THE POTENTIAL USE OF A PERSONAL PORTFOLIO FOR IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADOLESCENT

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2010

THE POTENTIAL USE OF A PERSONAL PORTFOLIO FOR IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT OF AN ADOLESCENT

by

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submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

**MAGISTER EDUCATIONIS
(EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY)**

in the
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

SUPERVISOR:
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PRETORIA

AUGUST 2010

DECLARATION

I, Magdalena Katarzyna Quinn, (student number: 27217117), hereby declare that all the resources that were consulted are included in the reference list and that this dissertation titled: **The potential use of a personal portfolio for identity development of an adolescent,** is my own work and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other tertiary institution.

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M.K. Quinn

August 2010

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This study focuses on how a Personal Portfolio can facilitate the narration of an adolescent's life story and the outcome on self understanding. An instrumental case study that was exploritative and descriptive in nature was used to gain insight into the potential value of using a Personal Portfolio to reflect an adolescent's quest for identity development. Data were collected by means of Personal Portfolio activities, open-ended interviews, tape-recordings of participant interviews, reflective reports written by the research participant as well as observations and field notes recorded in a diary by the researcher.

The thematic analysis of the data was done within a constructivist-interpretivist framework. Five core categories: Identity Crisis/Confusion, Identity Exploration, Identifying Developmental Assets, Unresolved Past Issues, and the Experience of Compiling a Personal Portfolio emerged. These core categories were further linked to sub-categories and related themes.

This study found that compiling a Personal Portfolio supported the research participant's quest for identity. In particular, it facilitated a process of self exploration regarding career choice and sexual identity and resulted in increased

self-knowledge, an awareness of personal assets and an overall improved sense of self-worth and self-confidence. This study also provided the research participant with a platform to work from and the means to solve some personal problems. The study further more concluded that a Personal Portfolio is a cost effective method that is suitable for use in a diverse South African context which could be utilised by counsellors and educators with their task to assist adolescents with their identity development.

KEYWORDS

- Personal Portfolio
- Adolescence
- Identity
- Identity crisis
- Identity development/construction
- Self-exploration
- Self-knowledge
- Post-modern narrative counselling
- Life story
- Constructivist-interpretivist

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CHAPTER 1
Overview And Rationale

1.1   PURPOSE AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY[1]

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into the potential value of a Personal Portfolio used to facilitate an adolescent's quest for identity development.

This study was explorative and descriptive in that an open and flexible investigation was conducted into the potential value that a Personal Portfolio could have during the process of identity development of a particular adolescent. The focus was on how a Personal Portfolio could facilitate the adolescent's narration of his life story and the concomitant effect on self understanding.

According to Berk (2000:456), identity achievement is a crucial step towards becoming a productive, happy adult. My interest in this topic was sparked during my service learning in 2008. While working with a group of adolescent learners who were faced with the challenging task of making future career decisions, it became evident to me that they were still in the process of discovering who they were and so they found it difficult to make decisions.

During my internship year at a high school, my assessments of adolescents revealed that adolescents needed to be supported in their quest for identity development. This need for support was reflected in their uncertainty and confusion when it came to making future career decisions. According to the Revised National Curriculum Statement (2003:36), one of the learning outcomes for the grade 10, 11 and 12 Life Orientation Curriculum is that *the learners must be able to demonstrate self-knowledge and be able to make informed decisions regarding further study, career fields and career paths.*

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[1] This mini-dissertation is to give the novice researcher the opportunity to demonstrate her ability to apply research skill in a study of limited scope.

Another reason for wanting to pursue this study was that my previous experience had been mainly with children between two and twelve years of age. The challenge of working with an adolescent offered me an opportunity to enhance my understanding of adolescents and to develop my professional expertise. In other words, I saw my internship as an extension of my service training. Since this research would have an equal focus on the benefits for my research participant and the knowledge I would acquire during the research process, we would both benefit (Furco, 1996).

In my view, a Personal Portfolio[2] is a strategy that is cost effective and sustainable. It is also possible to individualise it. If it is effective in enhancing identity development in adolescents, it can be used in a South African context. It could be incorporated into the Life Orientation Curriculum in South African Schools. This could meet the need that I had identified for adolescents to be supported in their quest for identity development and possibly result in adolescents making more congruent future decisions.

I concur with Hill, Bromell, Tyson and Flint (2007) who claim that as a result of the process of identity development, adolescence is also a time of heightened self-consciousness, self-focus and concerns about competence. I further feel that a Personal Portfolio can possibly be an effective intervention strategy that will reach out to adolescents in a way that best connects with their needs. Since the techniques used to compile a Personal Portfolio focus on individuals and their unique life story, adolescents are able to engage in a process of exploration which according to Marcia (2006) is a precondition for establishing an identity.

While the compilation of the Personal Portfolio was based on the post-modern narrative counselling approach, in the sense that the techniques used and methods of data collection fitted into the narrative approach, I did not engage in narrative research. The post-modern counselling approach focuses on life construction by clients who are viewed as the experts of their lives. Techniques that were used during the study were aimed at empowering narration and facilitating a useful qualitative understanding for the adolescent. Narration could

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[2] See page 5 and page 31 for an explication of the Personal Portfolio.

pose challenges if the relationship between the counsellor and client was not based on trust, openness and genuineness (Maree, 2007).

As Kroger (2006) points out, a variety of methods have already been used in narrative approaches to facilitate understanding of identity. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing theory base on supporting identity development in adolescents, especially in a multicultural context like South Africa where western principles still tend to dominate psychological assessment and intervention. A Personal Portfolio based on a post-modern narrative approach can be seen as evolving with time and may prove more appropriate in meeting the needs of the diverse adolescent population found in South African High Schools.

1.2   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.2.1   PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the potential value of a Personal Portfolio for identity development of an adolescent?

1.2.2   SECONDARY QUESTIONS

- How does the compilation of a Personal Portfolio influence the identity development of an adolescent?
- How did the adolescent experience completing a Personal Portfolio?
- How can the techniques of the post-modern narrative approach be best applied during adolescent identity exploration and construction?

1.3   CONCEPTUALISATION

For the sake of clarification the following key concepts used in the study are clarified: adolescence; identity; identity development; identity crisis; Personal Portfolio; post-modern narrative counselling approach.

1.3.1 ADOLESCENCE

According to Berk (2000) adolescence is the period from 11 to 20 years of age and is characterised as the bridge between childhood and adulthood. In this stage of development, thought becomes abstract and idealistic and young people prepare for the world of work. Defining personal values and goals and establishing autonomy from the family are the major concerns of this phase. For the purpose of this study an adolescent will refer to an individual who falls into the age group of 12 to 17 years.

1.3.2 IDENTITY

Identity is defined by Berk (2000: 457) as a *well-organised conception of the self made up of values, beliefs, and goals to which the individual is solidly committed.* Van Aardweg and Van Aardweg (1998:113) define identity as *knowing who one is and the knowledge that one is distinguishable from others.* For this study identity can be summarised as an individual's awareness of himself[3] as an independent unique person with a specific place in society. An individual's personal identity includes his socio-cultural identity, gender-role identity, vocational identity and personal value system (Louw & Louw, 2007).

1.3.3 IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT/ IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

The terms identity development and identity construction were found to be used interchangeably in literature. For the purpose of this study the terms were considered synonymous and were also used interchangeably.

Identity development begins with the infant's discovery of self, continues throughout childhood, and becomes the focus of adolescence (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2001). It is ultimately the result of a lifelong journey as the experiences that people acquire throughout life result in continuous modifications of their life constructs.

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[3] The researcher uses a masculine pronoun as for the purpose of this study the research participant was from the male gender.

1.3.4   IDENTITY CRISIS

An identity crisis arises from the adolescent's need to reconcile multiple roles into an integrated, coherent identity or self-concept (Identity vs. Identity Diffusion) so that he can be more prepared for the psychological challenges of adulthood (Hill *et al.,* 2007).

1.3.5   PERSONAL PORTFOLIO

Activities[4] such as the collage, life line, life chapters, success and failure experiences, and circle of influences are techniques that facilitate the client's narration of his story and offer a structure that eases narration and offers the person control of the activity (Cochran, 1997). In this study, a Personal Portfolio refers to a set of activities through which the participant tells his life story.

1.3.6   POST-MODERN NARRATIVE COUNSELLING APPROACH

Post-modernism implies that the universe cannot be understood objectively and that reality exists in the assumption of the observer. From this perspective individuals are treated as meaning-making person's (Maree, Ebersohn & Molepo, 2006). Post-modern narrative counselling focuses on co-constructing narratives and life stories with clients through dialogue. The client takes the role of narrator and the counsellor becomes the co-author of the stories and facilitates the interpretation of the autobiographical material. In this approach the client is regarded as the expert on his life and as the author of his life story. It focuses on the whole person and how identity elements are integrated via one's life story. Kroger (2006) suggests that language is a text out of which identities are constructed, justified, and maintained. For the purpose of this study a post-modern narrative counselling approach referred to techniques that facilitate story telling and allow the individual to share personal meanings in order to portray his life story and make sense of his life.

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[4] Personal Portfolio activities will be discussed in more detail in chapters 2 and 3

1.4 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE[5]

According to Kopala and Suzuki (1999: 52), a paradigm can be conceptualised as *a set of interrelated assumptions about the social world which provide a philosophical and conceptual framework for the organised study of that world.* A paradigm not only guides professionals in the discipline but also promotes the use of a particular research methodology. I selected constructivism and interpretivism as the underlying philosophy for this research study and adopted a qualitative approach.

The constructivist-interpretivist paradigm is essentially anti-positivist and views truth as based on personal knowledge and as being socially constructed between individuals (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). According to Van Glasersfeld (1996), knowledge is constructed by an individual's actions and his or her reflection on them. Constructivism implies that knowledge is created between the researcher and the participant, and the researcher seeks the participant's view points in order to understand his conceptions. Meaning making is fundamental to constructivism (MacMahon, Patterson & Watson, 2003). Through interpretivism, I endeavoured to gain an in depth understanding of the experiences of the adolescent during the process of compiling his Personal Portfolio.

1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.5.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

To guide my exploration of this study I selected an instrumental case study which is used to provide insight into an issue (Creswell, 2007). According to Cohen *et al* (2002), the case study is a respected qualitative research design and is well suited to research conducted from a constructivist paradigm. For the purpose of this study I focused on the experiences of the research participant during the compiling of his Personal Portfolio which was aimed at answering the question: Who am I?

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[5] See Chapter 3 for a comprehensive explanation of the research paradigm.

1.5.2 RESEARCH SITE

The research was conducted at the school where I was completing my internship. It is a small independent high school in Gauteng. Currently there are approximately 225 learners in the school and size of classes does not exceed 30 learners. It was originally established as a bridging school for learners from rural areas and townships that had the potential to succeed in a mainstream academic environment. While all the learners are black, they come from diverse language and socio-economic backgrounds. Most learners have mathematics and science corporate scholarships and there are also learners on private sponsorships.

Research took place in a private/neutral setting (an office on the school premises). The research participant was removed from the school group setting during official school periods as sessions took place when the participant had a free period or after school hours.

1.5.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

One[6] participant was identified and selected using purposeful convenience sampling. The participant was selected according to a set of criteria that included the following:

- The participant should fall within the adolescent stage of development.
- Be accessible and available.
- Be willing and able to reflect on the research process and express his feelings.

1.5.4 DATA COLLECTION

Yin (2003) point out that one of the principles of data collection in a case study is to use multiple sources of evidence that will result in richer, more detailed data (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004).

The following methods of data collection were used during this study:

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[6] One research participant was selected due to the limited scope of this study.

1.5.4.1 Personal Portfolio Activities[7]

The participant was required to complete nine portfolio activities. Activities included two drawings, an individual identity collage, interests, talent and values, a life line, my circle of influences, life chapters, success and failure experiences, and job from heaven, job from hell. After the completion of each activity the participant was asked to reflect on the activity, focussing on the process, value and experience of each activity. This was done in the form of an open-ended interview and by asking the participant to reflect in his written reflective reports. After initial data analysis, a final interview was conducted with the research participant in order to clarify and confirm the themes that emerged as well as to paint a bigger picture of what emerged, with regard to identity construction, during the process of compiling his Personal Portfolio. The research participant was informed that a copy of his Personal Portfolio and diary would be kept in a safe place at the University of Pretoria once the research had been completed. The research participant kept his original Personal Portfolio and diary.

1.5.4.2 Open Ended Interviews[8]

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participant. These took place by means of open-ended interviews which were conducted after each session and at the end of the research study. The open-ended interviews were guided by questions such as:

- Tell me about the activity you have just completed.
- What were you thinking while you were completing the activity?
- What feelings were you experiencing while you were completing the activity?
- How did you experience completing the activity?

Because of the nature of the open-ended interview, as a researcher I was able to engage in a naturalistic way with the research participant and was able to probe for responses in order to gather an in-depth perspective. The recording of the

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[7] See chapter 3 for a more comprehensive explanation of the personal portfolio activities.
[8] See chapter 3 for general questions prepared for the open ended interview

open-ended interview was done by taking notes as well as audio-tape recordings. The practical constraints were carefully considered, gaining participant consent and cooperation (Punch, 2005).

1.5.4.3 Research Diary

I was able to record the participant's verbal and non-verbal responses during the interview process. I kept a research diary to supplement my field notes by recording both descriptive and reflective field notes (Creswell, 2007). After each session, I wrote down process notes, research reflections and personal reflections.

1.5.4.4 Reflective Reports Written By The Participant

The research participant was given a diary and was encouraged to reflect on his experience after each session as well as at the end of the research process. I carefully explained to the research participant that a copy would be made of his diary and would be kept together with the rest of the raw data in a safe place at the University of Pretoria. The research participant was given the original diary and Personal Portfolio once the study had been completed.

1.5.5   DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The data was thematically analysed (Henning *et al.*, 2004). Recurring themes and ideas were identified from all the collected data. Creswell (2007) contends that researchers must first familiarise themselves with the content of their collected data, and then work inductively to delineate emergent themes from the content and to segregate themes into indicators and contra-indicators. Finally the most frequent themes must be clustered into core categories to ensure that the major themes are compiled with no preconceived hypothesis in mind.

Data was interpreted within a constructivist framework. Participant checking was carried out to ensure that the data interpretation was accurate and in accordance with the participant's experiences (Cohen *et a*l., 2002).

1.6   TRUSTWORTHINESS

As a researcher I strove to ensure that the generated data was an accurate and a true representation of the participant's personal meanings. Guba and Lincoln (1999), McMillan and Schumacher (2001) and Seale (1999) propose the following strategies to ensure trustworthiness in a naturalistic study:

- Intensive and prolonged engagement in the research setting.
- Disciplined observations.
- Multi method data collection strategies.
- Electronically captured data, such as audio taping and photographic evidence.
- Working in collaboration with research participants by employing participant checking and participant reviews.
- Leaving an audit trail so dependability can be confirmed.

In this study the data collection was carried out over eight weeks. Weekly sessions were approximately 60 minutes long. All open ended interviews were audio recorded and a researcher diary was used to record process notes, research reflections and personal reflections. Audio recordings were transcribed and original raw data was photocopied in order to leave an audit trail. Participant checking took place after the preliminary data analysis. After the final analysis of the data, I provided further feedback to the research participant and participant review took place.

1.7   OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

CHAPTER 1: Overview and Rationale
This chapter serves as an introduction to the research topic. The purpose for the study is discussed, concepts relevant to the study are defined and the primary and secondary research questions are stated. The researcher's paradigmatic perspective is explained and an overview of the research design, methodology and quality criteria is provided.

CHAPTER 2: Literature Study

This chapter focuses on the theoretical framework relevant to this study. Identity development during the adolescent stage of development is explored, with particular focus on traditional and post-modern theories of identity development. The underlying approach of the Personal Portfolio and the rationale for compiling a Personal Portfolio is explained.

CHAPTER 3: Research Design and Methodology

In this chapter the research process that was followed is described. The aim of the study and the research paradigm are briefly outlined and special attention is given to the design of the study, data collection methods and data analysis and interpretation techniques. Measures to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations are also addressed.

CHAPTER 4: Research Findings

This chapter presents the research findings and details the major themes that emerged during data analysis.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

In this chapter, the research findings are linked to relevant literature as well as the primary and secondary research questions. The challenges and limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations for further study are suggested.

1.8   CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The aim of this study is to gain insight into the potential use and value of a Personal Portfolio during identity development of an individual in the adolescent stage of development. The findings of this study could possibly contribute to the existing theory base on supporting identity development in adolescents, especially in a diverse and multicultural context like South Africa. Working from a qualitative approach and using an instrumental case study, I explore the possible benefit of using a Personal Portfolio to enhance an adolescent's self-knowledge and thus contribute to his identity development.

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CHAPTER 2
Literature Study

2.1   INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

In addition to the physical, cognitive, social and personality changes that occur during adolescence there is also a quest for identity. Some of the most important questions posed by adolescents during their transition from childhood to adulthood include; Who am I? What is my place in society? Where am I going in life? And what is my purpose on this earth? Identity development is considered one of the hallmarks of adolescence and is an extremely complex construction that has multiple domains.

This chapter aims to explore the theoretical concepts relating to identity development within the adolescent stage of development. Erikson and Marcia's theories of identity development will be given close attention as well as different types of identity. The underlying approach of the Personal Portfolio, namely the narrative approach, will be discussed in detail, revealing the rationale for compiling of the Personal Portfolio as well for the activities of the Personal Portfolio. The researcher's theoretical framework which serves as the basis for this research will also be explained. Figure 2.1 provides a schematic overview of chapter 2.

FIGURE 2.1: **Schematic overview of Chapter 2**
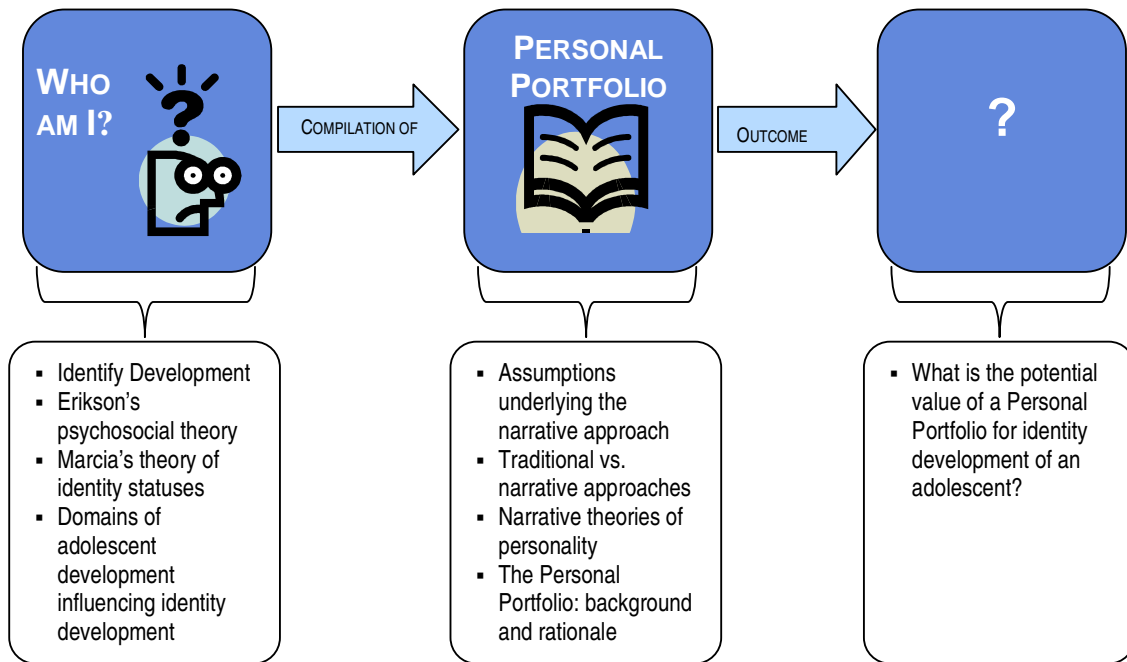
2.2 IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

2.2.1 DEFINING IDENTITY

The concept of identity is multifaceted and, according to Kail and Cavanaugh (2001), there is no agreed definition of identity. Thom and Coetzee (2004) argue that the multifaceted concept of identity embraces a complex array of social and self-representations, including personal, public, individual and group identities. Waterman (2004:54) provides the following definition of identity:

> *By identity I mean the goals, values, and beliefs to which an individual is unequivocally committed, and that gives a sense of direction, meaning, and purpose to life. I use the term potential identity elements to refer to any goals, values, and beliefs that are actively considered during identity formation. The task of identity formation involves the processes by which some range of goals, values, and beliefs are identified and evaluated, and by which commitment to particular identity elements are formed and activities towards their implementation begun.*

Constructing an identity involves defining who you are, what you value, and what direction you wish to pursue in life. In Berk's (2000) view, therefore, the search for what is true, real, and indispensable to the self is the driving force behind many commitments which include a commitment to a sexual orientation, to a vocation, to interpersonal relationships and community involvements, to ethnic group membership, and to moral, political, religious, and cultural ideals.

According to Louw and Louw (2007), Erikson's psychoanalytic theory provides us with the most comprehensive description of identity development during adolescence. His theory was later expanded on by James Marcia, who identified certain identity statuses. To gain a better understanding of how identity develops, these two theories will be reviewed.

2.2.2 THEORIES OF IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

2.2.2.1 Erik Erikson's Theory Of Psychosocial Development

Eriksonian and neo-Eriksonian theory state that identity formation in adolescence requires that adolescents explore a range of life choices about interpersonal and ideological domains before they make commitments (Graf, Mullis & Mullis, 2008). Erikson, a pioneer in the field of personality development, characterises the stage of adolescence as the need to solve the "Identity versus Identity Diffusion" crisis. According to Erikson, in order to form an identity, all the psychosocial crises of previous stages must be resolved and adolescents must be allowed a period of psychological moratorium during which they can experiment with, explore and question their life roles (Erikson, 1977).

Identity is multidimensional and may include physical and sexual identity, occupational goals, religious beliefs, and ethnic background (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2001). According to Erikson, adolescents need to form a gender-role identity, socio-cultural identity, vocational identity and a value system in order to form their own identity (Kroger, 2006).

a) **Sex role/Gender identity:** refers to a person's perception of the self as relatively masculine or feminine in character (Berk, 2000). Gender identity is a good predictor of psychological adjustment (Kroger, 2006). Most individuals have traditional gender identities but some develop an androgynous identity which is a type of gender identity that contains both masculine and feminine personality characteristics (Gouws & Kruger, 1994). Research has shown that individuals with a masculine or androgynous identity have a higher sense of self-esteem which results in superior psychological adjustment (Graf *et al*, 2008).

Adolescence is a time of gender intensification (Berk, 2000). This refers to a period where gender identities become more traditional due to the physical and cognitive changes that adolescents are experiencing as well as societies' expectations of gender-appropriate behaviours. While Kroger (2003) claims that gender differences in identity development have diminished in Western cultures, Marcia (1994) claims that differences still exist, especially with regard to vocational exploration. Graf *et al.* (2008) concur with Kroger (2007) who states that differences in gender identity development are based on differences in gender-role socialisation and expectations, rather than biological sex differences.

An inability to establish a gender identity or a resentment of biological identity can result in stress and confusion and is likely to create significant problems in the development of a confident, secure personal identity (Mussen, Conger, Kagan & Huston, 1990). Gouws and Kruger (1994) stress the importance of acquiring a gender-role that an adolescent accepts and feels comfortable with in defining his personal identity. An inability to come to terms with a gender-role identity can have a negative impact on social, affective and other domains of development.

Sexual identity is also explored during adolescence. Most cultures assume that this involves exploring one's attraction to the opposite sex (Herdt, 1989). Heterosexual adolescents spend little or no time considering their sexual identity while homosexual adolescents find it more challenging to establish a sexual identity because of the

stigmatisation and negative perceptions of homosexuals (Mondimore, 1996). If acceptance and commitment to a sexual identity does not occur in adolescence, feelings of isolation and guilt could result as well as difficulty in making the transition to Erikson's stage of intimacy versus isolation (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2001).

b) **Socio-cultural/ethnic identity:** entails a sense of belonging or attachment to one's own ethnic group (Way, Santos, Niwa & Kim-Gervey, 2008). Developing an ethnic identity involves a process of constructing who one is, who one wants to be or is becoming as well as whom one does not want to become in relation to one's ethnic group (Way *et al.,* 2008). Ethnic identity and group membership play important roles in healthy adjustment and development of personal identity in adolescents (Wakefield & Hudley 2007).

In a multi-ethnic society like South Africa, adolescents interact across racial and ethnic lines in their communities and schools, resulting in a more complicated negotiation and establishment of ethnic identity. Research suggests that a strong attachment to one's own ethnic group significantly correlates with high levels of self-esteem, low levels of depressive symptoms, increased levels of academic performance and motivation, high-quality friendships, self-efficacy, as well as decreased levels of delinquency, violence and drug abuse (Wakefield & Hudley, 2007; Way *et al.*, 2008).

Thom and Coetzee (2004) conducted interesting research on identity development of South African adolescents in a democratic society. Their research concluded that black adolescents developed a stronger sense of personal identity when compared to white adolescents. They put this down to the importance of a strong cultural identity among post apartheid black adolescents. Individual and cultural identity cannot be separated from each other as identity development is affected by both the changes that occur within the socio-cultural context and within the individual (Hill *et al.*, 2007). Prior to 1994, during the struggle against racism and apartheid, Thom and Coetzee (2004), claim that black adolescent's cultural identity

was strengthened and a common social identity developed. When South Africa became a democratic society, black culture gained its due status and black South Africans were able to proudly accept their culture as part of their identity. Conversely, Thom and Coetzee (2004) attributed the lower level of identity development of white adolescents to the fact that they are no longer the dominant and solely respected and competent cultural group in South Africa. As a result, they have to re-examine their cultural identity in order to gain a sense of mutuality with the broader South African society. The period of psychosocial moratorium may last longer for white adolescents as they examine and experiment with their personal and cultural values, norms and roles in a changing society (Thom & Coetzee, 2004).

c) **Vocational/Career identity:** According to Louw and Louw (2007) an adolescent's quest to answer the question *Who am I?* is closely related to the question *What am I going to do one day?* Deciding on and preparing for a future career is a very important task during adolescence. The development of a vocational identity involves becoming aware of career interests, goals, skills and talents (Strauser, Lustig & Ciftci, 2008).

Adolescents are in the life and career stage where they ask questions such as:

- Who *am I?*
- *What do I have to work with, in terms of interests, aptitude and personality characteristics?*
- *What do I want to make of myself*?

The career development theory of Donald Super views career development as the formation and implementation of self-concepts in occupational contexts (Super, 1990). The self-concept is an individual's views of his personal characteristics. While a person's self-concept can and does change over time, it is important to have an established self-concept in order to make congruent, informed decisions (Schreuder & Coetzee, 2006). Kail and Cavanaugh (2001) describe the following three

phases of career development that are closely related to identity development:

i) Crystallization takes place during early adolescence and involves exploring a number of career options that correlate with one's personality and interests.

ii) Specification occurs when adolescents make choices that limit their career options by choosing an occupation and/or further education and training. During specification adolescents start to incorporate their career choices into their identities.

iii) Implementation occurs when individuals enter their chosen career and it becomes part of how they view themselves.

According to Erikson's theory, identity achievement is a crucial step towards becoming a productive happy adult as it serves as a basis for our adult expectations and goals (Berk, 2000). A negative outcome of adolescence is identity confusion which results in the adolescent being unprepared for the psychological challenges of adulthood (Hill *et al.,* 2007). If the psychosocial crisis of "Identity versus Identity Diffusion" is not resolved during adolescence it can result in role confusion where an adolescent is unable to integrate his various roles and lacks the ability and self-confidence to make decisions (Louw & Louw, 2007). Identity or role confusion can also result in identity foreclosure or a negative identity.

Erikson claims that the identity crisis that occurs during adolescence is usually resolved by 15 to 18 years, however, the demarcation of adolescence is difficult. Research suggests that only 20% of adolescents are sure of their identity at 18 years old (Louw & Louw, 2007). Erikson's use of the term "Identity Crisis" seems to imply an impending disaster or traumatic experience. Contrary to this Kroger (2006) states that the concept "Identity Crisis" does not mean that the adolescent is on the verge of an impending disaster but rather that this stage of development is a key turning point in a person's identity development when development must move one way. As positive psychology forms part of my personal conceptual framework as an educational psychologist, I prefer to take a more balanced view on adolescence. While adolescence is a time of great change and conflict and

tensions can arise during the renegotiation of roles, it can also be a positive time for adolescents who are experiencing many firsts, like their first kiss or romantic relationship as well as the excitement of further studies and career possibilities. By creating a safe and optimal environment for exploration and self-discovery adolescents can be supported as they cross the bridge from childhood to adulthood.

2.2.2.2 JAMES MARCIA'S THEORY OF IDENTITY STATUSES

Marcia (1993) hypothesises that identity development involves two steps. The first step involves the adolescent breaking away from childhood beliefs and exploring alternatives for identity in a particular area, and the second step involves the adolescent making a commitment as to his individual identity in that area. Earlier, Marcia (1991) had identified four "Identity Statuses" to describe the process of identity development. In Table 2.1 Berk (2000: 457) describes these identity statuses as follows:

TABLE 2.1:   James Marcia's Identity Statuses

Identity Achievement	The status achieved when after adequate exploration, adolescents commit themselves to self-chosen values and goals.
Moratorium	This is the stage of exploration and gathering of information with the desire to find values to guide the adolescent's life.
Identity Foreclosure	When a commitment is made without exploring alternatives.
Identity Diffusion	This refers to the identity status of individuals who do not have firm commitments to values and goals and therefore lack clear direction.

Many adolescents start out identity foreclosed and diffused, but by late adolescence have moved towards moratorium and identity achievement (Marcia, 1991). Identity achievement and moratorium are psychologically healthy routes to a mature self-definition, whereas foreclosure and diffusion are maladaptive (Berk, 2000). The establishment of identity without exploration is associated with lower levels of mental health and more fragile self-concepts (Hill *et al.,* 2007).

While this research study has been carried out from a post-modern narrative approach, a review of Erikson's and Marcia's developmental theories was included as the researcher believes that these theories provide the foundation from which an adolescent's development can be understood and further research can be carried out. The researcher feels that the explanations and definitions provided by Erikson and Marcia help to identify where the adolescent is in his process of identity development. I used Erikson and Marcia's theory of identity development, not only to plan the research study, but also to make sense of and analyse the data obtained during the research process.

While the focus of this study is on identity development, it is important to keep in mind that this is only one domain of adolescent development and it cannot be seen in isolation from other domains of development. To view adolescents in their totality we need to understand how development in other domains can affect identity development.

2.3 DOMAINS OF ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT INFLUENCING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana (2006:38), state the following: *As in a spider's web, whatever happens in one part affects all other parts.* I support the view presented by Gouws and Kruger (1994) that it is important to view adolescents in their totality as complex individuals with, intellectual, emotional and social qualities, among others, which develop in different ways, at different rates and at different times in life. Development in different domains will affect development in other domains. For example, the adolescent's emotional state at any stage of development, may affect his concentration and, therefore his cognitive development. Development in different domains can have a psychological impact on the total development of the adolescent, including his identity development.

Table 2.2 summarises how development in other areas of development can affect identity development.

TABLE 2.2: **Summary of how development in different domains can affect identity development**

Physical	Berk (2000), states that puberty is linked to important changes in self-image, mood, and interaction with parents and peers. The timing of biological maturity can either have a positive or negative impact on social and emotional functioning and therefore psychological adjustment. Acceptance and integration of physical changes is important for forming a sense of unity as well maintaining a sense of continuity (Mussen *et al.*, 1990).
Cognitive	During adolescence most individuals gradually move from the concrete operational stage of cognitive development and enter the formal operational stage of cognitive development (Berk, 2000). Mussen *et al.* (1990) claim that cognitive changes during adolescence not only play a vital role in helping adolescents cope with increasingly complex educational tasks and vocational demands, but also influence many other aspects of development. Cognitive changes have an influence on many aspects such as the nature of the parent-child relationship, emerging personality characteristics, planning of future educational and vocational goals, mounting concerns with social, political and personal values, as well as the development of personal identity (Kroger, 2006).
	Gouws and Kruger (1994:53) contend that *the adolescent's formal operational ability leads to increasing introspection, that is self-consciousness, which prompts deliberate self-criticism, self-evaluation, and efforts at improvement as part of their quest for identity.* Self-contemplation is vital for the development of a self-concept and reaching identity achievement.
Social	An individual does not exist in isolation but forms a system that exists as a subsystem of a larger system. Individuals and their systems cannot be separated from each other as the boundaries between systems are open and interaction between systems is dynamic and reciprocal (Maree & Ebersohn, 2002). These constant and dynamic interactions between and within systems contribute to shaping an adolescent's self-knowledge and thus influences identity construction.
	The microsystem, which involves proximal interactions within the home, school and peer settings, has important and lasting effects on an individual's development (Thomas, 2005).
	Parents, peers as well as the larger society form part of an adolescent's microsystem.
	• Parenting: a secure base from which adolescents can explore the world as well as an effective parenting style can enhance the development of moratorium and identity achievement. Foreclosed adolescents usually have a close connection with their parents but lack the opportunity to have a healthy separation. A diffused identity status is usually experienced by adolescents who have less warm, open communication at home.
	• Peer interactions: can provide adolescents with the support and opportunities to explore different roles. They can, however, also have negative influences on development when they exert unfavourable pressures and present as negative role models.

	• Larger society: cultural context and historical time period can also affect identity development.
	Achieving social maturity involves gradually abandoning the childhood security of dependence on parents, adjusting to sexual maturation and establishing cooperative and workable relationships with peers. Mussen *et al.* (1990) claim that before adolescents can achieve this they need to have some idea of who they are, where they are going and what possibilities there are of getting there.
Personality	Personality encompasses a person's complete being and includes all other domains of adolescent development. According to Bee and Boyd (2002), it can be defined as the sum of what a person is, why they are like that and how they appear to and are perceived by others. Identity status is linked to personality characteristics. For example, a flexible, open-minded approach to problem-solving is important to achieving a mature identity while adolescents who lack confidence in decision making can result in identity diffusion. Self-understanding and identity development are important aspects of personality development (Louw & Louw, 2007).

For the purpose of this study, I felt it was important to have knowledge of both traditional and post-modern theories of identity development as traditional theories often provide the foundation on which new theories can be built. Narrative orientated theories are one of several types of post-modern therapeutic approaches.

2.4   THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

2.4.1   ASSUMPTIONS UNDERLYING THE NARRATIVE APPROACH

Narrative theory assumes that narrative is the primary form of translating human experience into meaningful stories and unified identities (Brooks & Dallos, 2009). As individuals develop, they create internalised narratives and stories (Winston Rice, Bradshaw, Lloyd, Harris, Burford, Clodmir, Kizzie, Carothers, McClair & Burrell, 2004). Morgan (2000) notes that people live multi-storied lives with numerous narratives taking place at the same time. This results in continuous negotiation and interpretation of their experiences. Narrative therapy is a means of re-authoring or re-storying these conversations in order to arrive at some personal meaning. The role of narrative therapists is to work in collaboration with their clients and to facilitate a safe exploratory environment (Smith & Nylund, 1997). The dual relationship created by practitioners undertaking research during their own counselling or psychotherapeutic service is very likely to have an effect, either

positive or negative, on both the therapy and the research (Bond, 2004). For this reason, I endeavoured to separate the two roles and took on only the role of researcher. Qualitative researchers and therapists have common goals such as making a difference with their work and seeking to empower and benefit their participants above all else (Bond, 2004). In this research, however, my goal was to gather data, not to provide any therapeutic services.

According to Morgan (2000), the basic assumptions of the narrative approach are as follows:

- Narrative therapy seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling.
- Stories guide the lives of people and are not produced in isolation.
- People are the experts on their own lives and can be supported to take responsibility and ownership of their own stories.
- Problems are seen as separate from people.
- People have the skills and competencies to change the relationship with problems in their lives.
- Narrative conversations are guided and directed by the interests of those who are consulting the therapist.
- Therapists adopt a curious stance and seek to understand what is of interest to the people consulting them.

Narrative counselling and positive psychology both aim at uncovering a client's hidden strengths and resources. If adolescents who are experiencing their adolescence as stressful and filled with tensions and conflicts are able to find ways of becoming aware of and mobilising their strengths and resources, they would be better able to cope with this time of change. In the South African context, adolescents are not only experiencing the tensions of adolescence but also systemic tensions like poverty and political changes. Therefore the benefits of narration could be even greater than for adolescents in other countries. It is important to note that narration also resonates with the oral tradition of many South Africans and may be more effective than using psychological assessment and intervention techniques based on western principles.

This study was explorative in nature as I was interested in whether or not the compilation of a Personal Portfolio could support identity development in an adolescent. By comparing traditional and narrative orientated theories, the underlying basis for the Personal Portfolio becomes evident.

2.4.2 TRADITIONAL VERSUS NARRATIVE APPROACHES

In this study the compilation of the Personal Portfolio was based on the post-modern narrative approach. Through using these techniques in the Personal Portfolio, I aimed to facilitate the participant's exploration of subjective experiences and thus possibly support self-exploration. Post-modernism relates to the multiplicity of perspectives, contextual influences, social constructions of reality as well as the subjective meaning that individuals ascribe to their experiences (Maree, Ebersohn & Vermaak, 2008). This shift to subjectivism is especially relevant in multi-cultural, pluralistic countries like South Africa (Maxwell, 2007). Narrative approaches to psychotherapy are derived from post-modern philosophies that emphasise the importance of shared language in the social construction of reality (Corey, 2001). Narrative approaches and post-modern philosophies share the assumption that knowledge is socially constructed and that there are many, valid and diverse ways of understanding ourselves and others.

Post-modernism implies that the universe cannot be understood objectively and that reality exists in the assumptions of the observer (Maree *et al.,* 2006). In other words, post-modern therapies operate from the premise that all knowledge is based on perspective, rather than assuming that all professionals have access to objective truth and that clients improve only when they concede to this knowledge (Smith & Nylund, 1997).

Amundson and Stewart in Smith and Nylund (1997:23) distinguish between traditional therapeutic approaches, which they describe as *a theory of certainty,* and post-modern therapeutic approaches which they describe as *a theory of curiosity* as follows:

TABLE 2.3: **A therapy of certainty and curiosity** (Smith & Nylund, 1997:24)

A therapy of certainty	A therapy of curiosity
Is uncomfortable with ambiguity; needs to have structure and clarity.	Can tolerate confusion and ambiguity without moving to premature closure.
Quickly insists on a diagnosis and adheres to descriptions of those diagnoses.	Moves more slowly in defining the problem, taking time to consider the experience in the room.
Relies on problem-saturated description of client behaviour.	Takes care to discover exceptions to the problematic behaviour.
Clients who "don't get it" are seen as "resistant" and this resistance must be subverted, broken through, etc.	When it seems that clients "don't get it" it may be that we haven't asked the kind of questions that will move therapy forward.
Is concerned with asking and answering "why" questions.	Asks circular questions and examines the effects of the problems.
Closes spaces by narrowing observations to one's constructions/predispositions.	Opens spaces by considering observations from many system levels.
Assumes that a symptom serves just as a function.	Does not assume symptoms to be doing anything in particular, and may fit many theoretical explanations.
Operates from a first-order perspective and does not consider the therapist-client system.	Operates from a second-order perspective, always considering the therapist-client system.
Is concerned with teaching, explaining, disseminating "expert knowledge."	Asks questions. Looks for the special indigenous knowledge of the client.
Discounts or overlooks the resources of the client.	Takes care to discover what strengths are present.

While this research study does not constitute narrative research, my aim was to facilitate the narration of the participant's life story, including past, present and future narratives, through the activities[9] of the Personal Portfolio. These activities were based on the techniques used during narrative therapy. Certain narrative theories of personality, particularly those of, Tomkins, McAdams, Singer and Hermans, influenced the planning of the Personal Portfolio activities.

2.4.3 NARRATIVE THEORIES OF PERSONALITY

According to Winston *et al. (*2004), narrative theorists of personality are particularly interested in the internalised narratives and stories that individuals

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[9] Refer to Table 2.5

create as they develop. These internalised narratives attempt to bring into focus the recollected past, perceived present and anticipated future (Winston *et al.*, 2004). In that sense, *narrative therapy views people as unique histories* (Polkinghorne, 2004:53)*.*

John, Robins and Pervin (2008) provide the following outline of the first and most widely studied narrative theories of personality:

TABLE 2.4:   **Summary of narrative theories of personality**

Tomkins's script theory	This theory of personality sees the developing individual like a playwright who organises his emotional life in terms of prominent scenes and recurrent scripts. Tomkins proposes that individual difference in psychological life are based on the particular kinds of affect-laden scenes and rule-generating scripts that individuals construct from their experiences as they move through life.
Dan McAdams's life-story model of identity	This theory maintains that during late adolescence and young adulthood individuals begin to interpret their lives as evolving stories that integrate the reconstructed parts and the anticipated future in order to provide life with some semblance of unity and purpose.
Jefferson Singer's self defining narrative memory	This theory argues that self-defining memories are the key components of a narrative memory as they represent vivid and emotionally intense life events that reflect recurrent life concerns.
Hubert Hermans' theory of dialogical self	This theory emphasises that personal narratives reveal multiple and conflicting self-expressions. According to Hermans (2008), a narrative identity is similar to a polyphonic novel that authored by many different voices within the person, all of whom engage in dialogue with one other and with real characters in their external world.

Brooks and Dallos (2009) describe narrative theories of personality construction as possessing the ability to guide conceptualisation of identity as a construction. Construction performed by the individual reflects his individuality and uniqueness. A developmental task of adolescence is to make sure of one's experiences and relationships through the development of and reflection on life narratives, in order to produce an integrated life story. As adolescents develop their cognitive abilities, they are able to engage in formal operational thought which enables them to create and possess a life story. This contributes to creating their identity (Brooks & Dallos, 2009; Winston *et al.*, 2004).

Certain aspects of these narrative theories of personality were taken into account during the process of planning this research study. Tompkins's focus on prominent scenes and recurrent scripts was helpful to both researcher and participant in identifying recurrent themes in the Personal Portfolio, especially with regard to goals, beliefs and values which need to be considered during identity development. McAdams's focus on the integration of past, present and anticipated future assisted in planning activities that would facilitate the exploration of these aspects of an adolescent's life in order to reach a complete life story. The Personal Portfolio activities were also aimed at evoking self-defining memories in order to assist the adolescent to become aware of what he believes, what he values and what his possible future goals may be.

2.5   THE PERSONAL PORTFOLIO

The term portfolio first emerged in teacher education in the 1980s (Jones, 2009). Losardo and Notari-Syverson (2001) define the portfolio as a purposeful collection of work that can be used to monitor and document progress and achievement over time. Portfolios have since been used in education for a range of purposes, particularly as comprehensive assessment tools (Fernsten & Fernsten, 2005) and to promote deeper learning (Jones, 2009).

As a Life Orientation educator, I had become aware of the benefits of using a portfolio as an assessment and learning tool. In this study, the term Personal Portfolio is used to denote the special focus on the individual and his personal life story.

The following insights influenced the design of the Personal Portfolio:

- According to Losardo and Notari-Syverson (2001), portfolio assessment approaches share the basic tenets of ecological and social constructivist views of child development which emphasise performance-based assessments that provide a complex, comprehensive and meaningful portrait of the child. This is consistent with the aim of actively engaging

the adolescent in meaningful activities[10] which could result in a comprehensive life story and thereby contribute to overall self-awareness and self-knowledge.

- Segers, Gijbels and Thurlings (2008:36) define a portfolio as *a purposeful collection of examples of learning collected over a period of time, which gives visible and detailed evidence of a person's attainment of competencies.* The activities included in the Personal Portfolio were planned with the purpose of providing the participant an opportunity to explore many different aspects of his life and thus construct a comprehensive life story.

- Portfolios are flexible and open ended and content is chosen according to the individual child's educational needs (Losardo & Notari-Syverson, 2001). The activities planned for the Personal Portfolio were chosen with the adolescent stage of development in mind. Although they provided data for the research study, the activities were participant orientated and the participant was able to complete them in any way he felt comfortable.

- Segers *et al.* (2008) point out that the construction of a portfolio promotes deep learning, which is associated with searching for meaning and is driven by an intrinsic motivation to seek meaning and understanding. The goal of the Personal Portfolio activities was to provide the participant with the opportunity for deeper introspection through activities that he experienced as meaningful and relevant to his life story.

- Research carried out by Fernsten and Fernsten (2005) indicates that reflecting on portfolio work helps learners think critically about their assignments. According to Jones, engagement in portfolio activities can trigger reflection that is not often present in every day practice: *[this] reflection is a process of critically examining one's present and past practices as a means of building one's knowledge and understanding in order to improve practice* (2009:1). Reflecting on activities, both verbally and in writing, was one of the proposed data collection methods. The aim

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[10] See chapter 3, Table 3.2 for an explanation of the activities.

of this was to allow the participant to reflect on both the process and value of each activity as well as on the Personal Portfolio as a whole.

- Losardo and Notari-Syverson (2001) state that the portfolio is a powerful tool for facilitating communication among different professionals and with parents as it provides coherent documentation of a child's progress over time. Communication and story telling are very important aspects of the narrative approach as through this the participant is encouraged to reveal his life story. My aim was to promote communication between me and the participant through the Personal Portfolio activities.

- According to Losardo and Notari-Syverson (2001), a portfolio usually includes different types of performance-based samples such as artwork, picture journals, dictations as well as teacher and parent observations. There are no specific rules that dictate a portfolio's appearance. This too was the case with the Personal Portfolio of the participant as the activities included were varied to meet his needs.

2.5.1   RATIONALE FOR THE PERSONAL PORTFOLIO ACTIVITIES

It is important to mention at this stage that while I had possible assumptions about the activities of the Personal Portfolio prior to study commencing, I was aware of these assumptions and limited my influence by being open to the participant's value and meaning attached to each activity.

Each activity that was included in the Personal Portfolio had a specific aim. These aims are provided in Table 2. 5.

TABLE 2.5:   Aims of Personal Portfolio activities[11]

Activity	Aim
Drawings 1 & 2	A symbolic representation of the self should be a less threatening way of revealing who one is compared to expressing one's thoughts and views in words, especially during the initial stages of the study. It requires deep and creative thinking thus encouraging deeper self introspection. I felt that it could provide

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[11] See Chapter 3 for an explanation of the procedures for the Personal Portfolio activities.

Activity	Aim
	me with a starting point to where the participant was possibly experiencing any confusion or conflict with regard to himself and his identity. The first drawing was done during the first session. The second drawing took place in the final session to see if the process of compiling the Personal Portfolio had in any way contributed to the participant's self-knowledge and therefore identity.
Individual Identity Collage	This was one of the first activities introduced and aimed to make the participant feel more comfortable and thus facilitate conversation. The activity requires the participant to reflect on certain aspects of himself, like his likes, dislikes, strengths, interests, goals, dreams, role models, and so forth, and then to visually represent these aspects in the form of a collage. This collage could provide the participant with a more comprehensive picture of who he is.
Interests, Talents And Values	This is a straightforward activity that doesn't require much creativity and will appeal to an individual that prefers facts and lists. While it doesn't require creativity it does require self-exploration and introspection. Becoming aware of one's interests, talents and values can assist in identifying and setting priorities and goals in life.
Life Line	The purpose of the life line is to allow the participant to become aware of any patterns and themes that are recurrent in his life and how these influence him and the decisions he makes. This activity can also reveal resilience and strengths that the participant was previously unaware of.
My Circle Of Influences	People play a very important role as adolescents do not grow and develop in isolation. Acknowledging one's role models can bring about an awareness of values and goals as well as who one identifies with and why.
Life Chapters	This is possibly one of the most important activities in the Personal Portfolio. It allows the participant to narrate a chronological life history focusing on meaningful experiences. Through narration and reflection on one's life, greater insight can be obtained into one's developmental experiences, life conflicts, major goals, significant influences, interests and activities, influential persons, and so on (Cochran, 1997). Recurring themes and scripts can provide the participant with deeper self-understanding.
Success and failure experiences	This activity aims at evoking self-defining memories in the participant. Self-analysis of one's past successful experiences can help one discover one's talents and strengths, while self-analysis of one's perceived failures can bring about an awareness of resilience and life lessons learnt.
Job from Heaven and Job from Hell	Knowing what one would like and expect one day from a career, as well as being aware of what one wants to avoid and dislikes, is an important step in preparing for and deciding on a future career. The aim of this activity is to encourage the participant to develop a future narrative with regard to his career identity.

While the compilation of the Personal Portfolio was mainly based on post-modern narrative approaches, the following traditional approaches also influenced the activities designed for the Personal Portfolio:

- Carl Rogers's person-centred approach corresponds with narrative counselling in that the client is the expert on his life and has the potential for constructive change and positive personal development (Thompson & Henderson, 2007). As the counsellor or researcher (which is the case in this research study) creates a safe space for self-exploration, the client can tap into personal resources which can lead to more effective decision making and productive behaviour.

- Gestalt theory proposes that awareness alone can be curative (Thompson & Henderson, 2007). Through narratives I aimed to "increase" the participant's self-awareness which in turn could support the development of identity.

- Positive psychology and the asset based approach both advocate building on the client's strengths in order to address challenges. According to Coetzee (2005), the asset based approach is an effective means of shifting perception in a positive direction. An optimistic thinking style helps maintain hope, increases resilience and improves one's chances of a successful outcome (Smith, 2006). By focusing on his best qualities, a client can put all his strengths to work and pursue what makes his life worth living.

  During adolescence, when there is a quest for identity, identifying and mobilising developmental assets can support young people to grow up to be healthy, caring and responsible (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Scales and Leffert (1999) identify both internal (positive values, social competencies, commitment to learning and positive identity) and external (support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations and constructive use of time) developmental assets that constitute the building blocks of healthy development.

- Developmental Psychology: I feel it is important to be knowledgeable and informed regarding the stage of development clients (or research participants) are at, as this will provide a greater insight into what they are capable of cognitively, as well as what they are experiencing physically, socially and emotionally. This knowledge can be helpful in facilitating the planning of appropriate and appealing activities for the Personal Portfolio. Since not all people develop at the same rate, it is important to ascertain the client's specific level of development so that support offered meets his unique needs.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the literature that informed this study. Particular attention was given to Erikson and Marcia's theories of identity development which provide useful insight into the complex and often difficult process of identity construction. An exploration of these theories confirmed my perception that adolescents may sometimes require additional support on their quest for identity development.

The chapter also discussed and compared the traditional and narrative approaches to identity development that provided the theoretical framework for planning of the Personal Portfolio activities and guided the research process, especially data interpretation. Finally, the rationale for the Personal Portfolio and the aims of each activity were explained.

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CHAPTER 3
Research Design and Methodology

3.1   OVERVIEW

This chapter will describe the aim of the study and provide the framework of the research methodology. The research methodology and data collection strategies that were employed in this study were informed by the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions.

A case study research design was selected to facilitate an investigation in order to gain an in-depth insight into how the research participant experienced compiling a Personal Portfolio.

Detailed attention will be given to ethical considerations as well as the measures taken to ensure trustworthiness.

3.2   AIM OF THE STUDY

This research study was explorative and descriptive in nature. Its purpose was to conduct an open and flexible investigation that would provide in-depth insight into whether or not the compilation of a Personal Portfolio could support identity development in an adolescent. My aim was to contribute to the existing theory of identity development in adolescence. The following primary research question directed this study:

What is the potential value of a Personal Portfolio for identity development of an adolescent?

3.3   THE RESEARCH PARADIGM

A research paradigm can be described as a basic set of beliefs which guide the researcher's actions in terms of how the researcher views reality, how knowledge is perceived and which research methods the researcher prefers (Creswell, 2007; Terre Blanche & Durrheim 2002). The choice of a paradigm emerges from the aim of the study (Silverman, 2000). In this study, I chose to work qualitatively and to view the participant and reality from a constructivist-interpretivist perspective seeing that the aim of this study was to gain insight into the potential value of a Personal Portfolio in an adolescent's quest for identity development. According to Silverman (2000), qualitative research tends to emphasise the dynamic, holistic and individual aspects of human experiences by attempting to capture those aspects in their entirety, within the context of those who are experiencing them.

Working qualitatively, the following beliefs guided my actions during the research process:

❖   **Reality**

Reality, according to qualitative research, is regarded as subjective to each individual and based on personal knowledge. The constructivist approach rejects the positivist belief that reality is objectively measurable and proposes that reality is constructed through interactive negotiation between the researcher and the research participant. According to Creswell (2007), reality is also regarded as context dependent and is accessed by means of an interpretivist approach. Interpretive researchers aim to make sense of feelings, experiences, social situations or phenomena as they occur in the real world (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999).

❖   **Knowledge construction**

Knowledge is constructed by an agent's actions and his or her reflections on them (Von Glasersfeld, 1996). The qualitative approach lies within an interpretivist tradition, one that seeks to understand the meaning of human experiences. Meaning making is a key aspect in constructivism (MacMahon *et al.,* 2003).

❖ **Research methods**

Qualitative research is unequivocally concerned with subjective experiences and naturalistic enquiry (Cohen *et al.*, 2002). The purpose of qualitative research is not to predict and control but rather to describe and understand (Speziale & Carpenter, 2005). This study was not approached with any preconceived assumptions as the main focus was to facilitate exploration with the research participant rather than to measure the social world objectively. It emanated from a desire to explore the value of compiling a Personal Portfolio could have for an adolescent who was in the process of identity construction. The research methods in this study included interviews and other techniques that were aimed at discovering the research participant's world and experiences thereof.

3.4 CASE STUDY DESIGN

This research study involved an instrumental case study which, according to Creswell (2007), provides insight into a case. Although traditional theorists view case study design as unscientific (Cohen *et al.,* 2002; Yin, 2003), it is ideal for research within a constructivist-interpretivist paradigm. In this study, the case study was used to explore and gain understanding into whether or not the compilation of a Personal Portfolio had an influence on the identity development of an adolescent.

According to Cohen *et al. (*2002), the hallmarks of a case study are:

- It is concerned with a rich and vivid description of the phenomenon and the context in which the phenomenon occurs.
- It provides a chronological narrative of the events relative to the case.
- It combines a description of the events with the analysis of them.
- The focus is on individual actors or groups of actors, and seeks to understand their perceptions of events.
- The researcher is integrally involved in the case.
- The focus is on specific phenomenon.
- Temporal and geographical boundaries allow for definition of their nature.

- An attempt is made to portray the richness of the case in writing up the report thus contributing to the readers' understanding of the phenomenon.

In this study, a case study was used to obtain a rich description of how the research participant experienced compiling a Personal Portfolio and whether or not a Personal Portfolio can be used to support identity development during adolescence. The study which centred on a single adolescent and used multi methods of data collection made it possible to produce a rich and vivid description of the findings.

3.4.1 ADVANTAGES AND CHALLENGES OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Nisbet and Watts (1984 in Cohen *et al.*, 2002) identify the following strengths and weakness of a case study design:

3.4.1.1 Strengths

- The results are more easily understood by a wide audience as they are frequently written in everyday, non-professional language.
- The results are immediately intelligible in that they speak for themselves.
- They catch unique features that may otherwise be lost in larger scale data like surveys.
- They are strong on reality.
- They can provide insight into other, similar situations and cases, thereby assisting interpretation of other similar cases.
- They can be undertaken by a single researcher without requiring a full research team.
- They can embrace and build in unanticipated events and uncontrolled variables.

3.4.1.2 Weaknesses

- The results may not be generalisable.
- They are not easily open to cross-checking and may be selective, biased, personal and subjective.

- They are prone to problems of observer bias, despite attempts to address reflexivity.

Other researchers take a similar view. Mouton (2001), for instance, points out that the main strengths of a case study design are its high construct validity, in-depth insights and the opportunity to establish good rapport with research participants. These, together with the flexibility and openness of the design, allowed me to address any unexpected issues as they arose during the research process as well as to *catch the close-up reality and thick description of participant's lived experiences of thoughts about and feelings for, a situation* (Cohen *et al.*, 2002:182).

As far as the disadvantages or weaknesses are concerned, Lindegger (2002) also notes the possible lack of generalisability of results, problems with the validity of information, difficulty in testing causal links, and non-standardisation of measurement. In addition, he points out that analysis is time-consuming. Mouton (2001), on the other hand, is concerned with the possibility of researcher bias and lack of rigour in the analysis.

It is important to note that the purpose of this study was to provide a rich and detailed account of the research participant's experiences during the research process, rather than to generalise the findings. The study could, however, provide insight into other similar cases. To limit possible researcher bias and to ensure that the data was portrayed accurately, member checking took place. In addition, the researcher reflected on the both the process and content of the data collection. In light of the claim that qualitative research findings can never be a true reflection of reality (Durrheim & Wasser, 2002), strategies were used to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness[12] of the research study.
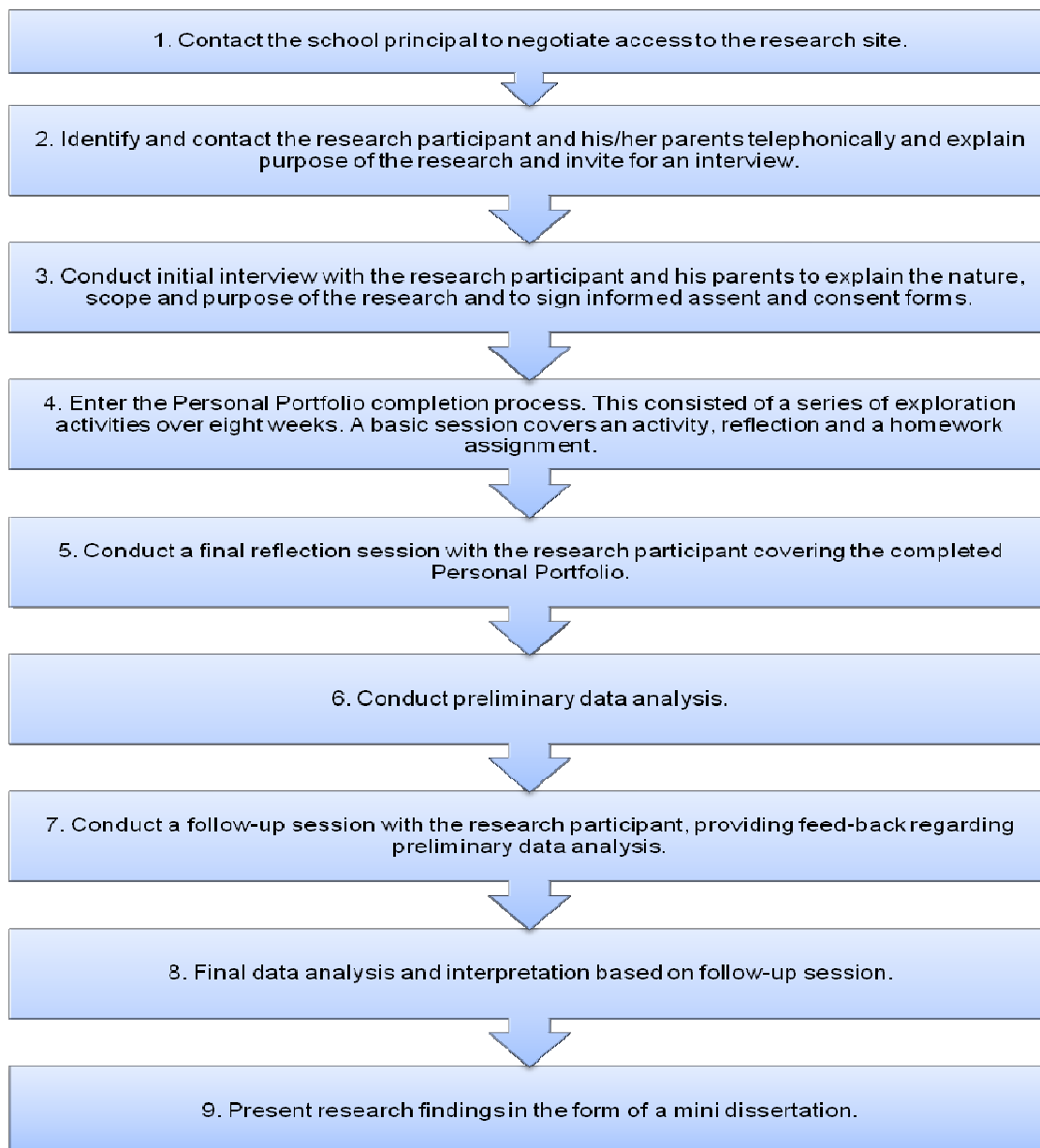
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[12] Refer to section 3.6 for a description of the measures that were selected to enhance trustworthiness of the study.

3.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.5.1 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Figure 3.1 indicates the steps involved in the research process and provide the reader with a bird's eye view of the process.

FIGURE 3.1: Overview of the research process

3.5.2 RESEARCH SITE

The research was carried out at an independent secondary school in Gauteng where I was working as an intern educational psychologist. The school has 225 learners and classes are kept to a maximum of 30 learners. While all the learners at the school are black, they come from diverse cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. Most learners are on mathematics and science scholarships or sponsored by private sponsors.

Research took place in a private and neutral setting. The research participant attended research sessions during free periods or after school in a private office on the school premises.

3.5.3 SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

The research participant was selected using purposeful convenience sampling as qualitative research does not require the same kind of rigour as quantitative research methods and a single subject can be used (Houser, 1998). While this type of sampling is less complicated and time consuming than other types of sampling, it did however require that the research participant meet certain criteria to ensure that the research question was being correctly addressed. The selected participant had to meet the following criteria:

- Was in the adolescent stage of development. For this study it included anyone between the ages of 12 and 17 years.
- Was available and accessible.
- Was willing and able to reflect on the research process and express his/her thoughts and feelings both verbally and in writing.

The research participant in this study was an African male aged 16 years and 5 months. He was in grade 10 and attended the school where I was completing my internship. While his home language was not English, his language of learning had been English for the past ten years, he was willing and able to comply with what was required during the research process in terms of oral and written language.

3.5.4 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

According to Cohen *et al.* (2002), participant observation, interviews, narrative accounts and documents, and diaries are data collection methods used in interpretative paradigm case studies.

To ensure that rich and detailed data was collected, multiple sources of evidence were employed. The following methods of data collection were used during this research study:

3.5.4.1 Personal Portfolio Activities

The research participant engaged in completing the following activities:

TABLE 3.2: Descriptions of Personal Portfolio Activities

Activity	Description
Drawing (1) **Drawing (2)**	The participant was instructed to draw a picture or symbol entitled *What I am* (Dail, 1989*)* After reflecting on the entire Personal Portfolio the participant was again asked to draw a picture or symbol entitled *What I am* (Dail, 1989)
Individual identity Collage	The collage consisted of two stages. The first stage involved the participant reflecting on questions such as: - Who am I? - What are my goals? - What is important to me? - What do I enjoy? - What is my dream? - What would I like to do? - Who are my role models? The second stage involved the participant creating a collage using pictures, words, quotes and/or drawings.
Interests, talents and values	This activity required the participant to reflect on what his interests, talents and values are and to represent these visually.
Life line	On a blank piece of paper, a line was drawn across the midpoint. On the far left the beginning of the line was labelled birth. The participant was asked to recall milestone experiences of life and to record them chronologically. In this activity, experiences are recorded by placing a dot higher on the sheet to the extent that it is positive or lower on the sheet to the extent that it is negative. Each dot is labelled to identify the event and then the dots are

Activity	Description
	connected to graphically represent the flow of the client's life (Cochran, 1997).
My circle of influences	This activity required the participant to identify and reflect on the people who have influenced his life in both positive and negative ways Then the participant was asked to plot these influences around a circle that represented them. The closer to the circle the greater the influence.
Life chapters	The participant was asked to think of his life as an autobiography. The chapter titles needed to reflect or sum up a particular period in his life. The participant was asked to write a few lines elaborating each chapter title (McAdams, 1993).
Success and failure experiences	The participant was asked to think about and write about three past success and failure experiences (Cochran, 1997).
Job from heaven, job from hell	This activity required the client to describe, in detail, two different work days. What he would consider as a perfect day at work and a nightmare day at work.

3.5.4.2 Open-ended interviews

After each session the research participant was asked to reflect on the completed activity, both orally and in writing. The researcher facilitated the reflection process by asking open ended questions such as:

- Tell me about the activity you have just completed.
- What were you thinking while you were completing the activity?
- What feelings were you experiencing while you were completing the activity?
- How did you experience completing the activity?

3.5.4.3 Tape-recording of participant interviews

The open ended interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed.

3.5.4.4 Reflective reports written by the research participant

The research participant was given a diary and at the end of each session was asked to take the activity home and to once again reflect on it in his diary.

3.5.5 RESEARCH DIARY

I kept a research diary throughout the research process. Both process and content notes were recorded. The diary was used to observe and record participant's verbal and non-verbal responses during the interview as well as research and personal reflections.

3.5.6 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Data was analysed from a constructivist-interpretivist framework by applying thematic analysis (Henning *et al.,* 2004). I used various reasoning strategies, including inductive reasoning, analysis, synthesis and intuition to extract themes from the data (Poggenpoel, 1998).

The process of analysis was as follows:

i. Transcription of all the tape-recorded interviews.

ii. Familiarisation with all the collected data by reading through the transcribed interviews, research diary, and the research participant's written reflective notes.

iii. Coding of all data manually. This was done by examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising the data.

iv. Delineation of emergent themes from the content.

v. Clustering of most frequent themes into core categories. Core categories were identified and interpreted utilising theoretical resources.

vi. A follow-up interview with the research participant involved presenting the preliminary data analysis for member checking.

vii. Integration of participant comments into the findings.

viii. Presentation of final data in the form of a mini dissertation.

3.6 MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

Reliability and validity are conceptualised as trustworthiness and quality in a qualitative paradigm (Golafshani, 2003). Qualitative research is concerned with the meanings and personal experiences of individuals, groups and sub-groups (Winter, 2000). To achieve research that is of good quality, the data generated

during qualitative research must be a true and accurate representation of the research participant's voice.

Qualitative researchers argue that the terms 'validity' and 'reliability' are not applicable to qualitative research and consider terms such as 'trustworthiness', 'worthy', 'relevant', 'plausible', 'confirmable', 'credible' and 'representative' as more appropriate (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Wolcot, 1999). Trustworthiness was ensured in this study by using the following various rigorous strategies during data collection and analysis.

3.6.1 CREDIBILITY

Poggenpoel (1998) defines credibility as the degree of confidence that the researcher has about the truth of the research findings. To establish credibility, I employed triangulation by collecting different types of data and evidence, and also carried out ten sessions, approximately one hour each. During this research phase, I made continuous observations of the participant and recorded them in my research diary. Participant checking was also carried out after initial data analysis to ensure that the research results were an accurate portrayal of the participant's experiences and perceptions.

3.6.2 DEPENDABILITY

Dependability confirms that the findings of a study can be replicated when carried out with the same participants or in a similar context (Poggenpoel, 1998). By leaving an audit trail, documenting the data, methods and decisions made during the study, dependability can be confirmed. All data, including copies of the Personal Portfolio activities, transcribed interviews and research diaries will be kept in a safe place at the University of Pretoria.

3.6.3 CONFIRMABILITY

Poggenpoel (1998) states that confirmability implies that the research methods and findings are not biased. The chain of evidence provided by the audit trail and the reflexive methodological account in the research diary were methods used to

establish confirmability. Participant checking was also carried out to ensure an accurate portrayal of the participant's voice.

3.6.4 TRANSFERABILITY

This concept refers to the generalisability of the findings to larger populations (Seale, 1999). Detailed descriptions and reflections of each session that were documented in the research diary could provide sufficient information for readers to judge the applicability of the findings to other known settings or similar cases.

3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The following ethical considerations described by Cohen *et al.* (2002); Bond (2004); Strydom (1998) and Babbie, Mouton, Voster and Prozesky (2002) were relevant to this study:

❖ **Informed consent**

Written permission to conduct the research at the school was obtained from the principal of the school after the scope and nature of the research study had been explained. After obtaining the necessary permission, the participant and his parents were telephonically invited for an interview during which the nature of the research study was clearly explained and they were made aware of the risks and benefits of the study. They also received a written document explaining the research in full, including the aims and methods that would be employed. Written informed consent was obtained from both the research participant and his parents.

❖ **Voluntary participation**

It was made clear to the research participant and his parents that participation was voluntary and that the participant could withdraw from the process at any stage.

❖ **Confidentiality and privacy**

The right to confidentiality is synonymous with the right to privacy. In this study data was handled in an ethical and confidential manner by keeping them in a place to which only the researcher had access and by removing any identifying information from the data. Furthermore, prior to the research, the research participant and his parents were informed that the analysed and interpreted data

would be published in the form of a mini dissertation and an article in an academic journal. During member checking after the preliminary data analysis, the research participant was asked if he was comfortable with the data that would be published and how it was written.

❖ **Deception of participants**

To ensure that the participant was not deceived in any way, the informed consent of the participant was obtained and he was provided with documentation describing the nature, purpose and scope of the study.

❖ **Protection from harm**

While the participant was not physically harmed in any way, this study was intrusive as it required the participant to share potentially emotionally sensitive information. For that reason, I scrupulously respected the participant's right to withdraw from or refuse to do a particular activity at any stage of the entire process or even to withdraw from the research completely. I also carefully monitored his well-being and provided him with the contact details of additional professional support.

❖ **The role of the researcher**

Lee and Renzetti (1993 in Abrahams, 2007), have pointed out that any research which seeks to explore personal experiences and perceptions must be regarded as a highly sensitive investigation. The researcher may encounter the ethical dilemma of having to take on dual roles. This dual role is very likely to affect both the therapy and the research, positively or negatively. I was aware that an existing limitation was that I was already perceived as the school intern psychologist whose role it was to provide therapeutic intervention. To avoid the ethical dilemma of taking on dual roles (researcher and counsellor) I ensured that, from the outset of the research process, the research participant understood the difference between a researcher and a counsellor. He was closely monitored to ensure that if at any stage therapeutic intervention was required, a referral would be made. Contact details of relevant professionals were also made available to the participant. I was scrupulous in ensuring that I recorded my personal reflections in my research diary after each session in order to ensure that my role of researcher was maintained.

3.8 SUMMARY

This chapter provided a detailed description of the research design, paradigm and methodology employed during this research study.

In order to address the research question, data was collected, analysed and interpreted within a constructivist-interpretivist framework. While there are many criticisms of qualitative enquiry, this approach seemed best suited to research the experience of the research participant during and after completing the Personal Portfolio.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study I applied certain measures such as triangulation, prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observations, and leaving an audit trail and personal reflections. I also met ethical obligations to protect the rights and identity of the research participant.

Chapter 4 describes the data analysis and data interpretation processes.

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CHAPTER 4
Research Findings

4.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of the themes that emerged from the data analysis process. The discussion of the results is presented against existing theoretical evidence. An illustration of the core categories, sub-categories and related themes, confirmed through participant checking, is provided.

4.2 THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Data was collected by means of Personal Portfolio activities, open-ended interviews, research diary and reflective reports written by the research participant. The research participant was required to complete nine Personal Portfolio activities. After each activity, an open-ended interview was conducted to allow the research participant to reflect on the activity. As the researcher, I kept a diary in which I compiled field notes of observations and participant explanations of each activity as well as descriptions of the content. The research participant was also provided with a diary in which he could further reflect on each activity at home.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

As stated in Chapter 3, the data was analysed within a constructivist-interpretivist framework by applying thematic analysis. First, all the tape-recorded interviews were transcribed. Next, I familiarised myself with all the raw data and made sense of it by reading through the transcribed interviews, my research diary and the research participant's reflective diary a number of times. I then identified and extracted emergent themes from the raw data using coding. Sub-themes and related categories were identified and interpreted utilising theoretical resources. After the preliminary data analysis had been done, participant checking was used

to ensure that the results were an accurate portrayal of the participant's views. Themes identified and verified by the participant will be discussed in the section below.

4.4 DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Research results will be discussed by means of core categories, sub-categories and related themes. Table 4.1 on the following page, presents the analysis.

4.4.1 IDENTITY CRISIS/CONFUSION

The first core category resonates with Erikson (1977) and Marcia's (1991) theories which state that the adolescent stage of development involves a process of establishing an identity. Both authors make a strong case that this can be a challenging and confusing stage of development. The emergence of this theme confirmed one of the reasons for this research study. During my service training and internship, I had concluded that the adolescents I was observing were struggling to make future decisions because they had not yet established their identities.

The two major sub-categories were identified as questioning personal identity and sexual identity conflict.

4.4.1.1 Questioning personal identity

This sub-category emerged, especially during the first two sessions, during which the research participant expressed that he was feeling 'lost' and not sure where he belonged. As researcher I observed this uncertainty in both his verbal and non-verbal language. He was initially quite hesitant to start the first activity and did not seem to know where to begin. The planning of his collage also took him a very long time as he would choose certain pictures and words and then seemed to change his mind and disregard them.

- *I cannot find myself.*
- *I still have the feeling that, where do I really belong?*

FIGURE 4.1:   Overview of Research Results
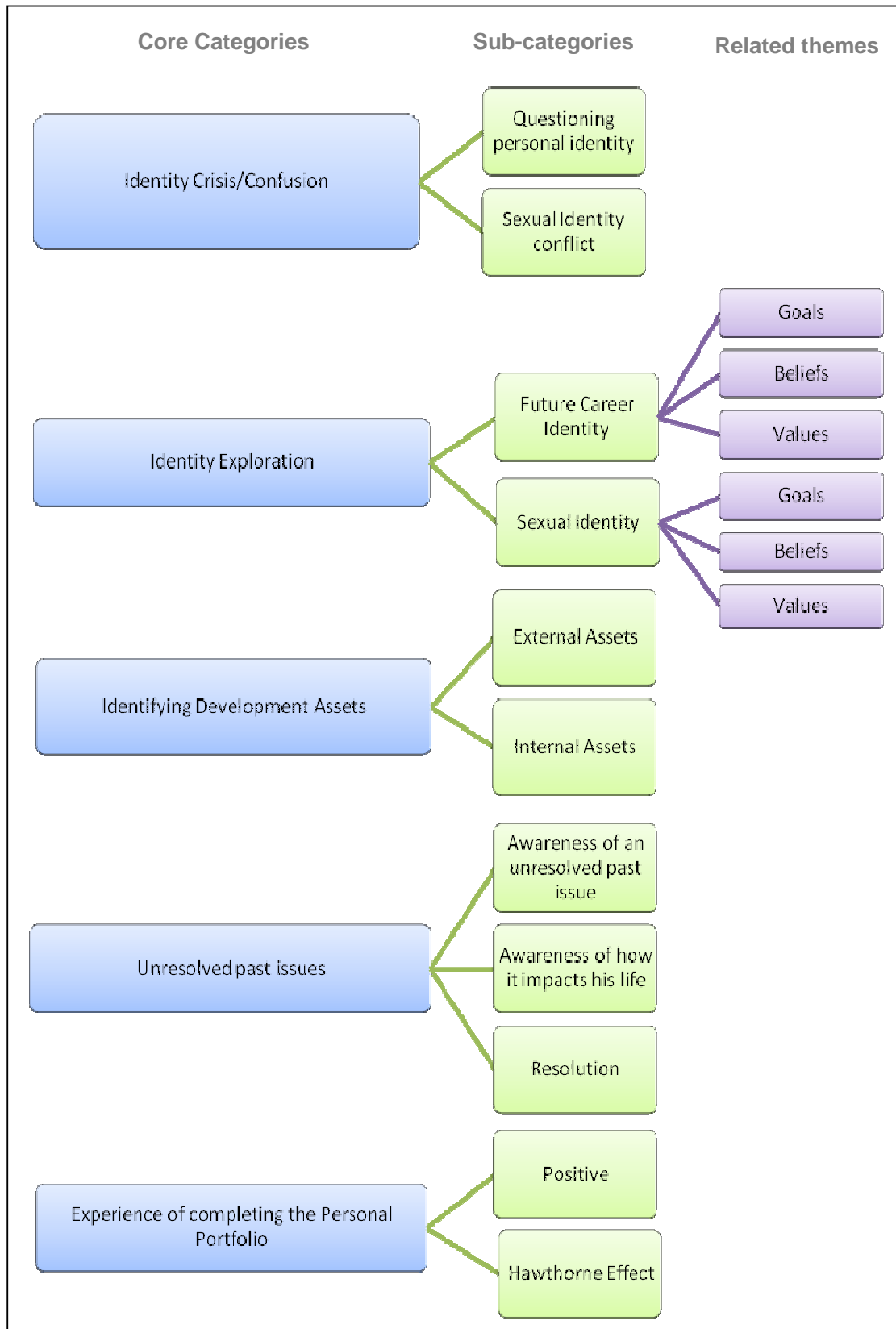
4.4.1.2 Sexual identity conflict

This sub-category was identified throughout most of the research process. I initially observed that, while the participant paid a lot of attention to his sexual identity, he seemed uncomfortable with exploring this aspect of himself. At the beginning of the research process, this could have been due to the fact that rapport had not yet been established between the participant and me and he was not comfortable divulging personal information. However, it could also be attributed to the conflict he was experiencing in trying to construct and commit to a sexual identity. Further analysis of the data revealed that he indeed seemed to be experiencing uncertainty and discomfort in terms of establishing his sexual identity:

- *…manhunt and dating made me feel a little scared because every time I come to the word dating it drives me crazy because I ask do I really want to date and who do I want to date?*

- *At the end of the day I know that I want to be with someone but I'm confused about who?*

4.4.2 IDENTITY EXPLORATION

The category of identity exploration is concerned with the quest to define who one is, what one values and which directions one wishes to pursue in life (Berk, 2000). While identity is multidimensional and may include many types of identity, future career and sexual identity were identified as the two major types of identity that the research participant was exploring.

4.4.2.1 Future career identity

During many of the activities of the Personal Portfolio, the participant focused on exploring his goals, beliefs and values with regard to his future career. These are important components to consider when establishing a career identity and deciding on a future career path. It seemed that verbalising his beliefs and values helped the participant become more aware of his goals. I observed that when he realised what was important to him, like financial success and working with people, he seemed to become aware of what he needed to do in order to achieve this.

❖ **Goals**

The participant became aware of and was able to identify both short-term and long-term goals. He expressed that he realised the importance of school and needed to work harder in order to achieve his long term goals of being rich and successful, possibly owning his own company one day.

- *I drew some books because I know education is important for me to get where I want in life.*

- *Mrs Parr was strict. She showed me the love of cooking, leadership and that hard work leads to success.*

- *I would love to open my own company and help those who need help.*

❖ **Beliefs**

In the course of doing many of the activities, the participant revealed that he felt that he had a positive attitude towards life and that he believed in his abilities. He saw himself as a people's person, a good speaker, a good problem solver and able to motivate others. He also enjoyed giving others advice.

- *But I learnt to be more open and to think positive even though things are tough.*

- *I try to be positive, and this gives me strength.*

- *I enjoy being around people, those who love being around me.*

- *My talents are talking a lot and making a deal with the great people, I can be a good speaker and I am good at motivating people and give people advices.*

❖ **Values**

The participant often referred to financial prosperity and success, helping the community, the importance of family and friends and happiness in life when discussing different activities and during his reflections.

- *…I also want to be rich and inspire other people.*

- *…I want to have money and help the community.*

- *I also realised that people are important in my life.*

- *My happiness comes first in life.*

- *…happiness is important to me.*

4.4.2.2 Sexual identity

In order to develop a sexual identity one must also be aware of one's goals, beliefs and values with regard to one's sexual orientation and then be able to commit to those goals, beliefs and values. Setting and committing to goals regarding his sexual identity was of great concern for the research participant and it seemed to elicit a lot of uncertainty and confusion. The researcher observed that as the participant became aware of and was able to verbalise his beliefs and values he seemed more comfortable about committing to certain goals regarding his sexual orientation. Further exploration and narration by the participant revealed the following:

❖ **Goals**

The participant often stated that he was searching for 'the perfect partner'. He was well aware of the qualities he was looking for in a partner and what he wanted from a relationship.

- *Manhunt is what I do, I search for men. I want a partner who will understand who I am, a person who is trustworthy and who is serious about life.*

- *Like I said before, I know I want to share my life with a partner but then I just don't know who. Who can I trust and who will give me what I need?*

❖ **Beliefs**

While the participant stated on different occasions that he was a homosexual male he seemed to be experiencing some inner conflict or confusion. During participant checking it emerged that the initial confusion and conflict he seemed to be conveying to the researcher was partially attributed to sexual identity conflict based on the fear of being judged by others, including the researcher. During the final interview it seemed as if he was able to commit to a sexual identity as he revealed a firm belief in his sexual preference and identity.

- *I used to be like so ok I am a gay guy but then I look at my history and how I have been hurt in the past and I get confused. I think people will judge me but I think that this is what I really want.*

- *I wrote men and love two times because I am a gay guy and I am searching for love.*

❖ **Values:**

The themes that emerged that were relevant to his sexual identity were that he seeks acceptance as a homosexual individual and he values a loving and committed relationship.

- *My values: Being myself as a gay guy.*

- *I woke up at 7am next to my partner and we were kissing.*

- *I want a partner who is trustworthy and who is serious about life and I want a relationship that is challenging and someone who is really committed to our relationship.*

4.4.3 IDENTIFYING DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

Discovering or becoming aware of one's strengths and assets ties in with the post-modern narrative approach that was used during the completion of the Personal Portfolio activities. Identifying and mobilising one's strengths and resources can serve as protective factors during the adolescent stage of development, which is often characterised by challenges and inner conflict. The research participant revealed a number of internal and external developmental assets in his Personal Portfolio activities and during interviews and discussions. I observed that as he became aware of his assets and was able to verbalise them his outlook on life seemed to become more positive and he seemed more confident and self-assured.

4.4.3.1 External assets

The participant often spoke about external assets such as a supportive family and supportive friends, his community orientation, adult role models and high expectations placed on him by family and friends.

- *My sister taught me how to really trust myself and to believe in myself. She always said that I can do anything I want and I believed her.*

- *I think that some people will judge me but I think that this is what I really, really want and am comfortable with, I know that my true friends will accept and support me.*

- *I want to live a good life and help my family and community.*

- *Oprah is someone I look up to. She achieved a lot in life and I also want to be rich and inspire other people.*

4.4.3.2 Internal assets

As the activities progressed and the research participant was telling his stories he identified internal assets such as being achievement orientated and having a positive view of his personal future. He also believed that he possessed interpersonal competence and positive values such as being caring and striving for equality and social justice.

- *I thought about what those people have achieved in their lives and how I also can achieve those things and maybe make them a little bigger than theirs.*
- *I try to be positive about things and value my happiness.*
- *The river is how I think my friends see me – a strong, positive friend. They rely on me a lot and believe in me a lot.*
- *I want to be able to help my mother and family one day. I also wish I could do something to help my community***.**

4.4.4   UNRESOLVED PAST ISSUE

A theme relating to an unresolved past issue emerged during the research process. This theme correlated with Erikson's (1977) concept of unresolved psychosocial crises. Just as Erikson claims that a person will struggle to move on to the next stage of psychosocial development if he is unable to overcome the challenge/crisis at a particular stage of development, I believe that an unresolved past issue can hamper an individual's ability to move forward with his life, especially with regard to setting future goals, establishing satisfying relationships and overall psychological well being.

4.4.4.1 Awareness of an unresolved past issue

During the first session of the research process the research participant became aware of an existing unresolved issue and this issue kept resurfacing in the other

sessions. I observed that while he would mention the issue, he did not go into any detail and seemed to want to avoid discussing it.

- *I want to heal myself.*
- *The red and orange clouds are the anger in me.*
- *…I found it sad to think about those things, especially about the year that I was in Pretoria with my uncle.*

4.4.4.2 Awareness of how it impacts his life

After the unresolved past issue had surfaced a number of times, the research participant seemed to become more aware of the impact that it was having on his life. I observed that while he was still brief in his discussions regarding the issue he was increasingly aware that it was something he could no longer ignore and needed to face it in order to move forward.

- *I sometimes try to run away from the bad things that have happened in my life.*
- *When I was doing the abused chapter I was feeling angry and sad at the same time and I realised how maybe ignoring things doesn't help.*

4.4.4.3 Resolution

At the end of the research process the research participant seemed to have become more resolved. He was able to work through the issue on his own by telling his story. As researcher I took on the role of interviewer and listener and facilitated this process of story telling.

- *…now when I talk about it I don't get so angry and know that I can be positive and try to move on.*
- *The black mud is gone because I have let go of my past. I think that holding onto it and trying to shut it down made me sometimes not see the other side of life. But looking at things like my time line, my circle of influences and my life book made me realise that I can let go and move forward. The angry clouds are also gone.*

- *Ya, I think I've gained I could say facing my history that I tried to shut down and forget about. I had to face it and realise that it has somehow become part of me and makes me want to be better.*

4.4.5 EXPERIENCE OF COMPLETING THE PERSONAL PORTFOLIO

This theme is concerned with how the participant experienced completing the Personal Portfolio. The Personal Portfolio activities were aimed at initiating a process of self-exploration and included activities that focused on the past present and future in order to elicit a comprehensive life story.

4.4.5.1 Positive

The research participant's feedback on the Personal Portfolio activities was mainly positive. He described the activities as enjoyable, and felt that the process had given him new insights into himself (especially his strengths), had made deeper introspection possible, allowed for critical self examination and helped him set future goals. He was also very proud of his final product.

- *I really had fun with my day in heaven.*
- *Yes I did because it helped me think about things that I didn't think about before and sort of find myself as well as see how some things work in my life.*
- *Mhh …I had to really think hard and look back into my past and think about the people who influenced my life because I haven't really thought about this before.*
- *The sun is now smiling because many things happened during this process to help me set goals and made me realise that I have the confidence and can reach my dreams one day.*
- *I am so proud of what is in this file, I would like to do more of these activities.*

4.4.5.2 Hawthorne Effect[13]

While the participant's feedback regarding his experience was mainly positive, I observed at times that the participant could have been trying to please and impress me. During participant observation I noted that the participant seemed to be struggling with some activities as they required in-depth exploration and seemed to challenge him and elicited some negative feelings. This was especially evident during the interests, talents and values, the collage and the life line activities when the participant verbalised the following:

- *My values were difficult because there were thoughts in my mind that I tried to stop or rather ignore. But the rest wasn't too difficult.*
- *I was looking more for nice positive words……*
- *Well it was sad for me to go back to some years, the things that happened and how things were.*

4.5   PARTICIPANT CHECKING

To ensure that the data analysis portrayed an accurate reflection of the participant's perceptions and experiences, participant checking took place. The purpose of participant checking was to confirm, reject and elaborate on emergent themes and sub-themes. The research participant agreed with and verified the themes that emerged during data analysis. He also clarified and elaborated on many themes, especially on the theme concerned with the exploration of sexual identity.

4.6   SUMMARY

The themes which emerged during data analysis were verified by the participant during participant checking and were described in detail in Chapter 4. The five core categories, namely Identity Crisis/Confusion, Identity Exploration, Identifying Developmental Assets, Unresolved Past Issue and Experience of Completing the Personal Portfolio, were elaborated on by discussing sub-categories and related

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[13] Hawthorne effect: People behave differently because they are aware that they are participating in a research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001)

themes in order to provide a rich description of the participant's experience, thus contributing to the readers' understanding of the results of this research study.

Chapter 5 will provide a brief overview of the previous four chapters and will present a summary of the research results. These results will be presented against the backdrop of the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.

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CHAPTER 5
Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1   OVERVIEW

This chapter provides a concluding synopsis of the study by providing a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations. The research questions posed in Chapter 1 will be addressed and the possible contributions and limitations of the study will be discussed.

5.2   SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

After careful and deliberate data collection and analysis various themes emerged. The results of this study were divided into five core categories namely: Identity Crisis/Confusion, Identity Exploration, Identifying Developmental Assets, Unresolved Past Issues, and the Experience of Completing a Personal Portfolio. These core categories were further linked to sub-categories and related themes. These themes will be discussed in relation to the available literature.

5.2.1   IDENTITY CRISIS/CONFUSION

It is important that adolescents have good self-knowledge in order for them to make wise decisions about themselves and their futures. The results of this study revealed that Erikson's identity crisis and Marcia's identity diffusion were being experienced by the research participant. An inability to resolve this conflict or to make decisions without adequate exploration could result in lower levels of mental health and a fragile self-concept (Hill *et al.,* 2007).

The research participant initially revealed that he questioned his overall personal identity and was especially uncertain and confused about his sexual identity. These findings confirmed that adolescents require additional support during their quest for identity. This does not necessarily mean that adolescents experience

confusion/crisis in each type of identity. The confusion that the adolescent was experiencing with regard to his sexual identity was, however, influencing his overall identity.

5.2.2   IDENTITY EXPLORATION

Exploration is a precondition for establishing an identity (Kail & Cavanaugh, 2001). Although the research participant was presented with a number of activities that aimed at facilitating the narration of his whole life story, the participant focused mainly on exploring his future career and sexual identities. This again confirms that an adolescent does not necessarily experience identity confusion/crisis in every type of identity, it is, however, important to note that the different types of identity contribute to overall personal identity.

The themes that emerged from his life story enabled the research participant to identify recurring themes and scripts with regard to his goals, beliefs and values. Identifying and evaluating one's goals, beliefs and values is one of the first steps of establishing an identity (Waterman, 2004).

5.2.3   IDENTIFYING DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

Narrative therapy assumes that people have many competencies, beliefs, values and abilities which can assist them to reduce the influence of problems or challenges that they will encounter in their lives (Morgan, 2000). The post-modern narrative approach and positive psychology, of which asset based theory forms a part, both aim at uncovering a client's hidden strengths and resources.

The Personal Portfolio was successful in helping the research participant become aware of both his external and internal developmental assets. Becoming aware of and mobilising these assets can help the adolescent cope better with the challenges that occur during adolescence and later in life. The research participant realised that he possessed developmental assets such as: supportive family and friends, a positive outlook on life, interpersonal competencies and that he could identify with good adult role models. Mobilising these assets could help him with

the difficulties he was experiencing in terms of his sexual identity and in terms of future decisions he will need to make.

5.2.4   UNRESOLVED PAST ISSUES

Cattanach (2000) states that a person's stories are not mere stories: they are a reflection of what is happening in his life, things that he experiences both consciously and unconsciously. The activities that the participant was required to complete drew his attention to an unresolved past issue. Having to identify recurring themes in his Personal Portfolio made him aware of this issue and the influence that it was having on his life. This research study did not involve therapeutic intervention. However, just as in narrative therapy, the researcher allowed the participant to talk through his problems, which often helps people find their own solutions (Morgan, 2000). This is what seemed to have happened during the research process. At first the research participant mentioned the issue but said he preferred to ignore it. By engaging in the required activities and reflecting on them, he became aware that even though he thought he could ignore the issue, it kept resurfacing. He also became aware of the negative influence that it was having on his life. At the end of the process he seemed to have worked through the issue and arrived at a resolution.

I believe that just as an unresolved Eriksonian crisis can hamper movement to the next stage of development, so too can an unresolved issue. It can also result in the individual feeling unable to deal effectively with life's challenges and prevent him from reaching his full potential (Thompson & Henderson, 2007). This will, therefore, also have an impact on the ability to construct an integrated and unified identity.

5.2.5   EXPERIENCE OF COMPLETING A PERSONAL PORTFOLIO

The activities for the Personal Portfolio were selected with an adolescent's needs and abilities in mind. The stage of adolescence is not only a time for identity exploration and establishment (Erikson, 1977) but is also described by Berk (2000) as a second stage of egocentrism during which the individual is capable of abstract and self-reflective thought.

This core category dealt with the participant's experience of completing a Personal Portfolio. While the research participant reported mostly positive feelings about the experience there was evidence of the Hawthorne effect. The participant related that he had found the activities enjoyable, had gained new insights into himself through critical self examination and had been able to engage in deeper self-exploration. According to Waterman (2004) and Berk (2000), a major aspect of constructing an identity involves defining the directions you wish to pursue in life. One of the reported benefits of the Personal Portfolio was that it helped the participant become aware of his personal strengths and interests. This in turn helped him set personal goals, especially future career and relationship goals.

5.3   CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to investigate and gain an in-depth insight into whether or not a Personal Portfolio was an effective method in supporting an adolescent on his quest for identity. The experience of completing a Personal Portfolio and the results of doing so were explored through post-modern narrative activities, open-ended interviews and reflective reports written by the research participant. Data from these sources were analysed and themes were identified. Based on the elicited themes, it appears that not only did the adolescent in this study require additional support in establishing an integrated identity, but also that the Personal Portfolio could provide support where he required it most.

While different types of identity, like sexual, ethnic, career, physical and religious, form part of overall identity it appears, based on this study, the research participant did not seem to experience conflict or confusion in every type of identity. In this study the adolescent was questioning his sexual identity which was having a negative impact on his overall identity. The activities included in the Personal Portfolio were aimed at facilitating the narration of a life story, raising the participant's awareness of his personal goals, beliefs and values in terms of career and sexual identity and using the recurrent scripts and themes that emerged to identify where additional support was required. By becoming aware of his goals, values and beliefs the research participant was able to commit to a sexual orientation as well as set better informed and congruent future goals.

The results of the study indicated that a Personal Portfolio can be a very effective method in helping identify developmental assets. Awareness of one's strengths and resources can serve as a buffer when one experiences challenges and problems. Since the developmental stage of adolescence is often confusing and challenging with regard to establishing who one is and one's future life direction, knowing one's strengths and resources can help one face these challenges with more confidence. Both internal and external assets were identified that not only contributed to self-knowledge but also seemed to increase the research participant's self-esteem and his confidence about taking on life's challenges.

The research findings revealed that the Personal Portfolio helped the research participant recognise and solve an unresolved past issue. By following the principle of narrative therapy, which encourages clients to talk through problems in order to reach their own solution, the research participant became aware of the negative influence that this unresolved past issue was having on his life and in the end seemed to be able to put it behind him.

The findings indicate that the participant's overall experience was positive. The activities required that the research participant engage in a process of exploration requiring critical self-examination, deeper introspection and careful consideration of his past, present and future. The process resulted in a more unified and positive self-image which enabled the participant to understand who he is and to identify and commit to personal future goals.

While there may have been some evidence of the Hawthorne effect, the overall findings of the study suggest that the compilation of the Personal Portfolio was a positive experience and meaningful in terms of facilitating self-knowledge and establishing a more integrated identity.

5.4   ADDRESSING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

5.4.1   PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the potential value of a Personal Portfolio for identity development of an adolescent?

Based on the research findings the following are ways in which a Personal Portfolio can be used in identity development of an adolescent:

- A Personal Portfolio has proved to be a cost effective and meaningful method that enables an adolescent to identify and clarify areas in which he is experiencing confusion about his identity.
- The activities that constitute the Personal Portfolio facilitate self-exploration, which is a necessary precondition to establishing an integrated identity.
- The Personal Portfolio can help the adolescent identify his personal goals, beliefs and values which will help him to answer questions such as: Who am I? And where am I going in life?
- The Personal Portfolio provides the adolescent with a unique and individualised portrait of his life story in which he can identify the strengths and resources available to overcome challenges in his life.
- The Personal Portfolio can also be used as an effective method for helping the adolescent identify and resolve unresolved past issues, thus contributing to his overall psychological well being.

5.4.2   SECONDARY QUESTIONS

How does the compilation of a Personal Portfolio influence the process of identity development of an adolescent?

Compiling a Personal Portfolio encouraged the adolescent in this study to take ownership of his self-discovery process. Instead of using westernised assessment and intervention techniques, the Personal Portfolio was used to facilitate the narration of a unique life story. The activities of the Personal Portfolio encouraged the adolescent to tell stories about his abilities, struggles, competencies, desires,

relationships, interests, achievements and failures; this in turn helped him understand himself better. As previously stated it is important for an adolescent to know who he is in order to make wise decisions about himself. The end result of the Personal Portfolio was that the adolescent had increased his self-knowledge and so felt more comfortable about identifying and committing to certain personal goals.

The life story also provided a meaningful context which motivated the adolescent to solve his own problems. Together with greater awareness of his strengths and resources, this resulted in increased confidence and self esteem which could facilitate further exploration and decision making.

How did the adolescent experience completing the Personal Portfolio?

According to the research results the overall experience of compiling the Personal portfolio was positive. By connecting with the adolescent's needs and embracing the oral tradition of the African Culture it facilitated a process of self-exploration, self-reflection and self-discovery in an enjoyable, non-threatening way. This self-discovery resulted in identifying and committing to personal future goals as well as an increased sense of self-pride and self worth.

How can the techniques of the post-modern narrative approach be best applied during adolescent identity exploration and construction?

Dryden & Feltham (1995:60) state that *the general aim of the narrative approach is that by freely expressing all feelings and thoughts you will uncover more and more of your unconscious.* The researcher concurs with Dryden's statement because she believes that through narration the adolescent's unconscious thoughts and feelings were revealed thus extending his self-knowledge and understanding. This in turn contributed towards identity achievement.

The process of narration can also provide the opportunity for the adolescent to identify what is important to him by identifying overriding themes and scripts. Becoming aware of and identifying personal goals, values and beliefs is a crucial step in identity achievement.

The post-modern narrative approach centres people as experts on their own lives. It assumes that people have skills, competencies and the abilities to deal with the influence of problems in their lives. Narration also allows clients to talk through their problems which often helps them to solve their own problems. By encouraging the adolescent to take responsibility for and ownership of his own identity development, he can achieve an identity that is integrated and a true reflection of who he really is. It can also contribute towards feelings of self-worth and confidence.

5.5   POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher believes that this study contributed to the existing theory base on supporting adolescent development during adolescence.

The case study design allowed for an in-depth investigation into how an adolescent experienced compiling a Personal Portfolio as well as how the techniques, based on post-modern narrative counselling, influenced identity development.

The Personal Portfolio can be used as a cost effective and developmentally appealing method that facilitates a process of self exploration in adolescents which leads to a better self understanding and increased self knowledge. This process can enable adolescents to set realistic and well informed future goals.

This study not only contributed positively to the research participant's identity formation, it also allowed him to uncover personal strengths, resources, values, goals and beliefs.

If it were incorporated into the life orientation curriculum at a high school level, it could assist some learners to come to terms with certain self issues in a relaxed manner within an educational setting. It could also enable educators to identify learners who may need further psychological intervention.

5.6   CHALLENGES OF THE STUDY

The following challenges existed and are acknowledged below:

- The in-depth case study involving just one research participant limits the generalisability of the research results.

- The themes that emerged were not verified by inter-rater verification.

- The research participant knew the researcher and he also knew that his answers were being audio recorded. The Hawthorne effect could have influenced his responses.

- Taking on the sole role of researcher was a challenge as narrative therapy involves more than simply listening to the stories that people tell. It took concerted effort not to step into a therapist role, especially when sensitive issues arose.

- The planning of the Personal Portfolio activities was mainly influenced by Cohran's techniques for facilitating client's stories; this could have been one of the reasons that career exploration emerged as a major theme. The selection of the other activities was influenced by the researcher's understanding of post-modern narrative techniques.

- While the focus was on facilitating the research participant's narration of his life story, it is possible that the participant misunderstood some of the instructions because of the language used. The choice of language could also have inhibited the participant's ability to express himself freely or precisely, especially during feedback interviews.

5.7   RECOMMENDATIONS

5.7.1   FURTHER RESEARCH

Further research could include:

- Conducting the research on a wider scope to include adolescent participants that are a representative sample of the pluralistic South African society.

- Running a pilot programme in private as well as public South African schools to investigate educators' experiences of implementing the Personal Portfolio into the Life Orientation curriculum.

- Making a comparative study of adolescents who have compiled a Personal Portfolio versus those who have not, focusing on levels of self knowledge and future goals and decision making.

- Doing a long-term study of adolescents who have had the opportunity to compile a Personal Portfolio during adolescence versus those that have not, paying attention to the career decisions they make after leaving school.

- Adjusting the activities of the Personal Portfolio so the development of specific types of identity like career or ethnic identity can be studied.

5.7.2 PRACTICE

Findings imply that the Personal Portfolio was a successful method in supporting identity development during adolescence. Educational psychologists can use it during assessment and intervention with adolescents who are struggling to define themselves and their purpose in life. It can also be used to increase self-esteem and confidence as well as to identify and mobilise strengths and resources.

Life Orientation educators at a high school level can use it to enhance teaching, especially with regard to learning outcomes 1 and 4 which focus on personal well being, self knowledge and decision making.

Educators can also use this method to identify any learners who are unable to cope with unresolved past issues and refer them to the appropriate professional accordingly.

5.8   CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Although adolescents are on the brink of adulthood and so are expected to make far-reaching decisions regarding the future, they often struggle to define who they are and where they are going in life. This can result in making uninformed decisions, experiencing lower levels of psychological well being or experiencing despair and uncertainty. In a developing country like South Africa not all adolescents have access to professional services that can support them during this time of change.

The findings of this study indicate that compiling a Personal Portfolio during adolescence can successfully support an adolescent in his quest for identity. This involved utilising techniques based on post-modern narrative approaches as well as other approaches like the person-centred approach and positive psychology. The adolescent emerged as the author and expert of his own life story and was encouraged to take ownership of his identity development.

Compiling a Personal Portfolio facilitated the process of self exploration and resulted in increased self-knowledge, an awareness of personal assets and an overall improved sense of self-worth and self confidence. In this study, it also provided the research participant with a platform to work through a previously unresolved problem.

As the researcher I feel that this study could offer a starting point for providing support for the journey of self discovery essential to identity development necessary to adolescents at a school level. The use of the Personal Portfolio represents a cost effective method that could be used in a multicultural context like South Africa to meet the diverse needs of our adolescent population.

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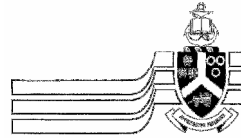
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Clearance certificate

Appendix B: Declaration of originality

Appendix C: Letter from the language editor

Appendix D: Permission to conduct research

Appendix E: Consent for participation in a research project

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UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**CLEARANCE NUMBER :** EP09/04/04
DEGREE AND PROJECT	MEd: Educational Psychology The potential use of a personal portfolio for identity development of an adolescent
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Magdalena Katarzyna Quinn
DEPARTMENT	Department Educational Psychology
DATE CONSIDERED	28 July 2010
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	APPROVED

Please note:

For Masters applications, ethical clearance is valid for 2 years

For PhD applications, ethical clearnace is valid for 3 years.

CHAIRPERSON OF ETHICS COMMITTEE   Prof L Ebersohn

DATE   28 July 2010

CC   Dr S Bester

                                 Ms Jeannie Beukes

This ethical clearance certificate is issued subject to the following conditions:

1. A signed personal declaration of responsibility
2. If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted
3. It remains the students' responsibility to ensure that all the necessary forms for informed consent are kept for future queries.

Please quote the clearance number in all enquiries.

15 April 2009

MR. D. V. ROSSOUW
PRINCIPAL OF SEKOLO sa BOROKGO

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SEKOLO sa BOROKGO

Dear Mr. D. Rossouw,

I, Magdalena Quinn, hereby apply for permission to conduct a research study at Sekolo sa Borokgo as part of my Masters degree in Educational Psychology. The purpose of this study is to explore whether a personal portfolio can assist adolescents in their quest for identity. The process will include conducting eight, one-hour sessions with a learner from your school. Throughout the study the ethical principles of confidentiality and anonymity will be strictly adhered to and the learner's participation will be voluntary.

The results of this study will contribute to the existing literature on supporting adolescent's identity development and will be published in the form of a mini-dissertation. No research records will be revealed, unless required by law.

I hereby request to perform my research with a learner from Sekolo sa Borokgo weekly over a period of 8 weeks. The sessions will be conducted on the school premises during the learner's free periods.

Please feel free to contact my supervisor or myself on the following numbers if you have any further enquiries regarding the research process.

Magdalena Quinn: 082 454 5784
Dr. S. Bester: 012 420 3891

Thanking you in advance,

Dr S Bester   M. Quinn
Supervisor   Researcher

Parent/Guardian consent for participation of a minor in a Research Project

Project Title: The potential use of a personal portfolio for identity development of an adolescent

Dear parent/guardian

I would like to invite your child…………………………………… to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to gain insight into whether a personal portfolio can assist adolescents in their quest for identity. A personal portfolio is a collection of stories told by the participant about their lives. Your child will be required to attend 8 sessions of approximately one hour each. Sessions will be carried out during your child's free periods at Sekolo sa Borokgo and I will provide the guidance and materials for all the activities. Activities will include drawings, collage, life-line, early recollections, success and failure stories, life chapters, interests, talent and values, and future dreams.

I hope this study will benefit your child by providing him/her with an opportunity for self-exploration. I do not foresee any risks for your child participating in this study. If any problems do arise they will be addressed and I will make sure your child is both able to, and feels comfortable to continue with the study.

Your child's identity will be kept anonymous and all the information that will be obtained from the study will be kept strictly confidential. A pseudonym will be used and your child's name will not be linked to the research publication. If you agree, I would also like to take photographs of the activities and audio record the interviews.

Raw data will be kept in a safe place and will only be accessible by me. Participation in this study is purely voluntary and both the parents/guardians as well as the child may refuse to participate in the study or withdraw at any time. The results from this research study will be published and submitted to the University of Pretoria in the form of a mini-dissertation.

Please feel free to contact my supervisor or myself on the following numbers if you have any questions regarding the research study:

Magdalena Quinn: 082 454 5784
Dr. S. Bester: 012 420 3891

………………………………………………………………………………………………
……..

CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been informed about the nature and conduct of this study. I have also read the above information regarding the study and understand the information that has been given to me. I am aware that the results and information about this study will be processed anonymously. I may at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent for my child to participate in this study. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and declare that my child may participate in this study

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____