT Future possibilities 75</li> </ul>
	<b>2. EXTERNAL INFLUENCES</b>	Microsystem
Mesosystem		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ▷ ◆ Sig events 58</li> <li>○ ▷ ◆ Trauma 152</li> </ul>
Exosystem		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ ◆ Economic status 24</li> <li>○ ◆ Technological influence 97</li> </ul>
Macrosystem		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ◆ MS Covid 19 19</li> <li>● ◆ MS SA context 18</li> </ul>

THEME	SUB-THEME (CODE GROUP)	SUB-SUB-THEME (CODES)
3. INTRAPERSONAL FACTORS	Attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▾ ○ ◇ Attributes 353               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ◇ A Adaptability 11</li> <li>● ◇ A Compassion 80</li> <li>● ◇ A Dedication 32</li> <li>● ◇ A EQ 36</li> <li>● ◇ A Honesty 32</li> <li>● ◇ A Humour 49</li> <li>● ◇ A Perseverance 56</li> <li>● ◇ A Resilience 68</li> <li>● ◇ A Self-efficacy 33</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Metacognitive application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▾ ○ ◇ Metacognitive application 1192               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ◇ MC Reflection 574</li> <li>● ◇ MC Self- and career c... 230</li> <li>● ◇ MC Self-awareness 409</li> <li>● ◇ MC Self-knowledge 241</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Intrapersonal climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▾ ○ ◇ Intrapersonal climate 122               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ◇ IP Health 12</li> <li>● ◇ IP lack of intention 6</li> <li>● ◇ IP Mental health issues 71</li> <li>● ◇ IP Spirituality 40</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Coping skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▾ ○ ◇ Proactive coping 13               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● ◇ PC Exercise 2</li> <li>● ◇ PC Journaling 4</li> <li>● ◇ PC Planning 1</li> <li>● ◇ PC Therapeutic interv... 6</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

THEME	SUB-THEME (CODE GROUP)	SUB-SUB-THEME (CODES)
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">▲ ○</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">◇</span> Destructive coping 105           </li> <li> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">●</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">◇</span> DC Addiction 19           </li> <li> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">●</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">◇</span> DC Avoidance 69           </li> <li> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">●</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">◇</span> DC Manipulation/Lyin... 7           </li> <li> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">●</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">◇</span> DC Perfectionism 2           </li> <li> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">●</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">◇</span> DC Pleasing behaviour 5           </li> <li> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">●</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">◇</span> DC self-criticism 5           </li> <li> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">●</span> <span style="margin-right: 10px;">◇</span> DC Sexual immorality 6           </li> </ul>



## APPENDIX D – EXAMPLE OF GENOGRAM



## APPENDIX E – EXAMPLE OF LIFELINE

