

The social experiences of a young adult growing up as an only-child

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The social experiences of a young adult growing up as an only-child

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This dissertation is dedicated to my extraordinary family.

*Thank you for your constant love, support and encouragement.
I would never have been here today if it was not for the immensity
of the influence you have all had in my life,
Grazie!*

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My very special and heartfelt thanks are expressed towards;

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Abstract

In this study, the social experiences of a young adult growing up as an only-child were explored. A single case study with a female only-child, 23 years of age was used to elicit the themes related to these social experiences. The conceptual framework utilised for this study included the concepts of social identity, social relations and social learning, which incorporated the various social agents and contexts explored in this study. Data was generated through multiple sessions, which consisted of the participant's life story, people and places maps, as well as unstructured and semi-structured interviews. In addition, field notes and observations were recorded in a reflective journal. The data was analysed and interpreted through thematic analysis, which involved an in-depth selection of themes evident in the participant's written and verbal expressions.

The results of the study were presented in the form of themes, subthemes and categories depicting the social experiences of the participant. The primary themes that seemed to have influenced the social experiences of the participant were her *relationships* (specifically that with her primary caregivers) and her *experiences* (attached to these relationships). This study yielded an additional category, which can be seen as contributing to the literature on the social experiences of only-children. This category focused on the cultural influences of the participants' family, which seemed to be significant in shaping her identity.

KEYWORDS

- Only-child
- Siblings
- Young adult
- Socialisation
- Social identity
- Social relations
- Social learning



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Chapter 1

Overview and Rationale

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This study aspired to explore the social experiences of a young adult growing up as an only-child. Single-child¹ families seem to be on the increase according to Sandler (2010) therefore, this type of family structure deemed a worthwhile topic for exploration, especially with regards to the changes over time. Only-child families consist of a family structure where there is only one child residing with his/her parent/parents. Over the years, only-child have been labeled using many stereotypes such as spoiled, selfish, dependent, unsociable, demanding, mature, egocentric and so on (Blake, 1981; Falbo, 1977; Polit, Nuttall & Nuttall, 1980; Roberts & Blanton, 2001). This study attempted to gain an understanding of the social experiences of a young adult only-child.

This chapter provides an overview of the study by firstly discussing the aim, rationale and purpose. I proceed to present the research questions as well as a concept clarification. The paradigmatic perspective in terms of the methodological paradigm and metatheoretical paradigm will be elaborated upon. The research design with specific reference to the participant selection, data generating strategies as well as the data analysis and interpretation will be described. Lastly, I clarify the quality criteria and ethical considerations of the study. This chapter concludes with a brief overview of subsequent chapters included in the research study.

1.2 AIM AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

My experiences of being part of a large family spiked my interest in only-children, and the various social experiences they encounter in the absence of siblings. I was thus interested in their relationships with their peers as well. I questioned whether having siblings contributed to the development of social skills in an only-child, and if such skills influenced a child's experiences in terms of their exploration of their social world. Reviewing relevant

¹ Only-child and single-child terminology is used interchangeably.

literature, this study aimed to explore the social experiences of a young adult growing up as an only-child. My view is that, by exploring the social experiences of an only-child, I may be able to contribute to existing literature on single-child families, and specifically to understanding the social agents and contexts which influence their social experiences. Thus this research may contribute to the limitations in existing literature by expanding on current knowledge on the socialisation of only-children in terms of their relationships and experiences with others within their various social contexts.

There seems to be much debate surrounding the influence of siblings on a child's overall development (Polit & Falbo, 1987). As stated by Mancillas (2006), it is assumed that for a child to develop normally, he or she should have siblings and that, in itself, the position of being an only-child may have detrimental effects on an individual's adjustment, personality and character.

Hence, it seemed worthwhile to explore the social experiences of an only-child growing up in South Africa, as previous studies have been conducted overseas. The fact that single-child families seem to be on the increase (Sandler, 2010) also makes studies regarding only-child beneficial for those individuals interested in exploring the single-child family structure. Thus, this study offers to possibly create further understanding of the unique role only-children occupy within their family, and the various strengths and challenges they may face.

There also seems to be a large body of literature regarding the one-child policy in China and the various effects this policy has had on the people of China (Settles, Sheng, Zang & Zhao, 2008). Settles *et al.* (2008) state that this policy has been one of the largest and most dramatic population-control campaigns in the world, receiving both praise and criticism. Studies regarding the one-child policy could serve as additional literature guiding this research study. Thus, developing an understanding of and describing the social experiences of only-child proposed in this study, could be beneficial and may add to existing literature.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this study was to understand and describe the social experiences of an only-child and the effects it may have on her social interactions as a child and young adult.

This research may possibly contribute to existing literature on understanding an only-child and her social experiences in terms of the various influences on them growing up.

In this study, I firstly explored the social experiences of an only-child in terms of her family structure as well as her various relationships with her family and peers. Secondly, I described the types of social relationships this young adult experienced growing up and the influences this may have had on her overall development, with specific reference to her social experiences. I further explored the types of social skills which this participant imitated in relation to her social interactions with others.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In view of the rationale and purpose of this study as explained above, the research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1.4.1 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

➤ **What are the subjective social experiences of a young adult only-child?**

In an effort to respond to the primary research question, the following secondary questions are explored:

1.4.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What were the primary and secondary social influences of this young adult growing up as an only-child?
- What are the factors that contribute to her positive social experiences?
- What are the factors that contribute to her negative social experiences?
- Which stereotypes from literature seemed to have been applied to this young adult only-child?

1.5 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

In order to attend to these research questions it is essential to define and clarify several key concepts relevant to this study.

1.5.1 ONLY-CHILD

For the purpose of this study, an only-child refers to the sole child of his/her parents, living or deceased who has from birth to adulthood never shared their home with another child (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). In this study, the only-child is a solitary child who still resides with both her heterosexual parents in one household. Studies on only-children are explored using the plural term 'only-children' and the only-child used in this study will be referred to in the singular term, 'only-child'.

1.5.2 SIBLING

The term sibling is used when more than one child exists in a family from the same parents (Louw, Van Ede & Louw, 1998). Cicirelli (1994) also states that when viewing industrialized societies, siblings are identified in terms of genealogical or biological principles. 'Full-siblings' would, therefore, share the same two parents, and 'half-siblings' would have only one parent in common. It is further mentioned that in non-industrialised societies, the term sibling may not be that simply defined, but rather reviewed as an extension of the term of certain sibling types (Cicirelli, 1994). The term sibling, thus, may have different meanings depending on the cultural orientation of various families. Throughout this research, it is essential to be aware of the meaning of the word 'sibling' with regards to its cultural connotations.

1.5.3 YOUNG ADULTHOOD

A young adult, according to Roberts and Blanton (2001), is an individual who ranges between the ages of 20 and 29 years of age. These young adult's fall into the developmental category often named 'Early Adulthood' (Louw *et al.*, 1998). In this study, the participant was a young adult woman, aged 23.

1.5.4 SOCIALISATION

In this study, the term 'social experience' has been linked to socialisation. Socialisation is described as a dynamic social sequence of social actions between individuals and groups and the development of relationships as well as the acquisition of socially acceptable and

appropriate behaviour (Louw *et al.*, 1998). In addition, socialisation consists of the acquisition of attitudes and values, habits and skills transmitted through family, peers and mass media (White, 1977). It is further noted that socialisation is depicted as the way in which individuals perceive social situations and interact with others (Louw *et al.*, 1998). Grusec and Hastings (2007) describe socialisation as the way in which individuals are assisted in becoming members of social groups with all members playing equal parts in the socialisation process. They further mention that with socialisation, various outcomes such as the acquisition of rules, roles, standards and values across the social, emotional, cognitive and personal areas are incorporated. Therefore, social experiences refer to the interpersonal relationships which an individual experiences within their specific contexts (Roberts & Blanton, 2001).

1.5.5 SOCIAL IDENTITY

Social identity is defined as a self-definition guiding how a person conceptualises and assesses themselves (Deaux, 1993, as cited in Baron & Byrne, 2003). Jarvis and Russell (2002) also mention that social identity focuses on the importance of social identification. In addition, social identity theory is described as the means in which individuals gain knowledge of belonging to a certain social category or group (Stets & Burke, 2000). By understanding the social self the individual is, thus able to understand the group process and the various relations within the group (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995).

1.5.6 SOCIAL RELATIONS

Social relational theory describes social relations as viewing people as social beings that interact with each other in different contexts (Edler-Vass, 2007). Kuczynski and Parkin, (2007) state that the parent-child relationship is defined as an essential component of social relations interactions, as being understood occurring in the context of close personal relationships. Once the parent-child relationship has been established, individuals can thus, form relationships with others (Blos, 1980, as cited in Bukowski, Brendgen & Vitaro, 2007).

1.5.7 SOCIAL LEARNING

Social learning is described by Bandura (1977) as the way in which individuals observe others, and thus, learn behaviours through modelling. They then form ideas about their own behaviour by regulating their future behaviour. The importance of imitational learning (Bandura, 1977) has been highlighted and Maccoby (1980) further states that children imitate adult behaviours and roles during imaginative play, acting as a central process of socialisation.

1.6 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

1.6.1 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative research approach was utilised. I believe that a qualitative approach was appropriate as I explored the personal opinions, attitudes and beliefs of an only-child in her natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The research method was based on non-numerical data, as I was intensively involved in the interaction with the participant for a lengthy amount of time (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2005).

1.6.2 METATHEORETICAL PARADIGM

My observations and activities were organised and reasoned (De Vos, Schulze & Patel, 2005) from an Interpretivistic paradigm, which allowed me as the researcher, to treat social action and human activity as text. According to Berg (1954), human action can be viewed as a generating of symbols expressing layers of meaning, Interpretivism, therefore, allowed me to discover the practical understandings of meanings and actions. Thus, I was able to gain an understanding regarding the experiences of an only-child in her social settings. I aimed to comprehend human experience with reference to the chosen case study.

According to Cohen *et al.* (2005) Interpretivism focuses on the individual, and the scale of research is small. Eloff and Ebersöhn (2004), state that subjective meanings are crucial for achieving understanding and meaning in Interpretivist research. This assisted me in my understanding of the social contexts and various social experiences which possibly influenced the participant in this study, and her expressions growing up as an only-child.

1.7 OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research was conducted according to the following research methodology.

1.7.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

I utilised a single case study research design for the purpose of this research. The aim of a case study was to focus on gaining a better understanding of an individual case, and therefore, not only understanding the issue but rather describing the case being studied (Fouche, 2005). According to Maree (2007) case studies can be used to describe a unit of analysis or a research method. Fouche (2005, p.272) describes a case study as an exploration or in-depth analysis of a “bounded system” bounded by place or time, or a single or multiple case, over a period of time.

An in-depth analysis is an important aspect which I took cognisance of in the current case study, as I gained an understanding of the participant’s life experiences as an only-child. People are individuals, and need to be understood as such. However, they cannot be understood only as individuals, but also in relation to a social context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, both the personal and social factors influencing the participants’ life experiences were addressed.

1.7.2 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANT

I selected the participant for this study by means of purposive sampling. Strydom and Delport (2005) describe purposive sampling as based entirely on the judgement of the researcher. The sample is composed of elements that contain most characteristics, as representative of the population. The reason for using purposive sampling is that I required the participant to have specific attributes for the study, as well as gain an in-depth understanding about the various aspects regarding the research topic, such as why and how they occurred, as well as how the participant perceived them (Berg, 1954). It was important, therefore, for the participant to be easily accessible to me.

The case study was conducted in the form of a written account, the participant’s description of her life story (Chen, 2007). In order for the participant to write her life story,

she needed to be literate and comfortable expressing herself in both a written and verbal format. The participant therefore, needed to be an only-child in the early adulthood developmental stage, between the ages of 20-29 years (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). The fact that, at the time of the research study, the participant was residing with her parents may have contributed to her ability to reflect on her social experiences of growing up as an only-child, as her family structure and setting were not likely to have changed over the years.

1.7.3 DATA GENERATION STRATEGIES

The data was generated from a single case, through activities which elicited the participant to share her social experiences as an only-child. I also made use of informal observations, and unstructured as well as semi-structured interviews with the participant throughout the research process. Strydom (2005) and Greeff (2005) state that making use of observations and interviews, allows the researcher flexibility in gaining additional and sufficient information for thematic analysis. These types of interviews assisted me in breaking down the data into themes and categories in order to build them up again in novel ways (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). The participant was interviewed in a place where she seemed comfortable. I chose both unstructured and semi-structured interview formats, as I intended for the participant to engage and interact freely, and did not want her to feel threatened with interviews that seemed too formally structured.

I also made use of a reflective journal to record my own experiences and field notes regarding my observations throughout the research process (Berg, 1954). I think that by making use of a reflective journal, and through debriefing with my supervisors, I was able to reflect on possible researcher bias and thus counter this effect.

1.7.4 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data was analysed by interpreting the information which was generated through the data generating strategies in a qualitative manner. The sessions with the participant were audio-recorded, and then transcribed. The data generated was explored thoroughly by means of thematic analysis (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) for the purpose of identifying

themes, subthemes and categories. Member-checking (Creswell, 2005; Maree, 2007) was used in order to validate the accuracy of the information generated from the participant.

1.8 QUALITY CRITERIA

The trustworthiness of this study was maintained by adhering to certain quality criteria. Credibility was utilised as an alternative to internal validity, keeping in mind the goal of being able to “demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described” (De Vos, 2005b, p.364). By attempting to place boundaries within my study I strove to maintain credibility of this study.

Transferability was proposed as an alternative to external validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in, 2005a) in order to provide for the applicability of the study’s findings in other settings. Transferability was especially adhered to when making use of qualitative research.

The alternative to reliability utilised in this study was dependability (De Vos, 2005b). This indicates that an expectation exists that when utilising the same methods on the same object, the results should be the same. In the current study, dependability was maintained by making use of prolonged engagement, member-checking, observations, field notes, as well as reflexivity (Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

Authenticity suggests the ability of the researcher to report the research findings through the eyes of the participant (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). I attempted to ensure authenticity in this study by acknowledging the participant’s experiences and expressions, and engaging her in member-checking to ensure my understanding and interpretations were accurate as she intended. Lastly, as the researcher I needed to liberate my interpretations from bias, and this was attempted by ensuring confirmability in the study (Ary, Jacobs & Razavieh, 2002).

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important for me as the researcher, to take into account the effects research may have had on the participant, and therefore act in such a way as to preserve her human dignity, as stated by, Cohen *et al.* (2005). As the researcher, my subjectivity also played an important role during the qualitative study, as I became the main instrument of data generating in the research process (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). I was involved in all aspects concerning the study, and therefore, needed to remain aware of, as well as submit to, the ethical standards as stipulated by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria.

In the interest of ensuring no harm to the participant, it was important to brief the participant at the start of the study to determine whether any assistance, counselling or explanations regarding the study may be necessary once the study was completed (Berg, 1954). I, therefore, made sure my participant was aware that access to a professional practitioner was available, should she require it to discuss sensitive issues, which may have arisen during the re-collection of her past experiences. The name and number of a qualified practitioner was provided.

Informed consent, which is described by Berg (1954) as knowing consent of the individuals that their participatory is voluntary, was obtained from the participant. The content of the consent form was discussed with the participant at the outset, explaining the purpose of the research, the procedures that I would utilise to generate the data as well as her permission to make use of the data generated and interpreted. The participant's informed consent, and permission to make use of the data obtained is included in Addendum B.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process, and is described as an active attempt to remove from the research records any elements, which may indicate the participants' identity (Berg, 1954). The participant's personal information and responses shared in the process of data generating were conducted in a private and respectful manner. The participant chose a pseudonym in order to protect her identity, thus the results presented remained anonymous (Maree, 2007). It was also important that the

participant did not feel coerced into participating in the research and thus she was made aware of voluntary participation (Delpont & De Vos, 2005).

1.10 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

This chapter orientates the reader to the research study by providing an overview, and explaining the rationale and aim of the study. The research questions are formulated, and the relevant concepts clarified. An overview of the paradigmatic perspective and the research methodology is also provided. The chapter concludes with an overview of the quality criteria and ethical considerations adhered to in this study.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

In this chapter the current literature on only-children is explored with regard to family structure, historical perspectives, as well as various stereotypes associated with only-children. The conceptual framework is discussed, with particular reference to the concepts of social identity, social relations and social learning.

CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology

Chapter 3 consists of a discussion regarding the research design, methodology, paradigmatic perspectives, data generation strategies, analysis and interpretation. The quality criteria utilised in this study to meet the requirements necessary for validity and reliability are also described. This chapter concludes with an overview of the ethical considerations adhered to in the research process.

CHAPTER 4: Results and Findings

This chapter consists of a presentation of the data analysis and interpretation conducted in the study. The results are depicted in terms of themes, subthemes and categories which emerged from the data generated. The findings of the study are discussed with reference to existing literature, as introduced in Chapter 2. The conceptual framework is re-visited to further validate the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5: Closing

In the final chapter, a summary of the themes identified in Chapter 4 is provided. This chapter also relates the findings of this study to the research questions posited in Chapter 1. This leads to an integration of the conceptual framework, as well as a look at potential contributions and limitations of the study. The research study concludes with possible recommendations for further training, practice and research in the fields of social experiences and the only-child.

1.11 CONCLUSION

This chapter provided an overview of the current study in order to orientate the reader regarding the research that follows. The rationale, aim and purpose of the study were discussed, as well as the research questions and key concepts relevant to this study. The paradigmatic lens, which I employed as researcher in this study, was also explained, as well as the chosen the research design and methodology. The quality criteria and ethical considerations adhered to in this study were also mentioned.

In the next chapter I present the literature review guiding this study. Current literature pertaining to only-children and the various contributions to their social experience will be addressed, as well as the conceptual framework adopted for this study.



Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 1, I provided a broad overview of the research problem, the purpose as well as the rationale for the study. The research questions were outlined to guide this enquiry. In addition, I briefly discussed the research design and methodology, while also outlining the key concepts of the study.

In this chapter, I explore the conceptual framework adopted for this study by incorporating existing literature on the only-child, with a particular focus on the social experiences of only-children. I begin with the historical and stereotypical perspectives on only-child as well as the theoretical constructs, namely: social identity, social relations and social learning, which are relevant to the conceptual framework for this study.

2.2 FAMILY STRUCTURE

As the world changes, so do families and therefore it is important to acknowledge the dynamic nature of family structures (Walsh, 2003). In comparison to previous patterns of family structures, currently, family structures are becoming increasingly diverse especially in Western societies more than any other time in history (Patterson & Hastings, 2007). When thinking about families, there may be a tendency to view them in terms of being normal and abnormal. However, such a view can be debated if we ask ourselves: “What is a normal family?” (Walsh, 2003). According to Levin and Trost (1992) society acknowledges that the family constellation is not the same for everyone. A marriage may not necessarily make-up a family, and a divorce may not mean the dissolution of a family.

In the past, as stated by Walsh (2003), the family composition was larger and it was considered usual to have more than one child. The father remained the breadwinner and the mother was responsible for running the household and taking care of the children (Walsh, 2003). Today, the previous model of the breadwinner father and homemaker

mother remains a small fragment of the constellation of families (Teachman, Tedrow & Crowder, 2000). Rigg and Pryor (2007) suggest that a child's personal experiences of family life, shapes the foundation of their perceptions with regards to family structure. Furthermore in some instances it may be essential to acknowledge the importance of cultural influences of various families, which in turn may influence their children's socialisation within these families as well as with the outside world. Therefore, as stated by Arnett (1995) family practices, values and norms may be transmitted during socialisation reflecting one's cultural background.

Previously, having only one child was frowned upon and society seemed to place judgment on parents of an only-child (Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). During the post war Baby Boom years, discrimination towards only-child families was displayed by professionals who preferred not to study them, as well as the public who made sure not to have an only-child (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Sandler (2010) however, mentions that single-child families became more popular, and it appears that contemporary society has had a "favourable change of heart" towards only-child families (Lui, Munakata & Onuoha, 2005, p.831). Thus, the conceptualisation of 'family' may have different meanings for different individuals, and there is no right or wrong way to view a family. It is essential to embrace and understand these different views regarding families that seem to exist.

There are different trends of family structures, which are visible in society today. Over time there seems to have been a great shift from what was previously known as the traditional family (Grusec & Hastings, 2007; Walsh, 2003) comprising of a mother, father and children, and modern day family structures, which may take the form of a variety of arrangements (Nabokov, 1969, as cited in Walsh, 2003). These arrangements include: single-parent families (Bodenhorn, 2007), step-families (Jeynes, 2006), adopted families (Wegar, 2000), same sex parent families (Ryan & Berkowitz, 2009), child-headed families (Burton, 2007), extended families (Goldstern, Judah & Shelah, 1991) and single-child families. The shift has further been elaborated upon by Travares, Fuchs, Diligenti, Pinto de Abreu, Rohde and Fuchs, (2004) who state that over the last decade the mean size of families has continuously diminished globally. In addition the change in family structure may have lead to an increase in one-child families. The most recent literature on only-child families (Sandler, 2010) suggests that as changes in family structures are becoming increasingly

more common, they are being embraced more by society. For the purpose of the current study I focus my discussion on the family structure consisting of an only-child residing with both heterosexual parents.

Single-child families are characterised by two parents and one child (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). Literature outlines various reasons why parents may have only one child. A common reason seems to be infertility (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Gee, 1992) as many couples discover that they are biologically unable to have children. Another reason may be due to a country's policy or law, for example, the one-child policy that was introduced in China in 1979 (Settles *et al.*, 2008). This policy forced parents to have just one child. Currently more than 90% of the children in China are only-child and this policy, as well as the socio-economic changes, which occurred in the 1970's, changed the context of socialisation amongst children in China (Liu, 2006). Parents in China placed more value on boys than girls, as boys are viewed as the carriers of the family by sharing in the welfare and security of their parents (Wang, Kato, Inaba, Tango, Yoshida, Kusaka, Deguchi, Tomita & Zhang, 2000). Thus, as gender inequality remained common in early Chinese societies, the one-child policy attempted to do away with these inequalities by preparing both boys and girls for their various school and social experiences (Liu, 2006).

Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989) suggest that choosing to have one child may assist the mother in a family with more of an opportunity to work outside the home environment. Parents thus indicate that having one child, is in a sense, the "*best of both worlds*" (Hawke & Knox, 1978, p.216) as they are able to experience joy and frustration of parenting without the excess pressure of additional parental responsibilities, which could prevent them from pursuing their own interests.

Furthermore, social and economic aspects, such as financial restraints, have also recently become reasons for parents' decision to have only one child (Falbo & Poston, 1993; Mancillas, 2006). These social and economic factors differ according to time, place and family. However, financial restraints common in contemporary society may also be a reason couples marry at a later age, and therefore, having one child seems more feasible to them (Falbo & Poston, 1993).

According to literature another common reason for parents' choice to have a second child appears to be to prevent their only-child from being alone (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Mottus Indus & Allik, 2008; Roberts & Blanton, 2001) because of the belief that not having siblings may lead an only-child to lack social competence (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). In terms of the family, Hawke and Knox (1978) mention that pre-marital break-up may also be a reason parents having only one child. Statistics have indicated that one in three only-children in the United States come from broken homes, as opposed to a one in five average of children with siblings. Some authors state that having one child increases personal and marital contentment in many homes (Hawke & Knox, 1978; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989).

Thus, due to the changes in family structure prevalent over the past few years, families have become varied and complex (Walsh, 2003). Due to varying views relating to families, it remains essential for individuals to advance their knowledge regarding the diversity and complexity of contemporary families in our current and changing world (Walsh, 2003). Whilst acknowledging various family constellations, in the current study I seek to understand the social experiences of an only-child living with both her heterosexual parents. I, therefore elaborate further on the historical perspectives, which encompass the only-child stereotypes.

2.3 A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON ONLY-CHILDREN

2.3.1 STEREOTYPICAL PERSPECTIVES ON ONLY-CHILDREN

Previous literature seems to be focused on the variety of stereotypes attached to only-children and it was only after the late 19th century that several researchers (Blake, 1981; Falbo, 1977; Mancillas, 2006; Polit, Nuttall & Nuttall, 1980; Roberts & Blanton, 2001) challenged the prevailing stereotypes by addressing the preconceptions that society associated with only-children.

Psychologist, Stanley Hall (1898, as cited in Falbo & Polit, 1986, p.176) was well known for his quote "being an only-child is a disease in itself". In addition, being regarded as spoiled, self-centred, selfish, egocentric, dependent, lonely and unsociable (Baskett, 1985; Blake, 1981; Falbo & Polit, 1986; Gee, 1992; Jiao, Ji & Jing, 1986; Mancillas, 2006; Polit, *et al.*,

1980; Roberts & Blanton, 2001; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989) were a few of the stereotypes, which have been associated with only-child in literature over the years. However, researchers also argued that only-children follow similar developmental paths as first-borns, and children from two-child families (Falbo, 1997; Falbo & Poston, 1993; Mellor, 1990; Polit *et al.*, 1980; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). However, according to Gee (1992) and Jiao, Guiping and Jing (1986), many researchers remain convinced that only-children are disadvantaged when compared to children with siblings.

In current literature, psychologists and psychiatrists (Lui *et al.*, 2005) have portrayed only-children negatively, such as developing abnormally, being associated with psychological disturbances (Jiao *et al.*, 1986; Lui *et al.*, 2005; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989) and acquiring undesirable personality traits such as being egocentric, less affiliative and more maladjusted (Jiao *et al.*, 1986; Lui *et al.*, 2005; Wang *et al.*, 2000,). According to Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989), only-children were also found to express less pleasant affect than sibling children. This may be because of the fact that they experience less deprivation in terms of affection, and therefore, have a lower need for affiliation (Falbo, 1977). Research in the 21st century has centred on the growth and development of only-children, focusing mostly on their personality attributes (Wang *et al.*, 2000).

Empirical research was conducted comparing only-children to sibling children and many researchers aimed to disprove Hall (1898, as cited in Falbo & Polit, 1986) as well as many others whose research viewed only-children in a negative light (Baskett, 1985; Blake, 1981; Gee, 1992; Jiao *et al.*, 1986; Mancillas, 2006; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). By reviewing relevant literature, it is clear that generally, only-children have been labelled as having certain character traits and, even though many of these traits have no empirical basis, they still seem to prevail in influencing preconceptions of only-children. These traits include adjectives such as negatively self-centred, selfish, spoiled, alone, maladjusted, immature, unfriendly and dependent (Blake, 1981; Falbo, 1977; Falbo & Polit, 1986; Mancillas, 2006; Mottus *et al.*, 2008; Polit & Falbo, 1987; Roberts & Blanton, 2001). In the section below I explore only-children in terms of achievement, intelligence, personal adjustment.

2.3.2 INTELLIGENCE AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Research focusing on only-children and academic achievement has found that only-child seem to excel in the areas of achievement, intelligence and motivation in comparison to other children with siblings (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Mancillas, 2006; Roberts & Blanton, 2001). Family structure, and how the only-child fits into the family, also seems to be an important feature, which seemingly contributes to their intelligence and achievement. Roberts and Blanton (2001) suggest that only-child seem to benefit from the financial rewards they receive from their parents as well as the life opportunities created by their parents. It has also been suggested that a result of the increased attention and educational investment from parents, only-child seem to achieve higher in terms of academic achievement and may have a greater desire to further their education beyond school (Glass, Neulinger & Orville, 1974; Lui *et al.*, 2005).

On the other hand, before and during the early 19th century, there seemed to be a general belief that being an only-child was a disadvantage as the absence of siblings was thought to involve deprivation of critical learning experiences (Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). However, Falbo (1977) demonstrated that only-children scored less well than first-borns of two, three or four children families and better than later-born children in families with four or more children in areas of intelligence. It was thought as the sole child in the family, only-children might tend to feel high pressure to achieve. In some instances such pressure might negatively influence their relationships with their parents (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). Thus, the relationships children have with their parents seem to have a significant influence on them in terms of achievement.

According to a comparative study of the characteristics of adolescent children conducted by Travares *et al.* (2004) only-children seem to achieve better at school. Highlighting an association between birth order and school achievement of only-child in different families and environments and indicate potential benefits related to intelligence, school, achievement and career success. In addition, Falbo (1977) argues that the language development of only-children tends to be accelerated due to them having more interaction with adults, thereby learning adult language patterns at a much earlier age.

Much of the existing literature aimed at refuting the stereotypes associated with only-children, have been results from international studies based in Western societies, as well as in China. Therefore, exploring an only-child's experiences from a South African perspective, remains essential for acknowledging our diverse cultures in order to critically analyse these Westernised viewpoints.

2.3.3 PERSONAL ADJUSTMENT

The personality of only-children and areas of social adjustment, are issues, which have sparked debate amongst researchers. It is argued that it might be difficult for an only-child's personality to be fully developed as they lack sibling companionship, which is viewed as a practice ground for children to develop social relationships (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Falbo & Polit, 1987; Hawke & Knox, 1978; Roberts & Blanton, 2001). In addition, only-children have also been portrayed as developing differently to their peers with siblings, and as a result obtaining undesirable personality traits (Falbo & Polit, 1986).

Since the 1970's when China launched their one-child policy, there has been much concern regarding the healthy development and growth of an only-child (Wang *et al.*, 2000). Earlier studies indicated that only-children seem more mature and socially sensitive (Blake, 1981; Gee, 1992) than children with siblings and that frequent and concentrated one-to-one interaction with parents usually assists an only-child to gain knowledge of social skills (Polit & Falbo, 1987). As only-children may spend much of their growing years in adult company, Roberts and Blanton (2001) suggest that only-children exhibit more adult-like qualities than their peers with siblings, as they seem to identify with adults much easier. Falbo (1977) further argues that children with siblings are exposed to child and adult forms of behaviour, which reduces their acquirement of adult-like behaviours as compared to only-children who are uninterruptedly surrounded by adults. Younger only-children may prefer social interactions and relationships with adults, however their interest in peer relationships is believed to develop accordingly once they are exposed to these relationships in other settings (Bedwell, 2009). In many families, parents may be the only models, which only-children have for learning appropriate and inappropriate behaviours.

Social Learning Theory suggests that the importance of role models in children's lives is focused on "the approach to personality development that places particular emphasis on the way children's individual behaviour patterns develop as a result of their imitation of models" (Bandura, 1977, as cited in Jarvis & Russell, 2003, p.172). The acquirement of adult-like behaviour may tend to be accelerated with only-children if their models of behaviour in the family environment are solely adults (Falbo, 1977). Researchers further indicate that only-children tend to spend more time alone, or in the presence of adults, than other children do and hence, they may learn how to entertain themselves acquiring preferences for solitary activities (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Polit & Falbo, 1987). This association, between only-children and adults, is further discussed by Blake (1981) who argues that only-children do not only imitate the linguistic behaviour of adults, but other behaviour as well. Sorensen (2008) suggests that such time alone may also result in only-children acquiring vivid imaginations, possibly due to the fact that they spend more time in solitude than children with siblings. She also mentions that only-children may experience difficulties such as low self-image and a sense of isolation if they do not have anyone to compare themselves to, or exchange opinions about their parental experiences. According to Roberts and Blanton (2001) some only-children may long for a sibling to share emotionally challenging experiences with.

Only-children do not seem to endure negative effects as a result of their continuous exposure to adult company, nor does their personality seem to be underdeveloped from engaging in increased solitary activities (Koroll, 2008; Sorensen, 2008). However, there seems to be significant views that an only-child's perceptions of being an only-child are different to the perceptions others have of them. Only-children's views of themselves could thus have an effect on their personal adjustment in social situations, and their interactions with others (Polit & Falbo, 1987). Thus, there are many positive aspects associated with being an only-child, which are to be discussed further.

According to literature, being an only-child may be considered to be beneficial in many ways (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). Researchers seem to agree that only-children's self-esteem, relations with parents and social competence seems to be at an advantage in comparison to peers with siblings (Blake, 1981; Falbo & Polit, 1986; Mottus, Indus & Allik, 2008; Wang *et al.*, 2000). Previous findings suggest that as adults, only-children manage

well in educational and occupational areas (Polit *et al.*, 1980). In addition, adult only-children are found to achieve high levels of education and hold jobs of high status when compared to those with siblings (Polit *et al.*, 1980). Veenhoven and Verkuyten (1989) also found that only-children adolescents appeared to display more life satisfaction than their peers with siblings. Thus only-children's personalities develop individually, and correlate with the way they interpret and approach social situations. Travares *et al.* (2004) suggested that only-children have not presented personality problems more frequently than children with siblings. Gee (1992) found that women who are only-children displayed differences in areas of life course characteristics and life course timing variables.

Falbo and Polit (1986) reject the notions that only-children are deprived or unique. However, Roberts and Blanton (2001) conclude that some only-children experience their time spent engaging in solitary activities as causing them to isolate themselves from others. Sorensen (2008) found that although only-child may be perceived as confident and outgoing by society, within themselves the opposite might be true. There seems to be a gap in the literature between people's assumptions of only-child and how only-child actually experience themselves realistically.

Thus, it may be postulated that only-child may prefer the company of adults due to constantly being in their company during their younger years. Only-child may also display maturity when compared to their age-mates as a result of these concentrated interactions with adults, and this constant interaction may not pose as a disadvantage to only-children.

In summary, I have discussed family structures, the historical and stereotypical perspectives on only-children and their contribution to the social experiences of only-children. I now outline the conceptual framework adopted for this study.

2.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Based on my review of existing literature, I considered various theories regarding socialization, and decided on the following conceptual framework within which to frame my understanding. The conceptual framework anchors my findings with various key concepts. These concepts include the various social experiences the participant,

encountered throughout her life relating to the various agents and contexts, which influenced her social experiences. The following concepts are incorporated into the conceptual framework of the present study: social identity, social relational and social learning. Figure 2.1 illustrates the conceptual framework guiding this study.

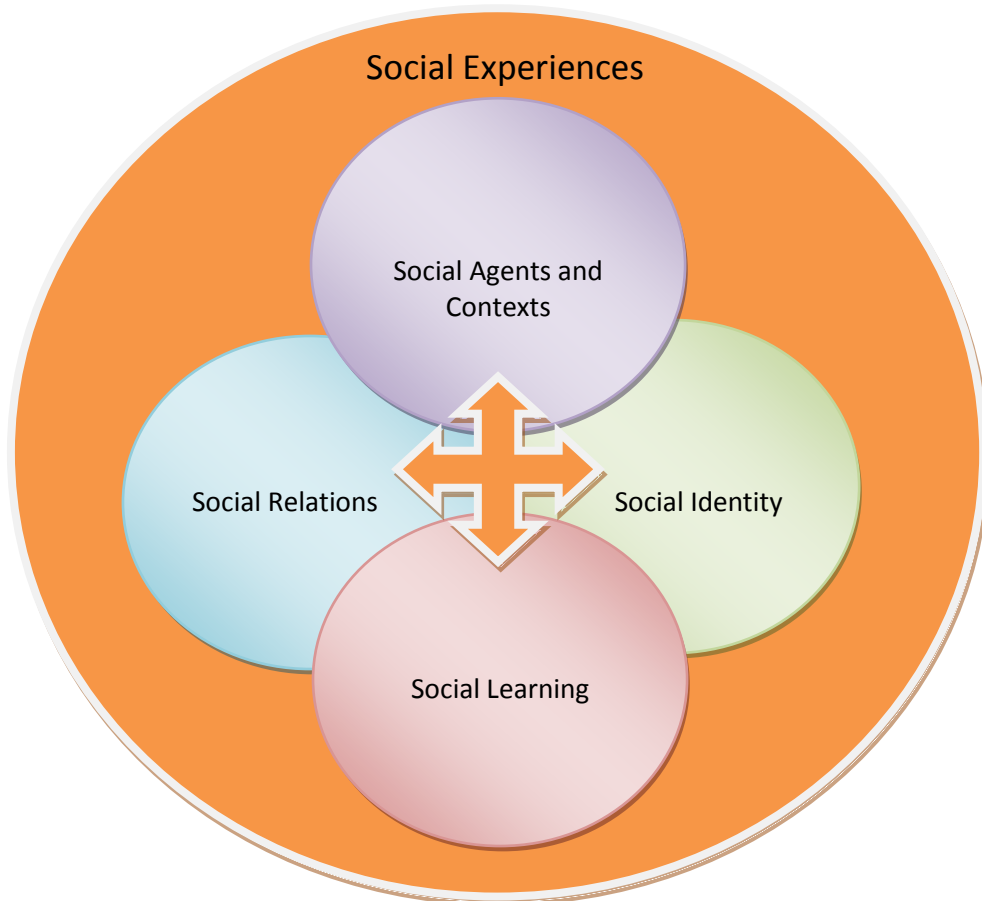


FIGURE 2.1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.4.1 CONSTRUCTING SOCIAL EXPERIENCES

The term socialisation is defined in several ways. According to some of the more popular definitions (Grusec & Hastings, 2007; White, 1977) socialisation can be defined as the process by which an individual learns the ways of a given society or social group, acquires knowledge, skills and dispositions. This includes taking part in a changeable transmissible relationship between a social and cultural environment with parents, siblings and others in order to participate and function in ways which are customary and acceptable to their specific group (Grusec & Hastings, 2007; White, 1977). As a result individuals may display behaviours congruent with effective members of society (Brim, 1966; Child, 1954; Cohen, 1971; Elkin, 1960; Kimball, 1974, all cited in Williams, 1983). In addition socialisation can be

described as the process by which individuals learn skills, behaviours, values and motivations they require for proficient functioning in the culture in which they are situated (Maccoby, 2007). These learning processes, skills, behaviours, values and motivations all form part of an individual's social experiences with his/her various social agents and contexts that exist throughout their lifetime, and will thus be further explored.

2.4.1.1 Social Agents and Contexts

A child's family plays a significant role in his/her development and adjustment, serving as role models for the child and influencing their social development (Bedwell, 2009). It was discussed earlier that only-children are often perceived as more mature, when compared to sibling children of the same age, due to their constant interaction with adults (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). However, as a result, an only-child may also receive excessive attention, mature relatively early, and due to the absence of siblings, possibly become selfish, demanding, dependent and moody, in comparison to children with siblings (Travares *et al.*, 2004). Such findings allude to difficulties only-children supposedly experience in developing relationships with peers, finding it easier to identify and relate to adults.

Although relationships within the family are important for individuals, it may be important for only-children to explore relationships outside the family situation. These relationships may allow them to grow and develop socially, since only-children may find socialising more of a challenge than their sibling counterparts (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). Literature highlights that children's social skills could impact their daily adaptive and academic functioning, their quality of life and their potential to be educated (Fussell, Macias & Saylor, 2005). As social processes are likely to play a significant role in shaping individual differences in what children understand about others, these differences are linked to children's moral sensibility and adjustment to school, as well as to relationships with others (Dunn, 2000). These social processes take place in various social contexts, such as the home, school and public areas, and involve various social agents, namely: the family and peer group.

Louw *et al.* (1998) describes the family context as the primary place where social development takes place. When a child is born, they are recognised into a world of unique

circumstances, which to a great extent are established by their parents, other caregivers as well as siblings within their home environment (Bedwell, 2009). Entering adulthood, these influences are more widespread than during childhood, as choices regarding lifestyles and the nature of interpersonal relationships become much more conflicting (Bedwell, 2009). It is therefore important to discuss the influential interactions within the family situation are thus deemed important for the social development of children (Dunn, 2000) and will thus be discussed below.

2.4.1.2 Parental Relationships

From a developmental perspective, the emergence of individuation or autonomy in relation to one's family is a crucial task for individual and relational functioning within the family and beyond (Lawson & Brossart, 2004). Lawson and Brossart (2004) further state that the individuation process is a primarily critical part in the parent-child relationship as it results in the acquisition of interactional patterns learned while in interaction with parents, which tends to be recreated in subsequent generations as well as extra-familial relationships.

The parent-child relationship can be singled-out as the primary socialization force for only-children (Polit & Falbo, 1987). Dunn (2000) states that family influences are important for a child's adjustment and these experiences of the parent-child relationship may differ with each child. Falbo and Polit (1986) suggest that because parents may feel that their only-child is all they have, they may feel the need to maintain positive relationships with them as well as motivate them to achieve. Tucker, McHale and Crouter (2003) indicated that despite social norms of equal treatment of offspring, parental differentiation treatment is common in some domain, specifically in allocation of privileges and the use of discipline (Tucker *et al.*, 2003). Thus, considering the effects of parental interaction, parents need to constantly be aware of the way they interact with each of their children.

In terms of the family structure, where there is only one child, triangulation between the family members namely; mother, father and child tend to be inevitable (Koroll, 2008) and one person is caught in the middle and identified as the person out. Walsh (2003) describes triangulation as occurring when two members (usually the parents) entangle a vulnerable

third person (usually the child). Most often parents benefit from the support of each other however this may lead to their child feeling isolated and disconnected from the family system (Koroll, 2008). Koroll (2008) further states that if parents feel that their children are becoming isolated or disconnected parents may compensate for this by becoming attentive and overly involved in their child's life. Sorensen (2008) suggests that mothers of only-children seem to put in a lot of effort with regards to arranging friends to visit and organizing exciting things to do for their child. Thus, the mother's role in an only-child's life seems to be an important one with regards to encouraging opportunities for friendships to develop.

As only-children and first-born children tend to receive more parental attention than do later-born children (Roberts & Blanton, 2001) it is suggested that excessive parental attention may lead to undesirable outcomes such as dependency and selfishness (Falbo, & Polit, 1986) in children. Koroll (2008) suggests that this consistent parental attention may be viewed negatively by only-children as they may experience a lack of privacy and therefore feel the need to defy their parents in order to keep hold of their privacy. This ongoing attention parents bestow onto their only-child may be perceived by their children as pressure to achieve, which was discussed in the previous section on achievement (Koroll, 2008). While undue negative pressure could cause only-children to retaliate or rebel, it is important for parents to convey care and love to their children, which can be a comforting and reassuring feeling for them (Roberts & Blanton, 2001).

Tucker *et al.* (2003), state that parents are socialization agents for adolescents and younger children, as they may put strain on them to conform to gender-role expectations and it's parents responses to their offspring's sex and sex-typed qualities that may create both similarities and differences between sibling's family experiences. Carl Pickhardt (2008, p.133) states that "parents are often so preoccupied with wanting the best 'for' their children, which may be interpreted by their children as wanting the best 'from' them". As described by Koroll (2008) the issue of parents living through their children seems to be a common occurrence in single-child families. Having one-child leaves parents with one chance to be a parent and this may cause them to bestow unrealistic expectations on their children and pressure their children to excel in areas in which their children may not be interested in.

Only-children are also in the position where they are the sole dependents of their parents and vice-versa (Hawke & Knox, 1978). Therefore they may feel burdened and pressured when they are faced with the responsibility of aging parents as they are the sole individuals whom their parents depend on to take care of them when they reach old-age (Hawke & Knox, 1978, Roberts & Blanton, 2001).

2.4.1.3 Sibling Relationships

In the past, the pure fact that only-children did not have siblings was reason enough to assume they were at a disadvantage when compared to children with siblings (Polit & Falbo, 1987). Literature yields different views on the role siblings play within the family. According to Fussell *et al.* (2005) the sibling relationship is known to influence the social and behavioural development of children. Furthermore, Dunn (2000) and Milevsky, Smoot, Leh and Ruppe (2005) regard the sibling relationship as the most enduring and longest-lasting relationships people have in their lifetime. It is particularly near the end of one's life that relations with siblings seem to take on a meticulous importance as sources of support for many individuals (Milevsky *et al.*, 2005).

Irrespective of whether the sibling relationship is affectionate and supportive or hostile and irritable Dunn (2000), states that this relationship offers children unique opportunities for learning about themselves and also about others. According to Dunn (2000) siblings are also known to act as valuable sources of support in times of stress and may even act as therapists for siblings experiencing life difficulties as siblings provide a confiding and intimate relationship. Despite siblings eventually separating from each other due to their own individual life courses as well as the reality of death, siblings tend to provide something that more current members of the family circle cannot (White, 2001).

Sorensen (2008) believes that as only-children are not exposed to a sibling relationship, they may not have adequate opportunities to learn tolerance, boundaries and realistic expectations. Furthermore, Sorensen (2008) also believes that learning takes place from their interactions with peers they might possibly miss out on that safe environment of the home and intervening parents and therefore most likely develop these above mentioned

skills on the school playground and other less emotionally secure places instead of the comfort of the home environment (Sorensen, 2008).

Having a warm and supportive sibling relationship has proved to have positive effects on the individual adjustment and seems to enable adolescents to deal more constructively with inevitable situations of comparison and competition they may encounter (Noller, 2005). In addition, siblings are seen as providing models of social interaction for their sibling counterparts to imitate (Fussell *et al.*, 2005). On the contrary, experiences of interaction in terms of only-children, which are more likely take place outside the home environment may cause only-children to hold back on emotions, which may cause them to become secretive hence inhibit emotional maturity and intimate relationships (Sorensen, 2008). Thus, siblings may act as an opportunity for experiment (Polit & Falbo, 1987) for both positive and negative social experiences.

Falbo (1977) suggests that because only-children lack sibling rivalry they assume a more trusting style of interaction as they frequently obtain help and nurturance from their parents, which in turn causes them to perceive these same expectations from others. In addition, Roberts and Blanton's (2001) findings suggested that because only-children do not have siblings they seemed to experience closer relationships with their parents.

Although only-children seem to have closer relationships with their parents, siblings are viewed as playing an important role in the emotional and sexual development of each other as they assist in the process of distancing from one's parents (Coles, 2003). Coles (2003) further states that the love one shares with siblings is an essential way of learning to relate to others in adult life.

Siblings also seem to act as models for comparison when parents viewing their children's overall adjustment in order for them to become aware of possible discrepancies when compared to their siblings. According to Marleau, Breton, Chiniara and Saucier (2004) only-children are reported for having psychiatric disorders because the presence of siblings may lessen the chance of parents perceiving their child's behaviour as problematic. Thus, they may not notice these challenging behaviours as easily as those parents with only one child who may be more likely to seek help than those parents with sibling children (Marleau *et*

al., 2004). Only-children's lack of siblings does not provide them with the opportunity for sibling differentiation, which may be a possible reason siblings cope with conflict and rivalry (Feinberg, McHale, Crouter & Cumsille, 2003). Thus, siblings may assist individuals in identifying themselves within a group.

2.4.1.4 Social Identity

Social identity is defined by Deaux (1993, as cited in Baron & Byrne, 2003) as a self-definition which guides how we conceptualize and assess ourselves. Individuals don't only use social categories as a way of simplifying their environment but to identify and define themselves (Niens, Cairns, Finchilescu, Foster & Tredoux, 2003). Identity formation is an important concept to acknowledge with regards to identity. Identity formation is described as a dynamic process, which incorporates self-awareness, self-concept, self-worth and self-confidence (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2003). These concepts all deal with acknowledging oneself as an individual, being able to evaluate oneself, your perceptions of yourself, both positive and negative as well as your expectations of your possible success' and failures (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2003). Once an individual has formulated their own identity they can begin to identify themselves within group settings.

Social identity theory is explained as the way in which individuals gain knowledge of belonging to a certain social category or group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Social identity theory focuses on explaining group processes and the relations within the group as well as the social self (Hogg *et al.*, 1995). In addition, it focuses on the importance of social identification (Jarvis & Russell, 2002). Social identity theory states that individuals identify themselves as being part of a group and then classify others as either being in the group or outside the group. This classification is known as categorizing (Jarvis & Russell, 2002). The basic concept of social identity theory is that individuals define themselves according to the social category they fall into, in which they feel they belong to (Hogg *et al.*, 1995). Social groups are explained by Stets and Burke (2000, p.225) as "sets of individuals who have a common social identification and view themselves as members of the same social category". Jarvis and Russell (2002) further state that once we categorize ourselves as being part of a specific group we tend to adopt identities of the group and behave accordingly. A positive social identity may be achieved by individuals by comparing

themselves or the group they identify with other social groups (Niens *et al.*, 2003). By associating oneself with a particular social identity signifies being one with a specific group and the group members as well as seeing things from the group's viewpoint. This self-definition individual's gain from the social category they find themselves belonging to also seem to form part of their self-concept (Hogg *et al.*, 1995).

Social identity theory connects three social psychological processes; *social categorization*, which is how individuals perceive themselves and others in terms of social categories; *social comparison*, which is the tendency to develop a sense of worth of groups and individuals by comparing with other groups and *social identification*, which is the notion that people are not detached from social situations, their own identity is implicated in their perceptions and responses to social situations (Tajfel *et al.*, 1971 cited in: Haslam, Knippenberg, Platow & Ellemers, 2003).

Social identity theory therefore involves how individuals perceive and understand others, which is fundamental to all social interaction and is therefore necessary for the construction of our society as well and in turn, our cultures. These definitions therefore influence their self-esteem and self-concept inevitably, which in turn influence their relationships with others. Therefore, social identity is defined as an individual's perception of who they are, which includes personal attributes as well as attributes shared with others (e.g. gender and race) (Baron & Byrne, 2003). Self-esteem and self-categorization are important terms when understanding social identity as individual's first need to be able to identify who they are before they can identify themselves within a group (Haslam *et al.*, 2003). Social identity theory describes individuals as not only having one personal self, but several selves instead, which exist in extending circles of group membership (Niens *et al.*, 2003). Thus, only-children's social experiences within their family context assist them in identifying themselves as well as the various social groups they find themselves forming part of.

2.4.1.5 Social Relations

According to social relational theory, people are viewed as social beings that interact with each other in different contexts (Edler-Vass, 2007). Social relational theory places emphasis

on socialization and the dynamics of the parent-child relationship in terms of their interactions being understood occurring in the context of close personal relationships (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). Relationships are formed in various contexts, the family being the most obvious is where the first form of socialization takes place (Arnett, 1995). Therefore it is necessary to explore the familial relationships of the participant as they are influential for the development of relationships outside the family structure. The influences of these various relationships will be elaborated further in the data analysis and results chapter of this study.

When parents are the only adult role models in the family, children obtain the majority of direct, consistent and systematic form of socialization (White, 1977). Social groups in which only-children associate themselves with may be a possibility in attempting to understand the socialization experiences of an only-child. In terms of social relationships it is essential to keep in mind that each individual in the relationship influences the other in conscious as well as unconscious ways (Mitchell, 1988).

Mitchell (1988) described aspects of social relations, which are essential to interactions within the social environment namely; attunement, empathetic responsiveness, experimental learning through interpersonal interactions, interpretive procedures, which deepen the understanding of the self and others, interpersonal behaviour, life experience, reinforcement, modelling and identification. Since parent-child relationship and interactions seem to be essential for an individual to form relationships outside the nuclear family and therefore I feel that this theory is particularly useful when it comes to the current study as only-child's social interactions with individuals other than their parents are their only exposure to other personal relationships.

Relationships within the family are important for individuals, especially only-children to explore relationships outside the family situation are as these relationships allow only-children to grow and develop socially, since only-children may possibly find socializing more of a challenge than their sibling counterparts (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). Children's social skills can considerably impact their daily adaptive and academic functioning, their quality of life and their potential to live and be educated (Fussell *et al.*, 2005). As social processes are likely to play a significant role in shaping the individual differences in what

children understand about others, these differences are linked to children's moral sensibility and adjustment to school, as well as to relationships with others (Dunn, 2000). Thus, for the purpose of the current study, social groups are referred to as any social relationships occurring outside the family context.

According to Maccoby (1980) interacting with others is essential for an individual to be able to function accordingly in social dyads and larger social groups thus transferring cultural customs from one generation to the next. Children are viewed as agents in their own socialization, as they are actively involved in observational learning, which they demonstrate through imitation (Maccoby, 1992). According to Blos (1967, as cited in Bukowski *et al.*, 2007, p. 358) the process of separating from parents, which occurs after adolescents achieve autonomy they move on to peers for "stimulation, belongingness, loyalty devotion, empathy and resonance" in order to regulate their emotions. Socialization theory proposes that verbal or imitated experiences during childhood are essential for the "transmission of ideologies, orientations and behaviours across the generations" (Moen & Erickson, 1996, as cited in Zhan, 2004, p.106).

During adolescence individuals restructure their childhood relationships with their parents and try hard to achieve differential relationships of quality with their peers (Blos, 1967, as cited in Bukowski *et al.*, 2007). Genuineness and loyalty seem to be two main qualities which adolescents regard as important in their friendships with their peers and often if there is an absence of this quality it is enough to break up a relationship (Foot, Chapman & Smith, 1980). Blos (1967, as cited in Bukowski *et al.*, 2007) further states that during the phase of differentiating the peer relations from the parental relations adolescents experience turmoil and anxiety together with despair, worthlessness, discouragement as vulnerability. Thus, the ability for an individual to develop a separate, meaningful and supportive relationship with their peers is essential to cope with these feelings (Blos, 1967, in Bukowski *et al.*, 2007). Social leaning theory has that specified the means by which peers influence each other.

2.4.1.6 Social Learning

Social learning theory was developed by Bandura (1977). According to social learning theory (Bandura, 1977, p.vii) “human behaviour is a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioural and environmental determinants”. According to social learning theory, individuals have an active role in formulating their responses to the environment. Individuals learn through modelling as they observe others and form ideas regarding their own behaviour thereby regulating their future behaviour (Bandura, 1977). In addition, Bandura (1977) highlighted the importance of imitational learning as children imitate adult behaviours and roles during imaginative play acting as a central process of socialization (Maccoby, 1980). Only-children may thus imitate the behaviour of their parents as they form part of their primary social experiences.

Furthermore, besides the traditional view on social learning theory, which states that children are agents of behaviour control and behaviour change in each other, peers are responsible for punishing or ignoring non-normative social behaviour and reward or reinforce culturally appropriate behaviours (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). Harris (1995, as cited in Bukowski *et al.*, 2007, p.359) stated that “young people are driven by the atavistic desire to be part of a group”. Thus, young people could change their behaviour in response to norms and expectations of a group in order to be part of a group (Harris, 1995, as cited in Bukowski, *et al.*, 2007). Children therefore could behave in socially appropriate ways in order to develop positive relationships with their peers and to limit behaviours, which could result in rejection from peers (Grusec & Hastings, 2007).

Focusing on Bandura’s (1977) theory one could maintain the reasoning that an individual does not exist in isolation and therefore it is essential to take all aspects influencing the individual’s functioning into consideration and in the case of only-children one can view them coexisting within the family situation as well as their peer group. Thus, all these aspects encompass the various social experiences that are essential for the healthy social development of an individual.

2.4.2 INTEGRATING THE THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS AND PRESENT STUDY

In light of this study, the above theories are significant as they focus on the social learning processes of individuals, which are acquired, imitated, modelled and learnt by interacting with others. Each of the constructs regarding social experiences, which are elaborated above, highlight the consistent interaction between the individual, the family and social groups, which seem to influence an only-child with reference to this particular study. These agents and contexts of socialization influence an individual's social interactions and relations with others. Social or peer relations refer to different social experiences that may be explained in terms of social identity, social relations and social learning with regards to social experiences.

2.5 SUMMARY

In summary, it appears that conflicting ideas regarding the social development of only-children still exist and there does not seem to be justified empirical evidence to show whether only-children are as labels suggest 'socially deprived' or 'socially well-adjusted'. There are also many factors, which contribute to the social experiences of individuals and therefore there does not seem to be one specific factor, which is the sole determinant to whether an individual adjusts socially or not. However, the inconsistencies in the literature are primarily due to differences in methodology and therefore it is difficult to draw conclusions with any theoretical significance (Falbo & Polit, 1986). Gee (1992, p.185) states that "virtually all of the studies of only-children have been motivated by curiosity of convenience, not theory". This may be why the discussion on the various social effects of being an only-child has continued over the years.

2.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I included existing literature on only-children with reference to the historical and stereotypical perspectives, as well as the various social agents and contexts in conjunction with the relevant theoretical constructs, which contributed to the conceptual framework of this study. In the next chapter I present a detailed account of the research methodology employed for this study as well as the quality criteria and ethical considerations addressed in this particular study.

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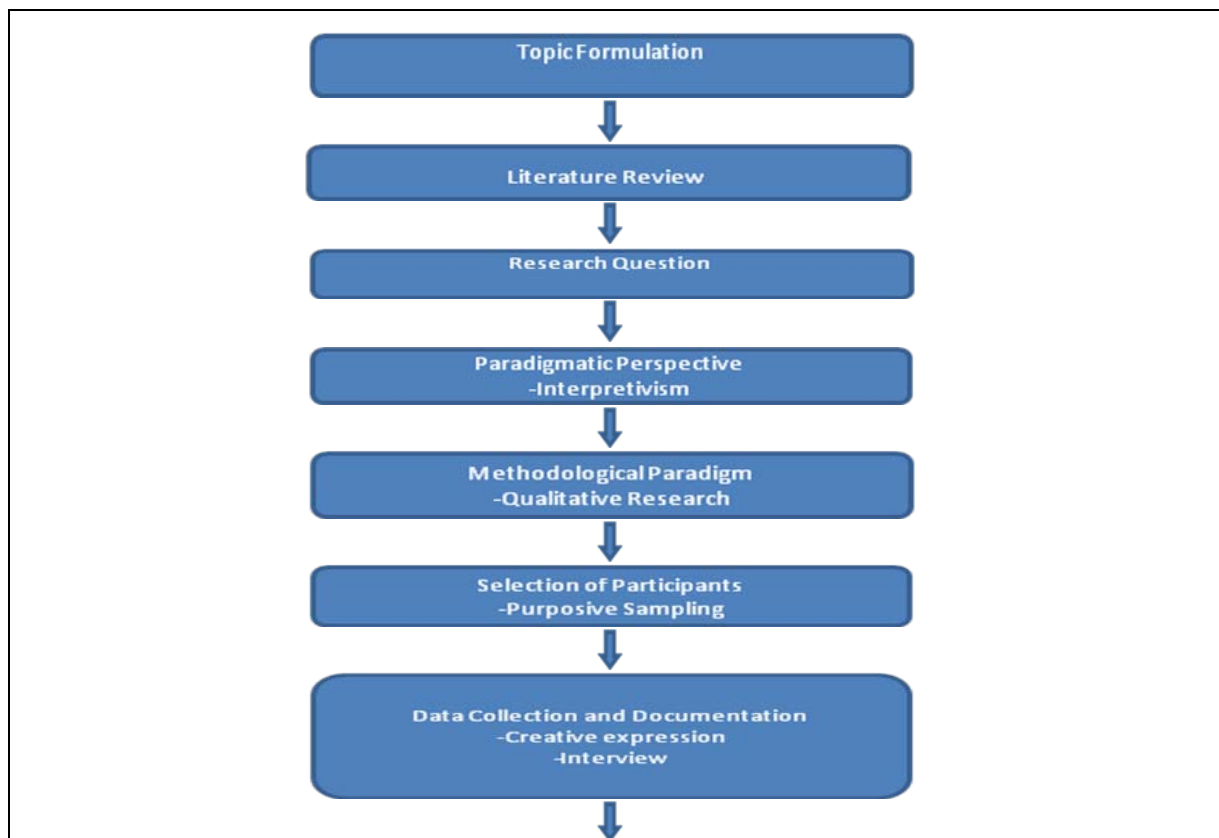
Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In Chapter 2, I explored existing literature pertaining to only-children such as the various family structures, historical perspectives on only-children as well as the positive and negative associations regarding only-children. In addition, I situated the study within a conceptual framework.

The current chapter presents the research design and methodology I followed in this study, including the paradigmatic perspectives, data generation and generating strategies, analysis and interpretation. I further outline the quality criteria, which I followed to ensure the study meets the necessary requirements for validity and reliability. Ethical considerations I adhered to are also discussed in this chapter. A visual illustration of the research process follows in Figure 3.1.



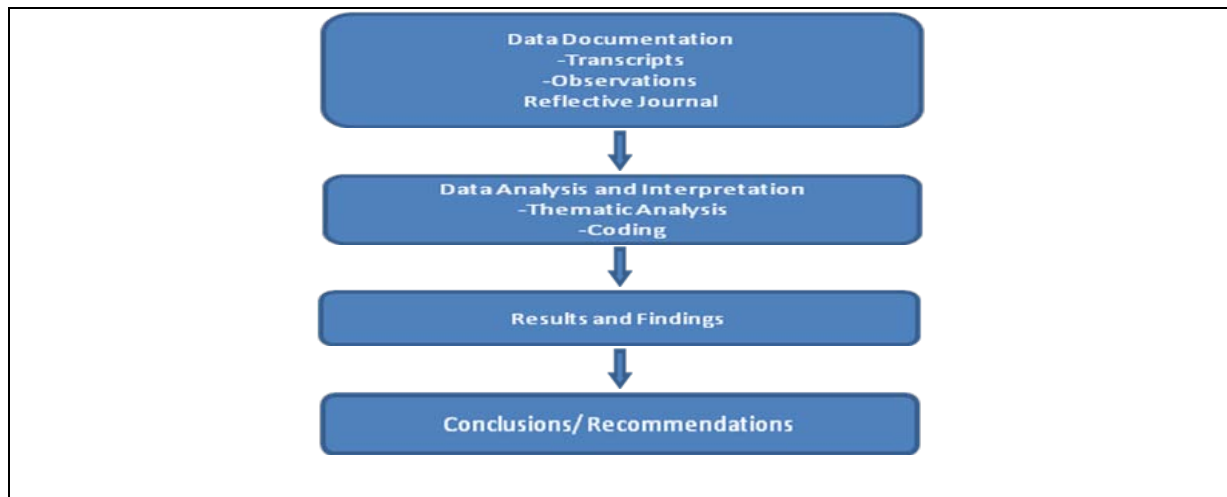


FIGURE 3.1: ILLUSTRATION INDICATING A SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS

3.2 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

A paradigm refers to the fundamental model, or frame of reference, which is utilised in organising observations and reasoning (Fouche, 2005). According to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) Interpretivism aims to explain the subjective meanings and reasons regarding social actions, which relates to the ontology of the current study with the participant. This study consists of the subjective experiences of the participant and, therefore, an inter-subjective and interactional epistemological stance can be adopted utilising methodologies such as interviews and observations (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). A representation of the above mentioned paradigm follows in Table 3.1.

TABLE 3.1 TABLE SUMMARISING THE PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

INTERPRETIVE PARADIGM	
ONTOLOGY	- Internal reality of subjective experience
EPISTEMOLOGY	- Empathetic - Observer inter-subjectivity
METHODOLOGY	- Interactional - Interpretive - Qualitative

(ADAPTED FROM TERRE BLANCHE & DURRHEIM, 1999, P.6)

In the next section I discuss the selected metatheoretical and methodological perspectives guiding this study.

3.2.1 METHODOLOGICAL PARADIGM

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right, as it covers many disciplines, fields and subject matters (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). By utilising a qualitative approach my intention was to gain a holistic and direct understanding of the phenomenon of an only-child's social experiences (Fouche, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) further describe qualitative research as studying phenomena in their natural settings and seeking answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. It therefore, emphasises the socially constructed nature of reality and the intimate manner between the researcher and what is being studied. In the study, I observed Chantelle² in her natural setting (her home) and communicated her meanings of her experiences in a sensitive and intimate relationship. As a qualitative researcher, I attempted to implement a critical interpretive approach to assist me in making sense of the conditions that Chantelle associated to her daily life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). My research required gaining an in-depth understanding of Chantelle's social experiences and, therefore, I chose a qualitative study, as I realised that Chantelle's own unique experiences, and the various meanings she associates with these experiences, would take the form of the 'heart' of my study.

Seale, Gobo, Gubrium and Silverman (2004, p.3) describe qualitative research as "the claim to get closer to the individual's point of view and therefore differentiates qualitative research beautifully from those benighted number-crunches whose concerns for mere facts precludes a proper understanding of authentic experience". Quantitative research tends to turn us away from practice, as well as maintaining unhelpful stereotypes regarding research that makes use of numbers. Therefore, a qualitative research approach is well suited for my particular study as it aims to search for a proper understanding of my participant, Chantelle's, experience that belongs entirely to her and thus may not necessarily be the same as other only-children.

² From this point forward the participant will be referred to as Chantelle, which is the pseudonym chosen by her. Refer to Table 3.2 for the participants' details.

Lastly, qualitative research is further defined as seeking answers to questions by regarding social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings. Chantelle has various people in her social settings who influence her in different ways. Thus, as the researcher I was interested in how she arranged herself and her settings, and how individuals within these settings made sense of their surroundings through symbols, rituals, social structures and social roles (Berg, 1954). Chantelle's various social engagements, and her roles in her different social settings guided the answers to my questions.

3.2.2 META-THEORETICAL PARADIGM

I followed an Interpretivistic paradigm, as it allowed me as the researcher to treat social action and human activity as text (De Vos *et al.*, 2005). The participant's actions were interpreted in a written format and, as Berg (1954) states that human action may be viewed as a generating of symbols expressing layers of meaning. Interpretivism, therefore, allowed me as the researcher to discover practical understandings of meanings and actions. Thus, by gaining an understanding of the experiences of an only-child in all her social settings, I aimed to comprehend human experience with reference to my case study (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999) and therefore acted as a co-creator of meaning making in Chantelle's world as an only-child.

According to Cohen *et al.* (2005), Interpretivism focuses on the individual and the range of research is small as it provides a perspective regarding the aspects of qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Interpretivism encourages the use of a variety of data sources and analysis methods in order to attempt the best possible validity (Henning, 2004). Although the current study consisted of a single case, the data was generated in an in-depth manner, from many sources. Interpretive research describes observations in rich detail and relies on direct accounts to present findings in engaging and suggestive forms of language (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

My interviews with Chantelle focused on gaining worthy data covering many aspects of her life as an only-child. Henning (2004) further describes knowledge as being constructed not only from observable phenomena, but also incorporating descriptions of people's intentions, beliefs, values, reasons, meaning-making and self-understanding. It was,

therefore, necessary for me as the researcher to ensure that Chantelle felt comfortable to share her experiences in a meaningful way.

Interpretivist knowledge may be dispersed and widely distributed, and the researcher has to look at many different angles to understand the specific phenomenon (Henning, 2004). Phenomena and events are understood through mental processes of interpretation, which are influenced by, and interact with, organised and social contexts (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). The types of knowledge frameworks that compel society, known as discourses, involve studying and analysing written texts (Maree, 2007) and these become important role players in the interpretive project. These 'knowledge systems' should therefore, be questioned by the researcher whose job it is to analyse texts looking for the way in which people make meaning, and what meaning they make (Henning, 2004). Thus, I had to constantly verify the meanings Chantelle associated to her expressions in order to be certain that the understanding I gained matched her intentions. The interpretive researcher, therefore, searches for the frames that shape the meaning, thus the researcher becomes extremely sensitive to the role of context (Henning, 2004). (Refer to transcripts in Addendum D for examples of my meaning making of Chantelle's expressions.)

3.3 CASE STUDY RESEARCH DESIGN

I chose a case study design for this study as it places emphasis on studying a particular phenomenon in-depth. According to Creswell (2007) case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e. a setting, a context). Case studies are particular, descriptive, inductive and, ultimately, a trial-and-error search to clarify the reader's understanding of an issue (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). Case study research explores a bounded system (a case), or multiple systems (cases), over time through detailed, in-depth data generating, involving multiple sources of information (such as observations, interviews, audiovisual material, documents and reports) and thus reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007).

The current study consists of a detailed in-depth study of a bounded system as I researched a single case. I generated data in an in-depth manner, and over time, through written texts, pictures, observations and interviews that are in the form of very detailed descriptions of

Chantelle's own experiences as an only-child (Creswell, 2007). As the research involved a single case, it was necessary to keep in mind to be constantly aware of subjectivity, bias as well as selective insight during the research process (Fouche, 2005). Researcher bias is further elaborated upon in section 3.8.

A strength in case study research is that it can take an example of an activity "an instance in action" (Walker, 1974, as cited in Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p.33) and use multiple methods and data sources to explore and interrogate it, and therefore, achieve a "rich description" (Geertz, 1973, as cited in Somekh & Lewin, 2005, p.33) of a phenomenon in order to represent it from the participant's perspective. Case studies may assist researchers in achieving a deeper understanding of the factors involved in a situation (Maree, 2007). In the present study, Chantelle shared her personal experiences, and thus allowed me, as the researcher, to attempt to understand the various factors that influenced her social experiences as she was growing up as an only-child.

During the data generating process I utilised multiple strategies to generate data, and therefore, had a vast database to engage with and work through in order to conduct a thorough data analysis. I believe that a qualitative process enabled Chantelle to express and share feelings and experiences, which she may not have necessarily shared with anyone prior to this study. As case studies also provide chronological and narrative descriptions of events (Cohen *et al.*, 2005), Chantelle's life story was narrated according to chronological life events and social experiences in her life.

According to Somekh and Lewin (2005) a limitation of a case study is that it is not possible to generalise statistically from one, or a small number of cases, to the population as a whole. In the current study, Chantelle's social experiences may be unique to her, and therefore, not necessarily applied to all only-children her age. Thus, the results of this study may not be generalisable. However, the purpose of the study was not to generalise the findings, but rather to provide an in-depth study regarding the social experiences of an only-child. Case studies are also prone to observer bias even though attempts can be made to address reflexivity (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). This case study involved a single case study and, therefore, I tried to remain objective by reflecting often. However, I acknowledge that there were likely instances where I may have allowed my own views to influence my

opinion. I expressed awareness of my possible subjective opinions in my reflective journal (Refer to Addendum E for extracts from my reflective journal). Furthermore, a case study may not be open to cross-checking (Cohen *et al.*, 2005) thus personal subjectivity and bias may be common.

3.4 SELECTION OF THE PARTICIPANT

The selection of my participant entailed generating information about possible individuals who could be part of the study. Hence, I selected my participant by means of purposive sampling. Strydom and Delport (2005) describe purposive sampling as based entirely on the judgement of the researcher, as the sample is composed of elements that contain most characteristics deemed representative of the population. Participants are handpicked for inclusion in the sample by the researcher on the basis of a judgement on their typicality. The sample is therefore chosen for a specific purpose, hence the name 'purposive sampling' (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). I met Chantelle through a mutual friend, and therefore, was able to contact her telephonically to invite her to be a participant in the study. Relevant information pertaining to my participant is presented in Table 3.2

TABLE 3.2 **DETAILS OF PARTICIPANT**

NAME:	Chantelle
AGE:	23 years
CURRENT AREA OF RESIDENCE:	Pretoria
STATUS:	Single and living at home with her parents
OCCUPATION:	Student (Bed Honours)

I chose my participant according to the criteria required for the study namely, being a young adult and an only-child. The gender, race, culture and economic status of my participant formed part of the exclusion criteria in this study. In addition, Strydom and Delport (2005) mention that purposive sampling illustrates features or processes that are of interest to a particular study, and therefore, my role as the researcher included critically thinking about the parameters of the population I wished to study and then choosing my sample (Chantelle) accordingly. A process that could provide adequate detail directed my

search for data in order to maximise the range of specific information obtained from, and about, that context. Thus, my inclusion criteria for selecting Chantelle, through purposive sampling, were that I required her to have certain attributes, such as being a young adult only-child. It was also important that she would be willing and able to provide me access and understanding into the various aspects relevant to the research setting, why and how they occur, as well as how she perceives them (Berg, 1954).

In order for Chantelle to write her life story, it was important that she would be articulate in the English language, and be able to express herself comfortably in both a written and verbal format. I also selected Chantelle because she was still living with her parents, and therefore, I assumed that her life construct would have remained consistent throughout her life thus far. Chantelle, therefore, met the criteria I required for selecting a participant, namely: she was an only-child in the early adulthood phase of development (which, according to Roberts and Blanton [2001], are individuals between the ages 20-29 years), who still resides with her parents. It was also important for this study that Chantelle be easily accessible for regular meetings in order to gain sufficient data with regard to creating written narratives and discussing her personal experiences of being an only-child. Chantelle stayed in close proximity to me, which facilitated my ability to meet with her on regular occasions.

3.5 DATA GENERATION AND DATA DOCUMENTATION

Data generation in this study refers to the various methods I employed in order to gain data from my participant. As I required an in-depth perspective of her experiences, I utilised an assortment of data generation methods. Such included a life story, collage, mapping and interviews allowing Chantelle to describe her life story in written formats (Chen, 2007). I also relied on observations and notes in my reflective journal. The data was documented by means of audio recordings, which were transcribed accordingly. Photographs were also included by the participant to visually enhance written accounts. In Table 3.3 I provide information on my various meetings with Chantelle, and in Table 3.4 the data generation sessions are presented.

TABLE 3.3: CONVERSATIONS AND MEETINGS

DATE	MEETING NUMBER	MEETING OUTLINE
18 December 2009	Telephonic Conversation	Invited Chantelle to participate in the research study
22 February 2010	Meeting 1	Generated collage and life story from Chantelle
7 April 2010	Meeting 2	Member-checking with Chantelle

TABLE 3.4: DATA GENERATION SESSIONS

DATE	SESSION NUMBER	SESSION OUTLINE
11 February 2010	Session 1	I met with Chantelle to inform her about the research process and asked for her written consent to participate in the research, as well as the use of audio recordings. Chantelle also chose her pseudonym and gave her written consent for her photographs to be shared for the purpose of this research. I also used this session orientate and explain the collage and the life story Chantelle was required to do
1 March 2010	Session 2	Constructed a people map with Chantelle
10 March 2010	Session 3	Constructed a places map with Chantelle
15 March 2010	Session 4	Semi-structured interview with Chantelle

In the next section, I elaborate upon the data generation and data documentation methods utilised in this study.

3.5.1 DATA GENERATION

I employed creative expression methods. Firstly, the participant was requested to write her life story (Maree, 2007) using her own prerogative. She also constructed a collage as a form of pictorial storytelling (Auner & Lochhead, 2002; Brockelman, 2001; Maree, 2007). Unstructured and semi-structured interviews (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002) were followed as commonly used methods providing the participant opportunities to narrate her life story through conversations with me. The participant constructed a 'people map' and a 'places map', illustrating the various people and places that she perceives to have influenced her socialisation as an only-child. These were discussed as she constructed them. During the

last session with Chantelle we engaged in a semi-structured interview to generate the last part of the data. In this interview my aim was not to gain coded answers to questions but to allow my participant to respond to questions posed to her (Hayes, 2000). An interview is simply described by Seale *et al.* (2004) as two people sitting down together talking about a specific topic. However, academic literature seems to have many names for the in-depth interview, such as active, biographical, collaborative, conversational, depth, dialogical, focused, guided, open-ended, oral history, reflexive, semi-structured and so on (Seale *et al.*, 2004). In Table 3.5 I present the data generation and data generating strategies utilised in this study:

TABLE 3.5: DATA GENERATION AND DOCUMENTATION

DATA GENERATION SESSIONS	DATA DOCUMENTATION
Creative Expression: 1. Collage 2. People Map 3. Places Map	Audio Recording Photographs Field Notes
Interviews	Audio Recording
Observations	Field Notes
Reflective Journal	Journal Entry

It should be noted that some of my meetings with the participant were informal, such as informing her of the research process, generating the data and informing her about the next stage of the research process. I divided my interactions with Chantelle into two separate parts. The first was meetings, informal discussions and generating tasks she had completed, while the second consisted of formal sessions, utilised to construct the people and places maps and the semi-structured interview. The latter focused on gaining specific information regarding Chantelle's socialisation experiences being an only-child.

3.5.1.1 Creative Expression Sessions

The creative expression sessions will be elaborated on below.

a) Life Story

During my initial meeting with Chantelle we discussed her role in the study, and the various data generation tasks, which she would be required to complete and engage in for this study. For the first activity Chantelle was requested to write her life story sharing significant events and relationships relating to her social experiences as an only-child, which she developed throughout her life. Life stories present the intentions humans make use of to make sense of their various life contexts (Maree, 2007). Allowing the participant to document her life story initiated the understanding of the dynamics that possibly impact a person at a specific time (Reddy, 2000). There are no set standard criteria for evaluating or interpreting life stories, and thus, the subjective nature of a life stories may be regarded as a limitation (Maree, 2007).

I explained the meaning of a life story to Chantelle, and her life story was written in terms of her experiences as an only-child from when she can remember to her present age. Life stories may be useful in assisting individuals in re-generating their past experiences as well as anticipating their future, and may also be used in career facilitation (Maree, 2007). Chantelle was encouraged to write her life story independently at home in her own time, thus allowing her the opportunity to write without the possible pressure of being rushed. The manner in which she wished to write and structure her life story was left entirely up to her.

b) Collage

Chantelle then created a collage to depict her life growing up as an only-child. Collages may be effective in terms of narrative inquiry as they are a form of pictorial story telling (Maree, 2007). As described by Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2009) a collage is the process of using fragments of found images or materials and gluing them to a flat surface to portray phenomena. Collages are also known as a postmodern way of thinking, knowing and communicating (Brockelman, 2001, as cited in Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2009). By allowing Chantelle the opportunity to create her own collage my intention was to provide for the emergence of themes revealing her personal attributes, such as her interests, characteristics, values and abilities (Maree, 2007). The collage process differs from the linear way of written thoughts as the focus is on feelings, and the ideas they evoke, instead

of the reverse. These reveal relations and understandings, which may be unstated before (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2009).

By utilising a collage as a means of communication with Chantelle, I was able to establish further rapport with her for the benefit of facilitating future sessions together. The collage process may have also facilitated the process of self-knowledge for Chantelle, achieved through personal confrontation (Maree, 2007). During the member-checking session Chantelle mentioned how she thought that the process had made her see things that she had taken for granted in the past.

Although collages may also add to the personal awareness and growth of the participant, their usage has limitations in that not all participants are capable of articulating themselves in this way (Maree, 2007). A possible reason for the hindrance of collage creation may be due to the participant's lack of prior knowledge regarding collages, and this may cause them to engage in a very concrete manner, which may limit the type of information one can gain from the process (Maree, 2007). Thus, I kept the needs of my participant in mind, along with my reasons for utilising collages as a data generating method. A photograph of Chantelle's collage is presented in Photograph 3.1 below.



PHOTOGRAPH 3.1: CHANTELE'S COLLAGE

c) People and Places Maps

Chantelle constructed people and places maps, where she included photographs and pictures of the people and places, which she thought, had influenced her social experiences

as an only-child. Chantelle was granted the freedom to organise the photos and pictures in any way, and there were no boundaries as to the way in which it needed to be completed, as long as she visually created the topic being explored (Maree, 2007). Mapping is used to demonstrate how people picture (envision) the relationships between various concepts (Wheeldon, 2010). Mapping serves as a “diagrammatic and visual means of expressing ideas in the mind” (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2009, p.5).

Maree (2007) states that the identification, analysis, interpretation, judgement and evaluation of characteristics, interests or values through the search for pictures representing the self, facilitates self-knowledge through one’s own confrontation with previously unknown information about the self. I utilised mapping in this case study as it allowed me, as the researcher, to make sense and stay in-tune with the data themes as they began to appear (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2009). This process also allowed me to concentrate on the meanings Chantelle was associating with the visual representations of her experience, knowledge, perception and memory (Wheeldon, 2010).

Utilising the mapping process with Chantelle provided a visual illustration of the vibrant schemes of understanding within her mind (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). In addition, mapping does not rely on intellectual abilities as ideas are represented through symbols, drawings or concrete objects; therefore it is a culturally-friendly method (Maree, 2007) which Chantelle constructed in her people and places maps.

According to Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2009) the fact that mapping is only effective when used along with written text may be seen as a limitation because of its subjective nature. Wheeldon (2010) elaborates on this limitation by indicating that different researchers may interpret maps in different ways. An additional limitation could be due to the fact that, as maps are constructed in the beginning of the research process, the participant may feel differently towards the end of the research process (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2009).

Chantelle decided to structure her maps placing the main idea in the centre and surrounding it with people and places of influence. Visual representations of Chantelle's creative expression maps are presented in Photographs 3.2 and 3.3 below³.



PHOTOGRAPH 3.2: CHANTELE'S PEOPLE MAP



PHOTOGRAPH 3.3: CHANTELE'S PLACES MAP

3.5.1.2 Interviews

Greeff (2005) describe interviewing as the main mode of data generating in qualitative research. Interviewing may also relate to narrative inquiry as through interviewing the researcher displays interest in other people's stories, which may act as a meaning-making process, making interviews interactional events. Further, they are "deeply and unavoidably

³ Photographs of Chantelle's collage, people and places maps were taken once I had generated them in my own time in and in my own settings. Therefore the dates on the photographs do not indicate the days I generated the data.

implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within the participants” (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, as cited in Greeff, 2005, p.287). Much of the data in this study was generated from the individual interviews with Chantelle.

I chose to make use of unstructured and semi-structured interviews in this study. Unstructured interviews are open situations which allow freedom and flexibility, and in which the participant is responsible for the content and wording (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Freedom and flexibility was evident during Chantelle’s mapping discussions.

A semi-structured interview consists of open-ended questions (Greeff, 2005; Hayes, 2000). I chose this data generating method to aid me conducting in-depth conversations to gain a deeper understanding of Chantelle’s social experiences. During interviews, both the researcher and the participant are responsible for meaning making. According to Cohen *et al.* (2005), it was essential throughout the interview process for me to be aware of Chantelle’s non-verbal communication, as these serve as possible indications of her level of participation as well as conveying any possible feelings of discomfort. Thus ‘active listening’ was an essential component of my interviews with Chantelle (Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

According to Hayes (2000) an interview occurs when a participant is asked questions which have been designed to elicit particular types of information, and the researcher records these responses in various forms (Creswell, 2005). Interview sessions with my participant were recorded by means of an audio-voice recorder and transcribed accordingly. Furthermore, interviews may take on many forms, can vary in time (from a few brief questions to an in-depth, probing experience which may last for more than an hour), and in structure (regarding the answers required). It is noted that they can also vary in the amount of interpersonal balance between the person being interviewed and the interviewer (Hayes, 2000).

During Chantelle’s mapping sessions we discussed specific people and places, which may have influenced her social experiences as an only-child. These interviews were unstructured and appeared relaxed. These sessions may, therefore, be referred to as open-structured interviews, as they encouraged Chantelle to give open-ended accounts of her ideas and opinions (Hayes, 2000). They are often compared to conversations, as the data

received by the researcher is much richer in terms of quality due to the participant's freedom to organise responses more freely (Hayes, 2000). Therefore, it is possible that Chantelle didn't feel compelled to answer specific questions as, due to the semi-structured format of the interview, she took a form of ownership of the conversation in the direction she chose to go. Thus I would ask Chantelle a question and allow her to answer in her own way and I embraced her responses, which continued beyond the specific question asked. Interviews may be viewed as useful means of obtaining large amounts of data quickly, as well as effective in getting in-depth information (Greeff, 2005). This appeared true in this study as Chantelle appeared to share in-depth and personal information with relative ease during the interviews, which did not emerge in her life story and people and places maps.

Making use of the life story, mapping and interview sessions as data generation strategies, provided me with an opportunity to gain information as well as to build rapport with the participant for the interview which followed. Thus building rapport is of utmost importance, especially when researching a single case, as the participant needs to feel that he/she can trust the researcher and be able to share personal experiences.

However, the issue of establishing of rapport also gives rise to one of the main limitations of interviews: if participants have not established rapport with the researcher, or for some reason feel they cannot trust the researcher, they could hold back providing untruthful responses (Greeff, 2005). According to Creswell (2005), interviews only work well with participants who are articulate and comfortable with speaking and sharing ideas. Chantelle seemed at ease during her sessions with me and was able to share personal experiences in a comfortable manner. Overall, interviewing appeared to have worked well for this particular study as it assisted me in generating valuable and in-depth information from Chantelle.

3.5.1.3 Observations

During the sessions with Chantelle I made use of participant observation (Strydom, 2005; Maree, 2007) observing Chantelle's non-verbal behaviour during her conversations with me. I was able to observe Chantelle's non-verbal behaviour and relate it to her verbal communication in her engagement with me throughout the sessions. I used this form of

observation with Chantelle because it allowed me to be immersed in the setting in such a way that the participant is unaware that she is the subject of observation (Maree, 2007). Therefore, according to Strydom, (2005) I observed Chantelle in her natural and everyday setting meeting with her in the comfort of her own home and observing her during these sessions. Observing Chantelle's body language assisted me in establishing congruence within the study. These observations further allowed me to conduct an in-depth investigation of the phenomenon under study according to the qualitative nature of my study. Thus, studying Chantelle's behaviours and attitudes in her natural setting allowed me to feel part of the process, as I was involved with her during the activities (Strydom, 2005).

Observations are drawn out and repetitive as events are observed more than once and this, therefore, aids reliability (Cohen *et al.*, 2005). Observations may also prevent the research from becoming too theoretically orientated (or complex?) as stated by Strydom (2005). A limitation of participative observation is the tendency for ethical concerns to be raised as participants are being observed without their knowledge and have not given consent to being observed (Maree, 2007). My observations, however, were used to gain insight into the non-verbal cues during the sessions I had with Chantelle. These observations were recorded with my reflections and field notes in my reflective journal.

3.5.1.4 Reflective Journal

I used of a reflective journal throughout the research process, wherein I recorded all my thoughts, ideas, accomplishments, challenges and frustrations. Reflexivity is referred to as the "ability to formulate an integrated understanding of one's own cognitive world" (De Vos, 2005c, p.363). I needed to be aware of my own influence or role when relating with Chantelle, which is linked to the meta-cognitive processes of thinking about one's ideas and perceptions (De Vos, 2005a). Creswell (2005, p.251) refers to the researcher as being in a "good position to reflect and remark" after spending a great length of time with the participant, and therefore, should be able to base interpretations on "hunches, insights and intuition". Engaging in reflexivity also adds rigour to the study as it allowed me to track my professional development and to constantly be aware of any biases I may not be consciously aware of. (Refer to Addendum E for excerpts from my reflective journal).

3.5.2 DATA DOCUMENTATION

3.5.2.1 Audio Recordings

All of the data generation sessions were recorded and then transcribed. Transcription practices are described by Oliver, Serovich and Mason (2005) as ranging from naturalism to denaturalism. Naturalised transcripts consist of verbatim representations of speech in which each sound, such as pauses, stutters, non-verbal, accents and involuntary vocalisations, are recorded as accurately as possible keeping in mind that language may be a sign of reality. Denaturalism is, therefore, the opposite and does not include each and every sound, however verbatim responses are recorded where possible. My transcriptions were naturalised transcriptions as all sounds were included. I was constantly aware of my interpretivist paradigm during this process, and needed to keep my focus on the subjective meanings Chantelle was ascribing to her socialisation as an only-child. (Refer to Addendum D for an example of the transcript). I was able to document the data generated with ease as I had made use of a good quality audio-recorder and saved these recordings on my computer, as well as a flash drive, in order to transcribe the recordings.

3.5.2.2 Photographs

Photographs may be used as visual illustrations, which are shared with the reader. According to Grossi (2006, as cited in Grossi, 2007), photographs may be used to ensure trustworthiness and substantiate written texts, as well as allowing for the re-evoking of dormant memories. Photographs may also act as sources of security for researchers when generating data, as they allow the data to have a voice and speak for itself as stated by (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2007). By taking photographs of Chantelle's creations, with her consent, I was able to enhance visually what I had written. It is important for the researcher to understand the role and uses of photographs to prevent misunderstandings, which may act as a limitation when making use of photographs (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2007).

By taking photographs of Chantelle's creations I was able to validate the descriptions I had included regarding her various sessions with me. Chantelle also shared photographs of herself, as well as of the various people, and places, which formed part of her social experiences growing up as an only-child. These photographs indicated how she perceived,

experienced and made sense of her world (Olivier, Wood & De Lange, 2007). Chantelle gave informed consent for the inclusion of these photographs in the research study. However, the identity of the other individuals depicted in her people and places maps have been protected and have been kept confidential. Chantelle's creations were stored in a safe place and not accessible to anyone besides the researcher and her supervisor and co-supervisor.

3.5.2.3 Field Notes⁴

According to Morse (1985, as cited in Greeff, 2005) field notes are written accounts of what is seen, heard and experienced by the researcher. Greeff (2005) also states that field notes include the researcher's thinking while generating, and reflecting on, the data during the study. During the sessions spent with Chantelle I recorded my thoughts and feelings as field notes in the reflective journal. According to Cohen *et al.* (2005) field notes may be written both during the situation, as well as out of the situation. I recorded most of my observations during the sessions with Chantelle on loose pieces of paper and then added these in my reflective journal.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data analysis may be described as the process of "bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of generated data" (De Vos, 2005b, p.333). Analysing data is necessary in order to make sense of, and interpret, the data generated. Analysing qualitative data as a process usually entails going from the particular, such as transcriptions and interviews to the general, codes and themes (Creswell, 2005). I analysed the data in the current study by, first, subdividing the data, and then, engaging in content and thematic analysis (Hayes, 2000).

According to Mouton (2001) content analysis refers to analysing the content of texts and documents, especially with regards to the meanings associated to words, as well as the themes that are communicated by the participant. Once I understood the content of the data generated, I was able to organise it into themes, thereby engaging in thematic analysis

⁴ My field notes were recorded within my reflective journal.

through coding (Maree, 2007). Hayes (2000) describes thematic analysis as the sorting of information into themes, which are recurrent ideas or topics occurring more than once, and found in the data generated. I needed to ensure that the way I conveyed my results was written in an understandable and logic manner for the readers.

I recorded my sessions with Chantelle via an audio recorder and then transcribed these sessions verbatim. I analysed Chantelle's collage qualitatively by noting themes (Creswell, 2005), which I felt could be further, elaborated on, and then probed these with Chantelle during the interview session. In addition, the data was analysed by identifying common themes, which emerged during the numerous sessions and conversations, and generated from the various activities. I searched for common themes, which seemed to reoccur in the transcripts. I noted such themes through coding, which involved writing on the actual transcriptions using different symbols and colours. The main themes identified were then separated into sub themes, which were further divided into categories. I then used different coloured paper for each theme, to elaborate on them further. Examples of the way I went about analysing my data are visible in the transcripts and included in Addendum D.

Repeated terms, expressions and metaphors may lend a particular meaning to the events spoken about (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999). Identifying metaphors and unspoken words, which related to the various themes conveyed, was not always the easiest task when analysing Chantelle's works. I looked for repetitive themes in her conversations with me, and made sure they were recurring before stating them as a theme. In instances where I was unsure of her meaning, I clarified during the member-checking session (Creswell, 2005; Maree 2007) to clarify that I have understood the meanings she had associated to her expressions and creations.

Member-checking (Creswell, 2005; Maree, 2007) is a process whereby the researcher asks the participant to check the accuracy of his or her account of the information generated, so that they can correct errors. Therefore, the researcher needs to report the results to the participant in order for the participant to verify (Creswell, 2005). The researcher may also check whether the description is "complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate to include and if the interpretations are fair and representative" (Creswell, 2005, p.252). The

researcher may take the opportunity to discuss the themes and results during informal conversations with the participant (Maree, 2007). Due to the qualitative nature of this study, as well as the fact that it consisted of a single case study, I constantly needed to ensure that I adhered to trustworthiness, credibility, transferability and dependability criteria throughout my study.

3.7 QUALITY CRITERIA

In this section I discuss the quality criteria I adhered to, to ensure the trustworthiness of my study, as trustworthiness is of utmost importance in qualitative research (Maree, 2007). Quality thus refers to the thoroughness and accuracy of the research. Reliability and validity are commonly used terms for ensuring the quality of scientific research. Reliability is referred to as the consistency of a measure over time with regards to its outcomes whilst validity ascertains whether a measure, actually measures what it is intended to measure (Hayes, 2000). With qualitative research the terms reliability and validity are commonly replaced with the concepts of credibility, dependability and transferability.

3.7.1 CREDIBILITY

De Vos (2005c, p.364) refer to credibility as an alternative to internal validity, the goal being able to “demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described”. In other words, I need to ask whether my study did in fact, study what it intended to study? Credibility allows for an in-depth description displaying the complexities of variables and interactions embedded within the data and derived from the setting (De Vos, 2005c). Another way of enhancing the study’s credibility was by attempting to place boundaries within my study. As such I constantly kept my research topic, and research questions, in mind so that my study remained focused. I achieved this by always making sure that my questions were directed and focused on Chantelle’s social experiences.

3.7.2 TRANSFERABILITY

Transferability is proposed as an alternative to external validity or generalisability, (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in De Vos, 2005b). This implies that the study can be applicable to

other settings, populations and situations (Maree, 2007). De Vos, (2005b) also noted that this might be problematic due to the nature of qualitative research. Thus, I attempted to gain an in-depth understanding of my participant's experiences as an only-child, to allow the reader a basis for applying this study in other situations. As this is a single case study, the transferability may be limited to similar studies and applied exactly as is to other similar settings and populations.

My effort to enhance the transferability of my study was maintained by utilising a wide range of data generating techniques such as the collage, maps, observations and interviews. I attempted to gain as much information regarding Chantelle's experiences as an only-child in order to increase and deepen the data generating with the intention of providing thick, detailed descriptions of her subjective experiences. In this regard, I probed on topics, which I felt would add rigour to my study, in terms of the information obtained from the data. Member-checking further served to assist in confirming my understandings of the data generated by Chantelle. However, I am aware that being a single-case study there will always be room for scrutiny regarding the transferability of this research to the wider, and more general population, as Chantelle's experiences may be just as they are described 'her' experiences and therefore may not be the same for another only-child.

3.7.3 DEPENDABILITY

De Vos (2005b) describe dependability as an alternative to reliability. It is expected that when using the same methods on the same subject, the results would be the same. However in qualitative research this may not be possible as each case study, and situation, can be described as unique. Dependability in such research, therefore involves member-checking, triangulation, prolonged engagement, observations as well as journals (Cohen *et al.*, 2005).

I attempted to make use of these techniques in order to achieve dependability. As such, my sessions with Chantelle were over a reasonable amount of time and consisted of four formal sessions in which she engaged in activities. There were also informal meetings in which I generated her creations and planned for the next session. I was able to gain data from her, which was consistent throughout the research process. I also observed

Chantelle's non-verbal communication and behaviour during the research process in order to be aware any changes in her mood or behaviour. Member-checking was adhered to throughout the research process. The interpretations of the data analysis were confirmed with Chantelle at the end of the research process to maintain and ensure credibility of her written, visual and verbal expressions.

3.7.4 AUTHENTICITY

According to Cohen *et al.* (2005), authenticity refers to the ability of the researcher to report the research findings through the eyes of the participant. This study considered the subjective socialisation experiences of a young adult only-child and therefore attempted to ensure authenticity of the study by acknowledging Chantelle's experiences and making use of member-checking. I constantly had to check that I understood Chantelle's experiences in the way she intended. All meanings and connotations related to the research findings were generated from Chantelle's own experiences in order to prevent bias from the researcher.

3.7.5 CONFIRMABILITY

Confirmability may be explained as the degree to which the researcher attempted to be liberated from bias during the process of interpretation of the results (Ary *et al.*, 2002). It, therefore, refers to the objectivity of the researcher (De Vos, 2005b). I maintained this by demonstrating that I remained faithful to the authenticity of the data and not allowing my personal values to influence the research process (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In addition, I ensured confirmability throughout this study by making use of transcripts, observations and member-checking to regularly verify the data and themes which emerged. My supervisor and co-supervisor also assisted me during this process thus establishing a 'string of evidence' (Yin, 2009).

3.7.6 ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

My role as the researcher was to constantly keep the best interests of my participant in mind. I needed to ensure that she was comfortable with the research process at all times and address any misunderstandings or concerns, which arose. Chantelle seemed at ease during the data generation and generating process, and did not display any discomfort or

concerns. She was able to express and articulate herself in an interactive way. Chantelle was aware of the confidential (De Vos, 2005b) nature of this study and this may have assisted her in sharing personal experiences with me. Member-checking (Maree, 2007) assisted with the research process as it appeared to have helped Chantelle feel involved in the process and gave her a sense of importance.

It is essential to keep in mind that the aim of this study was not to generalise the results across the population, but to provide an understanding from the participant's perspective of her experiences (De Vos, 2005b). Due to the subjective nature of this study, I needed to constantly keep my own bias in mind. According to De Vos, (2005b), the more time a researcher spends with her participant, the more the risk of bias as relationships are formed. This may lead the researcher to seeing what she would like to see thus missing important things, which do not conform to the misconceptions. By making use of my reflective diary, and engaging in member-checking with Chantelle, I attempted to reduce bias in this particular study. The fact that I had met Chantelle before the research process, may have contributed to my dual role as the researcher and thus by remaining professional at all times I reduced my researcher bias. This was also maintained with Chantelle, as she was informed at the start of the research regarding both our roles in this process and conveyed an understanding of this.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is important that as the researcher I take into account the possible effects of my research on the participant, and therefore I had to act in such a way as to preserve her human dignity as stated by Cohen *et al.* (2005). Furthermore, my subjectivity played an important role during qualitative studies, as I was the main data generating instrument in the research process, as stated by Cohen *et al.* (2005). I was involved in all aspects concerning the study, and therefore, needed to be aware of, and conform to the ethical standards as stipulated by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria. The ethical clearance certificate is included in Addendum A.

3.8.1 INFORMED CONSENT AND VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

The informed consent obtained from my participant is described by Berg (1954) and Delport & De Vos (2005b) as knowing consent of the individual's voluntary participation. The content of the consent form was discussed with the participant, explaining the purpose of my research as well as all of the procedures that were involved in data generating. Chantelle was briefed regarding the research process in order to determine whether any assistance, counselling or explanations regarding the study were required (Berg, 1954). I thus ensured that Chantelle was aware of, and had the sufficient knowledge regarding, what was expected of her during the research process before commencing with it. I placed emphasis on her voluntary participation, as well as her entitlement to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty, if she felt the need arose (Delport & De Vos, 2005; Hayes, 2000).

3.8.2 PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Confidentiality (Delport & De Vos, 2005) was maintained throughout the research process. This entailed an active attempt to remove any elements of records from the research, which may indicate the participant's identity (Berg, 1954). Chantelle's information and responses shared during the study were conducted in a private and respectful manner, and the results presented will remain anonymous in order to protect her identity (Maree, 2007). Chantelle gave informed consent for the data generated to be shared with my supervisor, co-supervisor as well as members of the public. She was aware that even though she had chosen a pseudonym, her identity could be compromised as she had given consent for photographs of herself to be shared. Thus, anonymity may not have been completely adhered to in this study, however the participant conveyed her understanding and consent regarding this aspect of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity.

3.8.3 RESPECT, TRUST AND PROTECTION FROM HARM

As a researcher I expressed my utmost respect towards Chantelle, which was manifested by ensuring that all procedures were in her best interest, as well as ensuring there was no harm was unintentionally inflicted. Due to the nature of this study it was essential for me

to create a trusting and secure relationship with Chantelle, so that she felt able to share her personal thoughts and feelings with me.

3.9 CONCLUSION

Chapter 3 focused on a detailed discussion of the research methodology I employed in this study. My paradigmatic perspective, methodological paradigm and research design were presented, as well as the methods of data generation and generating. Furthermore, I explained the data analysis and interpretation procedures, and I included my personal reflections during the process. Credibility, transferability and dependability were discussed in terms of the quality criteria established for this study, followed by a discussion of the ethical considerations.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the results and themes, which emerged from the study. I also situate the findings within relevant literature on this topic and according to the conceptual framework guiding this study.



Chapter 4

Reporting the Results and Findings

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I discussed the research methodology by presenting the research design and data generating strategies that suited the current study. I indicated the quality criteria, which I adhered to, such as trustworthiness, transferability, dependability, credibility and authenticity as well as accounting for the necessary ethical considerations in this study.

This chapter presents the results of the study as I explore, and attempt to answer, my main research question “What are the social experiences of a young adult growing up as an only-child? I further provide a brief explanation of the research process regarding data generation and data analysis. Where necessary I have made use of direct quotations to add rigour to this study, as well as to support the themes identified from the participant’s responses. I discuss the relevant literature consulted to aid in the interpretation of the results, and conclude the chapter by re-visiting the conceptual framework (as addressed in Chapter 2) as well as providing a summary of the findings.

4.2 RESEARCH PROCESS

In this section I offer a brief description of the research process with regard to the data generation and generating process with the participant.

4.2.1 SESSIONS WITH CHANTELE

I met with Chantelle on many occasions for the purpose of data generating (18 December 2009, 11 and 22 February 2010 and 1, 10, 15 and 22 March 2010). The first time I met with Chantelle, I explained the research project to her and invited her to make a decision as to whether she wished to participate in the study. Thereafter, I reassured her of her voluntary participation and confidentiality.

During the three following sessions Chantelle created a collage, a life story, a people map, a places map (see Photographs 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 in Chapter 3) and the final session consisted of a semi-structured interview. These sessions were audio-recorded on a dictaphone and transcribed thereafter. Her life story consists of her own written reflections on her life growing up as an only-child and the various social influences she experienced.

4.2.2 SESSION 1: COLLAGE AND LIFE STORY

After Chantelle's agreement to participate in the research project, I explained to her how to go about making a collage (Refer to Photograph 3.1, p.45) as well as the use of the life story. Chantelle seemed very eager at the start of the process and collected many magazines to create her collage. Her life story took her a little over a week to complete due to the demands of her studies and work. Once she had completed her collage and life story I took time to review the data. During our interview session we explored her collage in more detail so that I could understand the information she had portrayed therein. Chantelle's life story is included in Addendum C.

At this stage I thought that Chantelle's life story appeared superficial, as she seemingly included very little emotions and feelings, and appeared more comfortable discussing events and experiences in her life. She may have been nervous, as this was the first activity she engaged with and, therefore, she may have felt slightly vulnerable. This might have caused her to remain reserved initially. Her various relationships with the many people in her life were most evident in her life story. Through these activities I also realised that she seemed to have experienced a number of challenging events, which have possibly influenced her life both positively and negatively. The life story and collage were integrated with one another in order to understand Chantelle's experiences as an only-child.

4.2.3 SESSION 2: PEOPLE MAP

During the next session Chantelle compiled a people map, which consisted of herself in the centre, depicting all the people who she believes have influenced her socialisation as an only-child, surrounding her. She chose to use photographs for this activity as she had many photo albums and was able to relate to the various people and reflect on their specific

roles in her life while looking at their photographs. She seemed to share emotions and feelings more easily during this activity. (Refer to Photograph 3.2, p.47 for a picture of Chantelle's people map.) An extract from my reflective journal follows.

She referred to her parents and herself as a "tripod". Along with her parents, Chantelle's grandparents seem to have had a great influence on the young lady she has grown up to be. Coming from a very family-orientated background myself, I was able to relate to this quite easily (RL155-159).

4.2.4 SESSION 3: PLACES MAP

In the third session Chantelle created a places map, where she included all the various places where she had lived growing up (Refer to Photograph 3.3, p.47). Each place was associated with different memories, experiences and people. She enjoyed describing the various houses she had lived in, and how each one of them was different allowing her to experience different phases of her life with regards to her stage of development. It was evident that she seemed to miss her life in the residential estate after relocating from there. These various places seemed to have played an important role in Chantelle's life growing up as an only-child, and thus, I have included an extract from my reflective journal to substantiate this.

It was amazing for me actually, to see how each place, the various people and activities she associated with those places still have such an influence as well as a role in her present life. One can also see a lot of growth in terms of maturity and coping with change (RL195-199).

4.2.5 SESSION 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

The last session consisted of a semi-structured interview with Chantelle where she reflected on the various experiences she has had in her life thus far which she believes have shaped and influenced her socialisation as an only-child. This session was much longer than the previous sessions as it consisted of one hour and eleven minutes, covering a great deal of information. Chantelle seemed very open to share her experiences and the various

feelings and emotions she associated throughout her growing up as an only-child. She appeared honest and genuine in her responses and seemed to talk with ease, which gave me the impression that she was becoming more comfortable with the research process as compared to the first few sessions. An extract from my reflective journal is included below.

She was able to look at herself as an only-child and see both the positive and negative aspects of her personality, she was not afraid or hesitant to mention that she feels she is insecure and finds it difficult to trust people after her many disappointments with her various friendships (RL235-238).

4.3 PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Several themes emerged from the data generated during the sessions with Chantelle. These themes were developed from Chantelle's own representations and the various meanings she associated to her socialisation experiences as an only-child. The themes, as well as subthemes and categories presented in Table 4.1 are explored in more detail for purpose of the data analysis and interpretation of this study.

TABLE 4.1: THEMES EMERGING FROM THIS STUDY

THEME	SUBTHEME	CATEGORY
1. People	1.1 Relationships	1.1.1 Family
		1.1.2 Friends
2. Experiences	2.1 Strengthening and Challenging experiences	2.1.1 Sense of Maturity
		2.1.2 Behaviour
		2.1.3 Academic Achievement
		2.1.4 Challenges and Insecurities
		2.1.5 Loneliness and Longing

4.3.1 THEME 1: PEOPLE

Chantelle mentioned a wide range of people who have influenced her life as an only-child. Thus, the theme "People" seemed relevant in order to explore who were the people influencing her social experiences growing up as an only-child. Table 4.2 provides an

overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria I made use of in order to categorise the data in Theme 1.

TABLE 4.2: INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA FOR THEME 1

THEME 1	INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
Subtheme 1.1: Relationships	Any reference to the relationships she has/had with other people, specifically her family and friends	References by Chantelle, which did not pertain to her relations with others

4.3.1.1 Subtheme 1.1: Relationships

Chantelle seems to have developed relationships with many different people throughout her upbringing. During the data generation process it became evident that relationships with people are a great influence in Chantelle's life, and she appears to hold her relationships with others very close to her heart. She is also very close to her family: *"Family is so important"* (S4L2190)⁵, which she attributed to her Portuguese culture: *"Obrigado, it's my culture"* (S4L2168), implying that her Portuguese culture encourages close family relationships.

According to Chantelle many different people have played significant roles at various stages of her life, such as her family (consisting of her parents, grandparents and cousins), her family friends, friends from school, her boyfriend and friends after school. These various relationships seem to offer a sense of security and support for Chantelle, and are discussed further in terms of how she viewed their contribution to her social experiences as an only-child.

a) Category 1.1.1: Family *"You learn from your parents"* (S4L538) *"Family is so important"* (S4L2190)

Chantelle acknowledged the significant role both her parents have jointly played, and still play, in her life growing up as an only-child. She also spoke of the various individual roles they played in her development and growth into the young lady she is today. She reported

⁵ For the purpose of this study 'R' refers to reflections 'S' refers to the session number and 'L' refers to the line number of the reflections and audio-recording transcripts.

that when she was little her parents worked a lot and, as a result, she spent most of her younger years with her grandparents on their farm. Therefore, in Chantelle's situation her primary caregivers were not only her parents, but also included her grandparents. Thus, both these influences are significant when exploring Chantelle's social experiences growing up as an only-child. Further family variables that played a significant role in shaping Chantelle's socialising include her cousins and her cultural connection.

▪ **Parents**

Chantelle describes her relationships with her parents as good, referring to the three of them (her included) as a *"trio"* (S2L463-470), mentioning that: *"it will be hard to let someone else in"; "what is special is that my parents and I have like a...we like a trio of friendship, I guess you can call it...um, it's very weird having little family dinner and there's only three of us but, I will find it difficult to accept someone else that I have to marry or whatever to get into our little triangle"* (S2L463-467).

From the above it is clear that Chantelle experiences her family as being close, and reports having a good relationship with her parents. Although Chantelle describes this 'trio' in a positive light, there tends to be evidence of triangulation in some circumstances. According to Walsh (2003), triangulation occurs when three people are split into two groups of opposing views, in which the group with two members generally overpowers the third member. According to literature, triangulation among parents and their only-child is a common occurrence when the family structure consists of two parents and only one child (Koroll, 2008). From the data generated, it seems that there are discrepancies in the method of discipline used by her parents. In some instances, the triangulation seems to place Chantelle's parents on one side, and Chantelle on the other. However, Chantelle expressed that she has a good relationship with her father and, therefore, in some circumstances triangulation may occur with Chantelle and her father on one side and her mother on the other (Walsh, 2003).

While Chantelle was growing up and able to understand the concept of siblings, she asked her parents why she did not have any. According to Chantelle, she reported that her parents explained to her that they were unable to have children: *"To my parents I was a miracle baby"* (S1L7-8). There are many reasons for parents having only one child such as

financial constraints (Falbo & Poston, 1993; Mancillas, 2006), opportunities for mothers of only-child to work outside the home (Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989) as well increased marital contentment (Hawke & Knox, 1978; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). However, in this study Chantelle's parent's reason for having only one child seems not their choice but due to infertility, which is amongst the most common reasons for many parents having only one child (Falbo & Polit, 1986; Gee, 1992).

Chantelle expressed being close to her parents and mentioned that although they are very stern, they can also be very protective over her. Furthermore, Chantelle expressed a great sense of support and security from her parents by stating: *"I always felt like there's like a concrete block around me, that no-one can hurt me"* (S4L820-821). She also mentioned that her parents made every effort to provide her with many opportunities to socialise with other children, and always made sure she had something to do, stating: *"that's why my mom always had parties for me and friends over"* (S2L121-122), *"I was lonely, but not that lonely, where the weekends I wasn't lonely...I always planned something yes...it was either my friends from school or my family friends or my cousins"* (S2L129-136). Chantelle's parents also played a role in deciding which friends Chantelle associated with: *"they are very very protective over me, they worry about where I go and who I'm friends with"* (S2L139-140).

When viewing Chantelle's individual relationships with her parents, she describes that she and her mother did not always enjoy a close relationship: *"my mom and I tend to fight a lot, when I was a teenager my mom and I had a lot of disagreements"* (S2L106-154). Chantelle feels that this strained relationship may possibly be due to the guilt her mother feels for have missed out on Chantelle's younger years: *"from when I was born to the age of two, my mom hardly ever saw me, she would see me in the morning and see me when I was sleeping, so for her it was very traumatic"* (S3L99-103). According to Chantelle, an additional reason for this strained relationship could be due to her mother having a different upbringing, coming from a conservative household where she was rarely allowed to socialise on her own: *"she was brought up differently to me, she...very conservative, she was never allowed to go out and experience life"* (S4L489-491). Benson and Johnson (2009) indicate that it seems common for girls to be sensitive to family conflict. Even though her relationship with her mother seemed strained, Chantelle appears grateful to her mother

for the effort she has made contributing to her socialisation by allowing her the opportunities to socialise with children her age growing up.

It seems that Chantelle feels at times pressurised by her mother to succeed. She states: *"she's been very hard on me over, since I was little, I can remember and my dad actually admitted that she's actually sometimes too harsh on me, hard on me where she pushes me, to do this, to do that, dancing, swimming, whatever, netball, you name it...do well at school, she has driven me to where I am today, so I appreciate it, but going through it like from grade eight, it has been...not the best"* (S4L524-534). The increased pressure that parents place on their only-child could be due to the increased attention that such children receive from their parents, which could in turn cause the child to rebel (Koroll 2008; Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993). In Chantelle's case her occasional submissions to peer pressure (experimenting with alcohol) may have contributed to the ways she dealt with her perceptions of her parent's over-involvement.

Although, Chantelle concedes that she shares qualities from both her parents: *"you can see my personality, with my parents, it's so transparent you can see when I am like my mom and when I'm like my dad"* (S4L509-511), she reports having a closer bond with her father. She adds that she feels that she can express her feelings more easily with her father: *"I have the same personality as my father, we are very similar, I get along more, I get along better with my dad than with my mom"* (S2L106-109), *"I can go to him, speak to him about anything"* (S4L504-505). She attributes her personality traits as being influenced by her father, viewing herself as being more similar to him: *"My dad's far more talkative and...I am, I can just talk to him about anything, he doesn't...he's always said to me go live your life, just go, don't worry about what people think, he doesn't, he says it has got nothing to do with anybody else as long as you happy you must do what you want to do..."* (S4L515-520). She further reflects on her father's behaviour comparing it to her own: *"my dad is doing that's not so bad, and he accepts the way I behave when I go out and I have a party or something...it's one of, we the same..."* (S4L541-545). In addition to her personality being similar to that of her fathers, Chantelle views her father as a supportive figure in her life, describing situations where he stood up for her in situations where she was ridiculed and teased: *"My mom use to tease me and tease and tease, so that I wouldn't get upset when the kids at school tease me, but...my dad always defended me, always...shame don't upset*

her shame” (S4L816-819). Chantelle seems to view her father as a role model. This is quite common, according to Bedwell (2009) as the family is responsible in the development and adjustment of children. She also admits that her father spoils her and is always ready to protect her. Bandura (1977) suggests that individuals learn through modelling behaviour, which they observe from others. This assists them to relate these behaviours to themselves, which in turn allows them to regulate their future behaviour. Chantelle’s father, thus, seems to act as a positive role model for her to imitate, serving as her agent of social learning (Bandura, 1977).

Chantelle feels that her parents have positively influenced the person she is today, by supporting her, always looking out for her best interests and teaching her good morals and values (S4L740-743). She seems content with the way her parents have raised her, and feels that they have taught her a lot about life: *“my parents firstly, always guiding me, trying to guide me in the right direction, unfortunately in some cases in my life I didn’t listen and went the other way, obviously we all have to learn on our own...”* (S2L483-486).

According to Starrels and Holm (2000), social learning theory places importance on the imitation of available role models. Chantelle’s parents and grandparents were active agents for imitation thus contributing to her social experiences in her early years. Chantelle views her parents as influencing her life every single day as they continue to guide and teach her. This is in line with social relational theory, which emphasises the importance of the parent-child relationship, as the interactions between the parent and child occur within the context of a close personal relationship (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). Roberts and Blanton (2001) mention that because only-children may find socialising more challenging than their sibling counterparts, the relationships within the family are important. These relationships act as positive influences for only-children’s relationships outside the family (Dunn, 2000). Chantelle expressed the importance of her relationship with her parents who, along with her grandparents, were the only personal social influences she experienced during her younger years, which then served as the base for her relationships with others.

In addition to her parents, Chantelle’s extended family thus also played a great role in her social experiences during her younger years. This is evident in her relationship with her grandparents.

▪ Grandparents

Chantelle places a great deal of importance on her grandparents' influence in her life, and the fact that they were involved in much of her upbringing from her early years. According to Chantelle, her mother used to feel that her grandmother pampered her a lot and would call her *"miminhos"*, which means spoilt in Portuguese (S3L153). Her grandmother taught Chantelle etiquette, she educated her about her Portuguese culture and taught her cooking, baking, reading, religion, morals and values: *"She influenced me a lot and now in my life I still say things like my gran says this and this"* (S4L256-257). She spent most of her early years growing up with her grandparents who were able to observe most of her milestones when she was little: *"my first steps, speak my first words, my gran witnessed all of that"* (S3L106). Chantelle admits that being involved in this research assisted her in seeing her various characteristics and the reasons for behaving the way she does: *"Cause of my gran and thinking now like, this has been very interesting for me that you have asked me to do this with you because now I realize why I do certain things"* (S4L1038-1040).

Chantelle's grandfather also had a significant influence in her upbringing, instilling in her a love for animals: *"He taught me how to care for animals"* (S4L240-241), teaching her that *"you look after everything that you have..."* (S4L244-245). In addition, Chantelle describes herself as a caring person, and disagrees with the stereotype of only-children being selfish (Baskett, 1985, Blake, 1981; Falbo & Polit, 1986; Gee, 1992; Jiao *et al.*, 1986, Mancillas, 2006; Polit, *et al.*, 1980; Roberts & Blanton, 2001; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). She expresses that her parents and grandparents taught her to share and care for others from a very young age.

It seems that Chantelle formed her social identity within her family system, conceptualising and assessing herself within her relationships with her primary caregivers (Deaux, 1993). The importance of the parent-child relationship, suggested in social relational theory (Mitchell, 1988), can thus be viewed as being influential for the development of Chantelle's relationships outside her immediate family structure. Chantelle had two sets of primary caregivers that played a role in shaping her socialization process. She acknowledges that both her parents and grandparents have shaped her as an individual, and influenced the way she socialises and interacts with others.

▪ Cousins

Chantelle's cousins, N⁶ and B were also major influences in her early life, and formed part of her primary social experiences. B and Chantelle are a year apart in age, and seem to have shared a very special bond. Chantelle, being the older of the two, indicates that she and B were inseparable and that she regarded B as a sister figure: *"B and I were inseparable"* (LSL24), *"I saw my cousin B as my sister, because being an only-child can be very lonely"* (LSL25-26), *"B had a great influence on my socialisation"* (S4L152) *"we were very close and had a lot of common interests, we were very similar and we would always say this is my sister, we never used to be like she's my cousin"* (S4L157-164). Chantelle describes her and B as inseparable because of the endless amount of time they spent together in their younger years before B and her family emigrated: *"she is part of growing up when I was younger"* (S2L63) *"we spent a lot of time together, going on holidays and things"* (S2L68). B emigrated to the United Kingdom with her family when Chantelle was nine years old, which caused much of sadness for Chantelle: *"she was very very close in that way and just by having that company, I think that was important to me...we've got a very strong relationship"* (S4L166-171).

Chantelle's parents assisted her in coping with B's departure by arranging regular visits so that the cousins could see one another: *"I think what helped me the most is my parents had planned a holiday when B left that they would take me to see her"* (S2L394-395) *"that also made like a bit of peace of mind, but it was very weird not having her around..."* (S2L403-404). After B left, the cousins remained in contact and spoke to each other often: *"even if I don't see her or speak to her for three or four months, we pick up the phone and we, it's like we never stopped speaking...so our friendship has never died at all, even though she lives in the UK"* (S2L372-378).

Chantelle admits that she and B are slightly different in terms of their personalities now that they are older: *"well she is different actually, I am far more conservative in the way that I think and moral standards maybe because she's...obviously she's now living in the UK where she has no Portuguese like culture influence her life...as much as I have religion wise, as well she doesn't"* (S4L173-180). Their early bond from growing up seems to have helped

⁶ B, N, S, M, C and G are abbreviations for Chantelle's cousins and friends in order to enhance anonymity.

keep their relationship as strong as it is: *“it’s very weird how she changed so much, that’s very very different to me, but personality we will get along nothing is wrong with it...”* (S4L180-182). Chantelle seems to cherish this bond immensely: *“B is the closest that I will ever know how it feels to have a sister”* (S4L795-796). They also seem to share a trust between each other which Chantelle claims to not really share with anyone else: *“I trust her, she trusts me, my secret will never leave her mouth or anything...”* (S4L227-228). It is evident that B was a great influence in Chantelle’s life, and after her emigration Chantelle had to face many of the changes and challenges in her life on her own. She, therefore, has to find coping mechanisms to cope with these changes: *“the only thing that I wish was different is that we lived in the same country, at least a bit closer”* (S4L216-218). Although Chantelle has other cousins, it seems that B will always have a special place in Chantelle’s heart, and the bond they share appears to be for life.

N, Chantelle’s other cousin, and her family are from Chantelle’s fathers’ side. They also emigrated to the United Kingdom, but their departure did not seem to impact her in the same way as B’s did. Chantelle explains that she did not share as close a bond with them: *“I remember being sad, but I don’t remember feeling the way I did when B left...”* (S2L419-420). Chantelle admits that N and her do tend to clash at times, and this may be due to the fact that Chantelle describes herself as quite ‘bossy’: *“that’s why my oldest cousin N and I kind of clashed a lot, because I am the oldest in my house, I am the one and only, so why must I listen to you...”* (S4L622-624). Chantelle seems to admire the familial and sibling relationship which N and her sister have: *“N and her sisters are inseparable, inseparable, they know everything about each other, they always supporting each other no matter what”* (S4L2074-2076).

In terms of social identity, an individual gains knowledge of belonging to a certain social group, and thus, identifies themselves within that group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Chantelle’s cousins shared similar morals and values with regards to their Portuguese culture, which they formed part of. Thus, her social identity was formed within her nuclear family, which then influenced her relationships with her cousins because of the many similarities they shared with her nuclear family.

▪ Culture

Originally, when beginning with this research, I was not aware of the impact of cultural influences in terms of the social experiences of an only-child. However, after my data generating and analysis it became evident that Chantelle places significant importance on the cultural influences instilled upon her from her parents, and especially her grandparents: *“I only used to speak Portuguese”* (S4L250). Additional reading insinuated that it is common amongst Portuguese families for the grandparents to reside in close proximity to the family, as the extended family often adds to the existing support system (Morrison & James, 2009). This seems to have been the case with Chantelle’s family, as they resided with her grandparents when she was younger: *“My family, just having those people around me, I think they like helped me a lot”* (S4L49-50). By residing with both her parents and grandparents, Chantelle was able to participate in activities, which were culturally appropriate. As such she expresses gratitude to her grandparents for sharing these with her, relating these experiences as shaping her into the person she is today: *“We such passionate people, being Portuguese”* (S4L2183). She even compares herself to her cousin B, whom she feels has changed since she emigrated. She ascribes this to the absence of her Portuguese cultural influences: *“She has no Portuguese influence in her life”* (S4L176). In addition, Chantelle acknowledges the significant role her family has played in shaping the family and personal values she has formed: *“Family is very important to me”* (S3L172).

Literature reveals that the parent-child relationship is a significant influence in the social, and overall, development of children (Falbo & Polit, 1987). Chantelle’s grandparents seemed to have been a significant influence in teaching her life skills and educating her about her Portuguese culture. Her family, thus, served as her support system, especially during her younger years, contributing to her identity formation (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2003).

The term ‘narrow socialisation’ is used to describe cultures in which obedience and conformity are the most important values (Arnett, 1995). As her culture seems to have played a significant role in her personality development, this type of socialisation seems evident in Chantelle’s family, and the cultural values, which she inherited from her family. Her close bond with her cousin B also shows that their common culture likely had a positive influence on their relationship. Arnett (1995) also mentions the importance of the

extended family on a child's socialisation. Chantelle's grandparents have proven to be very influential in instilling cultural values and norms as part of her socialisation directly influencing the young woman she is today.

b) Category 1.1.2: Friends *"My friends are basically all I really have I don't, cause I don't have siblings"* (S2L144-145).

Friends emerged as a main theme in Chantelle's life as she values all the various friendships she has had throughout her life: *"having so many different friends and things really influenced different interactions with people"* (S4L343). Although familial relationships are important, only-children are encouraged to explore relationships, other than those within their family situation, to promote their social growth and development (Roberts & Blanton, 2001). When discussing the role friends have played in her life, Chantelle includes family friends and individual friendships. She draws specific attention to her best friends C, G and M as well as her previous boyfriend.

▪ **Family friends**

Chantelle indicates that she had many family friends while growing up, with whom she was very close, almost like siblings: *"These family friends were very important to me, as they were at every birthday party my parents ever organised for me and were always very supportive as my friends too"* (LSL42-44), *"they are like my siblings I don't have..."* (S3L171-173). When Chantelle moved to her home in the city, her contact with these family friends increased as they lived closer to one another: *"this is where I started spending a lot of time with family and friends"* (S3L139-140), *"I had my neighbours, which are our family friends still today"* (S3L224). These family friends still play an important role in Chantelle's life: *"I grew up with them as well, still today like they still, consider them as family"* (S3L224-229) and they seem to remain in contact with one another.

The basic concept of social identity is that individuals define themselves according to the social category, which they feel they belong to (Hogg *et al.*, 1995). Chantelle first categorises herself as belonging to her nuclear family, and thereafter she was able to use this identity to form part of the social identity with her cousins and family friends. The increased time spent with these individuals likely allowed her to develop meaningful

relationships, which may have, to a certain degree, been equivalent to those of siblings, although they were considered as family to Chantelle.

As discussed, the context of the parent-child relationship serves as the first arena where socialisation takes place (Arnett, 1995). Social relational theory, which stresses the importance of the parent-child relationship, suggests that familial relationships in turn influence the development of relationships outside the family structure (Kuczynski & Parkin, 2007). These relationships were evident in Chantelle's relationships with her cousins, family friends and peers. The various friendships, which Chantelle formed outside her family environment, make up her secondary social experiences growing up as an only-child.

▪ **Individual friendship**

During the interview session Chantelle indicated that her very first friend was a girl named Samantha whom she met in Grade one: *"I remember my friend Samantha in grade one and she was my first friend...I was very shy obviously, I just sat, I used to sit by myself like I didn't want anyone to come near me, um...but I just remember her, she played a big role in my life, when I was little in grade one...maybe if it wasn't for her I would have been quiet..."* (S4L131-143). This friendship seems to have had a positive influence on Chantelle's socialisation. It seems that, since Chantelle seemed shy and withdrawn, her friendship with S assisted her to gain the confidence to engage more with others.

According to Chantelle, her mother arranged many play dates for her so she could socialise with other children: *"a lot of play dates, a lot of, my mom put a lot of effort into making sure I was not on my own"* (S3L150-151). It also seems that Chantelle put a lot of time and effort into her friendships, and her friends from primary school seemed to have been like her own sisters, playing a big part in her life: *"I had many good friends"* (LSL37) Chantelle found that she depended on her friends: *"being an only-child I didn't have siblings, I relied on them for friendship and care as a sister or brother would"* (S3L430-432), *"When I reached grade seven, I had eight girlfriends that, we did everything together"* (LSL63), *"I treat them like my siblings because I don't have, so when you are my friend, you...I treat you with respect as I would if you were my own sister or brother..."* (S2L228-231), *"I put all our memories into a book, which I will always cherish our good times together"* (LSL66-67).

Unfortunately Chantelle lost touch with these friends once she changed schools: *“It was just very traumatic for the first three, four months, I used to miss my friends a lot, I still kept in contact with two of them till about grade nine”* (S3L334-339). Despite putting much effort in maintaining her friendships, inevitable some grew distant as she grew up and made new friends. These changing friendships taught her many different things which relate to her various social experiences, such as, making new friends, being able to make wise decisions when choosing her friends and coping with disappointments when her friends let her down: *“the most important thing that they’ve all taught me over the years, is that, if I meet someone new and there is a quality in them that I pick up and I’ve had a bad experience with a friend before, I stay away from them immediately...and if it’s a good quality, whether it’s good or bad, like I follow my gut with that...”* (S4L312-318). Through the disappointments, which Chantelle experienced in her peer relationships, she reports that she was able to identify characteristics in others, which she did not want to be affiliated with, thereby having more control over her choice of friends.

Additional reading confirmed that “peers shape human character which is essential for the continuation of the species”, as children need the skills to be able to survive in their own generation, and not that of their parents (Alter, 2000, p.241). Therefore, it seems that Chantelle’s various friendships provided her with many opportunities to develop different skills within her particular age-group. Arnett (1995) further suggest that peers are an important agent of socialisation as children spend much of their time with peers once they begin school, which continues into adulthood. Chantelle expressed the importance the various friendships have had in her life, and how her friends have, and always will, be an important factor in her life. According to Arnett (1995), conformity seems to be expected when forming peer groups. Hogg *et al.* (1995) further state that social identity relates to group processes, and the relations within these groups. Chantelle’s strong social identity within her family thus assisted her in establishing her identity with her peer groups without contradicting her family and identity.

When Chantelle changed schools, she seemed to have difficulty making friends in her new school and thus she attempted to maintain the friendships she acquired outside the school environment: *“I struggled because I had another friendship circle outside the school and would get into a lot of trouble with these people, testing, playing around with alcohol...”*

(S3L320-322). Chantelle admits that her older friends, the ones she had during high school from other schools, got her into trouble a few times: *“yes it got me into trouble a few times, with drinking and stuff like that, all the teenage naughty nonsense that you get up to”* (S4L663-665). Chantelle, however, insists that she was not a victim of peer pressure and most of the time when she did something, it was her own choice: *“I think I was mainly the one who instigated it most of the time, yes maybe once when I’d got very drunk once and I was grounded for a very long time cause of my older friends, they were like come I dare you to do this, I’m quite daring...”* (S4L678-681), *“with peer pressure, if I don’t want to do something I don’t, I just walk away...if I want to then I will, but if I don’t then you, no-one is going to force me”* (S4L701-705). Although there were instances in which Chantelle seemed to have succumbed to peer pressure she admits she did not feel pressurised, feeling that she was in control of the decisions she made. Literature suggests that over-involvement from parents may lead to rebellious behaviour in only-children (Koroll, 2008; Rosenberg & Hyde, 1993). This may have contributed to Chantelle’s rebellious behaviour.

Further reading suggests that, generally, adolescent girls may be prone to externalising their problems through behaviours such as substance abuse, resulting in impairments in functioning, such as failure at school (Huh, Tristan, Wade & Stice, 2006). Chantelle admits having experimented with alcohol while she was still in school, and experiencing difficulty with her academics during that time. However, she explains that she is a strong person who does not give in easily to peer pressure. It seems Chantelle’s identity formation within her nuclear family seemed to influence the way she approached her peer group (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2003).

Social learning theory suggests that children learn through imitation but are also agents of their own behaviour by controlling and changing their behaviour accordingly (Grusec & Hastings, 2007). Furthermore, Grusec and Hastings (2007) suggest that peers are responsible for punishing or ignoring non-normative social behaviour and rewarding or reinforcing appropriate behaviours. Although Chantelle imitated behaviours of her peers at times, she appeared to steer away from behaviours, which caused her to feel uncomfortable. Thus, her strong identity formation within her nuclear family, as an only-child, may have assisted her with her social identity amongst her peer group.

Chantelle expressed that her three main friends, who had the most influence in her life are M, C and G: *“Those are maybe the main three people”* (S4L441). Chantelle also referred to her boyfriend as an important part of her social experiences being an only-child. These friendships are discussed individually below.

▪ **M**

Chantelle’s friendship with M seemed to be prominent when Chantelle began secondary school. According to Chantelle, M had a tough upbringing and was involved in drugs, became pregnant and had an abortion at a young age. Despite this, Chantelle feels that her friendship with M had many positive influences in her life: *“it taught me how to be sympathetic to situations like that, that aren’t, don’t come around every day”* (S4L367-369). Chantelle’s friendship with M also challenged her in many ways, including making the decision to end their relationship, as she felt it was in her best interests: *“she was hanging around a certain crowd and then I had to decide for myself...it was very hard but I did it...I was 14 years old, to walk away from a friendship...I remember being so heart sore because I could not be friends with M anymore”* (S4L718-738). At present they are no longer friends, but do chat to each other on occasion.

▪ **C**

Chantelle’s most influential friend seems to be her best friend C: *“We were best friends and we were inseparable”* (LSL89-90). Chantelle and C seem to have a special bond as a result of a life-threatening experience which they shared when Chantelle and her family were robbed at gunpoint in their home: *“She saved my life...I will be forever thankful to have a friend like her in my life...after the robbery we were the best of friends who supported each other no matter what”* (LSL101-103). She expresses gratitude towards C, feeling that if it were not for C being there she would have been killed. Chantelle admits that originally she and C did not like each other and it was only after C helped Chantelle in a social situation that they became closer: *“We became friends in grade 10”* (S2L251); *“we didn’t like each other in grade eight and nine, she didn’t like me very much, for some reason...and then we became friends because we met at a party...and she saved me from a situation and then we became friends and we’ve been friends ever since, till this day”* (S2L274-282). C also influenced Chantelle’s social experiences at her new school: *“If I didn’t meet C I think it*

would have been a lot harder..." (S3L423), implying that C made a positive contribution to her life.

Presently Chantelle and C are still close friends. However, after C dropped out of University for a year, Chantelle continued and made new friends: *"this was hard for me, as I had to make new friends without her by my side like she always was"* (LSL169-170). According to Chantelle, their relationship became a bit strained due to some conflict between them at that time: *"that's when I became friends with G and a whole lot of other people, but that's what you do at varsity, and she felt that she was being left out and left me behind, so it became very...we fought a lot"* (S4L399-402). Chantelle admits that she has to put a lot of effort into her friendships especially after school: *"a lot of effort has gone into our friendship, more than anything else...you can't keep being the person that puts in"* (S4L405-416). She feels that she and C have drifted apart since completing their studies, and Chantelle also admits that they do have different ways of thinking: *"I drifted a lot from C because C has always been a little bit different, but the way she thinks of what I do"* (S4L433-435). However, Chantelle seems to still value her relationship with C, and looks forward to more years of friendship with her: *"yes, we will always be friends"* (S4L789).

▪ **G**

G, whom Chantelle met during her University years seems to have influenced Chantelle's social experiences even though their friendship was short-lived: *"I met a really stunning girl named G, from the moment we met I knew we would be great friends, my instincts with people are usually very accurate, but I never saw through G"* (LSL165-167). G's friendship was very important to Chantelle: *"G supported me with all my insecurities"* (LSL184), *"I thought she was like my soul mate...G never judged me in anything and supported me no matter what and vice versa"* (S4L433-437). G was also a very honest friend to Chantelle: *"G would say to me, that looks awful, C couldn't do that"* (S4L374). Chantelle expresses hurt and disappointment at the abrupt ending of her and G's friendship: *"you never know if your friends like in my situation, I never saw myself not being friends with G ever again...but by her actions I was forced to let it go, like I wanna phone her and be like can we go for coffee and I can't..."* (S4L782-786). Chantelle expressed a longing to rekindle her friendship with G, although she admitted that this is not possible.

▪ Previous Boyfriend

Chantelle's boyfriend seems to be a subject of much discussion, as he seems to have played an important role influencing her social experiences as an only-child: *"He was an influence from grade 11 to now..."* (S2L297). Being an only-child, Chantelle did not have siblings with whom to share her emotions and, therefore, relied on her boyfriend for this. It also seems that He also seems that he was the only long-term intimate relationship she has had in her life thus far: *"I thought he was going to be in my life forever, he became my best friend too, until he cheated on me"* (LSL116-117) *"he influenced my life a lot, um...as I thought he was someone really great, but, um...ended up not being who I thought he was...from now on I will know those characteristics in somebody"* (S2L291-294). The on and off relationship which seemed to exist between Chantelle and her previous boyfriend as well as his actions during their relationship over the year, seems to have made Chantelle more wary of people's characteristics.

Chantelle attached many positive experiences to her relationship with her previous boyfriend. She valued his friendship, and felt a close bond had developed with him, expressing that they had a good relationship when they were together: *"He was a great friend, he knows a lot of my insecurities, he was like my little security"* (S4L469,757). It also seemed apparent that she depended on her previous boyfriend for support and encouragement: *"thank goodness my boyfriend was by my side, because he was always the one when I thought I could not do it, he was the one along with G who supported me with all my insecurities"* (LSL182-184).

Chantelle feels that her previous boyfriend was someone who knew her well, and seemed to open up to her: *"I have been one of his best friends and he hasn't shared things with his friends that he has shared with me"* (S4L459-461). Chantelle also feels that her previous boyfriend helped her to become more confident: *"I haven't been a very positive person, I do come across as very confident and very...but I'm not and out of everybody he knows that...he has to be there on the phone, or with me saying you can do it, you can, you can"* (S4L459-465). According to Chantelle, he often described her as being: *"full of nonsense and very stubborn"* (S4L479); *"he's like you can't sulk like this, there's the only-child that we know"* (S4L959).

Chantelle felt hurt and disappointed by her previous boyfriends' actions and eventually ending the relationship proved to be very hard for her: *"this break-up that I'm going through, it's been so stressful"* (S4L999-1000). Chantelle admits that she is still trying to adapt to this change in her life: *"I really really really struggled, my whole world fell apart, that's how it felt and it influences my varsity, I'm still struggling to become positive with my varsity, but we'll see"* (S4L1005-1008).

As evident from the above, relationships with others are very important to Chantelle. She is a family-orientated young lady who seems to have grown up with strong cultural and moral values, which she commends to her parents and grandparents. According to Chantelle, she also places a lot of value in her friendships, especially and relationships with people who pay attention to her, indicating that she does not have anyone else besides her parents. Various experiences have been shared with the different friends she encountered throughout her life: *"every single friend I ever had has left me with some of the best memories"* (LSL197). Although Chantelle had many friends while growing up and still has today, she feels that she has not really had a lasting friendship: *"I have always just wanted one consistent friendship in my life story"* (LSL198-199). Her realization, according to her reflections, is that she finds it saddening that as many friends as a person has, they can, and never will, take the place of a sibling relationship: *"I try and have that with my friends, but that's never going to happen"* (S4L2086).

Mancillas (2006) indicates the significance of assisting children to maintain close relationships with others from a young age. This appears to assist them with their social development, providing them with a confidante to cope with conflict and stress. Although Chantelle had many friends, these friendships seemed to change often and she found herself being disappointed. McCoy, Brody and Stoneman (2002), state that this is where the sibling relationship plays an important role, as siblings may assist in buffering the individual's negative experiences with peers. Thus, I posit that Chantelle might have experienced less disappointment with regards to her friendships had she had a sibling to confide in (Dunn, 2000).

Social learning literature (Bandura, 1977) suggests that when individuals experience positive relations with others, they are more likely to identify them as models of

appropriate behaviour. According to Bedwell (2009) the family structure has a large influence on an individual's social preferences, as well as the course that their social development takes. Chantelle had many friendships, and those in which she experienced positive relations seemed to have instilled her with positive behaviour attributes. She also seemed able to distance herself from those relations, which created negative relations.

Chantelle's social identity was thus formulated within her family environment as she was able to identify herself as belonging to her family, and thereafter, she was able to identify herself within her group settings with regards to her various friendships (Stets & Burke, 2000). According to Tajfel, Billig, Bundy and Flament (1971), Chantelle's sense of worth in groups seems to have increased through her categorisation and self-enhancement. This seemed to relate to Chantelle's social experiences within the various groups she found herself belonging to, as she behaved according to the normative perceptions and stereotypes of these groups. She also seems to have many friends, describing herself as a loyal and caring person, positive attributes which indicate self-enhancement. However, there also seemed to be indications that at times she experienced some difficulties identifying herself within her various social groups. This was evident in her expressions of the negative influences, which contributed to her feelings of disappointment and insecurity. This may have resulted because of her limited social buffers, besides her (family members) in her life, which may have provided support during these times. These challenges are elaborated further in Theme 3. Theme 2 will include Chantelle's various experiences as an only-child.

4.3.2 THEME 2: EXPERIENCES

Chantelle's general life experiences growing up as an only-child were reflected during the sessions spent with her. She seems to have perceived these experiences as both strengthening and challenging. She expresses these experiences as influencing her identity as a young woman today. Table 4.3 provides an overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria utilised in Theme 2.

TABLE 4.3: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for Theme 2

THEME	INCLUSION CRITERIA	EXCLUSION CRITERIA
Subtheme 2.1: Strengthening and challenging experiences	All reference made to experiences which were either perceived by Chantelle as strengthening or challenging	These are aspects which did not contribute to strengths or challenges with regards to Chantelle's communicated experiences as growing up as an only-child

4.3.2.1 Subtheme 2.1: Strengthening and Challenging Experiences

Chantelle reflected and shared many of her experiences growing up as an only-child. It appears that she feels many aspects of her life, both positive and negative, have contributed substantially to the person she has grown up to be. Chantelle's relationships with the various people in her life have been the main influence on her social experiences, and providing life lessons growing up as an only-child.

a) Category 2.1.1: Sense of Maturity "*Mature, that's true*" (S4L866)

Chantelle views herself as being mature for her age and agrees with the maturity stereotype stated in literature describing only-children as being mature for their age (Blake, 1981; Gee, 1992; Polit & Falbo, 1987; Roberts & Blanton, 2001), when comparing herself to children with siblings: "*mature that is, that's true*" (S4L866), "*I was more mature always, even though it may not always seem that way...but mentally mature*" (S2L215).

Chantelle reports that she was surrounded by adults for most of her younger years: "*It was only adult conversation all the time*" (S4L605-606). She reflected that this extended amount of time in adult company is the main reason she, and others, view her as mature for her age. This was expressed throughout her various relationships and experiences: "*my mom's friends they could sit and have a full on conversation with me, like when I was like six*" (S4L588-590); "*they always used to say jeepers this kid she speaks so much, and she speaks like she is twelve...If I go now, go stand with only adults I don't feel younger at all*" (S4L592-596). This time spent in adult company thus made Chantelle feel older than her cousins and friends: "*I felt a lot older as well*" (S4L624).

She expressed that as she felt older than her peers, she often found herself getting along with children older than her: *“I was in grade eight and they were in grade eleven and it made no difference to me...it was like we were the same age”* (S4L659-661). She also shared experiences with these older friends: *“I had friends older than me and I would get into a lot of trouble with those people, testing playing around with alcohol”* (S3L321-322) and she admits that they were not always in her best interests: *“obviously with that comes things that they did and I wasn’t used to, so drinking early all that stuff, trying things early”* (S2L266-268). Her experiences within her peer environment assisted her in becoming more aware of the consequences surrounding her behaviour: *“It might not have been the best influence, but it also made me wary”* (S2L268-269) and thus she may be able to use these experiences to her advantage.

According to literature (Blake 1981; Gee, 1992; Polit *et al.*, 1980; Roberts & Blanton, 2001) it seems that maturity remains a consistent positive attribute associated with only-children. Falbo (1977) suggests that the acquisition of adult-like behaviour may be accelerated with only-children, especially if there models of social behaviour consist mainly of adults. In addition, social learning theory states that the acquirement of adult-like behaviour may occur faster in situations where adults serve as the main models of behaviour (Bandura, 1977). Thus, only-children may imitate the social and linguistic behaviours of adults (Blake, 1981). Chantelle admits having experienced feeling more mature than her friends and expressed that the adult models in her life influenced many aspects of her social experiences. Thus, the theme of maturity concurs with the findings with regard to this study.

b) Category 2.1.2: Behaviour *“When I was small I could sulk for hours...learned to just let it go, I’m not that bad anymore”* (S4L947-956)

Chantelle admits to being *“spoilt”* (S4L812) when she was younger as she was the centre of attention in her family. Chantelle uses the term spoiled to describe the material goods she received from her parents. She expresses that she also has a strong-willed personality in the sense that if she wants to do something she will do it, even though her parents attempt to steer her in the right direction: *“my parents firstly, always guiding me, trying to guide me in the right direction, unfortunately in some cases in my life I didn’t listen and went the other way, obviously we all have to learn on our own...”* (S2L483-486).

By always having this attention bestowed on her she also admits that she was self-centred when she was younger: *"I can be very bossy with, I think, my own space"* (S4L619). Chantelle admitted that her self-centred behaviours may have negatively influenced her relationships with her peers: *"I always felt like I was in charge"* (S4L621), *"I am the oldest in my house, I'm the only, so why must I listen to you"* (S4L621-624).

She also admits that she is spoilt: *"spoilt, yes that's true...demanding, moody...I do have mood swings and I'll admit it, is that I sulk a little bit"* (S4L941-945). Chantelle expressed that when she was younger, she would sulk for hours, and as she grew older she would still sulk if things didn't go her way. Her friends and previous boyfriend would relate her sulking to her being an only-child: *"you're the centre of attention all the time, in your, like my family the trio, I'm always in the middle um...ya, I will say I'm quite spoilt, I have, I do get my way with a lot of things, um...which is a negative thing socially, because you can't always get your way with your friends or other people"* (S4L810-815); *"you can't sulk, you have to get over it"* (S4L949-950). She admits that her sulking has improved as she has matured: *"I learnt to just let it go, I'm not that bad anymore"* (S4L956).

The findings in this study seem consistent with much of the literature regarding the stereotypical views of only-children. Such stereotypes indicate that some only-children may be described as spoilt, selfish and self-centred possibly as a result of excessive attention received from parents (Baskett, 1985, Blake, 1981; Falbo & Polit, 1986; Gee, 1992; Jiao *et al.*, 1986; Mancillas, 2006; Polit *et al.*, 1980; Roberts & Blanton, 2001; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). However, it is noted that Chantelle refuted the stereotype describing only-children as being selfish: *"I wasn't selfish at all, I'm not a selfish person"* (S4L902-903). This is concurrent with recent literature, which continues to disprove such stereotypes (Sandler, 2010).

c) Category 2.1.3: Academic Achievement *"Academically, I'm not intelligent"* (S4L868)

Chantelle indicated that she feels she does not do well academically and it seems that her emotional difficulties in her life influenced her academic achievements: *"I already had problems with many of my subjects at school as it felt like my world was falling apart"* (LSL117-118). Chantelle seemed to feel better about her academics when she was elected

on her school's council: *"I was chosen to be on the Student Executive Council, my parents were so proud of me"* (LSL120). Chantelle also admits experiencing difficulties with her academics especially during her Matric and first year of University. Her parent's absence, and her difficulties with her previous boyfriend at the time, seemed to influence her academic achievement a great deal: *"I failed three out of the six exams as I wasn't focused on my work because my parents weren't at home most of the time..."* (S2L141-143).

The findings of this study posit a contradiction to literature with regards to academic achievement and only-children. Chantelle expressed many difficulties relating to her academic achievement at school, however, literature indicates that generally only-children tend to achieve higher in comparison with children with siblings (Blake, 1981; Falbo, 1977; Mellor, 1990; Polit & Falbo, 1987; Roberts & Blanton, 2001; Veenhoven & Verkuyten 1989). Chantelle's difficulties in terms of her academics may be related to emotional challenges which she experienced growing up: *"it was a horrible experience"* (LSL120).

Despite these challenges, Chantelle also has many academic achievements. She managed to pass her Matric year as well as her undergraduate teaching degree. She has also furthered her studies by enrolling for an Honours⁷ degree, which she is currently completing. Chantelle mentions that although her parents were not very involved in her school activities, they expressed great joy in her achievements: *"they were very proud of me I think, at the end of Matric, what I achieved on my own, my mom and dad were never involved in the school at all, nothing and what I'd achieved"* (S4L2156-2159).

According to literature, (Glass, Neulinger & Orville, 1974 & Lui *et al.*, 2005) only-children seem to have a greater wish to further their education. In addition, Mellor (1990), states that only-children have higher levels of intuitive and personal aspirations. In this study, Chantelle expressed aspirations for her future, and hopes to be successful one day: *"I would like to have a steady job in a school...maybe in ten years I would like to have my own school"* (S4L2020-2022) *"I always see myself married"* (S4L2044).

⁷ Chantelle is currently completing an Honours degree in Special Educational Needs.

d) **Category 2.1.4: Challenges and insecurities** *“It was the most traumatic experience I have ever had in my entire life” (LSL99-100) “I’m insecure firstly” (S4L888)*

Chantelle seems to have expressed many challenges growing up as an only-child in terms of her social experiences, which have resulted in feelings of insecurity and distrust in her relationships with others. As previously mentioned, one of the main disappointments in Chantelle’s life was her cousin B’s emigration. Chantelle expressed her sadness in losing the very close and special bond they shared with one another. Another disappointment seemed to be experienced with her previous boyfriend, however, she feels she has learnt from these experiences trying to remain positive: *“I was disappointed with my friends actions along with my boyfriends too...then I decided to move on with my life without him”* (LSL191-193). She expresses that these disappointments have enabled her to be more wary of people, and to be more aware of the personality traits in her friends: *“my wariness of people, socially, I won’t just, I won’t take, if I meet somebody a friend, I won’t put 100% in”* (S4L1088-1090), *“socially I’m alert, my guard is up all the time, ya it’s hard, I think it’s very difficult, it’s going to be difficult for a while”* (S4L1093-1095).

These disappointments experienced by Chantelle seem to have caused her to develop insecurities. Although she describes herself as coming across as a confident person, she admits that she is insecure: *“I’m insecure firstly”* (S4L888) *“I haven’t been a very positive person, I do come across as very confident and very...but I’m not”* (S4463-465). Sorenson (2008) suggests that only-children’s perceptions of themselves somewhat differs from other’s perceptions of them. This seems to correlate with findings of this study. Chantelle admits that others may perceive her as being a confident person, however her perceptions of herself seem somewhat different. Some authors indicate there is evidence that only-children display more self-esteem (Mellor, 1990; Travares *et al.*, 2004; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989), however the participant in this study, Chantelle, describes herself as experiencing feelings of low self-esteem. Thus, it appears that the experience of this particular participant contradicts literature in terms of the positive way in which only-children may perceive themselves.

Chantelle also admitted that her insecurities may have caused her to question her parents on being an only-child: *“I used to think I was adopted when I was very young...probably just*

my insecurities” (S4L549-552). Chantelle explains that she needed some reassurance, which she received when her mother showed her a picture of herself when she was about the same age as Chantelle. Sorenson (2008) suggested that because only-children spend quite a significant amount of time in their own company, they seem to develop rich imaginations. Chantelle had a doll, ‘Nicholas’ which she confided in when she was younger and seemed to develop a trusting and secure relationship towards her doll: *“he couldn’t talk back, or upset me or break my heart or nothing...”* (S4L1050-1051).

It became evident that Chantelle seems to have difficulty trusting people, yet feels that she has good intuition when it comes to people: *“my instincts with people are usually very accurate”* (LSL165). According to Chantelle not having siblings has allowed her to develop relationships with family members and friends, all of which played a role in her views about people. The first trusting relationship she formed was with her parents and extended family and as she grew older this extended to her various friendships.

Sorenson (2008) indicated that the continuous interaction only-children have with adults, may cause them to be over-sensitive in their relations with their peers and thus this may cause them to find trusting other’s challenging. Although Chantelle developed a trusting relationship with her cousin B: *“I trust her, she trusts me, my secret will never leave her mouth”* (S4L227), she expresses her wariness and distrust towards her peers in general. Her relationship with B was the stepping-stone to the many other friendships she developed later, and she may have trusted too easily at first, expecting all her friendships to resemble the bond she had with B. Unfortunately, learning that, this would not always be the case. Literature suggests that because only-children don’t have siblings, they may not experience opportunities to learn tolerance and realistic expectations of others (Feinberg, McHale, Crouter & Cumsille, 2003; Sorenson, 2008). Therefore, as in this case they may display unrealistic expectations when it comes to their peers: *“that’s always been a fear, like are they still gonna be my friends tomorrow, cause I don’t have that permanent bond”* (S4L787-789); *“it really sucks because you never confident enough with a friend...I do have a lot of trust issues with people”* (S4L842-843).

Chantelle’s experiences of disappointment, from her previous boyfriend and friends, seem to have caused her to feel insecure about herself and to have difficulty with trusting

people. Feinberg, *et al.* (2003) indicate that by not having siblings, only-children may not experience differentiation, and thus are likely to experience difficulties with peer conflict and rivalry: *“I have a lot of trust issues with people”* (S4L842-843). Chantelle, therefore, feels that having a sibling might have made a difference: *“I wouldn’t be insecure with myself, like I said I come across quite confident, but it’s not like that...I think in many ways I’d be different”* (S4L754-758).

Chantelle admits that she can control her insecurities: *“I need to find, be happy with myself”* (S4L2007). Even though she has several insecurities within herself, she believes that she is in the process of trying to find her feet and be comfortable being with herself, without feeling lonely or longing for company as in the past. As she places a lot of importance on loyalty in her friendships, she has had to face disappointment at times. However, she explains that remains a loyal and caring friend, treating all those she befriends as her own family.

e) Category 2.1.5: Loneliness and Longing *“You on your own the whole time”* (S4L87)

Throughout my sessions with Chantelle, the theme of loneliness, and simultaneously, longing, seemed to emerge prominently in her reflections. Numerous times during the sessions she expressed her feelings of being alone: *“the first thing that comes to mind it’s loneliness”* (S4L56). She further elaborated on how these feelings were portrayed in her life, and the emotions they elicited: *“being an only-child can be very lonely”* (LSL26) *“I had a lot of fun with my parents but I always felt lonely because I was only with adults all day long”* (LSL61-62).

Literature refers to some only-children as being lonely (Blake, 1981; Falbo, 1977; Lui *et al.*, 2005; Mancillas, 2006; Mottus *et al.*, 2008; Polit *et al.*, 1980; Sandler, 2010). In addition, it may be possible that, due to the extended amount of time only-children may spend in solitary activities, they may be viewed as isolated from their peers and thus experience feelings of loneliness (Mottus *et al.*, 2008; Sorenson, 2008; Veenhoven & Verkuyten, 1989). During these times of loneliness her doll Nicholas played a significant role in her life, as she confided in him often: *“I used to talk to him, that’s who my friend was when I was*

alone...very important little thing, I mean he's still in my room...everyday he was the one thing that was my friend" (S4L1028-1048).

As Chantelle grew up it seems evident that her parents made a great effort to encourage her to spend time with other children her age, and this seemed to assist her with her feelings of loneliness: *"I was lonely, but not that lonely, where the weekends I wasn't lonely...I always planned something yes...it was either my friends from school or my family friends or my cousins"* (S2L129-136). Chantelle even admits that although she is now able to keep herself busy: *"I listen to music all day, whether I'm in the shower or whether in my room, whether I'm just at home, there is always T.V on"* (S4L73-75), she still experiences being alone as a challenge at times: *"being an only-child, it's lonely...but not when I got all my friends around..."* (S4L55-57). She also seems to yearn for companionship: *"you need some interaction or otherwise you go crazy, you feel sad, I can't explain, it's sometimes really sad, there's no-one there and you just by yourself"* (S4L75-78).

Chantelle revealed her many future aspirations; most significantly these include marrying one day and having children of her own. It is interesting to note that Chantelle would like to have more than one child, as demonstrated in her response to the question on whether she would like to have just one child: *"No...definitely not...I don't want them to go through what I've gone through, I want them to have a companion for life"* (S4L2054-2059). According to Blake (1981) many only-children aspire to have more than one child of their own and this seems consistent with the results of this study. In addition, the longing for a sibling, expressed often by Chantelle, may be the reason behind her desire. She therefore seems to feel that being an only-child has led to the disappointment and heartache she has experienced in her relationships, and that if she had had siblings, it might not have been the case.

Chantelle views the loneliness she experiences as negative: *"loneliness, companionship with, I mean I can't tell my parents everything and I won't, but I can tell my mom certain things and my dad certain things, but that companionship with that one person or two people, three sisters, whatever, that bond, I don't have that bond and I think it does affect me, maybe my socialisation with people so I'm always wary"* (S4L831-837). Chantelle however, has relied on her friendships for this companionship: *"being an only-child I didn't*

have siblings, I relied on them [friends] for friendship and care as a sister or brother would..." (S3L430-432).

According to literature it seems that some only-children wish for a sibling to serve as a confidante, and to share similar experiences with (Liu *et al.*, 2005; Mancillas 2006; Roberts & Blanton, 2001). Findings in this study seem to be congruent with literature regarding siblings (Dunn, 2000; Fussel *et al.*, 2005; Milevsky *et al.*, 2005), as Chantelle tends to look up to, and admire, sibling relationships, which she has been exposed to. She feels that it is something she will never be able to experience: *"I admire that and I envy that because I will never have that...I try and have that with my friends but that's never going to happen"* (S4L2086). It is evident that she expresses a longing to have a sibling *"I really wish I had siblings who would always be there for me no matter what"* (LSL197-198). Longing, therefore, seems to go hand-in-hand with Chantelle's expressions of her social experiences as an only-child. Chantelle's longing for a sibling is also displayed in how she latched onto specific things and people in her life, perhaps hoping that they would somehow fill that empty space she expressed as loneliness: *"I have always just wanted one consistent friendship in my life story"* (LSL199).

4.4 RE-VISITING THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

When re-visiting the conceptual framework, the findings of this study suggest that the main influences on Chantelle's social experiences seem to be her family, culture and peers. The findings from her reflections of growing up as an only-child indicate that social identity, social relations and social learning have all had an influence in Chantelle's social experiences, especially in her relationships with others.

Chantelle expressed her primary socialisation agents as members of her nuclear and extended family. She also mentioned the significant influence her parents, grandparents and cousins had, bestowing her with cultural morals and values. Chantelle reflected her secondary socialisation agents as the various friendships she experienced with her peers. She further highlighted the many strengthening and challenging experiences she had growing up as an only-child, and how these contributed to the young woman she is

presently. These agents formed part of the various contexts in which Chantelle’s social experiences occurred.

Lawson and Brossart (2004) state that individuation and autonomy, in relation to one’s family, is an important task for a young adult. This individuation forms a crucial part of the parent-child relationship, assisting the child to develop interactional skills. This then results in the child establishing interactions with members outside the family system (Lawson & Brossart, 2004). It appears that Chantelle developed her primary social relationships within her family context. It was only once she had formed her identity within her familial context, that she was able to identify with other social groups such as those of her peers. Therefore, Chantelle’s social identity, which formed within her peer groups, was related to the identity and culture she had established within her family context. In addition, Chantelle’s family context seems to be the main area in which most of her social learning took place. Her role models namely, her parents and grandparents, played an important role in her social modelling and imitation, which continued in her relationships with her peers. In Figure 4.1, I re-visit the conceptual framework.

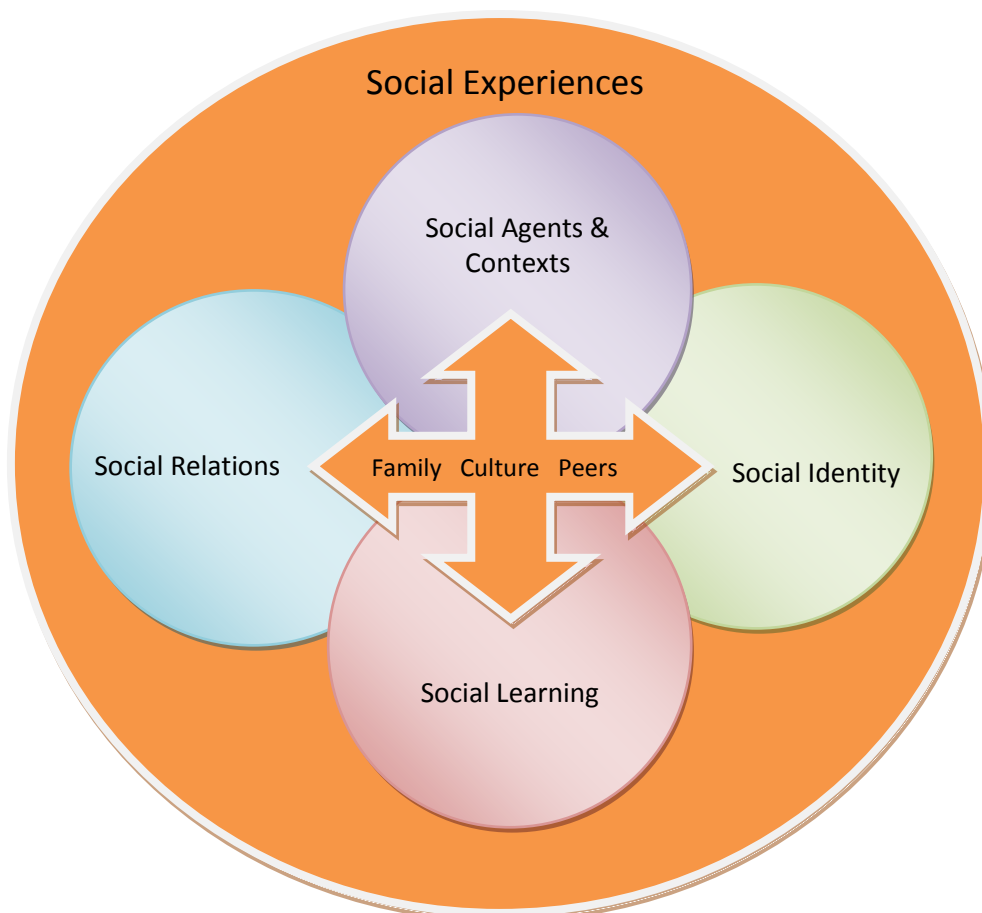


FIGURE 4.1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK RE-VISITED

4.5 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

The findings discussed in this study suggest the significant role of an only-child's relationships with others, and especially how her experiences growing up have greatly influenced her social experiences. It is evident from Chantelle's regeneratings of her social experiences growing up as an only-child, that she has experienced many strengthening and challenging aspects. She is aware that these experiences have shaped her into the person she is today, and felt grateful for that. In addition, she seemed to have maintained a positive outlook to life, sharing many of her future aspirations.

4.6 CONCLUSION

In this Chapter I have discussed the results of this study, as well as the findings with specific reference to literature and the conceptual framework. The following chapter concludes the study by providing possible answers to the posited research questions. In addition, I highlight possible limitations within this study, and potential recommendations for future research.



Chapter 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, I presented the results and findings of the current study. The identified themes and subthemes were interpreted and discussed in relation to existing literature.

In this final chapter, I address the conclusions and recommendations of the study. Firstly, I provide an overview of the previous chapters as well as a summary of the emergent findings. I then I discuss the research questions by revisiting the conceptual framework. I further reflect on the possible contributions and limitations of this particular study. Lastly, I make recommendations for further practice, training and research. This chapter concludes with the closing remarks for this research study.

5.2 OVERVIEW OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS

In Chapter 1, I presented the introduction to this study, discussing the purpose and rationale, keeping in mind the main research question guiding the study, namely “What are the social experiences of a young adult growing up as an only-child?”. I also provided orientation regarding definitions of the key terms referred to in the study. Lastly, I presented the adopted research paradigm, a basic overview of the research methodology, including quality criteria and the ethical considerations applied to this study.

In Chapter 2, I discussed existing literature regarding only-children focusing on the social experiences which influence their development. I also explored the conceptual framework adopted in this study, with specific reference to the various theoretical constructs which had been assimilated within the conceptual framework namely, social identity, social relations and social learning.

In Chapter 3, I described and elaborated on the research methodology applied in the study, as well as the selected epistemology of Interpretivism. The chapter included a discussion on the strengths and limitations of using a case study design, as well as the choice in selecting the participant. I presented the quality criteria followed in the study to meet the requirements necessary for validity and reliability, as well as the ethical considerations I adhered to.

In Chapter 4, I presented the results of the study with reference to the specific themes, subthemes and categories which emerged from the data analysis process. The two main themes, People and Experiences were elaborated on in detail and then discussed in terms of correlations and possible contradictions relating to existing literature outlined in Chapter 2.

In the next section I present a summary of the themes elicited from the data analysed. I subsequently address the research questions accordance with the results of this study, as well as with reference to the conceptual framework utilised in the study.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE THEMES

When analysing the data generated by Chantelle, it was evident the people in her life played a significant role as social agents. In addition, her various life experiences seem to have complemented her social experiences growing up as an only-child. Thus, the emergent themes were addressed and elaborated on in terms of her relationships with significant people in her life, as well as her strengthening and challenging experiences which influenced her growing up.

Chantelle expressed that the interactions with the various individuals in her life have led her to acquire knowledge and life skills in many areas. Her early years, spent with her parents and grandparents on the farm allowed her to acquire skills such as caring for others, etiquette, cultural and religious morals and values. Her relationships with her family members further served as the basis for her social learning as she imitated and modelled these behaviours which in turn influenced her relationships with her peers.

Chantelle reflected on the many strengthening and challenging experiences which she encountered in her various peer relationships and how she felt they had taught her to cope with peer pressure as well as assisting her with her insecurities. Chantelle's relationships with her peers also lead her to experience many disappointments which seemed to have caused her to develop a distrust towards other individuals.

5.4 ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this section, I address the research questions which guided this study. I begin by referring to the secondary research questions, creating a baseline for addressing the primary research question. The conceptual framework developed in Chapter 2, is incorporated in the interpretation of the findings and research questions.

5.4.1 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 1

- *What were the primary and secondary social influences of this young adult growing up as an only-child?*

Chantelle's family and friends seem to be primary and secondary influences respectively. Throughout this study the importance of the parent-child relationship was highlighted by literature as being an essential socialisation agent for only-children. This was also reflected in the findings of this research study, as Chantelle's relationships within her family situation seem to have been the main influence on her social development. According to Chantelle's reflections of her experiences growing up as an only-child, she indicates the important role her parents and grandparents played in her life. Chantelle also expressed that these agents contributed to her personal development in terms of her identity, culture, life skills and providing a support system.

By forming her identity within her family environment Chantelle was able to identify herself amongst her peers. Chantelle's various friendships outside her family environment contributed to the secondary social influences growing up as an only-child. These friendships seem to have assisted her in formulating her identity within her various social groups, her relations with other individuals, as well as influencing her adaptation to various social experiences. Her negative experiences with her peers assisted her in coping with

various disappointments in her social relationships with others. Therefore, it seems that Chantelle's social learning mechanisms have assisted her in interpreting and adapting to different social situations.

5.4.2 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 2

- *What factors contribute to her positive social experiences?*

The findings of this study indicated that Chantelle encountered positive social experiences growing up as an only-child. She seemed to have attributed these experiences to the various relationships she experienced throughout her life. Chantelle reflected on these experiences as shaping her into the caring, loyal and family-oriented young woman she is presently.

Chantelle related her maturity as being a positive experience, saying she was able to take control in social situations and overcome peer pressure. In addition, Chantelle expressed that having older friends assisted her in dealing with situations earlier than peers her age, which she believes will allow her to handle similar situations in her future. She related her experiences within her family as mainly positive, explaining that they were her support system. Her parents were described as being responsible for encouraging her to have friendships outside the home, especially during her younger years. She therefore, expressed gratitude towards her parents for the large amounts of effort to encourage these friendships. Chantelle expressed her relationship with her grandparents as a positive social experience as they played a key role in contributing to her cultural and religious values which now form part of the young woman she has grown and developed to into.

5.4.3 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 3

- *What factors contribute to her negative social experiences?*

Chantelle expressed several negative social influences in terms of her relationships and experiences growing up as an only-child. Negative experiences, such as disappointments and distrust in others, have contributed to her challenges and current insecurities. It seems that Chantelle's experiences of the disappointments in her life could have led her to

approach her relationships with her peers with distrust, and this might be negatively influencing how she experiences these relationships, as well as herself. Chantelle explained that she has become wary of people's personality traits, and this has led her to develop an increased sense of intuition when it comes to making new friends. Therefore, according to her these negative experiences have made her a stronger person as she is now able to cope better with disappointing situations. Such experiences appear to have made her more resilient.

Chantelle, however, also expressed feelings of loneliness as a negative social experience, conveying her need for company with individuals her age. In addition, she expressed the desire to have a sibling to confide in and trust wholeheartedly. It seems evident that lacking a confidante within her home environment, besides her parents, Chantelle relied on to her friends to fill this gap. In some instances these expectations regarding her friendships may have been unrealistic, resulting in hurt and disappointment when her friends could not live up to them.

5.4.4 SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTION 4

- *Which stereotypes from literature seemed to have been applied to this young adult only-child?*

Only-children seem to be labelled with certain characteristics which may depict them in a negative light. Although many of these stereotypes do not seem to be empirically proven, they seem to prevail. Literature describes only-children as encompassing many characteristics, and this study aimed at exploring the various stereotypes that were unique to Chantelle's experiences growing up as an only-child. Chantelle seemed to express different views regarding the stereotypes society often bestowed on only-children and these will thus be elaborated on.

Chantelle agreed with the stereotypes which describe only-children as being mature, spoiled, lonely and self-centred. She expressed feeling more mature than her peers and therefore would make friends with people who were older than her. In her mind, this validated her sense of maturity. She admitted to being spoiled by material goods, as well as

to the over-involvement she received from her primary socialisation agents. Chantelle described herself as preferring to be in control with regards to her interactions with her peers and thus conceded that she was self-centred at times. In addition, she expressed feelings of loneliness and the longing for a sibling companion and confidante.

According to Chantelle's experiences growing up as an only-child, she disagreed with the stereotype that only-children are selfish. She expressed that her parents and grandparents taught her to share and care for others from a young age, and thus, believes she developed a very caring and loyal personality towards others. Chantelle also disagreed with the stereotype of being dependent and unsociable, describing herself as being able to differentiate herself from her peers, while still being able to enjoy many positive relationships with her peers.

5.4.5 PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

➤ *What are the subjective social experiences of a young adult only-child?*

As evident from the above discussion, Chantelle has shared many of her personal experiences of growing up as an only-child. She expresses many attributes from her childhood of being an only-child and she felt that her experiences might have been different had she had a sibling. Her main concern was the loneliness she experienced, and how, even though she had many friends, she still felt lonely. She expressed that her desire growing up was to have a life-long companion, and therefore recognised that the inconsistent relationship with her boyfriend and several other friendships might have been her attempts at experiencing relationships similar to those of siblings. She admired her cousin's sibling relationship, and envied the close bond it entailed. In terms of her social experiences, and her ability to form strong bonds with others outside her nuclear family the relationship she maintained with her cousin B seemed to have mimicked that of a sibling, as even Chantelle reported that she viewed B as a sister rather than a cousin.

Chantelle explained that relating with adults during most of her younger years has allowed her to be comfortable with people older than her. The meaning Chantelle attributed the experiences of growing up as an only-child was that many positive and negative

experiences emerged. Despite her view that these negative experiences have assisted her in becoming a stronger person, she stated that she would have preferred a sibling to share these experiences with. She reflected gratefulness for the time and effort her parents had made to encourage her interactions with peers, as well as the guidance and support they offered her during her growing years. Her grandparents seemed to have a significant role in instilling her with religious and cultural morals and values and may have left a permanent imprint on her life. In summary, Chantelle holds her various relationships as significant influences on her social experiences growing up as an only-child.

Another prominent impact on Chantelle's social experiences growing up as an only-child seemed to be the cultural influences she received from her primary socialisation agents. By sharing a home with her parents and grandparents she had acquired many cultural nuances, being exposed to cultural factors such as traditions, rituals and language.

When considering the social experiences that Chantelle had growing up as an only-child, it is evident that the concepts of social identity, social relations and social learning interacted in shaping Chantelle's self-concept and her relationships with others. In this regard, the influences of her primary socialising agents (parents and grandparents) played a significant role in Chantelle's acquisition of social knowledge and norms which she subsequently carried through in her relationships with others. Furthermore, her strong cultural beliefs helped shape her social identity by playing a significant role in regulating her behaviour with others and defining aspects of her morals and values. This indicates that her social identity was primarily constructed through the learned behaviour of her primary caregivers, and thereafter her peers played a supportive role by exposing her to challenging situations, thereby strengthening her to cope and adapt in different social situations.

5.5 POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

This study offers rich descriptions and in-depth understandings of the social experiences of growing up as an only-child. Thus, I believe it adds to the existing knowledge regarding only-children and how their social experiences shape and influence their lives. In reviewing existing literature, I experienced a lack of research focusing on the social experiences of

young adult only-children, as most studies seemed to discuss only-children in general. This study, therefore may contribute to this possible gap in existing literature.

This study also identifies a correlation with regards to the theoretical constructs (social identity, social relations and social learning) utilised and the social development of only-children. These constructs may thus contribute to the body of knowledge pertaining to only-children.

Furthermore, the findings of this study have suggested the importance of familial and cultural influences on the social experiences of only-children. It seems that the peer group may not have the power to override the joint influence from the primary socialisation agents (parents and grandparents). Thus, this research may contribute in creating an awareness of the significant influence of culture in the social experiences of only-children. This is an important finding with regards to future studies on the influences and social interactions that only-children encounter.

5.6 LIMITATIONS AND DE-LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

This research study provided much valuable information in terms of the social experiences of this young adult only-child. However, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations and de-limitations which go along with the study.

- This study made use of a single case study. It is important to acknowledge many studies on only-children have been based on selected samples or cases and cannot always be seen as a representation of the whole population (Falbo & Poston, 1993). Therefore, one of the main limitations in this study is the issue of generalisability. This case study entailed an authentic, narrated life story of a single individual, thus allowing an in-depth exploration of the information of the issue at hand. Nevertheless, gaining rich and detailed information does not necessarily maintain that the results of this study may be applied to other young adult only-child.
- This study involved a female young adult and it is possible that, different results would have emerged if the study had been conducted with a male only-child.

Chantelle also seemed to have been privileged, in terms of her socioeconomic background and this may have influenced the results. However, it is important to keep in mind that the purpose of this study was to focus on a single case study, and as such, to generate rich descriptions and in-depth understandings from an interpretivist paradigm.

- Chantelle's experiences growing up as an only-child were viewed in terms of her current family structure as she still resides with both her heterosexual parents. Exploring the experiences of a young adult only-children growing up in a different family structure may also highlight interesting similarities or differences regarding social experiences.
- Furthermore, this study involved the exploration of sensitive and personal issues. I selected the participant from a known third person which I realize may have influenced the information and experiences she willingly shared with me. Although Chantelle seemed comfortable and honest in her reflections, it remains questionable as to what information she would have shared with me had I been an outsider. However, having met the participant previously may have also assisted her to feeling more comfortable thus generating in-depth data.

5.7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this particular study I propose the following recommendations for training, practice and further research.

5.7.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING

The findings of this study may assist various professionals in parent guidance training, offering support for parents of only-children. According to these findings, it is also suggested that such training demonstrates approaching only-children's social experiences holistically. Furthermore, it should be recognised that each individual case may have a different set of primary socialisation agents, which will then influence the social identity which an only-child develops and his/her various relations with others.

The activities utilised in this study to elicit experiences by the participant, may serve as effective methods of assisting other only-children in relating to these social experiences. They may thus allow other only-children to share similar experiences as expressed in this study, which may help them in their social interactions with others. The results of this study also indicate that training in assisting only-children in their relationships with their peers, specifically with conflict management, may be beneficial to enhancing positive relations with others. The findings of this study, specifically those refuting existing stereotypes associated with only-children suggest that further training may create additional awareness, thereby, possibly preventing stereotypes from negatively influencing individual's relationships with only-children.

5.7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The application of this study's findings in practice encourages professionals to familiarise themselves with the social experiences of only-children. I believe this will allow them to enhance their understandings of only-children, enabling future positive interactions with them. Teachers, psychologists and other individuals in the helping professions may be assisted to become more sensitive to all children, by keeping their individual differences in mind. It may be beneficial for these professionals to also be aware of the differences in insecurities related particularly to only-children, compared to those experienced by all individuals at some point in their life. These findings may also assist various professionals to open themselves up to the experiences of only-children, curbing the various stereotypes associated with being an only-child. Finally, the findings of this study indicate that professionals working with children need to be open to explore the diversity of existing family structures, and how these may influence only-children's social experiences.

5.7.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Exploring various family structures, in terms of a young adult's social experiences of growing up in different family structures, such as single-parent families, same sex parent families, step-families and extended families, may be beneficial in creating understanding of these various influences. It may be useful to establish the similarities and differences in the experiences of an only-child from different family settings.

Studies with parents of only-children can be studied in order to gain an understanding of their experiences of being parents of only-children. The parent–child relationship proved to be very significant in a child’s overall development and thus it may be worthwhile to provide in-depth studies on the various strengths and challenges which parents may face in terms of raising an only-child.

It may also be beneficial to conduct studies on the experiences of only-children across various cultural orientations. According to literature, most of the studies on only-children have been completed in the United States of America and China. There seems to be very little evidence of studies conducted in other parts of the world especially with regard to the South African context. It is evident in this study that culture played a significant role in influencing in the participant’s social experiences of growing up as an only-child. Therefore, viewing the social experiences of an only-child from a cultural lens could yield interesting results.

Throughout the study, difficulties with peer relations were evident in the Chantelle’s expressions of growing up as an only-child. She even expressed her belief that having a sibling may have shielded her from such experiences. It may thus be beneficial to explore whether having a sibling does in fact serve to buffer peer relations, and if so how do siblings fulfill this role. An additional recommendation may be to replace this study with a sibling child to determine whether this study’s findings indicate that Chantelle’s social experiences are like all other young adults social experiences.

Only-children’s relationships with their peers and the various friendships they form may be an area for further exploration. Peer relations form an integral part an individual’s social experiences, and therefore, the relationships which only-children form with their peers (especially in terms of conflict management) seem important areas to consider for further research.

5.8 CLOSING REMARKS

In closing, it is evident from this study that being an only-child has many positive and negative attributes. Unfortunately society has embedded beliefs and opinions regarding only-children and irrespective of the large number of studies which has attempted to eradicate labels of only-children, many of them still remain. Despite the typecasting, it seems evident from the literature (Sandler, 2010) that single-child families remain on the increase.

Apart from intelligence and academic achievement, few findings in literature concerning only-children may be conclusive. This particular study seemed to refute many of the stereotypes surrounding only-children describing them as selfish, dependent or unsociable. However, according to Chantelle's expressions she reported being self-centred, spoiled and lonely. In this particular study, there also seemed to be a positive attribute associated with this only-child, as the participant experienced herself as being more mature in comparison to her peers.

According to the findings of this study, familial and cultural factors seem to be significant influences on the social experiences of the only-child. The primary socialisation agents in this participant's life growing up, seemed to be major influences on her social experiences growing up as an only-child. Thus, the role of her peers did not seem as influential as that of her family. The parent-child relationship also seems to be an important factor in contributing to the overall development of only-children.

In conclusion, the aim of this study was to explore the social experiences of a young adult growing up as an only-child. Thus, the findings suggest that there seem to be many influencing factors which contributed to the social experiences of this only-child. The important of these factors being the significant role of the family especially in terms of the cultural influences transferred onto Chantelle's relationships with the various individuals who formed part of her social experiences. The role of culture proved to be a key finding in this research study as it served as the basis for her social experiences in her interactions with her peers. Overall, Chantelle's social experiences seem to have been primarily influenced and encouraged by her nuclear family and secondly, from her peers.

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Addenda

Addendum A:
Ethical Clearance Certificate

Addendum B:
Informed Consent

Addendum C:
Participants Life Story

Addendum D:
Transcriptions of Audio recordings

Addendum E:
Exerts from Reflective Journal





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Addendum A: Ethical Clearance Certificate



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Addendum E: Exerts from Reflective Journal