A PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF JOHN WINSTON LENNON

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Declaration

I, PHILIP H. KITCHING, in accordance with Rule G4.6.3, hereby declare that:

- This treatise is the result of my own original research and that this work has not previously been submitted for assessment to another university.

- This research contained in this treatise is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

- All sources used or referred to in this treatise have been documented and recognized.

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Abstract

Psychobiography can be viewed as the re-writing of an individual’s life story previously undetected. In general it consists of a combination of two central elements: biography and psychological theory that aim to explain the particular individual’s psychological development. This particular study serves to explore the extraordinary life of renowned singer, songwriter, artist and activist, John Winston Lennon (1940-1980). The basis for this investigation will take the form of notable biographical accounts of the subject’s life, together with Austrian psychiatrist Alfred Adler’s (1938) theory of Individual Psychology, which recognizes the importance of human society for the development of individual character and the orientation of every single action and emotion in the life of a human being. Adler’s theory further explores that the main motives of human thought and behaviour are an individual’s striving for superiority and power, partly in compensation for his feeling of inferiority. The psychobiographical data collection and analysis for this research thesis will be guided by Yin’s (1994) theory of ‘analytic generalisation’, which uses a theoretical framework in selecting relevant data which develops a matrix as a descriptive framework for organizing and integrating that data, and Alexander’s (1988) analytical model which focuses on lifting out themes through principal identifiers of salience was used and applied. John Winston Lennon expressed his personal experiences and ideals through his songs and became the spokesman for his generation on modern day issues such as feminism and world peace. It is however, unfortunate that Lennon throughout his life remained a boy who felt rejected and unloved by his parents and strove to be superior in all aspects of his rich life in an attempt to acquire the love and acceptance that was not bestowed on him as a child.

Key concepts: Psychobiography; John Winston Lennon; Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology
Chapter 1

Introduction and Problem Statement

Chapter Preview

This chapter serves as a general introduction to the research study. As such, it contains a brief outline of the psychobiographical research approach, as well as Adler’s (1929) theory of Individual Psychology. This is followed by a brief biographical outline of the life of John Winston Lennon and a description of the research problem. Finally, an overview of the chapters comprising this study is provided.

Context of Research

Psychobiographies are subjected to various challenges such as limited psychobiographical studies conducted at academic institutions (Runyan, 1988a), as well as criticism regarding the lack of generalizability and subjective methodology applied in the approach (Roberts, 2002). Thus, the psychobiographical approach to research is often neglected even though it has been acknowledged and promoted by many academics throughout the world (Carlson, 1988; Fiske, 1988; Runyan, 1982; Yin, 2003). As a discarded form of research, psychobiographies result in the neglect of the application or testing of psychological theories concerning human development.

Although large amounts of literature concerning John Winston Lennon’s life history exists, to date, no psychobiographical case study has been conducted. Whilst such literature provides a narrative grounding or basis for further exploration and description concerning the subject (and therefore cannot be considered trivial in nature), such literature provides differing
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and often conflicting views on the subject and furthermore fails to provide a psychological focus of the subject’s life.

Such a life history study, as Roberts (2002) suggests, creates the opportunity to re-evaluate opinions regarding the subject. Furthermore, Roberts strongly believes that a more vivid understanding of the subject’s personality might be obtained through the re-telling of that life story and examining the subject’s personality development, using the framework of psychological theory. In this way, one might be better able to understand what formed the character of that specific extraordinary human being and what made them act the way they did.

An overview of the psychobiographical approach. The field of psychobiography, in essence, concerns itself with the study of lives already lived, or “finished lives” (Carlson 1988, p. 106), and with the study of prominent, enigmatic or great individuals (Simonton, 1994). It also places emphasis on providing explanations for aspects of the individual’s life history, which are not easily derived through applying common sense or simple psychological principles (Alexander, 1988). The aim of such a study, as life-span psychologist McAdams (1994) suggests, is to discern, discover, or formulate the essential story of the entire life, a story structured according to psychological theory. Although the approach of psychobiography has always been subjected to close scrutiny, Elms (1994) contends that the value of looking at one whole life repeatedly cannot be underestimated.

The neglect of such an approach is compounded by the tendency of psychology to highlight the necessity of dependable scientific evidence (towards the study of development), and psychologists resisting the study of individual lives due to reasoning that such studies do not contribute to the formulation of more universal truths (Howe, 1997).
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Carlson (1988) lists several motivating factors for applying the psychobiographical approach to a psychological study. Firstly, he suggests that the study of finished lives enables the researcher to trace human development in ways beyond the extent of the best longitudinal research. Secondly, he states that the choice of life history materials allows for the detailed consideration of a variety of socio-historical contexts and thirdly, he argues that the researcher can achieve a high degree of consensual validation that is far beyond the possibilities of clinical case studies. In essence, psychobiographies focus on concluding and understanding the processes that stimulate the development of personality within the factual structure of an individual’s life story.

The value of such case studies and life history research lies within the following five areas, namely the uniqueness of the individual case within the whole; the socio-historical context; process and pattern over time; subjective reality and theory, and testing and development. The importance of psychobiographies cannot be emphasized enough and this particular study aims at making a contribution to the growth of such approaches to Psychology, particularly within an academic context, and it will also aim to contribute to the already existing body of psychobiographical research in South Africa.

An overview of the theoretical psychological framework. In recent years, psychobiography has retreated from a purely psychoanalytic stance to include a broader range of appropriate theories (Elms, 1994). This allows the psychobiographer to draw from various theories of personality and from other resources of developmental, social, cognitive and abnormal psychology. This particular study makes use of Alfred Adler’s (1870–1937) theory of Individual Psychology to explore the life of John Winston Lennon.
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Adler, originally a doctor of medicine, was one of Freud’s associates. Dissatisfied with Freud’s deterministic viewpoint, he broke away to found Individual Psychology, which explains personality development within a social context. Adler held an optimistic point of view concerning life and stressed the uniqueness of every personality. Human development is seen as resulting from an individual attempting to compensate for feelings of inferiority through striving for mastery over these perceived shortcomings. Human beings are seen as self-determined and creative in choosing their goals. Hereditary and environmental influences play an important role in shaping the individual but it is ultimately the individual’s perception of these factors that will determine their choice of goals and their path of development. Humans are seen as actors who script their own lives (Adler, 1930; 1958; Corey, 2005).

Adler saw the individual as a functional whole, and stated that personality cannot be solely explained by studying the components of personality separately (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). Adler (1929) expressed the foundation of Individual Psychology to be that every conscious or unconscious thought, feeling and action is part of a greater whole. Adler derived the name for Individual Psychology from the Latin word *individuum*, meaning indivisible, to emphasize the holistic approach of this theory (Mosak & Maniacci, 1989). Adler’s contribution to the field of psychology has become widely accepted (Mischel, Shoda, & Smith, 2004).

Adler (1929; 1930) views human personality as a whole that functions to achieve self-determined goals, and his notion of the structure of personality is that the individual has particular constitutional attributes and a creative self that interacts with the social environment (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). From this interaction, the individual creates a lifestyle that is unique and reflects development towards an individualized goal of superiority (Adler, 1929). Adler
stated that although each individual is born with a set of genetically determined attributes, these attributes are not decisive in determining the direction and nature of that individual. Instead, the individual compensates for real or perceived organic weakness by creatively determining a fictional goal of superiority - that is an aim for mastery in a particular area of life as a means to compensate for any self-perceived limitations (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003).

Adler further emphasizes that human beings possess the ability to be creative in forming their own goals, and have freedom in planning how to achieve them (Lemire, 1998). He states that this is achieved via the creative self, an innate individual capacity that enables the individual to interpret circumstances to their benefit (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). A person’s lifestyle, a central Adlerian concept, is indicative of their attitude towards life and others (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Adler (1927; 1929; 1930; 1958) describes the dynamics of personality (motivation and human functioning) in terms of his belief that the overall motivation of human kind is the striving for superiority and perfection. This striving for superiority is activated by perceptions of inferiority, leading to attempts to overcome it through compensation. Striving manifests itself in either a striving for power or a striving for social interest (Adler, 1929; Meyer & Viljoen, 2003).

Adler adhered to a teleological perspective concerning human behaviour, explaining that individuals are pulled towards their goals in that they will act accordingly to achieve the goal they have in mind, irrespective of the chance of success (what Adler termed the ‘fictional goal’) (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). The fictional goal is the individual’s means to negotiate the present and to overcome perceived inferiorities (Adler, 1929; Corey, 2005; Freeman & Urschel, 2003). Adler (1930, 1958) does not have a stage approach to development. While the first five years
greatly influence the development of life goals, these life goals can be revised at any point in a person’s life (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

Adler’s focus is on the striving of the individual to attain a self-developed goal. However, the ultimate consummation of this striving is only attained when the individual places that striving at the service of society, resulting in an optimally developed human being (Adler, 1929, 1930; Corey, 2005). According to Adler (1964), the optimally developed human being exhibits a high degree of social interest, a deep sense of fellowship in humanity, which he describes as being the essence of mental health and an ultimate requirement for human evolution.

The life of John Winston Lennon

John Lennon was an inspiration for millions of people. His search for peace, love, and truth inspired others to follow suit, and envision a better world for all. He was a unique individual who set the tone for a generation to make a difference and dream again. Although his life was characterized by personal and professional challenges coupled with chronic insecurity, he found a way to overcome these challenges through creativity and a striving for authentic self-expression (Kane, 2005). Maybe a man of words but his actions spoke louder.

John Winston Lennon, an only child, was born on the 9th October 1940, in Liverpool, England. He grew up mostly without the guidance of his biological parents as his father abandoned the family when John was a toddler, and his mother, unable to cope, gave John to her sister and brother-in-law, Mary and George, to be raised (Crampton & Rees, 2009). From the age of five, John was shuttled between the two homes (Norman, 2008). It was Mary who enrolled John at Dovedale Primary School in 1946 and he could often be found among a gang of boys (Shotton & Schaffer, 1984). John did well academically and his teachers had high hopes
John’s teenage years were complicated by the deaths of George in 1955, and his mother in 1958 (Crampton & Rees, 2009). At school, John was seen to be a student with great academic potential, and for this, he was placed in the A-stream. Unfortunately, he was not able to perform academically and soon found himself being moved to the lower C-Stream (Norman, 2008). However, it was during this time in his high school years that the new sound of rock ’n roll began to cross the Atlantic. Music inspired and motivated John, and he was particularly drawn to this new sound (Goldman, 1988). This led him to start his first group, The Quarrymen. Although John failed all his O-levels, he still managed to enrol at the Liverpool College of Art in 1957 (Norman, 2008). Rock ’n roll continued to dominate his life and by his second term at College he was seen to be a disruptive and undisciplined student. John decided not to complete his studies and left the College for a tour in Hamburg with his newly established band (Norman, 2008).

Whilst at college, John met Cynthia Powell, fell in love, and went on to marry her in 1962 (Lennon, 1978). Arriving back at Liverpool after his tour, John’s band, now called the Beatles, began to draw a lot of attention (Coleman, 1995). It was here that John met Brian Epstein, who eventually became the manager of the Beatles. Epstein began to steer the Beatles to stardom, and they were met and surrounded by hysteria wherever they went. The age of ‘Beatlemania’ was born. At the same time, Cynthia, John’s wife, gave birth to their first and only child on the 8th April 1963. John was touring with the band at the time of his child’s birth and consequently only saw him one week after birth (Powell, 1978). This is something John struggled to make peace with.
John often described feeling frustrated at having to live up to the image of being a Beatle, and feelings of being unfulfilled tormented him (Norman, 2008). In 1966, the Beatles stopped touring in order to make albums of their music, leading John to begin contemplating his future. He had failed to invest the necessary time and energy in his marriage, and realized that it had deteriorated to being one of mutual tolerance (Norman, 2008). He began contemplating leaving the Beatles and longed for someone to stimulate his artistic personality (White, 1992).

It was at this point that he met Yoko Ono, an *avante garde* artist (Kane, 2005). John decided to give up on his failing marriage and divorced Cynthia in 1968. He also left the Beatles at the same time. The Beatles consequently disbanded in 1970 (Norman, 2008). John and Yoko were married in 1969 and decided to move to America where John wanted to establish himself as an artist and get involved in politics (Norman, 2008). With the support and encouragement of Yoko, John agreed to lend his name to various political and social causes (Kane, 2005). Then, after numerous miscarriages, Yoko fell pregnant in 1975, and with the birth of his second child, Sean, John decided to retire from public life and raise his son with his wife (Norman, 2008).

For the next five years, John led a secluded existence, but continued to write songs (Kane 2005). He entered the public’s eye again in 1980, releasing a new album to wide acclaim (Norman, 2008). Tragically, on the 8th December 1980, as John was entering the doors of his apartment block, he was shot five times by David Mark Chapman. John was declared dead on arrival at the hospital (Sheff, 2000). As Crampton and Rees (2009) affirm, “If [John Lennon’s] legacy [was] merely that as a cornerstone of the Beatles…that would surely be enough to establish his iconic status but before [his life was cut short] he pursued a singular vision driven by his singular personality” (p. 9).
The Research Problem

Psychobiographical research is exploratory-descriptive in nature and as such, the primary aim of this study is to explore and describe the life of John Winston Lennon from the theoretical perspective of Adler’s (1930) Individual Psychology. The aim is to provide a fuller, more cohesive picture of John Lennon’s life in its holistic complexity. Therefore, Lennon’s psychological development will be explored and described to provide a better psychological understanding of the subject. It is not the aim of this study to generalize findings to the larger population, but rather to generalize the results of the research to components of Adler’s (1930) theory of Individual Psychology.

An Overview of the Study

This study consist of eight chapters, the first being this introduction. Psychobiographical and case study research is discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 discusses Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology, while a concise biographical outline of the life of John Winston Lennon follows in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 addresses the research design and methodology of this study while Chapter 6 sets out to outline preliminary methodological considerations. The findings of this research are then discussed in Chapter 7, and finally, the conclusions, contributions, and limitations of the study are discussed in Chapter 8. Additionally, the last chapter offers suggestions for future research in the field.
Chapter Summary

This study is a psychobiography of John Winston Lennon. The study utilizes a qualitative psychobiographical research method, and aims to describe and explore Lennon’s personality development in relation to Adler’s (1930) theory of Individual Psychology. Psychobiography and case study as research methods are expanded upon in the chapter that follows.
Chapter Preview

This chapter seeks to explain psychobiography as a qualitative case study of an individual’s life. The qualitative research paradigm wherein psychobiography is situated is explored to ensure the realization of its value concerning psychobiographical research. Furthermore, the relationship between psychology and biography is discussed in order to expand the understanding of psychobiographical research. Finally, the value of case study research as applied to psychobiography is highlighted.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research aims to provide rich, descriptive explanations of investigated phenomena (Geertz, 1973) and is interdisciplinary, multi-paradigmatic and multi-method in focus (Struwig & Stead, 2004). Qualitative studies are concerned with how participants make sense of their actions and how this knowledge influences their everyday interactions (Maxwell, 1996). This concern with how participants make sense of their actions or attribute meaning to their experiences is useful to understand and interpret the meaning of events, situations and actions particular to the participant (Purcell & Arrigo, 2006).

Roberts (2002) viewed qualitative research as a means of social intervention, as it helps realization by producing solidarity, by raising consciousness, or giving a voice to those who have not been heard. Qualitative researchers concern themselves with how individuals make sense of their world and the meaning they attribute to their experiences.
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(Roberts, 2002; Willig, 2001). The qualitative researcher takes into account the natural setting of the particular case investigated and focuses on the confluence of contexts (psychological, cultural, historic, political and economic) (Maxwell, 1996), seeking to determine how these contextual influences impact upon the case in order to bring about a better understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Creswell, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 1995).

Emphasis is placed on language as the individual’s perception of his world and is set out as a subjective narrative account for interpretation and understanding (Murray, 2003; Smith, 2003). This narrative account is essential for psychobiographical research as it communicates the individual’s explanation of his life (Ashworth, 2003; Willig, 2001). Qualitative resources include interviews, documents, films, focus groups and archival information (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Struwig & Stead, 2004). As mentioned earlier, the qualitative researcher is concerned with meaning in context (how individuals make sense of their world) (Roberts, 2002) and generates novel insights and interpretations from qualitative sources (Parker, 1999; Willig, 2001).

Psychobiography is essentially grounded in case research (Runyan, 1982). The use of a case-orientated approach captures the inner life of an individual (Willig, 2001) and explores a bounded system (Stake, 1995). This bounded system is situated by time and place, and it is the case itself that is investigated (Creswell, 1998). In the case of this study, the bounded system is an individual: John Winston Lennon.

The psychobiographical case study finds its value in the development and revision of theory (Howman, 2001; McLeod, 1994). Although its lack of generalizability has been criticized (Roberts, 2002), the psychobiographical case study presents itself as a means of
analysing core themes and interpreting a life narrative specific to an individual case (Elms, 1994).

This study will attempt to investigate the experiences of an individual case (John Winston Lennon). Stroud (2004) indicated that those within contemporary psychology who wish to investigate experience in detail would tend to make use of the qualitative approach of research to accomplish this. Smith (2003) stated that the investigation of human experience almost inevitably takes the form of qualitative research. Therefore, attention is now turned to the psychobiographical approach to research, which is embedded within the qualitative research paradigm. Forming part of the psychobiographical approach, the relationship between psychology and biography as it pertains to psychobiography will be discussed along with the nature of the case study, and the value of life history research.

**Psychobiographical Research**

Psychobiographical research implements biography and psychology in an attempt to understand a single life over a period of time (McAdams, 1994). McAdams (2006) defines psychobiography as, “the systematic use of psychological theory (especially personality) to transform a life into a coherent and illuminating story” (p. 503). Psychobiography is multidisciplinary, including professions as diverse as psychoanalysis, psychiatry, political science, academic psychology, literature and the arts, psychohistory, anthropology and religion (Fouché, 1999; McAdams, 1994; Simonton, 2003) and utilize theories of personality, abnormal, cognitive, developmental and social psychology. Elms (1994) described psychobiography as a way of doing psychology and not merely a way of doing a biography. A biography entails the written
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history of an individual’s life (Smith, 1998). The use of biography for social research has become an essential tool for understanding individual lives (Vorster, 2003). Biographical research seeks to interpret a life within its social and cultural context, which requires the researcher to have insight and creativity in the construction and writing of a life (Hart, 1998; Roberts, 2002).

Since most biographies fail to provide a psychological viewpoint of an individual (Schultz, 2003), the use of a methodical and self-conscious psychological theory should be used in the process of perceiving and distinguishing a life story (Fouché, 1999). The traditions of psychology and biography thus work together in exploring a life as many psychologists have used biographical sources for psychobiographical interpretations of leading figures (Runyan, 1988a).

As mentioned earlier, psychobiography is essentially grounded in case research (Runyan, 1982). Although psychobiographical research differs from the case study method, it is a form of case study research (McLeod, 1994). An overview of the characteristics of case study research is discussed next.

Case Studies

Case studies are the intensive investigation of a singular unit (person, group, organization) – bound within a time and contextual setting (Runyan, 1982; Willig, 2001; Yin, 1994). Case studies are not characterized by methods used to obtain and analyse data, but by its particular unit of analysis or the case (Edwards, 1990; Stake, 2005). Cozby (1997) stated that psychobiography is a good example of case study research as it aims to capture the uniqueness of a case rather than use it to make generalizations or theoretical inferences (Foster, Gromm &
Case study research is an approach that utilizes the case method and entails the systematic observation of a phenomenon (Neuman, 2003; Struwig & Stead, 2004). The case method aims to provide an idiographic perspective of the case (Hart, 1998; Willig, 2001) as opposed to the nomothetic approach, which aims to identify general or universal laws of human behaviour (Schultz, 2005). A nomothetic approach isolates theoretical and cause-and-effect relationships by quantifying phenomena for generalization via descriptive and inferential statistics and is utilized within the quantitative research paradigm (Flick, 2006). The ideographic approach aims to understand an individual case in its particularity (Cavaye, 1996) and is utilized within the qualitative paradigm (Patton, 2002). The case method is further characterized by its holistic approach in that it views the case as part of its context (Yin, 1994) and that it utilizes a variety of tools and techniques for data collection and analysis (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2005a). The case method thus pays attention to how the case relates to its specific environment (Willig, 2001) using various methods to integrate diverse sources (including documents and interviews) in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the case being investigated (Yin, 1994).

Epistemology concerning case research entails the way the researcher goes about constructing knowledge (Willig, 2001). Case study research is very versatile (Willig, 2001) and can be utilized within a qualitative and quantitative study (Yin, 1994). Psychobiographical research is a form of case study research that aims to interpret and understand human behaviour within the context it takes place (Willig, 2001). Yin’s (1994), statement: “establishing the how and why of a complex human situation is a classic example of the use of case studies” (p. 16) emphasizes the purpose of investigative case studies and enables the researcher to gain knowledge about the individual and social phenomena. Furthermore, case studies follow the
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change and development (Stroud, 2004) that occurs within a case over a period of time, making the temporal element (Willig, 2001) a key factor concerning qualitative case research.

Case research seeks to describe phenomena and generate new theoretical constructs through testing existing theories (Fouché, 1999; Yin, 1994). Freud’s psychoanalytic case studies set out a clear example of the relationship between case studies and theory development (Willig, 2001). Case studies are generalizable to theoretical propositions known as analytical generalization and refer to the way the researcher generalizes from a single experiment to theory (Yin, 1994). The case research process can be one of inductive or deductive case research (Fouché, 1999). The deductive process investigates the cause-and-effect relationships according to a natural science model (Yin, 1994) proposing logical hypotheses or theoretical propositions derived from theory (Colborn, 1996). The inductive process involves generating hypotheses and developing explanations for observed relationships to build theory (Bromley, 1986; Fouché & van Niekerk, 2005a). Psychobiography has as research objectives, the discovery and/or testing of theory and could be viewed as either inductive or deductive case research (Bromley, 1986; Fouché, 1999).

Research design is viewed as a logical sequence that connects data to the study’s research questions and its eventual conclusions. Case study designs vary in their complexity, for example, some involve the study of single cases, whereas others involve the study of multiple cases (Yin, 1994). The present psychobiographical study is in the form of a single-case research design and the researcher will look intensively at the life history of the biographical subject, John Winston Lennon. Cavaye (1996) stated that the study of the single-case allows the researcher to explore a phenomenon in-depth and in doing so provides a vivid description to reveal its deep nature. Furthermore, the single-case enables theory building (Yin, 1994) and access to more
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specialized populations (Neuman, 2003).

The case research method refers to the type of research tools and techniques used to collect and analyse data (Cozby, 1997). Yin (1994) mentions two types of data collection methods: the nomothetic or quantitative method and the idiographic or qualitative method. Psychobiographical studies primarily use qualitative methods and assume that the world is subjectively constructed from personal interactions and perceptions (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). Since a wide range of diverse methods of data collection and analysis exist, multiple sources of information that are contextually descriptive may be used in the qualitative case study (Yin, 1994). Sources of information can include personal documents (Willig, 2001), diaries, letters and recorded information (Alexander, 1990) and observations and archival information.

The objective of this section was to provide insight into the characteristics that psychobiography shares with case research. Various scholars in the field of life history research, including Alexander (1988), McAdams (1994), Roberts (2002) and Schultz (2005a) have promoted the value of psychobiographical case studies. The psychobiography of a finished life utilizes the life history of a subject within a psychological theory and the socio-historical context (Runyan, 1988; Schultz, 2005a) to understand the individual’s life and to investigate the value of a theory, contributing to theory building (Carlson, 1988). As mentioned earlier, psychobiographies focus on lives lived; therefore, a distinction needs to be made between life story and life history research.
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Life Histories and Life Stories

Runyan (1982) viewed life histories as valuable in examining social experiences. Whereas psychobiography focuses on the uniqueness of a single life (Rosenwald, 1988), life history identifies common patterns that facilitate the understanding of a group (Bertaux, 1981) and aims to examine relationships, similarities and patterns across lives (McAdams, 1994). The life history of an individual can be described as the past experience of the individual to relate a story (Roberts, 2002). This story or life story is a written or oral account of a life as perceived by the individual whose life is being studied (Atkinson, 1998; Schultz, 2005a). The essential feature of the life story is the subjectivity of the author’s personal thoughts, feelings and motives (Fouché, 1999). The life story relays different kinds of information in a structured format that emphasizes meaning (Coles, 1989; Howard, 1991). In essence, life story refers to the story narrated by the author, while life history implies the later interpretive work of the researcher (Roberts, 2002). The next section will look at the history of psychobiography. This is followed by a discussion on the value of life history research.

A History of Psychobiography

Psychobiographies promote the in-depth studying of individuals (Schultz, 2005a). The great interest in quantitative methods being applied to psychological research (Runyan, 1982), has led to life histories receiving less methodological attention (Runyan, 1988a). However, postmodernism and a growing interest in narrative analysis directed researchers to investigate the individuality of human meaning within a storied and time context (Roberts, 2002; Stroud, 2004). This form of research emerged in early twentieth century Vienna (Scalapino, 1999) as biographical research of individuals who are seen as being responsible for creating meaning in
their daily lives and making sense of their social existence according to these meanings (Stanley, 1992). These early biographers seldom applied psychological theory in describing their subjects and tended to neglect their subject’s imperfections, inner lives, feelings and fantasies (McAdams, 1994). However, the attempts of these early biographers led the way for psychological concepts to be applied and attempts at understanding an individual within his environment were made (Yin, 1994). With the development of psychoanalysis, biographers could begin to explore how childhood desires and frustrations impacted on adult life (Vorster, 2003), heralding the arrival of psychoanalytic biographies.

Freud with his publication of Leonardo da Vinci and a memory of his childhood was the first to use biography as a means to apply psychological principles and called his study a psychobiography (Scalapino, 1999). Freud proposed a dual focus concerning psychobiography, which entails the psychobiographer examining the way a given psychic concern generated both a neuroses as well as a creative masterpiece (Vorster, 2003). Psychobiography thus moved beyond the other form of psychoanalytic biography, namely pathography, which aims to expose neuroses in the lives of famous or influential people (Scalapino, 1999). As a result of being accused of being reductionistic in nature, psychobiographical studies have had their fair share of growing pains through the years.

The 1920’s saw a number of psychobiographies being produced, and in 1930, Henry Murray’s call on psychologists to study individual lives promoted the use of psychobiographies even more (Polkinghorne, 1988). This interest in psychobiographical studies was stifled between 1940 and 1960 as researchers begin to explore quantitative means of doing research (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1983). A growing disillusion with static approaches of data collection, and a growing interest in individual lives and how best to communicate this significance (Roberts, 2002) saw a
considerable amount of work being done in the social sciences related to the study of individual lives throughout the 1960’s to the present (Elms, 1988; McAdams, 2000). Psychobiography thus developed into a systematic way of exploring the field of psychology (Runyan, 1988a).

Within South Africa a limited number of psychobiographical studies have been undertaken in the past at academic institutions (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2005a). These studies have focused on a variety of influential and enigmatic figures and have applied various psychological theories to bring about a clear understanding of the studied subject. Furthermore, South African academic institutions have been and continue to be encouraged to promote psychobiographical research as a means of studying individual lives (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2005a). Psychobiographies completed during the last decade have included *The Life of Jan Christiaan Smuts* (Fouché, 1999); *The Life of Helen Martins, Creator of the Owl House: A Psychobiographical Study* (Bareira, 2001); *Bantu Stephen Biko: A Psychobiographical Case Study* (Kotton, 2002); *A Psychobiographical Study of Mother Teresa* (Stroud, 2004); *Karen Horney: A Psychobiographical Study* (Green, 2006); and *A Psychobiographical Study of H.F. Verwoerd* (Claasen, 2007). More recent examples include *A Psychobiographical Study of Paul Jackson Pollock* (Muller, 2010) and *Ernesto “Che” Guevara: A Psychobiographical Study* (Kolesky, 2010). The majority of locally completed psychobiographies stem from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, the University of the Free State and Rhodes University (Fouché, Smit, Watson & van Niekerk, 2007). The value of such research has been advocated by various scholars in the field of life history research to promote the deployment and testing of theories that explore human development (Fouché, 1999). The value of life history research and psychobiographical case study will be discussed next.
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The Value of Life History Research

The value of psychobiographical case studies and life history research can be found in the following five areas - the uniqueness of the individual case within the whole; the socio-historical context; process and pattern over time; subjective reality; and theory testing and development, which will now be discussed.

The uniqueness of the individual case within the whole. The morphogenic nature of psychobiographies emphasizes the holistic nature of individuals rather than the individuality found in single elements (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1982, 1983). This method of research allows for a unique, holistic description of an individual life (Carlson, 1988; Stroud, 2004) within the subject’s whole socio-historical context (Runyan, 1982). Researchers in the field of psychobiography view the unique and holistic description that psychobiographies provide regarding individual lives as one of its major advantages (Gronn, 1993).

The socio-historical context. A holistic understanding of an individual entails taking into consideration his environment. Adler (1938) stressed the importance of environmental influences, but believed that it is the individual’s perception of these influences that ultimately give them power to influence development. For this reason, detailed consideration is given to the individual’s socio-historical context in which he lived (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2005a). Psychobiography provides a holistic understanding of an individual, in taking into consideration the socio-historical culture, process of socialization and family history of the individual (Roberts, 2002).
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**Process and pattern over time.** Psychobiographies tend to be conducted on finished lives, allowing researchers to illuminate patterns of human development across an entire lifespan (Carlson, 1988). This characteristic allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the personality in action (Fiske, 1988). The research ultimately allows for a more comprehensive picture of personality and human development over time (Alexander, 1990).

**Subjective reality.** Life history research provides for an in-depth experience concerning the subject’s reality (experiences, thoughts and feelings) (Mouton, 2001). The Adlerian theory that will be used in the present study concerns itself with subjective interpretations of experiences (Corey, 2005). These subjective interpretations allow the researcher to develop levels of sympathy and empathy with the subject (Runyan, 1982; Schultz, 2003). In turn, these levels of empathy and sympathy make the construction of an emotionally compelling narrative possible (Mouton, 1999; Runyan, 1982).

**Theory Testing and Development.** Finished lives enable psychobiographers to test and develop theories concerning human development (Carlson, 1988). Yin (1994) stressed the role of theory in case research (in this case, life history research) in that theory plays an important role in both generalization and data collection. Collected data are thus analysed and compared to a theory that serves as a template for this purpose. Psychobiographical theory seeks to highlight how different aspects of an individual’s personality are integrated and in doing so, a vivid portrayal of the subject is obtained (Anderson, 1981a).
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In spite of the aforementioned advantages of psychobiographical research, criticism seems to be directed at the design and methodology of biographical approaches (Runyan, 1982). Yin (1994) argued for this criticism to be seen as a challenge. Criticism of the psychobiographical approach and suggestions to follow on how to minimize them will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter Summary

This chapter attempted to present psychobiography as a structured activity with a strong theoretical grounding and well established methodological guidelines to explore individual lives in psychology. The value and place of qualitative research as applied in psychobiographical studies was looked at as well as psychobiography’s implementation of biography, the case study approach and life histories. Finally, the value of psychobiographical research was discussed. The following chapter provides a discussion on Adler’s (1938) theory of individual psychology with attention given to the development of the theory and how it relates to personality development within a developmental framework.
Chapter 3

Alfred Adler’s Individual Psychology

Chapter Preview

This chapter focuses on Alfred Adler’s (1937) theory of Individual Psychology. A basic explanation of the term personality and psychological theory is provided as it applies to the science of psychology. The concept of personality development is outlined according to Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology, focusing on specific concepts of the theory that will be utilized in explaining and understanding the life of John Winston Lennon. Finally, the theory is evaluated and its application to psychobiographical research explained. A matrix of Adler’s Individual Psychology can be found at the start of the chapter to guide the reader as to how this theory served as a framework to extract salient biographical data. This matrix also provides the reader with a structured approach as to how Adler’s theory of individual psychology was applied to explore and explain the life of John Winston Lennon.
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Figure 1

ADLER'S INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY

CONSTITUTIONAL ATTRIBUTES
- ORGAN INFERIORITY
- PSYCHOLOGICAL INFERIORITY
- NATURAL INFERIORITY

PRIVATE LOGIC
- IDENTIFY INFERIORITY
- 4 TYPES

CREATIVE SELF
- SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION
- ESTABLISH

FICTIONAL GOAL
- SET
- DETERMINE
- TO OVERCOME INFERIORITY

LIFESTYLE
- HOW INDIVIDUAL STRIVES TOWARDS SUPERIORITY
- STRIVE

LIFE TASKS
- LOVE
- OCCUPATION
- SOCIAL INTEREST

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT
- FAMILY ATMOSPHERE
- BIRTH ORDER

POWER

OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Source: Own Construction
Personality and Personality Theory

The use of the concept personality has different connotations depending on the context in which it is being used. From a psychological perspective the term personality is used to refer to the totality of all attributes, that is, cognitions, values, attitudes, habits, emotions, prejudices and goals, which determine an individual’s behaviour and interaction with the environment (Louw, 1991). Personality theorists have various definitions of personality, depending on their theoretical orientation. This means that a definition of personality always implies at least a partial theory of personality (Liebert & Spiegler, 1994).

Personality theory is viewed as an attempt to develop a system for describing, explaining and comparing people and their behaviour (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen, 2003). Contemporary theories of personality differ in their approaches to understand personality development, but seem to complement each other as they aim to describe different aspects of human nature (Louw & Edwards, 1993). Personality theories are inclined to include a theory about human development and a description of the ideal personality, which relates to the theorist’s view of humankind (Meyer et al., 2003). Most personality theories include views about pathological behaviour and distinguish between the psychologically disturbed person and the psychologically healthy person.

The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler

The view of humankind. Alfred Adler (1870 – 1937) had at the core integration of his theory, a vigorous optimistic point of view concerning life (Stein & Edwards, 1998). Adler
viewed the individual as a functional whole whose personality cannot be understood by studying the components of personality separately (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). Adler (1929) stated that the foundation of Individual Psychology is that every thought, feeling and action (conscious or unconscious) exists as a unit.

Adler (1958) stressed that the individual subjectively experiences reality and although hereditary and environmental factors may impede development, it is essentially the individual’s perception of these factors that will determine their influence on personality development. The individual is seen as scripting his own life (Adler, 1930; Corey, 2005).

Adler adhered to a teleological perspective concerning human behaviour, explaining that individuals are pulled towards their goals, in other words they will act accordingly to achieve the goal they have in mind, irrespective of the chance of success (what Adler termed the ‘fictional goal’) (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). The fictional goal is the individual’s way to negotiate the present and to overcome inferiorities (Adler, 1929; Corey, 2005; Freeman & Urschel, 2003). Adler (1929) maintained that the striving for superiority from a subjective sense of inferiority is the basic motivation of human functioning.

Hans Vaihinger’s book *The Philosophy of “As If”* (1925) assisted Adler in forming the concept of fictional finalism (fictional goal). According to this principle, a person’s goals are fictions in that they do not ‘really’ exist, because the person forms them subjectively (Meyer et al., 2003). One of these fictions about who one is and where one is going is situated at the centre of everyone’s lifestyle (Boeree, 1997).

Adler believed that the main problem humans face is how to live together in this world, whilst appreciating other’s contributions from the past and creating a better life for future and present generations (Stein & Edwards, 1998). He stated that human nature reaches its fullest
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potential when individuals contribute to others and society as a whole, leading to an optimally
developed human being (Barlow & Durand, 2002).

The Structure of Personality

Adler’s (1937) explanation of human functioning does not use structural concepts. He
viewed personality as a functional whole that drives the individual towards self-determined goals
(Adler, 1929; 1930). This holistic view of personality was influenced by the writings of Jan
Smuts, who coined the term holism (Corey, 2005; Fouché, 1999; Smuts, 1926).

Adler’s (1937) notion of the structure of personality is that the individual has particular
constitutional attributes and a creative self that interacts with the social environment (Meyer &
Viljoen, 2003). From this interaction, the individual creates a lifestyle that is unique and reflects
development towards a subjective goal of superiority (Adler, 1929). These determinants, which
include constitutional attributes, social environment, creative self and lifestyle, guide the
individual’s development and articulate the goals they will strive for (Meyer, Moore, & Viljoen,
2003). These will now be discussed in more detail along with an explanation of what the private
logic and fictional goal of Adler’s individual psychology entails.

Constitutional attributes. Adler (1937) stated that each individual is born with a set of
genetically determined attributes. However, these are not decisive in determining the direction
and nature of the individual’s development. The reason is that the individual will try to
compensate for perceived weaknesses (Meyer et al., 2003) by developing them into strengths or
by substituting something else for these weaknesses. The individual compensates for real or
perceived weaknesses by creatively determining a fictional goal of superiority, that is, an aim for
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mastery in a particular area of life as a means to compensate for any subjective limitations (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003).

Adler identified organ inferiority as an important aspect of an individual’s constitution (Boeree, 1997). This referred to organic or physical weaknesses an individual is either born with or acquires through illness or accident. Adler (1937) extended this theoretical concept to include psychological inferiority. Boeree (1997) views psychological inferiority as the individual’s learned belief that he or she is in some way weak or deformed. A more general form of inferiority is the natural inferiority of children (Adler, 1958). Boeree (1997) explains that children are naturally smaller, weaker, and less socially and intellectually competent in comparison to the adults around them. Adler (1958) never prescribed a specific response to these weaknesses.

The creative self. Adler emphasized that human beings possess the ability to be creative in forming their own life goals and in planning how to achieve them. The creative self is the capability of the whole person and not a structural part of the personality (Meyer et al., 2003). Adler saw the creative self as the individual’s freedom in setting goals (Lemire, 1998).

Adler (1929; 1958) viewed hereditary and environmental influences as important factors that influence development, but in the end, it is the individual’s perception of these factors that will determine how they influence development (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Hereditary and environmental influences provide the bricks, the final form of the building is up to the individual (Spencer, 2003). Humans possess a creative power whereby they script their own life stories (Watts & Shulman, 2003) and construct their attitudes to life and relationships with the outside world (Adler, 1982).
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Mosak (1984) stated that individuals creatively and consciously shape the creation of their lifestyles by choosing a goal they intend to pursue. Adler (1927) stated that the individual creatively adapts to perceived inferiority, which constitutes the individual’s first creative act. The creative self is therefore a dynamic concept that entails psychological movement. This movement is the result of the unique creativity of the individual (Adler, 1929; 1930) in overcoming inferiorities, which entails the creation of a unique lifestyle that predicates movement through the world (Manaster & Corsini, 1982).

Social environment. The growing child’s entire social environment has a specific influence on his development, especially the family constellation, as it refers to the relationship between family members and the status of individual members within the family (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Maddi, 1989). Adler (1929; 1958; 1982) stated that there are certain roles and behaviour patterns associated with birth order that lead to typical personality traits in all children. It is important to consider that Adler held a non-deterministic viewpoint when it came to these social factors. Family atmosphere and birth order will be discussed later as factors that influence personality development.

The lifestyle. Adler expressed the concept of lifestyle as self or ego, personality, individuality, the unity of personality, an individual form of creative activity, the method of facing problems, one’s opinion about oneself and the problems of life or the whole attitude toward life and others (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). The lifestyle is a central Adlerian concept, subsuming constancy, unity, creativity, subjectivity and a teleological orientation (Strauch, 2003). Therefore, the lifestyle can be described as an individual’s approach or
avoidance of the three main tasks of life in an attempt to move towards a fictional goal of superiority (Stein & Edwards, 1998). Adler (1930) considered these tasks (social interest, love and marriage, and occupation) of life as social. According to Meyer and Viljoen (2003) the three social tasks promotes co-operation, contribution and social interest. Adler (1982) described the lifestyle as being unconscious in that individuals’ perceptions about themselves and about life are unknown to them (Christopher & Bickhard, 1992). Within the first five years of life, children will develop a life goal and a prototypical lifestyle to deal with life (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). This lifestyle is not fixed but depends on interpretations or how personality will eventually be shaped (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). These interpretations will determine the individual’s attitude towards life and the self (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

The lifestyle involves a goal-orientated approach of thinking, feeling and acting that navigates the individual’s movement through the world (Monaster & Corsini, 1982). This movement is towards the actualization of the fictional goal (the central theme of the individual’s lifestyle) that will provide the individual with a feeling of purpose and a sense of mastery (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). The creation of a unique lifestyle refers to the individual’s ability to take control and responsibility for his goals and the methods to attain them in such a way that they contribute to the development of social interest (Mosak, 2000).

Adler (1958) maintained that a faulty lifestyle results from the family atmosphere in childhood and highlighted that physical inferiority, neglect and pampering interferes with social interest. Individuals exposed to such an atmosphere avoid life tasks (Adler, 1958), lack self-confidence and courage (Adler, 1929) and tend to be focused on themselves. Although Adler (1929; 1958) insists that individuals develop their own unique lifestyles, he differentiated between four characteristic types of lifestyle, namely the active-constructive, the passive-
constructive, the active-destructive and the passive-destructive lifestyles (Dreikurs, 1973; Maddi, 1989). These four lifestyles are grouped according to the degree of social interest and the degree of movement towards success (Adler, 1982) and will be discussed next.

The active-constructive type. This type of lifestyle tends to develop in a family atmosphere where the prevalent spirit is one of co-operation, trust and respect (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). It is characterized by optimism and by a community-orientated approach to problem solving (Adler, 1958, 1982). People with this lifestyle usually establish goals that serve the community, and are often ambitious and active in their striving towards successful attainment of their goals and therefore tend to be community leaders (Meyer & Viljoen, 1997). Some literature refers to this lifestyle as the socially useful type (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Spencer (2003) suggests that this type of lifestyle (person) is successful in the three areas of life, namely work, community and love.

The passive-constructive type. This lifestyle shows low activity, but high social interest (Adler, 1982). Individuals with this type of lifestyle are inclined to take on community-orientated goals, but they pursue these goals in a passive way, relying on others to take the initiative (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). Boeree (1997) refers to this lifestyle as the leaning type and describes individuals who adopt this lifestyle as sensitive individuals who develop a protective shell and rely on others to carry them through life’s difficulties. Ansbacher and Ansbacher (1956) views individuals with this lifestyle as lacking in independence and enterprise.


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**The active-destructive type.** This lifestyle is referred to as the ruling type (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Spencer, 2003). Individuals with this lifestyle work actively to pursue and fulfil their goals and have an inclination to disadvantage society through power-seeking behaviour (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). The more active types are bullies, sadists, tyrants and delinquents and those less active types inflict pain upon themselves, for example alcoholics, drug addicts and suicide (Adler, 1982; Boeree, 2006b).

**The passive-destructive type.** This lifestyle is referred to as the avoiding type (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Spencer, 2003). Individuals with this lifestyle show low activity and low social interest resulting in the individual avoiding defeat by not confronting difficulties (Adler, 1982). These individuals are likely to be antisocial and display laziness, stubbornness and passive-aggressiveness (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). Individuals with this lifestyle can eventually retreat into their own world and display neurotic and psychotic symptoms (Adler, 1982).

The last three lifestyles discussed are viewed by Adler (1982) as useless lifestyles, suggesting that individuals who use these lifestyles will struggle to negotiate life tasks (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

**Private logic.** Adler (1937) maintained that the individual experiences and shapes his reality subjectively. Reality is filtered through the individual’s unique way of seeing things to conform to his internal attitudes (Eckstein, 2008). Adler (1937) states that the individual’s subjective view of life enables the construction of a private logic, which illuminates the individual’s attitude towards life and his place in this world. Since the family is the prototypical social group for the child, it plays a crucial role in the development of a private logic and a
unique lifestyle (Peluso, 2006). The private logic is viewed as an individual’s view of himself, the world and others (Adler, 1929; 1930; 1958).

**Fictional goal.** The fictional goal or guiding self-ideal is a fictitious goal that directs the individual’s movement throughout life (Adler, 1929; 1982). Adler (1929) noted that the fictional goal could be found in childhood fantasies and early recollections. The fictional goal can never be attained, signifying a permanent striving for perfection (Adler, 1929; 1958). Adler (1929; 1958; 1982) stated that once the private logic and fictional goal are set, the individual acts in accordance with the goal. The lifestyle indicates a striving for power to reach perfection (Adler, 1982). The fictional goal guides all psychological movement (Adler, 1930; 1958).

**Dynamics of Personality**

Adler describes the dynamics of the personality (in other words, motivation and human functioning) in terms of the belief that the overall motivation of humankind is the striving for superiority or perfection (Adler, 1930; 1938; Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970). This striving for superiority results from a perceived inferiority that leads to attempts to overcome this inferiority through compensation and underlies all the solutions to life’s difficulties (Adler, 1929). Adler (1930; 1958) views motivation as a way of moving towards the future (a teleological approach) and not as a force that is mechanically driven by the past. The individual’s striving for superiority results from the individual aiming to achieve personal, subjective goals (Jones & Lyddon, 2003). An individual does not have to achieve these goals, seeing as they can change along the way (Boeree, 1997). It is the initial striving for superiority to achieve subjective goals that gives meaning to the individual’s life (Jones & Lyddon, 2003), and this striving for
Inferiority, compensation and complexes. During his early works, Adler identified organ inferiority as an important aspect of individual’s constitutions (Boeree, 1997). Organ inferiorities refer to the physical or organic weaknesses people are either born with or acquire through illness or accidents. It was later that Adler identified psychological inferiority, which refers to a learned belief concerning a weakness (Boeree, 1997). Adler also identified the natural inferiority of children that persists throughout life (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). Boeree (1997) explains that all children are by nature smaller, weaker, less sociable and intellectually competent in comparison to the adults around them. Organ inferiorities are compensated for by either strengthening the weak organ, developing another organ to an extraordinary degree, or adapting psychologically supplementary skills (Boeree, 2006b).

Griffith (1984) notes that the influence of organ weaknesses will depend on the individual’s perception of the specific weakness. Therefore, Adler stated that the psychological inferiorities individuals hold are more important than organic weaknesses (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Boeree, 2006b). Whether these inferiorities are based in reality or not will make little difference as the individual strives towards compensating for these inferiorities (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). Individuals who acquire a learned belief concerning an inferiority may overcome and excel at the perceived inferiority or excel in another field, but they often retain feelings of inferiority or fail to develop their self-esteem (Boeree, 2006b).
Adler (1930) stated that children view their dependency on adults as an inferiority or a ‘minus’ situation. Children can be seen as striving to compensate for this ‘minus’ situation when they engage in play-acting as being adults (Boeree, 2006b). As noted earlier, Adler (1929; 1958) held the view that an individual develops a prototype for the lifestyle in the first four or five years of life, which will contain a belief system and guiding goal of how to strive towards overcoming perceived inferiorities. Adler (1930) stated that the constitutional situation provides present motivation to reach future goals. Perceived inferiorities are viewed as motivators for useful striving (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). An individuals’ response to inferiorities may lead to the development of an inferiority or superiority complex (Adler, 1929; 1930).

Compensation is viewed as a healthy reaction to feelings of inferiority and is an attempt by an individual to overcome a weakness by developing a weak organ through effort or practice or by developing abilities in different areas (Spencer, 2003). Additional responses to feelings of inferiority include sensitivity and overcompensation and both are viewed as less healthy responses to feelings of inferiority. Sensitivity refers to the individual’s preoccupation with a weakness, to the degree that they are easily hurt if reference is made to it and overcompensation is an overemphasis of strong points in an attempt to hide a weakness (Meyer et al., 2003). In the case of an inferiority complex, the individual focuses increasingly on the perceived inferiority (Adler, 1930; 1958) which stunts development and does not lead to successful compensation (Dreikurs, 1973). A superiority complex leads to the individual pretending to be superior to others to compensate for an exaggerated sense of inferiority that they cannot bear (Adler, 1929). These individuals display an imagined power through the use of drugs and alcohol. They lose social interest and tend to evade life’s difficulties (Adler, 1958).
Striving for superiority: striving for power and social interest. Adler (1930) defines the striving for superiority as a striving to move from the bottom to the top and believed that life is not possible without this upward pressure. During infancy, children become aware of their insufficiencies, especially when comparing themselves to adults. This can cause them to experience feelings of inferiority, which provide the motivation for them to strive towards superiority. Children make use of their creativity, which conveys itself in the desire to develop and to compensate for shortcomings. This power is teleological and is shown in the child’s every thought, feeling and action being in unison in pursuing their goal (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

The German philosopher, Hans Valhinger, influenced Adler’s thinking and resulted in Adler’s belief that an individual’s actions are not always guided by reality. They can also be guided by fictions or what they believe to be true. Following from Adler’s (1929) view of holism, people who strive towards perfection do so within a social context. People are viewed as social animals that cannot exist on their own (Boeree, 1997). This led to Adler establishing the central concept of social interest, also known as social feeling, community feeling or social sense (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler defined social interest as an innate desire to serve the community and as a striving for community with the whole of humankind and not just with people in the immediate environment (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1970). Ansbacher (1992) viewed the concept of social interest as perhaps Adler’s most significant concept, which entails an awareness of being part of the human community, identification and a sense of belonging in the social world and an individual attitude to deal with the social world. Social interest needs to be developed consciously even though Adler considered it inborn (Adler, 1930; 1938) and an attempt to be useful to others (Boeree, 1997). Parents exert a powerful influence on the
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development of social interest, as they are the first people the child identifies with (Ansbacher & Ambusher, 1970). Socialization and the identification with family, peers and the community can further strengthen a sense of social interest (Jones & Lyddon, 2003).

As the most important indicator of mental health (social interest) (Adler, 1929; 1930) Adler stated that individuals can only act with self-confidence when facing life tasks if they feel a unity with mankind (Adler, 1964). Individuals who lack social interest are thus not prepared to deal with life tasks as they tend to be egocentric and self-absorbed, retreating from responsibilities, whereas those who possess social interest are empathetic, take on responsibilities, contribute to society and see life’s problems as a challenge (Adler, 1929; Ansbacher, 1992). An increased connection with society diminishes self-absorption and diminishes personal problems, allowing the individual to contribute to humanity’s well-being (Adler, 1930; 1958).

Development of the Personality

Factors that influence development. As mentioned previously, Adler viewed constitutional attributes and environmental factors as having an impact on personality development. However, Adler also stated that it is the individual’s creative reactions to these factors that will determine to what degree personality development is influenced (Dreikurs, 1973).
Constitutional factors and creativity. Adler (1929) believed that organ inferiorities and other perceived weaknesses impact on personality development, but not in a deterministic sense. It is the individual’s perception of a weakness, which exerts influence on personality development and his creativity in compensating for the perceived weakness (Meyer et al., 2003). This has been discussed earlier on page 28 of this chapter.

Environmental influences and the creative self. Adler (1958) held a non-deterministic view concerning environmental factors. A developing child’s social environment including relationships between family members and status awarded to individual family members has an influence on the child’s personality development (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Maddi, 1989). Adler (1929; 1930) stated that a general feeling of inferiority develops from a child’s first social interactions and is present throughout the child’s life. The social environment in itself does not shape personality development (Boeree, 2006b). Adler saw people as creative and self-determining beings that interpret their experiences to give meaning to their lives and suit their purposes (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956).

As a child’s social context includes the cultural values and experiences within the family unit, Adler stressed the importance of birth order on personality development (Adler, 1929; 1930). The position of the child within the family influences later interactions with the world and the child acquires a style of relating to others (Shulman & Mosak, 1997). Adler maintained that this style of relating to others and the world is relatively set by the age of five (Corey, 2005) and indicates how the child is making sense or interpreting his circumstances (Adler, 1958).
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**Birth order.** Adler (1958) focused on five different positions within the family unit, namely firstborns, the second child, the middle child, the youngest child, and the only child. A discussion of these five different positions follows.

The first child is likely to be pampered and receives the parents’ undivided attention until a second child makes an appearance, who takes the centre of attention away from the firstborn (Adler, 1958; Boeree, 1997). If they (firstborns) are given the responsibility to take care of the other children, they can become responsible adults who like power. The fact that the first born no longer receives the parents’ undivided attention can result in them being sullen, withdrawn and disobedient (Boeree, 1997). The second child will often compete with the first child (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). Healthy competition can stimulate the second child to develop faster, but if the second child is unable to compete, it can produce feelings of inferiority (Spencer, 2003).

The middle child tends to be similar to the second child, although he will focus or choose a different sibling to compete against (Boeree, 1997). The youngest child is most likely to be pampered by the parents and also likely to be problem children that seek attention constantly and adopt the role of a clown (Spencer, 2003). The only child spends a lot of time with adults and enjoys being the centre of attention (Adler, 1958). They are likely to become individualistic and to struggle with perfection (Spencer, 2003). It is important to realize that the child’s perception of his role in the family will shape his personality development.

**Family atmosphere.** When a child is born, it is dependant on its parents for survival. This dependency creates an environment for cooperation to be developed and experienced. The mother of the child represents the first contact for the infant with a human being and this contact
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diverts the child’s attention away from himself. The mother’s skill at creating an environment of cooperation or lack of skill will impact on the development of the child (Adler, 1958). The father of the child features less prominently early on in the child’s life, but will play as an important role as the mother later in the child’s life. The relationship of the parents provides the child with his first impressions concerning the relationship between the sexes and the various roles allocated to each. The way the parents play out their roles will impact on the child’s impression of relationships, love and marriage (Adler, 1958).

An unhappy marriage or family atmosphere makes it impossible for the child to be trained in cooperation. Ideally, the mother should be able to direct the child’s interest towards the father and include the father in the family life. The father provides a role model to be a good partner, father and member of society. He must be able to support himself and his family and in doing so solve the problem of occupation as an example for the child. The father has to take care of his family and cooperate with his partner on an equal footing. Through his actions, his children will either admire him or view him as a great threat (Adler, 1958).

Life Tasks

Individuals reveal themselves in their attitude towards their environment (Orgler, 1963). Adler (1929; 1930) made use of the individual’s reaction to life tasks to explore the unity of their movement towards a fictional goal. Social interest, love and marriage, and occupation are the three great life tasks that present themselves to each individual (Orgler, 1963).
Social interest. Adler (1938) viewed the social task as the individual’s association with others whether it is individually or in a community context. This task is solved through social interest and cooperation. Adler (1929) saw individuals who are not interested in their fellow man as having great difficulties in life and as providing a threat to others. Adler (1958) stated that if a child’s subjective view of his environment and people that occupy it are hostile, he will not make good friends and be an enemy to himself. He further noted that these children do not have the self-confidence to reach their goals, thus forming gangs to unite in a common goal. Adler also noted that language is a social creation to connect with others in a common meaning and within the common sense of all mankind.

Love and marriage. Adler (1958) viewed the task of love and marriage as an individual’s intimate devotion towards the opposite sex, expressed as a partnership and physical attraction with the intention to have children. Love is viewed as a task for two people and should be an effort from each partner to ease and contribute to the life of the other to ensure mutual safety. The task of love is complicated and not viewed as natural. Sex forms part of love and marriage and being a drive, has to be adapted to a culture to ensure the welfare of society and mankind itself.

As mentioned earlier, Adler (1958) does not view the individual as determined by his environment. Yet children gain their first impression of marriage from their parents and if the parents are not able to create an environment of cooperation, it will be impossible for them to teach it. In the end, it is the child’s subjective view of his parents’ marriage that will shape his own attitude towards marriage. This attitude can be viewed as an expression of the child’s unique lifestyle.
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The sexual task, which forms part of love and marriage, should be an intimate, trusting, self-disclosing, cooperative and long term in commitment (Witmer & Sweeney, 1992). Physical attraction is trained in childhood, which involves the child’s impression of sympathy and attraction and the behaviour of the opposite sex in the child’s immediate environment. The selection of physically attractive types will be influenced by the impressions gained from the opposite sex that surrounds the child. Sexual attraction coming to an end between partners implies a lack of interest and that the partners no longer wish to be cooperative or contribute to each other’s lives (Adler, 1958).

Adler (1958) viewed monogamy as the solution to the task of love and marriage. Marriage and love are viewed as a social task, a task expected to be solved as it prevents a relationship from breaking up. The full solution of the task of marriage and love is the decision to have children. Those people who are most spontaneously interested in the welfare of humankind are the most likely to have children.

Occupation. Adler (1958) held that work encompasses everything that an individual does to sustain himself and contribute meaningfully to society. Individuals who avoid the task of work are viewed as discouraged and have given up finding satisfactory work. The value of each occupation is individually determined and is valuable in how it contributes to society.

Individuals who do their work well usually have self-confidence. Spoilt children often find it difficult to address tasks independently as they were deprived or denied independent work. Some individuals live for their occupation and nothing else. An over emphasis on one task of life usually indicates a flight from solutions of other tasks. Occupied by one’s occupation is often given as a reason to avoid the task of love and marriage (Orgler, 1963).
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Being successful at the task of occupation, reflects a striving for superiority that entails the needed recognition the individual seeks (Orgler, 1963). Adler (1958) suggested that people should have an objective attitude towards work for them to fully develop their abilities. He viewed exaggerated ambition as providing too much mental tension, which inhibits full development and the completion of other tasks.

Optimal Development

As mentioned earlier, the individual’s essential motivation is to overcome his or her inferiorities and to strive for superiority and perfection (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler viewed the active-constructive lifestyle as the most appropriate lifestyle to achieve superiority or perfection (Meyer et al., 2003). The ultimate of this striving is attained when the individual not only strives for perfection of the self but also places that striving at the service of society (Ansbacher, 1982). According to Adler (1929; 1930; 1958), a family environment of cooperation and trust promotes the development of an optimally developed person, which Adler characterizes as creative and courageous in facing life’s challenges. In contrast, individuals who lack social interest interpret life’s challenges through their own idiosyncratic worldview and come across as self-centred which results in poor inter-and-intra-personal functioning (Adler, 1964).

Evaluation of Adler’s Theory of Individual Psychology

Criticisms of Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology tend to revolve around whether, or not, or to what degree the theory upholds theoretical principles (Boeree, 1997). The theory is not viewed as scientifically rigorous because Adler does not explain his concepts clearly which
makes it difficult to validate them empirically (Corey, 2005). This dilemma has been addressed by extensive research concerning the usefulness of Adlerian theory (Watts & Shulman, 2003) and ‘neo-Adlerians’ recognizing the versatility of the theory, modifying it to address modern issues (Corey, 2005; Mosak, 2000; Watts, 2003). Adler’s work illustrates how to lead a happy life and avoid destructive tendencies, such as pessimism, hate, envy, enmity and how to prevent the onset of an inferiority complex. It also facilitates the growth of optimism, understanding for others, cooperation, courage and humanness (Orgler, 1963).

The adoption of a teleological approach also leaves room for criticism regarding Adler’s theory, as numerous details of his theory appear to be anecdotal, meaning they are true in some cases, but do not necessarily possess the generality Adler seems to claim for them (Boeree, 1997; Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). Adler recants this by stating that if one accepts teleology, nothing about human personality is necessary and that his concept of fictional finalism leaves room for differences (Boeree, 1997). In essence, Adler’s theoretical concepts are useful constructs, not absolute truths, and science is a matter of creative useful constructs (Boeree, 1997).

**Relevance of the theory.** Adler’s (1929; 1930; 1958) theory provides a rich contribution to the understanding of human beings and their relationship to the world. It is a holistic theory of human nature that incorporates a worldview and philosophy of living, and it crosses all boundaries of race, gender, culture or ethnic background. Adler was interested in the individual’s own story concerning his life (Hester, 2004) and insisted that this story encapsulates the meaning of a life (Adler, 1964).

Pozzuto (1982) viewed an Adlerian psychobiography as an attempt to understand a particular individual rather than explaining certain aspects concerning the individual’s
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development. Adler’s theory allows for the interpretation of an individual within his socio-cultural and historical context and from the individual’s subjective point of view (Adler, 1930; 1958). Adler’s theory is especially valuable in psychobiographical research because the concept of fictional finalism makes it possible to view a life in light of its end (Adler, 1958; Carlson, 1988).

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a basic outline of Adler’s Individual psychology. It will be used to facilitate a better understanding of the personality development of John Winston Lennon in Chapter 4. The following chapter provides an overview of Lennon’s life.
Chapter Preview

This chapter provides a historical overview of the lifespan of John Winston Lennon, as presented over a period of 40 years, from his birth in 1940 to his death in 1980. In this psychobiographical study, the researcher aims to explore Lennon’s personality development and the factors that influenced and shaped his lifestyle. In order to do this comprehensively, it is important to detail Lennon’s life and story. This chapter is therefore divided into four sections, namely; Lennon’s childhood; his school years; his time spent as a member of the Beatles; going solo; and his premature and unexpected death.

Childhood

John Winston Lennon was born on October 9th, 1940 in Liverpool, England to Alfred Lennon (a merchant seaman) and Julia Stanley (Lennon) (an usherette). World War II was raging and John’s father, Alfred (being a seaman), spent a lot of time away from home (Norman, 2008). As such, Alfred only saw his son for the first time three weeks after his birth, and only spent several weeks with his wife and child before leaving again to assume his seaman duties. This was the first and only (own emphasis) time that John’s parents lived amicably together—albeit with Julia’s parents (Riley, 2010). With her husband away at sea, Julia was thus left on her own vice to raise baby John (Norman, 2008). Julia’s mother (John’s maternal grandmother) died soon after John’s birth leaving John and Julia alone in an apartment with Julia’s father (John’s maternal grandfather). The presence of her father, and his protests about her
rambunctious social life, did not prevent Julia from pursing her nightly escapades (Kane, 2005) and she soon developed the habit of frequenting bars and having affairs with other men (Norman, 2008). At times, Alfred would return home and find John at his Aunt Mimi’s (Julia’s sister), or staying with a neighbour (Riley, 2010).

When John turned two, Mimi persuaded Julia to move into a cottage close to her own house, where she and her husband, George, resided. This newfound independence encouraged Julia’s nightly trysts even more as she was on her own with John for the first time since his birth with nobody to criticize her as a mother (Riley, 2010). John would often find himself waking up at night to a dark and empty house, as Julia would engage in social activities until the early hours of the morning. His crying would eventually wake the neighbours who would come to his rescue (Goldman, 1988). At other times, John was left in the care of his Aunt Mimi and Uncle George while Julia made her nightly excursions (Kane, 2005). Alfred, who had been taking Julia’s infidelities in his stride, now confronted her about her behaviour in his absences, which only led to Julia throwing hot tea on Alfred and Alfred striking her. After the incident, Alfred had to leave for sea again and Julia decided to move back into the apartment where her father had resided, as he had relocated with other relatives.

When John was three years old, he often witnessed Julia returning home drunk or with a new lover in tow (Riley, 2010). When Alfred returned home once again, after an eighteen-month absence from his wife and child, he found the neighbours babysitting John and Julia a few months pregnant by another man (as a result of one of her nightly excursions). Julia was forced, by her parents, to stay in a maternity home for the duration of the pregnancy and was told to put the baby up for adoption. With Alfred still at sea, the (now) four-year-old John was placed in the care of Alfred’s brother (Norman, 2008).
After her confinement, Julia, and a man, Bobby Dykins, began living together in 1946 (White, 1992). John, reunited with his mother after her pregnancy, but did not like Bobby and would often walk away from home to his Aunt Mimi’s house (Goldman, 1988). Nevertheless, John stayed with his mother and Bobby until Alfred, returning once again from sea, came to hear of his wife’s adultery, and a furious row erupted as he tried to save his marriage - John witnessing his mother’s screams as Bobby and Alfred got into a physical altercation. However, Julia refused to save her marriage and moved into a new apartment with Bobby and John (Norman, 2008).

Before leaving for sea again, Mimi informed Alfred about John walking two miles to her house because he did not like Bobby. Alfred then spoke to John and instructed him to stay with Mimi until he returned from sea. Mimi subsequently stepped into the mother role and enrolled John at a local kindergarten, but this was short-lived as John was expelled for behavioural problems that included being disruptive, being unable to cooperate or take instructions and bullying other children (Riley, 2010). A few weeks later (after having instructed John to stay with Aunt Mimi), Alfred appeared and decided to abduct his son (John) and take him to New Zealand to start a new life (Norman, 2008). Thereafter, John spent three weeks in Blackpool, and was at times left for days with one of Alfred’s brothers while Alfred made arrangements for the journey to New Zealand (Riley, 2010). Julia, realizing Alfred’s intentions, caught up with him and John at Blackpool and John was made to choose between his parents as they argued (White, 1992). John chose his father, but as his mother started to walk away he began to cry and followed her, pleading with his father to join them (Goldman, 1988). Alfred, finally realizing that his marriage was over, returned to sea and disappeared out of John’s life for twenty years (Spitz, 2005). John continued to stay with his mother and Bobby, in what Julia’s family
considered an environment of poor conditions and moral values (as Bobby and Julia were not married) (Norman, 2008). However, Mimi eventually persuaded Julia to relinquish control of John to her, and so it came to be that John was to stay with his Aunt Mimi until the age of 23 years (Kane, 2005).

These first five years of John’s life saw him being neglected, uprooted, and passed from hand to hand and forced to choose between his parents - in the end losing both (Goldman, 1988). Suffering emotional trauma, his parents made a poor job of raising John (Sounes, 2010), who now faced a new challenge - school.

**School**

Aunt Mimi was married to George Smith, who was the owner of a dairy farm (Goldman, 1988). As the couple had no children, they doted on John (White, 1992). Mimi played an active role in providing structure and order in John’s life as he shuffled between her and Julia. He was given his own room and Mimi made sure John adhered to strict bath and bed times. George treated John like a son and stimulated his interests in reading and writing (Norman, 2008). John grew very attached to George, who would often indulge him with sweets or movies and even sneak cake up to his room when Mimi sent him to his room as punishment for a misdemeanour (Riley, 2010). Julia visited John regularly at Mimi’s house and often spoiled him – her behaviour has been viewed as her way of dealing with the guilt of giving him up (Kane, 2005). The unstable shuffling between Mimi and Julia was said to have caused John’s insecurity and undisciplined behaviour at school (Goldman, 1988).

In 1946, when it was time for John to go to school, Mimi enrolled him at *Dovedale Primary* (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984). John performed well at school and his teachers had high
hopes concerning his academic abilities (White, 1992). John did not disappoint, and learned to read and write within six months of entering school (Norman, 2008). Socially, John enjoyed being the centre of attention and could often be found surrounded by a gang of boys with him being the undisputed leader and instigator of activities (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984). He also became involved in many physical fights with fellow pupils (Norman, 2008). John’s artistic side also surfaced at primary school as he enjoyed painting and drawing and quickly mastered the mouth-organ at age seven (Norman, 2008). Although he was an outgoing child, John would at times retreat to his bedroom and indulge in reading, writing, or painting (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984). Furthermore, his less appealing characteristics also began to surface at this time; John would often shoplift and produced grotesque pictures of handicapped people, which he found hilarious (Norman, 2008).

John eventually passed his eleven-plus exam and entered Quarry Bank High School in 1952 (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984). The eleven plus examination decided the educational future of every child in Britain, and those who passed it were sent to prestigious grammar schools, and the rest to technical or secondary schools. For his successful exam results, George rewarded John with a brand new bicycle - a traditional award for a child who brought the distinction of being able to attend a grammar school. At high school, John was identified as having academic potential and was placed in the A-stream academic stream. However, this perception of him quickly changed as John’s behaviour went from being that of a willing, co-operative student to that of being disruptive and confronting the authorities head-on (Norman, 2008). Indeed, John made it his mission to disrupt classes and disobey teachers. He would often set alarm clocks to go off in class, collapse black boards on teachers, and spray children with writing ink, which he projected from a bicycle pump. John distinguished himself from his peers by acting tough and
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adopting the local ‘Teddy-Boy’ style of dress (a phenomenon among British teenagers in the 1950s), which included Edwardian jackets and very tight jeans, and those who embraced the trend attempted to look tough and stylish (Riley, 2010). Not interested in conforming to school academic requirements, John pursued his passion for reading and writing and drawing (White, 1992). Rather than participate in class, he would make sketches, which depicted his teachers humorously, or the physically and mentally disabled grotesquely (Kane, 2005). These depictions made John popular at school when he included it in a mini newspaper, The Daily Howl, and circulated it among his peers who found it hilarious. The Daily Howl also contained running jokes about celebrities and black people. Mimi viewed John’s artistic abilities as a waste of time and as distracting him from his schoolwork. She would therefore often enter his room and throw away all his poetry, sketches, and writing. John never forgave Mimi for these actions as he felt she disrespected the genius in him (Norman, 2008).

In 1955, while at Quarry Bank, John’s beloved Uncle George died (Kane, 2005). John was seriously disturbed by his uncle’s death and it hardened his attitude towards the world (White, 1992). His interest in his biological mother, Julia, also seemed to have been re-awakened by George’s death as he started to visit her more regularly (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984). Indeed, John, having lost the only male figure (George) in his life, was now intent on building a relationship with Julia as he entered a new phase in his life – adolescence (Norman, 2008).

John’s teenage years initiated his sexual awakening. John viewed females as sex objects (hardly worth bothering with) to be kept in a box and only taken out to play with. He idolized Brigitte Bardot as a sex object and had a recurring memory of being sexually attracted to his mother – whom he thought would have consented to sex with him if the moment presented itself
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(Shotton & Schaffner, 1984). John also viewed Julia more as a friend than a mother. Ever since George’s death, John and his mother had been spending more time together and this newfound intimacy between them must have confused John’s feelings towards her (Norman, 2008). John lost his virginity to Barbara Baker at the age of 15, and afterwards informed a friend that he preferred masturbation as he found penetration too difficult (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984).

The year 1955 also saw the new sound of rock ‘n roll cross the Atlantic and find an immediate fan in the 14 year old John (Goldman, 1988). John viewed rock ‘n roll as an escape from his everyday existence, and it was this introduction to rock ‘n roll that set John on course for a musical career (White, 1992). Mimi did not approve of John’s new interest, while Julia, on the other hand, encouraged him to pursue his musical career, and bought him a guitar and taught him how to play. John found his first musical group, ‘The Quarrymen’, in High School and positioned himself as the undisputed leader of the band, writing his first song (Hello, Little Girl) when he was only 18. At a show of The Quarrymen, John met (soon to be fellow Beatle) Paul McCartney and a song writing partnership was born. John immediately realized Paul’s musical ability and decided that although Paul could be a threat to his leadership of the band, he would be a valuable asset to The Quarrymen. Paul then introduced John to George Harrison (the next Beatle member), a guitarist with exceptional talent (Norman, 2008).

John left Quarry Bank High School in 1957 – failing all his O-levels, including his favourite subject - Art (Norman, 2008). Although John’s marks did not permit him to enter any college, Mimi managed to get John into Art College through contacts, where he was to study a four-year diploma in Arts & Design (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984). John gave no thought of a future career, only that he wanted to be a millionaire. John was viewed by his fellow students and teachers as disruptive and problematic – he never handed in assignments, did his best to
prevent learning in the classroom, and at times even sat on a nude model’s lap for life drawing classes (Norman, 2008). His paintings for the first term at Art College were described as aggressive and very dark (Coleman, 1995).

John met two important characters at Art College that were to feature in his future – Stuart Sutcliffe and Cynthia Powell (Coleman, 1995). Stuart’s friendship with John turned out to be endearing and life-long, while Cynthia was to be John’s first wife (Kane, 2005). Stuart was a talented artist and grew very close to John. The friendship between the two began in art classes as they shared a passion for music and art. Stuart was the most talented artist at Art College and John’s artistic talents grew under Stuart’s tutelage as the two would sit quietly in a classroom and Stuart would teach John how to draw. Stuart thus stimulated and encouraged John’s artistic side while John motivated Stuart to explore rock ‘n roll as an art medium (Kane, 2005). Stuart, supported by John, eventually joined The Quarrymen (Norman, 2008). John even shared a flat with Stuart for a short while where the two would discuss music, art and poetry and even write songs together. Stuart’s sister, Pauline, stated in later interviews that Stuart was the personification of everything John wanted to be, namely, an artist, leader, and truthful. She further stated that she would not dismiss claims that John and Stuart had a homosexual relationship (Kane, 2005).

Cynthia Powell met John in 1957 at Art College and became his first wife in 1962, as he had to marry her because she was pregnant with his child (social mores at the time demanded it) (Norman, 2008). Cynthia was the first woman John loved romantically. Cynthia deferred to John in everything, catering for all his needs, and using her money to buy John cigarettes or guitar strings (Kane, 2005). She even changed her appearance, on John’s request, to look like his sex-idol, Brigitte Bardot (Lennon, 1978). John grew very possessive and mistrustful of Cynthia
in their relationship and often terrified her with his outbursts of anger (Harry, 2000b). Cynthia later admitted that John would strike her during jealous tirades (Kane, 2005).

John had to face death again in 1958 as his mother was run over by an off-duty police officer. She died on impact. The experience left the 17-year-old bitter and John admitted in later interviews that he was in a “blind rage” for almost two years after his mother’s death (Kane, 2005, p. 42). At this time, John had no intention of finishing his art studies and was unsure about his future (Coleman, 1995). He failed an annual exam despite help from his then girlfriend, Cynthia Powell and his best friend, Stuart Sutcliffe (Lennon, 2005). John was committed to rock ‘n roll now and decided to leave Art College for a tour in Hamburg, Germany with his group, now called ‘The Beatles’. Just before leaving for the tour, Pete Best - the last addition to the band - joined as drummer (Norman, 2008). Despite Mimi protesting vehemently that John should continue his studies, his mind was made up to leave for Hamburg.

The Beatles

The Beatles were contracted to play a 48-night engagement at a local Hamburg club in August 1960. The city of Hamburg introduced John to excessive sex and drugs with which he frequently experimented (Norman, 2008). He often used stimulants like amphetamines to help him play through a set that could last up to nine hours (Kane, 2005). The band returned in 1961 and 1962 to play in Hamburg again. The time in Hamburg helped the band to hone their stage presence and test out new songs written by Lennon and McCartney (Riley, 2010). Although having a magnetic stage presence, John was very insecure about his voice and guitar playing. Arriving back at Liverpool, he had serious doubts about his future as a musician as he saw himself as an artist or poet (Norman, 2008).
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The Beatles then started to play and draw a lot of attention at a Liverpool club, the Cavern (Coleman, 1995), where John met Brian Epstein (Norman, 2008). Brian Epstein became the band’s manager until 1967 (Goldman, 1988). It was said that Brian got involved with the Beatles because of his sexual attraction to John and rumours spread that the two were engaged in a homosexual affair after the pair left for holiday soon after the birth of John’s first son, Julian (Kane, 2005). Although John described their relationship as a love affair that was never consummated (Harry, 2000a), he did admit to a close friend that he had allowed Epstein to masturbate him (Shotton & Shaffner, 1984). John would often ridicule Brian about being homosexual and Jewish and delighted in Brian’s hurtful reactions. It is speculated that through his ridiculing John wanted to show Brian that even though he (Brian) was the band’s manager, he (John) was still the leader of the group (Norman, 2008). Brian was responsible for creating the Beatle image of four well-groomed English lads and felt that the Beatles had to give up their rebel attitude (synonymous with rock ‘n roll) – even convincing them to wear suits (Norman, 2008). Although John hated the carefully planned look of the band, he compromised for financial reasons (Kane, 2005).

When the Beatles travelled to Hamburg again in 1962, they found that Stuart Sutcliffe - who stayed in Hamburg after their first trip - had died (Norman, 2008). John wept inconsolably at hearing of Stuart’s death and his response was to hide his pain and turn to alcohol and drugs for relief. John was to speak of Stuart daily for the rest of his life (Norman, 2008). The band’s dynamics changed in Hamburg as Pete Best left the band and Ringo Starr took over as drummer (Riley, 2010), just before Beatlemania swept the foursome of Lennon, McCartney, Harrison, and Starr towards stardom.
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The word, Beatlemania, was coined in 1963 and meant that mass hysteria greeted the Beatles wherever they went (Norman, 2008). The Beatles released their first single, ‘Love Me Do,’ which reached number 17 on the British charts in 1962, and recorded their first album, Please, Please Me in 1963 – of which Lennon and McCartney wrote eight of the 14 tracks (Miles, 1997). Crowds greeted the Beatles at every opportunity and John began to feel overwhelmed by the Beatle image (Shotton & Shaffner, 1984). The Beatles now performed songs, mainly written by John and Paul McCartney, instead of covering standard rock n’ roll songs (Norman, 2008). John felt that being a Beatle limited his abilities to express himself concerning relevant world issues (Kane, 2005) and was frustrated by the responsibilities of being a Beatle, that is, saying what people wanted to hear and doing what was expected of him. Beatlemania continued to leave John unfulfilled (Coleman, 1995). More responsibility came his way as Cynthia gave birth to his first son, Julian, on April 8th, 1963, during Beatlemania. John, being on tour was to see his firstborn a week after the birth. John enjoyed the presence of Julian and would phone him daily while on tour (Norman, 2008). Career obligations would eventually prevent John from building a good relationship with his son as the period of 1963 to 1965 engaged John with touring, song writing duties, and writing books (Kane, 2005). He started to write his first book (In his Own Write) in 1963 and soon after publication, it received rave reviews. A second book (A Spaniard in the Works) followed in 1965, also to great acclaim (Norman, 2008).

The Beatles were appointed Members of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in 1965 (Riley, 2010) and John accepted it grudgingly as he viewed the event as yet another Beatle obligation (Norman, 2008). The Beatles decided to stop touring in 1966 and instead concentrated on producing albums (Kane, 2005). John felt that the fans at the Beatles concerts were unable to hear their music because of their screaming and the band’s musicianship was
beginning to suffer as a result (Miles, 1997).

Not touring left John frightful as it provided him with an escape from his responsibilities as father and husband. John thus decided to leave for Spain to act in a movie and to contemplate his future. It was in Spain that John began to consider leaving the Beatles (Norman, 2008) and it was also during this time that he was introduced to the effects of LSD (and could not wait to experience its effects again). The use of LSD affected John’s song writing and his songs now contained surreal images and hallucinations (Macdonald, 2005) which were in contrast to his past songs - which were described as simple love songs (Gould, 2008). An example of John’s new surreal lyrics can be found in the song ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’ on the Sgt. Pepper album released by the Beatles in 1967. In the song, John sings of newspaper taxis, gargantuan flowers, and a girl with kaleidoscopic eyes (Gould, 2008). John also viewed drugs as an escape from his Beatle existence and started to hate performing, as the music was barely audible due to hysterical screams of the crowd.

In 1967, John travelled to India to practice transcendental meditation (Norman, 2008). His band members (along with his wife, Cynthia) joined him and most of the songs for their next two albums were constructed during this time (Miles, 1997). Although John also took his wife, Cynthia, along on this trip with him, he significantly demanded a single cabin for himself (Kane, 2005). While in India, Brian Epstein died and John admitted to being scared at continuing with the band without the managerial skills of Epstein (Norman, 2008). It was also while in India that John realized that his marriage is deteriorating and would possibly end primarily because he was neglecting to invest time and energy into it (Kane, 2005). Indeed, John and Cynthia had been living together in what was described as a sibling existence (Norman, 2008). They merely tolerated each other and the physical aspect of their relationship was non-existent as John
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continued to indulge in multiple sexual exploits while on tour (Norman, 2008).

John needed someone to stimulate his eccentric personality (White, 1992) and he found the right person in November 1966, in Yoko Ono (Kane, 2005). She was an avant-garde artist and John met her at one of her art exhibitions (Shotton & Shaffner, 1984). At the time, drugs featured prominently in John’s life, and Cynthia blamed the deterioration of their marriage on his drug intake (Kane, 2005). John divorced Cynthia in 1968 and soon made his love for Yoko public knowledge (Norman, 2008). His creative focus began to shift beyond the Beatles as he and Yoko recorded three albums together between 1968 and 1970. He also formed the Plastic Ono band and released three singles – ‘Give peace a Chance’, ‘Cold Turkey,’ and ‘Instant Karma’ (Harry, 2000b).

The Beatles then broke up in 1970 and John decided to leave for New York, USA with Yoko (Coleman, 1995). John actually left the band in 1969, but due to contractual obligations, he was not allowed to inform the media of this decision. He was thus furious when McCartney informed the media that he (McCartney) was leaving the band in 1970, and at the same time released a solo album (Norman, 2008). John had wanted the world to know that he had started the band and that he was the one to disband it (Wenner, 2000). John attributed the break-up of the band to the death of Epstein. McCartney then took charge of the band’s next project, a film titled Magical Mystery Tour. This was a flop. John’s time was then consumed with making albums with Yoko and its accompanying soundtrack and this turned out to be a huge success (Norman, 2008). The Beatles got tired of McCartney’s domineering ways concerning the guidance of their musical future, and at the same time, John felt that the band did not respect his relationship with Yoko (Wenner, 2000). John wanted to establish himself as an artist in America and Yoko also encouraged him to get involved in politics. As a result, John wrote various
protest songs (Kane, 2005). John saw Yoko as his equal in every way and he viewed her as worthy of giving up the Beatles for. He felt he had outgrown the other Beatles and was insulted that the other Beatles did not accept Yoko (Coleman, 1995).

Solo

After the Beatles disbanded in 1970, John and Yoko underwent Primal Therapy together (proposed to deal with childhood-repressed emotions). John felt that Primal Therapy made him confront his childhood pain, motivating him to move away from all forms of religion. Soon after undergoing this treatment, John released his solo album, *John Lennon/Plastic Ono Band* (Norman, 2008). The album contained the emotional song, “Mother,” where John confronts his feelings of childhood rejection (Harry, 2000b), and a song titled “Julia,” dedicated to his mother (Sheff, 2000). John’s solo album is often referred to as the Primal album as it followed his primal therapy and sees him confronting his past - his childhood, the rejection he experienced as a child, and the death of his mother (Norman, 2008). His music thus changed from being objective reporting to subjective expression (Sheff, 2000).

John Lennon was the first superstar to use his fame to promote political and social causes (Kane, 2005). As early as 1965 John could be seen wearing anti-war buttons on his beret, even though Brian Epstein did everything in his power to keep the Beatles apolitical to ensure a good public image (Kane, 2005). Brian’s protests against the Beatles’ outspokenness concerning political and social causes did not deter John from refusing to play to a racially segregated crowd in Jacksonville when the Beatles toured America in 1964 (Norman, 2008). John’s early activism was exacerbated when he became involved with Yoko Ono.
Between the years 1968 and 1969, John and Yoko got actively involved in protests against the ensuing Vietnam War (Norman, 2008). John even went so far as to return his MBE medal in 1969 - the ultimate symbol of British establishment as a protest against Britain’s involvement in the Biafra war (Norman, 2008). In addition, John and Yoko used their honeymoon as a demonstration for peace - attracting worldwide attention. The demonstration was so successful that they staged another three months later.

When John and Yoko moved to New York in 1971, John released the Imagine album, which saw him still dealing with the significance of the Beatles breaking up in his life in the song ‘How Do You Sleep’. The song is directed at McCartney and John’s withdrawal from their relationship (Norman, 2008). John and Yoko befriended anti-war activists and performed in aid of the cause against the Vietnam War – John’s anti-war song, ‘Give Peace a Chance,’ being quickly adopted by anti-Vietnam war protesters as their anthem (Norman, 2008). This attracted the attention of the Republican administration who considered John’s anti-war activities as a threat to their leadership and attempts were made to deport both John and Yoko (Kane, 2005). John and Yoko even held a press conference to announce the formation of a new state, ‘Nutopia’, a place with no boundaries and need for passports, to ask for political asylum in the USA (Kane, 2005). After a drawn out legal battle, John obtained permanent residency in the USA (Norman, 2008). John would spend many hours supporting various charities and would eventually became his generation’s leading social critic (Kane, 2005), as The Some Time in New York album was released in 1972 and contained the song, ‘Woman is the Nigger of the World,’ which commented on the social issue of women’s rights and liberation (Norman, 2008). Yoko was clearly the catalyst behind John’s attitude change towards women, as he has been quoted as saying that Yoko was the first woman to confront his chauvinistic attitude towards women (Sheff, 2000).
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John and Yoko experienced problems with their relationship in 1973 (Sheff, 2000) as Yoko felt that John’s image as a Beatle was overshadowing her image as an artist (Coleman, 1995). She was also growing tired of John’s drinking and the media’s insistence that she was the reason the Beatles disbanded (Kane, 2005). She suggested that John take a lover, her assistant (May Pang), whom she trusted to look after John in her absence when he left for Los Angeles with May (Coleman, 1995). This was the start of what John called his ‘lost weekend’. He was to be separated from Yoko for 18 months. John was very happy during the time spent with May, and would at times indulge in drugs and alcohol (Coleman, 1995). May also played an active role in getting John involved with his son, Julian, and further motivated John to keep writing songs (Kane, 2005). John’s new involvement with his son was very important to him, as he admitted that he regretted not being involved in raising him (Norman, 2008). John released two albums during the 18 month ‘lost weekend’ - *Walls and Bridges* and *Rock 'n Roll*. He also co-wrote songs for other singers and produced an album for the artist, Harry Nillson (Norman, 2008).

In 1975, after John’s ‘lost weekend’ period, Yoko summoned John to return home and the two reunited (Kane, 2005), and Yoko, after suffering numerous miscarriages, fell pregnant (Norman, 2008). With the birth of their first child, Sean, on October 9th, 1975, John retired from public life and decided to raise Sean – taking on the role of househusband while Yoko took care of business matters (Sheff, 2000). He abandoned his solo recording career and espoused feminism (assuming the househusband role) and attempted to be a better father a second time around (Norman, 2008). In the next five years, John led a secluded existence, yet he continued to write songs (Kane, 2005). He came into the public’s eye again in 1980, releasing the album, *Double Fantasy*, to wide acclaim (Norman, 2008). Then, on December 8th, 1980, before entering the doors of his apartment block, John was approached for an autograph by David Chapman
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(Sheff, 2000). After John complied, Chapman shot John five times (Kane, 2000). John was declared dead on arrival at the hospital.

John’s impact on popular music was far-reaching. As a member of the Beatles, he revolutionized popular music with relation to sound, style, and attitude (Schinder & Schwartz, 2007). As a solo performer, he came to inspire and symbolize human hopes for a better world (Harry, 2000b). For example a song like ‘Imagine’ written in the seventies, was voted as the United Kingdom’s favourite lyric in 1999, showing the relevance of the song’s ideals even today (Harry, 2000b).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the salient events and developments in the life of John Winston Lennon. His first five years were explored to highlight the development of his lifestyle and his school years in order to validate the expression of his lifestyle. Themes relating to his sexual, occupational, and social development were illuminated to provide a holistic picture of a unique personality. In the following chapter, the methodological aspects of this research study are described and unpacked.
Chapter 5

Research Design and Methodology

Chapter Preview

Qualitative studies aspire to illuminate, explain and describe a pattern of relationship between the often-abstract identifying nature of people, objects and situations (Berg, 2007), in order to elicit the meanings attributed to them (Rudestam & Neuton, 2001). In this chapter the research design and method, the psychobiographical subject and the primary aim of this study are described. Furthermore, the research procedure and data collection methods are explained. Finally, data analysis as applied in this study is elaborated upon. To conclude the chapter, the researcher briefly highlighted the value of reflexivity within qualitative research.

Research Design and Method

This study is situated within the qualitative research paradigm and presents itself as life-history research (Runyan, 1988a). Furthermore, a single case design is used to test, clarify or challenge the value of psychological theory(ies), particularly against a unique individual case (Yin, 1994). Life history research allows the researcher to track a variety of experiences in an individual’s life (Runyan, 1982a). More precisely, the research design of this study may be defined as a single-case psychobiographical study over an entire lifespan (Fouché, 1999). This design will serve to present the subject’s life as a logical and clarifying story through the use of structured psychological theory (McAdams, 1988). This qualitative psychobiographical study is exploratory-descriptive and descriptive-dialogic in nature. It is exploratory-descriptive as it sets out to construct a rich description of Lennon’s personality development over his entire lifespan.
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(Edwards, 1990; Neuman, 2003). Furthermore, it is descriptive-dialogic as it intends to realistically portray essential phenomena and to explain or clarify the content of a specific theory (Edwards, 1990; McLeod, 1994), such as the theory of Adler (1929) highlighted in this study.

The psychobiographical research method of this study is qualitative-morphogenic (Elms, 1994) and stresses the individuality of the whole person within his specific socio-historical context (Runyan, 1983). This research method and its complementary single case design (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1983) will attempt to provide a holistic description of the life of John Winston Lennon within his specific socio-historical context.

The Psychobiographical Subject

Case studies are typically directed at gaining an understanding of the uniqueness and peculiarity of a specific case in all its complexity (Huysamen, 1994). The British artist, musician and writer, John Winston Lennon served as the single case whose life history was illuminated in this psychobiography. This study is a single subject qualitative psychobiography, with the subject being selected purposively, based on the interest value and significance of a life (Terre Blanche & Durheim, 1999). Purposive sampling was utilized to select the subject of this study and relies heavily on the researcher’s judgement in determining the characteristic attributes desired and to ensure richness of data (Strydom & Delport, 2005b).

John Winston Lennon serves as the single case selected for this study and was selected on the basis of his celebrated creativity as well as his well-documented and exceptional life. In studying exceptional individuals, the researcher (applying psychological theory) is able to understand the influences and developmental contexts of an individual’s life (Howe, 1997). The case study approach gives the researcher the opportunity to systematically analyse the
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complexity of a life lived (Huysamen, 1994; McAdams, 1994) in order to develop idiographic interpretations (Runyan, 1983) that assign coherent meaning (Norman, 2008) to the subjective view of an individual being studied. Furthermore, the life of Lennon appeared to have theoretical significance and applicability to Adler’s (1929) individual psychology. Much has been written about Lennon, but none of the existing literature adopts a specific psychological focus and no psychobiographical study of Lennon exists. The subject’s life continues to have a huge impact in the world (Sheff, 2000) and therefore the researcher chose to make Lennon the subject of this psychobiography.

Primary Aim of the Research

The primary aim of this study is to explore and describe the life of John Winston Lennon from the theoretical perspective of Adler’s (1929) individual psychology. The primary aim reflects the exploratory-descriptive nature of the study (Geertz, 1973). This involves an in-depth understanding and description of an individual case, while viewing the case as operating within a specific socio-historical context (Edwards, 1990).

A secondary objective was that the constructs of Adler’s (1929) individual psychology be informally evaluated by applying them to Lennon’s life. This objective reflects the descriptive-dialogic approach that entails a form of conversation between the exploratory-descriptive findings on the one hand, and the theoretical proposition and conceptualisation of Adler’s (1929) theory on the other hand (Stroud, 2004). The principle of analytic generalisation was applied, to informally test the theoretical model (McLeod, 1994; Yin, 1994).
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Research Procedure and Data Collection

The data collected in this psychobiographical study on John Winston Lennon was obtained from several sources. These sources included published materials as well as selected audio-visual media. The data collected concerning the subject was from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources refer to materials produced by the subject and interviews conducted with the subject (Strydom & Delport, 2005a) while secondary sources include all materials produced by others on the subject’s life.

Yin (1994) proposed the use of published materials in psychobiographical studies. The advantages of using these were that they could be continuously reviewed; they can be used to corroborate information from other sources and their accessibility to the researcher (Rudestam & Neuton, 2001). Yin (1994) however warns that published material is subjected to author bias and may negatively influence the outcome of a study. In the light of Lennon’s fame, material may have been produced in a biased fashion, which compromises its credibility. To minimise the impact of author bias Yin (1994) suggested the use of multiple sources, which in turn will allow for data triangulation and cross-referencing. The triangulation of data is proposed by Yin as a means to corroborate data and further minimise author bias. The use of multiple sources of published materials aims to promote the validity and objectivity of the study (Willig, 2001; Yin, 1994). The researcher made sure to make use of Yin’s instruction to make use of multiple sources of published materials. The following section is a discussion of the data extraction and analysis procedures utilized in this study. Fouché (1999) viewed this task as potentially the most difficult facing a psychobiographer in his compilation of a good psychobiography.
Data Analysis

Psychobiographers are often faced with an excessive amount of information concerning their subject. It is their duty to clearly distinguish between information that can be ignored and information essential to the study of the subject. There are certain events in an individual’s life, which form a major component of personality and need to be explored (Schultz, 2005b). Data in qualitative analysis is usually in the form of a textual narrative, leading to analysis focusing on the words of a subject to elucidate meaning (Creswell, 1998).

Faced with an infinite amount of information, the researcher needs to order the information to illuminate the data it contains (Alexander, 1990). Psychobiography aims to highlight salient events in an individual’s life and apply psychological theory to structure the information into a comprehensive narrative (McAdams, 1994). Schultz (2005a) stated that the individual be explored within his specific social, cultural, and historical context and not be made to fit a specific theory used to explore the life. Thus, the researcher applies psychological theory to explain the complexity of an individual’s life (Alexander, 1990; Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005a).

According to Yin (1994), the analysis of a case study is a process of examining, extracting, categorizing and recombining evidence. Yin stated that every investigation should start with a general analytical strategy- prioritizing what to analyse. He proposed two general strategies. These are described below.

1. Relying on theoretical propositions on which the original objectives and the design of the case study is presumably based. These propositions consist of research questions that will provide insight into the objectives of the study and the context of the theoretical
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approach. Alexander (1988) suggested two major strategies, similar to Yin’s, for the analysis of data.

2. Developing a case description: Yin (1994) refers to the development of a descriptive framework to integrate and organise a case study. A descriptive framework will take the form of a matrix with categories, wherein evidence will be collected. This strategy is elaborated upon later in this chapter on page 73.

**Alexander’s model.** As mentioned earlier, Alexander’s (1988, 1990) model suggested two major strategies, similar to Yin’s (1994) for the analysis of data. Alexander’s model focuses on lifting out themes and accomplishes this via two strategies: (a) asking the data questions, and (b) letting the data reveal itself whereby guidelines used to identify salient data help to reduce information to manageable quantities. The nine principle identifiers of saliency serve as guidelines to extract information in a systematic fashion and to deal with vast amounts of information.

**Questioning the data.** The first method used to analyse the data entails ‘asking the data questions’ (Alexander, 1988, 1990). This is done to obtain core-identifying units (themes, scripts) that have significance in untying and attaining the objective of the study (Stroud, 2004). The questions are based on the academic approaches to the study and the aims of the research, enabling the researcher to sort through large amounts of data to answer questions related to the personality theory applied. This enables the revealing of information critical to the subject of study (Alexander, 1988, 1990).
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The researcher approached the collected data on Lennon with two general questions that enabled the researcher to extract core themes related to the objectives of the study. The first question was, “Which section of the data will allow for the exploration and description of personality development across the lifespan of John Winston Lennon?” To answer this question, the researcher conceptualized Lennon’s personality development across his lifespan according to Adler’s (1929) individual psychology. This was achieved via a complete theoretical and literature review of the theoretical constructs of Adler’s individual psychology. Clear conceptualizations in case study research function as a guide to assist the researcher in extracting relevant data (Yin, 1994). A detailed discussion of Adler’s individual psychology was provided in Chapter 3- focusing on constructs applicable to this study.

The second question was, “To what extent do the biographical data collected relate to Adler’s (1929) individual psychology (as applied in this study)”. To answer this question the extent to which constructs of Adler’s Individual Psychology are related to Lennon’s life need to be examined through cautious examination of the category-specific organized data (Stroud, 2004). The researcher implemented analytic generalization to make this possible and through the process of informally testing the relevant theory, the researcher compared extracted biographical data with the conceptualizations and propositions of Adler’s individual psychology. It is important to generalise findings to the applied theory by relating biographical data to Adler’s Individual Psychology. This allows for the generalisation of new hypotheses concerning the theory and in turn can lead to new developments of the theoretical framework applied (Stroud, 2004).
Letting the data reveal itself. Alexander’s (1988, 1990) second method of data extraction is ‘letting the data reveal itself’. In order to facilitate this process, the researcher categorised the most salient available data. Alexander (1988) postulated nine principle identifiers for extracting salient data. The nine identifiers provided the researcher with an approach to collect materials in a systematic fashion (Edwards, 1990). Each guideline or principle identifier is described below.

1. **Primacy**

This refers to a first incidence in an individual’s life on which all future behaviour and motivation is built (Alexander, 1990). Elms (1994) argued that information presented first is commonly perceived as being very important. This included the individual’s early memories, first experiences and introductory remarks regarding autobiographies, which Schultz (2005b) saw as a means of promoting communication and theme extraction.

2. **Frequency**

This refers to incidents or events that occur frequently. The frequency with which something is reported is often an indication of increasing certainty surrounding it and relates to its importance (Alexander, 1990). Schultz (2005b) encouraged psychobiographers to pay attention to their subject’s obsessions. He saw these as revealing stories concerning the subject that has to be explored.

3. **Uniqueness**

This refers to what is singular or odd to the subject (Alexander, 1990). Examples of these are often preceded by statements of ‘nothing like this has happened to me before’ or ‘the strangest thing happened to me’ (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Vorster (2003) stated that
uniqueness refers not only to verbal expression, but also to the content of what is being expressed.

4. **Negation**

This refers to that which is the opposite and often exposes repressed or unconscious material. There may be a particular belief or understanding of an individual, which is in fact the opposite in reality (Alexander, 1988, 1990). Schultz (2005b) noted that a subject may at times deny a psychological or biographical fact vehemently, which may be confirmation of its opposite.

5. **Emphasis**

This refers to information that has been overemphasised. Information may be overemphasised, underemphasised or the emphasis misplaced (Alexander, 1988, 1990). The psychobiographer needs to be on the look out for mundane events that have been granted excessive attention, when a major life experience has been overlooked or when irrelevancy is stressed with undue force (Elms, 1994; Schultz, 2005b).

6. **Omission**

This refers to that element of an individual’s life, which seems to have been omitted when considering their lifespan and often attention to affect is omitted (Alexander, 1988, 1990).

7. **Error or Distortion**

This refers to the presence of mistakes - relevant to facts in general or the person self (Alexander, 1990).
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8. **Isolation**

This refers to that which stands alone or does not fit with the information as a whole (Alexander, 1990).

9. **Incompletion**

This refers to that which is not finished or where closure has not yet been achieved (Alexander, 1990).

The nine identifiers of salience discussed above provided the researcher with guidelines for approaching the collected materials in a relatively consistent and systematic way (Alexander, 1988, 1990; Fouché, 1999). This allowed the researcher to enhance the trustworthiness of the study (Fouché, 1999; Fouché & van Niekerk, 2005b). Furthermore, the researcher developed a conceptual framework as a matrix wherein information was contextualized to promote data analysis. The next section provides a more detailed discussion of this conceptual matrix.

**Conceptual framework or matrix.** Yin (1994) refers to the development of a descriptive framework to integrate and organize a case study. A clear working framework is essential in the data management process, which is a systematic, coherent process of data collection, storage and retrieval (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, the researcher developed a conceptual framework to categorise the most salient data to facilitate the process of the data revealing itself. The researcher developed a matrix to categorise components of Adler’s (1929) individual psychology across Lennon’s lifespan. This matrix I presented graphically on page 90. The researcher focused on experiences that influenced Lennon’s construction of his lifestyle. The development of his lifestyle was evaluated and examined within the constructs set out in the matrix. Chapter 3 discussed each of these constructs in detail.
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The matrix assisted the researcher to remain systematic and consistent during the process of data analysis (Vorster, 2003). Individual psychology emphasises the influence of socio-cultural and historical factors on personality development (Adler, 1958). The use of a matrix allowed the researcher to investigate the above-mentioned factors as to their impact on the personality development of John Winston Lennon.

Reflexivity

The life worlds of researchers form an integral part of qualitative biographical work (Roberts, 2002). The researcher needs to be critically aware of his role in the construction of knowledge, which can undermine the validity of the research (Tindall, 1999). Maturana (1991) stressed the importance of the complex relationship between researcher and subject concerning experiences and their description of social realities as a further threat to the validity of qualitative research. It is the researcher’s task to be aware of his contribution in the construction of meaning throughout the process of qualitative research. This is known as reflexive analysis (Wilkinson, 1988; Willig, 2001). Krefting (1991) viewed reflexive analysis as a way for the researcher to assess his background, perceptions and motivations regarding qualitative research. This allows the researcher to make use of critical reflection and be aware of the restriction he imposes on the research (Stroud, 2004). The researcher needs to be aware that complete objectivity does not exist and continually evaluate their subjective influences on qualitative research. Personal reflexivity refers to the researcher’s examination of how his values, experiences, interests, beliefs and social identity shape the relevant research (Tindall, 1999; Willig, 2001).

Parker (1999) noted that each reader would construct a new meaning when reading information. Meaning is constructed via the interdependent collaboration between the subject, researcher and observers (Stroud, 2004). This emphasizes that this research does not claim to
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have universal meaning or that the researcher of this study claims that his analysis of the data is final. While every effort has been made to produce informed, theoretically sound findings, other interpretations may be equally valid.

**Ethical Considerations**

Elms (1994) stated that the ethical guidelines for psychobiographies are limited, but that information obtained should be treated with respect. Runyan (1983) highlighted the invasion of privacy and potential harm to the subject and his family as important ethical issues to consider. This study was conducted in accordance with the 1976 ethical guidelines set out by the American Psychiatric Association (Elms, 1994). These guidelines state that psychobiographical studies may be carried out on, preferably, long dead individuals with no close surviving relatives who might be embarrassed by psychobiographical revelations. The researcher only made use of published material available in the public domain and treated all information gathered with respect and sensitivity.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlighted the research design and method as well as well as the subject of this study. In addition, the primary aim, research procedure, data collection methods and data analysis procedures were described, as well as the role of reflexivity in interpretive research. Finally, the ethical considerations relating to psychobiography were highlighted. The following chapter aims to provide a discussion of preliminary methodological considerations regarding psychobiographical studies.
Chapter 6

Preliminary Methodological Considerations

Chapter Preview

Psychobiographical research relies on interpretation and other qualitative methods as opposed to the traditional scientific method of research, which in turn makes it an easy target for much criticism (Roberts, 2002). Many of these criticisms are directed towards the methodology of psychobiographical studies (Anderson, 1981a), while others relate to the idiographic approach utilized to study individual lives (Runyan, 1983). Psychobiographers in attempting to write a good psychobiography are challenged by major constraints and obstacles that are linked to psychobiographical research (McAdams, 1994). These obstacles present themselves as methodological issues and difficulties that require careful consideration to ensure that the quality pertaining to qualitative psychobiographical research is maintained (Stroud, 2004).

It is the researcher’s responsibility to be aware of criticisms and obstacles inherent to the psychobiographical approach. Therefore, this chapter seeks to explain major methodological considerations that challenge the psychobiographical approach as a way of doing research. Furthermore, the chapter suggests strategies to reduce the influence of these methodological considerations and aims to carefully consider each consideration’s specific applicability to the study of John Winston Lennon.
Methodological Considerations in Psychobiography

**Researcher bias.** Psychobiographical studies require an in-depth study of an individual’s life, which often leaves the researcher with a subjective view concerning the subject (Anderson, 1981a; 1981b). Psychobiographical methodology is challenged by the psychobiographer's tendency to idealize or vilify the biographical object (Elms, 1988, 1994). Anderson (1981a) indicated that counter transference-like reactions can become a common occurrence and that these reactions (emotional) are non-deliberate and usually of an unconscious nature. Since research literature reports that complete objectivity and dispassionate exploration concerning the life of a biographical subject is impossible (Elms, 1994; Meissner, 2003), emotional responses experienced by the researcher cannot be ignored. The psychobiographer must guard against the biographical subject becoming a projection of the author (Meissner, 2003).

In an attempt to minimize the bias of idealizing and/or vilifying John Winston Lennon, this researcher attempted to employ preventative strategies. The researcher chose a subject about whom he feels ambivalent. Some aspects of the personality of John Lennon appear to the researcher to indicate a great individual while other aspects leave an impression of an ‘everyday man’. Elms and Song (2005) encouraged researchers to choose a subject that elicit feelings of approval and disapproval, as a means to promote objectivity. The researcher also consistently explored his feelings and attitude towards John Winston Lennon as suggested by Anderson (1981a; 1981b). The researcher made sure to diarize these feelings and attitudes over the entire literature study and kept an updated journal. This journal can later be examined to provide a possible explanation of how these feelings influenced the way the researcher perceived the
subject. The researcher made sure to discuss the feelings and attitudes that developed while undertaking the study of the life of John Winston Lennon with his research supervisors.

Psychobiographers are encouraged to consult with specialists, to ensure feedback on the degree of subjectivity exhibited in writing about a biographical life (Anderson, 1981b; Schurink, 1988). Researcher bias can be further counteracted by developing a sense of empathy with the subject (Anderson, 1981a). The researcher consulted with musicians, poets and artists in obtaining an empathetic understanding of John Lennon as a man and the different aspects of his personality that characterized his life. Opinions from those consulted enabled the researcher to step back from his own impressions and interpretations of the life of John Winston Lennon and provided opportunities for reflection and evaluation.

**Reductionism.** Psychobiographical studies are criticized for being reductionistic in approach (Anderson, 1981). Runyan (1988b) stated that there tends to be an overemphasis on the use of fixed psychological formulae in psychobiography, which leads to neglect in considering the complex social, historical and cultural context wherein the subject of the study exists. McAdams (1994) referred to overpathologizing as another reductionistic criticism. This entails psychobiographical studies putting unduly heavy focus on pathology evident in the individual at the expense of normalcy, health and creativity (Fouché, 1999; Runyan, 1988b). This form of reductionism inhibits the researcher’s ability to illustrate the inner life of a subject (Meissner, 2003) and limits the explanation of an entire life to a neurotic tendency (Scalapiro, 1999). Psychobiography is often accused of explaining adult character and behaviour predominantly in terms of early childhood experiences, neglecting later formative influences (Runyan, 1988b). Early childhood experiences are never the only explanation of personality.
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development (Schultz, 2005a) and should not be viewed as deterministic (Adler, 1958) which
neglects to investigate later processes and influences on personality development.

In an attempt to minimize reductionistic critique, this researcher employed various
strategies to minimize any tendency to be reductionistic in this psychobiography of John
Winston Lennon. The researcher utilized multiple sources when collecting and analysing data
and avoided the use of excessive psychological jargon as proposed by Runyan (1988a). The use
of multiple sources when collecting and analysing data promotes the subject of study (John
Winston Lennon) to be explored within a social, historical and cultural context (Anderson,
1981a; Atkinson & Delamort, 2005). The researcher not only consulted psychological material,
but also material that explained the socio-historical context wherein Lennon existed. The
researcher made use of the eugraphic approach in investigating the personality development of
John Winston Lennon.

The eugraphic approach emphasizes normality and health (Elms, 1994) and avoids
overpathologizing the subject (McAdams, 1994). The researcher explored John Lennon’s
personality development across an entire life span and not only with specific focus on his
childhood experiences. As mentioned earlier, Runyan (1988b) warned psychobiographers not to
neglect later formative influences. The researcher thus aimed to explore John Winston Lennon’s
life in a holistic manner across his lifespan.

**Cross-cultural differences.** Psychobiographical studies may be considered a form of
cross-cultural research, in that the culture in which the subject lived may have differed
significantly from present day culture (Anderson, 1981a). Runyan (1982a) noted that cross-
cultural criticism holds that modern psychological concepts would not necessarily apply to a
subject’s behaviour on account of their not being cross-culturally sensitive. Present-day psychological concepts therefore would not necessarily be applicable in researching the subject and might not be cross-culturally sensitive (Anderson, 1981a). Psychobiographers must recognize the context-bound nature of psychological concepts and find out which concepts of theories may be applied across cultures (Runyan, 1982a). To avoid cultural bias, Anderson (1982) suggested that psychobiographers undertake extensive historical research of the existing time and social culture to promote a culturally empathetic understanding of the subject. This entails consulting a variety of data ranging from primary sources to secondary sources (Berg, 1995). This enables the researcher to understand the culture from the perspective of people who experienced it and more important from the perspective of the subject (Stroud, 2004).

John Winston Lennon lived in a different socio-political, economic and cultural period to that of the researcher. For example, the researcher comes from an upper class, financially fortunate background, whereas Lennon grew up in a middle-class, financially stable but unstable family environment (Goldman, 1988; Norman, 2008). Furthermore, John Winston Lennon was born during the Second World War and experienced its aftermath as a child (Norman, 2008). In an effort to understand the context wherein Lennon existed, the researcher made use of extensive reading to ensure an understanding of the historical period, the community and the culture in which Lennon lived. The researcher acknowledged Anderson’s (1981a; 1981b) advice to the researcher to attempt a culturally empathetic understanding of the subject by undertaking an extensive historical research concerning the subject.
Validity and reliability. The design and methodology of the psychobiographical approach has been widely criticized in terms of its validity and reliability (Edwards, 1990; Runyan, 1983; Yin, 1994). The lack of controls and difficulty in generalization are cited as specific concerns relating to case study research (Runyan, 1988b; Yin, 1994). According to Yin (1994), the quality of a case study design can be measured by four tests common to all social science methods, namely construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. The following precautions and strategies are proposed to meet these tests.

1. Construct validity: The correct operational measures for the concepts being studied need to be established (TerreBlanche & Durheim, 1999). The researcher has to select carefully and clearly conceptualize the constructs and the variables that are to be investigated, all of which should be congruent with the researcher’s objectives (Yin, 1994). Yin (1994) states that clear conceptualization improves the researcher’s ability to clarify which of the constructs he wants to operationalize during data collection.

2. Internal validity: Runyan (1983) refers to internal validity as establishing casual relationships. The researcher pursues in-depth research to detect distortions and inconsistencies (known as structural collaboration) (Rudestom & Newton, 2001) and uses multiple sources of data (triangular) to clarify meaning in order to enhance inferences drawn. Fouché (1999) states that internal validity is primarily relevant when doing explanatory or causal studies, and is not used for descriptive or exploratory studies.
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3. External validity: this refers to extending the findings of the study beyond the confines of the design and study setting (Runyan, 1983; TerreBlanche & Durrhein, 1994). Yin (1994) stipulated that the psychobiographer should not aim to generalize to other case studies or the greater population. Findings should be generalized to the relevant theory (analytical generalization) which aims to confirm or relate a theory.

4. Reliability: this refers to the ability to replicate the study under similar circumstances (TerreBlache & Durrhein, 1999). To ensure reliability the researcher should ensure that a consistent coding scheme is applied during the processing and collecting of new data (Rudestom & Newton, 2001).

To ensure the reliability and validity of this psychobiography, the researcher ensured that Yin’s (1994) four tests were applied to ensure quality concerning the case study design. The primary aim of this study is to explore the personality development of John Winston Lennon over his lifespan. The study is thus exploratory and descriptive in nature, which entails that internal validity is not a primary concern as it pertains more to causal case studies. This does not mean that the researcher did not pursue a high level of truth when making general inferences throughout the study. The researcher made use of multiple sources that explored the life of John Winston Lennon, studying it in-depth and cross-referencing information obtained to ensure the credibility of information obtained. Triangulation was also used as a means of clarifying meaning.
In order to overcome a criticism of low construct validity in this case study research, the researcher conceptualized the components of personality development in a clear fashion. The conceptualizations were based on the research literature on individual psychology (see Chapter 3).

External validity was not a concern in this study, as the aim was to generalize findings back to the relevant theory (Adler) and not to a larger group. The researcher made use of analytic generalization.

To ensure reliability the researcher utilized a consistent coding scheme for raw data. Miles and Huberman’s (1994) general approach to analysing data in conjunction with Alexander’s (1990) guidelines for the extraction of salient data were also used in the process. A detailed explanation of this coding scheme was provided in Chapter 5.

**Elitism and easy genre.** Psychobiographies have been accused of being elitist and focusing on kings, queens and other privileged individuals (Runyan, 1988b). Runyan, in defence of this accusation, states that the factor of social class is not sufficient grounds to choose a quantitative method of research over psychobiography. As to the issue of psychobiography being an easy genre, Runyan states that a good psychobiography requires the use of multiple sources, a thorough knowledge of the subject’s socio-historical world, psychological knowledge and fine literacy skills in interpreting and describing the whole respectively. Runyan (1988a; 1988b) thus views a psychobiography as viewing and exploring an individual in all his complexities and personal characteristics as opposed to their standing in society.

Some would argue that a study of the life of John Winston Lennon adds to the elitist criticism, in this case, a famous individual. Although famous, the researcher sought to illuminate
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the person who acquired fame. This entailed acknowledging Lennon’s middle-class upbringing, his struggles and victories negotiating life and his frailties (insecurity, drug-addiction) which fame did not shield him from (Norman, 2008).

In response to criticism that a psychobiographical study of Lennon is an easy genre, it should be acknowledged that Lennon was a complex individual. A study of his life entails taking into account the artist, the musician, the family man and the political activist – all descriptions of a complex individual. Schultz (2005a) states that a good psychobiography elucidates the mystery of an individual’s life by means of a cogent and comprehensive narrative of consistent and viable data. This researcher concurs with this position and seeks to elucidate the mystery of Lennon’s life, which is an enormous challenge.

Infinite amount of biographical data. The psychobiographer is often faced with an infinite amount of biographical data concerning a research subject (Alexander, 1990; McAdams, 1994). The researcher has an enormous responsibility of selecting which information to include in order to construct a thorough narrative (Runyan, 1983). Alexander (1988) proposes two distinct, but complementary ways, to reduce personal data to manageable quantities. The first entails the psychobiographer identifying salience by sorting raw data into nine categories and then further examining data. The nine principle identifiers of salience are primacy, frequency, uniqueness, negation, emphasis, omission error or distortion isolation and incompletion. The second approach proposes asking the data questions (Alexander, 1988, 1990). This allows the psychobiographer to sift through large amounts of data in order to answer specific questions by specifying guidelines for assessing certain categories of information.
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In this study Alexander’s (1988, 1990) model was applied to the biographical material of John Winston Lennon. Therefore, a more detailed discussion of this model was provided in Chapter 5. The primary sources of data utilized for this research were biographies and interviews conducted with Lennon. The reason for this was that these sources were relatively easy accessible. Existing biographies provided lifespan information on Lennon and personal information from people who knew him. Engaging with various biographies made it possible for the researcher to follow Stroud’s (2004) advice to crosscheck, back reference and engage with the material for a long period of time. Information obtained from interviews conducted with Lennon gave the researcher a unique view of his life.

**Inflated expectations.** Some psychobiographers believe that a psychobiographical study will provide solutions to mankind’s problems. Anderson (1981a) advises that psychobiographers be aware of the shortcomings of their approach and have the insight to view their psychological explanations as supplementing an existing pool of explanations offered by other researchers. Thus, psychological explanations gathered from psychobiographical studies do not replace but rather add to other explanations (Vorster, 2003).

The focus of this study was to explore the personality development of John Winston Lennon, using Adler’s (1958) individual psychology. Components of Adler’s Individual Psychology were applied to the life of John Lennon. Applying this type of theory to Lennon seems appropriate as Adler’s theory proposes that an individual is creative in shaping his own life. Lennon was a very creative individual and fervently believed in shaping one’s own future (Sheff, 2000). Exploring and understanding the personality development of John Lennon using
components of Adler’s individual psychology was a realistic expectation of this study in terms of what the study aimed to achieve.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlighted the importance of recognizing preliminary methodological considerations in order to address criticisms aimed at psychobiographical research methodology. This should ensure a psychobiographical study of high quality and good design. In the following chapter, the findings of this psychobiographical study are presented and discussed.
Chapter 7

Findings and Discussion

Chapter Preview

In this chapter, the individual personality development of John Winston Lennon is presented and discussed. The Individual Psychology theory of Alfred Adler is explored as it relates to the life of John Winston Lennon in an attempt to explore and describe Lennon’s life in the context of Adlerian theory.

The View of the Individual and Presentation of the Matrix

Adler viewed the individual as a functional whole whose personality cannot be understood by studying the components of personality separately (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956; Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). The individual is seen as essentially scripting his own life (Adler, 1930; Corey, 2005). The researcher adhered to Adler’s holistic perspective and attempted to present Lennon as such. Lennon’s song writing was described as autobiographical (Du Noyer, 2010). Therefore, the researcher utilized Lennon’s songs in constructing a vivid and holistic picture of the individual. Since Lennon’s song writing became more confessional after he broke from the Beatles (Sheff, 2000), attention is given to the songs he wrote during this period (1970-1980). It is Lennon’s subjective view (via interviews) of his reality that guided the researcher in understanding and exploring his personality development.

The matrix found on the following page provides a graphic reflection of the way in which the researcher chose to structure the presentation and discussion of the findings of this research study. Using the initial Matrix of Adler’s Individual Psychology presented in Chapter 3 as
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catalyst, a further matrix was developed in which Adler’s theory was superimposed upon John Winston Lennon’s life.

The first five years of Lennon’s life are explored by discussing the structure of personality, the establishment of a lifestyle and the dynamics of personality, once again using Adler’s theory to illuminate aspects of significance. Secondly, the expression of Lennon’s lifestyle during his school years will be discussed. Thirdly, a discussion of Lennon’s approach to the life tasks of love, occupation and social interest will follow. Lastly, Lennon’s striving towards optimal development is discussed and presented. This is chronologically set out in the matrix (numbered 1-4) on the next page.
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Figure 2

ADLER’S INDIVIDUAL PSYCHOLOGY & JOHN WINSTON LENNON’S LIFE

1. CONSTITUTIONAL ATTRIBUTES
   - ORGAN INFERIORITY
   - PSYCHOLOGICAL INFERIORITY
   - NATURAL INFERIORITY

2. PRIVATE LOGIC
   - IDENTIFY INFERIORITY
   - 4 TYPES
   - HOW INDIVIDUAL STRIVES TOWARD SUPERIORITY

3. LIFE TASKS
   - LOVE
   - OCCUPATION
   - SOCIAL INTEREST

4. OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT

CREATIVE SELF

FICTIONAL GOAL

TO OVERCOME INFERIORITY

POWER

SET

DETERMINES

LIFESTYLE

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

- FAMILY ATMOSPHERE
- BIRTH ORDER

SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION

SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION

SUBJECTIVE PERCEPTION
Structure of Personality

**Establishment of the lifestyle.** Adler (1929) viewed the individual as an integrated and functional whole. The researcher recognised this holistic view and therefore first presents an initial perspective on Lennon’s lifestyle. Adler (1929; 1930) held that the individual develops a lifestyle in the first four or five years, after which the focus of striving will be purposive towards a fictional goal. Therefore, the researcher will focus on the first five years of Lennon’s life. The dynamic interaction of Lennon’s constitutional attributes, social environment and his creative power will be explored and discussed to ensure an understanding of the structure of his personality. This dynamic interaction will in turn highlight Lennon’s private logic, fictional goal and lifestyle.

**Constitutional attributes.** Adler (1930) stated that each individual is born with a set of genetically determined attributes that indirectly influence behaviour and development. He identified natural inferiority, organ inferiority and psychological inferiority (Boeree, 1997). Adler (1930) viewed natural inferiority as universal and positive. Ideally, the child’s natural inferiority should be guided towards social interest via experiences of contribution and cooperation (Adler, 1930; 1958).

Adlerian theory propagates that Lennon was naturally dependant on his parents and experienced this dependency as his first striving towards superiority. Early interactions with his parents shaped Lennon’s lifestyle (Adler, 1929; 1958). Both Lennon’s parents were dismayed at his conception and his childhood was characterized by their absence (Norman, 2008). A
discussion of this aspect of his childhood and its proposed impact on his development is now highlighted.

**Organ inferiorities.** Adler (1930; 1958) held that inferiority feelings could be a result of an organic deficiency. Organ inferiorities must also be viewed in the child’s interaction with his parents, which highlights the family environment concerning relationships between family members (Adler, 1929; 1930). To prevent a self-centred lifestyle, the child should be trained in cooperation with others. The mother is the most important figure to provide this training, diverting the child’s attention away from itself (Adler, 1958).

Lennon did not grow up in a stable family home during his first five years. The absences of his parents left him in the care of various relatives (Norman, 2008). This suggests that John was not sufficiently trained in cooperation and according to Adler (1958), may have initiated a self-centred lifestyle. Adler (1929) proposed that it is the child’s subjective experience of his childhood that determines his striving towards a fictional goal and lifestyle. One of the ways in which children develop faulty lifestyles is through the perception of neglect. Neglected children (unwanted or unappreciated) do not learn what it means to be loved and to experience cooperation with others (Adler, 1958; Boeree 2006b). Lennon came to believe that he was never really wanted (Norman, 2008). He was to undergo Primal Therapy later in his life, which focuses on the expression of repressed childhood emotions (Goldman, 1988; Kane, 2005; Norman, 2008). Lennon learned through Primal Therapy how deprived he was of mothering (Goldman, 1988). Loss and separation was said to be a central pain in his life and his primal statement was “mother you had me, but I never had you” as set out in the song “Mother” on his 1970 Primal Album (Norman, 2008).
Adler (1958) maintained that the mother’s first task is to give the child the experience of a trustworthy person. Since the burden of motherhood was too much for Lennon’s mother (Kane, 2005), the researcher argues that trust was never established between mother and child. The fact that the song ‘Mother’ is preceded by the sound of a bell which Lennon heard in a horror movie suggests to the researcher that the story of his relationship with his mother was not a happy one. He was to state that he lost his mother twice, when she rejected him and gave him to her sister, and when she died in 1955 (Norman, 2008).

Lennon’s mother had the habit of leaving him alone at home when she went on her nightly trysts. He often woke up to a vacant and dark house, screaming until the neighbours came to investigate (Goldman, 1988). John’s perception of his childhood (exposed via Primal Therapy) can be viewed as a psychological inferiority. The researcher argues that Lennon felt abandoned, rejected and unloved because of the neglect experienced as a child, which guided his behaviour towards a fictional goal of superiority. The neglect experienced as a child formed his private logic and eventual lifestyle. Lennon was to claim in later interviews that he knew at the age of five that he was a genius and that even in kindergarten he had nobody to relate to (Sheff, 2000). A neglected child finds it difficult to acquire a trustworthy person (Adler, 1958). Lennon’s view of himself as a genius can be interpreted as an attempt to isolate himself from a hostile world. The perception of neglect can be said to have guided his behaviour in perceiving himself superior to others.

**Creative self.** Adler emphasises that human beings possess the ability to be creative in forming their own life goals and in planning how to achieve them (Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1997). Adler (1958; 1982) described the creative power as an innate capacity of the whole
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person. The individual is viewed as having the freedom to choose between alternative lifestyles and fictional goals. The individual interprets his environment and heredity and creates a unique or subjective view of his life through which the world and he is observed. This subjective view or creative schema is a personal sense of meaningfulness, significance and power (Adler, 1929; 1930). It is through creativity that the individual strives towards superiority in achieving a meaningful goal (Adler, 1958). An example of this creative striving can be found in the song ‘I found out’ wherein John states that it was essentially his parents’ rejection of him that fuelled his desire for fame because he thought that he would acquire the love of his parents through his success (Du Noyer, 2010).

Lennon’s personality was self-determined by the meaning he gave to his experiences. According to Adlerian theory (1929), Lennon was a creative participant who interpreted his experiences through creativity to establish a lifestyle that directs his thoughts, feelings and actions. Aspects of Lennon’s creativity were previously discussed in relation to organ inferiority, being neglected and touching on a possible inferiority complex. Lennon’s creativity in every case influenced his personality development. For example, Lennon’s assertion that he was a genius indicates how he perceived himself despite a neglected childhood. From an Adlerian perspective, this mistaken perception of success broadly relates to avoiding or fleeing the task of life. This can lead to Lennon limiting himself to situations, which he feels able to dominate in order to reach his goal of superiority. The researcher argues that Lennon’s creativity helped him to negotiate a traumatic childhood. He creatively perceived himself as a genius as a way to achieve distance from his neglect and to subconsciously acquire the love of his parents.
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Social environment. The family is the prototypical social group for the child. This means that the social feeling inherent in the child is directly related to his family atmosphere (Peluso, 2006). Lennon’s childhood was characterized by the absences of his father (Kane, 2005) which he came to resent (Norman, 2008). Adler (1958) viewed the father as equal in importance to the mother’s role in facilitating personality development. The father must be able to solve the problems of life, such as occupation, friendship and love, and he must cooperate on an equal footing with his wife in taking care of his family. The father is seen as helping the child prepare for the task of occupation (Adler, 1958). Lennon’s father had difficulty maintaining stable employment and it was mostly left to Julia’s family to take care of John (Norman, 2008). Lennon’s dad made sporadic appearances and it usually involved John witnessing his father berating his mother which escalated in domestic violence (Norman, 2008). The researcher argues that Lennon’s father did not prepare him for any of the life tasks as he himself proved inadequate at them - he lost his wife, gave up his son and worked meagre jobs (Goldman, 1988).

The mother plays a very important role in the child’s life. She gives the child its first contact with another human being, moving interest away from itself and training the child in cooperation. Her ability to cooperate with her child and to win the child’s cooperation is essential to the child’s development. It is essentially the conclusions that the child draws from the experiences with his mother that will impact on his personality development (Adler, 1958). Adler further noted that it is the mother’s task to spread the child’s interest towards the father. If this does not happen, a serious block in the development of social feeling in the child can occur.

The marriage between Lennon’s parents was not a happy one (Goldman, 1988). Lennon’s father being away at sea and his mother having affairs with other men during this time made for a conflictual marriage (Norman, 2008). The researcher argues that in the absence of his
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father, Lennon’s mother was not able to divert his interest towards his father, causing a block in social feeling resulting in Lennon focusing intensely on himself. John’s mother neglecting him and often leaving him in the care of relatives (Goldman, 1988) made it impossible to train him in cooperation. Adler (1958) maintained that an unhappy marriage creates a family atmosphere full of danger for the child and makes it impossible to train the child in cooperation. The researcher argues that Lennon’s social environment made it impossible to train him in cooperation.

Birth order. John was the first child of Julia and Alfred Lennon (Norman, 2008). Adler (1958) noted that the first child is likely to receive the parent’s undivided attention. The researcher argues that in the light of Lennon’s parent’s frequent absences, they did not make him feel secure. The fact that John’s mother had another baby and left him in the care of relatives during her pregnancy must have increased Lennon’s sense of rejection (Riley, 2010).

Private logic. Adler (1929) viewed the individual’s private logic as the view of himself and the world. The researcher argues that Lennon viewed all situations from a private logic, which saw himself as unworthy of love and a sense that he did not belong. This is deduced from his traumatic childhood and his perception of himself as a genius (Norman, 2008). Furthermore, he viewed people as untrustworthy and was unable to co-operate with others. In interviews Lennon stated that he always wanted to belong, but he knew he could not belong (Sheff, 2000). Lennon’s song ‘Isolation’ makes it clear that he wants to belong, but also wishes to stand apart (Du Noyer, 2010). Unable to co-operate and find a trustworthy person, the researcher argues that the song ‘Isolation’ explains John’s predicament as he cannot cooperate and so sought to find his own way and stand apart.
Fictional goal. Adler (1982) stated that the individual’s striving is towards a fictional goal or self-ideal. The origin of this fictional goal can be found in fantasies and early childhood recollections (Adler, 1929). According to Adlerian theory (1929; 1982), Lennon’s guiding goal was a fictional image of success, significance, security and a sense of belonging. Lennon’s striving can be viewed as godlike, which indicates a sense of omniscient power (Adler, 1958). He experienced neglect as a child and came to perceive himself as a genius. The researcher argues that his fictional goal would be towards a desire to be accepted (loved) without the possibility of rejection. The ideal of godlikeness indicates a demand for love and the choice to accept or decline it in order to gain control over a situation. This sense of accepting or rejecting love provided John with a personal sense of superiority and control (Adler, 1958). Adler (1929; 1930) stated that power and control are characteristics of a useless lifestyle resulting in the inability to solve life tasks. This power and control can be observed in songs such as ‘Give peace a chance’, ‘Instant Karma’, ‘Power to the people’ and ‘Imagine’ which are an attempt to change people minds (Du Noyer, 2010). The researcher argues that through song writing Lennon expressed his need for control. His god-like striving is evident through his teachings, which he explicates through his songs. John was to refer to his fans as his kids (Sheff, 2000) which suggests to the researcher of his superior attitude and god-like striving in controlling his fans via his lyrics/songs.

Lifestyle. The lifestyle is a central Adlerian concept, subsuming constancy, unity, creativity and a teleological orientation (Strauch, 2003). Therefore, the lifestyle can be described as the individual’s approach to the three main tasks of life (Stein & Edwards, 1998). Within the first five years, children will develop a life goal and a prototypical lifestyle to approach life with
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(Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). This lifestyle is not fixed but depends on the individual’s interpretation of experiences on how personality will be shaped (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003). These interpretations will determine the individual’s attitude towards life and the self (Ansbacher & Ansbacher, 1956). Adler (1958) maintained that faulty lifestyles result from the family atmosphere in childhood. He stated that physical inferiority, neglect and pampering interfere with social interest. Individuals who were exposed to such an atmosphere avoid life tasks (Adler, 1958), lack self-confidence and courage and tend to be focused on them (Adler, 1929). Lennon’s early years indicate emotional trauma or neglect (Goldman, 1988), and his claim of being a genius (Sheff, 2000) suggests an intense focus on himself. Therefore, the researcher argues that Lennon was moving towards a useless lifestyle. A useless lifestyle (explained in Chapter 3) is characterized by power and control and the inability to solve life’s tasks (Adler, 1929). This will be explored during Lennon’s school years to find out if his fictional goal and lifestyle remained a consistent, purposive unity.

**Dynamics of personality**

Adler (1929; 1930; 1982) stated that the individual is constantly striving towards a fictional goal of superiority. Maintaining that the lifestyle is set by the age of five and is based on a private logic and fictional goal, the individual will act as if the fictional goal is attainable.

The biographical data on Lennon is indicative of a traumatic childhood during the first five years of his life (Kane, 2005; Norman, 2008) suggesting the development of an inferiority complex. Adler (1930; 1958) stated that the neglected child viewed himself as unworthy to attain love through cooperation. The researcher argues that Lennon perceiving neglect strived creatively to compensate for the lack of affection experienced and this will now be discussed.
Striving for superiority manifests itself in either a striving for power or a striving for social interest (Meyer & Viljoen, 2003).

**Inferiority/ superiority.** Inferiority feelings are a positive aspect of personality development, which motivates the individual to strive towards superiority. However, these feelings of inferiority can result in the development of an inferiority complex when the individual becomes overwhelmed by his perceived inferiorities and prevents him to resolve life tasks (Adler, 1929; 1930; 1958). The construction of a private logic, fictional goal and lifestyle can lead to the development of an inferiority complex (Adler, 1929; 1930). Adler stated that an inferiority complex could result from a lack of cooperation during early experiences leading to a self-interested lifestyle. An inferiority complex is an indication of a lack of social interest and appears before a challenge that the individual is unable to resolve. The goal is striving towards superiority, but the methods chosen indicate self-deception (Adler, 1929). The result is an accumulation of inferiority feelings that presses on the individual with greater urgency (Adler, 1958).

A superiority complex can develop when the individual, faced with inferiority feelings, pretends to be superior to others to compensate for his feelings of inferiority (Adler, 1929; 1930). This provides the individual with imagined power and a false sense of security, enabling him to evade life tasks and become intoxicated with personal superiority (Adler, 1958; 1964).

The discussion of Lennon’s organ inferiority and neglect indicated his perceived inferiority. The researcher argues that Lennon’s early experiences within his family and his perception of these experiences are indicative of an inferiority complex and are later expressed as a superiority complex. Lennon’s inferiority complex seems to be focused on his belief that he is
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unlovable and that he does not belong. An inferiority complex represents a block in cooperation that shapes the individual’s private logic, fictional goal and eventually his lifestyle (Adler, 1958; 1964).

Lennon experienced being uprooted, passed from hand to hand and in the end forced to choose between parents at the age of five (Goldman, 1988). He stated in later interviews that he always wanted to belong (Sheff, 2000). His inability to achieve this sense of love and belonging made him strive towards personal superiority rather than social interest. Adler (1929) stated that the goal of superiority is a high ideal and difficult to achieve. The researcher argues that Lennon in striving to reach his goal of superiority convinced himself he was unique or a genius as he proclaimed. He even viewed himself superior to children in his kindergarten class and thought the teachers below him, stating he had nobody to relate to (Sheff, 2000). This perception of himself as a genius enabled him to distance himself from his threatening environment by claiming superiority and striving for power.

Expression of the Lifestyle

The researcher will now explore how Lennon’s private logic, fictional goal and lifestyle came to be expressed during his school years. Adler (1929) adhered to a teleological perspective concerning human behaviour, explaining that individuals are pulled towards their goals. Lennon’s behaviour will be evaluated to trace its purposive line of movement towards a fictional goal.
**Private logic.** The researcher deduced from examining the lifestyle development (first five years) of John Winston Lennon, that he viewed himself as unlovable and that he did not belong. Adler (1929; 1958) stated that all failures in lifestyle could be identified in childhood, starting with the family environment. According to Adlerian theory, Lennon developed his private logic within the early interactions with his parents. His parents were mostly absent during the development of his lifestyle and he experienced neglect (Norman, 2008). Adler (1928) noted that neglected children do not learn what it is to be loved and to value co-operation. John, experienced neglect as an infant and not having a mother, which Adler (1958) stated should give the child its first experience of trust, was not trained in co-operation and viewed the world as unsafe. Unable to engage the interest of either parent, John may have become discouraged and developed the belief that he could never attain love or attention via co-operation. Adler (1964) viewed the private logic as guiding all feelings and behaviour. Lennon’s perception of neglect formed his private logic, and his actions throughout his academic career provided examples of his inability to co-operate. When among friends he had to assume the leadership role and often got into physical altercations (Norman, 2008). His school career was marked by non-interest and he was described as disruptive and confronting, preferring to indulge in his own reading and writing activities (Goldman, 1988). Lennon described his Art school days as finding him mostly inebriated (Sheff, 2000). Lennon in interviews denounced school and his teachers for not singling him out as a genius (Sheff, 2000). The song ‘Working Class Hero’ expresses his disgust with the social conditioning of the school system and how it robbed him of opportunities to express himself (Du Noyer, 2010). Lennon also engaged in shoplifting which Adler (1930; 1958) viewed as a lack of co-operation. The death of his uncle in 1955 and his mother in 1957 could only have strengthened his sense of abandonment and
inability to co-operate to ensure a sense of belonging, John became pre-occupied with himself, to the extent of viewing himself as a superior human being.

**Fictional goal.** According to Adlerian theory (1929; 1982), John’s fictional goal directed his movement throughout life from a minus to a plus situation. The researcher identified that John’s fictional goal was the continuous striving and desire to be accepted (loved) without the possibility of rejection. John’s private logic indicated that he viewed himself as a genius, therefore his striving can be viewed as god-like which indicated a sense of omniscient power (Adler, 1958). Lennon built a narrow stable, which entailed seeking out situations where he was able to dominate and achieve superiority. John surrounded himself with friends who accepted his undisputed leadership (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984) and even claim superiority over the physically handicapped which he often drew grotesquely or imitated (Norman, 2008). Lennon claimed that as a youngster he surrounded himself with friends who were supportive and subservient (Sheff, 2000). He also preferred his own reading to the prescribed reading of his school (Norman, 2008). Lennon’s shoplifting indicated his lack of respect for the law and his superiority. He often circulated a book at school wherein he depicted the physically disabled grotesquely and his teachers’ humourously (Shotton & Schaffner, 1984). Adler (1958) noted that language is a social construct to connect with others. Being unable to connect with others, the researcher argues that John used his art to create a world where he would dominate and achieve a sense of belonging and sustain his actions of superiority. Lennon confined himself to circumstances where he was in control and his view of himself as a genius was an attempt to gain control in a world where he felt unsafe. The song ‘Crippled inside’ sets out Lennon’s idea that one cannot use external facades (acting tough) to disguise fundamental problems (Du Noyer,
A PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF JOHN WINSTON LENNON (2010). The researcher saw John’s attempt to control and dominate situations as an attempt to steer clear from his inability to cooperate and to find a sense of belonging. He was essentially emotionally crippled inside.

**Lifestyle.** The researcher, from examining the lifestyle development of Lennon, deduced that he was moving towards a useless lifestyle. The risk of a self-centred lifestyle is greatest when the individual is not trained in co-operation (Adler, 1929; 1930; 1958). His striving to be god-like affirms Lennon’s striving for superiority and control. The researcher argues that Lennon displayed aspects of all three socially useless lifestyle types that Adler (1958) proposed. His avoiding lifestyle is seen in his abuse of alcohol throughout high school and his aversion of school related activities (Norman, 2008). His passive-constructive lifestyle is seen in his inability to act independently. John was said to always have a partner at school when instigating activities (Shotten & Schaffner, 1984). He did not start out as a solo performer, but started a band and allowed Paul McCartney, a more skilled musician to join (Goldman, 1988). John’s leaning lifestyle is also evident when he befriended the talented artist, Stu Sutcliffe, at art college (Kane, 2005) who would attempt to help Lennon pass his art courses. His ruling lifestyle is evident in the pranks he played at school (circulating humorous material of his teachers and harassing teachers) and surrounding himself with subservient friends (Shotten & Schaffner, 1984). His shoplifting is also a means of ruling over others along with his grotesque portrayal and imitation of the physically disabled (Norman, 2008).
Life tasks

Social interest, love and marriage, and occupation are the three great life tasks that present themselves to each individual (Orgler, 1963). The researcher set out to explore Lennon’s reaction to these life tasks in order to assess the unity of his movement towards a fictional goal.

Social interest. Eckstein (2008) stated that a commitment to universal principles such as non-violence and basic civil liberties are contemporary examples of rebellious social interest. Lennon took the task of social interest seriously and this is evident in his commitment to social and political causes. He was the first superstar to use his fame to promote political and social causes, for example he could be seen wearing anti-war buttons on his bere as early as 1965 (Kane, 2005). Even though his manager, Brian Epstein, insisted that the Beatles remain apolitical, Lennon refused to play for a racially segregated crowd in Jacksonville when the Beatles toured America in 1964 (Norman, 2008). He would also return his MBE medal in 1969 as a protest against Britain’s involvement in the Biafra War (Norman, 2008). Lennon also used his honeymoon with Yoko Ono as a platform to promote peace and recorded the anti-war song, ‘Give Peace a Chance’ that was adopted by anti-Vietnam protestors as their anthem (Goldman, 1988). His songs like ‘Woman is the nigger of the world’ and ‘Woman’ promoted feminism and rejected male macho values (Du Noyer, 2010). The researcher argues that Lennon’s inability to co-operate was put to good use when he was confronted with political or social systems that he found unacceptable and this assisted him to acquire and develop a community focus.
Love and marriage. Adler (1958) stated that children gain their first impression of marriage from their parents. This means that if the child viewed his parents’ marriage as harmonious, he will be better prepared to approach the task of love and marriage. Lennon’s parents were both dismayed at the prospect of having a child (Sounes, 2010) and their marriage was unhappy, characterized by long absences from each other, physical altercations and adultery (Norman, 2008). Lennon would often witness his parents getting into arguments (Goldman, 1988). If parents are not able to co-operate, it will not be possible for them to teach their children co-operation (Adler, 1958). The researcher argues that Lennon was not trained in co-operation and was ill-prepared for the task of love and marriage.

Love, a task for two people, may prove a new task to most but can be achieved if both parties develop an interest in their fellow man. Each partner must be more interested in the other than in himself to ensure success concerning the task of love and marriage (Adler, 1958). Not trained in co-operation and with a god-like striving (see fictional goal) Lennon’s first romantic relationship with Cynthia Powell (Norman, 2008) was focused on meeting his needs. Lennon did not view females as equals but rather as sex objects hardly worth bothering with, to be kept as possessions and used for entertainment (Shotton & Sheffner, 1984). Cynthia deferred to Lennon in everything and catered for all his needs – from buying him cigarettes to helping him with art assignments (Norman, 2008). He married her because she fell pregnant in 1962 and their marriage was soon characterized by mutual tolerance as John engaged in multiple sexual affairs (Norman, 2008) as he needed someone to stimulate his eccentric personality (White, 1992). Being ill-prepared for marriage, John’s behaviour is in line with his striving for god-likeness when engaging in his first marriage. He did not view Cynthia as his equal, would cheat on her and even at times physically assault her. As Adler (1958) suggested, monogamy is an
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attempt to solve the task of love and marriage. John’s inability to co-operate and his view of females (as unequal), along with his sexual exploits led to his first marriage failing. Drugs featured predominantly in John’s life during his first marriage (Norman, 2008). The researcher views the use of drugs as John’s attempt to escape the task of love and marriage.

John considered Yoko Ono his equal (Sheff, 2000). Yet, Ono once stated that John loved her because she represented him in drag (Kane, 2005). The researcher argues that John’s god-like striving is present in his attempting the task of love and marriage, as he found in Ono a representation of himself to love. His inability to co-operate is compensated for by finding a partner as an extension of himself. The song ‘Well Well Well’ which Lennon wrote, speaks of how he finds her so beautiful that he wants to eat her. The researcher argues that this is an expression of Lennon’s need to possess his loved one and be able regain control of his feelings. Adler (1958) stated that people who are interested in the welfare of mankind are more likely to have children than those who are expecting or demanding and more interested in their own persons. When Cynthia fell pregnant, John was invested in his musical career (Norman, 2008). This career would eventually prevent him from building a relationship with Julian, his firstborn (Kane, 2005). John gave up his career to raise his second son, Sean, by Yoko Ono (Goldman, 1988). John would say that the difference between Julian and Sean was that Sean was a planned child and admitted that he was too self-occupied in the past to want the responsibility of parenting (Sheff, 2000). The researcher argues that John’s god-like or genius perception of himself made him creatively adapt to parenting as he wanted and planned a child with Yoko. John succeeded as a parent with Sean, because he had developed a giving attitude and interest in the welfare of others. Yet, it was on his terms and in line with his god-like striving.
Occupation. An individual’s lifestyle is evident in the way he approaches the task of occupation. Overemphasizing this task is indicative of neglect concerning the tasks of social interest and love and marriage (Orgler, 1963). Lennon viewed rock ‘n roll as an escape from his everyday existence when he first discovered it in 1955 (White, 1992). He always considered himself an artist, poet or musician and felt that rock ‘n roll suited his talents. Lennon stated that he craved irresponsibility and never wanted responsibility (Sheff, 2000). The researcher argues that the irresponsible lifestyle associated with rock ‘n roll and the attack on established order that it purveys, attracted Lennon as it also gave him the opportunity to avoid responsibilities such as his academic life, relationships and a stable job. Lennon was to comment that he did not enjoy being a musician anymore once it became a nine to five job (Sheff, 2000). This suggests to the researcher that Lennon was avoiding the responsibilities of a conventional job. The fact that John stated that he doesn’t want to be a soldier in the song ‘I don’t want to be a soldier’ and also stated that being a lawyer or churchman are not vocational options for him (Sheff, 2000) makes the researcher view Lennon as not conforming to any state or moral laws, but striving to be superior to them. Lennon was to write a song ‘Nutopia’ wherein he unveiled a new nation (Dunoyer, 2010) and essentially states his unhappiness with his surroundings and his need to create a new world. Relating the task at work and school, John was viewed as uncooperative and disinterested (Kane, 2005). The researcher argues that John overemphasized his occupation when starting his musical career in order to promote his striving towards superiority. When his son, Julian, was born, he was engaged in work activities and could not engage with his son (Norman, 2008). These activities related to achieving superstardom. Lennon became actively involved with the parenting of his second child, Sean (Kane, 2005). The researcher argues that at this time Lennon’s task of occupation and social interest seem to merge. He was using his
superstardom to promote political and social causes, leaving him time to address the task of love and marriage with Yoko Ono.

Adler (1929; 1958) stated that the fictional goal could never be achieved. Although John achieved superstardom with the Beatles, it was not enough for him. He would denounce the Beatles (Norman, 2008) and pursue a solo career, which he claimed to be more important than anything the Beatles ever did (Sheff, 2000). He went further in writing the song ‘God’ wherein he stated that he did not believe in the Beatles (Du Noyer, 2010). The researcher argues that he needed this movement (from Beatles fame to solo stardom) to actualize his god-like fictional goal which confirms Adler’s statement that fictional goals cannot be achieved.

Optimal development

The ultimate goal of the striving for superiority and perfection is attained when the individual not only strives for perfection of the self, but also places that striving at the service of society (Ansbacher, 1982). Adler viewed the active-constructive lifestyle as the most appropriate lifestyle to achieve superiority or perfection (Meyer et al., 2003). Spencer (2003) suggests that this type of lifestyle is successful in the three tasks of life, namely occupation, social and love. The researcher argues that Lennon strived for perfection of the self and placed that striving at the service of society. Yet, it was his inability to cooperate and striving for his god-like fictional goal that came in handy in confronting systems that he could not accept and which led him to become a social reformer stressing his ruling lifestyle. He succeeded as a parent with his second son, Sean, and was able to stay married until his death in 1940. As discussed earlier, his parental attitude towards Sean was guided by his control of the pregnancy—again an example of his ruling lifestyle. He remained fiercely dependant on Yoko Ono, writing a
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song ‘Scared’ that describes him as helpless when she was not around (Du Noyer, 2010) and therefore highlighted aspects of his leaning lifestyle. He still needed a partner to function and engage in any activities, being musical, artistic or political. Lennon’s career as musician granted him the ability to express his ruling and leaning lifestyle. His songs gave him the opportunity to spread his ideas and messages and his celebrity made it possible to depend on others to accept him into groups, which deemed suitable to support socially and politically. Although successful at the three tasks, it seems that Lennon was still the boy who felt rejected and unloved and strove to be superior in all aspects of his life to attain the love of his parents. He negotiated the three tasks using three useless lifestyles and it is the researcher’s opinion that he essentially wanted society to serve him. Therefore, the researcher is ultimately of the opinion that John Lennon was not an optimally developed human being. However, the fact that John expressed his experiences and ideals through his songs and was able to transform his unique personal life into a universal language made him a spokesman for not only his own but, the human condition at large (Urish & Bielen, 2000).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the personality development of John Winston Lennon by attempting to integrate his life story with Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology. The researcher’s conclusions and recommendations of this study will be presented in Chapter 8.
Chapter 8

Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

Chapter Preview

This chapter describes the conclusions of this research by revisiting the purpose of the study and summarizing the findings. This is followed by a discussion concerning the limitations and value of the study, specifically with regard to the theory applied to the psychobiographical subject, and the psychobiographical approach. Recommendations for future research draw the research to an end.

Revisiting the Purpose of the Study

The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe the personality development of John Winston Lennon throughout his lifespan in terms of Alfred Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology. A detailed biographical account of Lennon’s life history was constructed in order to explore and describe Lennon’s personality development within Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology. The study was both exploratory–descriptive and descriptive dialogic in nature, meaning that a dialogue was established between the exploratory–descriptive findings of the study and the conceptualizations and theoretical propositions of Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology. This dialogue accomplished the secondary aim of this study, which will be discussed next.

The secondary aim of this study was that aspects or constructs of Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology were informally evaluated by applying them to Lennon’s life. It was not the aim of this study to generalize findings to a larger population. This study set out to
generalize the results of the research to the theory. Yin (1994) states that this process of
generalization is known as analytical generalization. The descriptive-dialogic nature of this
psychobiographical study enabled the researcher to investigate whether the theoretical constructs
of Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology adequately explored and described the personality
development of John Winston Lennon across his lifespan.

Individual Psychology in the Life of John Winston Lennon

A brief summary of the findings related to a biographical account of the life history of
John Winston Lennon within the conceptual framework of Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology
was provided.

The Value of the Study

The value of the study is discussed by referring to the theoretical model of psychological
development, the psychobiographical case study, and the relevant subject, John Winston Lennon.

The theoretical model of individual psychology. Adler’s (1929) theory of Individual
Psychology is especially valuable in psychobiographical research because the concept of
fictional finalism makes it possible to view a life in light of its end (Adler, 1958; Carlson, 1988).
This movement towards a fictional goal is the motivating force behind all human activity
(Dreikurs, 1973). Adlerians view this movement as teleological, implying that human behaviour
is motivated by a pull of a goal, rather than the push of a drive (Dinkmeyer, Dinkmeyer, &
Sperry, 1987). This takes the emphasis off perceived drives and empowers the individual to take
control of his life and future.
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Adler’s (1929; 1930; 1958) theory provides a rich contribution to an understanding of human beings and their relationship to the world, as it is an integrated, holistic theory of human nature. The theory provided a framework to explore and describe a variety of factors that influenced Lennon’s personality development. These factors included family atmosphere, birth order, and social interest. Along with the exploration of the individual’s striving towards goals and approaching life tasks, a more holistic view of the individual is established. The theory allows for the interpretation of an individual within his socio-cultural and historical context and from the individual’s subjective point of view (Adler, 1930; 1958).

Furthermore, the theoretical framework contributed to the study’s reliability and construct validity. With regard to reliability, the theoretical framework enabled the researcher to systematically extract, analyse, and contextualize salient biographical data concerning Lennon’s personality development. This resulted in a consistent pattern of data extraction and categorization that promoted the consistency and reliability of this psychobiography.

The construct validity of this psychobiography was enhanced as the theoretical framework – Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology – provided clear conceptualizations of the factors that influence personality development. This made it possible for the researcher to operationalize, with a higher degree of reliability, the salient biographical data related to Lennon’s personality development.

The psychobiographical case study method. The value in following a psychobiographical research approach is firstly that the study offered a ‘new and different dimension’ to Lennon’s life that had not been presented before. This refers to the psychological explanation this study offers on the life of Lennon, utilizing Adler’s (1929) Individual
Psychobiography represents the effective marrying of psychology and biography (Fouché 1999). This study illustrated the synthesis of biography and psychology in an attempt to study an individual life. Biographical material provided valuable material to study the personality development of John Winston Lennon, whereas psychological theory (Adler’s Individual Psychology) provided a conceptual framework, which enables the researcher to look at behavioural processes and patterns across an entire lifespan (Welman, 2009).

Further, this study reflects the value and significance of studying human lives within their socio-historical and cultural contexts (Stroud, 2004). This psychobiography illustrated the value of exploring Lennon’s personality development against the background of larger societal contexts, which influenced his life.

As mentioned earlier, biographical sources provided valuable material as a means if studying human development over an entire lifespan. The use of these biographical sources enabled the researcher to triangulate the most important findings, thereby enhancing the internal validity of the study.

Lastly, this psychobiography contributed to the number of psychobiographies that have been completed in the discipline of psychology in South Africa. The researcher hopes that this study will add to the growing interest in this form of study.

The psychobiographical subject. The inclusion of John Winston Lennon in this psychobiographical study held various advantages. The amount of rich and comprehensive resources available on the subject allowed for the extraction of salient information from these resources and the cross-referencing and triangulation of information.
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As evidenced in this study, there is great value in studying the lives of prominent individuals. With the help of Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology, we can better understand the choices that Lennon made that helped him achieve his greatness. What became apparent in the research study is that accomplishing great achievements does not require a financially and academically stable and advantaged childhood, social status or above average intelligence. What emerged was that reality is subjective to each individual and the interpretation of a particular reality sets the course for a life.

Limitations of the Study

This section discusses the limitations of this research study. As such, Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology, the psychobiographical case study research method, as well as the life of John Winston Lennon is discussed.

The theoretical model of individual psychology. Chapter 3, discusses some criticisms of Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology. Further criticism includes the archaic nature of some of Adler’s ideas when applying it in contemporary culture. An example is Adler’s (1958) view that the task of love cannot be achieved without the couple having children. However, should one consider the practicalities of having children (social, economical, political) it may impede a relationship from evolving into marriage and producing children. The theory thus views homosexual relationships as not socially orientated, as it is unable to produce children. It could be said that individuals higher on the Maslowian hierarchy are more prone to prove Adler’s theory. For example, individuals high on the hierarchy will not be deterred by the above-mentioned practicalities to have children. In the case of homosexual relationships, the adoption of children suggests a level of social, economical, and political comfortability.
Lastly, modern day society has become much more self-obsessed. The reality of this situation stressed the need to adapt Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology to make it more relevant to contemporary culture.

**The psychobiographical case study method.** As discussed in the Methodology chapter of this study, the psychobiographical research methodology receives the most criticism. The difficulties and constraints encountered with the methodology of psychobiography, such as researcher bias, reductionism, cross-cultural differences, validity and reliability issues, elitism and inflated expectations have already been discussed in Chapter 5. The methodological considerations, which were applied to this study, were discussed in the same section.

However, this study has certain limitations and these will be discussed next. This study has a relatively low external validity. This is in concurrence with the aim of the study, which set out to generalize the findings of this study to Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology. This process is known as analytical generalization (Yin, 1994).

Further, the level of internal validity is low, regarding causal explanation. This relates to the fact that the primary aim of this study guided the researcher to explore and describe John Winston Lennon’s personality development across his lifespan and not to explain cause-and-effect issues regarding the personality development of John Winston Lennon. However, the researcher adhered to Stroud’s (2004) recommendation to spend adequate time with the psychobiographical data, do comprehensive psychobiographical research to test for misrepresentations in the material as well as use several sources of biographical data. This was done in the pursuit of improving internal validity within the study.

The researcher’s findings are tentative and resulted from utilizing Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology. There are various other theories that can describe and explain Lennon’s
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personality development. The descriptions and explanations of this research should enhance other types of descriptions and explanations regarding the personality development of Lennon and not lead to any inflated claims.

Lastly, a limitation of a psychobiographical study is that it is comprehensive, lengthy and time consuming (Stroud, 2004). The qualitative nature of a psychobiography along with its narrative dimension accounts for this. In addition, multiple sources of biographical data need to be collected and analysed to provide a cohesive biography of the subject, John Winston Lennon.

**The psychobiographical subject.** Biographies on the life of John Winston Lennon are plentiful, but often set out to depict Lennon either as a creative genius or as a flawed human being. Therefore, the quality and objectivity of some of the sources used in this study is questionable due to their biased nature. The researcher made use of interviews conducted with Lennon in accordance with Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology, which explains the reality of an individual as subjective. This subjective outlook along with triangulation methods assisted the researcher to explore the most relevant information in order to provide an objective explanation of Lennon’s personality development.

As the research progressed, the researcher became aware if the difficulties explaining a life, within the restrictions of a master’s study. Some themes have not been adequately explored as a result of the focus of the study. This is viewed as another limitation as the deeper exploration of certain themes could significantly contribute to describing the richness of a life. This can be overcome by making recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for future research.** Further research on the life of John Winston Lennon on a bigger scale, would be an important recommendation. A more in-depth study can
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shed light or explore themes that this research had to ignore because of it being subjected to Master’s level. The findings of this research can be viewed as a point of departure for future research as they are not conclusive and should not be considered a final product. It would be interesting to explore the psychodynamic view of Lennon’s personality development and in doing so highlight sexual themes. The researcher would be interested to find out how Freud’s psychoanalytic theory adds to Adler’s Individual Psychology to explain and explore Lennon’s personality development, especially as Adler broke away from Freud due to Freud’s stressing of sexual themes. Further research would do well to explore these aspects (sexual themes) of Lennon.

Further, interviews with the subject’s family members would prove useful to understand the subject. This could ensure objective data from reliable sources, free from cultural and media interference in describing a human being and not just a pervasive figure in popular culture.

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized the conclusions of the research as well as the value and limitations with regard to the theoretical framework applied the psychobiographical case study method, and the psychobiographical subject of this study. The purpose of the study was revisited in an attempt to determine whether the primary aim was in fact achieved. The chapter is concluded with recommendations for future research to explore the personality development of John Winston Lennon more intricately. In accordance with the primary aim of this study, it is concluded that the study accomplished what it set out to achieve; namely a comprehensive, unbiased, and psychological account of the personality development of John Winston Lennon in accordance with Adler’s theory of Individual Psychology.
References


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