

**UNDERSTANDING SUICIDE: A PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF IAN KEVIN  
CURTIS**

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Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

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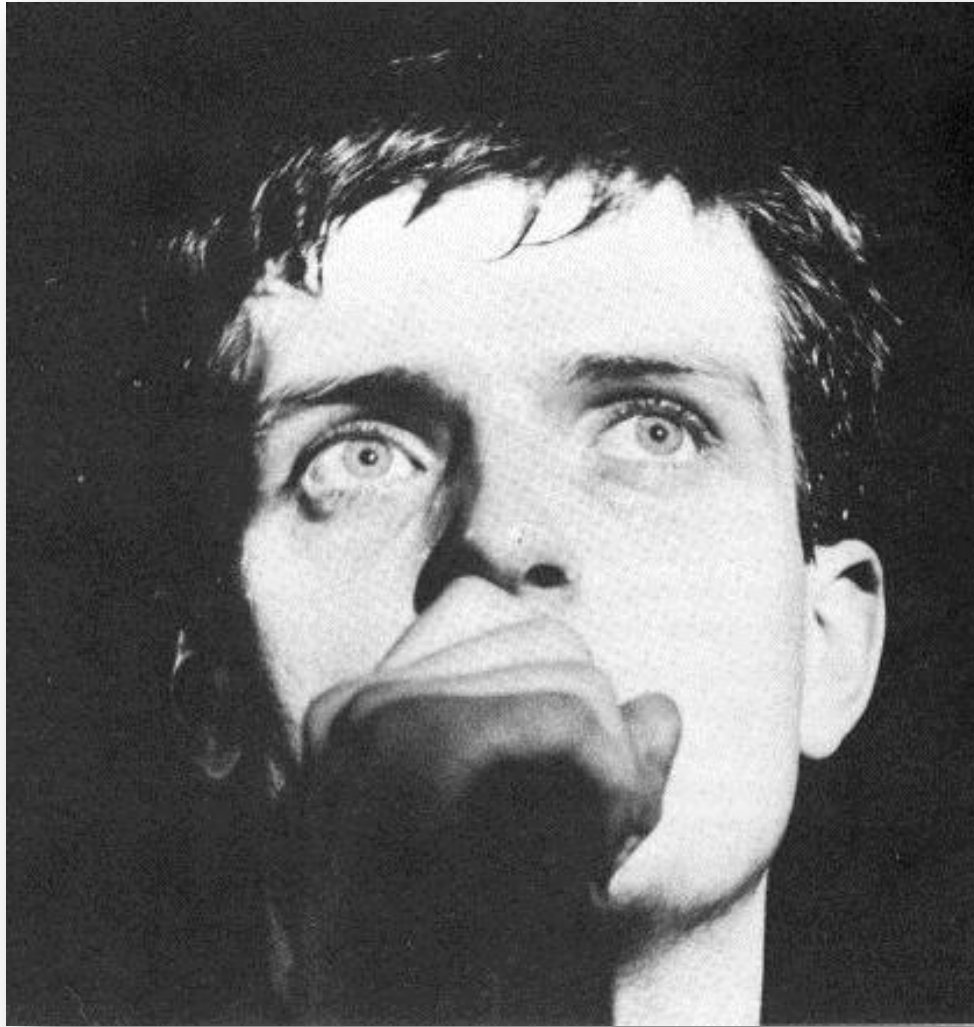
April 2017

Supervisor: Professor L. Stroud

**IAN KEVIN CURTIS**

**(15 JULY 1956 – 18 MAY 1980)**

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“When routine bites hard, and ambitions are low/ When resentment rides high, but emotion won't  
grow...and we're changing our ways, taking different roads/ Love will tear us apart.”

(Joy Division, 1980, track 10)

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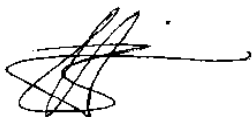
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- This treatise is the result of my own original research and that this work has not previously been submitted for assessment to another university.
- The research contained in this thesis is being submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in 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 thesis have been documented and recognized.

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be made available to the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University Library and for the title and summary to be made available to outside organisations.

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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, which aim to explain the particular individual's psychological development. This particular study serves to explore the extraordinary life of renowned singer and songwriter, Ian Kevin Curtis (1956-1980), who died by suicide at the early age of 23. The basis for this investigation will take the form of notable biographical accounts of the subject's life, together with the application of Thomas Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide which identifies factors that lead to suicidal ideation - in an attempt to understand the psychological circumstances that contributed to Curtis's suicide. In doing so, Adler's (1929) theory of Individual Psychology was applied to the life of Curtis in an attempt to build on Joiner's theory. This led to the concept of *control* being introduced and contributed to the development of an intake form to identify those at risk for suicide. It is hoped that exploring the psychological circumstances that contributed to Curtis's suicide and their interpretation by the subject will bring about an understanding of the risk factors that may induce suicide and, by extension, will highlight the relevance of this psychobiographical study as a tool for investigating and promoting preventative measures concerning suicide. The psychobiographical data collection and analysis for this research thesis will be guided by Yin's (2003) theory of 'analytic generalisation' which uses a theoretical framework in selecting relevant data which develops a matrix as a descriptive framework for organising and integrating that data, and Alexander's (1988) analytical model which focuses on lifting out themes through principal identifiers of salience.



**Key concepts:** *Adler's Individual Psychology; Ian Kevin Curtis; Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide; psychobiography*

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction and Problem Statement**

#### **1.1 Chapter Preview**

This chapter serves as a general introduction to the research study. As such, the research problem and the aims of the study are elaborated upon. A brief outline of the psychobiographical research approach, as well as Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide, is also set out. This is followed by a brief biographical outline of the life of Ian Kevin Curtis, before the chapter is concluded by an overview of the chapters comprising this study

#### **1.2 Problem Statement**

Suicide is a worldwide phenomenon that results in the death of thousands of people each year, to such an extent that the diversity of facts related to suicide and the precipitating events leading to this violent behaviour are intimidating and baffling (Joiner, 2005). Although suicidal behaviour is a major cause of concern globally, it has been given little empirical attention due the absence of theory development regarding suicidal behaviour (Van Orden, Witte, Cukrowicz, Braithwaite, Selby & Joiner, Jr<sup>1</sup>, 2010). It is therefore necessary to present an understanding of suicide and the factors that contribute to it in order to take a preventative stance against it.

Thomas Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide proposes that an individual will not die by suicide unless he has the desire to die by suicide and has developed the capability to do so (Van Orden, Witte, Gordon, Bender & Joiner, Jr., 2008). Joiner proposes that the most dangerous form of suicidal desire is caused by the presence of two interpersonal

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<sup>1</sup> For clarity, Thomas Joiner is at times cited as Joiner Jr in accordance with certain publications.

constructs - thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness (Van Orden et al., 2010). These factors, along with an understanding of the capability of the individual to voluntarily end his life, can present a possible means to predict a suicidal crisis (Van Orden et al., 2010). As most individuals who feel suicidal will often give clues as to their state of mind (Marcus, 2010), Joiner's theory can assist in preventing suicides as it aims to identify the initial factors that lead to the onset of suicidal desire. Psychological autopsy studies would be a useful tool in testing Joiner's (2005) theory as they offer an opportunity to study *if* the factors (as set out by Joiner) were present when a suicide occurred.

A psychobiography can be viewed as a psychological autopsy which enables the researcher to ascertain if the factors identified by Joiner (2005) were present prior to the suicide. The subject of this particular study is Ian Kevin Curtis, the singer and songwriter of the band Joy Division, who died by his own hand at the age of 23. By understanding the underlying mechanisms that left Curtis vulnerable to suicide, a preventative approach to suicide and suicidal desire can be promoted. Furthermore, in understanding these underlying mechanisms, a means for both intervention and prevention can be provided.

Suicide is ultimately a preventable cause of death (Ram, Darshan, Rao & Honagodu, 2012) and this study sets out to examine the plausibility of this statement by exploring one life that ended tragically. Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide will be applied to the life of Ian Curtis in an attempt to provide insight into the suicidal mind and, in addition, to build upon Joiner's (2005) existing theory.

### **1.3 Primary Aim of the Research Study**

Psychobiographical research is exploratory-descriptive in nature and, as such, the primary aim of this study is to explore and describe the life of Ian Kevin Curtis from the theoretical perspectives of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. Thus, the subject's life is reconstructed (providing a fuller, more cohesive picture of Ian Curtis's life in its holistic complexity) in an attempt to understand the psychological circumstances that contributed to his suicide. Exploring these circumstances and their interpretation by the subject (Ian Kevin Curtis) can bring about an understanding of the risk factors that may induce suicide and, in doing so, the psychobiography becomes a research tool to investigate and promote preventative measures concerning suicide. 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 Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. Therefore, a secondary objective was to formally evaluate the constructs of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide by applying them to Curtis's life. In doing so, aspects of Adler's (1929) Individual Psychology were applied to the life of Curtis as a means of building upon Joiner's theory. Therefore, the application of Adler's theory of Individual Psychology to the life of Curtis became a means to promote theory development.

### **1.4 Research Context**

Psychobiography has been neglected in the past (Stroud, 2004) and is a field of research that has been confronted by numerous challenges, including criticisms about its generalizability (Roberts, 2002) and subjective methodology applied in the approach (Roberts, 2002; Stroud,

2004). A further challenge to psychobiography is that only a limited number of psychobiographical research studies have historically been conducted at academic institutions (Roberts, 2002), particularly within the South African context (Fouché, Smit, Watson & van Niekerk, 2007; Vorster, 2003), which has led to further criticism. 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; McAdams, 2006; Runyan, 1982; Yin, 2003). Despite its predominant neglect, there has been a recent increase in the use of this insightful approach to understand and interpret individual lives (Fouché et al., 2007).

Although significant amounts of literature concerning Curtis's life history exist, 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, 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 (2002) 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 human being and what made them act the way they did.

**1.4.1 Overview of the psychobiographical approach.** The field of psychobiography may be understood to be the methodical use of a psychological theory to “transform a life into a

coherent and illuminating story” (McAdams, 2006, p. 503), often focusing on historical figures whose lives have been regarded as significant (McAdams, 2006). Carlson (1988, p. 106) states that psychobiography, in essence, concerns itself with the study of lives already lived, or “finished lives”.

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 (2006) 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. As McAdams (2005) and Schultz (2005) point out, psychobiography allows for an intense study of unusual and significant phenomena and their behaviour, and that understanding such behaviour allows researchers, in turn, to understand similar phenomena in others (VanWynsberghe & Khan, 2007).

The neglect of such an approach is compounded by the tendency of traditional 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).

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 (Carlson, 1988). Secondly, he states that the choice of the 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 (Carlson, 1988). 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.

There is much value to be found in case study and life history research, specifically within the following five areas: the uniqueness of the individual case within the whole; the socio-historical context; process and pattern over time; subject 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 body of psychobiographical research in South Africa.

**1.4.2 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 Thomas Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide which aims to explain why people die by suicide by acknowledging and incorporating existing suicidal theories to develop a framework that is not only consistent with the wide array of suicidal information available today, but also elaborates on it. Joiner therefore presents an understanding of suicide and the factors that contribute to it in order to prevent the tragic act of suicide.

The interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour states that when an individual holds two specific psychological states in his mind over a period of time, he will develop a desire for death (Joiner, Van Orden, Witte, Selby, Ribeiro, Lewis & Rudd, 2009). The two psychological states identified by the theory which instil a desire for death are perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (Joiner, Jr., 2009). These two components are subjective perceptions and not based on reality (Joiner, 2005).

Perceived burdensomeness is the perception or view that one's existence places a burden on family, friends, and society, while thwarted belongingness is said to be the experience that one is alienated from a valued group (Joiner et al., 2009). Yet feelings of burdensomeness and alienation are not sufficient to lead to death by suicide (Joiner, 2005). For this to occur, Joiner holds that another component needs to be present: the acquired ability for lethal self-injury (Joiner et al., 2009) which entails the capability to die by suicide. This capability to engage in suicidal behaviour is seen as separate from the desire to do so (Van Orden, Witte, Cukrowicz, Braithwaite, Selby & Joiner, Jr., 2010).

According to Joiner's (2005) theory, the only ones who are capable of suicide are those individuals who have experienced pain and provocation over a long period of time and have habituated to the pain and fear involving self-injury (Joiner, Jr., 2009). In doing so, self-preservation, which the interpersonal-psychological theory asserts is a powerful evolutionary instinct, is eliminated (Joiner et al., 2009). The interpersonal-psychological theory therefore posits a three-way interaction between perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness, and the acquired ability for lethal self-injury (Joiner et al., 2009). According to Joiner (2005), suicidal behaviour requires both the desire for death (perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness) and the capability to make it happen (acquired ability for self-injury). This



highlights the interactive nature of the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour (Joiner et al., 2009).

It is not easy to understand why and how people die by suicide, thus making it very difficult to put preventative measures in place (Joiner, 2005). Applying the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour to the life of Ian Curtis may provide an understanding as to why he took his own life, as well as providing further insight into the suicidal mind. Furthermore, a retrospective view of one suicide (i.e., Ian Curtis) may bring about the establishment of preventative measures for those considering suicide by facilitating the acquired understanding and depth of knowledge of perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness, and acquired ability for lethal self-injury as set out by Joiner's (2005) theory.

Therefore, the life of Ian Kevin Curtis will be systematically explored and described within this psychological framework. Particular attention will be given to the integration of significant developmental data of Curtis's life with the components of Joiner's (2005) theory. A brief biographical overview of Ian Curtis's life is provided below.

### **1.5 The Life of Ian Kevin Curtis**

Ian Kevin Curtis was the lyricist and vocalist for the British band, Joy Division. The band quickly rose to fame in the seventies even though their music was described as “dead-end and depressing” (Gilmore, 1998, p. 157). It was Curtis's baritone vocals and mechanical dancing which mesmerized and enthralled audiences (Curtis, 1995) and made him the main attraction of a Joy Division show. This, along with his melancholy lyrics (Gilmore, 1998) that spoke of pain, alienation, and repressed emotions (MacBain, 2013), spearheaded the post-punk genre.

Curtis was born on July 15, 1956, in Manchester, England. He grew up in a close-knit family and was a good student (Curtis, 1995). Intellectually sharp and academically gifted, he was awarded a scholarship to attend a prestigious grammar school at the age of 11 (Middles & Reade, 2009). He became disenchanted with his academics as his interest in music grew - fascinated with musicians who died young and whose music communicated sadness and violence, he had his dreams set on a career in the music business (Curtis, 1995). He left school at the age of 17 and worked briefly as a civil servant before he started his own venture, selling records at a market (Middles & Reade, 2009). After this venture failed, he found employment at a record store (Curtis, 1995). At the age of 19 he married his high school girlfriend and to make ends meet he pursued a career in the civil service (Curtis, 1995). Yet he still had an ambition to become a musician and in 1977 he met Peter Hook and Bernard Sumner and after they drafted in Stephen Morris, they founded the band Joy Division (Middles & Reade, 2009).

During their early shows, Curtis often inflicted violence upon himself and it was after one of the band's shows that he had his first epileptic fit at the age of 22 (Curtis, 1995). His epilepsy was exacerbated by his lifestyle (touring with the band meant lack of sleep, irregular meals and the excessive use of alcohol); this, along with the intensity of his performances, often saw him suffer epileptic fits on stage (Houghtaling, 2012). These fits caused him huge embarrassment and also made him withdraw from his wife, only to start an affair with another woman (Middles & Reade, 2009). The affair and his wife giving birth to their first child complicated Curtis's life even more (Houghtaling, 2012) as he was torn between an obligation to his family and his new-found love (Middles & Reade, 2009). With his epilepsy getting worse, his wife filing for divorce, and his band becoming more and more successful, Curtis took his own life on May 18, 1980, two days before the band was to embark on a tour of the United States of America

(Houghtaling, 2012).

Joy Division only recorded two albums and a few singles which would become the soundtrack for Curtis's youthful demise. It was said that if one was contemplating suicide, the music of Joy Division was bound to push you into the abyss (Middles & Reade, 2009). The music of Joy Division attempted to deal with the terrors and heartache that most people wanted to avoid and lyrically, Curtis held nothing back, expressing his confusion and disgust for the world (MacBain, 2013). In the process he lost his life, defined British post-punk genre, and changed music forever. Even though the life of Ian Curtis culminated in his suicide, he made a key contribution to an exceptional band that today is omnipresent and cited as an influence for many bands and inspiring musicians (Middles & Reade, 2009).

After Ian Curtis died, those closest to him revealed that "deep down, [they were] not really surprised that he had taken his own life" (Middles & Reade, 2009, p. 259) and that "something or someone could have prevented his death" (Middles & Reade, 2009, p. 262). These statements suggest that Curtis presented indications of his suicidal intentions and therefore, that his youthful demise could have been prevented if understood. Joiner's (2005) theory presents comprehensible reasons why people die by suicide along with the conditions under which a suicide occurs, enabling one to identify suicidal ideation and, in turn, attempt to prevent it. Using Joiner's (2005) theory to explore the life of Ian Curtis could bring about an understanding of why he took his own life. Since much remains to be learned about suicide prevention (Joiner, 2005), exploring the life of Ian Curtis could make the complex issue of suicide more accessible. An understanding of why one individual died by suicide could certainly contribute to an understanding of human nature in general (Joiner, 2005).

## **1.6. An Overview of the Study**

This study consist of nine chapters, the first being this introduction. Psychobiographical and case study research is discussed in Chapter Two. Chapter Three contains a concise biographical outline of the life of Ian Kevin Curtis, while the topic of suicide is discussed and elaborated upon in Chapter Four. Chapter Five discusses Thomas Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and Adler's theory of Individual Psychology. Chapter Six addresses the research design and methodology of this study, while Chapter Seven sets out to outline preliminary methodological considerations. The findings of this research are then discussed in Chapter Eight, and finally, the conclusions, contributions, and limitations of the study are discussed in Chapter Nine along with suggestions for future research in the field.

## **1.7 Chapter Summary**

This study is a psychobiography of Ian Kevin Curtis. The study utilizes a qualitative psychobiographical research method, and aims to describe and explore Curtis' personality development in relation to Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. Psychobiography and case study as research methods are expanded upon in the chapter that follows.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Psychobiography and Case Study Research**

#### **2.1 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.

#### **2.2 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) views 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 (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).

Runyan (1982) points out that psychobiography is essentially grounded in case research. 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: Ian Kevin Curtis.

The psychobiographical case study finds its value in the development and revision of theory (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 (Ian Kevin Curtis). Stroud (2004) indicates that those within contemporary psychology who wish to investigate experience in detail tend to make use of the qualitative approach of research to accomplish this. Smith (2003) states 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.

### **2.3 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). Schultz (2011) adds that psychobiography is an attempt “to zero in on a person’s psychology and, in order to do so, makes use of psychological theory” (p. 3).

Psychobiography is multi-disciplinary, 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

utilizes theories of personality, abnormal, cognitive, developmental, and social psychology.

Elms (1994) describes psychobiography as a way of doing psychology and not merely a way of doing a biography. Smith (1998) adds that a biography entails the written history of an individual's life. Vorster (2003) points out that the use of biography for social research has become an essential tool for understanding individual lives. 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). Schultz (2011) asserts that biographical research involves "the what, where, when, how, and who of the subject's life" whereas psychobiography "zeros in on the why" of a subject's life (p. XV).

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, McLeod (1994) states that it is indeed a form of case study research. An overview of the characteristics of case study research is discussed next.



## 2.4 Case Studies

Case studies are the intensive investigation of a singular unit (person, group, organisation) – 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 their particular unit of analysis or the case (Edwards, 1990; Stake, 2005). Cozby (1997) states 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 & Hammesley, 2000).

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). For instance, 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, on the other hand, 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 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) and 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 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 therefore 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 takes the form of a single-case research design and the researcher will look intensively at the life history of the biographical subject, Ian Kevin Curtis. Cavaye (1996) states 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 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 (2005) 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, 2005) to understand the individual's life and to investigate the value of a theory, thus 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.

## **2.5 Life Histories and Life Stories**

Runyan (1982) views 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, 2005). 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, followed by a discussion on the value of life history research.

## 2.6 A History of Psychobiography

Psychobiographies promote the in-depth studying of individuals (Schultz, 2005). 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 has 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 when 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 1920s 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 began to explore quantitative means of doing research (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1983). Nevertheless, 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 1960s 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); *Ernesto “Che” Guevara: A Psychobiographical Study* (Kolesky, 2010); *A Psychobiographical Study of William Wilberforce* (Daubermann, 2013); and *The Redemptive Life Story of Glenda Watson-Kahlenberg: A Psychobiography* (Connelly, 2013).

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.

## **2.7 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.

**2.7.1 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).

**2.7.2 The socio-historical context.** A holistic understanding of an individual entails taking into consideration his environment. 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 by taking into consideration the socio-historical culture, process of socialization, and family history of the individual (Roberts, 2002).

**2.7.3 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).

**2.7.4 Subjective reality.** Life history research provides for an in-depth experience concerning the subject's reality (experiences, thoughts, and feelings) (Mouton, 1999). Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide that will be used in the present study concerns itself with subjective interpretations of experiences. 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).

**2.7.5 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).

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 Seven.

## **2.8 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 and exploration on the life of Ian Kevin Curtis.

## **Chapter Three**

### **The Life of Ian Kevin Curtis**

#### **3.1 Chapter Preview**

The present chapter provides a historical overview of the lifespan of Ian Kevin Curtis, as presented chronologically over a period of 23 years, from his birth in 1956 to his death in 1980. In this psychobiographical study the researcher aims to explore and describe the life of Ian Curtis from the theoretical perspectives of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. Thus, the subject's life is reconstructed (providing a fuller, more cohesive picture of Curtis's life in its holistic complexity) in an attempt to understand the psychological circumstances that contributed to his suicide. The chapter begins with a discussion concerning the legacy of Curtis, followed by a motivation as to why he was chosen as a psychobiographical subject. Thereafter, the chapter is divided into eight sections in accordance with different stages of Curtis's life – family; school; marriage; Joy Division; epilepsy; affair; suicide; and final days.

#### **3.2 The legacy of Ian Curtis**

“There was a boy/ I almost knew him

A glance exchanged/ Made me feel good

Leaving some signs...”

(Reilly, 1981, track 4)

The above-mentioned lyrics are from the song “Missing Boy” that was written about Ian Curtis and can be viewed as encompassing his legacy. Curtis was still a boy when he died at 23 and many people did not know him. He made a lot of people “feel good” - parents who adored him, a woman who married him and gave him a child, a band that appointed him as their leader, and the local fans who attended all his shows. Yet, he did not feel good himself and the signs were there to read in his lyrics, and finally, in his violent demise.

Death was his attraction as he talked about suicide since his teens (Curtis, 1995) and it is reflected in his lyrics which explored a lack of belonging and confusion with life. Lyrics such as “I can feel emptiness and see hands held in shame”, “I can see only walls”, “I’ve lost the will to want more”, “Searching for some other life”, and “All the talk made no contact” reflected the “alienated and fatalistic sensibility” of Ian Curtis (in Gilmore, 1998, p.156). This in turn bestowed on Curtis the cult figure status of “the romantic, but doomed outsider” (Middles & Reade, 2009, p. 272) who, after thirty six years of being deceased, still attracts hundreds of fans to his gravesite to pay homage to his talents. This talent of being a brilliant performer and lyricist defined him as an artistic genius and lead to him becoming one of Manchester’s greatest songwriters and poets (Curtis, 1995).

Curtis sang about pain and fans adored him for it as they could vicariously associate with it and not experience it personally. Moreover, on stage, Curtis was doing something with this pain lyrically and the fans could experience it without suffering it. The art of music is, after all, in some manner of speaking, about feeling or conveying emotions, and who wants to feel pain when someone else can justify and own it. Yet, the pain for Curtis was lasting, and for his audience fleeting and in the end he died for it. Suicide made him a cult figure and a martyr for our pain. Yet, this portrayal as martyr is only one view of Curtis as he was also described as a

very talkative, friendly, and sociable character (Middles & Reade, 2009) that was on the brink of international stardom, which only fuelled his legacy as the tortured poet who had everything to live for, but chose death. In doing so, Curtis becomes the “Missing Boy” which the researcher made the subject of this psychobiographical study and aims to understand.

### 3.3 Curtis as Psychobiographical Subject

“...A blindness that touches perfection/ But hurts just like anything else.

Isolation, isolation, isolation.

Mother I tried please, believe me, I’m doing the best I can.

I’m ashamed of the things I’ve been put through, I’m ashamed of the person I am.

Isolation, isolation, isolation.

But if you could just see the beauty/ These things I could never describe,

These pleasures a wayward distraction/ This is my lucky prize”.

(Joy Division, 1981, track 18)

I heard the above-mentioned song one night late on the radio and had no idea who the band was that was performing this song. The music was good, but the lyrics sounded like some cry for help; like some old person lamenting a life of struggle and aloneness - I was transfixed. I *googled* the name of the song as I wanted to know more about this band. This is how I

discovered the band, Joy Division, and the sad story of Ian Kevin Curtis, the band's lyricist and singer. The story goes like this...

Ian Kevin Curtis was an intense performer who was drawn to a musical culture of living fast and dying young (Valdes Miyares, 2014). Both biographies written about his life (*Touching from a Distance* [2005] and *Torn Apart* [2009]) emphasized his attraction to rock 'n roll and self-destruction (Valdes Miyares, 2014). In retrospect, the lyrics Curtis wrote read like a suicide note of a desperate man. Take, for example, the lyrics he wrote for the song "In a Lonely Place":

"Hangman looks around as he waits,

Cord stretches tight then it breaks,

Someday we will die in your dreams,

How I wish we were here with you now".

(Joy Division, 1997, track 24)

These gothic lyrics would often be accompanied by Curtis's erratic dancing that would mimic the epilepsy he suffered. His dancing, described as the "dead fly dance" (Ott, 2004, p. 86) or a "trapped butterfly" (Morley, 2008, p. 113) further invigorated audiences and Curtis himself as he started to suffer epileptic attacks on stage which caused him great embarrassment (Middles & Reade, 2006). He would also hurt himself on stage to amuse his audiences and thereby promote a self-destructive stage presence that seemed to have been scripted early in Curtis's life as he used to inform those close to him that he had no desire to outlive his twenties (Curtis, 1995). He took control of this desire as he "... hanged himself at the age of 23, tortured by epilepsy, medication, fear and remorse, having just started a promising career as a singer and

songwriter for the band Joy Division, after releasing two intriguing long plays and a hit single...” (Daley, 2013). The dramatic, youthful act of suicide made Curtis a cult figure. The two albums Joy Division released - “Unknown Pleasures” and “Closer” - reflected the “desperate and despondent” lyrics written by Curtis which, after his death, meant that he was “elevated to the pantheon of rock’s tortured romantic rock icons” (Daley, 2013).

According to Valdes Miyares (2014), a rock band can be seen as a separate environment with its own rules and norms. Curtis, viewed from this perspective, creates a romantic vision of a tortured poet who was born to die. The romantic idea of the self-destructive rock star who dies by his own hand became a stereotypical explanation regarding the youthful demise of rock musicians (Valdes Miyares, 2013). There is nothing romantic about death, even less so when it results from a suicidal act as Curtis was not just a rock star - he was a child to loving parents, a brother to a sister, nephew to loving aunts, a good employee, a husband, and a father, and his death cannot be envisaged as romantic to those close to him.

The myth of the tortured and destined-to-die poet compared to a real life with its challenges interested me. I wanted to know why a youthful young man on the brink of stardom decided life was not worth living. What was going on elsewhere in his life? Those closest to Curtis stated that the effects of epileptic medication led to a depression which, in the end, contributed to his suicide (Curtis, 1995), despite the fact that he was never formally diagnosed with depression (Church, 2006). His youthful tendencies of self-destruction and idolizing rock stars who died young was also said to have been exaggerated by his epileptic medication (Curtis, 1995). There is no doubt that his epilepsy weighed heavily on him as he stated in a letter:

The attacks of epilepsy are beginning to frighten me... Sometimes I'm afraid to go out somewhere at night for fear of having a fit in a club or cinema. I get more nervous when we play now for fear of it happening, it seems more frequent. I don't think I could ever set foot on stage again if I ever had a full stage attack while playing. It gets more worrying with the American tour and lots of other dates coming up. I keep thinking that someday things will be so intense that I'll no longer be able to carry on.

(Curtis in Middles & Reade, 2009, p. 200)

Furthermore, Curtis was afraid of dying in his sleep while having an epileptic attack (Curtis, 1995). The Curtis who wanted to die young, suddenly seems at odds with a man who fears of dying in his sleep. It seems that Curtis was seeking control in death. It is said that a rock star's death leads to martyrdom and a label of genius that adds to the dead rock star's myth (Church, 2006). Curtis's heroes were those rock stars who died young (Church, 2006) and Curtis's wife stated that he followed a secret plan of "self-mythicizing" that culminated in suicide and that the band Joy Division provided a means to achieve this (Curtis, 1995, p. 138).

During his time with the band, he became estranged from his wife and more attracted to a fan of the band with who he would pursue an affair (Middles & Reade, 2009). Furthermore Curtis appeared more sombre during the recording of the band's last album, "Closer" and was thought by the woman who he was having an affair with to be expressing his real feelings (Middles & Reade, 2009). Lyrics like "This is the crisis I knew had to come" from "Passover" (Joy Division, 1980, track 14), "Existence, well what does it matter" from "Heart and Soul" (Joy Division, 1980, track 6), "Now that I've realized how it all gone wrong" from "Twenty Four Hours" (Joy Division, 1980, track 7), and "We knocked on the door of hell's darker chambers" from "Decades" (Joy Division, 1980, track 9) all recorded on the "Closer" album should have

warned band members of Curtis's inner turmoil.

Yet nobody took his lyrics literally (Valdes Miyares, 2014) although according to (Valdes Miyares, 2013) lyrics are not supposed to be taken literally. Not even those closest to him saw any kind of relationship between his lyrics and his personal anguish (Valdes Miyares, 2013) despite some suggesting later that the lyrics of "Closer" read as a suicide note - especially those of the song "Love Will Tear Us Apart" (Reynolds, 2005) which described a failed love relationship. Not even an attempted suicide made his band members reach out to him (Middles & Reade, 2009). A fellow band member stated that Curtis was balancing a life with the band, his home and an affair and lost control of the band (Hook, 2012). Furthermore his dour stage persona was in stark contrast with him being just a band member who was described as being fond of practical jokes, indulging in the use of alcohol and trying to meet up with female fans (Hook, 2012). He was indeed a contradictory individual (Nicolson, 2015) and described as a "people-pleaser" by his wife (Curtis, 1995, p.7).

Discussing his choice of psychobiographical subject (Truman Capote), Schultz (2011) stated that "the writing stirred me up first-art- and psychological questions followed". The researcher (relating to Schultz's statement) can say that the lyrics of the band, Joy Division, intrigued him first and made him set out to discover who the individual who produced these lyrics was. This in turn led to the introduction to the unique personality of Ian Curtis. Reading about him and his youthful demise left me with one burning psychological question: Why did Ian Kevin Curtis die by suicide on the brink of an American tour which could have meant international fame? According to Byatt (2001, p.167), "In the end, all I can do, is read the biographer's paragraph on the subject's dead body and make an imaginative stab at the penumbra of his words". The use of psychological theory along with the biographer might shed



some light on the death of Curtis and provide an interpretation of one suicide and tell a different type of story regarding Curtis. One of a human being that was beset by challenges and wanted to live but in the end lost control. If Curtis wrote the soundtrack for the movie about his life, I hope to produce some screenplay that strives to make suicide more comprehending, but let us focus on the biographical details first before continuing with the quest to understand Ian Kevin Curtis through a psychological lens.

**3.3.1 Stage one: family.** Kevin and Doreen Curtis had been married for more than three years before having their first child, Ian Kevin Curtis (Middles & Read, 2009). Born in Manchester, England on 15 July 1956 (Curtis, 1995), Ian was welcomed into a close-knit, “loving, respectable and middle-class family” (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 1). His aunts from both his mother’s and father’s side doted on him constantly and showered him with gifts and attention (Middles & Read, 2009). When Ian was four years old his sister, Carole, was born (Middles & Read, 2009). The siblings rarely fought (Middles & Read, 2009) and spent much of their childhood visiting relatives in Manchester (Curtis, 1995). Ian was eager to learn new things and loved books - a passion he shared with his paternal grandfather; consequently, the two would spend a lot of time together (Curtis, 1995).

**3.3.2 Stage two: school.** Ian attended Trinity Infants Square (Curtis, 1995), a church school, from the age of four years to seven years (Middles & Read, 2009). He loved school (Middles and Read, 2009) and was considered a “delightful” child to teach by his educators (Curtis, 1995, p. 1). It was here that Ian made friends with Pete Johnson who would attend the same school as Ian all the way through to secondary school (Middles & Read, 2009). The two friends played together most afternoons and enjoyed writing stories together (Middles & Read, 2009).

From the age of seven Ian and Pete began school at Hurdsfield Junior School (Curtis, 1995) where Ian excelled in History and Divinity, leading his family to conclude that he would eventually become a teacher or a minister (Middles & Read, 2009). Intellectually sharp and academically gifted, Ian was awarded a scholarship to attend a prestigious grammar school - King's Grammar School (Middles & Read, 2009) - after he passed his eleven-plus examination at Hurdsfield Primary School (Curtis, 1995). Ian's move to the new school saw him go from being academically at the top of the class to being basically at the bottom (Middles & Read, 2009). The teachers at King's School seemed to pay more attention to the boys from King's Preparatory School and consequently, these boys dominated the front of the class (Middles & Read, 2009). In return, Ian rebelled against the school which he thought did not value individualism (Curtis, 1995). Despite his averse attitude towards the school, Ian became involved in sports (Middles & Read, 2009), playing rugby, football, and practising athletics (Curtis, 1995). Pete considered Ian a born leader as Ian set out to start a football team and rally people together to form a band (Middles & Read, 2009). Ian's growing interest in music and Pete's focus on his academics would eventually cause the two friends to drift apart (Middles & Read, 2009). Ian became fascinated with musicians who died young and whose music spoke of violence and sadness (Curtis, 1995). Most of his heroes were "dead, obsessed with death or close to death" and Ian was becoming more and more attracted to the idea of not living beyond his twenties (Curtis, 1995, p. 7).

Ian continued to rebel and began to use alcohol and steal (and consume) any pills he could find (Middles & Read, 2009). The use of household drugs became a regular past time for Ian as they were easily available (Curtis, 1995), being that it was customary for the King's School boys to participate in social service for credits and Ian would use this opportunity to visit

the elderly and steal their prescription drugs (Curtis, 1995). On one occasion, Ian stole and consumed a powerful drug and in turn had to have his stomach pumped after falling ill (Middles & Read, 2009). However, this incident did not deter Ian from continuing to consume pills and sniff solvents and at times he would inflict pain on himself while in a drug-induced state by either burning himself or hitting himself with a spiked shoe until he bled (Curtis, 1995).

Although spending most of his time listening to music or being in a drug-induced state with his friends, Ian was still awarded prizes for History and Divinity (Curtis, 1995) and acquired nine o-levels at King's. Despite his academic prowess, Ian had no interest in attending university and often spoke of a career in the music business (Curtis, 1995). However, Ian considered studying for his History and Divinity a-levels (Middles & Read, 2009) and left King's School to study at St John's College, only to quit after a few weeks as he "couldn't agree with the view of his new tutors" (Curtis, 1995, p. 20). Ian then decided to join the Civil Service (Middles & Read, 2009) before embarking on a career selling records at a local record shop (Curtis, 1995). His experiences at the record shop expanded his musical interests (Joy Division Central) and led him to sell records on his own from a market stall in Manchester (Middles & Read, 2009). However, this venture was short-lived due to a lack of sales (Curtis, 1995) and Ian soon returned to the Civil Service to make a living as he was planning to marry Debbie Woodruff.

**3.3.3. Stage three: marriage.** Debbie Woodruff became acquainted with Ian when he was sixteen and attending King's Grammar School (Curtis, 1995). At the time, Debbie was dating one of Ian's friends, but the relationship soon ended, leading Ian to ask her out to a David Bowie concert (Middles & Read, 2009). The two soon became inseparable and Ian became rather controlling of Debbie's life, persuading her to leave school and dictating to her how to dress as to

not attract the attention of other males (Curtis, 1995). Furthermore, he persistently questioned her about contact with other men and forbid her from seeing her old friends (Curtis, 1995). Despite Debbie describing Ian as having “a great deal of hate” within himself and confiding in her that he had no intention to live beyond his twenties (Curtis, 1995, p. 17), the couple got engaged two years after they met (Hook, 2012). Ian’s family considered him far too young to get married, but he insisted it was what he wanted (Middles & Read, 2009). The couple married on 23 August 1975 (Hook, 2012) and after their honeymoon settled in with Ian’s grandparents in Manchester before finding suitable housing in Chadderton, Hulme (Middles & Read, 2009). Although Ian now stayed some distance from his family, he would often visit them and maintained close contact with his parents (Middles & Read, 2009).

Despite Ian’s commitments to his marriage and his career in the Civil Service, he still had aspirations of pursuing a career in the music business and could often be seen scribbling lyrics in a notepad (Middles & Read, 2009). As such, he began searching for local musicians to start a band and in the process met Pete Hook, Bernard Sumner, and Steven Morris (Curtis, 1995) - the future members of Joy Division.

**3.3.4. Stage four: Joy Division.** In 1976 the band, Sex Pistols, spearheaded the punk movement in the United Kingdom (Enkiri, 2012). Although most punk musicians could barely play an instrument, it did not deter them from starting bands and expressing their anger at the world (Enkiri, 2012) as the “desire to shock” was close to the punk ethos (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 46). The Sex Pistols played two shows in Manchester in 1976 which had a profound impact on the future members of Joy Division (Enkiri, 2012). Peter Hook, Bernard Sumner, and Terry Mason were friends since school and attended both Sex Pistol shows (Middles & Read, 2009). As a direct result, they decided to start a band with Peter Hook on bass guitar, Terry

Mason on drums and Bernard Sumner playing the guitar (Enkiri, 2012) but were still in need of a vocalist (Middles & Read, 2009). Ian also attended the second Sex Pistols concert and left the show believing that anyone could be a rock star after witnessing the limited musical ability of the band (Curtis, 1995). Thereafter, Terry Mason placed an advert for a singer in a local record store, to which Ian applied (MTV Artists, 2014). Hook, Sumner, and Mason recognised Ian from the local clubs and Ian was duly appointed as singer (Curtis, 1995). The band was initially called Stiff Kittens, but (due to Ian's dislike of the name) soon changed their name to Warsaw – in reference to the David Bowie song, "Warsawa" (Middles & Read, 2009).

Soon after joining the band, Ian and Debbie moved from Chadderton, Hulme (because they did not enjoy the community) to Macclesfield (Curtis, 1995). By coincidence Ian was transferred from his Civil Service job in Manchester to a new job in Macclesfield as Assistant Disablement Resettlement Officer (Middles & Read, 2009). The job entailed Ian helping people with special needs find suitable employment (Joy Division Central) or apply for benefits due to their disabilities (Middles & Read, 2009). Although Ian enjoyed his job (Curtis, 1995), some aspects of his duties, such as visiting a centre that cared for people with epilepsy, upset him and left him with a very negative impression of the illness (Middles & Read, 2009).

Settling into his new job and new home, Ian continued to rehearse with the band as they were set to play their first show on 29 May 1977 (Middles & Read, 2009). The show garnered positive reviews from the press and by December 1977, the band had already played more than ten shows. During these early shows Ian would at times get violent – rolling around in the glass shards of a beer glass on stage at one show and cutting himself, and at other times tearing the stage apart (Curtis, 1995). Around this time Steven Morris was drafted in as drummer to replace Terry Mason who decided to manage the band instead due to his musical ineptitude (Curtis,

1995). The band was playing more and more shows and decided they were competent enough to record their first record, “An Ideal for Living” at the end of 1977. During the recording of their first record the band discovered that a band with a similar sounding name existed (Curtis, 1995). Consequently, the band changed their name to Joy Division (Hook, 2012). It was said that Ian came up with the band’s new name, which refers to female prisoners who were kept in units to be prostituted to German soldiers (MTV Artists, 2014). The band played their first show as Joy Division in 1978 (Curtis, 1995) and as the band’s profile was growing, Debbie found out she was pregnant (Middles & Read, 2009). With a pregnant wife at home, settling into a new job, and Joy Division becoming more popular, Ian was experiencing overwhelming stress. On 27 December 1978, after the band’s first ever show in London, Ian suffered a fit (Middles & Read, 2009) and was driven to hospital where a doctor referred him to a specialist (Curtis, 1995).

**3.3.5 Stage five: epilepsy.** On 23 January 1979, Ian met with a specialist and was diagnosed with epilepsy (Curtis, 1995). After he was put on treatment for his condition those close to Ian became aware of his changing behaviour (withdrawing from Debbie) and him experiencing depression (Middles & Read, 2009). Ian became introverted, solemn and reserved (Hook, 2012) while Bernard stated that Ian’s moods would “fluctuate between ultra-politeness and rage” (Curtis, 1995, p. 72). Ian’s diagnosis with epilepsy coincided with the band’s ever-increasing popularity and demand (Hook, 2012). Although medical advice dictated that Ian seek a “calm and sheltered life” (Savage, 2007), Ian’s lifestyle (touring with the band meant sleep deprivation, a poor diet, and alcohol abuse) exacerbated his epilepsy (Houghtaling, 2011) and he began to suffer epileptic fits on stage (Cutis, 2005).

At the start of 1979 the band began recording their first album - “Unknown Pleasures” (Curtis, 1995) - and Ian was under pressure to produce lyrics and melodies for new songs

(Middles & Read, 2009). When Ian was not recording the album he was at home where Debbie was growing concerned about him spending most of his time “reading and thinking about human suffering” (Curtis, 1995, p. 90) instead of being joyous about pending fatherhood.

Natalie Curtis was born on 16 April 1979 (Middles & Read, 2009) while Ian was still recording “Unknown Pleasures” (Allen, 2011). Ian was reluctant to hold his child as he feared having an epileptic fit and dropping her (Curtis, 1995). Unable to handle his child and with Debbie’s attentions shifting to Natalie (Curtis, 1995), Ian was excluded from the bonding process and withdrew further from Debbie (Middles & Read, 2009). Ian’s time with Natalie was short-spent as he was committed to play shows with the band – one show being the day after Natalie’s birth (Middles & Read, 2009).

A few weeks after Natalie’s birth Ian suffered a serious epileptic attack (having four consecutive fits) and was hospitalised and advised by the doctor to get rest (Curtis, 1995). Having two television appearances with Joy Division lined up and a 24 date tour of the United Kingdom already planned (Curtis, 1995), rest was not forthcoming. Ian was also faced with the prospect of placing financial strain on his family – having to quit his job due to the band’s tour of the United Kingdom (Curtis, 1995). It was during this tour that Ian met Annik Honore, a Belgium journalist (Middles & Read, 2009).

**3.3.6. Stage six: affair.** Ian met Annik Honore on 13 August 1979 at a show Joy Division played in London (Middles & Read, 2009). A journalist for a music magazine and a huge fan of Joy Division, Annik travelled from Brussels to see them play in London and after interviewing the band, Ian and Annik became friends (Middles & Read, 2009). With Ian convincing Annik that his marriage was over and their shared love of poetry, music, and art (Allen, 2011) their relationship soon developed into something more than friendship (Middles & Read, 2009). As a

result, Ian invited Annik to join him on Joy Division's January 1980 European tour (Curtis, 1995).

While away on tour with Annik, Debbie was forced to work as a barmaid to make ends meet (Curtis, 1995). On Ian's return from the European tour, Debbie found him drunk and noticed that he had cut himself and stabbed holes into the Bible (Allen, 2011). Shortly after this incident Ian mentioned to Debbie that he wasn't opposed to her seeking other lovers and that he doubted his love for her (Curtis, 1995). Debbie suspected that Ian might be seeing someone else and while he was practising with the band she rummaged through his belongings to search for evidence to confirm her suspicions (Curtis, 1995). She found the name, Annik Honore, and a contact number in one of Ian's notebooks and confronted him about it (Curtis, 1995). Ian admitted to seeing Annik and immediately agreed to end the relationship, but instead kept in contact with Annik by writing her numerous letters which expressed his embarrassment of having epilepsy and his fears of not being able to stay in the band and take care of himself due to his illness (Middles & Read, 2009). With these thoughts in the back of his mind and his wife now aware of his affair, Ian set out to record Joy Division's second album, "Closer" (Curtis, 1995).

**3.3.7. Stage seven: suicide.** During March 1980, Joy Division recorded the album, "Closer", in London and were scheduled to play a few shows in early April (Middles & Read, 2009), during which Annik stayed with Ian (Curtis, 1995). Ian confided in Annik that he wished to leave the band and open a bookshop with her (Hook, 2012). However, these aspirations had to wait as Ian had to return home and face the consequences of his failing marriage. Instead, he attempted suicide by ingesting a large amount of pills (on returning home) and had to be rushed to hospital to have his stomach pumped (Hook, 2012) after alerting Debbie of his actions



(Middles & Read, 2009; Curtis, 1995). Ian was then seen by a psychiatrist and judged not to be suicidal and discharged to go home, only to inform Debbie that the doctor suggested he go somewhere quiet where there are no children (Curtis, 1995). He went to stay at his record label's boss (Tony Wilson) and instead of getting some rest, performed during a show only days after his suicide attempt (Middles & Read, 2009). Debbie decided to attend the same show and found out about Annik's stay with Ian while the band was recording "Closer" (Curtis, 1995). She confronted Ian at the show who chose to ignore her remonstrations and consequently stayed away longer from home - residing with Tony Wilson and missing Natalie's first birthday (Curtis, 1995).

While staying with Tony and his wife, Ian spent his time listening to music while smoking incessantly and only left after he apparently overheard Tony's wife complaining about him sitting in the same spot every day and her been left alone with him most of the time (Middles & Read, 2009). Ian then returned home for a brief stay (Middles & Read, 2009) during which he informed Debbie that he was unhappy with the music business and was considering joining the circus (Curtis, 1995). His stay at home was short-lived as he was scheduled to play a show with Joy Division where he was to meet up with Annik and the two spend the weekend together (Middles & Read, 2009). While away, Debbie phoned her parents and informed them about her and Ian's marital problems (Ian and Annik) (Curtis, 1995), who in turn phoned Ian's parents and informed them of Ian's affair and his attempted suicide (to which the couple was unaware) (Middles & Read, 2009).

After Ian returned from his weekend with Annik, his parents confronted him about his behaviour and offered their support, but Ian remained silent (Curtis, 1995) and felt very ashamed (Middles & Read, 2009). Consequently, Ian felt betrayed by Debbie (who had agreed to deal

with their issues privately) and soon after the confrontation left to stay with Bernard while Debbie decided on a divorce (Curtis, 1995).

**3.3.8. Stage eight: final days.** While Debbie was initiating the divorce, Ian decided to stay with his parents (Hook, 2012). Joy Division was about to embark on an American tour when Ian received a letter concerning his divorce proceedings. That same day he informed his mother that he would be returning home to greet Natalie before leaving for America (Hook, 2012).

When Ian arrived at home Debbie was on her way to work and told him she would be returning later that night (Middles & Read, 2009). On her return, Ian asked Debbie to reconsider the divorce even though he admitted to still having contact with Annik (Curtis, 1995). Although Debbie realized that their conversation was not constructive, she decided to stay with Ian in fear he might have an epileptic fit (Curtis, 1995). However, she first had to go to her parents (where Natalie was staying) to inform them that she would not be collecting Natalie, but would be staying the night with Ian (Middles & Read, 2009). When she returned from her parents, Ian requested Debbie leave him alone and only return the next morning (Curtis, 1995). Debbie was exhausted from work and thus adhered to Ian's request, returning to her parents' home late that night (Curtis, 1995). When Debbie returned the next morning, she found that Ian had hanged himself in their kitchen (Hook, 2012). Like his heroes, Ian died a youthful death at the age of 23.

### **3.4. Aftermath**

The "dark mythology surrounding Curtis had continued to swell" after his youthful demise (Houghtaling, 2011, p. 75) and Joy Division became the subject of biographies, biopics, and documentaries that primarily focused on Ian's personality (Valdes Miyares, 2013). This in

turn led to a “slew of Curtis-styled crooners” (Houghtaling, 2011, p. 175) in the new millennium keeping the music of Joy Division modern (Savage, 2007), thereby highlighting the exceptional contribution Ian Kevin Curtis made to the music world as a lyricist and vocalist – that even today, Curtis is omnipresent and cited as an influence for many bands and aspiring musicians.

### **3.5. Chapter Summary**

This chapter explored the legacy of Curtis and provided motivation as to why Curtis was chosen as a psychobiographical subject. Thereafter, an overview of the salient events and developments in the life of Ian Kevin Curtis was discussed. In the following chapter, the topic of suicide will be described and unpacked.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Suicide**

#### **4.1. Chapter Preview**

This chapter focuses on the topic of suicide and issues pertaining to suicide (definitions, historical attitudes, religious perspectives, attitudes, warning signs, prevention, and assessment). Thereafter, a basic introduction to the psychological theories of suicide that preceded Joiner's interpersonal theory of suicide is provided.

#### **4.2. Defining Suicide**

It is unclear as to “who or why or how” the first individual died by suicide (Jamison, 1999, p.12). The first recorded reference to suicide appeared more than four thousand years ago in a text entitled “The Dispute between a Man and His Ba” written by a man who grew tired of life and its ensuing challenges and decided to end his life (Colt, 2006). One can assume, however, that people died by suicide prior to this reference too (Marcus, 2010). Today, about one million people worldwide die by suicide each year (Bateson, 2012), stressing the importance in bringing about an understanding of the tragic act.

Marcus (2010) states that the word “suicide” derives from the Latin “sui”, meaning “self” and “caedere” meaning “to kill” and refers to “the act of killing oneself on purpose” (p. 2). The World Health Organization (WHO) defines suicide as “a suicidal act with a fatal outcome” and a suicidal act as “self-injury with varying degrees of lethal intent” (Jamison, 1999, p. 27). Yet definitions do not always bring about an understanding of a concept, and according to Bateson

(2012), “the challenge for those who study suicide, as well as for caregivers and survivors, is to understand as much as possible about what drives someone to the edge and beyond” (p. 246). Therefore, in studying the life of Ian Curtis a discussion of the issues pertaining to suicide is essential in order to understand and explain what drove him to the edge.

### **4.3. A History of Suicide**

**4.3.1 Ancient times.** During ancient times suicide was not regarded as a cultural taboo, but rather as a means to die when one was confronted with unendurable physical and emotional pain without any judgment attached to the act of suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Martyrdom was also deemed appropriate in the face of persecution - either civically or religiously (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Ancient Greece did not condemn the act of suicide unless it could be justified (Society for Old Age Rational Suicide [SOARS], 2015) when reasons for a suicide were attributed to grief, patriotism, and to avoid dishonour (Alvarez, 1990). The Greek philosopher Plato (who was said to oppose suicide) justified suicide as acceptable when it was ordered by the state as a punishment, when one had an incurable illness, or when one was conflicted with terrible circumstances (SOARS, 2015). Plato therefore justified suicide when an individual was conflicted by his external circumstances (Alvarez, 1990).

Socrates (400 years before the birth of Christ), also a Greek philosopher, was the first to debate the morality of suicide, denoting that human beings belonged to the gods and thus have no right in bringing about their own demise (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). However, Jamison (1999) states that ancient Greece was divided over the issue of suicide - the Stoics and Epicureans believed that the individual had the right to bring about his own death while those in

Thebes and Athens were less accepting of the act and denied those who died by suicide any funeral rites. The Greek Epicureans encouraged suicides as a means of escaping an unhappy life (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011) while the Stoics condoned suicide when faced with an incurable illness (SOARS, 2015). According to Alvarez (1990), the Stoics made suicide an acceptable way of death while the Epicureans celebrated pleasure - where a life characterized by displeasure can be ended by suicide.

Ancient Rome had no judgment regarding suicide, except in the case of slaves and soldiers where suicide was strictly forbidden due to economic and patriotic reasons (SOARS, 2015). That is, slaves represented a means of capital for their owners while a soldier was seen as the State's property (Alvarez, 1990). To the Romans, death had no importance, but how one died did, and therefore they viewed a suicide in the case of lunacy, dishonour, or terminal illness as a dignified way to die (Alvarez, 1990). The Romans went so far as to provide trained people to assist those who wanted to die (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011) as they did not consider life as a gift from the gods and actually supported suicide acts in cases where it was seen as an act to avoid sickness or old-age (SOARS, 2015). The Romans were therefore said to turn the act of suicide into "high fashion" (Alvarez, 1990).

According to Alvarez (1990), the Vikings believed that only those who met their end violently (this included suicide) would be allowed to spend their eternity in paradise. Furthermore, Jamison (1999) states that the Eskimo, Norse, Samoan, and Crow Indian tolerated and encouraged altruistic suicide. The fact that different cultures have different interpretations of suicide (Jamison, 1999) is evidence of society's continuing attempt to deal with suicide in its aftermath.

**4.3.2. Early religious perspectives.** The word *suicide* does not appear in the Bible, yet examples of people (in the Bible) who died by their own hand include King Saul, Judas, and Samson (Gearing & Lizardi, 2009). Although the Old and New Testament of the Bible mentions incidences of suicide without passing judgment of the act (Marcus, 2010), the traditional Christian doctrine has always maintained a reproving view of the act (Colt, 2006). For instance, there are eight suicides mentioned in the Bible, without any judgments passed on these acts (SOARS, 2015). Furthermore, seven suicides are mentioned in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament (Evans et al., 2003), while no specific word is used to refer to the act itself (Minois, 1999). Adding to this, the New Testament of the Bible attributes little importance to earthly life, thereby making suicide an attractive option to escape life's miseries (SOARS, 2015).

The Bible's lack of judgment towards suicide made it difficult for the church to speak out against suicide as even the suicide of Judas was seen as a way of repenting for betraying Christ and was recorded without judgment (Alvarez, 1990). It is therefore no surprise that the early years of Christianity saw many Christians considering and going through with the act of suicide when faced with religious persecution (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011) and which would eventually threaten the existence of the Christian church (SOARS, 2015).

Furthermore, the church portrayed the world as an evil place that is full of temptations and that peace and joy can only be found in the afterlife, inciting even more people to consider and go through with the act of suicide. (Alvarez, 1990). Some Christian leaders even promoted suicide as something to aspire to and viewed it as an honourable act leading to martyrdom (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Such an attitude led to the suicide rate among Christians rising to such an extent that as a means to curb this rise, eulogies and mourning for those who died by suicide were denied, eventually leading to the stigmatization of suicide in the Judeo-Christian

culture (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011).

St. Augustine was the first Christian leader with an influence on the church doctrine that openly condemned suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). He was concerned about the number of Christians dying by their own hand and condemned those who sought entry into heaven via the act (Minois, 1999) to escape the world in a process to acquire martyrdom (Alvarez, 1990). Therefore, the Christian perspective held a condemning view of suicide since St. Augustine argued that suicide is a violation of the biblical commandment, “thou shall not kill thyself” and reiterated that all life should be preserved.

Jewish leaders prohibited the burial of a Christian suicide in hollow ground and, in doing so, set in motion the first church-lead condemnation of suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Christians also began to condemn suicide as they began to associate those who died by suicide with Judas who died by his own hand after betraying Christ (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). This led to those who died by suicide being condemned and not being allowed proper burial rights (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011) as suicide came to be viewed as a “mortal sin” (Alvarez, 1990, p. 23). Furthermore, the church (adopting St. Augustine’s view of suicide) viewed suicide as a crime as it came to be associated with the sixth commandment of the Bible which states that an individual may not take the life of another and especially not his own (emphasizing a respect for human life) (Alvarez, 1990). This condemnation of suicide by the church led to the act of suicide becoming associated with fear and shame for centuries to come (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011).

The Catholic theologian, Aquinas, also condemned suicide as an act of sin and argued that those who died by suicide are unable to confess the sin and therefore are condemned to hell (Gearing & Lizardi, 2009). The Catholic Church considered it as a scandalous act and prohibited



those who died by suicide to have a church burial (Marcus, 2010). According to the Jewish faith, suicide was viewed as “a moral wrong” and mourning for the deceased was not allowed (Marcus, 2010, p.10). Funeral orations for those who died by suicide were not allowed and the deceased were buried in an isolated section of the Jewish cemetery (Jamison, 1999). Having an even more judgmental stance towards suicide, The Qu’ran forbids suicide and views it as an act punishable by eternity in hell (Gearing & Lizardi, 2009), and the Islamic faith states that those who die by suicide will be condemned to eternal hell only to repeat the suicidal act (Marcus, 2010).

**4.3.3. Middle Ages.** During the Middle Ages suicide was viewed as resulting from temptation, madness, and despair (SOARS, 2015), and furthermore it was equated with the possession of evil spirits (Murray, 2003), making it an evil sin (Alvarez, 1990). This led to criminal, religious, and civil sanctions against suicide and eventually an increase in the social stigma attached to suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Those who died by suicide were denied burial rights, and furthermore, the bodies of the deceased were mutilated and displayed in public as a means to prevent the act (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). The dead body of a suicide victim would at times be strung up somewhere for all to see or dragged through the deceased’s neighbourhood (SOARS, 2015). The possessions of those who died by suicide (as well as his/her family) became the property of the state, while those who attempted suicide but survived were arrested and put to death (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011).

**4.3.4. Renaissance and Reformation (14th-16th century) 1300, 1400, 1500.** The Renaissance represented a time of intellectualism when old perspectives and beliefs were questioned (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). It was a time when the individual’s right to die by suicide was discussed and questioned (Alvarez, 1990). Although attitudes regarding suicide began to change, most religious people still viewed the act of suicide with disdain (SOARS,

2015). Humanism and freedom regarding religious doctrines were emphasized but were unable to challenge the stigma associated with suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Yet the Renaissance and Reformation era's influence on perspectives regarding suicide cannot be ignored, leading to the topic of suicide becoming an important issue to contemplate during the 1600's (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011).

**4.3.5. 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century (1600, 1700).** During the 1600's Shakespeare challenged the stigma surrounding suicide by introducing characters in his plays who died by their own hand (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). He depicted these suicides as part of life by relating suicide to concepts like depression, escapism from shame, and the loss of a loved one (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011), thereby portraying suicide sympathetically (Minois, 1999). In the book *Biathanos* published in 1609 (Minois, 1999) and written by the English poet, John Donne, he wrote a defense of suicide (the first in over 1000 years) stating that it is one's right to choose to die by suicide, thereby stimulating a philosophical debate surrounding suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Donne's book represented the "first formal defense of suicide in the English language" and challenged the Christian view of suicide as a sin (Alvarez, 1990, p. 46).

Montesquieu (a French philosopher) also argued that it should be left to the individual to decide his demise via suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Another French philosopher, Voltaire, also opposed social taboos in an attempt to free suicide attempters from legal persecution (Minois, 1999). Opposing this view, John McManners and John Wesley continued to view suicide as an act that should not be condoned but severely punished (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011).

**4.3.6 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (1800, 1900).** The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the development of sociology as a means of studying human behaviour in society (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). In 1897, Emile Durkheim published *Le Suicide*, which argued that suicide is not just an individual choice, but that society contributes to the act (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011), thereby portraying suicide “as a symptom of what is wrong with society” (Alvarez, 1990, p. 84). Durkheim was a forerunner in changing society’s view of suicide - destigmatizing it by increasing awareness about suicide and bringing about an understanding of society’s role regarding suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). Durkheim therefore laid the foundation for suicide to be a research subject that would eventually be named suicidology (Alvarez, 1990).

Furthermore, the development of psychology also contributed to the destigmatizing of suicide as Sigmund Freud introduced the concept of psychosis and stated that mental disorders constitute medical conditions and attributed these to suicide (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011). By 1963 in England and Wales, suicide was no longer viewed as a crime (SOARS, 2015) and in 1983, the Roman Catholic Church allowed those who died by suicide to have proper burial rites, enabling the families of the deceased to bury the body in a church cemetery (Jacob Crouch Foundation, 2011).

**4.3.7. 21<sup>st</sup> century.** Although social, religious, and legal taboos towards suicide started to lose their power (replaced by sexual taboos) (Alvarez, 1990), suicide has become one of the biggest social issues of our time. Today, most religions have an empathetic understanding of those who die by suicide due to a comprehension of the role of mental illness (and other factors) preceding the act (Marcus, 2010). Bering (2012) (referring to suicide) states that “perspective changes everything” and it is clear that over time views regarding suicide have changed from judging those who die by suicide to understanding their predicament (p. 248) by looking out for

warning signs regarding suicide in order to aid prevention and contribute to suicide risk assessments. These topics will be discussed next.

**4.3.8. Warning signs.** Lezine (2008) lists the warning signs for suicide as experiencing mood changes, expressing anger, feeling anxious or agitated, feeling trapped, feeling hopeless, having a lack of purpose, abusing substances, engaging in reckless behaviour, and talking and thinking about suicide. Marcus (2010) identifies the following warning signs: threats of suicide, pre-occupation with death (including talk of hopelessness, helplessness, or worthlessness), previous suicide attempts, depression, trouble with school or work, alcohol and drug abuse, risk-taking, isolation (withdrawing from friends and family), personality changes, odd behaviour, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, moodiness (including anger and crying), giving away prized possessions, the preparation or changing of a will, and a sudden appearance in the person of happiness and calm after a period during which some of the above characteristics were present.

Schneidman (1961) states that 80% of people who died by suicide presented warning signs of their suicidal intentions. He identified three categories of clues that are indicators for the occurrence of a suicide. The first category, verbal clues, includes statements about leaving, not going on with life, and inability to stand pain (Schneidman & Farberow, 1957). The second category, behavioural clues, involves giving away prized possessions, preparing a will, and changes in eat, sleep, work, and sexual patterns, while the third category, situational clues, refers to events such as illness, the end of a relationship, and the death of a loved one (Shneidman & Farberow, 1957). Yet most people exhibit warning signs or give clues to their suicidal intentions at different stages of their lives and never take their own lives while others do (Marcus, 2010), making the prevention of suicide a complicated issue.

**4.3.9. Prevention.** There exists a number of myths surrounding suicide, such as those mentioned below:

- Those who kill themselves are cowards and selfish. People who attempt suicide are seen as attention seekers (Olsen, 2013).
- People who talk about suicide are only trying to get attention (Providing Access to Help [PATH] Training Manual, 2011)
- After suicide was attempted it won't happen again ([PATH] Training Manual, 2011)

A major mandate of suicide prevention has been to eradicate myths (like those mentioned above) about suicide and educate the public to eliminate stigma surrounding suicide (Olsen, 2013). Those who are suicidal are ambivalent about living and dying (Marcus, 2010), making suicide prevention possible. Yet the fact that suicide is considered a social taboo prevents people from discussing the issues of suicide and prevention (Bateson, 2012).

Suicidology attempts to address this challenge. Defined as the scientific study of suicide and suicide prevention, it (suicidology) does not exclusively focus on death by suicide and attempted suicide, but suicidal ideation, parasuicide, and self-destructive behaviours are also investigated (Maris, Berman & Silverman, 2000). Suicidal ideation refers to an individual's thoughts and gestures regarding suicide, while parasuicide refers to an individual who causes deliberate harm to himself/herself (Maris, Berman & Silverman, 2000). Self-destructive behaviours refer to any behaviour (intentionally or unintentionally) that causes one harm (Maris, Berman & Silverman, 2000). Furthermore, it is impossible to "assume the frame of mind" of one who has died by his own hand as "suicidal behavior is complex and precipitated by multiple causes" (Bateson, 2012, pp. 228; 230) which makes the assessment of suicide risk very difficult.

**4.3.10. Risk assessment.** Joiner (2005) stated that any risk assessment aimed at preventing suicide is faced with the challenge that multiple risk factors exist which can be indicative of suicide risk. This makes it very difficult for clinicians to assess the presence of these risk factors within a limited time (Joiner, 2005). The assessment of suicide risk entails the identification of warning signs, risk factors, and protective factors (Perlman, Neufeld, Martin, Goy & Hirdes, 2011). Warning signs refer to factors that can initiate suicide within a short period of time (Perlman, et al., 2011). Rudd (2006) identified warning signs as: threats to end one's life; looking for a means to suicide and access to such a means; talking about suicide or death; having a suicide plan or expressing a plan for suicide; anger; reckless or impulsive behaviour; feelings of entrapment; isolation from social ties; an increase in substance use or abuse; changes in sleep pattern; feeling purposelessness; and expressing a lack of motivation for living (other warning signs were also mentioned earlier). Therefore, warning signs are viewed as directly related to increasing the risk of suicide where potentiating risk factors are only associated with suicide risk (Perlman, et al., 2011). These risk factors can increase the risk of suicide, but only in the presence of the above-mentioned warning signs (Perlman et al., 2011).

Rudd (2006) identified risk factors as being unemployed, divorced, separated or widowed, having a past of suicidal behaviour, and suffering from chronic mental or physical illness. As mentioned previously, the assessment of protective factors also forms part of suicide risk assessment. This ensures that suicide risk assessment is “a multifaceted process for learning about a person, recognizing and addressing his or needs and stressors, and working with him or her to mobilize strengths and supports” (Perlman et al., 2011). The identification of protective factors does not necessarily reduce the risk of suicide, but serves as a resource to draw from in attempting to steer the individual away from suicide (Perlman et al., 2011).

Sanchez (2001) identified protective factors as being connected to a social group, conflict resolution skills, problem solving skills, belongingness, committed to future goals, and access to medical and clinical care. The identification of warning signs, risk factors, and protective factors forms an essential part of suicide risk assessment. Suicide risk assessment can therefore be viewed as a process, starting with the identification of the above-mentioned factors (warning signs, and risk and protective factors) in an attempt to prevent suicide. Granello (2010) stated that the process of suicide risk assessment is unique for each individual, making it complex and challenging. Furthermore, the use of risk assessment tools can help guide and support the process (Perlman et al., 2011). These tools can provide information to aid the risk assessment process or screen for suicide risk on on-going intervals as their ability to predict suicide is documented as not being very effective. These tools include:

- Beck Hopelessness Scale
- Beck Scale for Suicide Ideation (BSS ®)
- Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale
- Geriatric Suicide Ideation Scale
- interRAI Severity of Self-harm Scale (interRAI SOS)
- Mental Health Environment of Care Checklist
- Modified Scale for Suicide Ideation
- Nurses' Global Assessment of Suicide Risk
- Reasons for Living Inventory
- SAD PERSONS and SAD PERSONAS Scales
- Scale for Impact of Suicidality – Management, Assessment and Planning of Care
- Suicidal Behaviors Questionnaire

- Suicide Intent Scale
- Suicide Probability Scale

Predicting a risk for suicide is a complex issue which can either save a life or see it destroy itself. Therefore, predicting suicide complicates answering the question: Why people die by suicide? (Bateson, 2012). In an attempt to answer this question, theories have been put forward to attempt to answer it. The following section will look at these theories about suicide.

### **3.4. An Etiology of Suicide Theories**

Twenty million people attempt to end their lives each year, with close to a million of these individuals dying by their own hand (Bering, 2012). Despite this, Joiner (2005) points out that the “science of suicide is not well-developed” due to the “diversity” and extensive facts related to suicide and the difficulty in comprehending why and how people die by suicide (p. 16). Joiner (2005) adds that “theorizing on suicide” has also been slow as the last theory on suicide appeared in the 1990s and a theory put forth by Emile Durkheim in 1897 still permeates explanations for suicide (p. 33).

Durkheim (1897) viewed the failure of the individual to integrate into society as a cause of suicide. Durkheim (in Joiner, 2005) asserts that “the common denominator in all suicides is disturbed regulation of the individual by society” and concerns himself with two kinds of regulation - social and moral regulation (p. 33). Low social integration leads to what Durkheim terms egoistic suicide while too much integration leads to altruistic suicides. Social integration is viewed as an individual’s interconnectedness with society while moral regulation refers to the extent to which a society regulates its individuals (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014).



Altruistic suicide occurs when social integration is high and the individual places the needs of society above the self as opposed to egoistic suicide where the individual experiences low social integration and the absence of belonging (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014). With relation to egoistic suicide, Durkheim stated that humans need something that transcends them and stated that society is the only thing that can transcend an individual (Joiner, 2005). Furthermore, when it (society) breaks down, the individual will experience purposelessness (Joiner, 2005).

Moral regulation refers to anomic suicides where a change in the social status of the individual may lead to economic difficulty which precedes the suicide whereas fatalistic suicide refers to individuals with unrewarding lives like slaves (Joiner, 2005). Therefore, anomic suicide occurs where social regulation is low as opposed to fatalistic suicide where social regulation is excessive to the extent that a sense of oppression is experienced (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014). Durkheim's theory stressed social forces in contributing to suicide and neglected other factors like genetic disposition and mental disorders and held its ground until the first half of the twentieth century when psychoanalytic explanations for suicide started to emerge (Joiner, 2005).

Sigmund Freud (1920) stressed the importance of internal forces (death wish) in bringing about the demise of the self and believed that suicide derived from the repressed desire to destroy another. This psychoanalytic explanation of suicide as "hate turned inward" (Joiner, 2005, p. 35) was elaborated on by theorists like Karl Menninger (1938) who viewed self-harm and suicide as violent fantasies directed at one's parents and siblings. Menninger (1938) also drew from Freud's concept of the death instinct when he stated that some behaviours like smoking, drinking, and drug-abuse can be viewed as motivation for suicidal behaviour.

Furthermore, Menninger (1938) related suicide to three motives, namely to die, to kill, or to be killed. The wish to kill is viewed as anger which the individual turns on himself as he is experiencing aggressive thoughts towards a person but is unable to express it (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014). Shneidman (2001, p. 9) refers to the wish to kill as “murder in the 180<sup>th</sup> degree”. The wish to die is viewed as an instinctual drive and views an individual who dies by suicide as depressed and wanting to escape from psychological pain (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014). Lastly, the wish to be killed is related to a sense of guilt, where an individual has wronged another and suicide is viewed as a punishment by the (suicidal) individual (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014).

Another psychoanalyst, Melanie Klein (1935), went further and attributed suicide to the guilt caused over these aggressive fantasies and viewed suicide as the attempt to prevent the destruction of another. Although psychoanalytical approaches to suicide provided an “innovative view of suicide as a result of psychological stress” (Barzilay-Levkowitz & Apter, 2014, p. 4), psychoanalysis did not make a lasting contribution to the understanding of suicide and more “viable theories of suicide” began to emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century (Joiner, 2005, p. 36).

One of these emerging theories was established by Edwin Shneidman (1996) who stated that “suicide is caused by pain - a certain kind of pain - which he called psychache” (p. 4). According to Shneidman (in Barzilay-Levkowitz & Apter, 2014), this psychache, which is defined as “intense and intolerable pain”, stems from thwarted or distorted psychological needs and is seen as the main cause of suicide (p. 5). Shneidman stated that psychache is the product of unmet or thwarted needs which was identified by Henry Murray (1938).

These thwarted needs, as set out by Henry Murray (1930), include abasement, achievement, aggression, autonomy, counteraction, defendance, deference, dominance, exhibition, harm, avoidance, inviolacy, nurturance, order, play, rejection, sentience, shame-avoidance, succorance, and understanding. Shneidman drew from Murray's work to identify thwarted needs related to suicide, namely thwarted love, ruptured relationships, assaulted self-image, fractured control, and excessive anger related to frustrated needs for dominance, which Joiner (2005) collapsed into two categories - thwarted belongingness(thwarted love, ruptured relationships) and perceived burdensomeness (assaulted self-image, fractured control, and excessive anger related to frustrated needs for dominance).

Shneidman (2005) goes further to state that press and perturbation also play a pivotal role regarding suicidal behavior. Shneidman (2005) defines press as the influences from the outside world, and perturbation as deriving from inner strife. He goes further in distinguishing psychache from physical pain in relating it (psychache) as stemming from the individual's feeling about himself (Shneidman,1996). These feeling in turn can lead to a cognitive constriction that leads to a view that suicide is the *only* choice, in turn motivating the individual to escape from psychological pain (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014). Shneidman stated that the presence of psychache is not enough for a suicide to occur, but rather that another factor needs to be present which he called lethality or exposure to violence (Joiner, 2005). Shneidman's theory of psychache was the forerunner in pioneering the study of suicide in the United States of America and, along with his colleagues, founded suicidology and the American Association of Suicidology (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014). Furthermore, Schneidman (1996) identified ten commonalities of suicide:

1. The purpose of suicide is to find a solution
2. The goal of suicide is to end consciousness
3. The stimulus of suicide is psychological pain
4. The stressor of suicide is thwarted psychological needs
5. The emotion in suicide is a combination of hopelessness and helplessness
6. The cognitive state regarding suicide is ambivalence
7. The perceptual state regarding suicide is constriction
8. The action in suicide is escapism
9. The interpersonal act in suicide is the communication of intent
10. The pattern of suicide involves a consistency of lifelong styles

Present day suicide theories often incorporate the above-mentioned commonalities when attempting to understand why suicide occurs and exploring ways to prevent it (Pompili, 2014). Another valuable theory to emerge in the latter half of the twentieth century was put forth by Aaron T. Beck (1990), whose cognitive perspective of suicide stressed the role of hopelessness in contributing to suicide. Beck viewed hopelessness as a key factor in motivating suicide and viewed hope as a lifesaver (Pompili, 2014). Beck initially developed a scale to measure pessimism, but which came to be known to measure hopelessness (Pompili, 2014). Hopelessness constitutes a cognitive component of depression and proved to be a predictor of suicide in several studies (Pompili, 2014). Notably, Beck's views of hopelessness equates to Shneidman's views of psychache. Beck (1996) went on to stress the importance of previous suicidal experiences in sensitizing suicidal thoughts and behaviours and making them more accessible, which he termed cognitive sensitization.

Roy Baumeister's theory of suicide also appeared in the 1990s and focused on "the subjective lens through which a suicidal person sees the world" (Bering, 2012, p. 237), proposing an escape theory of suicide which stressed that when an individual falls short of certain standards, he or she will experience negative affect and cognitive deconstruction which leads to suicide (Bering, 2012, p. 239). Baumeister (1990, p.9) refers to cognitive deconstruction as a "numb state" and views suicide as an individual's attempt to escape being aware of life problems that have negative implications on the self's perception. According to Baumeister (in Barzilay-Levkowitz & Apter, 2014), "the most common motive reported by people for engaging in suicidal behaviour is to escape from an aversive situation and to obtain respite from an unbearable state of mind" (p. 7).

A scientific understanding of suicide is essential for those ever finding themselves or others considering suicide (Bering, 2012) in order to enable suicide prevention, although "much remains to be learned and to be done" (Joiner, 2005, p. 27). According to Joiner (2005), "a new theory is needed that builds on existing models and provides a deeper account of suicidal behaviour in order to explain more suicide-related phenomena" (p. 16). Consequently, Joiner (2005) puts forth the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide which collaborates with the aforementioned theories (to be discussed in the next chapter), thereby "incorporating the strengths of existing models" to present a picture of the suicidal mind (p. 38).

### **3.5. Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an introduction to issues pertaining to suicide and a discussion of theories on suicide that preceded Joiner's theory on suicide. The following chapter will discuss the theoretical underpinnings of this study as a means of obtaining a psychological perspective of Curtis.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

#### **5.1. Chapter Preview**

This chapter focuses on Thomas Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. Thereafter, Joiner's theory is discussed along with its commonalities with the suicide theories discussed in Chapter Four and presented as a matrix (Table 1, p. 66). A discussion of the central concepts of Joiner's theory and their interactive nature follow with the aim of explaining and understanding the life and suicide of Ian Kevin Curtis. The chapter will also look at the value of Joiner's theory as well as criticism regarding it. A matrix (Table 2, p. 81) is also presented at the end of this chapter to provide the reader with a structured approach as to how Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and aspects of Adler's Individual Psychology was applied to the life and death of Ian Kevin Curtis. Originally, the researcher was only going to apply Joiner's theory to the life of Curtis, yet during the application of the theory the researcher saw Adlerian Individual Psychology as a means to build on or contribute to Joiner's theory. Therefore, the chapter is concluded with a brief discussion of Adler's (1929) Individual Psychology, paying specific attention to Adlerian life tasks, as a means of exploring Curtis's mental health, and possibly adding to the insights of Joiner's theory.

#### **5.2. Joiner's Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide**

Prinstein (2008) notes that "few theoretical models have been offered to help understand self-injury in the manner that other manifestations of psychopathology have been examined" (p. 2). In particular, Prinstein (2008) observes that "few studies have considered integrative models

that address interplay between dynamic systems within the individual and between individuals and their environments” (p. 2). However, one emerging theory that has developed a high degree of empirical confirmation is Joiner’s (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour (Bender, Anestis, Anestis, Gordon & Joiner, 2012).

Presently, the interpersonal-psychological theory has stood up to 20 direct empirical tests, the results of which have generally substantiated the theory’s main predictions (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009). Joiner’s (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide aims to explain why people die by suicide and, in the process, presents an understanding of suicide and the factors that contribute to it in order to prevent the tragic act of suicide. According to Joiner, Van Orden, Witte, Selby, Ribeiro, Lewis and Rudd (2009), the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicidal behaviour states that when an individual holds two specific psychological states in his mind over a period of time, he will develop a desire for death (Joiner et al., 2009). The two psychological states identified by the theory which instils a desire for death are perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (Joiner, Jr., 2009) which stems directly from the thwarting of the need to be effective and the need to belong (Joiner, 2005).

Joiner points out that these two components (perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness) are subjective perceptions and not based on reality. Yet, feelings of burdensomeness and alienation are not sufficient to lead to death by suicide (Joiner, 2005). For this to occur, Joiner holds that a third component needs to be present: the capability to die by suicide (Joiner et al., 2009), which entails the acquired ability for lethal self-injury. This capability to engage in suicidal behaviour is seen as separate from the desire to do so (Van Orden, Witte, Cukrowics, Braithwaite, Selby & Joiner Jr, 2010). According to Joiner’s (2005) theory, the only individuals who are capable of suicide are those who have experienced pain and



provocation over a long period of time and have habituated to the pain and fear involving self-injury (Joiner, Jr., 2009). In doing so, self-preservation, which the interpersonal–psychological theory asserts is a powerful evolutionary instinct, is eliminated (Joiner et al., 2009).

Therefore, the interpersonal-psychological theory posits a three-way interaction between perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness, and the acquired ability for lethal self-injury (Joiner et al., 2009). According to Joiner (2005), suicidal behaviour requires both the desire for death (perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness) and the capability to make it happen (acquired ability for self-injury). Although the proposition may seem somewhat obvious at first, it is a powerful one in that it underscores the critical difference between suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviour – a distinction that many other theories of suicide fail to account for (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009). Indeed, the theory not only addresses the question of who wants to die by suicide, but speaks to the question of who can die by suicide as well (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009). The theory also includes the relationship between the three constructs (perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness, and the acquired ability for lethal self-injury) and thereby includes a specification of a casual pathway for the development of the desire for suicide and the capability to engage in serious suicidal behaviour (i.e. lethal or near-lethal attempts) (Van Orden et al., 2010) which highlights the interactive nature of the theory.

Joiner collaborated with the previously mentioned suicide theories to set out the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. Joiner (2005) refers to Durkheim's low integration (egoistic suicide) as low belongingness whereas high integration (altruistic suicide) into society refers to Joiner's concept of perceived burdensomeness. Therefore, Joiner (2005) agrees with Durkheim that social disconnection plays a vital role in bringing about suicidal desire. In addition, Joiner (2005) does not see psychoanalytic interpretations of suicide as valuable, but

rather emphasizes that his theory draws from the works of Shneidman and Beck. With regard to Shneidman, Joiner views psychache as a combination of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness. Joiner (2005) agrees with Shneidman that psychache alone cannot bring about a suicide, but adds that an additional factor is necessary – what he calls the acquired ability for suicide and relates it to what Shneidman terms lethality. Furthermore, Joiner’s theory, like that of Beck’s, acknowledges the importance of hopelessness as leading to suicidal desire, yet elaborates on hopelessness, stating that hopelessness about perceived and thwarted belongingness together with the acquired ability for self-harm leads to suicide (Joiner, 2005).

Both Beck and Joiner propose “psychological mechanisms underlying an escalating course of suicidal behaviour over time” which Beck refers to as cognitive sensitization and Joiner refers to as habituation (Joiner, 2005, p. 39). For Joiner (2005), habituation entails “getting used to fear and pain involved in self-injury” which together with perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness lead to suicide (p. 40). With regard to Baumeister, Joiner (2005) views perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness as a result of disappointed expectations and adds that cognitive deconstruction can lead to painful and provocative experiences which in turn can lead to an acquired ability for suicide. The relationship between Joiner’s constructs and the above-mentioned theories are set out in Table 1 below (p. 66). The following section will discuss the constructs of the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide in detail along with their interactional nature.

**Table 1: Relationship between Joiner's constructs and other suicide theories**

<b>JOINER</b>	<b>DURKHEIM</b>	<b>SHNEIDMAN</b>	<b>BECK</b>	<b>BAUMEISTER</b>
<b>Perceived burdensomeness</b>	Altruistic suicide	Psychache	Hopelessness	Disappointed expectations
<b>Thwarted belonging</b>	Egoistic suicide	Psychache	Hopelessness	Disappointed expectations
<b>Capability to die by suicide</b>		Lethality	Cognitive sensitization	Cognitive deconstruction

### 5.3. The Desire for Death

Joiner (2005) proposes that the thwarting of two specific needs leads directly to the desire for death, namely the need to be effective and the need to belong. The need to be effective is thwarted when “one perceives oneself as so ineffective that loved ones are threatened and burdened” while the need to belong is unsatisfied when “a combination of frequent interactions plus persistent caring” is absent (Joiner, 2005, p. 96). When the needs to be effective and belong are not satisfied it leads to perceptions that one is a burden and does not belong.

Perceptions of burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness lay the groundwork for the desire for suicide (Joiner, 2005). It is through the combination of these two constructs that Joiner's theory attempts to answer *why* someone would want to die by suicide (Selby, Anestis, Bender, Ribeiro, Nock, Rudd, Bryan, Lim, Baker, Gutierrez & Joiner Jr, 2010). Therefore, suicidal desire is caused by the simultaneous presence of two constructs - thwarted

belongingness and perceived burdensomeness (Van Orden *et al.*, 2010). Perceptions of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness are almost always distorted and explain why an individual wants to die by suicide (Anestis & Joiner, 2011). As such, the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide aims to explain the large discrepancy between those people who desire suicide and those who die by suicide (Anestis & Joiner, 2011).

#### **5.4. Thwarted Effectiveness: The Perception That One is a Burden**

Perceived burdensomeness comprises of the belief that the self is so flawed as to be a liability to others and “affectively laden cognitions of self-hatred” (Van Orden *et al.*, 2010, p. 580). The belief that the self is flawed is expressed as “I make things worse for other people” while self-hatred might be expressed as “I hate myself” (Van Orden *et al.*, 2010, p. 580).

Perceived burdensomeness is a dynamic cognitive affective state and varies over time (Van Orden *et al.*, 2010) and refers to the potentially dangerous view that the self is so incompetent that one’s existence is a burden on friends, family members, and/or society (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009). Those people who consider themselves as ineffective and that their ineffectiveness (viewed as permanent) affects other people too, will perceive themselves as being a burden on others (Joiner, 2005). Therefore, perceived burdensomeness implies “my death will be worth more than my life to family, friends, society etc.” (Joiner, Jr. *et al.*, 2009, p. 634). As such, perceived burdensomeness influences suicidal behaviour in that it contributes to a desire for suicide (Joiner, 2005).

As predicted by the theory, several studies have found a significant positive correlation between suicidal ideation and perceived burdensomeness (Ribeiro & Joiner, 2009). Perceived burdensomeness has been linked to suicidal ideation (Van Orden *et al.*, 2008), attempted suicide

(Joiner et al., 2009, 2002; Van Orden et al., 2008), and death by suicide (Joiner et al., 2002; Pettit et al., 2002). By contrast, feeling effective and being able to contribute to the life of others promotes the will to live (Joiner, 2005).

### **5.5. Thwarted Belonging: The Perception That One Does Not Belong**

Social isolation is a precursor to suicidal desire and stresses the importance of the need to belong to be satisfied to prevent this (Van Orden et al., 2010). An individual's perception of thwarted belongingness is viewed to change over time as it is considered a cognitive-affective state and not a stable trait (Van Orden et al., 2010). Experienced with perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belonging leads to suicidal desire (Van Orden et al., 2010). Thwarted belongingness comprises of loneliness and the absence of reciprocally caring relationships (Van Orden et al., 2010). Loneliness is conceptualized as an affectively-laden cognition that one has too few social connections and is expressed as: "I did not have a satisfying interaction today" or "I feel disconnected from other people" (Van Orden et al., 2010, p. 579). The absence of reciprocally caring relationships refers to the absence of caring relationships where the individuals involved feel cared about or care for another - expressed as "I am not a support for others" or "There are no people I can turn to in times of need" (Van Orden et al., 2010, p. 579). Therefore, thwarted belongingness involves the perception that one does not have any meaningful connections with others (Anestis & Joiner, 2011), and one is alienated from others and not part of a valued group (Joiner, 2009).

As with the research base on perceived burdensomeness, there is abundant evidence that thwarted belongingness is implicated in suicidal behaviour (Joiner, Jr., 2009). Furthermore, studies have found the construct of thwarted belongingness to be highly related to suicidal

ideation (Van Orden, Witte, Gordon, Bender & Joiner, 2008), suicide attempts (Conner, Britton, Sworts & Joiner, 2007), and completed suicide (Joiner, Hollar & Van Orden, 2006). Thus, the satisfaction of the need to belong is essential to the will to live as the thwarting of this need has a “negative influence on health, adjustment, and well-being” (Joiner, 2005, p. 118). For instance, Joiner, Hollar and Van Orden (2007) found that “pulling together” during positive collective experiences was associated with lower suicide rates. Ribeiro and Joiner (2009) have also noted that pulling together during times of crises has also been associated with lower suicide rates. The “thwarted” aspect of belongingness indicates that although some individuals may attempt to meet desires to belong, there may be barriers that are preventing them from successfully doing so (Selby et al., 2010). Thwarted belongingness is applicable to individuals who genuinely lack social support networks, as well as individuals who have contact with family and friends but feel that they are not genuinely connected to those individuals (Selby et al., 2010).

## **5.6. Capability to Die by Suicide**

Few people can bring about their own death as the basic will to live is very difficult to overcome (Joiner, 2005). Therefore, “those who have gotten used to the negative aspects of suicide, and additionally, who have acquired competence and even courage specifically regarding suicide, are the only ones capable of the act” (Joiner, 2005, p. 49). In essence, those who are capable to die by suicide have acquired this ability via painful and provocative experiences and who have, in the process, “habituated to pain and death” (Joiner, 2005, p. 55). This not only entails experiencing pain for oneself, but also “witnessing violence on others” (Anestis & Joiner, 2011, p. 262). According to Ribeiro and Joiner (2009), “the acquired capability is conceptualized as a continuous construct, accumulating over time with repeated

exposure to salient experiences and influenced by the nature of those experiences, such that the more painful or provocative an experience is, the greater risk it will confer” (p. 1293).

### **5.7. Acquired Ability for Lethal Self-Injury**

According to Joiner (2005) “Experience with suicidality or painful and provocative experiences is necessary before people can inflict serious physical damage on themselves” (p. 67). These experiences lead to courage and competence regarding suicide and can be acquired either mentally or behaviourally (Joiner, 2005). Mentally, a pre-occupation regarding one’s suicide can be viewed as a way to habituate to the act, whereas behaviourally, working up to the act of suicide can involve various acts of self-harm as a means of habituation to suicide (Joiner, 2005). Joiner (2005) asserts that suicidality is the consequence of past self-injurious behaviour as a means to acquire the ability for lethal self-injury. Thus, although perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness explain *why* someone might desire death, the acquired capability for lethal self-injury postulates *who* is capable of death by suicide (Selby et al., 2010). Joiner (2005) posited that because a lethal or near-lethal suicide attempt is extremely fear-inducing and often involves intense physical pain, experience with and habituation to the fear and pain involved is a prerequisite for a serious suicide attempt (Selby et al., 2010). It is this variable that separates individuals who desire to die by suicide but do not attempt or do so using a very low lethality method, from those who actually make a nearly lethal attempt or die by suicide (Selby et al., 2010).

Joiner’s theory suggests that acquired capability is developed over time through repeated exposure to painful and provocative events, in which pain and fear become less aversive and easier to tolerate (Selby et al., 2010). Consistent with this theory, Van Orden *et al.*, (2008) found

that individuals with previous suicide attempts and greater exposure to painful and provocative events may be more capable of self-injurious behaviours than those who have not experienced those events. Acquired capability and experience with painful and provocative experiences have been linked to a number of previous suicide attempts (Joiner et al., 2005, 2007, 2009; Van Orden et al., 2008) and death by suicide (Brown, Beck, Steer & Grisham, 2000; Holm-Denoma et al., 2008). Joiner's theory theorizes that the acquired capability for lethal self-injury is irreversible and, as such, is vital to improve our understanding of which individuals are most vulnerable to developing this particular risk factor for suicide (Bender et al., 2012).

### **5.8. The Interactive Nature of the Theory**

Two psychological conditions (effectiveness and a sense of belonging) are necessary to ensure that suicide will not occur (Joiner, 2005). If only one of these conditions is present, then so is the will to live. An individual who possesses either thwarted belongingness or perceived burdensomeness will experience passive suicidal desire which might be expressed as "I wish I was dead" (Van Orden et al., 2010). In contrast, the presence of both thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness (perceived as stable) will lead to active suicidal desire and expressed as "I want to kill myself" (Van Orden et al., 2010). Therefore, the combined presence of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness brings about the desire for suicide, but this desire can only lead to suicide when the individual has acquired the ability for lethal self-injury (Joiner, Van Orden, Witte, Selby, Ribeiro, Lewis & Rudd, 2009). Joiner (2005) asserts that even if an individual has acquired the capability for suicide and perceives himself or herself



as a burden, suicide will not occur if the individual has a sense of belonging - stressing the fundamental need to belong as life-asserting.

### **5.9. Value of the Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide**

Thomas Joiner opened an area of research new to the field of suicide (Lester, 2013). As such the concept of perceived burdensomeness was not a focus of study prior to the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide put it forth as essential (in bringing about suicidal desire) while the concept of acquired capability for suicide was also only broadly studied (Lester, 2013). Although the theory is relatively new, accumulating evidence confirms its ability to predict suicidal desire and behaviour (Selby et al., 2010). The theory is especially useful in determining who desires suicide and explaining who is capable in bringing about their own death (Selby et al., 2010). Prior to the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide it has not been possible to predict who was at risk for suicide and who wasn't (Joiner, 2005) making the theory valuable in aiding preventative efforts regarding suicide.

The interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide is the first theory to distinguish between those individuals who think about suicide (without acting on these thoughts) from those who move beyond suicidal desire to action (Barzilay-Levkowitz & Apter, 2014). Therefore, the theory is able to explain the discrepancy between rates of suicidal desire and rates of lethal suicide attempts (Anestis & Joiner, 2011). Furthermore, the theory produced new therapeutic strategies (Franklin, Hessel & Prinstein, 2011) in that it suggests that clinicians should be aware of an individual's level of perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness and acquired ability for suicide in selecting a therapeutic approach (Joiner, 2009). Removing or reducing any of the three aforementioned constructs via interpersonal psychotherapy techniques or cognitive

behavioural therapy reduces an individual's risk for suicide (Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014).

The fact that the theory does not contain psychological jargon in setting out its assertions makes it popular in the media and ideal for informing and educating the public about why people die by suicide (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014). In doing so “it brought about a healthy discussion about suicide” (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014, p. 34) which can only further studies in attempting to understand the suicidal mind.

### **5.10. Criticisms of the Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide**

The theory has been criticized for being unoriginal as it shares some similarities with other theories of suicide (Lester, 2013). Yet, in the development of new theories, the use of insights from older theories cannot be ignored (Lester, 2013) in order to ensure collaboration among theorists. The theory has also been accused of “oversimplifying” a complex issue like suicide as it attributes it to three constructs (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang 2014). The theory's assertion that one of these constructs, perceived burdensomeness, is present in all suicides (in all cultures) has also been challenged as it may only be present in some suicides (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang 2014). It is also unclear why individuals who have acquired the capability for suicide do not always die by suicide (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014).

Furthermore, research has been slow in testing the simultaneous presence of all three constructs and its effects and examining the relationship between the three constructs (Barzilay-Levkowitz & Apter, 2014). Research regarding the interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide has also been limited as most studies conducted (using the theory) have been cross-sectional

designs (Barzilay-Levkowitz & Apter, 2014), thereby failing to prove the effectiveness of the theory in predicting suicidal behaviour among cross-cultural samples (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang 2014). Lastly, the theory has been accused of not “reconciling” with well-known risk factors of suicide (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014, p. 34) and that it does not account for psychopathologies in completed suicides (Barzilay-Levkowitz & Apter, 2014). Every theory presents criticisms after its application which ensures further testing and development.

### **5.11. The Application of Joiner’s Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide**

During the application of Joiner’s theory to the life of Curtis, it was found that all the constructs that Joiner set out as being present when a suicide occurs (desire, which entails thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness, and capability to die by suicide which entails the acquired ability for self-harm) were present at various periods during Curtis’s life - without suicide occurring. Further investigation pointed out that during these periods (when all three constructs were present and suicide did not occur), Curtis had a sense of control over some aspect of his life. These aspects were related to Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology (specifically his constructs of life tasks). The researcher therefore attempted to build upon Joiner’s theory, exploring *why*, when all of Joiner’s constructs were present in an individual (Curtis), (which, according to Joiner should result in suicide) did not (yet) result in suicide. For the researcher, Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology offers a means of investigating this phenomenon. Therefore, the following section serves to unpack Adler’s constructs of life tasks in relation to his theory of Individual Psychology.

## **5.12. The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler**

**5.12.1. 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). His 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 (Adler, 1929). The theory also facilitates the growth of optimism, understanding for others, cooperation, courage, and humanness (Orgler, 1963). In order to ensure mental health, Adler (1929) argued that an individual has to negotiate the following three tasks: social interest, love and marriage, and work.

The theory is not viewed as scientifically rigorous because Adler does not explain his concepts clearly which makes them difficult to validate 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) such as suicide.

## **5.13. Adler and Suicide**

Adler’s notion of suicide can be related to Durkheim’s (1951) egoistic and anomic suicide where an individual’s suicide is related to his lack of regulation by society and his integration into society. Therefore, Adler placed emphasis on the social interest of the individual which he viewed as an innate motivation (Lester, 2013). Ansbacher (1961; 1969) viewed a deviancy in social interest as common to those deemed disturbed (neurotics, psychotics, and criminals). A deviancy in social interest stems from childhood where the child was either pampered or neglected (Lester, 2013), leading to a self-centred lifestyle and a striving for

personal superiority (Lester, 2013). Those who acquired a pampered lifestyle will lean on others and demand that others meet their needs and will experience anger when this does not happen (Lester, 2013).

Adler was aware that suicide often occurs as an act of aggression against others (and that this anger envelopes the whole lifestyle), and that suicide is viewed as mastery over death and a selfish act (reflecting low social interest) (Lester, 2013). Leenaars (1988) summarized Adler's ideas on the suicidal individual as follows:

1. The individual is suffering from intense low inferiority and wishes to escape from it.
2. The individual is lacking in social interest.
3. The individual strives for personal satisfaction and mastery to the detriment of others.
4. The individual viewed himself as intelligent to attain superiority via suicide.
5. The individual views suicide as a solution to injustices or an urgent problem.
6. The individual views himself as weak and wants to escape this feeling of inferiority.
7. The individual attains a sense of superiority by mastering life and death.
8. Childhood problems are linked to the individual's predicament.
9. The individual's unconscious mind created a desire for death to hurt another.
10. The individual is experiencing anger turned inward.

Adlerian ideas on suicide are limited to describing the suicidal individual as a psychologically disturbed neurotic (Lester, 2013). Therefore, the researcher focused on Adlerian life tasks as it

reflects an individual's mental health and compliments Joiner's theory in predicting and preventing suicide. Where Joiner indicates what was amiss when suicide occurred, Adler can possibly indicate what could have been present to prevent it.

#### **5.14. Adler's 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 itself to each individual (Orgler, 1963).

**5.14.1. Social interest.** Adler (1929) 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 being a possible 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, 1958). Adler (1958) also noted that language is a social creation to connect with others in a common meaning and within the common sense of all mankind.

**5.14.2. 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 of each partner to ease and contribute to the life of the other to ensure mutual safety

(Adler, 1958). The task of love is complicated and not viewed as natural (Adler, 1958). 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 (Adler, 1958).

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 (Adler, 1958). This attitude can be viewed as an expression of the child's unique lifestyle.

The sexual task which forms part of love and marriage should be intimate, trusting, self-disclosing, cooperative, and long term in commitment (Wittmer & 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 (Adler, 1958). The selection of physically attractive types will be influenced by the impressions gained from the opposite sex that surrounds the child (Adler, 1958). 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 (Adler, 1958). The full solution of the task of marriage and love is the decision to have children (Adler, 1958). Those people who are most spontaneously interested in the welfare of humankind are the most likely to have children (Adler, 1958).

**5.14.3. 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 therefore 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).

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 (Adler, 1958).

## **5.15. Relevance of the Theory**

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 that incorporates a worldview and philosophy of living that crosses all boundaries of race, gender, culture, or ethnic background. Adler was interested in the individual's own story concerning his life, and insisted that this story encapsulates the meaning of a life (Adler, 1964).



In essence, Adler's theoretical concepts are useful constructs, not absolute truths, and science is a matter of creative useful constructs (Boeree, 1997).

The constructs of life tasks as set out by Adler can highlight *why* suicide does not occur when Joiner's constructs are present. The sense of *control* in negotiating one of these tasks (with Joiner's constructs present) can possibly aid as a preventative measure regarding suicide, whereas its absence can direct a point of intervention to help establish a sense of control over these life tasks when Joiner's constructs are present in an individual's life. Table 2 (p. 81) below presents a matrix of how Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and aspects of Adler's Individual Psychology was applied to the life and death of Ian Kevin Curtis in this study. This will be further elaborated upon in the Findings and Discussion chapter.

**Table 2: Theoretical applications to the life of Curtis**

<i><b>HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT</b></i>	<i><b>JOINER'S INTERPERSONAL- PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY OF SUICIDE</b></i>			<i><b>ADLER's LIFE TASKS</b></i>		
	<b>DESIRE</b>		<b>CAPABILITY</b>			
	Perceived  Burdensomeness	Thwarted  belongingness	Acquired  ability for self-harm	Social  Interest	Love	Work
Childhood						
School						
Marriage						
Joy Division						
Epilepsy						
Affair						
Suicide						
Final Days						

### **5.16. Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a basic outline of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and its relation to previous suicide theories. Furthermore, the value of Joiner's theory, and also criticism regarding it, was discussed. Joiner's theory will be used to facilitate a better understanding of what drove Curtis to take his own life. To conclude the chapter, Adler's (1936) Individual Psychology was discussed in relation to Joiner's interpersonal psychological theory of suicide. The following chapter will discuss the research design and methodology of this research.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

#### **6.1. 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

#### **6.2. 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 Curtis's personality development over his entire lifespan (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 Joiner (2005) 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 Ian Kevin Curtis within his specific socio-historical context.

### **6.3. 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 singer and songwriter, Ian Kevin Curtis, 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).

Ian Kevin Curtis 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 and tragic early demise. 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 complexity of a life lived (Huysamen, 1994; McAdams, 1994) in order to develop idiographic interpretations (Runyan, 1983) that assign coherent meaning to the subjective view of an individual being studied.

Furthermore, the life of Curtis appeared to have theoretical significance and applicability to Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. Much has been written about Curtis, but none of the existing literature adopts a specific psychological focus, and no psychobiographical study of Curtis exists. The subject's life and his decision to end it continue to have a huge impact in the world (Middles & Read, 2009), and therefore the researcher chose to make Curtis the subject of this psychobiography.

#### **6.4. Primary Aim of the Research**

The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe the life of Ian Kevin Curtis from the theoretical perspective of Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. In doing so, the researcher also saw aspects of Adler's (1929) theory of Individual Psychology as providing further insight into the life and suicide of Curtis. 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). Therefore, Curtis's life was reconstructed in an attempt to understand the psychological circumstances that contributed to his suicide. This in turn can bring about an understanding of the factors that induce suicide, and aid in suicide

prevention.

A secondary objective was that the constructs of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide be informally evaluated by applying them to Curtis's life. This testing of theory lead to the researcher using specific aspects of Adler's Individual Psychology to build upon Joiner's theory. 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 Joiner's (2005) theory and aspects of Adler's Individual Psychology on the other hand (Stroud, 2004). The principle of analytic generalisation was applied to informally test the theoretical model (McLeod, 1994; Yin, 1994).

## **6.5. Research Procedure and Data Collection**

The data collected in this psychobiographical study on Ian Kevin Curtis 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 & Delpont, 2005a), while secondary sources include all materials produced by others on the subject's life. The biographical materials used for this study were either primary or secondary sources.

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 Curtis's fame and youthful demise, 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 (1994) 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 follow 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.

## **6.6. 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, 2005). 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 (2005) 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, 2005).

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

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 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.

**6.6.1. 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.

**6.6.1.1. 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).

The researcher approached the collected data on Curtis 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 personal development across the lifespan of Ian Kevin Curtis?” To answer this question, the researcher conceptualized Curtis’s personality development across his lifespan according to Joiner’s (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. This was achieved via a complete theoretical and literature review of the theoretical constructs of Joiner’s theory. Clear conceptualizations in case study research function as a guide to assist the researcher in extracting relevant data (Yin, 1994). A detailed discussion of Joiner’s interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide was provided in Chapter Five - focusing on constructs applicable to this study.

The second question was, “To what extent do the biographical data collected relate to Joiner’s (2005) interpersonal–psychological theory of suicide (as applied in this study)?” To answer this question, the extent to which the constructs in Joiner’s theory are related to Curtis’s life need to be examined through cautious examination of the category-specific organised 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 Joiner's theory. It is important to generalise findings to the applied theory by relating biographical case data to Joiner's theory as it 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).

**6.6.1.2. *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 (2005) 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 (2005) 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 (2005) 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 lookout 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, 2005).

## **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).

## **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.

## **6.7. 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 table (see page 80) to categorise the constructs of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and specific aspects of Adler's theory of Individual Psychology (life tasks) across Curtis's lifespan. Chapter Five discussed each of these constructs in detail. The matrix assisted the researcher to remain systematic and consistent during the process of data analysis (Vorster, 2003). Furthermore, the use of a matrix allowed the researcher to investigate the above-mentioned constructs and their impact on the suicide of Ian Kevin Curtis.

## **6.8. 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). Krefling (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 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.

## **6.9. Ethical Considerations**

Despite a lack of clear guidelines for psychobiographers (Elms, 1994), psychobiography entails the consideration and resolve of ethical issues to ensure a quality study where its subjects maintain their dignity and those close to the subject is respected. Therefore, the first ethical issue concerns itself with choosing a subject that is either deceased or alive (Elms, 1994). Secondly, what data is permissible to use (regarding the subject) and how should it be presented to respect and protect family and friends of the subject of embarrassing or harmful consequences? Elms (1994) stated that the ethical guidelines for psychobiographies are limited, but that information obtained should be treated with respect.

Runyan (1984) 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. Suicide is a sensitive issue entailing intimate knowledge and the researcher made sure to have empathy with both the subject and those close to him in presenting this knowledge. Elms (1994) stated all intimate knowledge regarding a subject should be treated and relayed with respect. Therefore, no attempts were made to judge or vilify Curtis for his actions or hold those close to him accountable for his demise. Information gathered was handled with sensitivity and aimed to explain why Curtis took his own life in an attempt to understand his behaviour and thereby bring some consolation to those close to him.

## **6.10. Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlighted the research design and method 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 Seven**

### **Preliminary Methodological Considerations**

#### **7.1. 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 Ian Kevin Curtis. The nature of this study and the potential reliability and validity weaknesses that could manifest as a result of the sensitive information being explored made this an essential chapter that needed inclusion.

## 7.2. Methodological Considerations in Psychobiography

**7.2.1. 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 Ian Kevin Curtis, the researcher attempted to employ preventative strategies. Firstly, the researcher chose a subject about whom he feels ambivalent; some aspects of the personality of Ian Kevin Curtis 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 elicits feelings of approval and disapproval, as a means to promote objectivity. Secondly, the researcher also consistently explored his feelings and attitude towards Ian Kevin Curtis 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. Thirdly, the researcher made sure to discuss the feelings and

attitudes that developed while undertaking the study of the life of Ian Kevin Curtis with his research supervisor. 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). Fourthly, the researcher consulted with various singers and songwriters in obtaining an empathetic understanding of Ian Kevin Curtis 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 Ian Kevin Curtis and provided opportunities for reflection and evaluation.

**7.2.2. 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 development (Schultz, 2005) 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 Ian Kevin Curtis. 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 (Ian Kevin Curtis) 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 Curtis existed. The researcher made use of the eugraphic approach in investigating the personality development of Ian Kevin Curtis.

The eugraphic approach emphasizes normality and health (Elms, 1994) and avoids overpathologizing the subject (McAdams, 1994). The researcher explored Ian Curtis's life 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 Ian Curtis's life in a holistic manner across his lifespan.

**7.2.3. 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).

Ian Kevin Curtis 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 Curtis grew up in a middle-class, financially stable family environment (Curtis, 1995; Middles & Reade, 2009). Furthermore, Ian Kevin Curtis was born during a time when people with epilepsy were stereotyped as being abnormal (Middles & Reade, 2009). In an effort to understand the context wherein Curtis existed, the researcher made use of extensive reading to ensure an understanding of the historical period, the community, and the culture in which Curtis 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.

**7.2.4. 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.
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 (TerreBlanche & 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 was to explore the life of Ian Kevin Curtis. 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. However, 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 Ian Kevin Curtis, studying it in-depth and cross-referencing the information to ensure the credibility of the 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 Five).

External validity was not a concern in this study as the aim was to generalize findings back to the relevant theory (Joiner) 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 Six.

**7.2.5. 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 Ian Kevin Curtis adds to the elitist criticism, in this case, a famous individual. Although famous, the researcher sought to illuminate the person who acquired fame. This entailed acknowledging Curtis's middle-class upbringing, and his struggles and victories negotiating life (e.g. love, work) and dealing with epilepsy which fame did not shield him from.

In response to criticism that a psychobiographical study of Curtis is an easy genre, it should be acknowledged that Curtis was a complex individual. A study of his life entails taking into account the musician, singer, songwriter and the family man – all descriptions of a complex individual. Schultz (2005) 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. The researcher concurs with this position and seeks to elucidate the mystery of Curtis's life, which is an enormous challenge.



**7.2.6. 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 incompleteness. 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.

In this study, Alexander's (1988; 1990) model was applied to the biographical material of Ian Kevin Curtis. Therefore, a more detailed discussion of this model was provided in Chapter Six. The primary sources of data utilized for this research were biographies and interviews conducted with Curtis. The reason for this was that these sources were relatively and easily accessible. Existing biographies provided lifespan information on Curtis 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 Curtis gave the researcher a unique view of his life.

**7.2.7. 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 life of Ian Kevin Curtis using Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. Applying this type of theory to Curtis seems appropriate as Joiner's theory proposes a means to explain why people die by suicide. Exploring and understanding the life of Ian Kevin Curtis using Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide was a realistic expectation of this study in terms of what the study aimed to achieve.

### **7.3. 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 Eight

### Findings and Discussions

#### 8.1. Chapter Preview

In this chapter, Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide will be applied to the life of Ian Kevin Curtis. Specific stages in the life of Curtis will be explored to confirm or deny the presence of Joiner's constructs which indicate suicidal desire (perceived burdensomeness, thwarted belongingness) and the capability to die by suicide (acquired ability for self-harm) that, according to Joiner, are indicative of suicidal risk. Furthermore, a table identifying which constructs were present during specific stages of Curtis's life is presented, and the concept of *control* as pertaining to Curtis's suicide is introduced and applied to specific stages of Curtis's life using aspects of Adlerian theory - the three life tasks, namely social interest, love and marriage, and occupation. The *control* aspect is elaborated upon in an attempt to build upon Joiner's theory as Adler's life tasks are woven into the exploration of Curtis's life. Finally, the chapter is concluded with a checklist to identify individuals at risk for suicide. In an attempt to structure this chapter, the primary aim of this study is revisited and discussed briefly.

#### 8.2. Primary Aim Revisited

This study set out to explore and describe the life of Ian Kevin Curtis using Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. In addition, the aforementioned theory was tested and built upon using aspects of Adlerian Individual Psychology to more fully understand suicide risk.

### 8.3. The Application of Joiner's Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide

The application of Joiner's theory to the life of Curtis entails the identification of constructs that identify suicidal desire and capability in Curtis's life. The presence of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness is indicative of suicidal desire (Joiner, Jr., 2009), whereas the capability to die by suicide entails the acquired ability for lethal self-injury (Joiner, 2005) which constitutes exposure to painful and provocative experiences and the individual habituating to the pain and fear involving self-injury (Joiner, Jr., 2009). These constructs, perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (which leads to suicidal desire), and the acquired ability for lethal self-injury (which leads to the capability to die by suicide), will be discussed next before being applied to Curtis's life whereby their presence will either be denied or confirmed during specific stages of Curtis's life.

**8.3.1. Perceived burdensomeness.** Perceived burdensomeness comprises the belief that the self is so flawed as to be a liability to others and "affectively laden cognitions of self-hatred" (Van Orden *et al.*, 2010, p. 580). According to Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014), being a liability is associated with unemployment, the sense that one is unwanted, and the belief that one is a burden to others. The belief that one is a liability to others is expressed as "I make things worse for other people" (Van Orden *et al.*, 2010, p. 580). Self-hate is associated with self-blame, shame, agitation, and low self-esteem (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014), and is expressed as "I hate myself" (Van Orden *et al.*, 2010, p. 580).

The researcher looked for evidence of the comprising elements of perceived burdensomeness (liability and self-hatred) during specific stages of Curtis's life. Since these

elements are expressed as statements (see above), the researcher asked the data the following questions:

- Did Curtis believe he made things worse for people?
- Did he experience self-hatred at this stage of his life?

**8.3.2. Thwarted belongingness.** Thwarted belongingness comprises loneliness and the absence of reciprocally caring relationships (Van Orden et al., 2010, p. 580). According to Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014), loneliness is associated with living alone, having few social supports, and a non-intact family unit. Loneliness is expressed as “I feel disconnected from other people” (Van Orden et al., 2010, p. 579). The absence of reciprocally caring relationships is associated with family conflict and domestic violence (Gunn III in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014), and is expressed as “There are no people I can turn to in times of need” or “I am not a support for others” (Van Orden et al., 2010, p. 579). The researcher looked for evidence of the comprising elements of thwarted belongingness (loneliness and the absence of reciprocally caring relationships) during specific stages of Curtis’s life. Since these elements are expressed as statements (see above), the researcher asked the data the following questions:

- Did Curtis feel disconnected from other people?
- Was there anybody Curtis could turn to in times of need?
- Was he a support for others?

**8.3.3. Desire for death.** The thwarting of two needs lead to the desire for death, namely the need to be effective and the need to belong, which in turn lead to perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (Joiner, 2005). The need to be effective is thwarted when “one perceives oneself as so ineffective that loved ones are threatened and burdened”, while the need

to belong is unsatisfied when “a combination of frequent interactions plus persistent caring” is absent (Joiner, 2005, p. 96). Suicidal desire is caused by the simultaneous presence of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness and is experienced as active suicidal desire which is expressed as “I want to kill myself” (Van Orden, Witte, Cukrowicz, Braithwaite, Selby & Joiner, Jr., 2010). The presence of either perceived burdensomeness or thwarted belongingness is experienced as passive suicidal desire which is expressed as “I wish I was dead” or “I would be better off dead” (Van Orden, Witte, Cukrowicz, Braithwaite, Selby & Joiner, Jr., 2010). The researcher attempted to identify and explain if Curtis experienced suicidal desire (active, passive, or absence) by referring to his needs to belong and be effective during specific stages of his life, by asking the data the following questions:

- Did Curtis experience the desire to die by suicide?
- In what way were his needs to be effective and belong either thwarted or satisfied?

**8.3.4. Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.** According to Joiner (2005), “Experience with suicidality or painful and provocative experiences is necessary before people can inflict serious physical damage on themselves” (p. 67). These experiences lead to courage and competence regarding suicide and can be acquired either mentally or behaviourally (Joiner, 2005). Mentally, a pre-occupation regarding one’s suicide can be viewed as a way to habituate to the act, whereas behaviourally, working up to the act of suicide can involve various acts of self-harm as a means of habituation to suicide (Joiner, 2005). Behaviours like self-injury (painful) and experiences like witnessing or engaging in violence (provocative) increase an individual’s acquired ability for self-injury (Anestis, Bryan, Cornette & Joiner, 2009). The researcher therefore sought to identify painful and provocative experiences during specific stages of Curtis’s life.

**8.3.5. Capability to die by suicide.** Those who are capable of dying by suicide have acquired this ability via painful and provocative experiences and who have, in the process, “habituated to pain and death” (Joiner, 2005, p. 55). This not only entails experiencing pain for oneself, but also “witnessing violence on others” (Anestis & Joiner, 2011, p. 262). Ribeiro and Joiner (2009, p. 1293) note the following with regard to the capability to die by suicide:

...the acquired capability is conceptualized as a continuous construct, accumulating over time with repeated exposure to salient experiences and influenced by the nature of those experiences, such that the more painful or provocative an experience is, the greater risk it will confer.

A direct route to acquire the capability to die by suicide is engaging in suicidal attempts (Van Orden, Witte, Cukrowicz, Braithwaite, Selby & Joiner, Jr., 2010). The researcher attempted to identify whether Curtis became more capable to die by suicide during different stages of his life.

#### **8.4. The application of Adler’s (1929) Individual Psychology**

Adler (1929) stated that the individual needs to negotiate three life tasks (social interest, love and marriage, and work) to ensure optimal mental health. The researcher proposed that a sense of control over any of these tasks could have prevented Curtis from dying by suicide. This would especially have been the case when the constructs, as set out by Joiner, namely perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (which leads to suicidal desire) and acquired ability for lethal self-injury (which leads to capability to die by suicide) were present.

The researcher attempted to identify whether Curtis displayed a sense of control over any one of the Adlerian life task(s) during specific stages of his life. It was anticipated that a sense of

control over any of the Adlerian life tasks would serve to prevent suicide from occurring, especially when Joiner's constructs were present.

## **8.5. The Eight Stages of Curtis's Life through Joiner's Lens**

### **8.5.1. Stage one: Childhood**

**8.5.1.1. *Perceived burdensomeness.*** Curtis was born into a "close-knit" family unit where his parents loved him and his extended family adored him (Curtis, 1995, p. 1). As Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) has pointed out, being a liability is associated with a sense that one is unwanted. It is clear, at this stage of Curtis's life, that he was a wanted and loved child and was not considered a liability to his parents or family. Rather, Curtis's mother referred to him as a "happy and bubbly" child who would entertain the family on their holidays with his impersonations and comedy acts (Middles & Read, 2009, p.9).

Furthermore, Curtis was described as "thoughtful" and "courteous" (Middles & Read, 2009, p.11). In this light, Curtis could not be considered to make things worse for his family. Moreover, Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates self-hate with low self-esteem. Curtis's eagerness to learn new things and his initiative to entertain his family (Curtis, 1995, p.1) reflects his confidence and high self-esteem, and thus the absence of self-hatred in Curtis's life. Therefore, the researcher is of the opinion that Curtis did not experience perceived burdensomeness during this stage of his life.

**8.5.1.2. *Thwarted belongingness.*** Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) states that loneliness is associated with a family unit which is not stable and where one experiences little social support. As has been previously noted, Curtis was born to parents who loved him,



spending a great deal of time with his grandfather (Curtis, 1995), as well as with an aunt who “devoted” herself to him (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 4). Therefore, Curtis grew up in a stable, loving family environment with social support from both his immediate and extended family. This meant that Curtis did not experience loneliness and did not feel disconnected from other people. Furthermore, Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates domestic violence or family conflict with the absence of reciprocally caring relationships, which were clearly not present in Curtis’s childhood. Indeed, in addition to his loving relationships with his parents, aunt, and grandfather, Curtis was very close with his sister (Curtis, 1995).

As such, Curtis’s childhood was filled with reciprocally caring relationships. His mother even attested to Curtis’s dependence on her as a child and how she always attempted to accommodate his needs (Middles & Read, 2009) indicating that there was someone he could turn to in time of need. In light of the above, the researcher argues that Curtis felt a connection with his family and found support with his parents and extended family and therefore did not experience thwarted belongingness during this stage of his life.

**8.5.1.3. *Desire for death.*** The researcher has argued that perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness were not present during this stage of Curtis’s life, indicating that his needs to be effective and to belong were satisfied. The need to be effective is thwarted when “one perceives oneself as so ineffective that loved ones are threatened and burdened”, while the need to belong is unsatisfied when “a combination of frequent interactions plus persistent caring” is absent (Joiner, 2005, p. 96). In light of this, Curtis did not experience suicidal desire at this stage of his life as he experienced frequent positive interactions and did not present himself as a burden to his family.

**8.5.1.4. *Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.*** Curtis underwent an operation as a child to remove a cyst from his stomach (Middles & Read, 2009) and would at times perform stunts (e.g. jumping from high structures) (Curtis, 1995). These painful and provocative experiences could be considered as a means of habituating to pain and fear (Joiner, 2005).

**8.5.1.5. *Capability to die by suicide.*** Curtis's painful and provocative experiences (as mentioned) meant that he was becoming more capable to die by suicide.

## **8.5.2 Stage Two: School**

**8.5.2.1 *Perceived burdensomeness.*** Curtis's primary school teachers described him as being "delightful" to teach (Curtis, 1995) as he was academically gifted and a top student (Middles & Read, 2009). He made new friends easily who considered him "likable and courteous" with leadership qualities (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 8). As such, Curtis was a pleasure for his teachers and peers (and not a burden) and felt wanted during this stage of his life. He was not a liability to them and therefore did not make things worse for others. Furthermore, his high self-esteem (reflected in his leadership qualities) is indicative of the absence of self-hate. Thus, Curtis did not experience perceived burdensomeness at primary school.

However, Curtis experienced being unwanted when he transferred to King's School where he was no longer a top student due to teacher favouritism (Middles & Read, 2009), and experienced being a liability to his teachers. As Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) states, the experience of being a liability to others is associated with the sense that one is unwanted. At this time Curtis also became fascinated with musicians who died young and became attracted to the idea of a youthful death (Curtis, 1995). He also began to experiment with

drugs and alcohol (Middles & Read, 2009) which, for escape purposes, could be indicative of Curtis's low self-esteem which Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates with self-hatred.

Curtis eventually dropped out of school and "for a while he felt unable to tell his parents" and "wandered the streets" (Curtis, 1995, p. 20). In addition, Curtis experienced shame in dropping out of school (he found it difficult to inform his parents about his decision) which Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) also associates with self-hatred. Furthermore, Curtis made things worse for his parents by dropping out of school as they had envisioned him having a high profile-job one day. His self-hatred found expression in his obsession of death and dying young and the use of alcohol and drugs. Curtis therefore experienced perceived burdensomeness at this stage of his life.

**8.5.2.2. *Thwarted belongingness.*** Curtis kept "separate friendships" at school in order to indulge in different activities (Middles & Read, 2009, p.18). Many students wanted to be included into his group of friends (Curtis, 1995) as he started a football team and founded a band, once again displaying his leadership abilities (Middles & Read, 2009). He was also the first boy in his class to have a girlfriend (Middles & Read, 2009). Curtis found social support in his endeavours and thus did not experience loneliness at school as Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates loneliness with a lack of social support.

Even though ashamed to tell his parents that he dropped out of school (Curtis, 1995), Curtis's parents accepted and supported his decision reflecting a reciprocally caring relationship. Yet, despite having social connections, Curtis still felt attracted to death and music that spoke of it, suggestive of a sense of loneliness and disconnection from others. Although his parents supported his decision to leave school, Curtis felt he was not able to support their vision of him

acquiring a high-status job. Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) suggests that not being able to be a support for his parents is indicative of the absence of reciprocally caring relationship. Furthermore, Anestis, Bryan, Cornette and Joiner (2009) point out that thwarted belongingness is experienced when previous solid relationships become strained. This is reflected in Curtis's previous solid relationships with his teachers (which disappeared at high school) and his parents. Therefore, Curtis experienced thwarted belongingness during this stage of his life.

**8.5.2.3. *Desire for death.*** Perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness experienced together lead to active suicidal desire (Van Orden, Witte, Cukrowicz, Braithwaite, Selby & Joiner, Jr., 2010), and since Curtis experienced both at school, he therefore experienced active suicidal desire. At this stage of Curtis's life, he felt ineffective in meeting the demands of his parents (burdening them with leaving school), and found little support in his teachers with whom his interactions were limited as his impressions of them were negative (Curtis, 1995), thwarting his needs to be effective and to belong. Active suicidal desire is expressed as "I want to kill myself" (Van Orden, Witte, Cukrowicz, Braithwaite, Selby & Joiner, Jr., 2010) and Curtis clearly reflected this in his fascination with death and dying young.

**8.5.2.4. *Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.*** Curtis abused alcohol and drugs at school and would inflict pain on himself while in a drug-induced state (Curtis, 1995). According to Bender, Anestis, Anestis, Gordon and Joiner (2012), impulsivity can lead one to experience painful and provocative experiences, and a form of impulsivity is a search for sensations which can be attributed to alcohol abuse. At one stage, he even had to have his stomach pumped due to an overdose of pills (Curtis, 1995). These painful and provocative physical experiences can be interpreted as ways to "habituate to pain and death" (Joiner, 2005, p. 55). Furthermore, Curtis's fascination with music which spoke of death and his statements that he wishes to die young can

be viewed as a mental habituation to death as Joiner (2005) noted that one can attain the ability for lethal self-injury either behaviourally or mentally.

**8.5.2.5. *Capability to die by suicide.*** Curtis's painful and provocative experiences (as mentioned above) suggest that he was becoming more capable to die by suicide. Experiencing painful and provocative experiences, either directly or vicariously, can lead to acquiring the capability for lethal self-injury (Joiner, 2009). As mentioned earlier, Curtis was experiencing painful and provocative experiences in both ways mentioned above.

### **8.5.3. Stage three: marriage**

**8.5.3.1. *Perceived burdensomeness.*** Before Curtis married Debbie he told her: "Don't worry about a job, I'm going to make so much money you'll never have to work" (Curtis, 1995, p. 20). Yet Debbie stated that she had to take on the role of "carer" and had to look after the finances (Curtis, 1995, p. 35). Furthermore, Debbie described married life as "not being comfortable" (Curtis, 1995, p. 35). Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) states that being a liability is associated with a sense that one is a burden to others. Due to Curtis's inability to provide for Debbie's needs, he perceived himself to be a burden on her. Curtis made things worse for his wife and therefore experienced being a liability.

At this stage of Curtis's life, he also experienced self-hatred. Shortly after getting married the couple went to see a show by the band, the Sex Pistols (Middles & Read, 2009). Their musical ability was dubious that night, which reaffirmed Curtis's belief that anyone could become a rock star (Curtis, 1995, p. 37). The fact that a band with limited musical ability affirmed Curtis's belief that he could attain stardom is indicative of Curtis's low self-esteem.

Indeed, Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) points out that low self-esteem is associated with self-hatred. Curtis therefore experienced perceived burdensomeness during this stage of his life.

**8.5.3.2. *Thwarted belongingness.*** Debbie stated that Ian became “obsessed with a lifestyle different from his own” referring to clubs where white people did not usually go (Curtis, 1995, p. 31). This can be viewed as Ian being disconnected and lonely and seeking connections elsewhere. Curtis married young seeking the reciprocal care of a marriage partner. His relationship with Debbie was described as “tempestuous” and “argumentative” (Hook, 2012, p. 36), while Debbie found Ian controlling (Curtis, 1995). Debbie, being the carer in the relationship, meant that Curtis did not take on the role of provider, leaving him feeling at odds in his family (Curtis, 1995) as Curtis was seen as a “traditionalist” who would have wanted to provide for his family (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 124); therefore his family unit was not intact. According to Lester (2014), loneliness is associated with a non-intact family unit, which is indicative of the loneliness Curtis experienced in his family.

Reciprocal caring relationships were also absent at this stage of Curtis’s life as domestic violence was present in the Curtis home - Ian kicked Debbie at one time and strangled her on another occasion (Curtis, 1995) - as Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates the absence of reciprocally caring relationships with family conflict and domestic violence. Curtis felt disconnected from his wife and his exploration of new cultures is evidence of him seeking out a new means of support as he was not a support for others. Furthermore, his controlling behaviour is indicative of his way to find a connection with his wife in a non-intact family unit. Therefore, Curtis experienced thwarted belongingness at this stage of his life.

**8.5.3.3. *Desire for death.*** Due to the presence of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness Curtis experienced active suicidal desire. He was ineffective as a husband in providing for the needs of his wife and burdened her with financial responsibilities, thwarting his need to be effective. Furthermore, the tempestuous relationship with his wife meant that persistent caring in the relationship was absent. His relationship with his wife became strained and, essentially, his need to belong.

**8.5.3.4. *Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.*** Domestic violence in marital relationships constitutes provocative experiences as engaging in violence increases the acquired ability for lethal self-injury (Anestis, Bryan, Cornette & Joiner, 2009). In addition, Curtis “revelled in the tortured lives” depicted in songs (Curtis, 1995, p. 42); therefore, experiencing pain vicariously through these characters provided Curtis with a form of mental practice to habituate to pain. Experiencing pain either directly or vicariously can assist in making one more capable to die by suicide (Joiner, 2009).

**8.5.3.5. *Capability to die by suicide.*** Curtis’s violence toward Debbie and his obsession with sadness and the tortured lives of others in song contributed to him becoming more capable to die by suicide.

#### **8.5.4. Stage four: Joy Division**

**8.5.4.1. *Perceived burdensomeness.*** Curtis joined the band Warsaw (soon to be Joy Division) and asserted himself as the leader of the band (Middles & Read, 2009). The other members saw it as a “bonus” that Ian joined the band as they appreciated his vocal abilities and his song writing talent (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 42), and so the band recorded their first album,

“An Ideal for Living” (Curtis, 1995 ). Clearly, Curtis was wanted by the band – he motivated them and “held the band together” - which are indicative of Curtis’s high self-esteem. Lester (2013) states that being a liability is associated with a sense of being unwanted, therefore Curtis was not a liability for the other band members. Shortly after joining the band, Curtis started a new job which entailed helping disabled people (Middles & Read, 2009), which he “thoroughly enjoyed” and did his best to accommodate these individuals (Curtis, 1995, p. 51). His thrift at work was acknowledged by his manager (Curtis, 1995) and his productivity at work reflected his high self-esteem. Thus, Ian felt happy and was content in his work environment.

With the band’s profile growing and Curtis settling into his new job, Debbie fell pregnant (Middles & Read, 2009) after suggesting to Ian they have a baby (Curtis, 1995). In meeting Debbie’s needs, Curtis felt wanted and contributed to her life in agreeing to have a baby. At this stage of Curtis’s life he was not making things worse for other people and thus did not experience being a liability. He was a contributing band member, a good employee, and added to his wife’s happiness by agreeing to have a baby and the couple falling pregnant. His leadership abilities in the band and his work morale, together with his happiness at becoming a father, are indicative of his high self-esteem, and therefore the absence of self-hatred as Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) does not associated high self-esteem with self-hatred. Curtis therefore did not experience perceived burdensomeness at this stage of his life.

**8.5.4.2. *Thwarted belongingness.*** The other band members realized that “Ian had begun to assume a natural position as leader of the group” as “his vision” inspired the band (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 96). Curtis’s band members accepted him as leader and thus provided him with support in striving for his musical vision, making him feel connected to the band. The band was also becoming more popular which means that Curtis was getting support from both the public



and his band members (Curtis, 1995). He did not experience a lack of social support which Gunn III ( in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates with loneliness. Curtis was happy when Debbie fell pregnant and relaying the information to his parents (Curtis, 1995), which is indicative of his new connection established with Debbie.

At this stage Curtis regularly visited his parents on weekends (Middles & Read, 2009), thereby maintaining a reciprocally caring relationship with his parents. Curtis felt connected to his band as they accepted him as leader, and to his wife as she was carrying their child. His job enabled him to be a support for those in need, while his parents provided an ever present reciprocally caring relationship. Therefore, Curtis did not experience thwarted belongingness at this stage of his life.

**8.5.4.3. *Desire for death.*** The absence of thwarted belongingness and perceived burdensomeness meant that a desire for death was not present as Curtis's needs to belong and to be effective were met. He felt effective as a band member and as an employee and furthermore met his wife's needs (the couple falling pregnant). The pregnancy established a new sense of belonging with Debbie, while he experienced positive interactions or feedback from his band members and his audience. Furthermore, he found persistent caring from his parents, satisfying his need to belong.

**8.5.4.4. *Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.*** During Joy Division shows Curtis would roll around in broken glass and cut himself (Curtis, 1995). These experiences constitute pain and provocation according to Joiner (2005), and enabled Curtis to habituate to pain. Curtis was also obsessed with World War II (WW2) (Hook, 2012), which provided him with a mental and vicarious way to habituate to pain and death. Furthermore, his work exposed him to people with severe disabilities which he found upsetting at times (Middles & Read, 2009). These people and

their suffering provided Curtis with a vicarious means to habituate to pain, as Ribeiro and Joiner (2009) state that witnessing the pain of others can enable one to become more capable to die by suicide.

**8.5.4.5. *Capability to die by suicide.*** Curtis's painful and provocative experiences, either vicariously or directly (self-harm), contributed to his capability to die by suicide.

### **8.5.5. Stage five: epilepsy**

**8.5.5.1. *Perceived burdensomeness.*** Curtis registered himself as disabled after he was diagnosed with epilepsy and Debbie stated that his "illness was something [they] would have to learn to accommodate" (Curtis, 1995, p.71). Furthermore, Curtis's in-laws paid for a phone to be installed in the house (in case Ian had an epileptic fit and Debbie had to call for help) since the Curtis' couldn't afford one (Curtis, 1995). Debbie (being pregnant) did not get enough sleep as she waited up for Ian after shows and then proceeded to sit with him and wait for an epileptic fit to surface as Ian was afraid to have a fit in his sleep (Curtis, 1995 ). As a result, Curtis perceived being a burden on Debbie and his in-laws and, according to Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014), the sense that one is a burden is associated with being a liability. Therefore, Curtis experienced being a liability to them.

After the birth of their first child, Natalie, Debbie took on most of the responsibility in caring for their child as Ian was reluctant to hold her due to his fear of having a fit while attending to the child (Curtis, 1995). Therefore, Curtis's experience of being a liability was also extended to being a father and partner to his wife and, as such, experienced shame. Indeed, Gunn III ( in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates self-hatred with shame and Curtis's shame as a

father and as a husband reflected his self-hatred.

Despite his epilepsy, Curtis was still able to produce lyrics and melodies for a new album, “Unknown Pleasures”, and took control of creating the album. Curtis’s leadership in recording the album meant that he contributed to the band and did not burden them. Although Curtis did not make things worse for his band, he complicated the life of his wife and therefore experienced perceived burdensomeness at this stage of his life.

**8.5.5.2. *Thwarted belongingness.*** Ian’s diagnosis as being epileptic left him feeling like an “alien” (Middles & Read, 2009, p.102). The people around him could not comprehend his illness and furthermore, epileptics were viewed as “mutants” in Curtis’s lifetime. Thus, Curtis became “moody and withdrawn” and stopped communicating with Debbie (Curtis, 1995, p.72). The birth of his daughter and his reluctance to handle her (Curtis, 1995) excluded Curtis from bonding with his wife and child (Middles & Read, 2009). Debbie admitted that after the birth of their child that her attention shifted to her child and that Curtis was no longer her first priority (Curtis, 1995).

Curtis experienced loneliness as his epilepsy was not understood, leaving him isolated and stereotyped by social stigma. Since society had a limited understanding of his illness (Middles & Read, 2009), he received little support in understanding and managing his epilepsy. Gunn III ( in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates a lack of social support with loneliness. He also experienced loneliness as his illness disconnected him from his wife and child. Unable to provide for his family and to care for his daughter Curtis found himself in a non-intact family unit and confronted with loneliness, as Gunn III ( in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) states that loneliness is associated with a non-intact family unit.

Curtis stopped communicating with Debbie, straining the relationship and thus preventing satisfying interactions with her, leading him to experience further disconnection from his marital partner. Furthermore, Curtis was unable to support Debbie with their child and despite supporting his band in recording their album, he experienced the absence of reciprocally caring relationships and became withdrawn. Curtis therefore experienced thwarted belongingness at this stage of his life.

**8.5.5.3. *Desire for death.*** Curtis experienced perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness and therefore, according to Van Orden et al. (2010), experienced active suicidal desire. He was ineffective as a father and marital partner, burdening Debbie with the full responsibility of parenting and worries about financial security. Furthermore, he became withdrawn, thereby limiting opportunities for positive interaction, making it difficult for those around him to care for him thwarting his sense of belonging.

**8.5.5.4. *Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.*** While recording the album, “Unknown Pleasures”, Curtis spent most of his time at home “reading and thinking about human suffering” (Curtis, 1995, p. 90). As one can become vicariously habituated to pain and suffering (Joiner, 2009), Curtis became vicariously habituated to pain and suffering via the material he was reading.

**8.5.5.5. *Capability to die by suicide.*** As experiencing the pain of others vicariously can make one more capable to die by suicide (Joiner, Jr. et al., 2009), Curtis’s obsession with mental and physical pain made him more capable to die by suicide.

### 8.5.6. Stage six: affair

**8.5.6.1. *Perceived burdensomeness.*** Due to their dire financial situation, Debbie started work as a barmaid to make ends meet (Curtis, 1995). Debbie's parents also had to take over the payments of Debbie's car and fed Debbie and Natalie when Ian practiced with the band (Curtis, 1995). Ian was telling people how unhappily married he was and even went so far as inform Debbie that he doubted his love for her (Curtis, 1995). He made it clear to Annik Honore that his marriage was over, although Debbie did not even consider a divorce at this stage (Curtis, 1995).

Curtis's relationship with Annik was not sexual as he was unable to achieve an erection due to the medication he was taking for epilepsy (Hook, 2012), and Annik herself did not want to get sexually involved with Curtis because of her sexual inexperience (Middles & Read, 2009). Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates being a liability with the sense of being a burden on others. Curtis considered himself a liability as he burdened Debbie with financial worries to the extent that she had to go work. He also made things worse for his in-laws as he burdened them with taking care of his responsibilities (car payments/ providing for his family). Furthermore, he burdened Debbie with the affair he was having as she experienced emotional turmoil. Curtis also felt unwanted, which Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) also associates with being a liability, as Annik did not pursue a sexual relationship with him. His inability to achieve erections and pursue sexual relations (with Annik and other females) left him feeling ashamed, which Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates with self-hatred. Therefore, Curtis experienced self-hatred, and thus perceived burdensomeness, at this stage of his life.

**8.5.6.2. *Thwarted belongingness.*** Ian was in the habit of telling his band members that his marriage was over (Curtis, 1995) and informed Annik that he had a desire to leave the band and return to his work as a Disablement Officer and work with “real” people (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 88). By this stage Ian had left his employment to dedicate himself fully to the band (Curtis, 1995). Gunn III (2014) associates loneliness with a non-intact family unit; therefore, at this stage, Curtis experienced loneliness as he viewed his marriage as over and he did not relate to his band anymore.

The conflict Curtis experienced with Debbie is indicative of the absence of a reciprocally caring relationship referring to their marital relationship, as Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates the absence of reciprocally caring relationships with family conflict. Curtis communicated with Annik on a regular basis, writing her letters which expressed his fear that his illness might become worse to the extent that he would not be able to take care of himself (Middles & Read, 2009). Curtis therefore turned to Annik in his times of need, seeking her support as he felt disconnected from his band members and wife. Although Curtis shared his fears with Annik (as he felt he could not turn to his band or wife), their relationship was not stable and lacked in proximity. According to Cornette, deRoos-Cassini, Fosco, Holloway, Clark and Joiner (2009), unstable relationships which lack in proximity contributes to thwarted belongingness. Therefore, Curtis experienced thwarted belongings during this stage of his life.

**8.5.6.3. *Desire for death.*** Curtis experienced perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness, and therefore suicidal desire. He was ineffective as a husband (providing for his family and cherishing his marital vows), burdening Debbie and threatening her identity as a married woman. His inability to achieve an erection also challenged his effectiveness as a sexual being. Frequent positive interactions were also absent (reflected in his desire to leave the band

and his marital conflict), thwarting his need to belong. The fact that Curtis wanted to return to work with “real” people meant that he no longer associated or connected with the band or the music environment.

**8.5.6.4. *Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.*** Debbie came home to find Curtis drunk, having cut himself and stabbing holes in the Bible. These provocative and painful experiences habituated Curtis to pain. According to Anestis, Bryan, Cornette and Joiner (2009), behaviours like self-injury (painful) and experiences like witnessing and engaging in violence (provocative) increase one’s capability to die by suicide.

**8.5.6.5. *Capability to die by suicide.*** According to Ribeiro and Joiner (2009), the capability to die by suicide involves the habituation to pain and the fear of death and is developed through the repeated exposure to painful experiences. By engaging in cutting himself (a very painful experience), Curtis was becoming more capable to die by suicide.

### **8.5.7. Stage seven: suicide**

**8.5.7.1. *Perceived burdensomeness.*** Ian set out with his band (and Annik) to record the band’s second album, while Debbie was at home worrying about their family’s financial situation (Curtis, 1995 ). While on tour with the band, Ian suffered regular fits on stage, leaving him embarrassed and unable to complete some shows (Curtis, 1995). After Ian’s attempted suicide, he told Debbie that he reached his goals with the band (when he recorded a single and one album) and felt that there was nothing left to do and considered joining the circus (Curtis, 1995).

At this stage Curtis was becoming a burden to his band and his wife and, as Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates being a liability with the sense of being a burden, Curtis considered himself as a liability to both (his band and wife). Since Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates self-hate with shame, Curtis's shame about suffering fits on stage contributed to his self-hatred, while his low-self-esteem, which Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) also associates with self-hatred, was reflected in his inability to set new goals for himself and wanting to join the circus.

Shortly after Ian's suicide attempt he played a show where, due to his health, he could only perform a few songs, leaving the crowd upset (a riot ensued) (Middles & Read, 2009) and some of Ian's friends were hurt (Curtis, 1995). Ian blamed himself for this (Middles & Read, 2009). According to Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014), this self-blame meant that Ian experienced self-hate. This is evident as Curtis wrote a letter to Annik after the riot, stating that he felt he was "upsetting" her life and that he felt a deep "self-hate" for himself (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 243), which is indicative of his sense of making things worse for her. Curtis now perceived himself as being a burden to Annik too (and in turn a liability), pursuing her as a married man.

Meanwhile Debbie found out that Ian took Annik on tour with him which lead to an altercation and Ian staying away from home - missing his child's first birthday (Curtis, 1995). Debbie then decided to inform Ian's parents about the affair as they (his parents) were oblivious to this (Curtis, 1995). Curtis's parents then confronted him, leaving him feeling very ashamed (Middles & Read, 2009). At this stage, Curtis experienced being a liability to Debbie as he felt unwanted and thus stayed away from home. The self-hate he was already experiencing was intensified by the shame he felt when his parents found out and confronted him about his affair.



Curtis made things worse for Debbie who had to worry about finances, celebrate their child's milestones alone, and had to inform his parents (Ian's) about her adulterous husband. This, together with Curtis's self-hatred, meant that he experienced perceived burdensomeness during this stage of his life.

**8.5.7.2. *Thwarted belongingness.*** After Ian's suicide attempt he stayed away from home and even missed Natalie's birthday due to conflict with Debbie (Curtis, 1995). Curtis's non-intact family unit, which Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates with loneliness, made him feel lonely and disconnected, and the conflict he was experiencing with Debbie meant that a reciprocally caring relationship between them was absent as Lester (2013) associates family conflict with the absence of reciprocally caring relationships. Ian even told Annik that he felt "lost" after his suicide attempt (Middles & Read, 2009, p. 222) and that he had informed Debbie that he wanted to join the circus (Curtis, 1995).

Curtis wanting to join the circus, where human oddities and 'freaks of nature' perform, might be further indicative of Curtis feeling disconnected with people and feeling like he himself was a freak. Furthermore, he stated in a letter to Annik that he had no friends (Middles & Read, 2009), thus adding to his loneliness. Thus Curtis felt disconnected from his wife and band to the extent that he saw a connection with circus folk-people who travel around without roots.

Moreover, since Debbie informed Ian's parents about his affair, Curtis also felt disconnected from his parents, and his reciprocally caring relationship with them was challenged and strained. According to Anestis et al. (2009), thwarted belongingness is perceived when previous solid relationships become strained - in this case, Curtis's relationship with his parents, leaving him with nobody to turn to in his time of need. Curtis thus experienced thwarted belongingness at this stage of his life.

**8.5.7.3. *Desire for death.*** Curtis experienced perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness at this stage of his life and thus active suicidal desire. He was ineffective as a husband and father, burdening Debbie with finances and an affair and neglecting his responsibilities as a father. His parents, the other previously reciprocally caring relationship in his life, were also burdened by Curtis's affair and the notion of their son's marriage falling apart. Furthermore, Curtis felt he was burdening Annik with the stress of seeing a married man. Although Curtis was effective in recording a second album with the band, he perceived himself as burdening the band with his epilepsy.

At this stage of his life Curtis's need to belong was thwarted as he considered himself a burden to those close to him, and thus experienced a lack of positive frequent interactions and, in turn, a lack of caring. Indeed, Curtis stayed away from Debbie and did not have frequent interactions with Annik from whom he sought love and support. Furthermore, although his parents offered their support after finding out about his affair, Ian refused to talk to them about the matter.

**8.5.7.4. *Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.*** Curtis's suicide attempt constitutes a painful and provocative experience.

**8.5.7.5. *Capability to die by suicide.*** According to Van Orden et al (2010), a direct route to acquire the capability to die by suicide is engaging in suicidal behaviour. Therefore, Curtis's suicide attempt constitutes a direct means to acquire the capability to die by suicide.

### **8.5.8. Stage eight: final days**

**8.5.8.1. *Perceived burdensomeness.*** Before Ian died he was staying with his parents as Debbie was initiating a divorce, and his epilepsy “exaggerated” his dependency on others (Curtis, 1995, p.125). At this stage his band members were in contact with his mother to ensure he woke up for band commitments (Middles & Read, 2009). A minder was also appointed by the band to look after Ian during the upcoming American tour (Middles & Read, 2009). Unable to look after himself and considering himself a burden (to his family and band), which Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates with being a liability, Curtis experienced being a liability to both. Ian also felt ashamed (which Gunn III [in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014] associated with self-hatred) of his epilepsy, his strained relationship with his child, and his approaching divorce, and thus experienced self-hatred. Therefore, Curtis experienced perceived burdensomeness during this stage of his life.

**8.5.8.2. *Thwarted belongingness.*** Debbie was filing for divorce (Middles & Read, 2009), which is indicative of Curtis’s non-intact family unit and also his loneliness, as Gunn III (in Gunn III, Lester & Yang, 2014) associates loneliness with a non-intact family unit. Furthermore, Curtis expressed his desire to refrain from going on tour with the band to other people, but not to his band members (Middles & Read, 2009). His disconnection from the band was evident in him wanting to cancel going on tour with them, but being unable to communicate this to them.

The day before Ian died he received a letter regarding his divorce (Curtis, 1995), which was a tangible realization of his disconnection from Debbie. Furthermore, the night Ian died he wanted to look after his child (as Debbie was at work), but Debbie did not “trust” him with their child (Curtis, 1995, p. 131.) Curtis was thus not a support in helping to look after Debbie, and Debbie’s unwillingness to leave their child with him is evident of the disconnection the marital

couple experienced, and by extension, Curtis's loneliness in reaching for the company of a child. The absence of reciprocally caring relationships is also evident as Curtis was not able to communicate to his band his need not to tour and his pending divorce from Debbie, and Annik was away on holiday. Therefore, Curtis had nobody to turn to. Curtis thus experienced thwarted belongingness at this stage of his life.

**8.5.8.3. *Desire for death.*** The presence of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness is indicative of active suicidal desire. Curtis was ineffective as a husband, father, and band member. He burdened Debbie with the care of their child and financial concerns and betrayed her trust by having an affair. Curtis also burdened his parents with his affair and by them having to look after him. Thus, Curtis no longer belonged with his family or band and Annik was away on holiday - leaving him feeling very lonely, isolated, and limiting his positive reactions with others.

**8.5.8.4. *Acquired ability for lethal self-injury.*** Curtis takes his own life.

**8.5.8.5. *Capability to die by suicide.*** Curtis takes his own life.

## **8.6. Curtis in Perspective: A summary**

Joiner (2005) stated that when the constructs perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness (which leads to suicidal desire), and acquired ability for self-harm (which lead to a capability to die by suicide) are in place, an individual is at risk for suicide. In essence, the individual must have the desire to die by suicide and the capability to bring about his own death (Joiner, 2005). Referring to the above statements, Curtis was at risk of suicide throughout his life

and the constructs that Joiner identified were present when Curtis died. However, the constructs were also present at other times during Curtis's life (see Table 3 below, p. 133); yet he did not take his own life. As Schultz (2011) states that psychobiographers are guided by the question "why," the researcher attempted to answer the question as to *why* Curtis did not take his own life during the other stages of his life (see table) when the constructs were also present. In pursuing this task, the researcher speculated that even though all the constructs were present, Curtis had some control over an aspect of his life.

Although all of Joiner's constructs were in place at **Stage Two**, the researcher is of the opinion that Curtis found a sense of control in life by embracing death. Whereas life often leaves one at its peril and presents itself as uncontrollable, death is something one can bring about, and therefore exert some form of control over life or one's life. This is evident as Curtis started to associate with music that spoke of death and became fascinated with musicians who found a youthful demise. Furthermore, Curtis stated that he had no wish to live beyond his twenties.

Other stages of Curtis's life where Joiner's constructs were present include **Stages Three, Five, and Six**. **Stage Three** saw Curtis taking control of Debbie's (his wife's) life, directing her as to what she should wear and who she should speak to. Although Curtis had to deal with becoming an epileptic during **Stage Five**, he found control in recording the Joy Division album, "Unknown Pleasures", as he played a leadership role in bringing about the album (which has been mentioned earlier). **Stage Six** saw Curtis in the midst of an affair and thus engaging in the possibility of new love or being in control of directing his romantic inclinations.

Furthermore, **Stage Seven** and **Eight** saw Curtis lose control over negotiating any of the three life tasks as proposed by Adler. In an attempt to assist in suicide prevention - by identifying an individual “at risk” - the researcher therefore recommends that one probe for issues of control or determine if the individual feels in control of aspects of his/her life at the time of determining the risk of suicide.

**Table 3. Joiner Applied to the life of Ian Curtis**

STAGES IN CURTIS'S LIFE	PERCEIVED BURDENSOMENESS	THWARTED BELONGINGNESS	DESIRE FOR DEATH	ACQUIRED ABILITY FOR LETHAL SELF – INJURY	CAPABILITY TO DIE BY SUICIDE	AT RISK
<b>CHILDHOOD</b>	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO
<b>SCHOOL</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>MARRIAGE</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>JOY DIVISION</b>	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO
<b>EPILEPSY</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>AFFAIR</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>SUICIDE</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
<b>FINAL DAYS</b>	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES

## 8.7. Theory development

This study set out to explore and describe a life using a psychological theory. Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide aims to explain why an individual will die by suicide. Therefore, Joiner's theory was utilized to explore and describe the life and death of Ian Kevin Curtis (who hanged himself at the age of 23) in an attempt to understand his life and death. Describing and exploring Curtis's life and why he died by his own hand became a pivotal focus of this study in an attempt to contribute to suicide prevention.

The application of Joiner's theory to the life of Curtis also offered the researcher the opportunity to test the relevant theory and possibly build on or add to it. It was found that Joiner's theory applied to the life of Curtis as the constructs (which Joiner proposed to be present when a suicide occur) was indeed present when Curtis died by his own hand. Yet, these constructs were also present throughout other periods of Curtis's life yet suicide did not occur.

In an attempt to explain this, the researcher proposed that a sense of control over some aspect of his life prevented Curtis from dying by suicide even though Joiner's constructs were present. The aspects of Curtis's life which the researcher proposed offered Curtis a sense of control was death, marriage, his affair, and his occupation (as a musician in the band Joy Division). The researcher then related these aspects to Adler's Individual Psychology as he (Adler) postulated that mental health depends on the successful negotiation of three tasks: love and marriage, social interaction, and work. Table 4 (p. 135) below serves as a graphical representation of how the researcher related aspects of Curtis's life to Adler's three life tasks:

**Table 4: Aspects of Curtis's Life in Relation to Adlerian Tasks**

Aspects of Curtis's life	Adler's tasks
Death (Curtis's attraction to music that spoke of death drew him to similar minds)	Social interaction
Marriage and Affair	Marriage/Love
Joy Division	Work/ Occupation

### **8.8. Adler's Individual Psychology in relation to Joiner's Theory as Applied to the Life of Curtis**

The researcher applied Adlerian theory to the life of Curtis in an attempt to build on Joiner's theory. In doing so, the researcher made use of specific aspects of Adler's theory, namely the life tasks of love and marriage, social interest, and occupation. The researcher indicated that Curtis's sense of control over any one of these tasks prevented him from dying by suicide even though all of Joiners' constructs were present during these specific stages (see Table 3, p. 133) of his life. These stages, in relation to Adlerian theory, will be discussed next (and presented in Table 5, p. 138).



The application of Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide to **Stage One** (Childhood) indicated that Curtis was not at risk for suicide to occur. Curtis had a sense of control over the task of love as his parents and family adored him. Adler (1958) stated that if a child perceives his environment as hostile, he or she will not make social connections. Curtis had good relations with his parents, aunts, and sibling and was especially close to his grandfather. Therefore, a sense of control regarding the task of social interest can be attested to as Curtis sought and maintained social connections. Curtis had good relations with his family and presented himself as self-confident.

Although all of Joiner's constructs were present during **Stage Two** (School) of Curtis's life, he did not die by suicide. The researcher proposes that a sense of control over the life task, social interest, prevented Curtis from taking his life. Adler (1958) stated that language is a social creation to connect with others in a common meaning. Therefore, the sense of control regarding social interest can be related to Curtis being drawn to musicians who celebrated death through their lyrics.

The application of Joiner's theory to **Stage Three** (Marriage) of Curtis's life indicated that he was at risk for suicide. The researcher argues that suicide was prevented as Curtis had a sense of control regarding the task of love and marriage as Curtis took control of his wife's life. Adler (1958) stated that the full solution to the task of love and marriage is the decision to have children. Curtis, wanting a child with his wife, can attest to his sense of control over the task of love and marriage.

Moreover, Curtis was not at risk for suicide at **Stage Four** (Joy Division) of his life, as the researcher argues he had a sense of control over the task of love and marriage as his wife was

expecting. Indeed, Adler (1958) denoted that the decision to have children is the full solution to the task of love and marriage. Furthermore, Curtis's band was developing well and his career as a musician was beginning to take shape. Adler (1958) stated that one's work involves making a meaningful contribution to society and being able to sustain oneself. Therefore, it can be argued that Curtis had a sense of control over the task of occupation as he was contributing musically to society and building a career to sustain himself. In addition, Curtis's job as a disability officer (helping other people) also provided him with a sense of control over the task of social interest. Adler (1929) associated the task of social interest as being interested in the welfare of others. Curtis was interested in the welfare of those he assisted as disability officer and a sense of control over social interest can therefore be attested.

Although all of Joiner's constructs were present during **Stage Five** (Epilepsy) (indicating suicide risk), Curtis found a sense of control regarding the task of occupation - Curtis was the leader of the band in recording the album, "Unknown Pleasures". Ogler (1963) stated that the task of occupation can provide a relief from the task of love and marriage. This is true in the case of Curtis who, having been diagnosed with epilepsy and thereafter withdrawing from his wife and child, sought control over his occupation as a musician.

During **Stage Six** (Affair) of Curtis's life he was at risk for suicide as all of Joiner's constructs were present; yet he found a sense of control engaging in an affair and therefore negotiating the task of love and marriage. Although his band was making great progress, he feared his future as a performer (due to the onset of epilepsy), thereby neglecting the task of occupation. As his communication to society via the lyrics of Joy Division was threatened, he lost control of the task of social interest too.

During **Stage Seven** (Suicide) of Curtis's life, he attempted suicide as all of Joiner's constructs were present. At this stage, Curtis was afraid of losing his new found love (the affair), not being able to perform, and therefore wanted to join a circus. This is indicative of him losing control over the task of love and marriage (his affair and marriage stagnating), occupation (unable to perform during shows), *and* social interest (wanting to join a circus).

At **Stage Eight** (as in **Stage Nine**) of Curtis's life, all of Joiner's constructs were present. However, a sense of loss of control over Adler's three life tasks (as discussed earlier) can possibly explain his decision to end his own life. Table 5 below serves as a graphical application of Adlerian theory to the different stages of Curtis's life, whereby Curtis had a sense of control over (at least) one of Adler's life tasks (thereby preventing the act of suicide):

**Table 5: Adlerian Individual Psychology Applied to the Stages of Curtis's Life**

STAGES IN CURTIS'S LIFE	Adlerian Life tasks (sense of control)		
	Love/Marriage	Social Interest	Occupation
CHILDHOOD	Yes	Yes	
SCHOOL		Yes	
MARRIAGE	Yes		
JOY DIVISION	Yes	Yes	Yes
EPILEPSY			Yes
AFFAIR	Yes		
SUICIDE	No	No	No
FINAL DAYS	No	No	No

The researcher incorporated aspects of Adler's theory with that of Joiner's to account for the fact that all the constructs of Joiner's theory were present in Curtis's life at times, yet a sense of control over one of Adler's tasks prevented suicide from occurring. This can add to Joiner's theory in explaining the presence of the constructs, but suicide not occurring. Furthermore, the researcher saw a connection between Joiner's constructs of perceived burdensomeness and thwarted belongingness, and Adler's tasks.

Establishing a sense of connection and belonging regarding Adler's tasks can aid in preventing suicide by ensuring an aspect of control in an individual's life. Suicide prevention became a very personal goal for the researcher during this study as he lost close friends due to suicide during this time. Pursuing this goal, the researcher attempted to draft an intake form/checklist (Table 6, p. 140) using Joiner's theory to probe for the presence of the three constructs and, in so doing, identify an individual *at risk* for suicide. Furthermore, it is hoped that the intake form will establish the individual's perception about his/her sense of control over Adler's three tasks by addressing the connectedness and belongingness related to these tasks.

**Table 6:** *At risk* intake form

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT YOURSELF?	
DO YOU BELIEVE YOU ARE MAKING THINGS WORSE FOR OTHER PEOPLE?	
UNEMPLOYMENT	YES/NO
SENSE OF BEING UNWANTED	YES/NO
BELIEF THAT ONE IS A BURDEN	YES/NO
LIABILITY	YES/NO
SHAME	YES/NO
AGITATION	YES/NO
SELF-BLAME	YES/NO
LOW SELF-ESTEEM	YES/NO
SELF-HATE	YES/NO
PERCEIVED BURDENSOMENESS	YES/ NO
DO YOU FEEL DISCONNECTED FROM OTHERS?	
ARE YOU A SUPPORT FOR OTHERS?	
IS THERE ANYONE YOU CAN TURN TO IN TIMES OF NEED?	
LIVING ALONE	YES/NO
NON-INTACT FAMILY UNIT	YES/NO
LACK OF SOCIAL SUPPORT	YES/NO
LONELINESS	YES/NO
FAMILY CONFLICT	YES/NO
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE	YES/NO
ABSENCE OF RECIPROCALLY CARING REL.	YES/NO
THWARTED BELONGINGNESS	YES/NO
SUICIDAL DESIRE	ACTIVE/ PASSIVE/ABSENT
WOULD YOU SAY THAT YOU HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO MANY PAINFUL AND PROVOCATIVE EXPERIENCES?	
DO YOU THINK ABOUT SUICIDE OFTEN?	
HAVE YOU TRIED TO END YOUR LIFE?	
ACQUIRED ABILITY FOR LETHAL SELF-INJURY	YES/NO
HAS THE INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPED THE CAPABILITY TO DIE BY SUICIDE	YES/ NO
DESIRE AND CAPABILITY PRESENT	YES/NO
AT RISK	YES/NO
ADLERIAN TASKS ( <i>Sense of control</i> ).	YES/NO
LOVE	
WORK	
SOCIAL INTEREST	

## 8.9. Chapter Summary

This chapter explored the life of Ian Kevin Curtis using Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide in an attempt to understand *why* Curtis died by his own hand. The researcher's conclusions and recommendations of this chapter will be presented in Chapter Nine.

## **Chapter Nine**

### **Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations**

#### **9.1. 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.

#### **9.2. Revisiting the Purpose of the Study**

The primary aim of this study was to explore and describe the personal development of Ian Kevin Curtis throughout his lifespan in terms of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. A detailed biographical account of Curtis's life history was constructed in order to explore and describe Curtis's personality development within Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. 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 Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. 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 Curtis'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 in order to aid theory development regarding

suicide and, by extension, to strengthen preventative practices. 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 Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide adequately explored and described the personality development of Ian Kevin Curtis across his lifespan.

### **9.3. Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide Applied to the Life of Curtis**

A summary of the findings related to a biographical account of the life history of Ian Kevin Curtis within the conceptual framework of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide was provided in Chapter 8.

### **9.4. 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, Ian Kevin Curtis.

**9.4.1. The theoretical model of Joiner's interpersonal psychological theory of suicide.** Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide is especially valuable in psychobiographical research where the subject of study died by his own hand and the application of the theory makes for a psychological autopsy. The presence of Joiner's constructs (thwarted belongingness, perceived burdensomeness, and capability to die by suicide) provides an explanation as to *why* an individual will die by his own hand by distinguishing between those who *can* die by suicide, from those who *want* to die by suicide.



The theory provided a framework to explore and describe a variety of factors that influenced Curtis's life and lead to his demise using the above-mentioned constructs. 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 Curtis'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 – Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide– 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 Curtis's personality development.

**9.4.2. 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 Curtis's life that had not been presented before. This refers to the psychological explanation this study offers on the life of Curtis, utilizing Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide.

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 and explain its end. Biographical material provided valuable material to study the personality development of Ian Kevin Curtis, whereas psychological theory (Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide) provided a conceptual framework, which enables the researcher to look at behavioural processes and patterns across an entire lifespan (Welman,

2009). Furthermore, 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 Curtis'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 of 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.

**9.4.3. The psychobiographical subject.** The inclusion of Ian Kevin Curtis 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.

As evidenced in this study, there is great value in studying the lives of prominent individuals. With the help of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide, we can better understand the choices that Curtis made that helped him achieve his greatness, and also lead to his demise. 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.

## 9.5. Limitations of the Study

This section discusses the limitations of this research study. As such, Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide, the psychobiographical case study research method, as well as the life of Ian Kevin Curtis is discussed.

**9.5.1. The theoretical model of individual psychology.** Chapter Five, discussed the criticisms of Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide.

**9.5.2. 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 7. 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 Joiner's interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. This process is known as analytical generalization (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, 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 Ian Kevin Curtis's personality development across his lifespan, and not to explain cause-and-effect issues regarding the personality development of Ian Kevin Curtis. 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 to 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 Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide. There are various other theories that can describe and explain Curtis's personality development. The descriptions and explanations of this research should enhance other types of descriptions and explanations regarding the personality development of Curtis, 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 in order to provide a cohesive biography of the subject, Ian Kevin Curtis.

**9.5.3. The psychobiographical subject.** Biographies on the life of Ian Kevin Curtis are plentiful, but often set out to depict Curtis 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 and letters written by Curtis in accordance with Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide, 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 Curtis's personality development.

As the research progressed, the researcher became aware of the difficulties in explaining a life, within the restrictions of a doctoral 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 or articles.

## **9.6. Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research on the life of Ian Kevin Curtis on a bigger scale, would be an important recommendation. A more in-depth study can shed light on, or explore themes that this research had to ignore because of it being subjected to a doctoral level study. 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. The intake form (checklist) developed during this study can also be further explored with specialists (during therapy) and possibly tested using subjects who died by their own hand (psychological autopsies). Furthermore, 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. Furthermore an exploration of Ian Kevin Curtis's lyrics might shed new light on his life and demise.

**9.6.1. The lyrics of Ian Curtis and future research.** The lyrics written by Ian Curtis were “an intense personal examination of living life in existential darkness; a sightless existence, a lonely place where relationships are only learned through sound” (Middles & Reade, 2009, p. 173), and coming from “his soul” (Hook, 2012, p. 51). Furthermore, Curtis's lyrics were seen as “impenetrable and profound” (Hook, 2012, p. 75), with Hook (2012, p. 142) describing the lyrics as ranging from “detached and aggressive” to “introspective and quite frightening”.

Moreover, the music of Joy Division purveyed Curtis's "alienated and fatalistic sensibility" and reflected "authentic accounts of dissolution and despair" (Gilmore, 1998, p. 156) and offered "a world of intense introspection" (Middles & Reade, 2009, p. 20). Fascinated with musicians who were either dead or died young, it was believed that the band (Joy Division) served as a means for Curtis to join his musical idols who died young like Jimi Hendrix (Curtis, 1995). Indeed, Curtis was "carried away with the romantic magic of an early death" (Curtis, 1995, p. 7).

Curtis also stated that the band (Joy Division) did not really carry a message, and referred to the lyrics of his songs as "multi-dimensional" and purposefully left open for interpretation (Curtis, 1995, p. 75). Furthermore, he described his lyrics as "subconscious" and not about "anything in particular" (Middles & Reade, 2009, p. 100). Referring to his lyrics, he confided to some that he would write about someone, but that he was "actually describing himself" and that his lyrics were often misunderstood. It was found that Curtis's lyrics mostly referred to thwarted belongingness, followed by capability to die by suicide and perceived burdensomeness, according to the researcher's interpretation.

The researcher felt that his interpretation of Ian Curtis's lyrics should include the use of a language program to present an objective view of Curtis's lyrics. The use of a language program could identify psychological variables associated with suicidal behaviour. Furthermore, psychoanalytic theory could provide insight into Curtis's "subconscious" lyrics. The researcher is therefore of the opinion that the use of a language program and psychoanalytic theory could pave the way for future research.

## **9.7. 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 in order to explore the personal development of Ian Kevin Curtis 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 personal development of Ian Kevin Curtis in accordance with Joiner's (2005) interpersonal-psychological theory of suicide and Adler's (1929) theory of Individual Psychology. In doing so an explanation was put forth as to why Curtis died by suicide that may bring about an understanding of suicide in order to prevent it.

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