

**THE PHENOMENON OF IDENTITY FORECLOSURE AMONG  
LEARNER-ATHLETES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

by

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The experience I had in this study is the most incredible one I have ever experienced in my life. I must admit that the study required full engagement from the commencement of this study until the final submission. I would really want to express my appreciation for the amazing relationship I have with my supervisor and everything went so smoothly until the end. I also want to thank all the participants who were willing to participate remotely under the conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic. Without their willingness and their patience of the participants, this study would not have been possible. Finally, I would like to thank the Department of Psychology for such an amazing opportunity to allow me to investigate a topic that I am so passionate and fond of.

## DECLARATION

I, **Ntandazo Nkonki (19155493)**, declare that this mini-dissertation (***The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes in a South African context***) for the degree, Magister Artium (Research Psychology) in the Department of Psychology at the University of Pretoria, has not previously been submitted by me for this degree, at this or any other university. This is my own original work in design and all materials from published sources and secondary material contained herein have been acknowledged and referenced.



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**SIGNATURE**

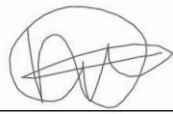
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## ETHICS STATEMENT

I, **Ntandazo Nkonki (19155493)**, declare that I have obtained the applicable ethical approval for the research titled ***The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes in a South African context*** (see APPENDIX E: FORMAL ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER). This study was approved on the **22<sup>nd</sup> of May 2020**, with **reference number HUM024/0220** from Prof. Innocent Pikirayi, the Deputy Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Research Ethics, in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.



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**AUTHOR SIGNATURE**

04/02/2021

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**DATE**

## ABSTRACT

**Title:** The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes in a South African context

**Supervisor:** Prof. B.J.M. Steyn

**Department:** Psychology

**University:** University of Pretoria

**Degree:** Magister Artium (Research Psychology)

The main mission for young people in sport is to develop their potential to the highest level of excellence. The need to capture young people and to nurture their potential necessitates specialized sport schools to accommodate this need of young people to pursue excellence in their sport. Tertiary institutions are also in alignment with this development to accommodate talented and high level sport participants to create a special environment to follow a dual career. Sport and academic demands create a challenging environment in terms of balancing athletics, academics, and other social roles. The extreme demands and stressors of the learner-athletes are well documented in the literature. The main concern of this study is based on how these extra demands impact on the psychological well-being of the learner-athlete. This concern necessitated the current study to explore the phenomenon of identity foreclosure in a sport school setting and tertiary institutions. The identity foreclosure phenomenon is an identity status defined by the premature ending of self-exploration and self-definition (Marcia, 1966). The study included 10 learner-athletes from the age of 17 years to 20 years. The data was collected using the semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the following themes emerged: The love of sport and how the love of sport developed, social support, emotional attachment and obsession with sport, envisaged life without sport, living a balanced lifestyle, spending too much time in sport and sport's values transference. The findings had managed to meet all three study objectives: To explore how high athletic identity (intense identity) for sport can develop into identity foreclosure; to uncover the psychosocial factors that may contribute to the susceptibility of identity foreclosure; and to explore the role of obsessive passion in the phenomenon of identity foreclosure.

**Keywords:** Learner-athletes, identity foreclosure, susceptibility, and phenomenology.

## LIST OF FIGURES

*Figure 1:* The summary of the seven main themes with their corresponding subthemes that emerged from the analysis

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>ACT</b>	Acceptance Commitment Therapy
<b>AIMS</b>	Athletic Identity Measurement Scale
<b>APA</b>	Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association
<b>CBT</b>	Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
<b>IPA</b>	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
<b>RFT</b>	Relational Frame Theory

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1. Introduction**

According to the humanistic view, the individual's potential must be celebrated, and it is crucial to develop the whole person (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010). Within the humanistic paradigm, human nature can be viewed as a benevolent force that seeks to develop and grow human abilities and competencies to the highest level of potential. This driving force that urges the individual to become the best they can be and follow the mission to self-fulfilment is called self-actualization. The concept of self-actualization was created by Maslow (1954) and forms a key concept within the humanistic paradigm. This benevolent force and urge to become our best version is the main motivation why individuals strive for excellence in many performance-evaluative contexts, such as sport, academics, performing arts and other performance domains of life.

In the last few decades, there has been radical transformation from amateur sport to professional sport (Booth, 2005). Young people enter competitive sport with the main mission to develop their sport potential to the highest level of excellence. The most important reason why there are specialised sport schools is the need to accommodate young people to nurture their potential to pursue excellence in their sport. The Sport High School at the University of Pretoria (TuksSport High School) is one of the examples of the schools with trained teachers, coaches and other specialized services that can assist a young participant to develop to the highest level of potential. This is one of the South African schools, which works as an assisting by-product of the professionalism and modern phenomenon to facilitate the professional culture in sport. According to Ward, Sandstedt, Cox and Beck (2005), sport and academic demands create the challenging environment in balancing athletics, academics, and other social roles. The logical question is: How do these extra demands impact on psychological well-being of the learner-athlete? This study's focus is to explore the phenomenon of identity foreclosure in a sport school setting.

### **1.2. Background and motivation for this study**

The identity foreclosure phenomenon is an identity status defined by the premature ending of self-exploration and self-definition (Marcia, 1966). Erich Fromm, a key proponent in the humanistic movement, raises a significant question in his work "To have or to be", which could be directly related to the core issue of the study, stating,

“If I am what I have and if that is lost, who then am I?” (Fromm, 1976, p. 111). This could be the mindset of an athlete with identity foreclosure on athletic identity. In this case, Fromm’s (1976) terms could be more simplified or alternately interpreted in these terms; *if sport defines me, then without sport who then am I?* This significant statement of Fromm underlines the importance of healthy identifications in the very sensitive life stage of young people in sport. It is very crucial to understand how these young people (adolescents) in sport balance their dual career (sport and academics) and how they identify themselves with sport.

The core focus of this study will be to explore the phenomenon of identity foreclosure in a sport school setting. It is therefore important to explore the young adolescent’s susceptibility to unhealthy identification with sport. Research has indicated that identity foreclosure can be linked to multilayered psychological problems and finding an appropriate balance in their pursuit of sport and academics can significantly decrease athletic identity foreclosure and early dropout in sport (Stambulova, Engstrom, Franck, Linner & Lindahl, 2015). Thereof, for the purpose of this study *adolescents in sport* will be referred as to *learner-athletes*, and *unhealthy identification* and *over-identification* will be referred to as *identity foreclosure phenomenon* (Fromm, 1976; Malanga, 2018; Marcia, 1966; Proios, Proios, Mavrovouniotis & Theofanis, 2012; Watt & Moore, 2001). The conceptual definition of a *learner-athlete* is an individual who is enrolled in a learning institution for academic purpose, who participate in sport with high interest, intensity and purpose to engage in that sport (Malanga, 2018; Watt & Moore, 2001).

In Erikson’s (1968) psychosocial stages of development, adolescents are faced with the challenges of *identity formation crisis*. The *crisis* refers to the adolescents’ experience of decision-making and struggles of identifying with who they are before their identity can be formed. The psychological crisis for the adolescents is one of the *identity versus role confusion*. If the tension between these two is resolved towards identity, an adolescent will develop *fidelity* as virtue. Significant relationships in this stage are peers as well as role models. Learners are in a developmental phase with various contexts and people influencing their identity development; these include for instance sport (being athletes), academics and religion. The intended study’s concern is learner identification as being an athlete and the consequences in terms of their identity status. Identity foreclosure “seems to hint at the important role of dominant socio-cultural orientations in the process of identity formation” (Hofer, Kärtner, Chasiotis, Holger Busch & Florian Kiessling, 2007, p. 268).

In engaging with the literature, it was detected that there are two opposing views. Several authors who are predominantly American (USA) are of the notion that high athletic identity leads to identity foreclosure (Brown, Glastetter-Fender & Shelton, 2000; Martin, Eklund & Adams-Mushett, 1997; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Visek, Hurst, Maxwell & Watson Li, 2008; Whipple, 2009). However, South African studies (Nkonki, 2016; Van Heerden, 2005) disagree with this opinion, stating that, higher athletic identity does not necessarily lead to identity foreclosure. Nkonki (2016) and Van Heerden (2005) both found that high athletic identifiers ranked family roles as more important than any other roles. Thus, there seem to be a contradiction in this matter that necessitates exploration of the phenomenon.

It was noted by Eldridge (1983) that athletes invest most of their psychological significance to their participation in sport, meaning that, there is a probability of athlete's psychological well-being; being dependent on sport participation. In that sense, athletes who over-identifying with their athletic roles without considering the conflict between the athlete's role and other heavy demands, such as peer relationships and other social-development opportunities, may experience difficulties concerning their psychological well-being (Brown & Hartley, 1998). People tend to be more likely to experience enhanced psychological well-being when they achieve balance between the different domains in life and develop an internal locus of control to be able to create self-generated goals that will assist their personal needs (Orlick, 1998). In contrast, the process that is mostly associated with emotional distress is the tendency of individuals making mistakes in strongly committing to other's expectations and preferences. This external locus of control may lead to neglect of personal needs (Hofer et al., 2007).

It is further discussed in chapter 2 that identity foreclosure could be associated to other serious ramifications, such as burnout, injuries, obsessive passion, and substance use. These may negatively affect the well-being of learner-athletes, which ultimately may affect their optimal development. It is therefore of paramount importance that the phenomenon of identity foreclosure needs to be explored to achieve a deeper understanding of the phenomenon among learner-athletes in a South African context.

### **1.3. Research problem statement**

The role of sport in the identity development in South African learner-athletes needs more exploration and research. However, it has been argued that organizations of sport should be responsible in developing more than just athleticism in their players

(Stronach, Adair & Taylor, 2014). It has been reported by several American studies (Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Visek et al., 2008; Whipple, 2009) that Identity foreclosure is led by high athletic identity and it may have a detrimental effect on psychological well-being (Sandhu, Singh, Tung & Kundra, 2012). Psychological well-being is defined as self-acceptance, sustainability of individuality within a social context, making the most out of one's talents and capacities, having warm, trusting and satisfying relationships with other people, and the capacity to shape own environments to meet personal needs and desires (Keyes, 2006; Wissing, Potgieter, Guse, Khumalo & Nel, 2014). Thus, for the purpose of this study, psychological well-being will be referred as balance, flexibility and coping in different life domains. The reciprocal relationship between optimal development and psychological well-being in any performance-evaluative contexts reiterates the importance to investigate any factor or variable that may affect the psychological well-being of the performer (Steyn, Steyn, Maree & Panebianco-Warrens, 2016). Over-identification with sport can lead to identity foreclosure that can heavily affect the psychological well-being of the athlete (Proios et al., 2012). Psychological well-being is a prerequisite for optimal development and high performance in sport (Steyn et al., 2016).

Based on the above information, one can argue that high performance and psychological well-being could be the main contributors to optimal development in sport. Additionally, identity foreclosure is more likely to be associated with an imbalanced lifestyle, which may lead to deterioration effects in psychological well-being and performance (Stambulova et al., 2015). Research from America indicates that student-athletes, as well as professional-athletes are susceptible to athletic identity foreclosure that can result in over-identification with sport and neglecting other life roles (Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Visek et al., 2008; Whipple, 2009). Due to the importance of the athletes' psychological well-being and balanced lifestyles, there is a need for exploration of the identity foreclosure phenomenon among learner-athletes. Identity foreclosure is likely to disrupt the positive synergy between optimal development and psychological well-being. Another motivation for this study is the fact that research in this specific area is predominantly quantitative and focuses mainly on those psychosocial and physical ramifications such as burnout, injuries, and other illnesses (Martin, 2011). The major gap in the research is the lack of qualitative research in this area of study, which can significantly contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. In an extensive search on the research platforms, no

phenomenological studies were available on this crucial topic and only one qualitative research project could be detected (Beamon, 2012). The research platforms also revealed that no such study has been conducted in the South African context.

#### **1.4. Aim, objectives and the research question of this study**

The aim of the intended research was to explore the phenomenon of athletic identity foreclosure among learner-athletes. The objectives of the study were *firstly*, to explore how high athletic identity (intense identity) for sport can develop into identity foreclosure. *Secondly*, to uncover the psychosocial factors that may contribute to the susceptibility of identity foreclosure. The *third* objective was to explore the role of obsessive passion in the phenomenon of identity foreclosure.

The research question of the study was:

**What would a phenomenological investigation reveal about athletic identity foreclosure among learner-athletes?**

#### **1.5. Paradigmatic point of departure and research methodology**

The study was guided by the interpretivism, where the researcher had to interpret the obtained data to uncover values, explanations, and meanings (Jones, 2015). The original philosophical approach of Heidegger's hermeneutical interpretive phenomenology created a foundation for the evolution and development of interpretivism (Heidegger, 1962). The two major developments in the phenomenological method incorporated the interpretive explication and a descriptive analysis of human experiences (Schrag, 1962). The explorative nature of this current research project has been well suited for the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach, which enabled the researcher to uncover the experiences of the individual, and the meaning or meaningfulness of these experiences associated with athletic identity foreclosure (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The humanistic paradigm is well aligned with the IPA approach, due to its concepts such as self-actualization (coined by Maslow, 1954), optimal development and peak experience, which are core concepts in the humanistic paradigm. The IPA methodology has been considered as a very effective approach for the study to make meaningful interpretations. The significant development of the IPA approach by Smith and Osborn (2003) and Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) enabled the researcher to illicit an in-depth and rich understanding of the phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes.

The research methodology of this study was therefore a qualitative approach. The motive in opting this type of methodology was based on better understanding of participants' phenomenological world of identification with athletic identity. The aim of the study was based on understanding from the perspectives of the participants. Therefore, the study utilised the IPA approach, which was meant to explain the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences (Christensen, Johnson & Turner, 2010). The sampling method was purposive (purposeful) sampling. The participants consisted of 10 South African learner-athletes between the age of 17 years and 20 years. The study made use of semi-structured one-on-one interviews and were transcribed verbatim. The interpretation went through IPA stages, and the themes that emerged were discussed in the findings and discussion chapter (4).

## **1.6. Outline of chapters**

### **Chapter 2: Literature review**

The humanistic paradigm is the point of departure for this study and the core concepts of the paradigm are discussed in this chapter. The importance of human experiences root the arguments of this study in the centre of the humanistic paradigm. With the core focus on optimal development and self-actualization, the sport psychological works that focus on high performance and optimal development will be discussed in this chapter. Relevant literature and recent research that pertains to the phenomenon of identity foreclosure will be discussed to facilitate the central argument of this study. Additional concepts related to the phenomenon of identity foreclosure are discussed in this chapter, as well as opposing views concerning the phenomenon of the identity foreclosure. The ramifications of identity foreclosure such as burnout, academic development and expectations, psychological consequences, obsessive passion and substance use will also be clarified.

### **Chapter 3: Research methodology**

This chapter provides a full description of the methodological approach employed in this study. The methodological approach used was qualitative, due to in-depth nature of investigation of this study. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis(IPA) has been a tool used based on the aim of the study to explain the meaning, structure, and the essence of the lived experiences of the learner-athletes. The study comprised of 10 learner-athletes equally male and females between the age of 17-20 years. The data collection tool used was one-on-one semi-structured interviews. In terms of ensuring quality of the research, important aspects were addressed to enhance the quality of this research such as reflexivity, dependability, credibility,



transferability and authenticity. In terms of respecting the participants of this study and avoiding any harm to the participants, ethical considerations were adhered to and will be fully discussed in this chapter.

#### **Chapter 4: Findings and discussions**

In this chapter the findings of this study (qualitative data) are fully discussed. Seven main themes and two subthemes emerged from the data, which are the following: The love of sport and how the love of sport developed, social support, emotional attachment and obsession with sport, envisaged life without sport, living a balanced lifestyle (subthemes: the importance of a balanced lifestyle and the execution of a balanced lifestyle), spending too much time in sport and sport's values transference. The narrative quotes from the data are fully discussed and integrated with existing literature and the most recent research that was available.

#### **Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations**

This chapter comprises of the reflection and experience of the researcher in conducting this current study with the emphasis on what was discovered and revealed through the analysis of the data. A final reflection on the research was done in terms of determining if the three main objectives of this study were achieved. The strengths and limitations of this study are highlighted and recommendations for future research were made. Practical applications of the information that are captured in the study are also clearly stated.

##### **1.7. Orthography**

This study deals with a variety of psychological dimensions, such as interpreting personal experiences, mindfulness, motives for participation, optimal development, peak experiences, and over-identification as examples. Due to the psychological nature, the APA referencing style is the required style for this study. Both the in-text and the reference list was done according to the guidelines based on the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA)*. Noteworthy terms that were used in the text are emphasized by an italic typeface.

##### **1.8. Conclusion**

As discussed, learner-athletes are on the developmental phase where they want to grow their abilities and competencies to the highest level. They are faced with challenges where they are in need to balance their dual careers, which are sport and academics. It is reported that high identification, which can be associated with

optimal development, that is performing to the highest level may lead to identity foreclosure. However, it is argued that high identification does not necessarily lead to identity foreclosure. Albeit, these studies are contradictory, identity foreclosure could be associated to other serious ramifications, such as burnout, injuries, obsessive passion, and substance use. These may negatively affect the well-being of learner-athletes, which ultimately may affect their optimal development. Hence, the researcher intended to explore what would a phenomenological investigation would reveal about athletic identity foreclosure among learner-athletes.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Introduction

The choice of a paradigm for a study is to provide a framework not only to explain the research phenomena effectively, but also to interpret the data that were selected in the most meaningful way possible. To differentiate between a paradigm and a theory is important because a paradigm provides an overarching conceptual framework for the related theories. According to Jordaan (2017, p. 14), the “theories that are related to the paradigm are the ‘off-spring’, the more or less practical ‘spin-offs’, of paradigms.” There can be many theories that emanate from a certain paradigm. The humanistic paradigm for this study does not only provide an effective framework to explain the phenomenon of identity foreclosure, but the methodology approach, namely the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), is meaningfully aligned with the humanistic paradigm. Under the overarching conceptual framework of humanism, theories and constructs such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, self-actualization, Social Identity Theory, peak and flow experiences, as well as *to have or to be* can be meaningfully interpreted (Hill, 2001). The humanistic paradigm and the related theories and constructs will be discussed in this chapter. The core concepts of this study, which are athletic identity and identity foreclosure, will be discussed according to available literature. Due to the fact that literature and research are limited on the phenomenon of identity foreclosure, the researcher had to rely on other closely related performance-evaluative contexts and disciplines to explain some of the elements of identity foreclosure. This chapter will also discuss opposing views in the research findings and will explain the possible psychosocial ramifications of identity foreclosure.

### 2.2. Humanistic paradigm as point of departure

The humanistic paradigm is closely related to positive psychology due to emphasis on optimal development of human potential, positive growth, and accompanied by a deep human benevolent force that seeks full actualization of human potential. The human core desire to be the best that one can be occupies centre stage in the humanistic paradigm and the positive psychology (Hill, 2001; Seligman, 1998). The reason why the humanistic paradigm can provide a very meaningful framework for this study is the fact that aspirations to be the best resonates strongly in the humanistic paradigm, as well as sport as performance-evaluative context and the discipline of Sport Psychology. Sport psychological works such as *Embracing your*

*potential* (Orlick, 1998), *Pursuit of excellence* (Orlick, 1990) and Gallwey's *The inner game of tennis* (1974) are examples of the multitude of works where the highest levels of personal achievement are the key feature and central focus of these works.

The humanistic paradigm also emphasizes the importance of human experience as a key construct in the study of the human psychology. Special emphasizes are on the phenomenological internal world of one's concept of self and the experience of other people and the world. The phenomenological approach can be seen as an important proliferation of the humanistic paradigm and this provides a perfect fit for the IPA approach of this study where the athletes' personal, unique and meaningful experiences are explored by means of the phenomenological interview (Hill, 2001).

Identity is a concept of human development; this raises a question on what motivates identity development? The motives to identity development could be guided by Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs (self-actualization) and Fromm's (1976) *to have or to be*. These are some of the humanistic models, which "elevate holistic development of individual human potential as the primary concern of psychology" (Hill, 2001, p. 107). Within the humanistic paradigm, terminology such as positive psychology, self-actualization, peak performances and experiences, as well as the flow phenomenon are well represented. The phenomenon of identity foreclosure was identified as one of the obstacles that may negatively impact on the optimal development of an athlete. The multilayered ramifications of identity foreclosure are fully discussed in this chapter and therefore, it is important to relate the major theories, constructs and concepts of the humanistic paradigm to the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. Therefore, these concepts will be briefly discussed and their relevance for the phenomenon of identity foreclosure among athletes will be elaborated on.

### **2.2.1. Self-actualization**

The main motivator of every human toward the highest goal of self-fulfilment is referred to as self-actualization, and it is the central construct in the humanistic model (Hill, 2001). The concept self-actualization was coined by Maslow (1954) and it is defined as the process of which the powers within the individual come together coherently in an efficient and intensely enjoyable manner. The well-known hierarchy of human needs explains the motivational force behind self-actualization as different levels of needs. The basis of the hierarchy of human needs starts from physical needs and move up in the hierarchy through safety needs, social needs, esteem needs and culminate in the self-actualization needs (Hill, 2001). An important

prerequisite for this upward movement in the hierarchy of needs is to achieve homeostasis in each of these needs before an individual can move upwards to the peak of self-actualization. The self-actualized person is more integrated and less split, more open for new experiences, more idiosyncratic, more proficiently expressive or spontaneous, or fully functioning, more creative, more humorous, more ego transcending, more independent of his lower needs, which are esteem, social, safety and physical needs (Maslow, 1954).

Rogers (1980) provides a unique perspective on self-actualization as a movement towards more interrelatedness, complexity and greater order in the individual. According to Hill (2001), Rogers' ideas pertaining to the complexity of self-actualization are a precursor to the complexity theory of biological life that incorporates adaptive systems that are nonlinear, dynamic and self-organizing. This benevolent force to be someone is explained by Rogers (1980) by making use of an example of a one-year-old child learning to walk. Through the pain and frustration to master the upright position, the child still persists through difficult struggles and sometimes discouraging setbacks. The self-actualization force within the child assists him to become fully human (Hill, 2001).

In sport participation, self-actualization pursuit could be described as an athlete that is more likely to be motivated to engage in sport and exercise behaviours. Therefore, the athlete benefits from his participation in sport by increased and improved social interaction, opportunities to build confidence, development of the athletic skills, and comparative skills assessment (Pearson & Petitpas, 1990). According to Pearson and Petitpas (1990), the self-actualization force within the athlete assists the pursuit of excellence and self-actualization and due to the intensive investment in terms of time, energy and effort, the athlete may develop a strong and exclusive identification to athletic role. This is the danger that a healthy and benevolent human force that is given to every individual may derail into over-identification with the activity that provides the most growth and optimal development. This over-identification can develop into identity foreclosure that may ironically derail the optimal development of the athlete. Generally, in sport, every athlete's intent is to perform well and successful. Athletic performance is a vital aspect in sport and it is dependent on the improvement and skill execution. Strong and exclusive identification (high identification) with the athletic role is reported to improve athletic performance due to increased exposure to athletic experiences along with a desire to perform successfully in sport (Danish, 1983; Oregon, 2010).

### 2.2.2. To have or to be?

Erich Fromm, one of the key proponents in the humanistic movement, created a significant contribution to the humanistic movement in his work *To have or to be? 'A new blueprint for mankind.'* The blueprint that Fromm created can provide a very effective framework to explain the phenomenon of identity foreclosure (Fromm, 1976). According to Fromm (1976), the desire to have not only yourself, but to own the world and everything in it, can be traced back to the ego. With this deep desire for total ownership, the human ego has no satiation point and the intense wanting, craving and attachment are caused due to the ego's desire on the one side and the fear of the ego for its own temporary, transience and impermanent nature on the other side. The bundle of desires and fearful nature of the ego is the core driving force to create strong attachments and over-identifications. Fromm (1976, p. 77) defines the ego as "a mixture of real qualities that we build around the core of reality. But the essential point is not so much what the ego's content (name, social status, possessions, knowledge and image) is, but that the ego is felt as a thing we each possess, and that this 'thing' is the basis of our sense of identity."

The deep desire of the ego to own itself is the core desire to own the world and to attach to life and over-identify with objects, things, activities and deeds (Fromm, 1976). Fromm points out a very significant question related to the core issue of the study, stating, "If I am what I have and if that is lost, who then am I?" (Fromm, 1976, p. 111). This is likely to be the mindset of an athlete with identity foreclosure on athletic identity. Fromm's (1976) terms could be more simplified as "if sport defines me, then without sport who then am I?" This over-identification problem is also collaborating by the mindfulness literature where the ego can easily become attached due to the fact that "exercise settings offer many examples of this clinging, craving and ego-defense" (Mannion & Andersen, 2015, p. 5). One can become attached and over-identify with fitness, youth, body, and sport as core objects of your identity.

In the being mode one's security is not centered on having something, but one's security is centered in who you are as a human being. The being mode is an opposite of the having mode in terms of egoboundness and egotism. The original thoughts on the being mode by master Eckhart's was expounded upon by Fromm (1976) and can be summarized as life, activity, renewal, birth, flowing out, outpouring, productivity and life itself. The being mode is to go beyond and transcend oneself and to become one with the world in a very creative and productive manner.

Therefore, desire and fear are not the dominant forces in the being mode, and one is less susceptible to attachments and over-identification with roles and activities. One could argue that in line with the being mode that the chances of identity foreclosure are slight. *Being* is the mode of existence that is not motivated by having anything or craving to have something, but comprises of joy, which employs one's faculties productively, is *oned* to the world (Fromm, 1976). The process of *being* indicates the importance of health identifications and this can be argued that over-identification susceptibility and identity foreclosure could be much less in the critical life stage of young people in sport. The crucial part is to understand how these learner-athletes balance sport and academics, as well as how they identify themselves concerning sport.

In conclusion, the humanistic paradigm and theories that proliferate from the humanistic paradigm can provide meaningful interpretations. The explorative intent of the current research is well aligned with the IPA, which will be used by a researcher as a tool to investigate the learner-athletes experiences, and understanding the meaning of these experiences concerning athletic identity foreclosure (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The concepts such as self-actualization (Maslow, 1954), optimal development, peak experience, the having mode, the being mode are core to humanistic paradigm, and this paradigm is well aligned with IPA approach that the researcher will make use of. According to Breivik (2011), individuals frequently understands themselves in a certain unique way and the IPA methodology can be a very effective approach to make meaningful interpretations in understanding the unique motives of identity development by athletes.

### **2.2.3. The self in the Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT)**

The Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) is an important proliferation in the acceptance and mindfulness-based interventions that deviate significantly with the traditional behaviourism and the Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). The ACT is part of the Third Wave of Behaviour Therapy due to the acceptance and mindfulness-based approach (Bach & Moran, 2008). The ACT is based on the relational frame theory where language plays a pivotal role in understanding the client's world in terms of the way that language expresses his relationship with the world. The ACT is also a functional contextual approach that implies that a person always act-in-context and this interactive relationship with the whole imply that he is never alone. People interact as *whole organisms* within a situational and historical context (Human, 2015).

A very important contribution that is relevant for this study is the three ways in which the self can experience the unique self (Bach & Moran, 2008). The three ways in which the individual can experience himself, namely as *conceptualized self* (self as content), *self as process* and the *self as context* (perspective) provide a useful interpretation of how a unique individual relates to his context (world). The conceptualized self is the verbal content that includes verbal evaluations and descriptions of oneself. For example, 'I am a student that participates on a high level in rugby', 'I am also a keen adventurer that loves the outdoor and adventurous events' and 'I am a very social person and I love dogs.' The *conceptualized self* is a useful way to communicate in a social environment. Therefore, the *conceptualized self* can never be in itself a problem, but strong attachments to certain roles in his life context can create psychological inflexibility and other psychological ramifications (Bach & Moran, 2008). The *conceptualized self* corresponds with the ego descriptions in mindfulness literature (Mannion & Andersen, 2015) and the humanistic approach as represented by Fromm (1976). The strong attachment with one specific role where the individual over-identifies as example with his athletic identity and excludes other important roles and facets of his world (context), can lead to psychological inflexibility and rigidity.

The *self as process* refers to the mindfulness function of the self where the individual is self-aware of the ongoing processes such as bodily sensations, thoughts and feelings. For example, 'now I am feeling anxious', 'I have a sore backache' and 'I am tremendously disappointed and depressed.' The *self as context* can be referred to as the transcended self that cannot be captured with any verbal content, because it has no form and no boundaries (Bach & Moran, 2008). The *self as context* or the self as perspective is always present and represents the observer that is always aware of the content such as thoughts, sensations and feelings that are distinct from the "I." This *self as context* is aware in the present moment and can notice any feeling, thought or experience. Interestingly, the *self as context* corresponds with the *being mode* as explicated by Fromm (1976). Both the *self as context* and the *being mode* share the core meaning of 'nothingness' and no boundaries. The following statement by Bach and Moran (2008, p. 10) that the "self as perspective is transcendent in that it has no form or verbal content" corresponds significantly with the *being mode* as explicated by Fromm (1976). According to Bach and Moran (2008), the experiencing self as perspective can be a powerful tool where clients can access their willingness and acceptance and the self as perspective provides a safe place where content can be experienced for what it is. Within this context, the sport psychologist can assist



the sport participant with the problem of identity foreclosure to become aware of his attachment and exclusive identification with sport, as well as the possible ramifications that may flow from this problem.

The core aim of the ACT is to establish and facilitate psychological flexibility through six core processes, namely *clarifying values, committing genuinely to action, cognitive defusion, total acceptance*, in the *present moment from the self as context*. It seems that the ACT approach can be an effective therapy to re-establish a more balanced role identification in the world of the athlete and mitigates the problem of over-identification that can lead to identity foreclosure.

#### **2.2.4. Social Identity Theory**

Social Identity Theory and Identity Theory are the theories associated with answering questions such as, “What defines me?” “Who am I?” “In social identity theory and identity theory, the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and can categorize, classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications” (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 224). This process in Social Identity Theory is called self-categorization (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987), whereas in Identity Theory it is called identification (McCall & Simmons, 1978). According to Stets and Burke (2000), the results of this process of self-categorization or identification are that an identity formation occurs. Based on studied literature, it is notable that there is a very close relationship on how a person answer (to the question who am I?) and what guides them to answer these questions. Applying this Social Identity Theory and Identity Theory to the current research project, the intent of this research was to scientifically understand how people are identifying themselves. Each person is proved to respond to any investigative scientific inquiry based on the methodological approach devised by the researcher. If a researcher is looking for answers in an objective manner, quantitative methodology will be the guidance and the approach used to understand how people are identifying themselves. The same process applies as the researcher of the current study intends to understand how people identify themselves in a subjective manner that will guide the approach of this qualitative study. There are other scientific approaches to choose from, other than the above mentioned, as it depends on the researcher’s intentions. Even in a qualitative approach, there are more than one method and guidelines of understanding how people are identifying themselves. The current study is therefore guided by the need to understand how people identify themselves phenomenological, hence exploring the current scientific inquiry of the

study using the humanistic model as a paradigmatic framework in line with the IPA methodology.

There is a number of studies (Brandt, 1960; Erikson, 1963; Festinger, 1954; Lewis, 1966, Marcia, 1966; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Turner et al., 1987) concerning identity, but the most relevant studies relating to this study are Erikson's (1963) stage five (identity formation versus role confusion) of psychosocial development, and Marcia's (1966) ego identity status (identity foreclosure). According to Alberts (2000), identity foreclosure is categorised as the less sophisticated mode of decision-making. Several studies (Adler & Adler, 1991; Beamon & Bell, 2011; Brewer, Van Raalte & Linder, 1993; Murphy, Petitpas & Brewer, 1996) support Alberts' (2000) statement due to the concept of identity foreclosure mostly linked to a lack of career maturity and resulting in difficulties in transition out of sport, hence the need to explore this phenomenon.

### **2.3. Athletic identity**

Hurst, Hale, Smith and Collins (2000, p. 432) defined athletic identity as "the degree athletes identify with the athletic role." Horton and Mack (2000, p. 102) also emphasize the strength of identification by defining athletic identity as "the extent to which a person identifies with the athlete's role." Creznak's definition of athletic identity adds to "the degree of importance, strength and exclusivity attached to the athlete role that is maintained by the athlete and influenced by their environment" (Oregon, 2010, p. 14). Brewer et al. (1993, p. 238) defined athletic identity as a process to which an individual identifies with an athlete role, in its specified sense it is "a cognitive structure, or self-schema that guides and organises processing of self-related information." Van Heerden (2005, p. 15) emphasizes the effect of high athletic identity on the participant's life by stating that "a person with high athletic identity is likely to interpret life events in terms of how it impacts on their athletic functioning." Athletic identity is an identity assumed or formed by an individual in terms of answering the question "who am I?", which in this case an individual might respond to him/herself as "I am an athlete." Some of the scholars (Brandt, 1960; Erikson, 1963; Festinger, 1954; Lewis, 1966, Marcia, 1966; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Turner et al., 1987) have studied the 'identity' concept. In the case of understanding this complex concept with relevance to the study, a more enriching explanation can be acquired by gathering the meanings around the Social Identity Theory (Hogg & Abrahams, 1988; Turner et al., 1987), Identity Theory (Burke & Tully, 1977; McCall & Simmons, 1978; Thoits, 1986), psychosocial development

(Erikson, 1963) and ego identity statuses (Marcia, 1966). In the Social Identity Theory, an individual's identity is the knowledge that they belong to a social category or a group (Hogg & Abrahams, 1988). A social group is a collective of individuals with a common social identification or view of themselves held as members of the same social category (Stets & Burke, 2000). By means of social comparison, persons can determine similarities with other people and categorize and label themselves with the group of people with the same roles, activities and functions. In the Identity Theory, identity's core is regarded as the self-categorization as an occupant of a certain role, and then merge, into the self, of the expectations and meanings related with that role and its performance (Burke & Tully, 1977; Thoits, 1986). These meanings and expectations create a set of standards that guides an individual's behaviour (Burke, 1991; Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Additionally, the naming in the Identity Theory encompasses the things, including self and other that take on meaning regarding to an individual's plans and activities (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

In further explanation of identity formation, Erikson (1968) provided a conceptualized comprehensive understanding concerning the concept 'identity.' The problem of not including human development in identity formation was addressed in his book *Identity youth and crisis* where he stated that "most of identity theory approaches lack the theory of human development which attempts overcome closer to a concept of what identity is by finding out where from and where to it develops" (Erikson, 1968, p. 24). In other words, the process of identity formation involves a process of concurrent observation and reflection (Erikson, 1968). A process that encompasses all levels of mental functioning in which an individual judges himself in alignment of what he perceives himself, as well as how others perceive them typically to what is significant to them. The fifth stage refers to identity formation and is one of the stages according to Erikson (1963) that most of the adolescents are likely to experience more complicated identity formations in their development. According to Erikson (1968), identity formation involves a process of the number of times an individual has made certain choices regarding different identities, and how the individual shows the commitment to those choices. In contrast with unhealthy identification, an individual can experience role confusion, which is associated with individuals that have little understanding of their weaknesses and strengths, as well as a weak articulated sense of self (Erikson, 1968). According to Erikson (1968), the psychological crisis on adolescents involves *identities* versus *role confusion*. Once the tension is resolved through identity formation, then the adolescent will develop *fidelity* as a virtue. The vital relationships from this stage are based on peers and role models.

However, Alberts (2000) highlights the work of Marcia (1966) by emphasizing the importance of the fact that Marcia (1966) elaborated and expanded on the original work of Erikson pertaining to the bipolar stage of *identity formation* versus *role confusion*. Marcia (1966) develops an identity status model where he refers to four qualitative distinct ways of resolving identity crisis. Marcia's (1966) identity statuses development provided more clarification on the processes of mental functioning of an individual experiencing the fifth stage on psychosocial development. The work of Marcia (1966) resulted in the development of an interview instrument that can measure four identity statuses (modes of decision-making). These modes of decision-making definition are in accordance with two dimensions, which are *crisis* and *commitment* (Alberts, 2000, p. 24). The concept of *crisis* refers to an exploration and deliberation of meaningful alternatives that can lead to a process of decision-making where one can commit to a meaningful alternative. The concept of *commitment* can be described as a stable focus where energy and emotions are invested in certain roles, values and goals, accompanied by behaviour that confirms the role investment. Learners are in a developmental phase with various contexts and people influencing their identity development; these include for instance sport (being athletes), academics and religion. The intended study's concern is learner identification as being an athlete and the consequences in terms of their identity status.

The exploration of the four identity statuses can result in identify foreclosure, due to the fact that the athlete only commits to his athletic role without experiencing any nuanced identity possibilities. Individuals with identity foreclosure tend to be influenced by the expectations of others regarding their future (e.g. allowing a parent to determine a career direction). These individuals tend to conform to choices made for them or influenced on them, without exploring a range of options. The obvious reason most of these individuals are influenced by others is that athletic talent is usually recognized when an individual is still at a younger age and development of that talent becomes a central part of their life as well as their family's life (Webb & Nasco, 1998). In that sense, athletic identity is formed early in a person's development and much attention, time and psychological commitment is given to this role. This means when the person reaches adulthood, athletic identity has become internalised (Van Heerden, 2005). This internalisation can lead to exclusion to the possible social roles and can result in the fact that athletic identity can dominate the individual's self-concept (Webb & Nasco, 1998).

The findings pertaining to the central topic of *high athletic identity can lead to athletic identity foreclosure* (Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Visek et al., 2008; Whipple, 2009) is the main motivator to explore the reasons why one mode of decision-making (identity status) can lead to identity foreclosure. This mode of decision-making is the most reported by researchers in this field of study as the most experienced identity status in athletes (Adler & Alder, 1991; Brewer et al., 1993; Beamon, 2012; Beamon & Bell, 2011; Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1997, Murphy et al., 1996; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Visek et al., 2008; Whipple, 2009).

#### **2.4. Identity foreclosure**

Identity foreclosure as explained by Marcia (1966, p. 558) is an identity status where an “individuals prematurely make a firm commitment to an occupation or ideology.” Individuals with foreclosed identities have not allowed themselves to explore all the possible different identity roles available in their life, as well as their internal needs and values; instead, they conformed to environmental demands and adopted a specific social role identity (Oregon, 2010). Evidence of identity foreclosure was found among college athletes and the researchers also revealed that identity foreclosure are related to low moral development, lack of autonomy and career plans (Blann, 1985; Kennedy & Dimick, 1987; Sowa & Gressard, 1983). Murphy et al. (1996) found that the physical and psychological demands accompanied by a very restrictive athletic system may isolate athletes and prevent them to participate in the normal mainstream college activities. This high demand situation for the athlete can prevent opportunities to explore other roles and behaviour and facilitate premature identity foreclosure. These findings are also supported by Chartrand and Lent (1987), Nelson (1983) and Petitpas and Champagne (1988). This confirms the notion that investment of energy and effort in one specific role such as athletics may lead to the exclusion of other significant roles and inflexible attachment to this specific role can lead to the phenomenon of identity foreclosure.

Weichman and Williams (1997) showed a very related concept to identity foreclosure, ‘role engulfment’ as “when a person’s time and energy is poured into one role” (Van Heerden, 2005, p. 16). Weichman and Williams (1997) found that basketball players throughout their four years at university, players became engulfed in the athletic role, withdrawing from student and social roles. Danish (1983) emphasises the fact that in psychological identity foreclosure, individuals rigidly rely to their identities to maintain security or to cope with intra-psychic anxiety. They tend

to be more resistant to change and more vulnerable to threats of identity loss. This vulnerability to threats of identity is caused by their perceived method of coping with their life situation and to seek approval through their athletic success. The loss of the athletic role as a result may become a threatening aspect to their entire defensive structure.

## **2.5. Opposing views of the research findings**

Most of the studies in athletic identity are predominantly American (USA), with concurrence on the notion that *high athletic identity can lead to identity foreclosure* (Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Visek et al., 2008; Whipple, 2009). In contrast to this notion, Horton and Mack (2000), Van Heerden (2005), and Nkonki (2016) found that *higher athletic identity does not necessarily lead to identity foreclosure*. The study by Horton and Mack (2000) hypothesised that individuals with high athletic identity with high importance of the athletic role should relate negatively to the importance of other life roles, such as family, friends, and romantic roles. However, the research of Horton and Mack (2000) found that even though there are some of the runners who identified high in athletic identity, they showed no significant difference with those who identified low on athletic identity in rating other life roles as more important than athletic role. The runners with a high athletic identity ranked family first, followed by romantic partner, athletic role, academic/occupational, friendship and lastly, extracurricular. Those with low athletic identity ranked family first, followed by romantic partner, academic/occupational, friendship, athletic role and lastly, extracurricular. However, it was found that runners indicated that running decreased the amount of time spent on these other roles. The conclusion by Horton and Mack (2000) was that high athletic identity does not lead to identity foreclosure, but takes a lot of time which might lead to other roles suffering to be engaged properly. A study conducted by Nkonki (2016) on Eastern Cape, South African high school athletes, it was noted that the majority (90.7 % of 613) of athletes that measured moderate to high on athletic identity, contrary ranked their athletic role low in comparison with other life roles. The findings of this study (Nkonki, 2016) were supported by similar results that Van Heerden (2005) found in his study that high athletic identifiers ranked family roles as more important than any other roles. This is indeed contrary with the notion that *high athletic can lead to athletic identity foreclosure* (Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Visek et al., 2008; Whipple, 2009).

On the other hand, the research concerning athletic identity and academic grades produced contradictory results (Oregon, 2010). It was determined by Adler and Adler (1991) that basketball players' athletic identity increased as they age. These findings are in contrast with the findings of Brewer et al. (1993) that found that athletic identity decreases with academic yearly progression. Oregon (2010) based his view on the available findings and argued that as students get older and are exposed to multiple opportunities; their exclusivity of athletic identity begins to depreciate.

## **2.6. Ramifications of identity foreclosure**

Eldridge (1983) noted that athletes invest most of their psychological energy in their participation in sport. Interestingly, Settles, Sellers and Damas (2002) found that high athletic identity correlates positively with psychological well-being. However, Brown and Hartley (1998) stated that, over-identifying athletes with their athletic roles who are not considering the conflicts between athletic role and other heavy demands on other roles (peer relationships and other social-development opportunities) are susceptible to difficult experiences concerning psychological well-being. Taking all the available information pertaining to over-identification, high athletic identity and psychological well-being into consideration, one can argue that a balance between athletic participation with high identification combined with a relatively well-balanced lifestyle can be an effective combination for enhanced psychological well-being. This occurs when an athlete develops an internal locus of control, where they have achieved balance between the different domains in life to be able to create self-generated goals that will aid to their personal needs (Orlick, 1998). In contrast, findings suggest that over-identification and identity foreclosure are associated with external locus of control. This tendency can lead to a situation where athletes have to live up to external expectations where their own preferences and goals are neglected, and this can result in emotional distress (Hofer et al., 2007).

Identity foreclosure could be link to some vital ramifications, which are burnout, injuries, obsessive passion, and substance use. These could have a negative affect on the well-being of learner-athletes, which might affect their optimal development at a later stage. According to Oregon (2010) athletic identity can have an important impact on the athlete's motivation, self-concept, and the way they view themselves. It is for this reason that the negative ramifications must be carefully investigated to be able to mitigate the negative impact on the psychological well-being of the athlete. One of the negative effects of athletic identity is that a person's motivation and self-esteem can be more affected by performances, due to the impact that poor

performances may have on the self-concept of the athlete (Harter, 1990; Rosenberg, 1989). The key factor in athlete's lives is the fact that if sport represents the core of who the athlete is, they are much more vulnerable to negative feedback and performances that may impact on their self-image.

### **2.6.1. Identity foreclosure and burnout**

Several studies (Black & Smith, 2007; Gould, Tuffey, Udry & Loehr, 1996; Martin, 2011; Raedeke, 1997) have indicated that foreclosure of athletic identity as well as high levels of obsessive passion are relatively associated with higher levels of physical and emotional exhaustion. Hence, a strong athletic identity may lead an athlete to early symptoms of burnout (Martin, 2011). A study conducted by Gould et al. (1996) on junior tennis players comparing non-burnout athletes and athletes who identified as being burnout, found no differences on their identification levels of athletic identity. In contrast, Raedeke (1997) found that swimmers reporting to have the highest levels of burnout showed lower levels of identification with a swimming identity compared to other swimmers. With these contradicting findings, the general notion in the literature is that high identity and identity foreclosure can be associated with burnout. The research of Black and Smith (2007) corroborate this link between high identity and burnout with their investigation on burnout and athletic identity in adolescent swimmers. The findings confirmed that athletic identity exclusivity with lower perceived control result in higher burnout and the traditional stress-based variables accompanied by relatively high stress further predict burnout (Martin, 2011). These contradictory findings strongly suggest that further research is needed on the relationship between identity foreclosure and burnout.

### **2.6.2. Identity foreclosure, psychosocial and physical problems**

Playing sport, by nature is unstable and varies from time to time (Lockhart, 2010); there are a lot of possibilities of uncertainties in terms of the career lasting longer or being secured. Therefore, an injury that threatens the athletic performance is more psychologically harmful to athletes. This is because an injury triggers a perception of identity loss when an athlete is not able to perform (Brewer et al., 1993). In other words, some athletes with high athletic identity experience events that can disrupt their performances and athletic role, such as illness, injury and de-selection may negatively affect their personal identity (Sparkes, 1998). Athletes with low athletic identity that perceive sport as an activity that they do, rather than who they are, can cope better with life changing stresses (Ford, Eklund & Gordon, 2000).



### **2.6.3. Identity foreclosure and academic (career) development and expectations**

Cieslak (2004) reported on the study by Hale and Waalkes' (1994) on the relationship between athletic identity and identity foreclosure in relation to their academic interest. The highlight from their findings was that individuals who highly identified with athletic identity showed less interest in academics (Cieslak, 2004). These findings are corroborated by Brewer et al. (1993) that found that college athletes that measure high on the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) relates negatively to academic interest.

The lack of interest in academics among student athletes is a result of unrealistic sport career expectations that can lead to delayed career development (Cieslak, 2004). According to Cieslak (2004), this tendency to over-identify with one's sport career at the cost of neglecting academic development has unfortunately become a norm for most collegiate athlete students. In an overview by Cieslak (2004), several studies that expanded the research on this specific problem of the relationships between dedication to the athlete role and its effects on academic performance, career development, and sport career transition, experience difficulties in differentiation between academic identity (vocational identity) and athletic identity. In conclusion, the research on high athletic identity in sport (strong and exclusive) strongly suggests that over-identification with sport alone, can contribute to limited self-development and a lack of preparation for life following sport participation and the retirement from sport.

### **2.6.4. Long-term psychosocial consequences of identity foreclosure**

High identification with sport as a career may result in long-term career consequences, due to the fact that many sport participants that invested all their energies in their sport development may experience post sport career problems (Price, 2007). Price (2007) found that young rugby players are unrealistic in terms of the length of their rugby career. When rugby players terminate their rugby career, which was their central focus where they invested most of their identities, they may find it very difficult to develop a follow-up career (Price, 2007). Another reported factor contributing to athletic identity development is the ethnicity factor. Both Oregon (2010) and Beamon (2012) found that black American males are more foreclosed than white American males. Even though they have retired several years ago, they still identify themselves as athletes, claiming that is how people view them. They often feel that there is nothing else that they can ever do other than sport. Some are

unable to get other jobs due to lack of experience, because there is nothing that they ever done other than sport throughout their lives. Most of the literature (Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Van Heerden, 2005; Visek et al., 2008; Whipple, 2009) report correlations of high athletic identity and identity foreclosure, which may have long-term consequences for the participant.

#### **2.6.5. Identity foreclosure and obsessive passion**

According to Wilson and Potwarka (2015), obsessive passion is a result of a controlled internalization of an activity into one's identity. Obsessive passion results from an "intra and/or interpersonal pressure typically because certain contingencies are attached to the activity such as feelings of social acceptance and self-esteem or because the sense of excitement derived from the activity engagement is uncontrollable" (Vallerand, 2010, p. 102). When individuals experience obsessive passion, they fully or partially internalize everything associated with such activity and these could be the regulations, values as well as the norms relative to that activity (Vallerand, 2010). Furthermore, individuals with obsessive passion for an activity can be seen as experiencing uncontrollable urges to participate (Vallerand, 2010). According to Vallerand (2010), if an individual is *obsessively passionate* they may be dependent on an activity, and this may conflict with other aspects of their life such as family, work, and school, when engaging in the activity, as well as frustration when they no longer participate. This can be a precursor to a premature identity problem or the onset of athletic identity foreclosure. Some of the essential elements that describe the phenomenon of obsessive passion are also some of the elements that describe the identity foreclosure. Therefore, there is an overlap in meaning. Interestingly, they are used collaboratively in research due to the effective combination of these constructs (Martin, 2011).

#### **2.6.6. Identity foreclosure and substance use**

In considering the relationship between identity foreclosure and substance use, the latter has been reported as the consequence of the former (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). The research shown that athletes with high athletic identity may be more susceptible to the use of alcohol and performance enhancing drugs (Hale & Waalkes, 1994; Murray, 2001; Smith & Hale, 1997) as compared to those with low athletic identity (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017). Cieslak (2004, p. 54) discovered that "athletes with higher Athletic Identity Measurement Scales (AIMS) scores were significantly more willing to use sport performance drugs to obtain success even with life threatening consequences." The use of alcohol and performance enhancing

drugs have detrimental consequences, where the former might lead to misbehaving in society which might threaten the athletic career and the latter might result in athletes being suspended or expelled (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017).

The relevant literature seems to be neglecting or putting less emphasis on the phenomenological factors that contribute to individuals over-identifying with their athletic role. The limited literature in South Africa in this regard necessitates an exploration of phenomenological understanding in terms of athletic identity and foreclosure.

Some of the consulted studies suggest a more in-depth investigation of all the variables that may interact on the problem of identity foreclosure in sport, stating that, “further exploration of athletic identity foreclosure has the potential of enhancing understanding of the roles of sport participation in identity development, and how the state may contribute adaptive or maladaptive behaviours exhibited by athletes” (Brewer & Petitpas, 2017, p. 121).

Additionally, “it is possible that, in future research, the athletic identity dimensions (self-identity, social identity, exclusivity, and negative affect) should be treated individually instead of as a unidimensional or singular construct” (Martin, 2011, p. 75). Therefore, the proposed study’s intention is to explore the phenomenon of identity foreclosure.

## **2.7. Conclusion**

The humanistic paradigm provided a useful framework to interpret the phenomenon of over-identification in sport that can lead to identity foreclosure. The theoretical frameworks of Maslow (1954) in terms of self-actualization, and Fromm’s (1976) development of insight into the fundamental human modes of *to have or to be*, provided deeper insight into the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. The literature on the phenomenon of identity foreclosure is limited. However, the available literature supports the fact that identity foreclosure is a real problem and can lead to multi-layered psychological problems that may hinder the full development of the learner-athlete. High athletic role identification in sport is reported to lead to identity foreclosure, however, it is contrasted that high athletic role identification does not necessarily lead to identity foreclosure. With these opposing views presented, the necessity to explore the phenomenon of identity foreclosure is highlighted by the fact that identity foreclosure is associated with these ramifications, namely, burnout, injuries, obsessive passion, and substance use, that have the possibility of the

negative effect on the well-being of learner-athletes, which then affect their optimal development.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1. Introduction

The primary aim of the methodology chapter is to provide a detailed description and overall strategy that provide a thorough explanation how the research was conducted. According to Jones (2015), it is important to distinguish between the concepts of methodology and methods. Methodology is the overall research strategy that “outlines how you go about answering your research question, justifying decisions about things such as what to study, who to study, what type of data to collect, what to do with that data, ethical concerns and so on” (Jones, 2015, p. 112). The term methods indicate the specific techniques how to collect the data. However, the methods or techniques are always an integrated dimension of the methodology (Jones, 2015).

The humanistic paradigm was selected as the preferred paradigm, due to the optimal framework that the humanistic paradigm can provide to explain the phenomenon of identity foreclosure effectively (Hill, 2001). However, it is crucial that the paradigm must also be effectively aligned with the methodology and methods employed in this study. In the humanistic paradigm, the individual experiences, as well as personal meanings assigned to those experiences are centre stage in the humanistic philosophy. There are two major tenets detectable in the humanistic paradigm framework. Firstly, emphasizes are always on the *whole* that incorporates all the complexities, as well as the various perspectives. Secondly, the individual human experiences are always studied in a specific context (Hill, 2001). The way an athlete gives meaning to his personal experiences are always shaped by unique perceptions and the social constructions that are integral parts of the context. It is interesting that the phenomenological methodology and specifically the phenomenological interview is well represented in the humanistic approach. The following statement by Dale (1996, p. 309) “proponents of existential phenomenology would view an athlete as being indissolubly linked to his or her world whether it be in practice or competition” emphasizes the importance of the phenomenological approach.

The core aim of this study is to explore the lived experiences of young adolescent athletes pertaining to the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. This phenomenon is embedded in the context of young adolescent athletes that follow a dual career that requires extraordinary demands, which can create a myriad of complexities. The

qualitative approach and specifically the IPA approach are well suited to achieve an in-depth exploration of identity foreclosure.

## **3.2. Methodology and research design approach**

### **3.2.1. Qualitative approach**

The methodological approach of the study was a qualitative approach. The study was an iterative process, which was based on a flexible non-sequential approach (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2007). The motive in opting this type of methodology was based on the intent of seeking in-depth understanding of participants' phenomenological world of identification with athletic identity. The aim of the study was to understand from the perspectives of the participants. Therefore, the study was phenomenological, which explained the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of learner-athletes around identity foreclosure phenomenon (Christensen et al., 2010).

### **3.2.2. Interpretative phenomenological research**

The IPA use and aim were to explain the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of learner-athletes around identity foreclosure phenomenon (Christensen et al., 2010). It allowed the interpretation that analysed the meaning, cognition, action and effect with regard of context in which data is collected (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). The data was analysed through making use of Smith et al.'s (2009) six-step approach to substantial analysis. Where steps one and two involved getting closer to the data, which comprised of reading and re-reading as well as initial noting. Then, step three consisted of identification of emergent themes and to connect the identified themes to one another. In step four, the researcher had to search for connections across emerged themes. In step five, all the previous four steps were repeated, and then step six was to search for patterns across cases (Jeong & Othman, 2016).

### **3.2.3. Researcher's position**

It is important for the researcher to consider the philosophical underpinnings of his research. In an explorative research, it is always important to ask the question what is knowledge and how it is acquired? Jones (2015, p. 18) captures the essence of the philosophy of knowledge in the following statement: "the philosophy of

knowledge, or 'what knowledge actually is', is referred to as an *ontology*, and the philosophical study of how such knowledge is acquired is referred to as an *epistemology*." According to Jones (2015), it is essential for the researcher to have an awareness of his own ontological and epistemological position. Firstly, the broad ontological and epistemological awareness can assist to determine the most appropriate research design that will answer the research question the best. Secondly, a broad ontological and epistemological awareness is essential for the researcher to understand the assumptions, the researcher's position, the key decisions during the research process and how to analyse and interpret the findings. Lastly, the researcher's own inclinations enable him to determine research questions that are more suited to his own research preferences and ontological and epistemological understanding (Jones, 2015).

Due to the phenomenological approach, the study's ontological position was concerned with the relativist position through research assuming that learner-athletes had multiple realities. As a result, experiences of the identity foreclosure phenomenon were manifested in multiple ways that created various meanings, as well as similar tendencies (Willig, 2013). The epistemological position of the study refers to the study of knowledge or rather how knowledge of a phenomenon is acquired (Jones, 2015). The study obtained knowledge through exploration of subjectivities and inter-subjectivities involving the understanding and co-constructing meaning of experiences (Willig, 2013). With regards to an axiological position, the researcher's own beliefs, pre-knowledge and pre-conceptions of the world can enhance interpretation and fuller understanding of the participant's experiences (Davidsen, 2013; Willig, 2013). The researcher was continuously aware of his own influence on the research, selection and processing of the data and he provided a full account of his involvement in this study. The researcher's *personal reflection box* can be a useful tool for the researcher not only to reflect on the analysis and findings of the data, but also to declare his own involvement in the study and to give a full account of possible influences he may have as co-constructor of meaning of experiences. The personal reflections are done in the first person, due to the fact that the researcher has to merge and fuse with the data in such a way that he becomes the data and acquires the inside perspective of the research participants' involved (Smith et al., 2009).

### **3.3. Target research population**

#### **3.3.1. Sample selection**

The researcher recruited 10 learner-athletes. It is with regard to the Covid-19 pandemic that participants were only recruited through e-mails and WhatsApp. The recruitment process was facilitated through the assistance of coaches and club managers. The learner-athletes who were still in high school were only two, and the rest was in tertiary institutions. The targeted age group was 17 to 20 years old and the reason was to investigate if athletic identity foreclosure has already manifested in the latter part of the learner phase. Another reason was the fact that transition from learner to student phase is accompanied by an intensification of their pursuit of excellence in sport. The reasons why participants must be learner-athletes were firstly, because of the identified time zone where the athletes' susceptibility for identity foreclosure may be the highest and secondly, because of their pursuit for the highest level of sport participation (e.g. soccer, netball, rugby, hockey and cricket), which allowed them to see their own athletic trajectories to the highest level of professionalism. Due to confidentiality adherence, the learner-athletes who participated in this study were given pseudonyms namely, in no particular order: *Zanele, Bongani, Onke, Langa, Olona, Sisipho, Luzuko, Andile, Khanyi, and Azola.*

#### **3.3.2. Sampling criteria**

A non-probability key informant sampling method was utilised to select participants based on the knowledge and experience they possessed pertaining to the athletic identity foreclosure phenomenon (Jones, 2015). This sampling method is also known as purposive (purposeful) sampling. The sampling method was best suited for the intended study, because the participants were already intensely involved in sport and participating on a provincial and national level. The participants were purposefully selected, due to the anticipation of relevant responses that the participants could provide to enlighten the phenomenon of this study (Jones, 2015).

The participants comprised of 10 South African learner-athletes who fulfilled the following inclusion criteria.

- Five females and five males.
- Played on a provincial or national level.



- They participated in sport, which are allowing development up to professional level and the examples of these sports are soccer, netball, cricket, rugby and hockey.
- Only participants between the ages of 17 and 20 were selected for this study, due to the fact that they were on the brink of leaving school and entering professional development and their susceptibility to identity foreclosure is high.

### **3.3.3. Sample size**

The study had 10 learner-athletes from 17- 20 years of age, which were five males and five females, three out of five males played cricket, and the other two played rugby and soccer. Three out of five females played rugby including one who also played netball, and the other two played netball and hockey. The rugby, hockey and netball learner-athletes were on a national level and soccer, cricket, and rugby learner-athletes were on a provincial level.

## **3.4. Research data**

### **3.4.1. Data collection strategies and procedures**

The study made use of the semi-structured one-on-one interviews of not more than an hour. The researcher conducted the interviews and with regards to the Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews had to be telephonically done and they were audio recorded, based on permission granted by the participants and their parents/guardians. The recorded interviews were fully transcribed by the researcher (Jones, 2015).

Some of the interview questions were formulated from the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer et al., 1993) and the Passion Scale (Vallerand et al., 2003) for qualitative purposes. Only the questions relevant to the aims and objectives of the study were selected from the AIMS and the Passion Scale that are quantitative measures, which are used as an effective guide to formulate interview questions. For example, AIMS: I consider myself as an athlete. Converted question: How do you see yourself as an athlete? Passion Scale: I am emotionally dependent on my sport. Converted question: How do you relate emotionally to your sport? The literature review also assisted in uncovering relevant questions that will be included in the list of interview questions (see Appendix A).

### **3.4.2. Transcription procedure**

The purpose of the transcription process was to put the thoughts and lived experiences of the participants into a written format. According to Polkinghorne (2005), the qualitative research essentially deals with language data in a narrated form. The audio-recordings were quite a useful tool that was used to transcribe the interviews verbatim; hence the transcription process had to create verbatim written information accurately (Smith et al., 2009). The transcription process was conducted by the researcher. According to Jones, Brown, and Halloway (2013), the transcription process provides an advantage for the researcher in terms of familiarising themselves with the participants' lived experiences. Thereafter, the interpretation and analysis took place.

### **3.4.3. Data analysis procedure**

The study data was analysed using the IPA. Smith et al.'s (2009) six-step analysis approach was used throughout the process of data analysis.

The *first step* was to familiarise the researcher with the data that was verbatim quotes. Then the researcher had to understand what the participants' perspectives were, how their lived experiences prevail, how they utter their experiences and in what tone and what attitudes they reveal about their lived experiences.

The *second step* was based on the continuation of the first step. The process in this step was to re-read, get closer to the data and ensuring that the researcher acquires a deeper understanding of the lived experiences to uncover and illicit the ideas of the themes that emerged. This process was repeated three times to ensure that the researcher was getting closer and closer to the data.

The *third step* comprised of organising the thoughts based on getting closer to the data re-reading the transcripts. The emerging themes of the participants were regrouped into categories with shared similar sentiments and lived experiences and this gave birth to the emerging themes. The researcher had to revisit each and every theme to ensure that there is consistency and alignment of participants' verbatim accounts or quotes with the emerged themes.

The *fourth step* was the iterative process where the initially emerged themes had to be altered, removed, and re-created. The *third step* made it possible in ensuring

there was a connection between the emerged themes and the categorised participants' verbatim accounts or quotes. Thereafter, the subthemes emerged; they were aligned and connected with the participants' verbatim accounts or quotes.

The *fifth step* entails the repetition of the four preceding steps. This enables the researcher to deepen his understanding of the meanings attached to experiences and also allows him to reorganize the emerging themes and select the most relevant quotes to substantiate the emerged themes. With meaningful insights, the researcher can connect the emerging themes in a coherent meaningful structure that represents the lived experiences of the participants (Smith et al., 2009).

The *final stage* was to search the patterns across cases (Jeong & Othman, 2016) where the prevailing quotes were the instruments leading and substantiating the discussion of the emerging themes. The most relevant quotes were selected as representative of similar experiences by other participants. This stage was to convey the message extracted with no alterations from the participant's point of view. The role of the researcher was to communicate the interconnections of the lived experiences by the participants by means of relevant quotes to substantiate the themes that emerged. The interpretations of the data were achieved through integration with relevant literature and recent research.

### **3.5. Enhancing quality of the study**

The quality of this study was enhanced based on the emphasis of the shortcomings of the study in Chapter 5, and clear detailed explanation on how results were obtained and analysed. To ensure the quality of this research, the reporting of sufficient details pertaining to the methodology, details of data collection and a detailed description of the analysis process will permit readers of this study to make a judgement on the total scientific quality of this study (Patton, 1999). Quality enhancing was applicable even to the researchers' personal characteristics and ability to conduct interviews concerning reflexivity throughout the research.

#### **3.5.1. Reflexivity**

According to Haynes (2012, p. 72), reflexivity is described as "awareness of the researcher's role in the practice of research and the way this is influenced by the object of the research, enabling the researcher to acknowledge the way in which he

or she affects both the research process and outcomes.” Due to the study being guided by the interpretivism, where the researcher had to interpret the data collected to uncover values, explanations, and meanings (Jones, 2015), the reflexivity of the researcher can enhance the quality of the study. The researcher is well acquainted with quantitative research and perceived himself as inexperienced with the qualitative approach and specifically the IPA approach. The researcher had to reflect on his novice position with regard to this specific methodology and was aware of the fact that some of the participants’ responses and experiences were anticipated and pre-determined in his mind. This had an effect in terms of how the interpretations of the lived experiences are represented and communicated. This awareness per se assisted the researcher to make the necessary mindset adjustments and relevant reflections to represent the data as truthful as possible.

### **3.5.2. Quality assurance**

In assuring the quality of the research, the researcher made use of and adhered to the following aspects of qualitative assurance.

#### *Dependability*

According to Guba (1981, p. 80), dependability is adhered to through asking this question, “how can one determine whether the findings of an inquiry would be consistently repeated if the inquiry were replicated with the same (or similar) subjects (respondents) in the same (or similar) context?” This was achieved through provision of description in terms of how interpretations and results were reached (Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005). Dependability was achieved through the discovering that the studied phenomenon has the potential of existence among learner-athletes.

#### *Credibility*

According to Guba (1981, p. 79), credibility is adhered to by asking the following question, “how can one establish confidence in the “truth” of the findings of a particular inquiry for the subjects (respondents) with which, and the context in which the inquiry was carried out?” In other words, credibility refers to the extent to which the research represents the actual meanings of the research participants, or the *truth value* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher in assurance of credibility will attempt to be clear in terms of context, participants and settings of the research that will enable readers to understand and evaluate the research findings (Thomas et al., 2005). This aspect was achieved through researchers being reflexive to clarify the

direction and the roots of interpreting the meanings of the lived experiences of the participants.

### *Transferability*

Transferability refers to the degree to which the current study findings had strength and usefulness in terms of the application to other people in other settings (Polit & Beck, 2014). This will be achieved through provision of rich, detailed description of the context, location, people studied, as well as by being transparent about the analysis (Connelly, 2016). Additionally, the researcher provided a clear picture that informed and resonated with the readers (Amankwaa, 2016).

### *Authenticity*

Authenticity refers to a degree to which qualitative researchers completely and fairly show varieties of realities conveying participants' lives (Polit & Beck, 2014). In the current study, authenticity was achieved through appropriate selection of people for the study sample and provision of a rich, detailed description of the results and interpretations (Schou, Høstrup, Lyngsø, Larsen & Poulsen, 2011).

## **3.6. Ethical consideration**

The ethical consideration was adhered to with the intent of avoiding harm to the human participants. It is essential that in every study that ethical consideration must be the primary concerning in conducting the research. The researcher needs constantly to ask the following question: *Will my study avoid harm or be harmful to its participants?* The current study ensured that the answer to that question was to avoid harm. In conducting the process of avoiding harm to research participants, the study provided informed consents forms, information sheets, ensured autonomy, confidentiality, and anonymity. However, the study had no anticipated benefits that were direct to participants and the risk of any harm to the participants is very low, due to the nature of this study.

### **3.6.1. The informed consent**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the researcher and participants never met physically. The process of interaction between the researcher and participant was through e-mails and WhatsApp. The researcher initially provided the information sheet soft copy to participants and attended to all the questions pertaining to the research from

the participants. Thereafter, informed consent was acquired where they had to provide a signed consent form to indicate their willingness to participate in this research project. There was only one minor from the study participants and this also required that the guardian had to provide a signed consent form.

### **3.6.2. Autonomy**

Autonomy refers to the participant's freedom of action and freedom of choice to be part of the intended study, which has to be respected by the researcher (McLeod, 2010). The researcher made it clear in the information sheet that any participant wishing to withdraw at any time in the study, were free to do so.

### **3.6.3. Anonymity and confidentiality**

The researcher assured anonymity in terms of reporting the data obtained, where it will not be uniquely identified able information, so that it cannot be easily be traced back to the participant that provided information that are of a personal nature (Martens, 2010). Confidentiality is referred to as privacy of the participants' information that was gathered and will be protected by reporting the information in such a way that it cannot be associated with the participants personally (Martens, 2010). The researcher protected the information of the participants through ensuring that the format of reporting will ensure that the participant is untraceable. Anonymity was applied through provision of pseudo names that could not be traced back to the participants of the study.

### **3.6.4. Storage of data**

Electronic information will be stored for a period of 15 years in the Department of Psychology in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. Future use of the data will be subject to evaluation from the Postgraduate Studies and Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities.

## **3.7. Conclusion**

In conclusion, Chapter 3 provided a full description of the methodological approached employed in this study. The qualitative nature of this study was fully explained. The researcher made use of the purposive sampling technique. The interviews were the useful instrument to collect rich data that were analysed using the IPA approach. The study followed and adhered to ethical considerations with the

intent to avoid harm to the research participants. The next chapter will be based on the analysis of the qualitative data that were collected by using the IPA approach.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Introduction

The study's aim was to explore the phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes in a South African context. The IPA was employed to analyse the one-on-one interviews of this study. The emerged themes will be substantiated with relevant quotes from the learner-athletes and integration with relevant literature will assist in the explanations of the emerged themes. The main themes that emerged from the findings were: The love of sport and how the love of sport developed, social support, emotional attachment and obsession with sport, envisaged life without sport, living a balanced lifestyle, spending too much time in sport and sport's values transference.

#### **My personal reflection**

In alignment with the philosophical underpinnings of this study, the themes and subthemes that were revealed and discussed are my interpretations of the participant's perspectives of their life experiences in the context of the phenomenon that is the focus of study (identity foreclosure) in the relation to the world around them. The themes and subthemes that are discussed in this chapter are not absolute truth and the possibility could exist that another researcher's interpretation may reveal different and alternative themes and subthemes.

### 4.2. The participants

The research participants consisted of 10 learner-athletes who played on a provincial and national level of rugby, hockey, soccer, cricket, as well as netball were recruited by the researcher to participate in the study. All participants were given an information sheet prior to the participation in this research project to ascertain if they met the selection criteria. Only one learner-athlete was under the age of 18 years, the other nine were between the ages of 18 years to 20 years. The participants consisted of five males and five females. Most of the research participants were African, with only one Caucasian. Eight of the research participants were in a tertiary institution with only two participants that were still in high school.

In ensuring the participants' confidentiality, the study used the pseudonyms: Khanyi (19 years-old), Zanele (19 years-old), Luzuko (19 years-old), Onke (20 years-old),



Andile (18 years-old), Azola (17 years-old), Bongani (19 years-old), Sisipho (20 years-old), Langa (20 years-old), and Olona (20 years-old).

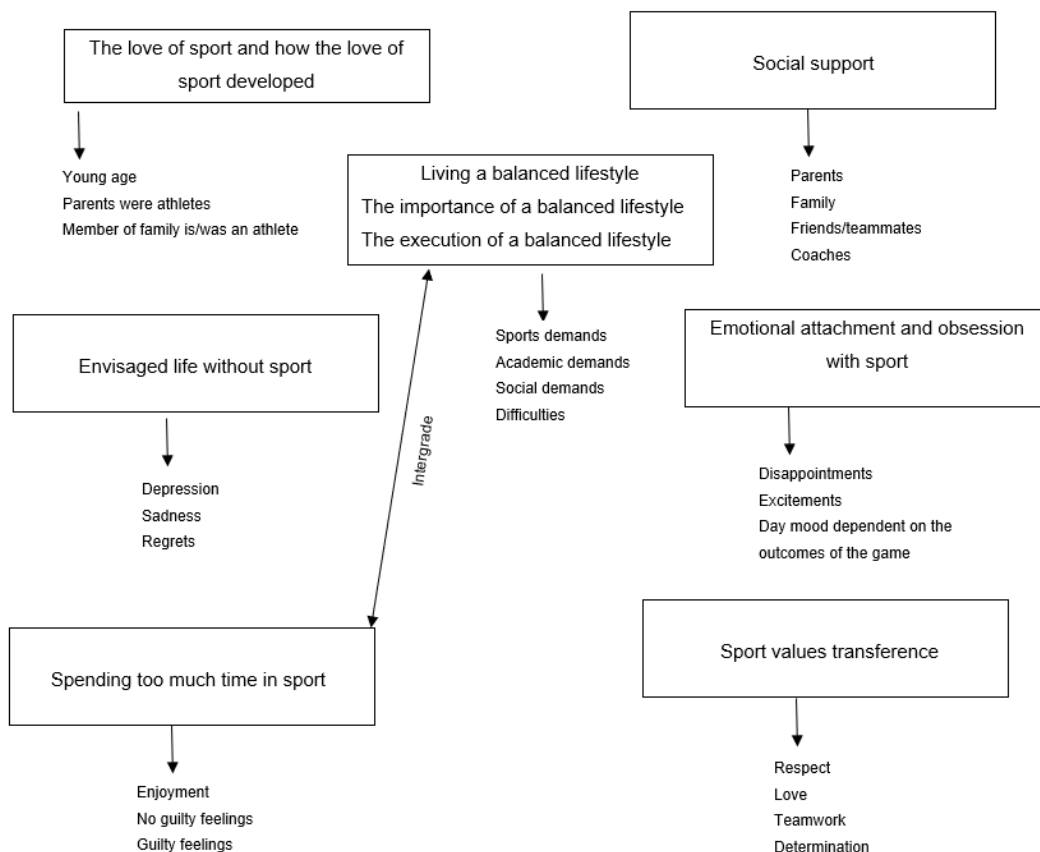
**My personal reflection**

As a researcher, I felt the need to let the reader understand that using the IPA methodology for the first time was a daunting experience for me, but I have approached it as a wonderful challenge and a learning process that is effectively aligned with the research process. I also perceived this study as an expansion of my research capabilities. On the other hand, the internship programme that was very demanding for me, as well as my academic training in the professional master's degree, gave me the confidence that I will conduct this type of research effectively.

### 4.3. Themes and discussions

The following seven themes emerged from the study findings: The love of sport and how the love of sport developed, social support, emotional attachment and obsession with sport, envisaged life without sport, living a balanced lifestyle, spending too much time in sport and sport's values transference.

Figure 1: The summary of the seven main themes with their corresponding subthemes that emerged from the analysis.



#### **4.3.1. The love of sport and how the love of sport developed**

The love for sport that was revealed in the learner-athletes' experiences is referred to as the commencement of interest in sport. This first encounters created an interest that develop into an intense love for the sport. The seed for the development of this passion and love for sport was planted very early in their lives. The positive first impressions provided the ideal environment for the nurturing of this initial interest into an intensive love for the sport. The social environment that includes their immediate physical surroundings, social and cultural interaction, as well as the important people in their lives played a crucial role in this development in their love for the sport.

The following statements by the participants indicate the strong influences of their physical, social and relational environment on their development of love for their sport.

*I was nine years old... when I watched the World Cup and I had a different feeling about rugby. I had a wish of being part of a rugby team one day, basically that's when the love started.* – Khanyi

*From my mother, my mother was a SA player from netball. I used to travel with her when she has small tournaments in the city or in town like maybe in the provinces.* – Zanele

*It all started back in primary school, I fell in love with netball in Grade 2. I'd always watch netball practises, watch how the game is played. I tried it out when I was in Grade 3, since then I have been loving the sport and it's been keeping me going all these years.* – Sisipho

*It has been a family thing ever since I was young. Everyone in my family follow soccer, so I had to support and keep it in the blood.* – Azola

*My parents were athletes, so it was an athletic kind of family and I started in Grade 1 with hockey and I found the love for hockey.* - Onke

*First of all, I grew up in the villages (rural environment), so for us to play we should play sport. I mean any sport we never had toys, we could only play through sport.* – Olona

Khanyi and Zanele shown evidence that the love for sport developed through exposure, whereas Zanele's, Azola's and Onke's love for sport started developing due to a family history, where they wanted to maintain the sport culture in their family, because they want it to *keep it in the blood*. On the other hand, Olona's love developed due to circumstances of not having toys and therefore, the only thing they could use to play with was *sport*. Olona found herself in a historic social environment of a village in a rural area and this social environment only allowed the children to play through the sport medium. This statement from Olona emphasized the importance of the social constructionism framework, which primarily is concerned with the historical and cultural impact in people's lives and this can influence the unique way in which reality is shaped through their unique social environment and interaction (Adams, Collair, Oswald & Perold, 2004). Reality is constructed according to the social and relational interaction (Beyer, Du Preez & Eskell-Blokland, 2007). Social constructionism involves that the individuals give meaning to their life experiences and are closely connected with the historical and cultural background (Burr, 2000). The implication of this social constructionism framework is the fact that sport can be perceived as a way to lift themselves out of a disadvantage community and provides social mobility that can develop into a professional career with all the financial and status benefits. This intense identification with sport can create a possibility of healthy passion and participation in sport, but it can also be a precursor for over-identification that can lead to identity foreclosure. Social constructionism is not the theoretical framework of this study, but it is important to acknowledge that the phenomenon of over-identification and identity foreclosure can also be traced back to the primary social, cultural and historical environment of the participant. According to the statements and the commitments of the participants, a duality of healthy participation in sport is a possibility, but it may also carry the seed that can develop in a premature and exclusive identification with sport (Marcia, 1966). The major influences on the participants were primarily the family, social and relational interaction with the family and their physical circumstances in their full commitment to their sport.

The study findings concerning this theme are quite consistent with the relevant literature. According to Van Heerden (2005), athletic identity is formed early in a person's development, due to intensive investment in sport in terms of time and psychophysical energy. The result of this investment is the fact that athletic identity has been internalised and strongly rooted in the way the participants perceive themselves. The following statements of the participants reveal that this exclusive

investment in sport happens at a very early age: “when I was young...” “it started in primary” “my parents were...” At this young age, the role of the parents, guardians, teachers and coaches is quite significant and can lead to an external locus of control where the young participant has no choice, but to conform to the environmental demands set up for them by their social and relational environment.

*It started from primary school. I used to play cricket and my teacher took me to rugby then I played rugby for a long time. – Langa*

As for Langa, his teacher had a strong influence on him by the fact that he personally took him to the rugby games for a long time. This statement by Langa can be an indication of this strong hold that coaches may have on young participants.

#### **My personal reflection**

It is not possible at this stage to conclude that the seeds of identity foreclosure is already present at this very young age, but it is also possible that in this very early and susceptible age. My overall feeling that I experienced during the interview is that the possibility for over-identification that can lead to identity foreclosure is already in subtle way present. My reflections on the participants are based on the information that they provided at their current age group, which is between 17-20 years and the fact that they are still playing the same sport on a very high level is significant.

#### **4.3.2. Social support**

It is imperative for any athlete participating in sport to strive for optimal development and to progress to the highest level of performance. The book of Orlick (1990), *Pursuit of excellence*, provides an example of an instruction manual for psychological assistance needed to achieve the highest levels of personal performance. Almost all psychological textbooks and applied psychological manuals emphasize the importance of social support to nurture the athlete’s ability to the highest level (Orlick, 1998; Weinberg & Gould, 2003). The learner-athletes in this study put it into perspective that in some situations they could never have done it alone in sport. The majority of support they obtained is from family, teammates, friends and coaches. According to Steyn et al. (2016), psychological well-being is a prerequisite for optimal development and high performance in sport. The nature of the narrative by the learner-athletes in this study is that they have a very good social support structure that is quite powerful in terms of psychological well-being enhancement.

*I would say my mom played a very huge role, because each and every time I tell her about this cricket thing, she used to be excited. And would be like No, next time you should do better. She was the only one motivating me, even my siblings they were the ones giving me money for transport and for food buying me expensive kits. They also played a huge impact in motivating me. – Adile*

According to Adile's statement, it is clear that he definitely enjoyed the social support system that will assist him to develop his potential to the fullest. Social support is essential not only for optimal development, but also for maintaining psychological well-being (Steyn et al., 2016; Weinberg & Gould, 2003). Sport participation in general involves a lot of challenges, difficulties and disappointments and as a result it might not be easy for an athlete to deal with all of the setbacks and experiences (Orlick, 1998). Coaches, teammates and friends are the most key social support players that can support the learner-athlete's psychological well-being. The support and encouragement from the coach is quite clear in the next statements and the participant views his success as a success for both him and the coach.

*I feel so happy and even my coach says congratulations you did well today. It encourages me to do more and more and put more effort. To do better in a game, it's an award for us. - Langa*

*There are a lot of people, to mention a few. I would say my coach from here. He is the one who said I should come and play cricket. I was just watching and he saw me catch the ball. He was busy working with me for almost seven days a week. Then another coach the one who kept motivating me when I went to trials, because I would always tell myself I am never gonna make it. So, I made u15 in 2016. Those were the two coaches that helped me. Then growing up with friends who were in a same team working together, it is quite a lot of people. – Bongani*

However, there is also two sides in the social support from the significant others in his life. As already stated, social support can be conducive for optimal development, but it can also put extreme pressure on the athlete to perform well. The athlete does not only perform for himself, but he also performs to his highest level not to disappoint all the significant others that contributed to his development in sport. This might have implications on the athlete's psychological well-being by putting too much pressure on them to perform well. This extra stress may negatively impact on his psychological well-being. This duality in terms of social support as being a conducive

force for optimal development and the possible negative impact from his social environment, is evident in the next statements:

*Yeah that's what I said, like people in my community. Whenever I am coming from a stop sign going home probably there is gonna be like five to six people asking me how I performed. So, when I am going to the game, I am not just playing for me I am playing for the people who are just gonna ask me. So, I would be ashamed if I would always say I scored a duck like every day. I would say that some people in my community played such a big role in me. So, this helps me to be like, let me work harder, so I can get good results. If I got good results and score a 100, my community will be like oh yeah keep going. – Bongani*

*It feel sad when you do bad in sport and you also disappoint the coach, also myself, my family, my friend, and someone who is watching. So, to perform bad is not a good thing to me. It motivates me to do better for the next game. – Langa*

In as much as bad performance might keep the learner-athletes' psychological well-being out of check, it is quite a powerful indicator for them to push through and towards self-actualisation. It is quite evident from Langa that bad performance is not a good thing, but it can serve as a motivator do better and better the next day. It is quite imperative that Langa's mindset is to combine the constructive social support with the ability to transform the negative pressures and disappointments into motivators to pursue excellence in his sport. This tendency in athletes not only to perform for themselves, but also to perform for the significant others in their lives, make them can experience tremendous pressures to live up to their own standards of performance, as well as the expectations of the significant others can put tremendous pressures on the athlete (Stovitz & Satin, 2004).

One of the motivators to perform to your highest ability is inspired by the way the significant others view the sport participant and his achievements. The career trajectory and the participant's view of his sport career's development is also strongly influenced by the significant others' view of him, and specially his personality as a sport person, as well as his future development in his sport. This social influence is quite clear in the next statements:

*They always motivate me. They know I am a hard worker and they always told me that one day I would become a Springbok. – Luzuko*

*I don't really know because they never said anything to me; they see me as a quite disciplined person, especially my coach. I am just cool I am not out there. My teammates use to say I motivate them to do better. They like how I do things. – Khanyi*

*I think I am a very friendly person, very humble and I think they love me, when I'm around them. If they are around me they are always happy and I am always happy... because I am that talkative person, bubbly and everything ... they see me... I am not only a friend to them, but I can play different roles as a brother and a sister...they believe a lot in me...because I also believe a lot in myself. They see me as that boy who believe in himself as much as they do I believe in myself. So, I think that is how they see me. – Andile*

This very positive experience of the statements above illustrates the importance of the psychosocial interaction and dynamics to foster not only a good relationship with yourself, but also with your significant social relationships. According to the goal orientation theory and research on self-mastery approach, where participants invest in a task orientation approach to sport, enjoy good peer relationships accompanied by good personal qualities, such as performance satisfaction, enjoyment, persist longer and athletes feel very positive about themselves (Roberts & Ommundsen, 2007). However, these lived experiences are described within the context of sport. The transferability of this positive psychosocial dynamics is not directly expressed in these statements, but the possibility exists that this positive psychosocial interaction can be transferred to other important performance-evaluative contexts, such as academics and other social contexts.

#### **My personal reflection**

Being familiar with the phenomenon of identity foreclosure through the literature research triggered some realization concerning social support. It is highly possible that as much as learner-athletes might be negligent in social relations outside their sport context, due to the extreme sport demands and exclusive participation in sport, it is highly probable that the sport participant may only be negligent in social relations with the people who are not in sport or in their sport, but having lived experiences with people that are within their sport. This could only be an issue for learner-athletes that do not have significant social relations outside their sport. However, the chances of this incongruence between the inside and outside the sport context are highly

unlikely. The goal orientation theory confirmed through research that self-mastery could foster good peer and social relationships inside and outside the sport, as well as a good relationship with yourself.

### 4.3.3. Emotional attachment and obsession with sport

Some of the learner-athletes have shown the evidence that their emotional states are much more dependent on their sport, especially the outcomes of the sport. From the statements of the participants, there were indications that they do not cope well inside and outside the sport context, due to their poor performance. Some of the learner-athletes indicated that the poor performance had a negative impact on their mood states. This change in mood states also had a detrimental effect on their behaviour and their relationships with other people.

*As for me I take sport very personal up to a point that it changes my whole thinking. Let's say if I lost a game and I have to write a test on Monday that game would still be on my mind, while studying and doing all those things I would still think about how did I do it. So, it really affects even though I don't speak to people about it. It really changes my whole behaviour, because I am really a talkative person who makes jokes and stuff. The moment I lose, I really lose it even on my teammates when everyone makes jokes. I just get grumpy; get mad out of the blue. So, it changes me to something that I really do not even know. – Bongani*

*...then when winning games, I am always happy, young boys' lifestyle, posting on social media, I never post when we lost, I always post wins and that's my goal. – Bongani*

*I become very emotional to my sport... uhm... I take sport as (sighs)... I don't know...it's like a second life to me if I put that way because... I feel the game, it's not just watching it, it's not just playing it, it's the emotions that I feel in court and off court, prior the game and after the game. – Sisipho*

*If you lose the game that is important to you and it affects you outside, because in your mind you like... If I was to win that game, I was going to the next level, next division. So, it affects outside of sport, if I lose. – Langa*



*If we lost the game, my mood would be down completely, and I would not be feeling like doing anything. So, it has a very big impact on me. I would be able to do things based on the results based on that certain game. – Olona*

From the statements of Bongani, Sisipho, Langa and Olona, it is clear that the outcome of a game can have a dramatic impact on the general emotions and mood states, as well as their cognitions of themselves and their sport. According to the Relational Frame Theory (RFT), which is also a contextual approach that is effectively aligned with the humanistic paradigm that incorporates and emphasizes that context (Bach & Moran, 2008). The importance of the RFT is the fact that language plays a pivotal role to explain the relationship of the individual with his world and the way that the participant relates to his world after a win or lose in his sport, is significant (Bach & Moran, 2008). It is quite evident in the statements that the participant's relationship with himself, sport and relationships with other people were temporarily changed. This *causal* relationship that the participants have with the outcome of their sport is clearly expressed in their language. In the next statement, the *causal* relationship is clearly expressed: *The moment I lose, I get grumpy.*

Andile, Zanele and Luzuko mentioned some interesting coping skills when they experienced negative related emotions and unfavourable outcomes. The statements indicate that the participants developed coping skills to maintaining balance and to keep their psychological well-being in check:

*If I am sad related to sport, I will always read something like a book or go out to chill with my friends just to remove that sadness. – Andile*

*If we lost, I will be upset for like an hour after the game after that I can speak about, I can see where one is wrong, where something went wrong and all of that. I can converse about it. It does not attack my mood towards other people. – Zanele*

*Every time I go to practice or a gym session, I just change my mind; it's a must that you need to change your mind, even if you say negative things to me. If I have a gym session or training session or have a match I take it off put my mind at that state so I can focus, after that or if I am done with that game I can focus on my life things. – Luzuko*

*You know in life there is a good and there are bad things, not everyone is perfect or is gonna be a champ you know. If you fail to do something, you still have a chance to fix it. Not everyone is a winner in sport. If you lose today you will not be a loser for your whole life. If you see yourself doing something that someone can do that means you can do it. –Luzuko*

*It will affect me, uhm... I don't want to lose. If I lose, I will do funny things for like a week, and if it happened during the game, I knocked the ball and my team lost, I will blame myself. At the end of the day it's sport, you can't take things in the sport and put them in real life. Lose or win, its still part of the sport. – Luzuko*

The statements of Bongani, Sisipho, Langa and Olona are indications that poor performance can have a devastating effect on their mood states, emotions and way of thinking about themselves and their sport. This is a direct *causal* relationship between the outcome and the impact on their lives and this *causal* relationship is clearly indicated through their language (Bach & Moran, 2008). However, the statements of Andile, Zanele and Luzuko indicate that they developed coping skills to mitigate the impact of the disappointment and maintain balance. The ability not to be able to cope may be one of the first indications of over-identification that can lead to identity foreclosure in sport.

The constant reoccurring of certain thoughts on something specific in one's mind can be an indication of the importance or something that causes a lot of stress and it can even be an indication of a traumatic experience (Perls, 1974). However, according to Vallerand (2010), this overshadowing mindset and the over-emphasis and engagement in one activity can also be an indication of obsessive passion that can be a precursor of identity foreclosure.

The experience of the following learner-athletes (Olona, Andile and Azola) can be linked to the obsessive passion. According to Vallerand (2010), when a learner-athlete is not feeling like doing anything when a game was lost, they may be dependent on that activity, and this may conflict with other aspects of their life such as family, work, and school, when engaging in the activity, as well as frustration when they no longer participate. According to Vallerand (2010), this tendency is called obsessive passion. This might be the early signs of or the indication of identity foreclosure. In some of the learner-athletes, the most thoughts that are always in

their minds are about sport, they always think of sport, how they can improve, and what did they do wrong.

*Most of the time I think of sport, for example if I am not given a program and I do not do anything I really feel irresponsible that I should know what to do. – Olona*

*Uh... I am not only loving cricket; I am obsessed with cricket. When you obsessed with something you always want to do your best and you know as you know cricket is a confidence game. If your level of confidence is very low, then you lost your best so you have to...even if you fail somehow... as long as your confidence is still high, you will do your best and you will be at your best. I think confidence plays a huge role in performance and being honest to yourself and know your abilities you have to know your abilities that I can do this I cannot do this then. That's when...to do this and how to do this... You will perform better. – Andile*

*I always think soccer ... as in where I am going with it, where am I going to end up with it, and the ideas of how to make it better. It is how I relax and how I feel free. – Azola*

Some of the participants have developed advanced coping skills to cope with disappointments and setbacks on the one side, and a common trend in almost all the participants were the fact that success and winning a game gave them a sense of powerfulness and ecstasy. There is evidence of a growth mindset from the participants and the ability to learn how to utilize positive and negative outcomes to the benefit of their sport, is an indication of a progression in their learning experiences from sport (Dweck, 2000). In their statements, the progression and growth in terms of coping with setbacks, as well as enjoying the positive energy that comes from a good win, is evident in the following statements:

*When you do well in sport, you always happy and your heart is rejoicing you doing what you are supposed to do and you do it well, perfectly so. – Andile*

*If for example we win a match that uplifts my mood, I become so happy I do things so happily. I become so much excited. When we lose a match, I become so dull and sad but at the same time that motivates me to do more hard work on fixing my mistakes, but it really does not affect me that much when we are losing or something. – Khanyi*

*It used to affect me, but now I have learned to live with it and I have realised that you cannot always win. It used to affect me deeply before because I would not want to lose. I would not want to do things but now I am able to do things. – Azola*

*My emotions for sport...uhm especially for rugby sometimes I got anger issues, but in sport you have to calm down and relax even when somebody is provoking you; you should not be that harsh, because sport is something that you have to make friends. My emotions now are I do not entertain what people say to me because some people can say negative things, but as a person you have to calm down even though it hurts. – Langa*

*It depends how is the loss goes about, if I know the empire was fair, I will be fine still be fresh because I know I had a good game, because it was a fair loss. If it was an unfair loss, then by the time we get to a changing room I'd cry a bit, because I feel like we've been cheated, but it's part of what happens. So, I'd cry let it out, once it's out and I am over it I move on. I cannot stay at one point where I know life goes on; we need to move on look at the next game and look what we can do better and prove the empire what we are capable of. – Sisipho*

In terms of coping with losing, it really differs from athlete to athlete based on the level of maturity and the attitude towards their sport. The obsessive passion tendencies are not present in all the participants of this study, due to the fact that they are not only thinking and focusing on their sport, but are interested in other areas of life. This broader interest is evident in the following statements:

*I think of making money (laughs) honestly... I think of making money. – Sisipho*

*I think about err...poetry I also do poetry... I write some poem and go look for sunrise if I cannot go to the gym or the sport. These are the things I usually do. – Langa*

*I do not think honestly (of sport), I am on my phone and scroll on Instagram. I would do facetime people and I will see through the day what to do I have to do, if I have to gym or anything like that. – Zanele*

These statements provide evidence of the participant's full commitment to their sport, and there are not indications of obsession passion and their emotions are not dependent on their sport. The statements of Sisipho, Langa and Khanyi indicate that

their emotional reaction to a disappointing performance is only temporary and they have to develop coping skills to move through the disappointment and are able to learn from their experiences and focus on the next performance. This is also evidence of a mature approach to sport and a more balanced lifestyle, which is one of the major themes that will be discussed.

In conclusion, the statements pertaining to emotional attachment and obsession about sport reveal that obsessive passion is present in some of the participants and the emotional reaction and consequent negative mood states indicate that the necessary coping skills to mitigate disappointments have not fully developed. The elements of obsessive passion can be a precursor of the development of over-identification and identity foreclosure. However, some of the participants' statements reveal a mature and more balanced approach to their sport in general and specifically their reaction to disappointment and setbacks. They are also intensely disappointed and emotionally upset when they lose, but they somehow learned how to move through experiences much faster.

#### **4.3.4. Envisaged life without sport**

The importance and intense love for sport among the learner-athletes of this study were emphasized throughout the interviews. When the participants were confronted with the possibility to see their lives without sport, due to injuries, the intense love and dependence on their sport shifted radically to the foreground. The participants' general perception was that they could not envisage their life without sport. Most of the participants perceived the possibility of not participating in sport, due to an injury as a serious threat to their lives. However, there are elements of approaching the injury as a challenge that can be overcome. The question that took them by surprise and where the participants mostly responded to was the following: "how would you feel if you get injured and could not compete in sport?" Some of the learner-athletes indicated a bit of a startled reaction, because they never thought they would come across such a question. In other words, it almost never crossed their minds that they might get injured and never compete again. According to Sisipho, her mindset is comprised of not seeing injury as a threat that may end her career, whereas others are quite aware that the injury may be an experience that they are not ready for.

*I would feel so bad, you know how to play the sport and the way you play the sport...sometimes it is also sad when you know you will play the important game and*

*you not there. It feels so sad you watch your teammates...it so sad and it hurts. – Langa*

*I took my injury as a steppingstone. I told myself no injury formed against me should prosper after this injury. I will get back into the game and improve where I need to improve. It does not matter, I will not stop even if I get something broken, when I am healed, I am getting myself back at the game. – Sisipho*

*Oh! Oh! I would really feel bad, you actual asking something that is happening to me right now I think I broke my back or something I don't know. I would say I am scared. I would be scared that I am gonna lose my position in the camp. Being in a team, playing whenever they play it actually gives that thing that I am okay knowing that I am doing what I love. When you injured there is really nothing you can do, maybe you will be told to stay at home for four months and in that four months I will be thinking if I still have my spot in the team. To be honest, I would be really scared and emotional. I will have a lot of regrets that expecting and injury that will keep me away from playing sport. – Bongani*

*I would be depressed; like I am currently injured I have not played since like last week. I am feeling really down, like I would really be depressed. – Onke*

*My heart will be broken, especially when you see the guys you are playing with and you not competing. It is not easy, your spirit is there but physical you not there. Sometimes I will just go and sit at home than watching the game. – Luzuko*

*I would really feel sad and have questions, why I could not compete with other people. – Olona*

*Without sport, I would be severely depressed, that's how I can put it. – Zanele*

According to Lockhart (2010), sport is an industry that provides no guarantees and sport by nature is a very unstable phenomenon that can vary from time to time. Therefore, these findings provide evidence of the radical impact of occurrences that may disrupt participation in sport and are consistent of the perception of the learner-athletes that their identity is under threat if they envisage life without sport. This is because an injury triggers a perception of identity loss when an athlete is not able to

perform (Brewer et al., 1993). In other words, some athletes with high athletic identity experience events that can disrupt their performances and athletic role, such as illness, injury and deselection (i.e., getting 'cut' from a sport team) that may negatively affect their personal identity (Sparkes, 1998). It is ironic that Sparkes (2000) also found in his intensive case study on an elite athlete that the *Achilles heel* in the injury process is the fact that strong identity can cause the injury and also psychologically harm the athlete in terms of his psychological reaction to the injury. This raises some concerns on some the humanistic motives that drives these learner-athletes towards their sport. Fromm (1976) resonates with the very significant question related to the experiences of these learner-athletes, stating, "if I am what I have and if that is lost, who then am I?" (Fromm, 1976, p. 111). The question as simplified is that "if sport defines me, then without sport who then am I?" The statements of the participants of this study in terms of identity loss indicate traces of over-identification and identity foreclosure. However, it is not possible to make a conclusive statement that the participants in the study experience full blown identity foreclosure. The findings show elements of a mindset of someone that experience a certain degree of identity foreclosure. The following statements indicate a strong ego attachment that is part of the over-identification and identity foreclosure. This over-identification problem can be traced back to the mindfulness literature, where the ego can easily become attached due to the fact that "exercise settings offer many examples of this clinging, craving and ego-defense" (Mannion & Andersen, 2015, p. 5).

*It is very important; it (sport) started out as a hobby, but now has become something. I just can't live without it. I always watch soccer, even if its highlights I know a lot about it. – Azola*

*If I don't do hockey for two to three weeks, I would be a very different person, because I don't feel comfortable going out if I don't do sport and it doesn't make sense going out. – Onke*

On the other hand, athletes with more balanced athletic identity that perceive sport just as an activity that they do, rather than who they are, can cope better with life changing stresses (Ford et al., 2000).

*Wow! The question! I was never ready for it. I'd be more disappointed to be honest. I just don't know I have never thought of any...so I always have that mindset that...let*

*me balance my life with academics maybe I would have a permanent injury one day and not be able to play again. So, with sport one day I am okay and I am all right the next I am injured. However, I would be very sad (because of the injury), but at the same time I have a backup. – Khanyi*

As for Khanyi, it is clear that she will experience intense sadness and disappointment with the possibility of an injury, but she is also quite aware of how unpredictable sport can be. However, her perception of a more balanced lifestyle where she can fall back on her academics in case her sport career is terminated is evident in her statement. Balancing her life is a priority in case anything happens. She is mindful that anything can happen in sport.

In conclusion, most of the participants of this study reacted strongly when they were confronted with the following question: *How would you feel if you get injured and could not compete in sport?* Most of the participants expressed intense sadness and depression when the thought of terminating their sport crossed their minds. In their statements it was clear that they are not psychologically ready for such a radical event in their life and that they will definitely have a loss of identity when it might happen. Traces of over-identification and identity foreclosure were detected in the statements of the participants in terms of their identity loss that they would experience if their sport role were suddenly disrupted by injuries or other life events. The statement of Khanyi reveals a more balanced approach to life and sport and her perception of the temporary nature of sport and her academic career as backup creates a much more psychological secure situation. This theme connects with the following theme, namely living a balanced lifestyle.

#### **My personal reflection**

At this stage of my analysis of the data, I became aware of the complexity of the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. Through the read and reread of the narratives of the participants, I became aware that the phenomenon of identity foreclosure has many tentacles embedded throughout the context of the participants' lives. The metaphor of a puzzle came into my mind when the major seven themes emerge from the narratives of the participants. The themes up to this stage provided an emerging picture in the puzzle, but there are still a lot of puzzle pieces that are absent. The love of sport's narratives provided the possibility that their intense love and commitment to sport can develop into a healthy passion, but the possibility also exist



that passion for sport can derail into an obsessive passion that can lead to identity foreclosure. The social support also created a duality in terms of the sport's career trajectory that can also create conducive circumstances for optimal development, but the social support can create tremendous external pressures that can change the healthy identification into over-identification. In the emotional attachment and obsession about sport, the first traces of the possible presence of identity foreclosure could be detected. The statements of the participants when they envisage a life without sport provided glimpses and concrete snapshots of the presence of identity foreclosure. However, with these initial indications (puzzle pieces) it would be unscientific to conclude that identity foreclosure is a living reality in the lives of these participants. The over-identity tendency that came forward in the envisage life without sport's statements are a definite movement of the data towards the core of the phenomenon. If Marcia's (1966) definition of identity foreclosure is taken into account, the core of exclusive identification where the sport participants only define themselves as a sport person and the majority of other life contexts, such as family, academics, friends, social life and community are fully at the background, then more definite statements pertaining to identity foreclosure can be made. The question of balance and the outstanding puzzle pieces of the identity foreclosure may be clarified in the next section.

#### **4.3.5. Living a balanced lifestyle**

People tend to be more likely to experience enhanced psychological well-being when they achieve balance between the different domains. Identity foreclosure is more likely to be associated with an imbalanced lifestyle, which may lead to deterioration effects in psychological well-being and performance (Stambulova et al., 2015). The study findings seem to be relative to the notion that student-athletes as well as professional-athletes are susceptible to athletic identity foreclosure that can result in over-identification with sport and neglecting other life roles (Brown et al., 2000; Martin et al., 1997; Oregon, 2010; Proios et al., 2012; Visek et al., 2008; Whipple, 2009). The research of Brown and Hartley (1998) is consistent with the previous authors in the sense that athletes who over-identifying with their athletic roles without considering the conflict between the athlete's role and other heavy demands with other roles, such as peer relationships and other social-development opportunities, may experience difficulties concerning their psychological well-being.

From the learner-athlete's perspective, a balanced lifestyle is considered as quite important, however, the realization to create and maintain a balanced lifestyle can be a challenge to some. As the literature indicates, it is important for the sport participant to strive towards the ideal of a balanced lifestyle, due the fact that it can nurture psychological well-being and facilitates optimal development for the athlete. Sport is an extremely high priority for these learner-athletes, but they are also mindful of the temporary and transient nature of sport. Therefore, most of the participants are also aware of the fact that they must create a backup system for themselves when their sport is terminated in their future. The following statements provide evidence of their awareness of the importance of academic development and a backup system:

*In the future I see myself in the higher level especially about sport, because I love sport a lot. I see myself maybe sometime playing overseas. I want to be the special doctor on the animals because I love animals. For now... that's all... but as time goes by, things change. – Langa*

*I personally want to do civil engineering you know, and in cricket I want to... I would love to wear that green and gold jersey of the Proteas representing my country. I think and... as time goes on your vision at first your vision is blurry, but as time goes on it becomes a bit clearer and clearer and I can see myself playing for Proteas. It (potential) is within me. – Andile*

*My goal is, I just wanna be a sportsman. I just wanna play cricket of course. I am studying, but I do not even know what I wanna do based on studying. The main thing in my mind is to play cricket as I am working so hard toward it. When I have my degree, I will see about them when I am done with cricket. For now, my goal is to play cricket. To be honest, I do not have any other plans. – Bongani*

*Sport is more important than studies and I will focus more on sport than studies, but I will go back to studies after sport. – Onke*

Bongani and Onke are the learner-athletes that devalued their academic training, due to their total commitment to their sport at this specific stage of their lives. The possibility still exists that they may become aware of the importance of academic development and the creation of a backup career in their future development.

### **My personal reflection**

According to the available information that the participants shared with me in terms of living a balanced lifestyle, I cannot conclude learner-athletes are experiencing identity foreclosure. The way these athletes express themselves, reveal that sport is extremely important to them, but they are at the same time also mindful that academic and career development are also very important for a healthy balanced lifestyle. As I mentioned in my previous personal reflection block, the over-identification and glimpses of identity foreclosure is already visible, but the crucial element of exclusive identification with sport to the neglect of other areas in their life is not completely evident if the themes that were discussed up to now are taken into account.

Living a balanced lifestyle has two emerged subthemes, which are: The importance of balanced lifestyle and the execution of a balanced lifestyle that also integrate with the main theme, which is spending too much time in sport.

#### **4.3.5.1. The importance of a balanced lifestyle**

Orlick (1998), a Canadian sport psychologist, made a balanced lifestyle the central theme in his work *Embracing your potential*. His statement that “the purest path to quality living and performance lies in a spirit of balance” (Orlick, 1998, p. xiii) emphasizes the importance of balance not only as a prerequisite for optimal development of potential, but also living a quality life. According to Orlick (1998), an athlete must be able to perform to his highest level of potential, but he must also excel in his ability to live a quality life where he can embrace the full context of his life, which includes family, friends, a capacity to recover and enjoy life in general.

The following statements of the participants emphasize the importance of living a balanced lifestyle:

*It makes things easier, because if your life is balanced. I do not see anything in your life that will stop you if your life is balanced and it is easy to face a challenge once you actually know how to be disciplined and to resolve it because you dealing with different people in sports. Mindset is very, very vital. – Luzuko*

*It is very important because you can never have too much of sport or too much of one other thing. If you gonna have an imbalanced life, making things difficult for you*

*and you gonna cause strain to yourself, you gonna be stressed, you gonna be tired, you gonna be overworked and you just gonna bring pressure upon yourself with unnecessary depression. So it's very important that you balance everything that you do in your life not necessarily write it down, but to plan it in your mind how you want things to work and take it step by step. – Sisipho*

*It is very important because if I don't do sport and if I don't eat well and I don't manage my time right, I feel off-balance and I feel disorganised, I panic and I get anxiety from not having a balanced life. – Onke*

*It is very important, because you will never know what tomorrow will be so you need to have a plan B. So your plan B is your balance so your physical aspect has to be on top, while your academic and your social and everything is on top. If something is not right on the other side, everything will be wrong. So, you can't have one thing going for and everything is falling apart, because if everything is falling apart its gonna mess that one thing that's going for you. – Zanele*

*It is important not to spend much time on sport, but also to academics as well. Even if I fall down in my sport, I have academics and even if I fall down in academics, I have something in sport. – Langa*

The statement by Luzuko indicates a full understanding of the importance of a balanced lifestyle and he clearly emphasizes that life will become much easier if you can achieve a well-balanced lifestyle. Sisipho and Onke emphasize the fact that balance in your life can mitigate all the negative emotions, pressure, anxiety and depression. The research of Li and Sum (2017) and Tshube and Feltz (2015) indicate that there are advantages in following a dual career of sport and academics. The fact that the academic development creates a safer environment where there is less anxiety and uncertainty what will happen if the sport career is terminated. The academic component also creates a more balanced lifestyle that makes life easier in dealing and reacting to difficult situations (Li & Sum, 2017). With Onke's perception, the balanced lifestyle is not understood in general terms but within the sport context, a balanced lifestyle to Onke is mostly concerned with health that will enable her to perform well in sport. As for Zanele, a well-balanced life with a backup career is having plan B.

It is quite interesting how these athletes perceive the importance of a balanced lifestyle from different perspectives. The above statements of the participants emphasize the importance of having a backup system, while the following statements of the participants indicate that sport will not be a professional career that they will pursue. However, the career that they prefer must be connected to an academic career that is related to sport. The participants are also quite aware of the temporary nature of sport and they cannot totally rely on sport alone.

*As you know I play two sports netball and rugby. I do not see myself taking sport as the professional full time. I'd make it as a profession part time. I have a big love for journalism, so I was thinking of doing journalism and still play sport... in that way I can report back on our tournaments, and on our games. – Sisipho*

*You know that sport is not a life thing after I am done playing sport. I see myself working and have a family, and be a good father and be an example to my children. – Luzuko*

*It is very important because rugby could be a career, but it is not a guaranteed on how long I will play it. Maybe in three years to come I may have an injury and not be able to compete. So, if I have a degree, I might be able to get a job and move on with my life. – Olona*

In conclusion, according to the statements of the participants, the importance of a balanced lifestyle is clearly emphasized by the participants and the fact that they value a dual career that provides certain benefits and advantages during their sport career development, as well as an academic and backup career to support them after the termination of their sport career, is clearly expressed.

#### **4.3.5.2. The execution of a balanced lifestyle**

Even though a balanced lifestyle is projected as important, to some of the learner-athletes the execution is quite a challenge. The big question is *do the participants walk their talk* or is there a disconnection between the value that the learner-athletes express towards a balanced lifestyle and their execution of a balanced lifestyle.

*It is very challenging at certain times, you'd find that the academics are demanding so much and also the sport is demanding. You really need to balance, training*

*sessions with academic extra classes, and tutorial classes. You need to reschedule every day for your day to go forward. It is kind of very hard sometimes you would find that I have practical at four until five, but I need to be on the field at six o'clock. You see I do not have much time for my social life, so it's kind of difficult for me. – Khanyi*

*Uh first of all cricket is demanding and also academics are demanding; it becomes a lot of challenge. Sometimes I have to cut a lot of things like hanging out with friends and some point you have to cut, you have to minimise so have to draw yourself a time table...what am doing at this time; what I am doing at this time. But it is difficult I won't lie, the only time you meet your friends is at cricket practice. If they do not play cricket, you only meet at school during break time. When it comes to your family...at night you with your family... then on Saturdays it becomes a huge problem when you have a Saturday class and you have a cricket game and that's where it becomes a huge problem. It will depend on you, which decision you take whether you are going for a class or cricket game, you will be responsible for the decision you take you know. – Andile*

*You have to plan your study times and practice sessions. So ever since I have been around here in the Western Cape there has been a lot of practise. I would have to drive for about 50 kilometres to get proper practice. I would say I plan my study period, like when am I going to study. During the week I practice from four till five and from there I get home at about 17:30 and then take a shower. To summarise I plan what to do on that day if I don't have sport on that day. I would say today I am going to study that and that. If I am going to have a practise I will see what I can do later. I gonna come after practice tired, wanna sleep and not do what I am supposed to do. It is all about planning, if not you will fall behind. – Bongani*

*I find it hard, because I am doing a lot of things and my mom always tell me to do chores. There is a lot of homework as time went, I had to balance because I'd come back at school around three and I will starting going to the gym at four before that I will have to get ready for the sport and do my chores. If I get back I do homework, the only problem is I have less time to sleep. – Azola*

It is clear from these statements that the participants experience a lot of pressure to manage their time properly. According to available research, the dual learner-athlete's situation creates stress and a lot of sacrifices have to be made. The

research of Gomez, Bradley and Conway (2018) corroborate the stress that participants experience and the sacrifices that they have to make to cope with the myriad of demands that are made on the learner-athletes' performance-evaluative contexts. In the section on the importance of a balanced lifestyle, the learner-athletes express the importance and value of a balanced lifestyle, but it is clear from the above statements that it is difficult to execute a balanced lifestyle. However, the following statements of Sisipho and Luzuko are indications that some of the learner-athletes have mastered the skill to create more balance for themselves.

*I manage my time very well. I got good time management skills. I know there is time for everything and I know I have to sacrifice time for certain things. I do not compromise when it comes to my studies, my sport, and my family. If it has to be social life, it can be on hold and I will rather focus on my studies, my sport, and my family. – Sisipho*

*I used to have like a timetable. I know like at four in the morning I would wake up and do some work out till half past five; then take a shower or a bath. After that I will study for like two hours and I will have a break of 30 minutes in between. Then around eight that is when I will start eating my breakfast and eating my shake (protein). Then from nine or half past nine, I will stay with my family for like three to four hours so that I can recover and all of that. From one I will have my lunch. From one till two, I will have a gym session again like three sessions for like 45 or 30 minutes and then from five till seven I will study again. That is my routine for the day. – Luzuko*

It is clear from the above statements that the execution of a balanced lifestyle is quite a challenge to some, and skilfully managed by others. The common aspect is that most of the time is spent in sport and that academic demands compete heavily with the sport demands.

This theme can be concluded that there is a disconnection between the value of a balanced lifestyle and the manifestation of balance in their real life situation. This disconnection tendency is also reverberated in the problem of the use of drugs where sport people value health, but when it comes to high performance they are willing to take performance-facilitating substances (Anshel, 2005). The two most important competing values for the participants are their sport and academics and it seems that

other areas of life such as social activities and family are the first areas that have to be sacrificed. This tendency is also an indirect indication that identity foreclosure may be present and may strengthen the argument that identity foreclosure is present among the learner-athletes of this study. The next theme may provide important pieces to the puzzle that can provide a gestalt picture of the learner-athletes' context and the presence of identity foreclosure.

#### **My personal reflection**

I became extremely aware of the tremendous demands of following a dual career that these learner-athletes experience in their day-to-day life. They are aware of the importance of living a more balanced life, but they are struggling to maintain balance in the reality of their situation, which is not always conducive to maintain balance. A positive element for me is the fact that they are aware of the importance of balance and this awareness helps them to cope with the extreme demands of their situation.

#### **4.3.6. Spending too much time in sport**

The study findings are consistent with what was found by Murphy et al. (1996) that the physical and psychological demands accompanied by a very restrictive athletic system may isolate athletes and prevent them to participate in the normal mainstream college activities. This high demand situation for the athlete can prevent opportunities to explore other roles and behaviour and facilitate premature identity foreclosure. It has been noted as the learner-athletes struggle to execute a balanced lifestyle and it also forces them to disengage from other life roles.

*Uh first of all cricket is demanding and also academics are demanding. It becomes a lot of challenge. Sometimes I have to cut a lot of things like hanging out with friends and at some point you have to cut, you have to minimise and so you have to draw yourself a time table...what I am doing at this time. But it is difficult I won't lie, the only time you meet your friends is at cricket practice. If they do not play cricket you only meet at school during break time. When it comes to your family...at night you are with your family... then on Saturdays it becomes a huge problem when you have a Saturday class and you have a cricket game. That's where it becomes a huge problem. It will depend on you, which decision you take whether you are going for a class or cricket game, you will to be responsible of the decision you will take you know. – Andile*



These statements from Andile are supported by the research of Chartrand and Lent (1987), Nelson (1983) and Petitpas and Champagne (1988). This tendency to invest all your energy and effort in one specific role, such as athletics may lead to the exclusion of other significant roles. The inflexible attachment to this specific role can lead to the phenomenon of identity foreclosure (Marcia, 1966). In their statements, it is also evident that some of the participants do not feel guilt at all spending too much time in their sport and their time investment is seen as beneficial to be the best in sport.

*I actually don't feel bad because being on the field; that's what I wanna do so I can spend almost the whole day doing sport than being somewhere else. Even if I play for 20 hours I do not care. If I am playing cricket only, I can be there and I don't mind.*  
– Bongani

*I always go to gym every day, eat healthy to keep my body fit and this helps me to keep on participating in sport.* – Langa

*As for me, I do not see any problem because I am doing what I love at the end of the day. I know I will succeed if I do this and spending more time on it.* – Azola

Brown and Hartley's (1998) research revealed some interesting insight into the problem of over investment of time in one activity such as sport. On the one side the time investment can lead to positive effects such as optimal performance in sport and actualizing the sport potential, but on the other side the danger of over-identifying still exists to exclude other competing life roles, such as peer relationships and other social-development opportunities. This conflicting situation may lead to the concern of the athlete's psychological well-being.

The fact that some of the learner-athletes feel guilty about spending too much time in their sport and being aware of the consequences of this time investment emphasize the conflict between the advantages and disadvantages of this time investment. This conflict also raises the concern about their psychological well-being that might be out of check.

*I feel like I am a disappointment because I am spending so much time in my sport and failing in some other aspects. Sometimes I try to forget about sport and try to focus on my other aspects. – Zanele*

*Not always good (spending too much time on sport), but it has some advantages and some disadvantages. – Onke*

Brown and Hartley's (1998) research accommodate the contradiction in the sense that as much as the learner-athletes spend much time on their sport, some do not feel any guilt and they are quite happy with how things are in their lives. The long hours of training do not bother some of the learner-athletes, as long as they are doing what they love and their psychological well-being is in check.

*I feel comfortable; I love sport. – Olona*

*Oh that's not a problem to me because I am more around to what I like, to what I love and so it does not make any difference to me, because I am not much about the other things. I just love being around all the things that has to do with sport. I mean anything whether its netball, soccer or anything that has to do with sport. – Khanyi*

Some of the learner-athletes showed an interesting insight into the fact that they are spending too much time in their sport, because it actually keeps them sane. In other words, their psychological well-being is in check. The other factor is that spending too much time in sport for some of the learner-athletes keep them out of trouble and are beneficial to their psychological well-being.

*I find it way better spending more time in my sport than in other things. Its less complicated, less drama, it's not gonna bring tension upon people; it's not gonna bring enemies upon me for some unknown reasons. Even though there are gonna be people that are jealous of you doing certain stuff, they are not gonna put you down, instead they push you forward and you become better than you were before. – Sisipho*

*I feel like you taking yourself from many challenges. There are a lot of challenges out there; so it's up to you if you want to be part of the challenges or you do not want to be part. – Luzuko*

*Sport is very important, things like drugs and substances, you do not have time for them because most of your time you dedicate to be busy working on your fitness and you do not want your fitness to drop and also it is good for your health. – Luzuko*

According to these statements of the learner-athletes, it is clear that there is conflicting evidence of pros and cons that exist in their extensive time investment in sport. The amount of time, energy and effort that are invested into their sport is also an indication of their over-identification in their sport. If other life roles such as family and social activities are excluded, then it is a strong indication that identity foreclosure is present in their lives. Paradoxically, some of the learner-athletes feel no guilt with their time investment in sport and it helps them to stay out of trouble. This attitude can also assist in their psychological well-being. It is important to apply the *both and* approach and not the *either or* approach in this situation. It seems that there is a fusion and a unique blend of advantages and disadvantages of this extensive time investment in their sport.

#### **4.3.7. Sport's values transference**

An interesting theme emerged that sport is perceived as a training ground for life skills that can be transferred to other areas of their lives. The discipline and long hours of investment in their sport and the fact that sport is a central theme in their lives assists the learner-athlete with life and social skills. Sport can be an educational instrument where participants can develop the best version of them and make a significant contribution towards society. The following statements indicate the transference values of sport into the broader context of life:

*According to the way I think, sport plays a big role in terms of being disciplined, knowing what you want and it teaches young players to be more focused on what they want. To put more hard work on what they do, it just teaches you to be the better person, you understand? – Khanyi*

*If you are someone who has love and caring in your life even someone hurt you; you should not rush to them, you have to be calm...and you should be like it's okay, even if they hurt you. You should love them and care about them. – Langa*

*If you are a sport person you should be disciplined off court and on court. You need to have respect. – Sisipho*

According to the statements, it is clear that sport assisted the learner-athlete to become more actualized and someone that can contribute towards society.

*Firstly, sport has made me gain a lot of recognition, locally, provincially and nationally and actually it made me gain a lot of recognition around South Africa. I came to know the people who play the sport and who are interested in the sport. I learned from them of which I am adding more to my knowledge of the sport and implementing what I am being taught meaning that the values they have for the sport I take them and implement into the game. – Sisipho*

*I would say probably determination. I am determined to do the things. Sometimes I do not feel like giving up since like I feel so addicted, it feels I am attracted to the gym and I cannot skip a day without going to a gym. That's how much I love or respect a gym. So cricket helps me to apply the same thing to my relationship to my parents and respect them. The same thing you must apply in sport, you must respect it and never underestimate it. So respecting people and determination is something that's gonna keep you going. You need some self-motivation, so you must be determined to do something even though you do not feel like doing it. If you are determined and have some respect and patience, patience must come there as well. If I have had a bad season, I must work on myself and be patient. Give it time and then I am gonna see results at the end. – Bongani*

*Uh okay first I am coming from a very disadvantaged background I am raised by a single mother and my mom is not working. So now... I think sport played a very, very huge impact in myself... I started having confidence in myself...when you coming from the poor background. You don't have that confidence to speak around your friends and maybe they come from the better background. Sport helped me to stand firm with people whom are coming from a better background. I think it is what sport does to me it has moulded confidence in me and now I am not afraid of myself. I am not ashamed of my background. And I am proud of myself...that's how sport is important to me, because of sport I am very respected. – Andile*

*So sport teaches many things like sportsmanship, courage and it teaches us or me mostly about patience, which I can use in my profession. You need to have patience with yourself if you want to work with children and people. – Onke*

*We as black people we are unprivileged and when you play sport, it can open doors for you man. Once those doors are open and you get a chance, you can't play with the chance because we know our backgrounds, especially black people. – Luzuko*

*Like sport has taught me a lot of values like sheer, determination, consistency, and all of that, and this helped me in my academics and my social life and my life in general. So all the qualities I have learned in the sport and being in a team, being able to work in a group has allowed me to get work at places like hotels and all of that. Being able to work with other people can be traced back to sport, because I am used to work in a group from netball players. – Zanele*

*Sport relates quite well with my values, for example values like respect. Sport is playing a much bigger role for me to be a respectful person; then again like in life I learnt to be a person who pushes to become successful. – Olona*

Sport has played a significant role in the learner-athlete's life and the transference of values from the sport context to life in general is substantial. The transformation of the learner-athlete's self is also evident and the impact of sport on transforming themselves into respected optimum functioning individuals is also expressed in the statements above.

#### **My personal reflection**

When I encountered these very motivational and inspiring statements of the learner-athletes of the tremendous impact that sport had on their personal life and the ability to transfer the values that they have learned in sport to the broader context of their lives, I became convinced that sport can be one of the most powerful educational tools to uplift people from underprivileged circumstances. I share the conviction with Nelson Mandela that sport can be a transformer of society to create a better life for everyone.

#### **4.4. Summary of the findings**

The narratives of the learner-athletes indicated that their love for sport started in a very early age when they started playing informal sport in their early childhood environment. With this love for sport, the perception that sport can be a gateway to a better life and that sport can uplift them to a more quality life, the pursuit of excellence in sport was also activated. Therefore, it was imperative for the learner-

athlete to strive for excellence, as well as optimal development to achieve the highest level of performance in sport. This striving for the highest level of performance in sport could not have been achieved if the social support that they received from their family and broader community were not present in their life. The social support that they received assisted them to maintain their psychological well-being on the one side and also inspired and motivated them not to disappoint their family, friends and teammates on the other side. The social support created a positive support system to nurture their sport talent, but the pressure from their friends, family and teammates can also cause an external pressure that can be detrimental to their performance, as well as psychological well-being.

The first glimpse of the possible presence of identity foreclosure was when the learner-athletes expressed that they will be devastated if their sport career is terminated by injuries or circumstances out of their control. In a possible scenario in the future where they imagined that they could never compete again, they clearly expressed that it will leave them in a state of depression, disappointments and regrets. Even though these athletes considered a balanced lifestyle as important in terms of maintaining their psychological well-being, the majority of learner-athletes struggle to cope with the overload of demands in their day-to-day reality. Following a dual career, the academic demands are also putting severe pressure on their capacity to live a quality life by attending to other life contexts, such as family and social demands. Some of the athletes preferred to spend most of their time in the simplistic sport environment where they have full control to their lives, but they also experienced guilt at the same time by not being able to attend to other dimensions in their lives. In this scenario, it is also expressed by the learner-athlete that sport actually keeps them out of trouble and their psychological well-being is always in check, because they are spending time on something they love.

The learner-athletes of this study have unique experiences in sport, but one thing that they all share is the fact that sport is playing a very important role in terms of development in sport, as well as outside of the sport domain. Sport also teaches them fundamental values such as respect, discipline, love and determination that can be applied in social relationships and other domains of life. Concluding from the learner-athletes' experiences, sport is the most important thing to them, and no life role can compete with sport as their primary interest. However, their academic development as part of the dual career pursuit is also important for their future in case of serious injuries and possible early retirement in sport.

#### **4.5. Conclusion**

In the analysis of the rich data that the learner-athletes provided in the interviews, seven significant themes emerged from the data. The primary research question and aim of this study to understand the phenomenon of identity foreclosure, as well as to explore how the identity foreclosure originated and manifests in their lives, still needs to be answered. The phenomenon of identity foreclosure is not something that can be directly determined in a sense that you can ask the learner-athlete if he/she has an identity foreclosure problem. The phenomenon tends to be illusive and has to be constructed from different pieces of information that the learner-athletes have provided. The first evidence of the presence of identity foreclosure is that sport is the most important pivotal activity for them in their current life development and that they will be devastated if they consider terminating their sport career. Another piece of evidence is the fact that they spend most of their time between sport as primary activity and academic development as supporting activity. Some of the learner-athletes expressed that family, social relationships and other activities have to be sacrificed, due to the fact that they do not have the time or psychophysical capacity to attend to other life domains. These are all indirect evidence that the phenomenon of identity foreclosure is present at this stage, but the degree of identity foreclosure is difficult to determine and can only be determined by a quantitative study where the degree of identity foreclosure can be measured.

The next chapter will conclude the study and will reflect on the final findings, shortcomings and recommendations for future studies.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1. Introduction**

The core purpose of this chapter is to synthesize the central facets of the study and to conclude the final findings of the research. An essential dimension to conclude a study is to reflect on the research process before a final summary is presented. Strengths and weaknesses will be deliberated on in terms of justification of the decisions that were made pertaining to the application of the methodology. The findings of this study will be transformed into possible future research in this specific field of study.

### **5.2. Reflection on the research process**

The qualitative approach is a novel experience for me and can be classified as one of the most challenging experiences in my life. The challenge that I have experienced was not only due to this new methodology and research itself but was also a result of the very demanding internship that I had to complete in one year. I sometimes felt that I could not emerge deeply enough with the data, due to this extreme and complex demands that I experienced during 2020. In some other sense it was quite an amazing and interesting journey. In terms of the data collection, the Covid-19 had a huge impact on the process of data collection. It was quite difficult to recruit participants to commit to the study, because most of participants that I have contacted ignored my messages and phone calls. This was the main reason why the data collection was a bit delayed. The pressure that was caused by the research and the internship resulted that I had experienced mood disturbances and emotional reactions that I had to cope with. The constructive and positive dimension of this intense experience is the fact that my self-knowledge increased exponentially, as well as my ability to cope with extreme demands.

The research process provided me with powerful insights in understanding the identity foreclosure phenomenon. This provided me with a deeper understanding of the multiple realities that people live in. However, similarities and differences were revealed pertaining to the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. The 10 participants that contributed to this study provided rich descriptions to the study and is far above the suggestion that new researchers in the qualitative method can make use of three participants (Callary, Rathwell & Young, 2015). It has been quite a journey, most challenging, interesting, and amazing. The interview protocol questions provided



some benefits to participants where they reflected that they never anticipated some of the questions that were asked; as a result it assisted them to be mindful of the unpredictable circumstances in sport.

### **5.3. Summary of the main findings**

The study findings uncovered what could be the answer to the research question, which was: What would a phenomenological investigation reveal about athletic identity foreclosure among learner-athletes? On the other hand, the study findings had managed to meet all three study objectives that were set: 1. To explore how high athletic identity (intense identity) for sport can develop into identity foreclosure, 2. To uncover the psychosocial factors that may contribute to the susceptibility of identity foreclosure, 3. To explore the role of obsessive passion in the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. The themes that emerged in the study provided meaningful insights based on the learner-athlete's lived experiences in answering the research question, as well as meeting the study's objectives.

- 1. To explore how high athletic identity (intense identity) for sport can develop into identity foreclosure.*

Murphy et al. (1996) found that the physical and psychological demands accompanied by a very restrictive athletic system may isolate athletes and prevent them to participate in the normal mainstream college activities. This high demand situation for the athlete can prevent opportunities to explore other roles and behaviour and facilitate premature identity foreclosure. The study findings have shown consistency with the literature, the themes that emerged, the love for sport and how it developed, envisaged a life without sport, the subtheme, the execution of balanced lifestyle, and the theme spending too much time in sport, are the evidence that actually show that the learner-athletes of this study are not only susceptible to identity foreclosure, but that the phenomenon of identity foreclosure is present in this small sample of this study.

According to the definition of Marcia (1966) and the description of identity foreclosure, the essential elements of premature identification, exclusion of other mainstream activities, sport as primary activity and the psychological devastation if a life without sport is envisaged, can be distilled as criteria for identity foreclosure. Identity foreclosure is an elusive phenomenon, because it cannot be directly detected in the sense that you can ask the learner-athlete the intrusive question "do you have

identity foreclosure.” The identity foreclosure phenomenon can only be detected by looking at all the emerged themes and find the indirect evidence to construct and determine if identity foreclosure is present. The metaphor is to put the puzzle pieces from the narratives together and see if a clear picture can manifest and if there is enough evidence to state that identity foreclosure is present.

It was discovered that most of the learner-athletes started participating in sport at a very young age, and this is quite interesting in the sense that sport is still their main activity in their life. These findings linked us back to the definition of identity foreclosure, which is premature ending of self-exploration and definition. With sport as a core activity over such a long period in the learner-athlete’s life can be an indication that other activities and their life roles could be neglected. Some of the learner-athletes confirmed this notion that sport as primary activity and academics as second activity took up most of their time and other life roles such as social activities and family were the first to be neglected.

Majority of these learner-athletes do not only consider sport as an activity, for them sport is their oxygen, their lifeline and something they cannot live without. In possible scenarios where the learner-athlete’s sporting career may be terminated were perceived by the learner-athletes as devastating that will leave a major void and loss in their lives. These lived experiences that the learner-athletes revealed support the fundamental statement of Fromm (1976, p. 111), “if I am what I have and if that is lost, who then am I?” The question as simplified is that “if sport defines me, then without sport who then am I?” They also experienced emotional disturbances and mood changes when they had major disappointments and poor performances in their sporting career. This is an indication of their importance and central role of sport in their lives.

According to Murphy et al. (1996), the physical and psychological demands accompanied by a very restrictive athletic system may isolate athletes and prevent them to participate in the normal mainstream college activities. This high demand situation for the athlete can prevent opportunities to explore other roles and behaviour and facilitates premature identity foreclosure. Most of the learner-athletes find it very hard to live or execute a balanced lifestyle due to high demands of their sport, which lead them to spend too much time in their sport. The more time they spend in their sport can lead to a situation where sport becomes their comfort zone where they simplify life and love what they do. The fact that some of the learner-

athletes do not feel guilty is an indication that their sport identity has taken over most of their lives and is consistent with Marcia's (1966) definition of identity foreclosure.

An important question that can arise from all the above-mentioned evidence of identity foreclosure is why these learner-athletes do not experience more devastation and chaos in their effort to cope with all the demands and desire to live a balanced life. An important psychological dimension that was also revealed in the learner-athletes' narratives is the fact that they are acutely aware of their situation and predicament. One of the leading proponents of the Gestalt Psychology, Friedrich Perls, made a profound statement "that awareness per se – by and of itself – can be curative" (Perls, 1974, p. 17). The learner-athletes' high level of awareness may be the mitigating factor that protects them against the myriad of psychological ramifications that are associated with the phenomenon of identity foreclosure.

*2. To uncover the psychosocial factors that may contribute to the susceptibility of identity foreclosure.*

It is of great importance to identify the factors that may contribute to the manifestation of the identity foreclosure as a phenomenon. Early childhood always plays a crucial role in the overall development of any individual. It is also well documented that the early childhood years can lead to psychological problems ranging from addiction to problems such as developing an overtraining syndrome (Andersen & Hanrahan, 2015).

The learner-athletes described in detail how their initial love for sport was ignited. This deep love and motivation for sport was nurtured in their families, as well as in their communities and sport was sometimes perceived as a gateway to success and a way to uplift the young talented athlete from underprivileged circumstances. The support that learner-athletes received from their family, friends and community created a duality in terms of social support that can assist them in their pursuit of excellence or the social expectations that can create tremendous levels of stress. This external locus of control can assist the development of attachment and over-identification that may develop into identity foreclosure. The intense motivation and healthy love for sport can also be transmuted into a more obsessive approach, which can reinforce and compound with the external pressure to facilitate the problem of identity foreclosure.

According to the narratives of the learner-athletes of this study, the factors that can contribute to the development of identity foreclosure can be equally attributed to the psychological and sociological forces. Another factor that has to be considered is the fact that high level sport participation in our modern society creates extreme demands, due to the high level of expectations from the broader community and the sport codes that represent South Africa in international competitions. All these layers from internal to external forces have a compounding effect on the probability to develop the problem of identity foreclosure.

*3. To explore the role of obsessive passion in the phenomenon of identity foreclosure.*

According to Vallerand (2010, p. 102), the origin of obsessive passion is due to the “intra and/or interpersonal pressure typically because certain contingencies are attached to the activity such as feelings of social acceptance and self-esteem or because the sense of excitement derived from the activity engagement is uncontrollable.” Another indication of obsessive passion is when the participant experiences an uncontrollable urge for a certain activity and this compulsion to participate can lead to guilt feelings when participation is not possible (Vallerand, 2010).

The descriptions pertaining to the theme of envisaged life without sport provides evidence that obsessive passion is present. The devastation and great loss that learner-athletes expressed if they envisaged life without sport is evidence that they are attached to the activity and that obsessive passion can be detected. Not all the learner-athletes expressed the same level of loss if sport would be terminated and some expressed the fact that they have an academic backup to pursue a second career. In the definition of Vallerand (2010), the need for social acceptance for enhancing self-esteem is a component of disharmonious passion that can be linked to the need of the learner-athletes in this study to be fully accepted by their families, friends and community. To disappoint the people that believe in the learner-athlete is experienced as painful. This is an indication that elements of obsessive passion are present in the learner-athlete.

Looking holistically at all the themes that emerged, one could state that harmonious passion and obsessive passion are present in certain degrees. It is even possible that a learner-athlete may have a unique blend of harmonious and disharmonious passion. To determine the intensity and the degree of disharmonious passion in a

qualitative study is very difficult. The strength of the disharmonious passion factor can only be determined in a quantitative study where the passion scale is employed on a large sample of learner-athletes in their adolescents developing stage.

#### **5.4. Limitations and strengths/contributions**

##### **5.4.1. Limitations**

The first limitation of the study is that the sample predominantly consisted of African learner-athletes (90%), with only one Caucasian learner-athlete (10%). This sample is therefore not fully representative of the South African learner-athlete population. The findings of this study therefore only represent the participants that were included in this study and because of the qualitative nature of this study, the findings cannot be generalised to a broader population. However, the primary aim of qualitative studies is to deepen the understanding of the phenomenon that is the focus of this study.

The second limitation is that the level (intensity or strength) of identity foreclosure cannot be fully determined by a qualitative approach. The qualitative approach of this study revealed that the phenomenon of identity foreclosure is present among these learner-athletes, but the level or intensity of identity foreclosure can only be determined by a quantitative study, employing the Athletic Identity Measurement Scale (AIMS) (Brewer et al., 1993), on a representative sample of learner-athletes in the South African context. The same principle applies to determining the strength of disharmonious passion. The strength of passion (harmonious and disharmonious) can only be determined by a quantitative study making use of the passion scale (Vallerand et al., 2003). This quantitative research can also determine the strength of the relationship between the identity foreclosure and disharmonious passion.

The third limitation was the fact that I only made use of telephonic interviews. Video recordings could have captured much more information in terms of body language and facial expressions, which could enrich the data significantly.

The fourth limitation would be the researcher's inexperience in terms of the research approach that ranges from the interview process up to the analysis of the data, using the IPA.

The fifth limitation would be the language problem. English is not the home language of these learner-athletes and they may have limitations to express themselves fully in their second language.

#### **5.4.2. Strengths/contributions**

The study had shown much consistency with the current reviewed literature and the findings of this study are well aligned with findings in existing literature, which assisted enriching the discussion of the results.

The study is one of the very first if not the only South African study to investigate the phenomenon of identity foreclosure using the qualitative methodology. The research platforms that were used in the literature search only revealed one qualitative study pertaining to the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. Therefore, the study partially fulfils the research gap that exists, due to the lack of literature and research on this specific field of study.

The information in this study can be utilized to initiate and develop other quantitative research projects that can assist in developing new knowledge on this very important area of study that effects the psychosocial well-being of the learner-athlete. This study has the potential to be included in a mixed method approach (qualitative and quantitative methodology).

The study has discovered that as much as learner-athletes may be susceptible or experiencing identity foreclosure there is no clear relationship between identity foreclosure and maintaining psychological well-being. Although identity foreclosure is present, these learner-athletes are quite aware of their over-identification and the possible ramifications if their sport career should come to abrupt termination. What is really remarkable is the high level of coping with extreme demands from following a dual career and maintaining sufficient psychological well-being to perform on an optimal level.

Normally, spending too much time on an activity like sport can be perceived negatively in terms of over-identification and not having balance in your life. However, the remarks of some of the learner-athletes in this study indicate that the investment in terms of time in their sport actually assist them to maintain psychological well-being. As one learner-athlete stated that *it keeps him out of*

*trouble*. The study has discovered that spending too much time in sport, which could be relative to role engulfment, can at the same time enhance the learner-athletes' psychological well-being. This finding is contra to the current literature that indicates that spending too much time in sport deprived the learner-athlete from learning social skills, fundamentals and other life skills that are needed. The learner-athletes of this study did not indicate that they lack any social skills and socially dealing with people outside of the sport context.

## **5.5. Recommendations**

***Recommendations for learner-athletes:*** The information in this study can be helpful to the learner-athlete to understand his high demand situation and may also assist to cope with the high levels of stress that are part of the lives of students that follow a dual career. The information in this study can fast track the learning process, which is usually acquired over many years of painful experiences. The information in this study can be helpful to the learner-athlete to understand all the forces that impact on their psychological well-being and assists them to be more open to learn from other people's experiences.

Coaches and sport managers can also benefit from the information in this study in terms of assisting the learner-athlete to nurture not only optimal performance, but also invest in their psychological well-being. The coach can play a crucial role in the learner-athlete's life to maintain balance.

***Recommendations for future research:*** From the current research findings, it can be recommended that more qualitative research is needed in this specialized field of study and on the phenomenon of identity foreclosure. The study has shown how complex this construct can be and it cannot be predominantly understood by using a quantitative approach. The advantage of a quantitative approach is that the strength of identity foreclosure can be accurately measured and important relationships with other phenomena such as passion in sport can also be determined. Both qualitative and quantitative studies are recommended and the mixed method approach may reveal substantial results.

The IPA as a qualitative method has proved to be effective and revealing valuable and rich information pertaining to the learner-athlete's life. The IPA can be employed on more representative learner-athlete samples and longitudinal studies can provide

valuable information especially after termination of their sporting careers where they enter into the normal career market as professional.

## **5.6. Conclusion**

The study's aim was to explore the identity foreclosure phenomenon among learner-athletes in a South African context. This chapter summarized the results and highlighted the strengths and limitations of this study. The complexity for identity foreclosure was revealed and further research in this specialized field is needed. Recommendations for future research were also proposed.

In my last reflection on the process of this study, I realized that conducting a master study is not only to uncover new knowledge, but it is also an inquiry into my own existence and life. I constantly find myself in a steep learning curve and the old and proven virtue of "know thyself" that was carved on the entrance of the Delphic oracle became a reality of self-discovery during the research process. This study inspired me to continue to be a student of life and adopt a *not knowing approach* to the complex world that surrounds us.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS



#### Interview questions

- Can you tell me where your love for sport started?
- Who are the people in your life that motivated and assisted you to pursue excellence in sport?
- Everyone has dream goals, can you elaborate on your personal life goals.
- How important is sport for you in your life?
- How do you maintain balance with your sport, academics, family and other social responsibilities?
- Amongst your friends, family and other people in sport environment, how do you they see you?
- How do you relate emotionally to your sport?
- How do you feel when you do poorly in sport?
- How does sport relate to your most important values in your life and how do sport relate to other areas in your life?
- How important is a well-balanced life to you?
- How do you maintain full commitment to keep participating in sport and always give your best?
- If you could tell me, how does your normal day look like, what do you do on a normal day?

- How do you feel about spending too much time on your sport in relation to other areas in your life?
- Can you tell me something about your sport related moods during the day, and how it affects your effectiveness in other activities?
- What do you mostly think of when you are relaxed (when not playing or practising)?
- How would you feel if you get injured and could not compete in sport?
- How do you feel when you participate in sport and do well?
- How do you see yourself in the future?

## APPENDIX B: INFORMATION SHEET



## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

### TITLE OF THE STUDY

The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes in a South African context

My name is Ntandazo Nkonki, I am currently a Master Research Psychology student in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. You are being invited to take part in my research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take some time to read the following information carefully, which will explain the details of this research project. Please feel free to ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if need more information.

### THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Learners that are pursuit of excellence in sport and academics within the school and university context is more under pressure, due to the dual career demands that require long hours of practice that are added to the normal school demands. Due to the importance of the athletes' psychological well-being and balanced lifestyles, the researcher saw the need to explore the level of identification with sport, academics and other social roles. Over-identification with one of these mentioned areas can also be referred to as identity foreclosure, where a person identifies early with a certain role (being an athlete) and neglect other roles and areas in his or her life.

### WHY HAVE YOU BEEN INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate as a learner-athlete, and you have complied with the following...

- You play on provincial or national level.
- You participate in sport which allows development up to professional level (e.g. soccer, netball, rugby and cricket).

- You are between the ages of 17 and 20 and you are either a male or female, since you are close or about to leave school and entering professional development.

#### **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?**

You will be expected to participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher. The interview will not take more than an hour to complete.

#### **WITHDRAWAL FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE**

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent/assent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you decide not to take part in the study, you can do so without any negative consequences or being penalized.

#### **WILL THE INFORMATION THAT YOU CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Confidentiality will be ensured by assigning numbers to each participant, and that will be used in all research notes and documents. Findings from this data will be disseminated through conferences and publications, and your participation and reporting of findings will be anonymous. The only person with access to the information gathered from your participation will be the researcher.

#### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

The anticipated indirect and direct benefits will be a comprehensive report back of the findings after the study has been conducted. That will assist the participant on their career development, as well as for coaches and other sports institutions in terms of their athlete's career development. However, there are no guaranteed of direct benefits.

#### **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There are no anticipated risks in participating in this study. However, in case of unforeseeable circumstances they will be acted on in an ethical and relevant manner. A sport psychologist will also be available if there are questions that were experienced as uncomfortable.

#### **HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?**

Electronic information will be stored for a period of 15 years. Future use of the data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Participant information in hard copies of raw data will be locked in the cabinet and electronic data will be kept in a file that is password protected in the Department of Psychology.

#### **WILL YOU BE PAID TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?**

There will be no payment that will be provided in participating in this study.

**HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?**

The study has not yet received a written approval from the Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.

**HOW WILL YOU BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?**

The findings of this research study will be shared with the researcher (Ntandazo Nkonki) after the completion of this study.

**WHO SHOULD YOU CONTACT IF YOU HAVE CONCERN, COMPLAINT OR ANYTHING YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE STUDY?**

If you have questions about this study or you have experienced adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher whose contact information is provided below. If you have questions regarding the rights as a research participant, or if problems may arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the researcher, please contact the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria at this number +27 (0)12 420 3111; or email: [psychology.rescom@up.ac.za](mailto:psychology.rescom@up.ac.za)

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and in advance for participating in this study.

**Researcher**

Name Surname: Ntandazo Nkonki

Contact number: 066 388 3728

Email address: [ntandazonkonki@gmail.com](mailto:ntandazonkonki@gmail.com)

**Supervisor**

Name Surname: Professor Ben Steyn

Email address: [ben.steyn@up.ac.za](mailto:ben.steyn@up.ac.za)



APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes  
in a South African Context

WRITTEN CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Participant's Name and Surname:

Gender:

Ethnic Group:

Date of Birth:

Sport:

Level of Sport:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any consequences or penalties.		
I understand that information collected during the study will not be linked to my identity and I give permission to the researcher of this study to access the information.		
I understand that this study is not yet reviewed by and received ethics clearance		

from Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.		
I understand who will have access to personal information and how the information will be stored with a clear understanding that I will not be linked to the information in any way.		
I understand how this study will be written up and published.		
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.		
I consent/assent to being audio recorded.		
I consent/assent to have my audio recordings be used in research outputs such as publication of articles, thesis and conferences as long as my identity is protected.		
I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication whilst remaining anonymous.		
I have sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I agree to take part in this above research study.		

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

APPENDIX D: INFORMED ASSENT FORM



The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes  
in a South African Context

WRITTEN ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Participant's Name and Surname:

Gender:

Ethnic Group:

Date of Birth:

Sport:

Level of Sport:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm that the person asking my assent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any consequences or penalties.		
I understand that information collected during the study will not be linked to my identity and I give permission to the researcher of this study to access the information.		

I understand that this study is not yet reviewed by and received ethics clearance from Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria.		
I understand who will have access to personal information and how the information will be stored with a clear understanding that I will not be linked to the information in any way.		
I understand how this study will be written up and published.		
I understand how to raise a concern or make a complaint.		
I consent/assent to being audio recorded.		
I consent/assent to have my audio recordings be used in research outputs such as publication of articles, thesis and conferences as long as my identity is protected.		
I give permission to be quoted directly in the research publication whilst remaining anonymous.		
I have sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I agree to take part in this above research study.		

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of person taking consent

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

## APPENDIX E: FORMAL ETHICAL CLEARANCE LETTER



22 May 2020

Dear Mr N Nkonkie

<b>Project Title:</b>	The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes in a South African context
<b>Researcher:</b>	Mr N Nkonkie
<b>Supervisor:</b>	Prof BJM Steyn
<b>Department:</b>	Psychology
<b>Reference number:</b>	19155493 (HUM024/0220)
<b>Degree:</b>	Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 7 May 2020. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Pikirayi'.

**Prof Innocent Pikirayi**  
**Deputy Dean: Postgraduate Studies and Research Ethics**  
**Faculty of Humanities**  
**UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**  
**e-mail: PGHumanities@up.ac.za**

## APPENDIX F: PERMISSION LETTER FOR STUDY WITHIN TUKS SPORT HIGH SCHOOL



18 February 2020

To Whom it May Concern

**RE: Permission for Study within Tuks Sport High School**

This letter serves as confirmation that TuksSport High School, through my office, has been approached by the researcher requesting permission to approach our learner athletes as identified by their coaches, for the purpose of the research stated below.

**Title of Research:** The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes in a South African context

**Degree:** Masters in Psychology

**Student:** N. Nkonki (19155493)

We hereby grant permission for the researchers to, after consultation with the coaches, approach TuksSport High School learner athletes with the aim of participating in the study. Please note that additional permission should also be obtained from the parents of the learner athletes as they are minors.

The request is that the findings of the research be provided to the school after assessment and on completion of the research.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions

Yours sincerely

**Hettie de Villiers**

**PRINCIPAL: TuksSport High School**

## APPENDIX G: PERMISSION LETTER FOR STUDY WITHIN TUKS SPORT



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Tuks Sport

7<sup>th</sup> February 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

**RE: Permission for Study within TuksSport**

This letter serves as confirmation that TuksSport, through my office, has been approached by the researcher requesting permission to approach our various TuksSport specific clubs for the purpose of the research stated below.

**Title of Research:** The phenomenon of identity foreclosure among learner-athletes in a South African context

**Degree:** Masters in Psychology

**Student:** N. Nkonki (19155493)

We hereby grant permission for the researchers to approach the TuksSport Coaches within the clubs, as agreed upon with myself. We suggest that this drive is done through my office, so as to encourage the coaches participation and endorsement of the research. Please note the targeted athletes are school going in the TuksSport High School, thus additional permission and support should be obtained from the school. The request is that the findings of the research be provided to TuksSport and the club and School after assessment and on completion of the research.

At TuksSport, we are encouraging the practical research application into our club systems, which aligns with the University of Pretoria's 2025 strategic vision and plan and ultimately aid and enhance our sporting performances on the field of play.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Ball'.

Mr S. Ball

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR: Coaching & Performance Management**

Building and Room no: TuksSport  
Complex  
University of Pretoria  
PRETORIA 0002  
Republic of South Africa

Tel: (012) 420 2828  
Fax: 086 636 4014

Email address: [steven.ball@up.ac.za](mailto:steven.ball@up.ac.za)  
[www.up.ac.za](http://www.up.ac.za)