

# **A PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF ANTWONE FISHER**

A thesis submitted in the fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Psychology  
of  
Rhodes University

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December 2013

## **ABSTRACT**

Psychobiographical researchers methodically formulate life histories and interpret them by means of psychological theories. The research typically focuses on exemplary and completed lives. The cases that are studied are usually of individuals who are of particular interest to society as a result of excelling in their particular fields, be they to society's benefit or detriment. Antwone Fisher was chosen for this study using purposive sampling as he meets the psychobiographical requirement of being an extraordinary individual. Fisher grew up in the Foster Care System and faced many abusive experiences as child. Despite difficult beginnings, Fisher developed into a stable and creative adult who excels as a poet, screenwriter and film director. The primary aim of this study is to describe and interpret the life of Antwone Fisher through Erikson's theory of psychosocial development. The data was processed and analysed using Miles and Hubermans' general view of qualitative analyses as well as Alexander's method of asking the data questions. This study contributes to the development of psychobiographical research in South Africa as well as to personality and developmental theory.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the following for their support throughout this process:

Firstly, thank you to my supervisor Professor Roelf van Niekerk for his patience, guidance, humour and encouragement.

My fellow student psychobiographers for sharing ideas.

Haggis, Kipper and Hawk for always being there.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>PAGE</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>AKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Chapter preview .....	1
1.2 Subject.....	1
1.3 Aim of the study.....	3
1.4 Context of the study.....	3
1.4.1 The psychobiographical approach .....	3
1.4.2 Theoretical framework.....	4
1.5 Overview of chapters.....	4
1.6 Chapter summary.....	5
<b>CHAPTER 2: THE PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH.....</b>	<b>6</b>
2.1 Chapter preview.....	6
2.2 Overview of psychobiography.....	6
2.3 Related concepts.....	7
2.3.1 Psychohistory.....	7
2.3.2 Life histories and life narratives .....	8
2.3.3 Autobiography .....	9
2.3.4 Biography.....	9
2.3.5 Single-case experiment.....	10
2.3.6 Historiometry.....	10
2.4 Brief history of psychobiography.....	10
2.5 History of psychobiography in South Africa.....	12
2.6 Psychobiography as a research method.....	14
2.6.1 Qualitative research .....	14
2.6.2 Interpretive paradigm.....	15
2.6.3 Case study.....	15
2.6.4 The idiographic versus nomothetic approach to research.....	16

2.7 Limitations and strengths of the approach.....	18
2.7.1 Limitations of the approach.....	18
2.7.2 Theoretical reasons for using the psychobiographical method for research.....	20
2.7.3 Applied uses of psychobiographical research.....	21
2.8 Chapter summary.....	22
<b>CHAPTER 3: PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT.....</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1 Chapter preview.....	24
3.2 Overview of Erikson’s theoretical framework.....	24
3.3 Erikson’s stages of psychosocial development.....	26
3.3.1 Stage 1: Trust versus mistrust (0-1,5 years).....	26
3.3.2 Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt (1,5-3 years).....	27
3.3.3 Stage 3: Initiative versus guilt (4-5 years).....	28
3.3.4 Stage 4: Industry versus inferiority (6-11/12 years) .....	29
3.3.5 Stage 5: Identity versus role confusion (12-19 years) .....	30
3.3.6 Stage 6: Intimacy versus isolation (20-35 years).....	31
3.3.7 Stage 7: Generativity versus stagnation (36-60 years) .....	31
3.3.8 Stage 8: Integrity versus despair (60+ years).....	32
3.4 Critique of psychosocial theory.....	33
3.5 Erikson in current research.....	35
3.6 Chapter summary.....	36
<b>CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>37</b>
4.1 Chapter preview.....	37
4.2 Research objectives.....	37
4.3 Research design.....	37
4.4 Participant and sampling method.....	38
4.5 Theoretical conceptualisation.....	38
4.6 Data collection.....	39
4.7 Data processing and analyses.....	41
4.7.1 Data reduction.....	42
4.7.2 Data display.....	42
4.7.3 Conclusion drawing and verification.....	44
4.8 Validity considerations.....	44

4.8.1 Credibility.....	44
4.8.2 Construct validity.....	45
4.8.3 Transferability.....	45
4.8.4 Dependability.....	46
4.9 Research procedure.....	46
4.10 Ethical considerations.....	47
4.11 Chapter summary.....	47
<b>CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION.....</b>	<b>49</b>
5.1 Chapter preview.....	49
5.2 Stage 0: Prelude to birth.....	49
5.3 Stage 1: Trust versus mistrust (0-1,5 years).....	51
5.3.1 Findings.....	51
5.3.2 Discussion.....	51
5.4 Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt (1,5-3 years).....	53
5.4.1 Findings.....	53
5.4.2 Discussion.....	55
5.5 Stage 3: Initiative versus guilt (4-5 years).....	57
5.5.1 Findings.....	57
5.5.2 Discussion.....	60
5.6 Stage 4: Industry versus inferiority (6-11/12 years).....	64
5.6.1 Findings.....	64
5.6.2 Discussion.....	73
5.7 Stage 5: Identity versus role confusion (12-19 years).....	80
5.7.1 Findings.....	80
5.7.2 Discussion.....	90
5.8 Stage 6: Intimacy versus isolation (20-35 years).....	97
5.8.1 Findings.....	97
5.8.2 Discussion.....	103
5.9 Stage 7: Generativity versus stagnation (36-60 years).....	108
5.9.1 Findings.....	108
5.9.2 Discussion.....	110
5.10 Life summary.....	112
5.11 Chapter summary.....	116

<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>117</b>
6.1 Chapter preview.....	117
6.2 Overview of the study.....	117
6.3. Extent to which the research objectives were met.....	117
6.4 Value of the study.....	118
6.4.1 The psychobiographical approach .....	118
6.4.2 Psychosocial theory of development.....	119
6.4.3 Creativity and healthy personality development .....	120
6.4.4 Data.....	120
6.5 Limitations of the study.....	121
6.5.1 Psychosocial theory.....	121
6.5.2 Data.....	121
6.5.3 The researcher.....	121
6.6 Future research.....	121
6.7 Concluding remarks.....	122

<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>124</b>
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**TABLES**

<b>Table 3.1: Erikson’s eight stages of psychosocial development.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Table 4.1: Fisher life data sources.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Table 4.2: Data processing and analyses sequence.....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>Table 4.3: Data collection and analyses matrix.....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Table 4.4: Research procedure.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Table 5.1: Stage 1 timeline .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Table 5.2: Stage 2 timeline.....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Table 5.3: Stage 3 timeline.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Table 5.4: Stage 4 timeline.....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Table 5.5: Stage 5 timeline.....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Table 5.6: Stage 6 timeline.....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>Table 5.7: Stage 7 timeline.....</b>	<b>112</b>

**APPENDICES**

<b>Appendix A: South African master’s and doctoral level psychobiographies.....</b>	<b>140</b>
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**Appendix B: Consent for research.....142**  
**Appendix C: Fisher life summary timeline .....143**

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Chapter preview

This chapter provides a general orientation to this psychobiographical study including an introduction to the research subject, Antwone Fisher. The aim of the study is presented as well as a description of the context of this study which deals with the psychobiographical approach and theoretical framework. Lastly an overview of the chapters of the manuscript is presented.

### 1.2 Subject

Antwone Fisher was chosen as the subject of this research by means of purposive sampling (Durrheim & Painter, 2006). This was based on Fisher being an individual who meets the general characteristics of a subject for psychobiographical research, as he is extraordinarily creative (Howe, 1997, 1998; McAdams, 1988a). Fisher is a playwright, screenwriter, poet, director and film producer (Fisher & Rivas, n.d.). He has received numerous accolades for his work such as the *Humanitas Prize*, the *Screenwriter of the Year Award* from the National Association of Theater Owners, the *Outstanding Literary Work Instructional* from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as well as an honorary Doctorate from the Cleveland, Ohio State University (“Antwone Fisher biography,” 2013).

The choice of Fisher as research subject was also influenced by the researcher’s interest in Fisher’s inspirational life story, as well as a question posed by Fellman (1986) with regard to psychobiographical research. Fellman (1986) questioned the purpose of psychobiographies that are done on individuals merely because they are interesting. According to Fellman the discipline of psychology has greater relevance when focused on attempting to lessen distress and “solve real human problems” (1986, p. 193) and that this should be incorporated into psychobiographical research. Although Fellman posed this argument in 1986, it is still relevant to psychobiographical research today. The reason that follows as to the choice of Fisher as a research subject provides an answer to Fellman’s (1986) question with regard to this particular research. This reason for researching Fisher’s life relates to his development as a child exposed to abusive experiences. Fisher’s early life was

characterised by significant challenges. He was born in prison and as his father had been murdered during his mother's pregnancy, he became a ward of the state and was placed in foster care (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004). Fisher was initially placed in a caring environment but the social services agency decided that because his foster mother had become too attached to him he should be removed from her custody (Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Consequently, Fisher was placed in another foster home where he spent the next 12 years (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Fisher & Rivas, n.d.). During this period he was neglected as well as physically and sexually abused (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Fisher & Rivas, n.d.; Macfarlane, 2004). At the age of 14 years, Fisher was sent to a reformatory school (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Fisher & Rivas, n.d.).

Although his life had begun to change for the better at the reformatory school, Fisher again found himself homeless when he completed Grade 12 at the age of 17 (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Fisher & Rivas, n.d.). A key contribution to Fisher's survival until this point had been his love of drawing and creative writing which not only had consolatory factors but also provided him with an imaginary escape (Fisher, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). In an attempt to find an identity as well as a career, Fisher enlisted with the navy (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Fisher & Rivas, n.d.; Macfarlane, 2004). He began to respond to his fellow sailors with increasing aggression until he was sent for mandatory therapy (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Fisher & Rivas, n.d.; Macfarlane, 2004). During therapy Fisher began to heal and discovered that his passion for writing and art had the potential to aid in the healing process (Fisher, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Fisher & Rivas, n.d.; Macfarlane, 2004). Fisher currently lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two daughters, where he continues to work as a writer, director and motivational speaker (Fisher & Rivas, n.d.).

With regard to Fellman's (1986) suggestion, Fisher was chosen for the purposes of this research as he was abused and neglected as a child but developed into a creative and productive adult. Researching Fisher's life may provide further insight as to, (i) how his personality developed, and (ii) how he resolved developmental crises while being exposed to abuse.

### **1.3 Aim of the study**

The primary aim of this study is to describe and interpret the life of Fisher through the use of Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). The study also aims to assess the suitability and usefulness of Erikson's theory (1950/1973) with regard to the interpretation of Fisher's personality development. While it is not an objective of this study to generalise the results to the larger population, it is intended through analytical generalisation to contribute to the refinement of personality and developmental theories (Denzin, 1990; McAdams, 2009; Miller 2010; Roberts, 2002; Yin, 1994) as well as the academic field of psychobiography (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

### **1.4 Context of the study**

#### **1.4.1 The psychobiographical approach**

The purpose of psychobiographical research is to systematically formulate life histories and interpret them by means of psychological theories (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; McAdams, 1988a). The research typically focuses on exemplary and completed lives (Carlson, 1988) and aims "to discern, discover or formulate the central story of the entire life, a story structured according to psychological theory" (McAdams, 1994, p. 12). The cases that are studied are usually of individuals who are of particular interest to society as a result of excelling in their particular fields, be they to societies benefit or detriment (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; McAdams, 1988a).

During the last century psychobiography has established itself as a particular research genre and research methodology. In most instances it is qualitative, done through an interpretive paradigm, and takes the form of a single case study (Schultz, 2005a). With regard to knowledge generation at the level of the individual, the psychobiographical case study method is suited to research as it is idiographic and more specifically morphogenic in nature (Allport, 1962; Runyan, 1982). This approach takes a holistic view to researching the relationship between the components making up the individual as well as how the components or characteristics are structured (Allport, 1962; Lee & Tracey, 2005; Luthans & Davis, 1982). The methodology of psychobiographical research as well as its focus on illuminating the individual life has caused much debate. This will be addressed in detail in the following chapter.

### **1.4.2 Theoretical framework**

This study employs Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010) to offer a description and interpretation of Fisher's personality development. Erikson's theory is suitable for this study as it offers sufficient structure for the morphogenic nature of psychobiography (Runyan, 1982).

According to Erikson (Erikson, 1963, 1964; Miller, 2010) both genetic variables and the social environment influence the development of personality. Erikson viewed development throughout the entire lifespan, in which individuals face eight critical developmental crises that need to be resolved, as being important (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010). The outcome of each developmental crisis has the possibility for positive or negative effects on development (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010). If a stage is successfully completed an ego strength develops (Erikson, 1950/1973; Monte, 1999). However, if the crisis of a certain stage is not resolved, complications are experienced during later stages (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). Erikson was of the view that earlier developmental crises may still be resolved at any later stage (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010). Erikson's (1950/1973) eight stages of psychosocial development (that will be explained in more detail in chapter 3) will be used to describe and interpret Fisher's development and the possible positive or negative effects on his personality and identity, which occurred at each psychosocial stage.

### **1.5 Overview of chapters**

This study consists of six chapters, the first being this introductory chapter. Chapters 2 and 3 are literature review chapters. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical overview of psychobiographical research as well as a critical discussion regarding the importance of studying individual lives. Chapter 3 focuses on Erikson's psychosocial theory of personality development as well as the use of his theory in recent research. The research design and methodology are dealt with in chapter 4. Previously many psychobiographies have included a *preliminary methodological considerations* section or chapter. While methodological considerations are necessary this form of chapter has at times come across as yet another defense of psychobiography. Therefore for this study the methodological considerations have been integrated into

the research design and methodology chapter. The findings of this study as well as analyses thereof are presented in chapter 5. Lastly chapter 6 concludes this study by discussing the value and limitations of this research as well as providing future recommendations.

### **1.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter has provided an overview of this study by introducing the reader to the research subject, Antwone Fisher, outlining the aims of this study as well as providing a brief preface to the psychobiographical method and the theoretical framework. Lastly an overview of the chapters that are to follow was presented.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **THE PSYCHOBIOGRAPHICAL APPROACH**

#### **2.1. Chapter preview**

This chapter introduces the reader to psychobiography. An initial orientation to the field will be provided with an overview of psychobiography as well as a description of related concepts. This is followed by a brief general history and a more particular local history. The latter part of this chapter deals with psychobiography as a research method, its limitations as well as theoretical and applied reasons for using the method.

#### **2.2. Overview of psychobiography**

Psychology focuses on discovery in three overarching domains (Kluckhohn & Murray, 1953; Runyan, 1982, 2006; Van Os, 2007). Runyan (1982) suggests a three tier approach that enables both nomothetic and idiographic knowledge generation, as people are studied at (i) the level of the general human population, (ii) the level of groups, and (iii) at the level of the individual (Runyan, 1982, 2006; Van Os, 2007). While these three levels or domains are not viewed as completely independent of one another, each level of human existence and functioning is significant in its own right and requires further focus and research (Runyan, 1982). With regard to knowledge generation at the level of the individual, the psychobiographical case study method is suited to facilitate research as it is idiographic and more specifically morphogenic in nature (Allport, 1962; Runyan, 1982).

Psychobiographical researchers methodically formulate life histories and interpret them by means of psychological theories (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; McAdams, 1988a). The research typically focuses on exemplary and completed lives (Carlson, 1988) and aims “to discern, discover or formulate the central story of the entire life, a story structured according to psychological theory” (McAdams, 1994, p. 12). The cases that are studied are usually of individuals who are of particular interest to society as a result of excelling in their particular fields, be they to societies benefit or detriment (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; McAdams, 1988a).

Psychobiography is still developing and establishing itself as a reputable field within psychology (Clark, 2007; Fancher, 2006). As with other case study methods,

psychobiography's validity and worth has often been questioned (Clark, 2007; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Howe, 1997). Despite its limitations, psychobiographical research contributes to the confirming or refuting of psychological models, especially with regard to the further development of personality and developmental psychology (Denzin, 1990; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; McAdams, 1988a, 2009; Schultz, 2005a). Barresi and Jukes (1997) maintain that psychobiography is one of the areas of psychology best equipped in its method to deal with the storied nature of lives and meaning making that takes place across entire life spans. As a result, its growth has been viewed as necessary but nevertheless as a revolt against the recognised forms of doing research and theory generation (Barresi & Jukes, 1997; Clark, 2007).

Psychobiographical research focuses on complete life histories, including historical, societal and political influences (Clark, 2007; McAdams, 1988a; Runyan, 2006). This allows for detailed investigation of longer-term developmental processes (Barresi & Jukes, 1997; Kóváry, 2011). Psychobiographies usually draw attention to the conditions or contexts that encourage positive development of those who excel (Denzin, 1990; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b), but they too can provide more knowledge into the possible effects on development as a result of experiencing abusive situations or living conditions (as in the case of Fisher). Once a large number of cases of similarly extraordinary individuals have been studied, comparative studies can be conducted that may reveal important similarities and differences (Elms, 2007; Howe, 1997; Isaacson, 2005; Kóváry, 2011).

## **2.3. Related concepts**

### **2.3.1 Psychohistory**

While psychohistory is an important relation of psychobiography it is a term that often causes confusion with regard to its focus and difference (Kóváry, 2011; Runyan, 1982). Prior to the establishment of psychobiography there was concern surrounding the nature and scope of psychohistory as a result of the tension between history and psychology as disciplines (Kren & Rappoport, 1976; Runyan, 1982, 1988a). The potential for mutual benefit was not recognised and some academics wished to keep the disciplines separate (Runyan, 1982).

More recently there has still been discrepancy about the relation between psychohistory and psychobiography (Kóváry, 2011). Botand (1991) views psychobiography as a sub discipline of psychohistory which incorporates the application of psychology to any past people or events. These applications of psychology to history include the lives of famous people as well as motivations behind historical group events or the differences in family and social structures at different times in history (Botand, 1991). Mazlish (1976), as well as Runyan (1982), Shiner (2005) and Kóváry (2011) make a distinction between psychobiography and psychohistory in that psychobiography is the application of psychology to biography or more specifically the lives of eminent individuals, while psychohistory is the application of psychology to historical events or group behaviour.

### **2.3.2. Life histories and life narratives**

With a call to refocus personality psychology on more idiographic methods during the 1970's and the growth of the narrative approach to psychology in the 1980's, the value of studying individual lives was reignited (Bruner, 1986; Carlson, 1971; Kóváry, 2011; Laszlo, 2008). With the increased interest in the narrative approach, psychobiography's worth as a means to study individual lives also increased (Barenbaum & Winter, 2003; Kóváry, 2011; Runyan, 2005). According to Runyan (1982) it is important to distinguish between life histories as (i) a method of collecting data from respondents in the form of their life stories as they narrate them or (ii) as the subject itself, to be interpreted through a selection of numerous methods.

The life history method has faced many criticisms such as lack of accurate information, the reconstruction of assumed life events as well as too narrow a focus with regard to topics (Runyan, 1982). These criticisms have incited disapproval toward anything regarded as a 'life history' (Runyan, 1982). For this reason it is imperative to distinguish and establish life histories or life narratives as the subjects of studies that refer to the "sequence of events and experiences in a life from birth until death" (Runyan, 1982, p. 6) as opposed to merely being a method of data collection.

Other researchers and theorists agree with Runyan (1982) that life histories or narratives should be viewed as the subject matter of the research but differ in that they either view or include as life narratives the person's autobiographical account or own

story structured with a beginning and ending, order, significant experiences, themes and meaning (Barresi & Juckes, 1997; Denzin, 1990; Fancher, 2006; McAdams, 1988a). Mazlish (1976) as well as Simonton (2003) extend the definition of life history to include how the society and culture of the individual in a particular historical period influences the individual's development and life narrative or story, as well as how the individual may have impacted on the culture and society of the time.

### **2.3.3. Autobiography**

An autobiography is a form of life story or life narrative told from the first person perspective (Barresi & Juckes, 1997; McAdams 1988a; Runyan 1982). Autobiographies may be viewed as a sub discipline of the case study method when they are done as assisted autobiographies (Runyan, 1982, 1983). According to Gough and Madill (2012) qualitative research is strengthened when it takes the subject of the studies own subjective views and experiences into account. Howe (1997) furthers this argument by suggesting that the insider perspective that the subject may provide is crucial to understanding the impact of particular events or situations on the individual's life. Autobiographies or personal narratives not only provide further insight into individuals' lives, which may enrich psychobiographical study and understanding (Barresi & Juckes, 1997), but in some cases present reasons or more sound 'evidence' for the thoughts or emotions surrounding creative outputs than the mere conjecture that occasionally occurs (Lake, 1983).

### **2.3.4. Biography**

Biographies, like autobiographies, are a form of life narrative or life history (McAdams, 1988a; Runyan, 1982). A biography is study of an individual life, written by someone other than the subject of the study (McAdams, 1988a; Runyan, 1982). Biographers approach the life of the individual from both historical and literary perspectives (Howe, 1997) and draw from public, private as well as archival data (Lake 1982; Simonton, 1999). Psychobiographies draw from biographies as a source of indirect or unobtrusive data in order to apply a psychological theory to illuminate the individual's life (Clark, 2007; Howe, 1997; Simonton, 1999).

### **2.3.5. Single-case experiment**

The single-case experiment (n=1) is a quantitative approach to measure the effect of certain events or variables on the behaviour of the individual (McAdams & West, 1997; Runyan, 1983). While both qualitative and quantitative single case designs focus on intensive analysis of the individual, the single-case experimental design employs the manipulation of an independent variable to quantify its causal relation to a dependant variable in a controlled environment (Luthans & Davis, 1982; McAdams & West, 1997; Runyan, 1983).

### **2.3.6. Histrimetry**

In contrast to psychobiography which applies qualitative psychological techniques to a life history, histrimetry is concerned with applying nomothetic techniques to quantify historical data (Runyan, 1988c; Simonton, 1990, 2003). Hypotheses are tested or generated by quantifying specific behaviours that have been abstracted from particular historical periods or events (Runyan, 1988c; Simonton, 1990, 2003).

## **2.4. Brief history of psychobiography**

The initial theorist whose thinking would influence the future development of psychobiography was William James, in the 1800's (Barresi & Juckes, 1997). An in depth explanation of James' views and theory is beyond the scope of this chapter but a brief summary of his concepts will be provided. James viewed the past and future as important to the present conscious self (Barresi & Juckes, 1997). People's concept of themselves as well as their thoughts surrounding their life history (personal narrative) may change as they develop. People are continually influenced by their past, as well as their possible future (Barresi & Juckes, 1997). James did not study lives in their entirety. However, his notion of identity and the view of the self, as well as unconscious self, which are framed within an entire life history, influenced future psychobiographers (Barresi & Juckes, 1997).

The roots of actual psychobiographical research can be traced to Freud's contentious analysis of the life of Leonardo da Vinci in 1910. However, Lytton Strachey can be viewed as the person who changed the course of biographies to include psychological examination (Barresi & Juckes, 1997; Carlson, 1988; Denzin 1990; McAdams, 1988a). The subjects of his biographies included revered people such as Cardinal

Manning and Florence Nightingale, but came under much scrutiny as either his intense admiration or aversion were apparent (McAdams, 1988a). While Strachey's research may have aided the development of psychobiography by causing furor and debate, he has been criticised for being overzealous in the pathologising of his subjects to the detriment of their characters (McAdams, 1988a).

During the 1930's Henry Murray, who was influenced by William James, also influenced the development of psychobiography as his research focused on entire lives as opposed to single events within the lifetime (Barresi & Juckes, 1997; McAdams, 1988a; Murray, 1938). Murray found meaning in the way a person connects events and stages and assimilates them into thoughts and actions. Murray's influence was strengthened with Gordon Allport's emphasis on using idiographic methods to understand the individual (Runyan, 1982, 1983). At the same time that Murray was doing whole life focused research in the United States, the use of biographical material to inform psychological theory and research was occurring in Europe (McAdams, 1988a). This could most notably be seen in Buhler and Frankel's work as they attempted to advance developmental psychology through studying biographies of various lives (McAdams, 1988a).

Erik Erikson also initially caused debate around the validity and nature of psychobiography as well as its place within the field of psychology (Barresi & Juckes, 1997). This was as a result of his study on Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958) where he did not have all the information on Luther's childhood and therefore hypothesised what had happened in order to explain later events (Barresi & Juckes, 1997). Erikson was nevertheless instrumental in turning psychobiography into a reputable method with which to study people's lives (McAdams, 1988a). His analysis was more sound and all-encompassing than his predecessors had been as he studied the development of the people within their family and society at a particular time in history (Clark, 2007; Erikson, 1968; McAdams, 1988a). Erikson's most well-known psychobiographies are the studies of Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958), as already mentioned, and Mahatma Gandhi (Erikson, 1969).

Following Erikson's contribution to psychobiographical research there was an increase in the number of psychobiographies being done, but this was followed by a

hiatus until the late 1970's, beginning of the 1980's (Clark, 2007; Barresi & Juckes, 1997). With more emphasis being placed on quantitative studies it became increasingly difficult to support doing single case study research (Barresi & Juckes, 1997). However, there were still personologists and developmental psychologists using biographical material for research purposes, but not all referred to themselves as psychobiographers (McAdams, 1988a). During the 1980's it once again became acceptable to study the whole person as opposed to looking at only certain life events or situations (McAdams, 1988a). During the 1980's and 1990's William McKinley Runyan, Dan McAdams and Alan Elms were highly influential in reigniting interest in psychobiography (Barresi & Juckes, 1997; Elms, 1994; Fancher, 2006; McAdams, 1985, 1988a, 1988b, 1994; Runyan, 1981, 1982, 1988a, 1988b, 1988c). During this time an increase in psychobiographies on psychologists occurred as a way to better understand the influence of their lives on their theories (Runyan, 2006).

Despite the increased interest in psychobiography there has still been debate surrounding its value and status within the field of psychology (Fancher, 2006; Howe, 1997; Schultz, 2005a). It has however developed into a particular genre and a method of doing research in its own right (Fancher, 2006; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). This is noted by Fancher's (2006, p. 287) statement that psychobiography no longer seems like "such a dirty word after all".

## **2.5. History of psychobiography in South Africa**

Psychobiographical research is well established in the North America, Europe and Australia, but it is still a growing discipline in South Africa (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Walter, 2007). The first study resembling a psychobiography undertaken in South Africa has been traced to Burgers' examination of Cornelis Jacobus Langenhoven in 1939 (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). In 1960, 21 years later, Burgers did his second psychological study on Louis Leipoldt (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Again nearly two decades passed before a third study on Ingrid Jonker was conducted by Van der Merwe (1978) as a doctoral thesis (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). The early maturation of psychobiographical research in South Africa was slow, but its growth has been steady since its resurgence in the 1990's (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). While the international history of psychobiography has provided a basis for psychobiographical research in South Africa, the driving force behind its

resurgence and development has been by academics at various universities within the country (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

Various psychology academics in the country have been particularly active in encouraging their students to embark on psychobiographical research (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Academic institutions, where this is particularly the case, are Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (former UPE), University of Johannesburg, the University of the Free State as well as Rhodes University (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). Thus far there have been several psychobiographies completed at South African Universities (see Appendix A.) The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University has by far produced the most psychobiographies at Masters and Doctoral level. Since 2006 Rhodes University has produced five Masters and Doctoral psychobiographies. There are currently several more underway.

Until recently most psychobiographical research in South Africa has been the outcome of post graduate research (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). This changed in 2005 when academics and their students presented their findings at congresses and conferences both locally and internationally (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). This has encouraged scientific debate and peer review which is needed for the growth of the field (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). For psychobiography to continue to grow and be salient in South Africa a more diverse set of subjects will need to be researched as most studies have focused on the lives of white males who are exceptional in their fields in a positive regard (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

In 1971 Carlson posed the question, “Where is the person in personality research?” (p. 218). In 2013 this is still not only pertinent to the value and development of psychobiography in general, but specifically to the South African context. An increased focus on South African individuals through psychobiographical research will allow for the testing and “refinement” (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010, p. 501) of psychological theories and models, which have been developed abroad, to the local context (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

## **2.6. Psychobiography as a research method**

With the development of psychobiography it has established itself as a particular research methodology. In most instances it is qualitative, done through an interpretive paradigm and takes the form of a single case study (Schultz, 2005a). The research terms associated with the psychobiographical method and genre will be described in more detail.

### **2.6.1. Qualitative research**

The qualitative approach may be described as an “umbrella term” (Van Maanen, 1979, p. 520) that covers a range of methods, particularly from an interpretive paradigm (Luthans & Davis, 1982; Mellenbergh et. al., 2003; Van Maanen, 1979). The qualitative approach to research is naturalistic, holistic as well as inductive as its focus is on real world situations or whole people as they occur in their natural contexts (Durrheim, 2006; Kelly 2006b; Neuman, 2003). Qualitative research uses observations, interviews, the study of texts, language and people in their entirety as opposed to discrete variables. Qualitative research also focuses on a thorough description of the data as well as the varying complexities of the individuals and their circumstances (Durrheim, 2006; Kelly 2006b). Unlike quantitative research that has delineated variables that are to be measured and standardised, qualitative data is allowed to unfold and be understood as the research process deepens (Ashworth, 2003; Durrheim, 2006; Parker 1999; Wassenaar, 2006; Willig, 2001).

In contrast to quantitative research which views the researcher as being objective and distanced from the reality and meaning of the data, the subjectivity of researcher and how this affects the interpretation of data is taken into account in the qualitative approach (Kelly, 2006b; Gough & Madill, 2012; Parker, 1999; Stroud, 2004; Taylor, 1999). Some researchers even view their subjectivity as integral to meaning making as long as they maintain awareness or researcher reflexivity (Gough & Madill, 2012; Grubs & Piantanida, 2010; Stroud, 2004; Taylor, 1999).

While qualitative research is increasingly accepted as a suitable approach within itself, it is still viewed as a useful addition to quantitative research as it provides a platform for the development of hypotheses which can then be tested or measured quantitatively (Terre Blanche, Kelly, Durrheim, 2006). As a rich description of

human experience is of value and desired in the qualitative approach, researchers often use an interpretive paradigm with a case study design (Charmaz, 2000; Grubs & Piantanida, 2010; Kelly, 2006b; Simonton, 1999; Willig, 2001).

### **2.6.2. Interpretive paradigm**

Researchers who conduct studies through an interpretive paradigm take an empathetic stance to understand the subject of the studies personal experiences (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006; Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). Interpretive research is not concerned with nomothetic principles, causality or standardisation but with the individual's experiences, which are viewed as the internal reality of the subject (Grubs & Piantanida, 2010; Kelly, 2006c; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). Research done through an interpretive paradigm attempts to understand the person in context and through interpretation provide a perspective to the subject's narrative (Terre Blanche, Kelly & Durrheim, 2006). As the interpretive paradigm uses qualitative methodologies for data collection, the researcher's role and subjectivity in interpretation are acknowledged (Grubs & Piantanida, 2010).

An interpretive approach is crucial to psychobiographical study as it allows for the discovery of patterns within the life of an individual which coincides with the morphogenic nature of this methodology (Allport, 1962; Johnson, 2013; McAdams & West, 1997). An interpretive approach is also important to understanding the individual and therefore to psychobiography as the researcher goes "beyond common sense" (Kóváry, 2011, p. 750) and provides more than a mere explanation of the subject's life. The interpretive approach may therefore be linked to the hermeneutic spiral where the researcher is continually immersed in the data and open to deepened understanding (Kóváry, 2011; Rehnsfeldt & Arman, 2012).

### **2.6.3. Case study**

Case study research is a move from the more general or standardised knowledge generation, as in quantitative research, to the more specific (Kelly, 2006a). Case studies are used to research particular elements of people, specific people, events, contexts, units, organisations or communities to name but a few examples (Kelly 2006b; Lindegger, 2006; Runyan, 1983). Case studies fall within the idiographic approach to research and are usually thoroughly examined and detailed in their

descriptions or explanations (Lee & Tracey, 2005; Lindegger, 2006; McAdams & West, 1997). They may provide in-depth cross-sectional or longitudinal information about a particular individual or situation (Lindegger, 2006; Schultz, 2005a). The intention of case studies is to provide a greater understanding of the particular phenomenon being researched (Lindegger, 2006; McAdams & West, 1997; Schultz, 2005a). The psychobiographical case study is a specific type of case study that uses indirect methods (that do not involve interaction with the subject) of data collection, such as biographies and autobiographies and is usually longitudinal in form (Simonton, 1999). It goes beyond merely being a descriptive case study by explicitly delving into previously unexplored questions and focusing on explaining and interpreting the life of an eminent individual (Bushman, 1976; Runyan, 1982; Simonton, 1999, 2003).

#### **2.6.4. The idiographic versus nomothetic approach to research**

The unease between supporters of the idiographic and nomothetic approaches to research has been long standing (Kóváry, 2011; West & Ryu, 2010). The nomothetic approach to research has dominated in psychology as a result of the discipline's attempt to be viewed as a reputable science (Kóváry, 2011; Luthans & Davis, 1982). The nomothetic approach uses quantitative methodologies with the aim of producing standardised or normative results and universal laws (Allport, 1937, 1962; Kóváry, 2011; Luthans & Davis, 1982; Runyan, 1983). In contrast with the more subjective idiographic approach, the nomothetic approach is viewed as being objective (Luthans & Davis, 1982). The points that follow pertaining to the nomothetic approach may be valued by its supporters, but are a cause of contention to those in favour of the idiographic approach. The nomothetic approach assumes that people are more similar than different and that their environments remain stable over time (Luthans & Davis, 1982; Marceil, 1977). While the nomothetic approach derives its laws from statistical measurements across groups, its results are nevertheless viewed as being 'true' for each individual making up the group (Lamiell, 2013; Luthans & Davis, 1982).

The idiographic approach to psychology was introduced by Allport in the 1930's in response to the focus of psychology being removed from the individual and the distinctive components that make up each person (Allport, 1937, 1962; Kóváry, 2011; Runyan, 1982, 1983). Therefore at the core of the idiographic approach is the person's

individuality (Allport, 1962; Luthans & Davis, 1982; Runyan, 1983). The idiographic approach most often makes use of qualitative methodologies to provide in-depth information about how the individual interacts with others as well as the environment (Lee & Tracey, 2005; Luthans & Davis, 1982). Individual motivation, as well as perceptions are valued (Ashworth & Greasley, 2009; Runyan, 1982, 1983). The idiographic approach takes a holistic view to researching the relationship between the components making up the individual as well as how the components or characteristics are structured (Allport, 1962; Lee & Tracey, 2005; Luthans & Davis, 1982). The pattern and structure of a particular individual refer to what Allport (1962) called morphogenesis. The morphogenic approach to psychology, derived from the biological term, is not concerned with what is common to all people but with the elements that make-up the individual as well as how the particular elements are developed and formed (Allport, 1962; Runyan, 1982, 1983).

The idiographic versus nomothetic debate, that disputes the value of studying the individual life, is integral to psychobiographical research. This is because, as Carlson (1988) states, the point of psychobiography is to “seek coherent *patterns* (as contrasted with dimensionalised variables) and examine the “fit” of life-history data to conceptual categories” (pp. 108-109). The main objections to studying the individual life are that findings are not normative nor scientific (Luthans & Davis, 1982; Runyan, 1983). As stated in the first paragraph of section 2.2, Runyan (1982, 1983, 2006) postulates that one of the three dimensions of psychological discovery is at the level of the individual and that such research is as important as studying the population at large or how the individual measures in relation to the group. Gough and Madill (2012) also argue that people are often more complex than the suggested variables or attributes in experimental techniques. In support of this view is Allport (1962, p. 405) who thought that to “generalize about personality is to lose it”. Results therefore need not be normative in order to be of any value.

While some of the above mentioned points in support of the idiographic approach may seem obvious, there is nevertheless much contention to studying the individual life. The approach has been referred to as an “antiscience” (Nunnally, 1978, p. 548), while the researcher or clinician that dares to study life histories has in the past been referred to as a “deviant psychologist” (Allport, 1962, p. 406). Runyan (1983) argues

against the non-scientific stance of studying the individual with two pertinent points. Firstly, experimental and quantitative methods, which are considered scientific, are also used in single case designs, as was discussed in section 2.3.5 (Runyan, 1983). Secondly, science is not only concerned with universal laws or normative standards as can be viewed by other scientific fields such as geology, biology and physics which are concerned with not only the particular but also with structure and pattern within the particular (Runyan, 1983).

Both cross-sectional and longitudinal research indicate that people change as they develop over the life course (Cervone, 2005; Foster, Campbell, & Twenge, 2003; Helson, Jones, & Kwan, 2002; Uher, 2013). These findings suggest the importance of research, such as psychobiography, that focuses on the entire life span of a coherent and complex individual as opposed to a snap shot view or a normative result that may provide very little, if any information about the individual. A more humorous take on the idiographic versus nomothetic debate may be viewed in the words of Elms who said; “Experiments and correlational studies, and statistical analyses of the data they generate, may identify significant variables in the lives of people-in-general. But I haven’t encountered a psychologist yet who could put together a live person from those statistical body parts and honestly cry out, ‘IT’S ALIVE!’” (1994, p. 13).

## **2.7. Limitations and strengths of the approach**

### **2.7.1. Limitations of the approach**

At the outset of this section it is important to note that the limitations that will be dealt with in the following section are not necessarily all problems with the psychobiographical method but with how some psychobiographers apply it.

The most pervasive criticism of psychobiography, as already mentioned, is that the findings are not normative and therefore cannot be generalised to the population at large (Clark, 2007; Howe, 1997). A response to this criticism was dealt with in section 2.6.4 and therefore it will not be discussed in this section.

Clark (2007) notes that although psychobiography’s beginnings showed potential there has not been enough sustained research and focus in the area. This has not only limited its development with regard to quantity of knowledge in the field but even

work of substance has not been able to generate enough critique and debate needed for growth. Lake (1983) criticises psychobiographical researchers that draw conclusions through conjecture when there is not enough data. Runyan (1981, 1982), Van Os (2007) and McAdams (1988a, 2009) support psychobiography as a research method, but they too caution that psychobiographers need to be critical and thorough during their research.

Some psychobiographers have also been accused of focusing on single life events or characteristics of the individual instead of analysing the whole life (McAdams, 1988a). In certain cases this has led to the over-pathologising of the person (Falk, 1985; McAdams, 1988a). The converse of this is also problematic such as when the researcher over identifies with the individual under examination or idealises the person and produces a distorted view of the life being interpreted (Falk, 1985; McAdams, 1988a; Van Os, 2007).

Aside from there not always being an adequate amount of data to make a thorough assessment, the information that is available may not be reliable (Clark, 2007; McAdams, 1988a; Runyan, 1981; Van Os, 2007). While most psychobiographical subjects are deceased, those that are still alive sometimes provide interview material (Clark, 2007; Howe, 1997). As with all research interviews the information gathered may be unintentionally falsified through the people's memories or people may purposefully present themselves in a particular light (Clark, 2007; Howe, 1997; McAdams, 1988a; Runyan, 1981). Therefore it is imperative to have other sources of information and to verify data (Clark, 2007; Van Os, 2007).

A foremost criticism that has come against psychobiographical research is that researchers too often attempt to make individuals fit into specific theories and will even distort the person's life or be selective of the data they use in order to support their claims (Clark, 2007; Howe, 1997; Lake, 1983; Runyan, 1981). Howe (1997) and Carlson (1988) also note that in order for an understanding of unique individuals and their development to be understood new theories need to be generated as older theories focused more on the development of the "average person" (Howe, 1997, p. 237).

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Fellman (1986) questions the purpose of psychobiographies that are done on individuals merely because they are interesting. According to Fellman the discipline of psychology has greater relevance when focused on attempting to lessen distress and “solve real human problems” (1986, p. 193) and that this should be incorporated into psychobiographical research. A general response to Fellman’s (1986) question or criticism will be provided in the following section.

### **2.7.2. Theoretical reasons for using the psychobiographical method for research**

Benefits of using the psychobiographical method have been mentioned throughout this chapter. The initial part of this section will provide a brief summary of benefits already mentioned. The latter part will deal with reasons for using the approach that have not been discussed in detail.

As discussed in section 2.6.4 the focus on the individual life is a value of the psychobiographical approach. This is facilitated by the psychobiographical approach employing the case study method. The case study method is important to psychobiography as it allows for specific individuals who have excelled in their particular fields to be researched (Clark, 2007; Howe, 1997; McAdams, 1988a). It also enables psychological theories to be tested and developed (Carlson, 1988; Clark, 2007; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010). By focusing on particular people, the entire life of the individual, including historical, societal and political influences, can be studied as opposed to only certain aspects or events (Clark, 2007; McAdams, 1988a; Runyan, 2006; Simonton, 2003). With a greater focus on individuals’ whole lives than on them merely being a statistic or diagnosis, more can be learnt about how people develop in different ways (Barresi & Jukes, 1997). According to Simonton (2003), psychobiographers’ inclusion of the socio-historical and cultural aspects of the individual’s life in the interpretation, enables the results to have “real world” (p. 629) applicability.

The unique talents of people such as Mozart or Goethe are often viewed as a mystery or a miracle, but when applying developmental theories such as is done in psychobiographical research, plausible reasons are discovered (Diel, 2010; Howe, 1997). While some qualities may be innate to the person, many characteristics that are

attributed to a person's exceptional intelligence, creativity, athletic ability, health or happiness may have been advertently or inadvertently developed (Diel, 2010; Howe, 1997). Repetition of events such as practicing a task, a safe and stimulating environment or of trauma, have been shown in more cases to be the cause of outstanding achievement or extreme dysfunction in adults than singular events in childhood (Howe, 1997). This once again emphasises the importance of taking the individual's entire life, including the mundane and repetitive, into account in order to study circumstances that produce optimum health, happiness and creative or intellectual output as well as the converse (Diel, 2010; Howe, 1997; McAdams, 1988a).

Associated with conditions that increase optimum functioning is the call to develop a positive psychology (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Simonton, 1999) as well as a research basis to understand human potential (Simpson, 2009). The development of positive psychology as well as understanding optimal potential may be facilitated by psychobiographical research. This type of research may provide a potential answer to Fellman's (1986) question as to the value of psychobiography, posed in the previous section. According to Simonton (1999, 2003) a focus on eminent individuals, as is done in psychobiographical studies, may provide the significant samples needed to research the qualities as well as situations conducive to the development of healthy, high functioning personalities.

While psychobiography also has practical benefits, which will be dealt with in section 2.7.3, it provides an answer to Carlson's (1971) question that was posed earlier in this chapter as to the location of the "person in personality research?" (p. 218). Runyan (2006) and Clark (2007) affirm the importance of this question as psychology has become so focused on "micro phenomena" (Clark, 2007, p. 557) and lost sight of the actual subject of the research, namely, the human being. Both Clark (2007) and Schultz (2005a) suggest that psychobiographical research is the answer to the lost focus on the person and the individual's entirety.

### **2.7.3. Applied uses of psychobiographical research**

As previously mentioned, psychobiographical research benefits the field of psychology through its relevance to personality and developmental theory as well as

its focus on the individual life. Reasons for using the psychobiographical method that are more theoretical in nature were discussed in section 2.6.2. The following section deals with reasons for doing psychobiography that have applied or practical value.

Doing psychobiographical research at postgraduate level not only eases the research process for both student and supervisor (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010) but skills that may be learnt through doing psychobiographical research have relevance to further research as well as clinical practice and treatment applications (Kóváry, 2011; Singer, 2013). With regard to student research and supervision, the process is less complicated in terms of accessibility to information, alleviating issues with regard to willing volunteers as well as there being fewer ethical issues with regard to informed consent when subjects are chosen from the public domain (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010).

According to Simpson (2009), psychobiographical research may be more suited to postgraduate studies, but nevertheless is a useful and interesting tool for undergraduates to learn about conducting research and to begin to produce knowledge. It is also useful for interdisciplinary studies, which may make learning about research more appealing to undergraduates (Simpson, 2009).

Furthermore, psychobiographical research provides a space for students (i) to learn empathetic psychological interpretation (Kóváry, 2011; McAdams & West, 1997), (ii) to reflect on one's own subjectivity during the interpretation process as well as in terms of choice of preferential theories (Arnold & Atwood, 2005; Clark, 2007; Kóváry, 2011) and (iii) to learn to question initial judgments, that may require further investigation, about events which may have seemed incomprehensible (Runyan, 1981). These skills along with learning to take the person's entirety into account are valuable to future researchers as well as clinical and counselling psychologists (Kóváry, 2011; Singer, 2013).

## **2.8. Chapter summary**

This chapter has laid the foundations for understanding the psychobiographical research method that is used for this research. The history of psychobiography, the

idiographic and morphogenic approach it takes to research, as well as the importance of studying the individual life have been explained in order so that the reader may understand this choice of research method. Lastly limitations to the psychobiographical approach as well as theoretical and practical benefits were discussed.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT**

#### **3.1. Chapter preview**

This chapter provides an overview of personality and developmental theory as well as Erikson's (1950/1971) theory of psychosocial development which will be used to interpret Fisher's life. This will include a description of each psychosocial stage. Lastly a critique of Erikson's (1950/1971) theory as well as the use of Erikson's (1950/1971) psychosocial theory in current research will be discussed.

#### **3.2 Overview of Erikson's theoretical framework**

This study employs Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010) to offer a description and interpretation of Fisher's development. It is important at the outset of this chapter to mention that Erikson's psychosocial theory provides one possible framework for the interpretation of a life, as there is no single personality or developmental theory that can encompass the entirety of a life or all possible perspectives (Fancher, 2006). Psychosocial theory is however the choice of framework for this research and as such reasons for this choice will be provided.

Erikson's work grew out of the psychoanalytic tradition (Monte, 1999). He was influenced by Sigmund as well as Anna Freud, who trained him (Sollod, Wilson & Monte, 2009). While Erikson was influenced by his predecessors in psychoanalysis, his psychosocial theory developed a new way of thinking about the person within the world that had not been previously recognised or researched (Erikson, 1963; Sollod et. al, 2009). Erikson acknowledged the person's perception and development of the self within family and society (Erikson, 1963; Sollod et. al, 2009). This is of value as it allows for a more holistic view of possible factors influencing development to be considered.

Erikson's theory views personality from a lifespan developmental perspective. According to Runyan (1982) the development of personality is an ongoing process. Experiences and environments which the person is exposed to, influence the developing personality which in turn influences which experiences and environments

the person will seek out (Runyan, 1982). Therefore there is an “interactive cycle” (Runyan, 1982, p. 212) between the person, family and society and personality. McAdams (2006) defines personality as the “*patterning of dispositional traits, characteristic adaptations, and integrative life stories set in culture and shaped by human nature*” (p. xvii). The developmental perspective is concerned with age related behavioural and psychological changes that take place across the lifespan (Runyan, 1988d; Santrock, 2001). For the above-mentioned reasons Runyan (1982) suggests that personality psychology - from a developmental perspective is - particularly relevant to psychobiographical research.

Erikson’s place in the history and development of psychobiography has been discussed in chapter 2, but it is worthwhile to mention that Erikson, as one of forefathers of psychobiography, still influences the development of psychobiography as well as personality psychology (Denzin, 1989; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While Levinson has been the favoured theorist in South African psychobiographical studies (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010), Erikson’s (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development has also been used and shown to be relevant in many varying contexts (Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

According to Elms (2005) psychobiographical studies seldom include an explanation as to why the researcher chose a particular theoretical framework even though such discussions may aid researchers with future theoretical selections. For this research Erikson’s theory will be used as (i) it offers sufficient structure for the morphogenic nature of psychobiography (Runyan, 1982), (ii) it provides a theoretical basis for the entire lifespan, as well as (iii) it is relevant to current research (Irvine, 2013; Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013; Trzebinski & Zieba, 2013).

According to Erikson (Erikson, 1963, 1964; Miller, 2010) both genetic variables and the social environment influence the development of personality. Erikson viewed development throughout the entire lifespan, in which individuals face eight critical developmental crises that need to be resolved, as being important (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010). These stages are summarised in Table 3.1. The outcome of each developmental crisis has the possibility for positive or negative effects on development (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010). If a stage is successfully completed

an ego strength develops (Erikson, 1950/1973; Monte, 1999). However, if the crisis of a certain stage is not resolved, complications are experienced during later stages (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010).

Erikson was of the view that earlier developmental crises may still be resolved at any later stage (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010). It is important to note that no stage may ever be resolved completely and that the major crises of a particular stage are also present in some way in all other stages (Van Manen & Whitboure, 1997). Erikson's (1950/1973) eight stages of psychosocial development, that will be elaborated on in the following sub-sections, will be used to describe and interpret Fisher's development and the possible positive or negative effects on his personality and identity, which occurred at each psychosocial stage.

**Table 3.1: Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development (McAdams, 2001).**

Age	Psychosexual stage (Freud)	Psychosocial issue	Central Question	Associated virtue
Infancy	Oral	Trust vs. mistrust	How can I be secure?	Hope
Early childhood	Anal	Autonomy vs. shame and doubt	How can I be independent?	Will
Childhood (play age)	Oedipal	Initiative vs. guilt	How can I be powerful?	Purpose
Childhood (school age)	Latency	Industry vs. inferiority	How can I be good?	Competence
Adolescence and young adulthood	Genital	Identity vs. role confusion	Who am I? how do I fit into the adult world?	Fidelity
Young adulthood		Intimacy vs. isolation	How can I love?	Love
Mature adulthood		Generativity vs. stagnation	How can I fashion a "gift"?	Care
Old age		Ego integrity vs. despair	How can I receive a "gift"? (gift of life)	Wisdom

### 3.3 Erikson's stages of psychosocial development

#### 3.3.1 Stage 1: Trust versus mistrust (0-1,5 years)

The first stage occurs from birth until infants are between one and half to two years old (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). At this stage the mother or primary care-giver has the greatest effect on whether the infant will find the world to be secure and reliable (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). This being said, others in the infant's environment still affect the way the infant

perceives the world and assimilates its nuances (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). The purpose of this stage is not only for infants to learn to trust in the mother and the surrounding world but also in themselves (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). It is also essential that in certain situations, infants learn to distrust in order to develop self-protective tendencies (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010).

As this stage is very oral, infants learn to negotiate, understand and expect certain things from others through feeding, biting and making sounds (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Monte, 1999). If infants learn that the world is unpredictable and unsafe, an over-arching sense of mistrust will develop (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This mistrust may potentially be carried into the following stages causing adolescents or adults to be suspicious, aggravated, discouraged and to possibly develop some form of psychosis from not being able to assimilate the different parts of themselves into their egos (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The successful negotiation of this stage encourages infants and the growing person to hope in themselves, others and the world (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

### **3.3.2 Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt (1,5-3 years)**

This stage occurs when children are roughly between one and a half to three years old (Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). During this time children become physically stronger and more mobile (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Their new found mobility allows them to go for and test their desires within the boundaries that parents set as well as the boundaries of a particular society or culture (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). During this stage children also learn that they have the ability to hold on to what they want or to dispose of what they do not wish to possess (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This is not only demonstrated with children accepting food or spitting or throwing it down, holding onto to toys or giving or throwing them away but also with their ablutions (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Children learn that to a certain degree they can control the outcome of circumstances by controlling themselves or letting go of all restraint (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). How the parents respond is not only crucial to whether children feel shame and lose their

sense of autonomy and will and therefore doubt themselves and others, but the trust that was developed in the first stage can be broken (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

This stage is imperative to learning what is right and wrong and what one wishes to have versus what one is allowed (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Therefore if parents are overbearing, children might become obsessed with always doing what others see as correct and expected of them or they may become unlawful with no sense of self-control when wanting to fulfill their desires (Erikson, 1950/1973; Sollod et. al, 2009). Successful completion of this stage will form a child who has a strong sense of will but nevertheless acts within familial and lawful boundaries (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

### **3.3.3 Stage 3: Initiative versus guilt (4-5 years)**

This stage occurs when children are four to five years old (Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). During this stage children's mobility as well as cognitive abilities have developed and therefore their ability to speak and think (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Children may identify with or idealise a certain parent while also fearing this parent's power (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Children will now attempt to initiate activities and relationships and are aware that the response they receive means that what they have done is worthwhile and accepted or frowned upon (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

During this stage children are expected to start taking responsibility for their actions which, if undesirable, may be met with harsher consequences than in previous stages (Haensly & Parsons, 1993). The reactions from parents to children's undesirable behaviour will influence the development of the conscience (Hamachek, 1988). If too many of children's' endeavours are viewed as unfavourable they will experience feelings of guilt and a lack of self-esteem (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). They may also identify as being evil doers (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As children develop they face new opportunities and may begin to set goals for themselves and purposefully pursue activities which are meaningful to them (Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). Children's success at managing to establish objectives and attain goal-directed

behaviour during this time may influence whether they pursue meaningful endeavours in later years or instead become inhibited (Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010).

According to Erikson (1977) children may attempt to resolve developmental crises through play. Through play children may imaginatively recreate the past event or conflict in the present and thereby anticipate a future based on their resolutions and new insights (Erikson, 1977). If children successfully complete this stage by learning to initiate mostly acceptable activities they will gain the ego strength of a sense of purpose (Erikson, 1950/1973; Sollod et. al, 2009).

#### **3.3.4 Stage 4: Industry versus inferiority (6-11/12 years)**

This stage occurs between six years of age and puberty (Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). For both Erikson and Freud this was a more peaceful time in children's development (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). At this stage children are not trying to gain mastery over themselves or anyone else but rather a sense of ability and competence with the new world of school, technology and social relationships (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Successfully moving through the previous stages is important for preparing children for this stage (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Children's self-control increases during this stage and energy that may have previously been used in play activities is increasingly channeled into more formal activities (Hamachek, 1988; Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997). During this stage it becomes increasingly important for children to contribute to their social environment and to meet the requirements set by people other than their parents (Hamachek, 1988; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). The goal-directedness which children established in the previous stage is developed not only in children's individual endeavours but also in group activities (Thimm, 2010).

School aged children have a greater need to complete activities and creations which they have started (Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). Children may also begin to take more pleasure in mastering tasks which in turn may motivate their self-development as well

as future endeavours (Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). If children are constantly put down they will feel that they are unable to do anything and are inferior, but if their efforts are rewarded in some way or they are made to feel good about themselves they will establish a sense of industry and competence (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

### **3.3.5 Stage 5: Identity versus role confusion (12-19 years)**

This stage occurs during adolescence. Not only do adolescents' bodies change, but their cognitive abilities mature to take on adult roles (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963, 1968; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). During this stage adolescents need to define for themselves who they are and their place in society (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963, 1968; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Successful completion of the previous stages is needed in order for adolescents to feel secure enough in themselves to assimilate previous identities and to form a consciously integrated identity (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963, 1968; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

During the previous stages children were greatly influenced by their parents and close adults (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). During adolescence, teenagers are more aware of society's expectations and possible roles that they may fill within their peer groups and community (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964, 1968; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The stability of adolescents' home environments is nevertheless crucial to their emotional capacities to self-regulate and make life choices (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). The stability of the home environment is also essential for encouraging adolescents' abilities and for them to be able to define their identities (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). Adolescents that manage to form a stable identity will be aware of their strengths as well as weaknesses, have a healthier self-esteem and be less confused about themselves and their roles in society than those whose identities are diffused (Luyckx et. al, 2013).

The greater the problems experienced in previous stages and the more negative ego qualities developed will hinder adolescents' abilities to develop an identity (Hamachek, 1988). The formation of stable identities that incorporate both individual desires and abilities with cultural and societal expectations is essential to being able to adjust to adult life (Capps, 2011; Hamachek, 1988). It is therefore important that

while adolescents experiment with roles for a while, they establish a sense of self that is both committed to others and the pursuit of a career (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). If this is accomplished the ego strength of fidelity is realised. If not, the adolescent may become lost in various roles, including negative ones, and not form a stable identity (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

### **3.3.6 Stage 6: Intimacy versus isolation (20-35 years)**

This stage occurs during young adulthood (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The primary importance of this stage is being able to form an intimate relationship with another and build a life with this person that will see individual through into the following stages (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Forming intimate friendships, being committed to others as well as a chosen career are also essential developmental negotiations of this stage (Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Hamachek, 1990; Studer, 2007). For young adults to develop intimate relationships and not to become isolated or lonely their senses of self need to expand to include others, which may also involve sacrifice and compromise (Erikson, 1963; Hamachek, 1990).

Young adult's identities need to have been reasonably well established in adolescence in order for them to form an intimate relationship with another (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This is because the two identities need to fuse together and if partners are not secure in their own identities, they may fear becoming lost or may become diffused in the other person's identity (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Young adults' fears of being lost in someone else's identity or not being able to assimilate their identity with another's leads to isolation (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). If a healthy and mutual intimate relationship is attained, the ego strength that is founded is love (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

### **3.3.7 Stage 7: Generativity versus stagnation (36-60 years)**

The following stage occurs during middle adulthood (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This stage is related to the adult's concern for future generations (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While in the

previous stage the young adult needed to commit to a partner, close friendships and a profession, the middle aged adult's concerns may be directed toward contributing to society at large (Dunkel, Mathes & Papini, 2010; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989). It is not a prerequisite, nor enough to merely have children of one's own (Haensly & Parsons, 1993). Adults need to be actively playing a role in the betterment of society for future generations or caring for children and others in some way that is not necessarily for their own benefit (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

The contributions that adults make at this stage may not necessarily be in the form of nurturing, mentoring, teaching or caring for younger generations but may also be in the form of products, artwork or ideas that may benefit society or be passed on to future generations (Evans, 1981; McAdams, St Aubin & Logan, 1993; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989). Erikson believed that for adults to make a meaningful contribution during this stage of their lives they need to believe that progress of the human species is possible and a worthwhile undertaking (Erikson, 1963; Irvine, 2013; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989). Generative adults are happier and have a more coherent sense of themselves and their lives than adults who withdraw and reject others during this period (McAdams et. al, 2001). If adults successfully develop in this stage they acquire the ego strength of care (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). If adults do not develop in a way that allows for creative and caring input into others, they will become self-absorbed and stagnate psychologically (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

### **3.3.8 Stage 8: Integrity versus despair (60+ years)**

This final stage occurs in late adulthood and involves the integration of all the previous stages (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Older adults become more reflective as they need to form a coherent life story (Hamachek, 1990). Older adults develop a sense of integrity during this stage if they are content with the way they have lived and that they have made an impact on others or society (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Older adults' acceptance of what they could not achieve is also necessary for the development of integrity (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

According to Erikson it is not possible to have completed all the previous stages equally well, but acceptance of this as part of life as opposed to being viewed as failure is needed for the development of integrity (Brown & Lewis, 2003; Hall, 1983). Even if previous stages have been problematic, older adults may still resolve earlier issues and face the end of life with peace and contentment (Brown & Lewis, 2003; Hall, 1983). If older adults have not resolved earlier crises and are unsatisfied with their lives, they will despair (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Disappointment, distress as well as impatience and contempt for others may occur if older adults realise that there is no time to start over and fear death (Hamachek, 1990). In contrast, if older adults are at peace with themselves, others and the universe, they will attain the last ego strength that is wisdom (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Erikson did however warn older adults not to make the pursuit of the last ego quality “too darn wizard like” (Hall, 1987, p. 135), but rather view it as a maturing of previous ego strengths.

### **3.4 Critique of psychosocial theory**

Two foremost criticisms of Erikson’s psychosocial theory is its irrelevance to women’s development (Douvan, 1997; Franz & White, 1985; Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997) and its lack of clearly defined constructs or variables for measurement (Hamachek, 1988; Ochse & Plug, 1986). According to Franz and White (1985) psychosocial theory does not fully describe the development of intimacy and attachment which they feel are more applicable to women. Douvan (1997) disagrees with Franz and White (1985) and holds the position that Erikson’s emphasis on trust, intimacy and generativity account for developmental issues that some may align more with women’s experiences of development and that these are often under emphasised. Secondly each individual man and woman develops differently and may place greater emphasis on any of the psychosocial issues, which may previously have been aligned with a particular gender (Douvan, 1997).

While Erikson’s constructs have been accused of lacking operational quality, Hamachek (1988, 1990) as well as Ochse and Plug (1986) maintain that there are descriptions of emotions and attitudes for each psychosocial stage which may be measured. This measurement may occur either through subjective reports or through operationalising behaviours, which may be associated with the negative or positive

development of ego qualities of each stage. The operationalisation of Erikson's constructs or behaviours associated with each stage's emotional and attitudinal qualities has occurred for decades. This may be viewed in the research of Hamachek (1988, 1990), Domino and Affonso, (1990), Van Manen and Whitbourne (1997), Zhang and He (2011) as well as Luyckx et. al (2013) to name a few examples.

Erikson's constructs have also been accused of lacking operational quality and of being too abstract and as a result are continuously linked to identity formation in order to be understood (Ryckman, 1989). Ryckman (1989) furthers this argument by stating that Erikson (1950/1973) places too much emphasis on identity formation. While there may be emphasis placed on identity formation in Erikson's theory, it is merely the focus of one stage. The view that Erikson's (1950/1971) theory places disproportionate emphasis on identity formation may have developed as a result of more research (by researchers other than Erikson) focusing on this stage as opposed to other stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950/1973).

Aside from Erikson's (1950/1973) theory being criticised for being difficult to use for assessment as it lacks operational quality, it has been mentioned that it is difficult to assess the longitudinal validity of the theory as such research would be costly and complicated to conduct (Ryckman, 1989). In response to this argument, research such as psychobiographies using Erikson's theory to interpret a life history, may be used to assess the suitability and validity of the longitudinal developmental processes of psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1950/1973).

Despite criticisms of Erikson's psychosocial theory, it is considered a particular strength of this theory that it continues to generate research (Feist & Feist, 2009). This will be discussed further in the following section. Erikson's notion of identity, the influence of society, the individual's history and culture on development have also been influential on the advancement of developmental psychology (Burger, 2000; Douvan, 1997; Hamachek, 1988, 1990; Sollod et. al, 2009). As Erikson's psychosocial theory (1950/1971) extends development into adulthood, it was critical in establishing the field of lifespan development. It is also of value as it provides a theoretical framework to understand the psychological growth and development of the self at any given time in the life cycle (Douvan, 1997; Hamachek, 1988).

A significant strength of Erikson's (1950/1973) psychosocial theory is its applied or practical value (Feist & Feist, 2009; Ryckman, 1989). Erikson's psychosocial theory has been used to develop treatment programs for individuals, schools, hospitals and businesses (Feist & Feist, 2009). The concepts of the various ego crises have been used by counsellors to address developmental issues (Feist & Feist, 2009; Ryckman, 1989). This is particularly valuable in terms of counsellors assisting with career choices, the establishment of identity formation and generativity concerns (Feist & Feist, 2009; Ryckman, 1989).

### **3.5 Erikson in current research**

As previously mentioned in this chapter, Erikson continues to influence the development of psychobiographical research (Denzin, 1989; Fouché & Van Niekerk, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009) and his theory of the stages of psychosocial development is still utilised to guide studies as well as to produce new information and theories (Miller, 2010). In particular Erikson's (1971/1950) theory is used in researching lifespan development (Miller, 2010; Zhang and He, 2011). It is also often used to research the pursuit of identity in adolescence and young adulthood as well as identity formation in old age (Miller, 2010; Zhang and He, 2011). Erikson's (1950/1971) psychosocial theory has been particularly useful in research that involves cross cultural concerns (Miller, 2010; Zhang and He, 2011).

While much research using psychosocial theory as a framework has focused on identity studies, a wide range of human experiences have also been researched. This can be viewed with Kramer's (2002) application of Erikson's (1950/1971) psychosocial theory and psychobiography to research the lives of numerous individuals who committed suicide. Trzebinski and Zieba (2013) have used psychosocial theory to explore trust and its influence on recovery and posttraumatic growth in oncology patients. Erikson's (1950/1971) theory has also been used to assess healthy psychosocial development in Holocaust survivors (Greene, Graham and Morano, 2010).

Psychosocial theory as a research framework has also been used in researching and developing projects that promote healing and optimal psychological growth. This can be viewed with (i) the development of Filipino art groups for disabled older adults to

help them form coherent selves and life stories in later life (De Guzman et. al, 2011), (ii) the use of companion animals to aid homeless and formerly homeless people to establish a moral identity, be generative and resolve earlier developmental crises (Irvine, 2013), and (iii) the establishment of a framework for mentorship that promotes the psychosocial growth of the mentor and mentored (Studer, 2007).

### **3.6 Chapter summary**

This chapter introduced Erikson's psychosocial theory as the theoretical guideline that will be used to interpret Fisher's development. This was followed by an overview of Erikson's psychosocial theory and his location in the history of personality and developmental psychology. Erikson's eight stages of psychosocial development that will be used to describe and interpret Fisher's life were summarised to clarify the theoretical framework. Lastly, a critique of psychosocial theory, as well as its usage in current research were provided.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.1. Chapter preview**

This chapter describes the research objectives of this study as well as the research design and methodology. This chapter also focuses on the participant and sampling method, theoretical conceptualisation as well as the data collection, processing and analysis. Lastly the validity as well as ethical considerations that have been taken into account for this study are discussed.

#### **4.2. Research objectives**

There were three main objectives to this study. The first was to describe and interpret the life of Antwone Fisher through the use of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). The achievement of this objective made a contribution to psychological knowledge and understanding of the development of extraordinarily creative individuals. The second objective was to assess the suitability and usefulness of Erikson's theory (1950/1973), in this way contributing to personality and developmental theories (Denzin, 1990; McAdams, 2009; Miller 2010). The achievement of this objective illuminated situations and events that encourage healthy personality development despite unsatisfactory or traumatic childhood events and experiences. The final objective was to make a contribution to the growing academic field of psychobiography (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010) in South Africa.

#### **4.3. Research design**

This study takes the form of a psychobiographical case study (McAdams, 1988a, 2001, 2009). This study employs a single-case research design which can be described as qualitative and morphogenic in nature (Runyan, 1982; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006). This design allows for in-depth description and analysis of personal phenomena and also takes into consideration historical, societal and political influences (Elms, 1994). The investigation will be conducted within the interpretive qualitative paradigm (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2006) as it attempts to portray and analyse the life history of Antwone Fisher through Erikson's (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development (Durrheim, 2006).

#### **4.4. Participant and sampling method**

Fisher was chosen as the subject of this case study by means of purposive sampling as there is available literature on his life and as he is a successful writer and film director (Durrheim & Painter, 2006). He is also purposively sampled as he may be classified as an individual who meets the general characteristics of a subject for psychobiographical research (Durrheim & Painter, 2006; McAdams, 1988a). While purposive or non-probability sampling does not allow the researcher to generalise findings to the larger population as in probability sampling, this method is less expensive, more practical in terms of available participants and information, and allows for a more in depth study (Durrheim & Painter, 2006).

Psychobiography has been accused of being elitist as its usual focus is on famous people who are exemplary in their fields (Chezé, 2009; Fouché, 1999). As mentioned in chapter 2, the psychobiographical lens has focused more on white males who are accomplished and recognised for positive reasons (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010). Psychobiographies can be conducted on any person however usual or unusual. Nevertheless focusing on those who are extraordinary, for positive or negative reasons, provides an opportunity for socio-cultural factors as well as family dynamics that form extra-ordinary personalities, to be studied (McAdams, 2005; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b). Related to the latter, Fisher was a prime candidate for selection. Fisher grew up with complex family dynamics that were influenced by the racial segregation of the time. He was also exposed to many abusive experiences. Yet, he developed into a stable adult who still excels in his field.

#### **4.5 Theoretical conceptualisation**

In chapter 3 Erikson's (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development was operationalised. This not only provided a theoretical framework with which to interpret Fisher's life, but also helped to increase the dependability of this study. Psychobiographers have been cautioned against as well as criticised for using psychological theories that are not relevant to the historical time in which the subject lived (Fouché, 1999; Runyan, 1984). Using theories that are irrelevant to a different time or culture may interfere with the validity and transferability of the study's findings (Fouché, 1999; Runyan, 1984). The researcher's lack of understanding of a particular historical time or culture may also be a threat to the internal validity.

Therefore, sufficient research of other cultures and times in history pertinent to investigations has to be undertaken (Runyan, 1988b). Erikson's (1950/1973) theory is not only still relevant and being used successfully for psychobiographical research (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010), but is also particularly relevant to this study in terms of era. This is partly because Fisher was born in the same decade in which Erikson (1950/1973) developed his theory of psychosocial development

A theoretical concern related to the data processing and analyses, discussed in section 4.7, was the use of Erikson's triple bookkeeping approach (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 1988a). This approach is brief and straightforward but was nevertheless useful to each of the data processing and analysis steps. Erikson's approach provided an empathetic stance and aided the objectivity of the data selection and analysis as it attempts to take the 'whole' person into account (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 1988a). This process engages the researcher with the individual's (i) physical and mental faculties, (ii) ego development and ways of dealing with situations and emotions that arise, and (iii) development within a particular society and family at a certain time in history (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 1988a).

#### **4.6 Data collection**

Psychobiographies have been criticised for being based on insufficient evidence as well as an over reliance on childhood events to draw conclusions about the behaviour of the adult subject (Runyan, 1984, 1988). Fouché (1999) relates these criticisms to the researcher not having contact with the subject of the study. While psychobiographers that have worked from a psychoanalytic stand point have been criticised for drawing conclusions based on dream journals or free association, Alexander (1990) as well as Runyan (1988), note that in the case of artists such as Fisher, their works may be used as a substitution and source of more reliable information. By studying various sources of data the researcher may gain information from across the subject's lifespan and from diverse viewpoints which may shed more light on the individual's life as opposed to if the subject were the sole source of information (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1984, 1988).

While the possibility of inadequate evidence is plausible, it is far more often the case that the psychobiographer is faced with a surplus of data (Chezé, 2009; McAdams,

2006). Focusing on the research objectives and asking questions that relate to these objectives aid the researchers in selecting appropriate data (Alexander, 1998; Yin, 1984).

The data collection regarding Fisher’s life and development has been guided by the data triangulation principle (Kelly, 2006). Data was therefore purposively selected from a variety of sources and carefully sorted through for relevant and valid information (Kelly, 2006; Yin, 1994). The collected data was also screened for its objectivity or lack thereof toward the subject of the study (Kelly, 2006). Data sources included biographical information on Fisher (see Table 4.1), autobiographical information, journal articles, news articles, as well as texts on psychobiography (Runyan, 1982, 2006; Schultz, 2005a, 2005b) and Erikson’s (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development (Miller, 2010). The selection of an appropriate strategy for selecting and analysing data may be necessary. In the case of this research the method of data collection and analyses follows in the current chapter.

**Table 4.1: Fisher life data sources**

<b>Data source</b>	<b>Source reference</b>
Autobiographical	Fisher (2003, 2010); Fisher and Rivas, (2001).
Biographical	“Antwone Fisher biography” (2013); Fisher and Rivas (n.d.).
Journal articles	Butts (2006); Macfarlane (2004); Pfefferman (2010).
Newspaper articles	Doty (2003); Dutka (2003); Eaton (2013); Hanna (2010); Scharwzbaum (2002); Turan (2002).

With regard to this research, data collection concerns relating to the subject’s childhood were also considered. These are reductionism and reconstruction. It is a concern that some psychobiographies are reductionistic (McAdams, 2005; Runyan, 1988b; Schultz 2005a). This accusation has been laid as some psychobiographers purely focus on childhood events, that there is an over emphasis on psychopathology to the detriment of healthy aspects of the individual’s life as well as that many psychobiographies neglect the role played by socio-cultural factors on the subject’s life (McAdams, 2005; Runyan, 1988b; Schultz 2005a). With regard to this study, reductionism is addressed through the use of Erikson’s (1950/1973) stages of psychosocial development that look at events in the individual’s life across his

lifespan and incorporates the social and cultural as well as healthy and unhealthy aspects of the subject's life.

Contrary to the concern with the psychobiographer's over reliance on childhood events to describe and interpret the adult subject, psychobiographers have also been criticised for using information and events from the adult's life, to reconstruct a childhood of which little is known (McAdams, 2005; Runyan, 1988b). Runyan (1988b) states that this is unjustified and that any interpretations that researchers make should be based on evidence. With regard to Fisher's life, there is sufficient information about his childhood and therefore reconstruction has been avoided.

#### **4.7 Data processing and analyses**

The overarching data management (or data processing and analysis) guidelines for this study were provided by Miles and Huberman (1994, 2002). The conduction of the processing and analyses of data was aided by Alexander's (1988, 1990) method of asking the data questions. With regard to their view of qualitative analyses Miles and Huberman (1994, 2002) propose a three step interwoven process. This involves selecting and transforming data which is then organised in a manner which allows for the drawing of conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002). This is also referred to as data reduction, data display, as well as conclusion drawing and verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002). The guiding data management framework for this study is represented in Table 4.2.

**Table 4.2: Data processing and analyses sequence**

		Explanation:	See section:
Step 1	Miles and Huberman 1 and Alexander's asking the data questions	The three step process provides the overarching guideline for the data processing and analyses. The first step is data reduction. The initial data reduction is aided by Alexander's method of asking the data questions.	4.7.1
Step 2	Miles and Huberman 2	The second data processing and analyses step is data display.	4.7.2
Step 3	Miles and Huberman 3	The third data processing and analyses step is conclusion drawing / verification.	4.7.3

These steps, which may be further simplified, will be explained in the following subsections.

#### **4.7.1 Data reduction**

Data reduction occurs throughout the research and analytic process (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002). It begins with the researcher deciding on which questions to ask and which methodological framework will best aid in finding the answers (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002). Data reduction continues as the researcher selects which evidence to focus on and then applies the chosen theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002). It is only concluded when the researcher has transformed all the findings into a meaningful and coherent report (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002).

The initial data selection and reduction was facilitated by Alexander's (1988, 1990) method of asking the data questions. The method of asking the data questions is used when the initial collection of data needs to be sorted for its relevance to the study (Alexander, 1988, 1990). This type of reduction may lead to the formulation of various hypotheses about the subject's life (Alexander, 1988, 1990). It also provides an initial summary with which to consider possible important information (Alexander, 1988, 1990). In terms of psychobiographical studies, two questions are posed to the data. With regard to this study the questions are:

- How do the primary and secondary data sources account for Fisher's psychosocial development with regard to each of Erikson's (1950/1973) eight stages?
- How do the primary and secondary data sources portray the socio-cultural context that informed Fisher's development?

Alexander's (1988, 1990) method of asking the data questions informed the choice of information that was relevant for data display, which will be discussed in the following section.

#### **4.7.2 Data display**

This step in the analytic process involves the researcher organizing the information into a manageable display that allows it to be clearly accessible (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002; Yin, 1993, 2009). Examples of displays that may be used are matrices, graphs and charts (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002; Yin, 1994, 2009). The display

allows the researcher to analyse the data in a practical manner and to draw conclusions if deemed feasible or to take another analytic step if necessary (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002, Yin, 1994, 2009).

A matrix (see Table 4.3) was employed as the conceptual framework for this study. The matrix allowed the integration of the psychobiographical data with Erikson’s (1950/1973) stages of psychosocial development to be systematically displayed. The vertical columns of Table 4.3 represent Erikson’s (1950/1973) psychosocial theory which was discussed in chapter four. The horizontal rows represent significant periods in Fisher’s life. Yin (1994) referred to such chronological representation and analysis as a unique form of time-series analysis. According to Yin (1994) the possibility of chronological and time-series analysis is a strength of case studies as this allows the researcher to discover causal events and patterns across the lifespan. A chronological time-series matrix that facilitates the interpretation of patterns is especially relevant to the morphogenic nature of psychobiographical studies.

**Table 4.3: Data collection and analysis matrix**

FISHER’S LIFE	STAGES OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT							
	Infancy	Early childhood	Childhood : Play age	Childhood : School age	Adolescence	Early adulthood	Middle adulthood	Late adulthood
	Trust vs Mistrust	Autonomy vs Shame / Doubt	Initiative vs Guilt	Industry vs Inferiority	Identity vs Role confusion	Intimacy vs Isolation	Generativity vs Stagnation	Integrity vs Despair
Childhood I: Ward of the state								
Childhood II: Homeless								
Adulthood I: Navy and therapy								
Adulthood II: New beginnings and search for family								
Post memoir								

Based on Erikson (1950/1973) and Fisher and Rivas (2001).

### **4.7.3 Conclusion drawing and verification**

The third step of the analytic process involves drawing conclusions and verifying them (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002). Preliminary conclusions may be drawn throughout the research process, but until the researcher has sought through a sufficient amount of evidence and followed the previous analytic steps, final conclusions should not be drawn (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002). Once final conclusions have been drawn the researcher should review the findings and results that have been arrived at in order to make sure that the study is valid and verifiable (Miles & Huberman, 1994, 2002; Yin, 1994).

## **4.8. Validity considerations**

One of the greatest downfalls of the case study method in particular and more generally qualitative research is the lack of rigour in the research process (Yin, 1984, 2009). Research that is conducted in a rigorous manner pays particular attention to validity and reliability in order for it to be credible or 'trustworthy' (Cozby, 1997; Yin 1984, 2009). Associated with increasing the rigour of the study, Yin (1984, 2009) also stresses the importance of an appropriate research design, data collection method as well as analytic process that are aligned with the research objectives (the specifics of which related to this study, have been discussed previously in this chapter). Further validity and reliability concerns were credibility, construct validity, transferability and dependability.

### **4.8.1 Credibility**

Yin (1984) as well as Edwards (1998) and Fouché (1999), state that credibility or internal validity is particularly important in the case of explanatory cases where one's analyses and results need to be based on factual events and evidence as opposed to speculation. All possible reasons for a particular event occurring or a person behaving in a certain way also need to be explored (Yin, 1984). Related to the previous two points is researcher bias, the researcher's own feelings about the subject of the study as well as the researcher attempting to fit events or a person into a particular theory (Edwards, 1998; Fouché, 1999; Yin, 1984, 2009). To avoid such events occurring, researchers can reflect on their own feelings and assumptions during a study as well as discussing them with a supervisor or peers (Edwards, 1998). Data triangulation can

also be used to ensure that as many factors as possible are included in the researcher's analyses (Fouché, 1999; Yin, 1984, 2009).

#### **4.8.2 Construct validity**

Construct validity refers to the defining of the parameters of what is to be studied (Yin, 1984, 2009). In order for this to occur the subject of the study needs to be clearly stated and the research objectives must be set out at the start of the study. The approach which the researcher intends to use to measure or research the subject needs to be operationalised (Yin, 1984, 2009). Statistical measures are not used in qualitative studies and therefore the stages of the theory used need to be operationalised (Yin, 1984; 2009). In the case of this study, the stages of Erikson's (1950/1973) eight stages of psychosocial development were presented and explained in chapter four. As with credibility or internal validity, construct validity is also increased by using multiple sources of information as well as non-biased data collection (Fouché, 1999; Yin, 2009).

#### **4.8.3 Transferability**

The transferability or external validity of a study refers to the extent to which the findings can be generalised to other cases or situations (De Vos, 2005; Krefting, 1991; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Yin, 1984, 2009). The transferability or lack thereof is often a criticism of case studies (McAdams, 2006; Yin, 1984). According to Fouché (1999) and Stroud (2004) external validity is not as relevant in psychobiographical studies as it is in other research methods as the focus of the research is on explaining the life under question as opposed to generalising the findings of the subject's life to other lives. This being said it does not rule out the possibility for psychobiographies to be used for generalisation (Isaacson, 2005; Yin, 2009). As with other case studies, once many studies on similar subjects have been done, inferences can start to be made across the studies (Isaacson, 2005; Yin, 1984).

Yin (1984) also mentions that the case study method can be used to test the generalisability of particular theories. For example the extent to which Erikson's (1950/1973) eight stages of psychosocial development can be used to describe and interpret the life of Fisher, an extraordinarily creative individual, can be tested and if found to be adequate, can possibly be used to describe and interpret the lives of other

creative individuals. A process of further testing can then take place by using Erikson's theory to interpret the lives of other creative individuals. If also shown to be adequate, it can be noted that Erikson's (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development is useful for interpreting creative development (Yin, 1984, 2009). As a result a form of transferability can be achieved through the use of the psychobiographical case study method.

#### 4.8.4 Dependability

The dependability or reliability of a study is established by the researcher setting out the aims of the research as well as the details of the method that will be used in order to analyse the data (Yin, 1984, 2009). As with construct validity, the operationalisation of the theory used increases the dependability of the study (Yin, 1984). It is not only important that someone who has no knowledge of the subject being researched or limited knowledge of the researcher's field can follow the chain of logic of the study but also that if another researcher were to follow the same method with the same research objectives in mind, the same conclusions will be reached (Yin, 1984, 2009). In the case of this study dependability was contributed to through the operationalisation of Erikson's (1950/1973) theory, as well as the objectives of this study, the method of data collection and analyses.

#### 4.9 Research procedure

The overall research procedure used for this study consists of 11 steps which are described in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4: Research procedure**

Step 1	Literature review relevant to psychobiographical case study method.
Step 2	Selection of research subject and preliminary data collection.
Step 3	Preliminary data collection.
Step 4	Selection of theoretical framework.
Step 5	Selection of methodological framework.
Step 6	Proposal.
Step 7	Literature review: The Psychobiographical Approach- Chapter two.
Step 8	Literature review: Psychosocial personality development (operationalisation of Erikson's theory) - Chapter three.
Step 9	Methodology – Chapter four.
Step 10	Data collection and analyses- Chapter five.
Step 11	Summary / conclusion.

#### **4.10 Ethical considerations**

As mentioned in section 2.7.3 there are fewer ethical considerations in psychobiographical research than in some other forms of research. Nevertheless various ethical considerations relevant to the psychobiographical approach were deemed important for this study (Elms, 1994; Runyan, 1982). While Elms (1994) compares the psychobiographer to a journalist in terms of accessing public domain information, he does caution that all documents and information be handled with respect. Runyan (1982) adds that there should not be any invasion of the subject's privacy as well as that caution must be taken not to harm or embarrass the subject or the subject's family. In terms of this research all data that was used was available in the public domain and included Fisher's autobiographical information.

The issue of informed consent (Wassenaar, 2006) was deliberated. The information that has been gathered about Fisher's life is, as has been mentioned, public domain texts, but he was nevertheless contacted with regard to his consent for this research. This letter may be viewed in appendix B. There was no response to the letter from Fisher; therefore the research was continued based on the public domain texts. Caution has been taken when researching his life and in the write up in order to remain impartial and objective (Runyan, 1982; Wassenaar, 2006). This has been aided by discussions with the researcher's supervisor and peers who were undertaking similar research.

Elms (1994) stated that while information about psychobiographical subjects may be freely accessible, psychobiographies must nevertheless remain ethical. According to Elms (1994) the ethical psychobiography will add "to our understanding of ourselves and other human beings" (p. 255). While the study did not directly benefit Fisher it does contribute to the understanding of extraordinarily creative individuals as well as add academic value to the field of psychology.

#### **4.11 Chapter summary**

This chapter began by outlining the research objectives for this study. The overall research design and methodology and in particular Alexander's (1988, 1990) method of asking the data questions and Miles and Hubermans' (1994, 2002) general view of qualitative analyses were explained. The particular validity considerations of this

study and the research procedure were outlined. Lastly the ethical considerations of this study were discussed.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1. Chapter preview**

This chapter focuses on the processing and analyses of the data pertaining to Fisher's life. The data has been collated and analysed in terms of Erikson's (1950/1973) stages of psychosocial development (see chapter 3). The data display of each of the seven stages that Fisher has experienced will be followed by an interpretation in accordance with Erikson's (1950/1973) theory. The data display and interpretation will be followed by a summary of Fisher's life history. As most of the autobiographical and biographical data were retrieved from Fisher and Rivas (2001) the reader may accept this as the data reference unless the data is otherwise referenced.

#### **5.2. Stage 0: Prelude to birth**

While Erikson's theory of psychosocial development (1950/1973) is extensive, covering the entire lifespan after birth, it does not include the time spent in utero. The information provided in this section was deemed necessary as it provides the reader with the circumstances that lead to Fisher's conception, birth in a women's prison and how he came to be a Ward of the State, which all my have influenced his development.

Fisher's paternal grandfather, Horace Elkins was a slave in his youth. His 'slave master' forced him to change his surname from Barnett to Elkins. When he was later freed he moved from the South to the Midwest area, more specifically to Cleveland, Ohio. Horace educated himself and became a staunch Catholic in an attempt to reject the previous way his life had to be lived when he was a slave. He married Emma and the couple had nine children. Emma was known for taking in the neighbours' children and feeding them. As a result, the community respected the couple.

While eight of the Elkins' children were also hard workers and known as respectable children and young adults in the community, Eddie the second eldest (who was Fisher's father) was irresponsible. He was described as being good looking, debonair, a talented writer and musician, and a ladies man. If he did not like a situation he was known to merely walk away. When he was in the military he went AWOL a few

times until he was dishonourably discharged. The 23 year old Eddie already had two children with a woman named Francis. They were not living together as Eddie would hit her and also threatened to shoot her brother. Eddie also had other girlfriends. One was Eva Mae, who was a teenager at the time.

Eva Mae, Antowne Fisher's mother, was the youngest of six children. Her mother had died when she was 12. Her father would often beat her and the other children. Shortly after Eva Mae's mother died, her father was deemed unfit to parent his children and she went into foster care. Eva Mae often tried to run away and got involved in criminal behaviour. As a result she was sent to juvenile prison when she was 14. She was released when she was 16 years old. Eva Mae met Eddie when he was performing outside a record shop. After Eddie had had sex with Eva Mae he told her that he could not be with her because she was too young. Later, during a routine checkup at Child Welfare it was discovered that Eva Mae was four months pregnant. As a result she was sent back to juvenile prison (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010).

Eva Mae had no plans for the child she was about to have until she was 7 months pregnant. She then thought that she would tell Eddie and that he would buy her a house and marry her. This was not to be.

Eddie heard that Francis's stepfather, who had raped her, was being released from prison and he wanted Francis to accompany him to Chicago. Francis had a restraining order out against Eddie for beating her and did not want to go with him for fear he would do it again. When he went to her home she would not let him in and he became violent. He screamed and began kicking the door in. Francis fetched a shot gun and shot Eddie as he opened the door (Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004). He was taken to Mt Sinai Hospital but died on arrival. The court ruled that the homicide was justified and Francis was free. Two months later, in August 1959, Fisher was born in the prison hospital (Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010).

### **5.3 Stage 1: Trust versus mistrust (0-1,5 years)**

#### **5.3.1 Findings**

At birth, Fisher was given the Ward Number 13644 as he was illegitimate. His father was dead, his mother was a minor and in prison, and at that time there was no prospect of her being able to take care of him. Fisher was temporarily placed in an orphanage in Cleveland. At the time Mr and Mrs Elkins did not know that they had a grandson or that he was in an orphanage in their neighbourhood. After a few weeks in the orphanage, Fisher was placed in the foster care of Mrs Nellie Strange. After a visit to the home, Fisher's caseworker noted that he was developing well and was "receiving much love and security" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 25). At a later visit Fisher was described as an active child, crawling and learning to walk, who greeted people, smiled a lot, and liked pancakes.

Just prior to Fisher's first birthday his foster mother became uneasy about her attachment to him. She phoned Child Welfare wanting to have him removed. Nellie Strange then changed her mind and said that there was no way that Fisher could be taken from her. At this stage Fisher's caseworker had reported that his biological mother had not shown any interest in him.

#### **5.3.2 Discussion**

This stage was particularly difficult to analyse as there was little information available on Fisher's life during this time. Therefore while the researcher has attempted to avoid reconstruction, the available information was analysed in terms of Erikson's (1950/1973) first stage of psychosocial development as well as how this information made sense with regard to the following stages. For example, it cannot be stated that Fisher definitely acquired the ego strength of hope during this stage, but when considering the available information in accordance with information and analyses of the following stages, it is suggested that he probably did acquire the ego strength of hope. Therefore the analysis of this stage is provided tentatively in terms of the most plausible analysis of the available information.

Fisher had a complicated start to life. While all people that children come into contact with and especially those that care for them are integral to their development during this stage, mothers are of particular importance (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964;

McAdams, 2001; Miller 2002). Fisher was separated from his biological mother and therefore it is assumed that he was not breastfed. This along with not having a primary care-giver but being passed between multiple people from the prison hospital to the orphanage until he was placed with Mrs Nellie Strange could have influenced Fisher's understanding and expectations about the world around him (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller 2010; Monte, 1999). Erikson's theory (1950/1973) suggests that as Fisher had many different care-givers in his first few weeks, he would learn that the world is neither secure nor reliable (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2001; Miller 2010). This would also influence his developing into an untrusting child and adult as well as negatively affecting his view and value of himself (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2001; Miller 2010).

From what is known of Fisher during the time he was with Mrs Nellie Strange, he developed normally with regard to physical and cognitive abilities. The love and short lived security he received from Mrs Nellie Strange probably influenced Fisher's ability to learn to trust some people later in life (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2001; Miller 2010). While for most of his life Fisher remained mistrusting of others, the time Fisher was placed with Mrs Nellie Strange provided him with some sense that the world can be loving, good and secure (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2001; Miller 2010). This is seen by Fisher developing the ego strength of hope (Erikson, 1950/1973). Throughout his life Fisher would hope in himself and that a better life was possible. Although this waned at times, it helped him to not give up on himself and others as will be seen in the later stages (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2001; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Fisher's mistrust in the world could also have been influenced and reinforced by his insecure attachment to Mrs Nellie Strange who would vacillate between wanting to give him up and keep him (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2001; Miller 2010). While Fisher had other aggravating circumstances in his childhood that could have influenced his feeling of being unwanted, this feeling possibly stemmed from the first stage as first his mother gave him up and then he was passed from one care-giver to another.

The theory suggests that as Fisher did not receive consistent love and care during this stage which resulted in his mistrust, he may become suspicious and withdrawn, and would learn that the world is unsafe and may develop some form of psychosis later in life (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While Fisher has not become psychotic, his difficulty to assimilate the different parts of himself did lead to periods of depression and aggression. Fisher’s inability to assimilate different parts of himself into his ego and incapacity to deal with certain emotions also possibly lead to his dissociating, or *going into his head*, which happened throughout his childhood. While this may be viewed as a negative polarity, Fisher’s dissociating can also be viewed as a protective function that influenced the development of his imagination. These aspects of Fisher’s development that were influenced by this first stage will be discussed further in the following stages.

**Table 5.1: Stage 1 timeline**

Year	Events and experiences
1959	Born 3 <sup>rd</sup> August in a women’s prison. Temporarily placed in an orphanage (Cleveland, Ohio). Abandoned by biological mother. Shares orphanage with many other children.
1960	Mrs Nellie Strange fosters Fisher Experiences the foster mother’s (Mrs Nellie Strange) love and security.

#### **5.4 Stage 2: Autonomy versus shame and doubt (1,5-3 years)**

##### **5.4.1 Findings**

A short while after Fisher’s second birthday another visit was arranged with the caseworker at Child Welfare. Fisher had grown attached to his foster mother and would not leave her side even to play with the toys. The caseworker described that Mrs Nellie Strange held Fisher as if he were a “3 month old infant” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, P. 24). She was reprimanded for this and told that he would be taken away from her regardless of her feelings for him.

In September 1961, a month after Fisher’s second birthday, it was decided that he was going to be re-placed in the foster home of Reverend and Mrs Pickett. Before this could happen Fisher once again had to be placed in temporary custody at an orphanage (Doty, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010). The week prior to the transfer occurring, three visits to the orphanage were arranged.

At the first visit Fisher responded to the caseworker and showed delight in the crayons and coloured paper that he could play with. According to the caseworker he seemed very relaxed. The second visit took place two days later. It was reported that Fisher did not want to leave Mrs Nellie Strange's side but he nevertheless wanted to take the art materials home with them. During the third visit Fisher was neither interested in the art materials nor the caseworker, and clung to Mrs Nellie Strange. Mrs Nellie Strange became very upset and did not want to leave Fisher at the orphanage. As she did not want to drop him off, he was brought to the orphanage by a friend of hers who brought her son along. As they entered the lobby, the friend and her son quickly slipped away. When Fisher realised that he was alone with the caseworker he screamed and tried to follow his foster mother's friend. He had to be restrained while crying until he collapsed from exhaustion.

After a few weeks Fisher was taken to the Picketts' home. At this stage Fisher did not want to leave the caseworker, but he too slipped away while Fisher was looking at a bicycle. The Picketts were a middle aged couple who had children and grandchildren of their own. There were two other foster children living in the home. Flo and Dwight, a half-sister and brother, were both older than Fisher.

Mrs Pickett began beating Fisher when he was two years old (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010). She would later claim that he was retarded and that she had to beat him right. When Fisher was three years old and into his later childhood he believed that he was the Pickett's biological son even though he and the other foster children all had different surnames. According to Fisher, even though he thought he was the Pickett's son, his earliest memory is of feeling that he was unwanted and that he did not belong.

A repeated traumatic experience that began when Fisher was three years old was the sexual abuse by his baby sitter (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010). He refers to this as a "recurring nightmare from childhood" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 43). Fisher would be left at the house alone with Willenda, who was one of their neighbours. Fisher would play very quietly when he was left alone with her. He was constantly on the alert, listening, waiting and hoping that someone else would come back to the house. Instead he would hear

Willenda screaming at him to come downstairs. He would hesitate and she would get angry and scream at him even more. When Fisher would get downstairs Willenda would not say anything but pick him up and carry him to the basement.

In the basement Willenda would first hit Fisher, before telling him to take his clothes off. When Willenda was naked and Fisher had still not taken his clothes off, she would rip them off. She would touch him and then make him perform oral sex on her. When Willenda was finished she would scream at him for not having any clothes on. Fisher thought she had the “worst monster face you ever saw” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 44). Fisher heeded Willenda’s warning to “never, never, never tell, or something more horrible than you can even imagine will happen to you” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 44). According to Fisher it was not Willenda warning him that kept him from telling anyone, but “the unspeakable shame” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 44) of the experiences and the fear and shame that it was his fault.

#### **5.4.2 Discussion**

The events of this stage suggest that Fisher did begin to develop a sense of will and autonomy, but through being passed on yet again to new caregivers, and being neglected and abused, his development was impeded (Doty, 2003; Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller 2010; Pfefferman, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher developing a sense of will and knowing what he wanted in the world, and being able to act on his desires, was demonstrated by his playing with the coloured crayons and paper when visiting the caseworker. This was also revealed with Fisher wanting to take the art materials home even when he did not want to play with them in front of the caseworker (Erikson 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher also demonstrated the development of autonomous behaviour and a sense of his own desires by showing that he did not want to be separated from his foster mother, which he demonstrated by crying and trying to go back to her after he was dropped at Social Services (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). On the other hand Fisher’s lack of autonomy can be viewed by his clinginess to his foster mother when around the caseworker and not wanting to play with the toys at times. This lack of autonomy may also have been a result of his distrust in the world that had developed in the previous stage and his wanting to remain where it was safe (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

According to Erikson (1950/1973) it is possible for a previous stage to be renegotiated at a later stage. Therefore according to the theory it would have been possible for Fisher to learn to trust in himself and the world around him and therefore become more autonomous during this stage (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). However, as a result of abuse and once again being placed at the orphanage and then with a new foster family, his distrust in people and the world were reaffirmed (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher learnt that what he wanted or cherished did not matter to others through his separation from his first foster mother (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001, 2010; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010). This was reaffirmed through the denial and abuse of Fisher's autonomy through the physical abuse he received from the Picketts, and the sexual abuse he experienced as a result of Willenda's actions (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001, 2010; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010). As a result of some uncontrollable circumstances as well as purposive abuse of Fisher, he would learn that what he willed or desired did not matter and that others would determine what would happen to him and with him (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). According to Erikson's theory (1950/1973) the disregard for Fisher's psychological and physical health and the traumatic crossing of his boundaries would not only lead to loss of autonomy but also a sense of shame (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This sense of shame is reiterated through Fisher's own statement that his never telling anyone about the sexually abusive situations was as a result of "the unspeakable shame" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 44) and his learning to doubt himself by believing that what was happening to him was somehow his fault.

This stage is imperative to children learning what is right and wrong, which is guided by responses from their parents (Erikson 1950/1973; Sollod et. al, 2009). In terms of Erikson's theory (1950/1973) Fisher seems to have struggled with the resolution of this stage until young adulthood. This can be viewed with his sometimes extreme neatness and cleanliness in an attempt to gain some sense of control over himself, as well as his constant attempts to do what is right and lawful on the one extreme and on the other his lashing out and fighting. While children are influenced by the laws of the greater society, parents and family provide the immediate understanding and reference points to what is accepted or lawful behaviour within the home environment

(Erikson 1950/1973). In Fisher’s childhood and teenage years he was continuously learning that it was acceptable behaviour for adults and older children to abuse a child, in this case himself. Facing constant physical and sexually abusive situations, Fisher learnt that this behaviour was ‘normal’ within his environment and that if he did not obey or if he spoke out about what was happening he would be exposed to far worse punishment. Therefore the theory suggests that through shame and fear of abuse or punishment Fisher became obedient, doubted himself, and lost a sense of himself and his desires (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

**Table 5.2: Stage 2 timeline**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Events and experiences</b>
1961	Temporarily placed in an orphanage. Placed in the Picketts’ foster home. Physical abuse begins. Enjoyment of art.
1962	Sexually abused. Experience of shame relating to the abuse.

### **5.5 Stage 3: Initiative versus guilt (4-5 years)**

#### **5.5.1. Findings**

During this stage the physical and sexual abuse that Fisher experienced continued (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010). As a result of this and being the only child at home when the older children went to school he began to escape in his mind (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). He would stare out of the window and day dream even though he was supposed to clean the house and do other chores during the day (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher would imagine that he had heat-ray-vision and could melt the snow. He also imagined that he was the only human living there and that the rest of the household were alien monsters that only wore human faces as disguises. He was sure that if he was quick and quiet enough he would one day catch them with their alien faces on. When Fisher had a bad experience with a family member he would reenact the event or scenario envisioning a different outcome (Fisher, 2010).

Fisher still had to go for visits to Social Services. This tended to happen when he was daydreaming and did not want to be interrupted. On these occasions Mrs Pickett would suddenly talk nicely to Fisher although he thought she was just pretending

because that is “how monsters play” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 34). He did not forget that the rest of the time she called him and Dwight “Nigga” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 35) and told them “Niggas ain’t nothin” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 36). When it was time to go to Social Services she always made him wear his church clothes. Fisher noticed that most of the people there were white. Fisher did not really mind going, as for a little while he got to play with the toys they had at Social Services.

On one particular occasion Dwight was told that he had to go with Fisher. On that particular day Mrs Pickett told Fisher that he had to go and meet his mother. This made Fisher confused as he thought Mrs Pickett was his mother. Mrs Pickett referred to them as “you and your no-account mammy” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 36). Fisher felt bad and ashamed that this woman’s socio-economic status may have something to do with him. After Mrs Pickett’s comments Fisher did not want to meet the woman that was supposedly his biological mother. He felt dizzy and nauseated at what lay ahead but he was scared that if he got sick he would mess up his church clothes and then he would be in grave trouble with Mrs Pickett.

As they entered Social Services Mrs Pickett started to wave and speak very loudly in what she called “other tongues” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 38). Fisher and Dwight were very embarrassed and went quickly to sit on the chairs with their heads bowed. Fisher felt awkward because he thought people were looking at them as if they were “weird-people” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 38). When the caseworker told them to go through Fisher was once again excited about the toys and showing them to Dwight. The caseworker commented that Fisher was still not very talkative and asked Mrs Pickett how he was doing. Her only comment was that Fisher’s cleaning of the house had improved. It was noted that she was extremely happy that she got a child of four and a half to do a full days cleaning.

This was apparently the third visit that had been arranged with Fisher’s mother but she had missed the previous two appointments. Mrs Pickett commented to the social worker that she did not think Fisher’s mother was bright and that he did not know that she was his real mother. As Fisher overheard this, it further confused him. Fisher found it difficult to deal with his feelings, so he picked up his favourite robot toy to play with. Fisher’s mother did show up on this occasion but just sat there staring at

Fisher. The only exception was when Dwight took a toy from Fisher, she snatched it from him and gave it back to Fisher. This made Fisher think that she might be a nice person.

During this time Fisher had more meetings with his mother. It was reported that if the caseworker fetched him, he enjoyed the drive in the car and was very interested in looking at the buildings and people that they passed. With regard to the visits with Fisher's mother, the caseworker reported that he was friendly with her and greeted her, but treated her as if she were any other person. Eva Mae began missing her appointments again until she one day wrote to Social Services and said that she was going to get married and wanted custody of Fisher. Nothing came of this and she stopped contacting Social Services to find out about Fisher. At this stage Fisher still thought that Mrs Pickett was his mother.

One day when Willenda was 'looking after' Fisher, he became intrigued by the blue flame burning under the pot on the stove. At first he stared for a while then he pulled out one of the straws of the broom. He put the straw in the flame and watched while it melted away. According to Fisher he did this "several more times, feeling quite powerful" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 49). Engrossed in what he was doing, Fisher did not realise that Willenda had entered the kitchen and seen him playing. Willenda scolded and smacked him and then told him to go and wait upstairs for Mrs Pickett. Fisher remembers having a pain in his chest and it being difficult to breathe. This form of anxiety would stay with him for years.

When Mrs Pickett got home she was angry and called Fisher "Nigga", her "brand of disgust" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 49) for him. Mrs Pickett rolled up a newspaper and lit it on the stove. After which she grabbed Fisher and hit him with it while it was burning. All the while she and Willenda laughed.

On another occasion Mrs Pickett had told Fisher to take a nap (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). When he heard the older children come home from school he sat up in his cot and thought about sneaking out to play with them (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Just as Fisher was having these thoughts Mrs Pickett screamed to him that she knew he was not sleeping and that he was not allowed out of the room until

he had slept (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Dejected, Fisher carried on lying in his cot when he began to smell and then see smoke and flames (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). The older children had set the house on fire (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). As the flames surrounded Fisher he wanted to flee but did not dare move as Mrs Pickett had told him not to come out of the room until he had slept (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Eventually an adult came and carried the stunned Fisher out of the burning building (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001).

At this stage Fisher began to like his foster father, Reverend Pickett, and thought that he might actually like Fisher in return. He would sometimes walk past Fisher at the dinner table and rub him on the head to let him know that he noticed him. When no one was around Reverend Pickett would sometimes give Fisher a nickel. Although Reverend Pickett never smiled at Fisher, Fisher still enjoyed the attention.

When Fisher was 5 years old he started kindergarten. It was a temporary relief from the Pickett home. Fisher loved to learn. It was reported that he did well at school, was very neat and eager to help.

### **5.5.2 Discussion**

As with the first stage, Fisher had a complex developmental response to this stage. During this stage children's increased mobility and cognition influence their ability to initiate activities as well as relationships (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et al, 2009). Because of Fisher's lack of trust in himself, as well as lack of autonomy, he struggled to initiate activities and relationships and find a sense of purpose (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964). However, to a certain extent his imagination and developing creativity provided him with an opportunity to act autonomously, initiate activities, and experience a sense of purpose (Erikson, 1950/1973; Fisher, 2010; Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). Outside of Fisher's relationships with his foster siblings and family, nothing is known of external relationships that he may have had at this time in his life. Therefore his development in this area cannot be theorised. It can be assumed that to some degree Fisher struggled with the resolution of this stage with regard to relationships as he did not manage to make friends at school initially but only managed to initiate and develop

relationships with children at a later stage (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

As mentioned previously, Fisher's inability to initiate activities was probably largely due to his lack of autonomy, the strict rules and boundaries that were set for him by the Picketts and fear of the consequences if he disobeyed. During this stage children also have a greater understanding that what they have done is received by others as being worthwhile or as being frowned upon (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Haensly & Parsons, 1993). This would probably have influenced Fisher's desire to obey the Picketts and not want to upset them (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). For example, this could be seen when Fisher was traumatised by hearing that he had to see his biological mother and that Mrs Pickett was not his mother. As a result he felt confused, dizzy and nauseated but still tried to restrain his physiological response and not vomit on his church clothes as this would make Mrs Pickett angry.

The culmination of Fisher's inhibition and lack of initiative which were probably unable to develop as a result of his mistrust in himself and lack of autonomy were demonstrated when the house was on fire and Fisher remained upstairs in his bedroom as Mrs Pickett had told him that he had to take a nap and was not to leave the room (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The theory suggests that as Fisher could not trust his own instincts and feared the consequences of disobeying Mrs Pickett, to the extent that he seemed to be stripped of any autonomy (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Therefore Fisher could not pursue the needed action for his survival, which would have been to leave the room where he was supposed to be sleeping and run out of the burning building (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

While within the boundaries of the Pickett home and the daily duties Fisher had to perform, he did not manage to initiate many activities. He nevertheless showed the potential ability to do so. This can be viewed by Fisher becoming intrigued with the blue flame on the stove and pulling out pieces of the broom to burn and melt. According to Erikson's theory (1950/1971), this initiative provided Fisher with some autonomy as he felt powerful. It also reveals that Fisher was within such constricted boundaries in the Pickett home that he had to cross acceptable boundaries in order to

initiate an activity and to have a sense of freedom and autonomy (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

A more protective and possibly healthier sense that Fisher was able to initiate activities was demonstrated by his ability to play and pretend (Erikson, 1977; Fisher, 2010). This could be viewed by Fisher picking up the robot toy and playing with it in order to distract himself when he could not deal with his emotions relating to being at Social Services and meeting his biological mother (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964, 1977; McAdams, 2009; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Erikson (1977) suggested that children may resolve developmental crises through play as they imaginatively recreate the past event in the present and thereby anticipate a future based on their resolutions and new insights. This ability to initiate activities within the freedom of his imagination is further demonstrated by Fisher pretending that he was the only human in the house and would someday catch the other members of the family out when they were wearing their alien monster faces (Fisher, 2010). This imaginative play can be seen to have provided Fisher with a way of dealing with the way his foster family treated him and the abuse he experienced (Erikson, 1977). Fisher also used his imagination to recreate scenarios that had happened with family members and to imagine other possibilities for how the scenarios could have transpired (Fisher, 2010). Although these recreations were only in his imagination, they provided Fisher with creative autonomy and purpose as he imagined new roles for himself (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964, 1977). Therefore while Fisher struggled to find purpose and set goal-orientated behaviour for himself in reality, his imagination and developing creativity enabled him to some degree to deal with and resolve some of the developmental crises of this stage (Erikson, 1977).

The theory suggests that as Fisher's cognitive abilities increased during this stage, his ability to think about the abusive situations he was experiencing also increased (Doty, 2003; Erikson 1950/1973; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004; Miller, 2010; Pfefferman, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As a result, Fishers feelings of shame that had developed in the previous stage not only increased, but also influenced the development of his feelings of guilt (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). These feelings of guilt can be assumed to have been reinforced by the harsh and sometimes shameful punishment Fisher received such as when Mrs Pickett hit

him with the burning newspaper, (while laughing at him), after he burnt pieces of the broom on the stove.

The theory suggests that not only the physical and sexual abuse that Fisher was experiencing would affect his self-worth, but also Mrs Pickett's demeaning words and racist remarks (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Pfefferman, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As Fisher was becoming more socially and racially aware at this time, negative remarks with regard to his race may have had a more profound affect. Therefore Mrs Pickett calling Fisher a "Nigga" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 35) and telling him that he was nothing as a result, probably reinforced the shame that he developed in the previous stage and also negatively affected his self-esteem (Erikson 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher's shame and lack of self-esteem were also possibly reinforced by other events as well. These were, firstly, by Mrs Pickett aligning Fisher's mother's economic status as well her supposed lack of intelligence with him. Secondly, Fisher's self-esteem was probably affected by his confusion about who his biological mother was (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Thirdly, the confusion and events surrounding Fisher's mother coming into his life and then disappearing again, also possibly reinforced his feelings that he did not belong and that people and the world were unreliable and unpredictable (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

It was mentioned in chapter 3 that if too many endeavours are frowned upon or punished, children may feel guilty, have a loss of self-esteem, as well as possibly identify as evil doers (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While there is evidence to suggest that Fisher felt ashamed and had a low self-esteem it is not evident that he identified as an evil doer, although these feelings probably began to develop in this stage (as will be seen in the following stage).

Besides for the positive effects of Fisher's developing imagination, the attention he sometimes received from his foster father as well as starting Kindergarten seem to have had stabilising effects on his development. The hope that Fisher had begun to develop in the first stage was possibly fostered by him assuming that his foster father liked him (Erikson 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al,

2009). The healthier attention Fisher received from his foster father also possibly aided in the prevention of Fisher assimilating being an evil doer into his identity at a later stage (Erikson 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Not much is known of Fisher’s time in Kindergarten. However, it was reported that he excelled and loved to learn. This reveals that Fisher’s curiosity about the world was increasing as well as that with some normal or healthy structure as well as autonomy or freedom from the Pickett household, he had the potential to grow (Erikson 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

**Table 5.3: Stage 3 timeline**

Year	Events and experiences
1963	Meets his biological mother, Eva Mae Fisher. Starts to escape into his imagination. Notices people at Social Services are white.
1964	Older children set the house on fire. Starts Kindergarten. Fisher is too fearful of Mrs Pickett to leave his room when the house is on fire. Experiences a bond with his foster father.

## **5.6 Stage 4: Industry versus inferiority (6-11/12 years)**

### **5.6.1 Findings**

During this stage the physical and sexual abuse that Fisher experienced continued (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010). He was also bullied by Dwight at home and other children at school.

One Halloween provided a shocking revelation for Fisher and Dwight. The children went trick-or-treating. Fisher enjoyed dressing up and pretending to be someone else. When Fisher, Dwight and Flo got home that evening they were not allowed any of the sweets they had collected. The next morning they sat before Mrs Pickett as she sorted through the sweets. She then put them in a metal box and told them that they did not deserve any (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). When the foster children went back upstairs Fisher and Dwight complained that other mothers were not so mean. Flo listened to them and then explained that Mrs Pickett was not their real mother and that they were foster children. Flo also told the boys that Mrs Pickett recieved money for keeping them. Fisher was shocked. During this conversation he also learnt that while Dwight and Flo were half-brother and sister they were not his biological siblings.

When the news settled Fisher was relieved that he was not really Mrs Pickett's child. Mrs Pickett whipped Flo for telling the boys the truth. Almost every day since then Mrs Pickett would warn Fisher and Dwight; "I'm gonna take you rotten niggas back where I gotcha" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 62). Mrs Pickett also told the three children that their parents did not want them and that nobody wanted them. Otherwise they would not be with her. In addition, she told them that they must not think that she wants them; she only has to pay her accounts.

Initially Fisher still found relief in nature, imagery, and his day dreams. He enjoyed autumn and liked the colours of the leaves and the crunching sound they made under his feet as he walked to and from school. Even though winter was on its way it reminded him that spring would come and bring with it new things. After Fisher found out that he was a foster child, he wondered where he came from and where he belonged in the world. As a result he started to daydream about his parents and imagine who they were (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher would look out for them and be on his best behaviour just in case they came looking for him (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). At night he began to dream about meeting his parents and family and having a nice meal with them. This dream gave him hope and helped him to get through the day. Fisher felt that this dream belonged to him and no one else.

While Fisher went through Kindergarten successfully during Grade 1 things generally did not go so well. His home life began affecting him at school. Fisher was very shy, held his head down and struggled to speak if asked a question. He was also often reprimanded for daydreaming in class. Fisher's case workers did not know how much he was battling at school as Mrs Pickett managed to keep them at bay until he was eight years old. She told the case workers that she had no complaints and as they were busy with problems that had been reported, they did not arrange any visits.

When Mrs Pickett was angry with Fisher and Dwight she would take them down to the basement and tie them to a pole (Doty, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). She would leave them there in the dark for hours (Doty, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). She would also tie them up there before and after beatings (Doty, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001).

When Fisher was seven he started wetting the bed. Mrs Pickett threatened to cut his penis off as punishment.

As Dwight and Fisher got older, Dwight's rebellion grew and he got into more trouble with Mrs Pickett than Fisher. Dwight also noticed that one of the Pickett's teenage twins, Mercy, would sometimes treat Fisher kindly. As a result Dwight hit and teased Fisher even more. Fisher described Mercy's kind gestures such as a pat on the shoulder or a warm look as lighting "up my days like a black-and-white movie turning into Technicolor" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 67).

It was not only Dwight who resented Mercy's kind acts toward Fisher but also her twin sister Lizzie. Lizzie would tell Fisher if he walked to the shop to buy her chips she would give him some ice-cream. Even though he was exhausted from working in the house the thought of the ice-cream made him go. When Fisher returned with the chips Lizzie refused to give him any ice-cream and then proceeded to ignore him. When Fisher went to bed that night he felt silly and hurt as he realised that Lizzie had never intended to give him any ice-cream.

Prior to Fisher turning eight Mrs Pickett phoned the case worker (Ms Vicki Blum) to complain about Fisher wetting the bed. She elaborated on this story and lied that the boys were urinating in bins, cupboards and bottles. This involved the caseworker more, who insisted that Fisher go for a physical exam. This resulted in Fisher having to go to hospital to be circumcised. When he was in hospital he asked the nurses if he could stay there. Fisher's caseworker wanted to know why he wanted to stay there and he replied that the people there were nice. No further investigation resulted.

Soon after Fisher left the hospital a new ward Keith arrived at the Pickett house. Keith was four years old. As a result of him being mixed race Mrs Pickett treated him very well. He had a double bed to himself while Fisher and Dwight had to share a cot. This led to Fisher believing "that being lighter-skinned made him [Keith] better" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 70). At this time Lizzie started to call Fisher names such as "chocolate" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 70) which she would say with disgust. Fisher felt that he could not change the colour of his skin and began to hate its darkness. With Keith's arrival the fighting between Fisher and Dwight also increased. Mrs

Pickett favouring Keith because he had a white father caused Dwight to hit Keith. Fisher would step in to protect him because he knew what it was like to be the youngest and to not be able to protect oneself. He also wanted Keith to like him as well as that he wanted to be like Keith. Fisher began protecting Keith from the neighbourhood bullies. They became best friends and it felt like Keith was his little brother.

In the evenings Mrs Pickett would speak on the telephone for hours, telling her friends how terrible the foster children were and that she could not put up with them for much longer. The part that bothered Fisher and caused him severe stress was her telling people that they “were such bad young’uns, we’d tear up the devil” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 62). Fisher had heard a lot about the Devil from the Picketts at home and at church as they went every evening and three times on Sundays. Fisher believed that they were the worst children ever.

Fisher began to struggle even more through the second and third grades, both socially and academically. He felt that things were becoming more difficult and that he was changing as he could no longer escape in his mind or through his imagination to find happiness. One day Fisher came up with a misguided plan to make friends. Early that particular morning he went into the Pickett’s room and took two nickels. On the way to school he went inside the sweet shop and chose sweets for himself for the first time in his life. Fisher’s spirits lifted on the way to school at the thought of being able to share the sweets and change with the other children at school. This went on for a few more days until Fisher was called into the principal’s office. The rumour had spread that he “had been giving money away to the entire student body” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 73). When asked where he got the money, Fisher told the principal the truth. When asked why he took it he said, “if I give the kids candy and money, they like me and want to be my friend...Nobody liked me before” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 74).

The principle responded by telling Fisher that his actions were not that of a good boy and that Mrs Pickett was to be contacted. When Mrs Pickett arrived at the school all Fisher could hear was the blood flowing in his ears. He blanked the rest out. The next thing he remembered was being in his bedroom. Fisher was naked and tied to the end of the cot. Mrs Pickett whipped him until the welts on his skin opened and bled. She

proceeded to beat him unconscious (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010). Mrs Pickett would brag about beating eight year old Fisher unconscious for years to come.

It was revealed that Dwight and Flo had also been taking small change from the Picketts. As a result, from the day after Fisher was beaten unconscious the children were strip searched each morning. At school, the result was that Fisher was teased and picked on worse than before. Fisher lost interest in school and decided not to go. Fisher would go in one door at school and leave out another. Each time he would go straight to the Tot Lot which was a playground under construction. He felt that any punishment that he received could not be any worse than what was already happening to him. Therefore he decided to enjoy the play time while it lasted, which it did for a few weeks.

One day Fisher saw a teacher drive past the Tot Lot and he thought that school had been let out early. He ran home only to find that the other children were not there. As he turned to leave Mrs Pickett caught him and phoned the school. She found out about his absences and whipped him. When Fisher went to school on the Monday, he was hit with a paddle by the vice principal. When he got home from school Fisher saw that Ms Vicki Blum was there. She had heard about him skipping school. Fisher was very nervous to speak to Ms Vicki Blum and she suggested to Mrs Pickett that she speak to Fisher outside of the home. At this Mrs Pickett went into a tirade and said that Fisher only ever lied, stole and that he had thieving in his blood.

After this episode Ms Vicki Blum arranged for Fisher to be assessed by a psychologist, Mrs Honhart. The psychologist reported that Fisher had above average intelligence but was not living up to his potential. From the projective tests she administered, she noted that Fisher had a lot of fear and anger. In her report it was also noted that Fisher had “a fear of bodily damage” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 84), he showed “concern about missing parts and damage to himself” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 84). The psychologist also reported that Fisher had difficulty with pictures that had “strong sexual connotations” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 84).

Even though Mrs Honhart made the above mentioned observations as well as that Mrs Pickett needed guidance with regard to raising the children, she did not investigate

further. After the psychologist's report Ms Vicki Blum received a troubled phone call from Fisher's principal who had concerns about Mrs Pickett. After this Ms Vicki Blum arranged for Fisher to see a therapist, much to Mrs Pickett's disapproval. Fisher was told that he had to go and see a Dr Fisher. Fisher assumed that he was going to meet his father and became very excited.

Fisher began to hope that his father would like him and keep him. He was confused when he went into Dr Fisher's office and saw that he was white. Fisher realised that Dr Fisher was not his father but was confused about why they had the same surname. Fisher did come to think of Dr Fisher as an ally even though he was not his father. Ms Vicki Blum had wanted Fisher to go for regular therapy for four to six months and then for Dr Fisher to tell her if Fisher should remain in the Pickett house.

Early on during the therapy sessions, Dr Fisher told Social Services that he thought that Mrs Pickett needed therapy as well. Mrs Pickett refused to go and kept not taking Fisher to his appointments. She became angry if it appeared to her that Dr Fisher was on Fisher's side in any way. Fisher got yet another new caseworker. Mrs Pickett told the new caseworker that she was not going to take Fisher to therapy anymore because it was making him worse and she was thinking of having him removed. At first the new caseworker was convinced by Mrs Pickett but at a later stage she tried to reinstate the therapy sessions with Dr Fisher. However, Mrs Pickett refused.

After the events of the year Fisher failed the fourth grade. He only felt competent in art class and it was the only thing that he genuinely enjoyed doing. The other children asked him to draw things such as Santa Clauses, houses and the sky for them. Fisher's drawings were multi-dimensional while the other children's were one dimensional. Even Mrs Pickett realised his talent and encouraged him to enter an art competition. He won and the prize was a position in an art course. While no one was willing to pay for Fisher to go on the course, for once Mrs Pickett had something good to tell a friend about Fisher. It was the first time that he felt that he had done something that gave other people pleasure and he enjoyed it. After this event Fisher's awareness of other people's feelings and experiences increased.

With Fisher's new emotional awareness and growing empathy he also started to become more socially aware. When Willenda watched television he became aware of the war in Vietnam. Fisher became aware of the racial tension in the country in April of 1968 when Martin Luther King was killed and Fisher's neighbourhood broke into chaos. There was rioting, while army jeeps and trucks went up and down the streets. The children were sent home from the schools.

With Fisher's growing awareness of what was happening around him and his increasing need to ask questions, church made him scared and confused (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). He was told that it was blasphemous to question anything that happened at church. Fisher had many questions in his mind and so he thought that he must be extremely bad. Fisher's church experiences were worsening. For example, he did not understand why people were flailing on the floor. In addition, Fisher was taken to church to pray through the whole night because according to the Picketts, normal church was not working for him (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher became so scared of the judgment, hell and damnation stories that Reverend Pickett preached that he began to dissociate at church.

One day when Fisher and Dwight were not singing, Mrs Pickett told them to leave the church and made them walk the 16 kilometers home. On arrival Fisher announced that he was never going to church again (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Everyone was shocked that the boy who never spoke made such a statement (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Since Fisher "was on the fast track to Hell" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 109) Mrs Pickett said that she would not make him go but she was going to lock him outside of the house for the four hours. Fisher was supposed to sit at the front door. For the first and second Sunday he did this. Then he began to explore and play in the neighbourhood. It became four hours of freedom.

When Fisher was nine years old the Picketts moved houses. This meant that Fisher had to change schools. He was anxious about meeting new people as well as repeating the fourth grade. When Fisher started the fourth grade again at his new school he became known as Fish. Initially he did not like the nickname but it grew on him and it felt like a chance to start over. Mrs Brenda Profit was Fisher's teacher. Fisher's description of her is that if "there are such a thing as human beings who act as angels

in our lives, Brenda Profit was that for me” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 122). She was fair with discipline and encouragement and treated everyone as if they were special. Mrs Brenda Profit gave everyone a chance to do well as well as to do the special helping jobs. When Fisher got to clean the erasers on the stairwell he said it was “a glorious feeling I’ll remember for the rest of my life” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 123).

One day Mrs Brenda Profit arranged the desks facing each other so that there were no longer rows such as the front row for the good children and the back row for the naughty children (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). With this arrangement she also had them sitting girl and boy next to one another and facing one another (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher was extremely shy but the seating arrangement helped him to make friends, even with girls (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Mrs Brenda Profit also arranged field trips and parties for the class. Fisher also fondly remembers Mrs Brenda Profit’s husband, Mr Milton Profit. He thought that Mrs Brenda Profit “shared Milton with” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 124) them. Fisher always noticed how Mr Milton Profit would look at Mrs Brenda Profit when he came to pick her up as well as that they cherished each other. Fisher thought of Mr Milton Profit as “a true gentleman” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 124). Mr Milton Profit was the first husband that Fisher saw being “loving toward his wife” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 125). According to Fisher the image of the Profits’ relationship and their care for one another was one that he held with him for years to come.

Fisher realised that Mrs Brenda Profit was spiritual but not religious in the way the Picketts were. Just after the breakfast program she would give the class a few moments of silence to think about anything they liked, to meditate or to pray. This was such a contrast to the Picketts’ “hellfire and damnation” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 125) that Fisher did not feel pressured. Initially Fisher felt that he was too bad to talk to God directly so he would recite the Lord’s Prayer. Over time he started to talk to whoever God may be. Fisher began to have these conversations when he was in bed at night as well. He would talk about his pain and concerns and cry.

During the fourth grade in Mrs Brenda Profit’s class Fisher slowly started to like himself more and develop a sense of self. He did very well in art class but was still struggling in his other subjects. As Fisher stuttered he had particular difficulty reading

and saying orals in front of others. Mrs Brenda Profit had to decide whether to fail Fisher or promote him to the fifth grade. She did the latter.

Around the time Fisher was ten years old he became interested in music and began to enjoy the words and melodies. As Fisher had been struggling to escape in his mind, music provided him with a new means of escape. As he was not allowed to listen to secular music at home he would stand outside the record and barber shops to hear the music they were playing. After they moved to the new house the Picketts opened a thrift store. Fisher had to work there after school and on weekends. As the thrift store was directly opposite a record store, Fisher would enjoy listening to the music blaring from it while he worked.

Fisher had become accustomed to the cleaning he had to do at home and at the thrift store. He felt that it was the only way to create order in his chaotic life. One day Fisher offered to do a display in the windows of the thrift store. He did a bridal scene. Mrs Pickett was so impressed with how the display changed and improved the ambiance of the store that designing displays became Fisher's special task.

A group of parents approached Fisher's school and asked if Mrs Brenda Profit could continue with her class to the fifth grade. It was approved. As Mrs Brenda Profit remained their teacher for another year, Fisher was even more grateful that she had promoted him. Mrs Brenda Profit stayed with this particular class until the end of the sixth grade when they went to junior high school. Fisher felt that Mrs Brenda Profit mentored the class from childhood into adolescence and that she was preparing them for life.

One day in fifth grade during reading circle, when it was Fisher's turn to read, for the first time he did not panic. He read the whole passage, including a difficult word, without stuttering. Mrs Brenda Profit told Fisher that she was proud of him and glad that she had promoted him as he was doing very well. According to Fisher her words felt like "lightning bolts and thunderclaps" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 127). In this moment Fisher realised that he could do something to change his life. Even if he was told that he could not do something, if he worked hard and persisted he thought that he could change his situation.

Other highlights of the fifth grade were a field trip to listen to the Cleveland Orchestra and a camp in a wooded estate. Fisher said that the classical music transported him “out of time and place” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 127). During the camp in the estate Fisher began to enjoy the outdoors even more. When it was time to go to bed Mrs Brenda Profit would check that the children were in their cabins and would say goodnight to them. Fisher felt that this experience was an example of what it might be like to have a mother.

### **5.6.2 Discussion**

As was mentioned in chapter four, the successful completion of the previous three stages is necessary preparation for the following stage (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Thus far Fisher’s development had been hindered and he had not successfully moved through each developmental stage. The theory suggests that this is a more peaceful time in the children’s development (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009), but this was not so for Fisher. Besides dealing with the change of moving to a new school and receiving a new family member, Fisher was dealing with a lack of support from his foster family as well as continued physical and sexual abuse (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010).

During this stage it becomes increasingly important for children to contribute to their social environment and to meet the requirements set by people other than their parents (Hamachek, 1988; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). For the most the only other environment that Fisher was exposed to that was not related to his home environment or foster family was school. But Fisher’s ability to perform academically as well as socially was greatly affected by what was happening in his home environment. Therefore this section will first address Fisher’s development during this stage with regard to his home environment and related spaces such as church, the thrift store and the therapists’ offices. Thereafter Fisher’s development in the more social environment of school will be discussed.

Fisher’s home circumstances not only compounded the negative effects of the previous developmental stages but also influenced his inferiority feelings as well as his inability to master tasks (Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). For a long time Mrs Pickett

was successful at ensuring that the foster children seemed to meet the requirements of wider society and thus managed to not raise any questions about her parenting skills or lack thereof. An example of this is the children being allowed to dress up for Halloween and go trick-or-treating, but on returning home having to hand over their sweets to Mrs Pickett and not receiving any for their efforts (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). In relation to the theory this event reinforced that Fisher's efforts were for nothing and would not be rewarded, which in turn would reinforce his lack of sense of purpose developed in the previous stage (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This event also demonstrates Fisher's growing social awareness as he and Dwight realised that Mrs Pickett was not like other mothers and that something was not quite right in their family (Erikson, 1950/1973). This possibly resulted in Fisher feeling that he had an inferior family situation in comparison to other children in his neighbourhood.

Fisher's feelings of inferiority were probably built on his self-mistrust and doubt. His low self-esteem was possibly also negatively influenced by him finding out that the Picketts were not his biological family (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). These feelings of inferiority may have been reinforced by Mrs Pickett telling the children that nobody wanted them, not even their biological parents nor herself and that she only kept them in order to receive money (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

As the ability of children to develop a sense of competence is largely founded on the parents as well as family and community members noticing what they have done and making them feel good about their actions, the Pickett's responses to Fisher's activities would have influenced him in this regard (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Mrs Pickett was often angry with Fisher and would punish him as a result. The beatings he received as well as being tied to a pole in the basement further violated his boundaries, increased his shame as well as lack of autonomy and probably influenced his feelings of inferiority as whatever he attempted to do was met with harsh punishment and even abuse (Doty, 2003; Erikson 1950/1973; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Even when Fisher desperately needed the Picketts to take notice of what was happening to him psychologically and to take care such as when he began wetting the bed, skipping school to go to the Tot Lot as

well as stealing to buy sweets in attempt to make friends, Fisher was merely humiliated, punished and abused. According to Erikson's (1950/1971) theory as Fisher's actions (both voluntary and involuntary) were met with threats such as that of having his penis cut off as well as being beaten unconscious, his shame as well as inability to initiate activities would increase for fear of punishment (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This would probably be exacerbated by his learning that whatever he did was not valued and that if he had a problem he was made to feel as if he were the problem which would influence him feeling inferior (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). These events probably also increased Fisher's self-doubt and his identifying with being an evil doer (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

According to the theory, Fisher's feelings of inferiority would also be influenced by his struggling to gain acceptance with his siblings and develop mutual relationships with them (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This could be observed when Fisher was beaten by Dwight and put down and tricked by Lizzie. Lizzie tricking Fisher also possibly influenced his sense of hope, trust as well as sense of purpose as when he performed a task for her he was not rewarded as she had promised (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While Fisher's family relationships mostly reinforced his developmental struggles, his relationship with Mercy and especially Keith aided in his negotiation and resolution of this stage as well as the previous stages developmental crises.

Mercy's relationship with Fisher and acts of kindness can be viewed as a contradiction within the home environment. Mercy's actions enabled Fisher to feel noticed, experience warmth and believe that he was worthwhile. In relation to the theory, this may have fostered Fisher's hope and trust that some people may be kind as well as encourage the growth of Fisher's self-esteem and competence in relationships (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher's relationship with Keith also helped him to grow in the sense that he had a sense of purpose and initiative when it came to protecting Keith's autonomy from Dwight and other children. It also aided Fisher in becoming more competent with relationships as he and Keith became close friends (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While these relationships provided Fisher with some sense of kindness, his

value in the world and companionship, they transgressed the ‘laws’ of the Pickett home. As a result Fisher experienced further emotional and physical pain from his other siblings, such as Dwight hitting Fisher and Lizzie’s racist remarks. This may have led to confusion, further feelings of inferiority and Fisher may possibly not have fully incorporated the developmental resolutions that these relationships provided him with into his being (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963, 1977).

In accordance with the theory Fisher’s church experiences, along with Mrs Pickett telling her friends that they were such bad children that they would “tear up the devil” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 62) not only reinforced that Fisher was not competent at doing anything good or lawful but increased his doubt in himself, guilt, as well as identification as an evil doer (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). At this point the only good that came of Fisher’s church experiences and his dissociating while he was there as a result of his anguish, was the day he was sent out of the church by Mrs Pickett for not singing and had to walk home as a result (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). This led to shy Fisher exclaiming that he was never going to the church again. In accordance with the theory this act was a reclamation of some of Fisher’s autonomy and displayed his ability to initiate a self-protective action which began with his dissociating and then his standing up for himself (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher being able to stand up for himself at this time may have been a result of him beginning to resolve some of his earlier developmental crises through his imagination, creativity and the healthy relationships he had managed to form (Erikson 1950/1973, 1964, 1977; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Fisher possibly had a mixed developmental response to Ms Vicki Blum’s concern and actions as well as to Mrs Honhart and Dr Fisher. These adults not only provided Fisher with a sense of care but also of his worth (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Therapy with Dr Fisher provided Fisher with a space to establish a new relationship, to feel heard as Dr Fisher would speak to Mrs Pickett about Fisher’s feelings, and to possibly develop his sense of hope (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While Ms Vicki Blum, Mrs Honhart and Dr Fisher noticed that Fisher was struggling and that there was reason for concern as well as that Mrs Pickett was potentially unstable, nothing ever came of their concerns and

Fisher was left to fend for himself in the abusive home. According to psychosocial theory this may have lead Fisher to further doubt others, believe that the world can never be safe and that people are inconsistent (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Due to the structure of the Social Services system Fisher once again received a new caseworker who did not know about his problems. This along with Mrs Honhart and Dr Fisher not taking their concerns about Fisher and Mrs Pickett further possibly lead to Fisher feeling let down by adults, and that he was not worth protecting (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As a result, Fisher may also have perceived Mrs Pickett as all powerful and feared her even more.

Even though Fisher was struggling emotionally he still found respite in nature, his imagination, and creativity which was initially through play and later through music and art as he became more invested in formal activities (Hamacheck, 1988; Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997). Even though as Fisher got older he struggled to escape in his mind, the hope he developed in the first stage seems to have fueled his imagination and creativity (Erikson, 1977). Fisher's imagination again provided him with a space to hope and initiate activities and scenarios as he imagined what his biological parents were like and how it would be to meet them. As he felt that these imaginings were his own and that no one else could touch them, they provided him with a sense of autonomy (Erikson 1950/1973, 1977; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher's growing ability to initiate self-protective activities and cultivate a sense of purpose in doing so was demonstrated by him seeking out places where music was playing, as it took him away in his mind as play had previously done (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

As mentioned in the previous stage, even though Fisher was struggling to resolve developmental crises in reality, his imagination provided him with a safe space to discover himself and develop (Erikson, 1977). The culmination of Fisher's successful development within the space of his imagination, which he seems to have started to incorporate into his sense of self, can be viewed outwardly when he took it upon himself to design the bridal scene in the thrift store to Mrs Pickett's delight. In relation to the theory this event displays Fisher's ability to perform a task competently and not only feel happy in himself, but to be the source of and witness to other people's happiness (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher's

new found ability to create something artistic in reality also can be seen to have provided him with a developmental bridge between his self-belief, autonomy, sense of purpose and competence in the space of his imagination to that of reality (Erikson, 1977).

While Fisher had found kindergarten to be an escape from his home life, when he began Grade 1 he no longer managed to separate what was happening to him at home from his time at school. This resulted in Fisher having some problems at school that were similar to those at home. This could be viewed with him being bullied at school, not being able to form friendships, as well as his inability to perform academically. Fisher's increasing transgressions at school such as him bunking and stealing money to buy the other children sweets also increased his punishment in this environment. In relation to the theory Fisher's inability to resolve previous developmental crises was affecting his ability to establish a form of competence at school (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As with Fisher burning the broom pieces on the stove, he may not have intentionally been trying to act as an evil doer when stealing the money to buy sweets, but he once again crossed accepted boundaries in order to act autonomously while pursuing an activity in the hope of resolving his friendship issues (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As mentioned earlier Mrs Pickett's and the principal's response to Fisher's unacceptable actions lead to Fisher being punished and feeling even more incompetent and inferior (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

The effects of Fisher's struggles at home and school culminated in him failing the fourth grade. In accordance with Erikson's theory this would not only cause Fisher to doubt his ability and negatively affect his self-esteem but would also reinforce his developing feelings of inferiority (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As mentioned earlier the positive effects of Fisher's imagination and creativity began to translate to situations in reality (Erikson, 1977). With regard to Fisher's school situation this can be viewed with him excelling in art class. He not only enjoyed art and felt able but it also provided him with a healthier way to interact with other children (Erikson 1950/1973, 1977; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This could be seen when the children wanted to know how Fisher drew his pictures or wanted him to draw something for them. In accordance with Erikson's theory this

would probably also have increased Fisher's self-esteem and caused him to pursue art with more vigour as it provided him with a sense of purpose and competence (Erikson 1950/1973, 1977; Hamacheck, 1998; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010).

While Fisher was still dealing with a difficult home life, things began to change for him when he had to change schools and repeat the fourth grade with Mrs Brenda Profit as his teacher. Fisher did not initially do well at school, even with Mrs Brenda Profit as his teacher, but the consistency of her behaviour as well as that she remained Fisher's teacher for three years provided him with stability. With regard to the theory this healing relationship aided Fisher's development and along with art helped him to resolve some earlier developmental crises (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As Mrs Brenda Profit was fair and consistent Fisher learnt to trust her which transferred to him beginning to trust other children in his class (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Mrs Brenda Profit's behaviour and view of Fisher also contradicted the Pickett's view of him as an evil doer (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This can be viewed by Fisher being allowed to do the special helping tasks as well as that with the new desk arrangement Fisher was not in the back row for the naughty children (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher also gained a new perspective on religion and spirituality while in Mrs Brenda Profit's class which probably helped Fisher to separate his sense of guilt and badness from spirituality.

While Mrs Brenda Profit was aiding Fisher to resolve his earlier development crises she was also fueling the hope that he had developed in the first stage. Although Fisher was very shy around girls, which was probably influenced by his sexually abusive experiences, witnessing Mrs Brenda Profit and her husband's relationship encouraged him to hope to have a similar relationship with someone one day (Erikson 1950/1973; Fisher, 2010; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Mr Milton Profit is also the first man that Fisher mentions viewing as a role model. Fisher's looking up to Mr Milton Profit and viewing him as gentleman, possibly influenced his wanting to incorporate such characteristics into his identity at a later stage (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Mrs Brenda Profit promoting Fisher to the fifth grade, even though he was struggling, possibly showed Fisher that she believed in his potential and encouraged him to believe in himself as well (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The development of this self-belief which possibly encouraged Fisher to develop a sense of will as well as purpose with regard to his school work could be seen with Fisher mastering his reading passage (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The development of Fisher's sense of competence was possibly influenced by Mrs Brenda Profit noticing how far he had come and acknowledging that his school work was improving (Erikson 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This was also a defining moment for Fisher in terms of resolving previous developmental crises as he realised that if he wanted to do something and if he committed to attaining his goal, he had the potential to fulfill his desires as well as make something of his life (Erikson 1950/1973, 1964; Hamacheck, 1998; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). Fisher's desire for a happier life as well as belief that it was possible also seems to have been fostered by the outings that Mrs Brenda Profit took the children on. On these outings Fisher was exposed to events and experiences outside of the Pickett environment and their rules and realised that there could be more to life.

For most of this stage Fisher struggled to gain a sense of mastery and competence as he was still struggling to resolve previous developmental crises. However, through his imagination, art and relationships with Mercy, Keith and Mrs Brenda Profit he began to develop relationships with others. Fisher also developed and incorporated the various parts of himself which was integral to him entering adolescence and potentially being able to form a stable identity (Erikson 1950/1973, 1977; Hamacheck, 1998; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010).

## **5.7 Stage 5: Identity versus role confusion (12-19 years)**

### **5.7.1 Findings**

Dwight reached puberty before Fisher did. Dwight was terrified that he was turning into a woman. After a while (and realising that Dwight had not turned into a woman) Fisher realised that he would not turn into a woman himself, but he was still anxious about his body changing. When Fisher began to perspire more, Mrs Pickett's solution was to pour liquid bleach into a bath and make Fisher scrub himself with it (Fisher,

**Table 5.4: Stage 4 timeline**

Year	Events and experiences
1965	Halloween-went trick-or-treating. Wonders why Mrs Pickett is different from other mothers. Learns the Picketts are not his biological family. Starts Grade 1. Wonders where his place is in the world.
1966	Wets the bed. Struggles in Grade 1. Fears that his penis will be cut off.
1967	Goes into hospital to be circumcised. Keith arrives. Steals money to buy sweets for other children. Feels that people at the hospital are nice and wants to stay there. Starts to feel inferior about his race.
1968	Bunks school. April: Views Martin Luther king being shot on tv. Neighbourhood becomes chaotic. Is psychologically assessed. Starts therapy with Dr Fisher. Hopes that Dr Fisher is his father and that he wants him. Wins an art competition. Fails the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade. Mrs Pickett sends Fisher out of the church. He announces he is never going to church again. Experiences competence in art.
1969	Moves to a new house. Repeats the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade with Mrs Profit as his teacher. Becomes known as Fish and likes it. Respects Mr Milton Profit. Starts to make friends.
1970	Prepares bridal scene display in the thrift store. Listens to music outside barber shops.
1971	Goes on school field-trips to wooded estate and Cleveland Orchestra. Sketches to deal with his feelings.

2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). To Fisher's relief Mrs Brenda Profit addressed his concerns in health class.

At the end of the fifth grade Fisher did very well and was promoted to the sixth grade with Mrs Brenda Profit as his teacher for the last year. She had spoken to the children about grooming in health class and Fisher felt that even with his limited resources he had to develop a sense of style. Because his pants were old and he wanted to look neat, he began to starch them every morning. Fisher also began to pay particular attention to his hair. This even went as far as putting strawberry gel in it for a while.

In the sixth grade when Fisher was 12 years old the children were taken on field trips to the Cleveland Space Museum and the Health Museum. Fisher was very excited about these trips as he became more interested in learning about anything that he

could. Not only did his general knowledge improve, but he was improving socially and began to accept his dark skin.

While school was a break from the reality of the rest of his life, the Picketts were still having an impact. One day when Fisher and Mrs Pickett were driving back from the thrift store Mrs Pickett noticed a VHF antennae that Lizzie had left in the car. Mrs Pickett pulled her glasses onto the tip of her nose, looked at the antennae and screamed to Fisher, “Nigga!...A bomb!” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 132) as she flung the antennae out of the car window and sped off. Two blocks later she came to her senses and brought the car to a screeching halt. She then told Fisher to run back and fetch it. According to Fisher, this “event coincided with the realisation that on top of being cruel, Mizz Pickett was probably crazy” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 133). This realisation worried Fisher. He worried that he would become as mean and crazy as the Picketts. Fisher would cry himself to sleep worrying and despairing about this.

After this incident Fisher began to tell his friends stories about Mrs Pickett’s antics. This not only helped him socially, but helped him to develop a sense of humour which also helped him to deal with what was going on at home. Fisher’s other coping mechanisms were sketching and listening to music which he would do when he was alone in his room. Sketching and music became a “release valve” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 137) for Fisher’s pent up emotions.

Toward the end of the sixth grade and Fisher’s time with Mrs Brenda Profit, she asked the children what they wanted to be when they grew up and Fisher replied “I want to be the greatest artist since Michelangelo” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 141). Fisher went on to Junior High performing far better academically and socially. He said that “even if I lived a thousand years and a hundred lives, I don’t think I could ever do or say enough to thank Mrs Profit for what she gave me” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 141).

Fisher started Junior High well, but he was struggling emotionally. One day when he was walking home from school with his friends he could not stop himself from crying so he ran away, embarrassed. He felt used and old before his time and realised that he was not like the other children. Fisher’s distress increased when he was 14 years old and he had just begun the eighth grade. At this stage Social Services removed Dwight from the Pickett home. Dwight’s removal occurred as result of events that transpired

after he met his biological mother. Flo had refused to meet her mother. Dwight however, was extremely eager to meet his mother. He would run away to see her. When the caseworker found out she wanted to speak to Fisher about Dwight. The caseworker, Ms Balestreit, reported “I talked to Antwone and was pleasantly surprised by this child’s amount of warmth and understanding” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 153). Dwight ran away for two weeks and Fisher worried terribly about this. Consequently, Dwight was removed and sent to Boys Town as his mother indicated that it was not convenient for him to come and live with her. While Dwight could no longer hit and bully Fisher, Fisher felt that besides for Flo, his only ally against the Picketts was gone.

As Fisher had become more aware of his appearance while he was in Mrs Brenda Profit’s class he came up with an idea to buy himself some clothes. Fisher started to clean the neighbours’ yards. He bought himself a new T-shirt as soon as he had enough money. Mrs Pickett was so pleased that she started to hire him out, but kept the money for herself. The only way Fisher knew how to react was with silence as he feared something worse might happen if he reacted differently.

The school gave Fisher a job playing records during the lunch hour. He made sure that Mrs Pickett did not find out that he was earning any money this time. At the start of Junior High, school was still like a haven to Fisher. However, he started to feel increasingly uncomfortable and ashamed around girls. He struggled with these feelings as he developed an interest in Freda Smolley. One day she asked Fisher if he would lend her a record. Freda along with other children also asked Fisher to mix their paints for them in art class and draw pictures for them. Fisher was so shy that he felt it “was on the level of a brutal terror” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 168). Freda liked him, but he did not know what to do about it. Even though they would walk and talk together he felt that he could not hold her hand as “most of the human touch [he’d] experienced in [his] life had hurt” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 168). Fisher would nevertheless imagine himself being married to Freda and having a family with her.

Thus far during Fisher’s childhood he had looked up to his foster father. He presumed that in some way they shared a bond. One day when Fisher was leaving the house Mr Pickett called “Boy” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 177) so that Fisher would go and help

him with the lawn mower. After Fisher had helped Mr Pickett and he turned to go, Mr Pickett called again looking at him seriously and asked him “What is yo’ name?” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 177). Fisher was devastated when he realised that after he had lived with Mr Pickett all those years, the latter did not even know his name.

During this time Mrs Pickett also came up with a new way to make more money. She decided that she was going to board the mentally handicapped from the local psychiatric hospital. Things became more difficult for Fisher when Mrs Pickett decided to put one of the boarders in the room with him. Fisher was scared of some of the patients but he nevertheless became an orderly to them, even having to bathe some of them which he hated doing.

Mrs Pickett kept complaining about Fisher, saying that he must be removed. When he was 15 years old he told the caseworker for the first time how he was actually feeling. The caseworker reported “Antwone complains that Mrs Pickett is inconsistent and unreasonable and CW tends to agree with him” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 181).

Fisher’s foster parents’ lack of concern for him could be seen when Fisher was 15 years old. He slipped at school, broke his arm and elbow, went into shock and developed a fever. The school nurse suggested that Fisher go to the hospital. However, the Picketts would not take him for three days. Fisher needed intricate surgery to reattach the bones but because the swelling had become so bad from not being attended to, he had to spend three days in hospital before the surgery could take place.

Even though school had become a sort of sanctuary for Fisher, by the time he was 16 years old he was struggling at school again. He could not stop his home life from affecting the way he felt at school and when he was with his friends. Fisher began to fall “further and further into the hopelessness of [his] reality” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 193). When Junior High was completed Fisher had to start a new school away from his friends and he therefore became even more isolated and lonely.

Fisher never had any of his friends over to the Pickett’s house. One day Jessie, a friend of Fisher, came and knocked on the front door and told Mrs Pickett that he

wanted Fisher to go with him to the movies. Mrs Pickett slammed the door and scolded Fisher, calling him every name that she could think of. She took her shoe off and hit him with it. When she hit him with the heel in his neck, he grabbed the shoe. They both stood there in shock until she told Fisher she wanted him out of her house. Feeling bad, Fisher hoped that she would calm down and wondered what he could do to appease her. The next morning Mrs Pickett threw some paper bags at him and told him to put his clothes in them. Initially she told him that someone was coming to fetch him and take him to Social Services. Then she told him he must catch the bus and get there himself. At first Fisher felt angry and sad as he thought the only family he had known was kicking him out. When he was on the bus he started to feel happy that he was finally free. When Fisher arrived at Social Services, the receptionist was surprised to see him and asked him what he was doing there. All Fisher could say was “She sent me back” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 201).

The caseworker that Fisher met that day was Ms Patricia Nees. She arranged for Fisher to be sent temporarily back to the orphanage. She also took him shopping for new clothes as he refused to take the clothes he had at the Picketts. Fisher could not believe that he was taken to a proper clothing shop and allowed to choose what he wanted. Ms Patricia Nees told Fisher about his mother and father and what the situation was when he was born. He was overwhelmed with being told any information about himself and his biological parents. Ms Patricia Nees also gave Fisher his birth certificate which he then kept on his person at all times. Fisher spent four months at the orphanage. He felt depleted and had lost hope. He became depressed but tried to imagine himself as a good person, as a family man and in a better position than he was in at the time. Fisher needed to believe that he could prove Mrs Pickett wrong about him. He also desperately wanted to get away from Cleveland.

Ms Patricia Nees located a reformatory school, George Junior Republic, in Pennsylvania (Doty, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010). She was not very eager to send Fisher there because he would be the only student who had not committed a crime and sentenced as a juvenile offender. But Fisher was relieved that it was far away from Mrs Pickett and that it was on a farm. He loved the natural setting and stayed there for 12 months (Fisher 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001).

According to Fisher it became a “form of refuge, a place where I could rest and recuperate” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 225). While Fisher was at the reform school he missed his friends. He was taken one weekend to visit a Mrs Ewart. She seemed very nice and offered that Fisher could come and live at her house as a foster child. Fisher was “embarrassed, feeling totally unworthy” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 228). He also did not trust going back to another foster home no matter how nice the people seemed, so he declined the offer and remained at George Junior Republic.

One day when the other children were moaning about the school Fisher thought about joining in, just to feel that he was part of the group. However, Fisher told the other children that they have so many opportunities at the school and that he was glad to be there as he did not have anywhere or anyone else. Fisher realised from his own words that if he did not use the opportunity or if he made a mistake no one was going to help him out. From that day he made stringent rules for himself that lasted for the rest of his life. He was not going to do anything to get arrested and he would not do drugs, smoke, party all night or get a girl pregnant. Fisher thought that he had to be his own parent.

When Fisher turned 18 he would no longer be a ward of the state. He was worried that he would have to leave the reformatory school (George Junior Republic) only having completed Grade 11. Fisher went to speak to the principal about his concerns. It was decided that Fisher could take the tests the Grade 12s were taking. Fisher passed all his tests and graduated high school in June 1977. Not yet 18, Fisher was an emancipated minor (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010). Therefore a social worker took him to a YMCA men’s shelter in Cleveland.

Fisher was scared of the other men at the YMCA. The first night that he was there he locked his door but then he needed to go to the toilet. When he was urinating a very big man came into the bathroom and said loudly, “Don’t put it away” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 239). The man was standing in only his underwear. He grabbed Fisher’s waist and pulled Fisher toward him. Fisher tried to push the man away. After struggling with the man Fisher managed to escape. For the next two days Fisher avoided being alone or going to the toilet at night. On the third night Fisher was bursting for the toilet and thought that he would go quickly. But the man and his

sidekick caught Fisher in the corridor. They said to him, “Relax, honey, this ain’t gona hurt” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 241). Knowing too well what the men’s intentions were Fisher fought with everything he had. He managed to get free and ran down the steps and out into the night. That night Fisher hid in the alley. He gave up on finding a job to save up for art school or on seeing his friends again. His focus had to be on finding protection. The next day he decided that he needed to sneak back into the shelter and get his things. Fisher thought that he would rather live on the streets than at the shelter with what might happen “because sometimes outside is less terrifying than inside” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 241).

Butch, a rather large man, was at the shelter to do business. When Butch saw Fisher coming into the shelter wearing his pajamas he asked Fisher what was going on. Fisher told Butch what had happened and why he was at the shelter. Butch said that he would look out for Fisher if Fisher worked for him (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher did not realise what he was getting himself into (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). His first job was to fetch money from prostitutes for Butch. Fisher was scared of the prostitutes as “their business was sex” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 245). During this time Fisher stayed at the shelter with Butch’s protection. Butch started to make Fisher roll joints. He despised the smell. Fisher was then given a new job which involved selling playing cards with addresses on them. Fisher did not know what it involved except that he was supposed to hand over the cards and collect the money. One night he had six cards. A man said to Fisher that he wanted all of the cards. Fisher told the man that he could only give him four cards as the other two were for regulars. The regulars did not show. The following day Fisher was beaten by the furious Butch (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Everyone who was there just stood and starred, and then left. One of the prostitutes, Rhonda, stayed and helped Fisher up and around the corner. She warned Fisher to get far away from Butch. When Fisher asked Rhonda what he had done that was so wrong, she explained to him what the cards meant.

Heroin addicts who could not pay Butch traded their children for drugs. The addresses were where the men could find the children. The children would get used for sex and pornography. When Fisher heard this he “felt like dying” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p.

248). He thought of everything that had happened to him with Willenda and what those children must have gone through.

Fisher left the shelter for good that night. He knew what Butch would do to him if he found him. Fisher found an abandoned storefront to sleep in. He spent a couple of weeks there, not even realising that his 18<sup>th</sup> birthday had passed. During this time Fisher would beg to make money. He tried on numerous occasions to apply for a job but each time he was turned away as he did not have a telephone number or an address.

Another man had also been sleeping in the same storefront as Fisher. The man seemed to be becoming more unstable and Fisher was scared of him. In his desperation, Fisher decided to go back to his old neighbourhood. When Fisher got to Glenville (Cleveland, Ohio) he found his old school friend Jessie. He told Jessie about his situation but was ashamed to see his other friends. He spent the next two weeks at Jessie's home. Fisher had been playing basketball at the courts when Jessie called him to come along to the shop. Fisher told Jessie that he would catch up to him. As Fisher arrived at the shop he saw the owner shoot Jessie. Jessie had apparently tried to rob the old man. Fisher started to run, not knowing where he was going to. He went back to living on the streets. Fisher felt haunted by Jessie's death and was depressed. He realised that he had to make a plan and get away. Fisher felt that he had to take charge of his life but was not sure how to. Fisher thought "if I figured out where the somewhere I belonged was, I'd figure out who the somebody was that I was meant to be" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 253).

Before Fisher left Cleveland he wanted to see Flo. He found out that she was staying with Mercy. Mercy invited Fisher to come and stay with them for a bit, not knowing what his situation was. Dwight also came over for dinner. Fisher stayed with Mercy and Flo for two months. He helped around the house and with Mercy's children. Dwight and Flo thought that this was all that there was to life. Fisher thought "if growing up meant the death of dreams, I chose immaturity" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 255). Fisher was so scared that something would go wrong while he was staying at Mercy's and that she would kick him out that he chose to go back to the streets (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010). When Fisher passed the recruiting office

one day he saw a poster that he had not seen before. It had a wooden sailing ship on it and a sailor holding a young boy's hand. On the poster it said, "Join the Navy, See the world" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 261). Fisher looked young and disheveled. The recruiting officers did not believe that he was 18 or that he could have completed school. Fisher's two prize positions, his birth certificate and his school graduation certificate were always on his person. After showing the recruiting officers his certificates he joined the navy (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010).

Fisher's first experience of the navy was boot camp. Boot camp took his memories back to his time in Mrs Brenda Profit's class where he was not below average academically nor physically. Even to Fisher's surprise he coped physically. The self-image that Fisher had begun to develop in Mrs Brenda Profit's class, that had waned with later challenges, began to develop again. When others wanted to quit or were homesick, he knew it was not an option for him as he would be homeless again. Fisher's fellow recruits became his family. The boot camp graduation ceremony made him feel for the first time that he was not alone but connected to others. Physically and mentally he was becoming stronger. Fisher felt that in the navy he belonged and that people were not able to see how different his childhood may have been from the other recruits. Fisher felt proud of himself as he graduated.

After naval boot camp Fisher became a seaman apprentice, situated in San Diego, California. Fisher was assigned to the deck department where he had done everything that he was told to do without flinching or questioning. Then he was told that he would be the sole person responsible for guiding the pilots safely to landing. As the first Huey (a military aircraft) was approaching Fisher argued with the chief that he could not do that task. Fisher thought that he was going to send the aircraft crashing into the ship, killing and maiming everyone. Fisher continued to argue with the chief that he cannot put peoples' lives in his hands. The chief took off his helmet and threw it at Fisher. Fisher stood there looking at the incoming aircraft but was frozen. The chief screamed at him again to signal. Fisher did manage to guide the pilot safely onto the ship. The chief made him signal the incoming pilots for the next hour. Fisher experienced an "unforgettable feeling of power, purpose and importance that springs from the realization that everybody was depending on me and I didn't let them down" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 272). Fisher felt that that was the day he left his childhood

behind him and started to become a man. He then went overseas on the ship the U.S.S Schenectady, a large troop-carrying ship.

According to Fisher, sometimes he was helped or taught lessons without realising it at the time. An example of this was when he was stationed on the U.S.S Schenectady. Senior Chief Lott decided to confront Fisher about a few things. According to Fisher he had “a mouth so foul I was sure the expression about cursing like a sailor was invented for him” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, pp. 273-274). Fisher was known as easy going and hard working. At this point he hardly got into trouble but one day Chief Lott started to swear at him and told Fisher he was sick of him walking with his head down. He proceeded to scream and swear and warned Fisher what he would do to him if he saw him walking with his head down again. At first Fisher was constantly looking around every corner for Chief Lott so that he would lift his head up in time. He became so worried about bumping into Chief Lott that he started to keep his head up all the time.

The next thing that Chief Lott began to complain about was Fisher’s shyness and that he was soft spoken. Fisher was worried that he would stutter but Chief Lott carried on screaming that he must speak up and direct his attention and voice toward him. Fisher was so scared of Chief Lott that he did what he said. According to Fisher in that moment it “felt like I was some bizarre contortionist, my neck craned up like that, my voice a trumpet blaring out from inside my throat, right at him, my eyes pulled tight into slits” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 276). Chief Lott continued to reprimand Fisher because he wanted him to be able to look up at people and to not be afraid to speak to them and for this to come naturally to him. Although Fisher remained reserved, with time speaking to people did come more naturally to him.

### **5.7.2 Discussion**

As mentioned in chapter four, during adolescence, individuals need to determine who they are and what their place in society is (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Successful completion of the previous stages is needed for adolescents to feel secure enough in themselves to assimilate previous identities and to form a more coherent identity (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). At this stage Fisher had not fully resolved the previous developmental

crises, but his relationship with Mrs Brenda Profit, as well as the safe space that his imagination provided him with, were helping him to counter the negative effects of his home environment (Erikson, 1977; Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). Fisher faced many difficult situations during this stage which could potentially have added to his developmental difficulties or even eroded the beginnings of the ego strengths he was developing. However, Fisher showed resilience (Erikson, 1950/1973). This resilience possibly developed as a result of his ego strength of hope (Erikson, 1950/1973). In addition, the positive effects of the developmental crises that he had begun to resolve and the development of his self-concept, were potentially strong enough to withstand further traumatic experiences (Erikson, 1950/1973).

As a result of Fisher's awareness of his changing body as well as growing understanding that there were now societal expectations of him as well as the expectations at home, adolescence became a time of anxiety, confusion and shame (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963). This was fuelled by three such events. Firstly, by Fisher witnessing Dwight fearing that puberty would turn him into a woman. Secondly, by Mrs Pickett bathing Fisher in bleach in response to his increased sweating. Thirdly by Mrs Pickett throwing Lizzie's antennae out of the car thinking when she thought it was a bomb (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). This latter event in particular caused Fisher great anguish as he feared that he would become as mean and crazy as the Picketts. According to the theory Fisher's fears reveal that he was having difficulty assimilating the different parts of himself as well as distinguishing himself from his foster family (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964). He was also becoming more aware of these various parts of himself and the need to establish an identity and therefore feared that his identity would diffuse with that of the Picketts (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964). Fisher's level of self-awareness, as well as his concern about becoming like the Picketts, possibly helped to prevent it from happening (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964).

Initially school and art provided Fisher with respite from the Picketts and aided the formation of his identity. In relation to the theory, the safety of Mrs Brenda Profit's class and her lessons provided Fisher with a place to not only understand what was happening to him physically, but also to experiment with who he wanted to be and to discover what his interests were (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et al., 2009). Fisher's experimenting as well as self-discovery could be seen in his

wanting to develop a sense of style and wearing strawberry gel in his hair for a while as well as taking an interest in anything that he could learn about. While Fisher was becoming more competent at school (both socially and academically) he still experienced self-doubt. However, with affirmation and reassurance from Mrs Brenda Profit he slowly began to incorporate the view of himself as a capable person into his identity (Hamachek, 1988; Luyckx et. al, 2013).

During this stage Fisher also further developed his coping mechanisms and ability to initiate self-protective activities (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1977). This was demonstrated with his developing a sense of humour, which was possibly influenced by his creative way of viewing the world, as well as furthering his interests in music and sketching. Fisher increasingly incorporated the creative side of himself into his identity and pursued art with more vigour (Capps, 2011; Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Luyckx et. al, 2013; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This was probably because, (i) his protective tendencies involved his imagination and creativity from an early age, and (ii) that his creativity and imagination helped him to develop positively (Capps, 2011; Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Luyckx et. al, 2013; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This is further displayed by Fisher defining himself as an artist when he said “I want to be the greatest artist since Michelangelo” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 141) and desiring to go to art school in order to pursue art as a career.

While Fisher demonstrated his ability to pursue activities that would help him to establish his identity such as mowing the neighbour’s lawns to make money to buy clothes and playing records at school, he still struggled to gain autonomy (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This could be seen by Mrs Pickett using Fisher to look after the psychiatric borders as well as hiring Fisher out to the neighbours and taking the money for herself. This possibly made Fisher feel that his sense of purpose was taken from him as well as that it increased his difficulty in establishing an identity that was separate from that of the Picketts (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Fisher’s difficulty with forming an identity that was separate from that of the Picketts was aggravated by his shame that had developed in the second stage and remained with him (Erikson, 1950/1973). This was possibly reinforced by the loss Fisher

experienced during this time, such as Dwight going to Boys Town and Lizzie leaving the home, while Fisher remained with the Picketts (Erikson, 1950/1973). While the adolescent's identity is greatly influenced by those outside of the family, Fisher felt incompetent in terms of forming relationships with females and felt increasing embarrassment around them which was possibly as a result of the sexual abuse that he had experienced (Erikson, 1950/1973). The potentially damaging effects of both the physical and sexual abuse can be seen during this stage when interacting with others on a more adult level becomes important as well as experimenting with romantic attachments. However, Fisher was hindered as "most of the human touch [he'd] experienced in [his] life had hurt" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 168). Even though it was difficult for Fisher to interact with females, he nevertheless still demonstrated an almost childlike way of addressing his problems in his imagination as could be seen with him imagining that he would one day marry his crush, Freda Smolley (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1977).

The losses that Fisher experienced during this time, such as Dwight leaving the foster home, realising that the bond he imagined with his foster father was not real, and later Jessie's death, possibly reinforced that the world is unsafe as well as unpredictable (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While Fisher may have known that Dwight and Jessie did not purposefully abandon him, their absence from his life may have reinforced Fisher's feelings of abandonment that developed in the first stage, as well as his distrust in being able to rely on people to remain in his life (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). These events may also have negatively affected Fisher's self-esteem which becomes increasingly important as adolescents try to define who they are in the world (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Luyckx, 2013; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher's lack of self-esteem was possibly further affected by the neglect he experienced when he broke his arm and was not taken to the hospital for three days as well as that Mrs Pickett would constantly threaten to have him removed (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Luyckx, 2013; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Even though Fisher was feeling depressed and hopeless about his situation, when he stood up to Mrs Pickett after she hit him because Jessie wanted him to go to the movies, he displayed some autonomy and sense of his own worth (Erikson,

1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This autonomous act was possibly as a result of the positive ego qualities Fisher had been developing at school, as well as his increasing self-protective tendencies (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Luyckx, 2013; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). According to the theory Fisher could not retain this autonomous aspect of himself when he felt bad for standing up to Mrs Pickett and wanted to appease her as he was dependant on her and still could not fully assimilate the various parts of himself into a cognizant whole and separate his identity from hers (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The effects of Fisher's actions seemed to have devastating repercussions at the time as he was sent back to Social Services and then had no family, good or bad. This event did nevertheless free him from the constant emotional and physical abuse that he had still been experiencing in the Pickett home.

Ms Patricia Nees played a significant role during Fisher's identity formation as she provided him with an understanding of his beginnings, his birth certificate and explained to him how he had become a ward of the state. Even though Fisher became depressed and despondent after Mrs Pickett being yet another person to give him away, he still managed to retreat into his imagination and envision himself as a good person with a better life (Erikson, 1977). According to Erikson's (1950/1971) theory, even though Fisher was not a juvenile offender being sent to the reformatory school could potentially have lead him to identify as an evil doer. However, Fisher seemed to have learnt enough about himself at this stage to know that he was not evil and to make the most of the situation (Doty, 2003; Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Luyckx, 2013; Miller, 2010; Pfefferman, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Even though Fisher managed to not identify as an evil doer his self-worth was extremely low and his distrust in people had increased as could be seen by his not wanting to become Mrs Ewart's foster child (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Even though Fisher had experienced another traumatic experience of Mrs Pickett giving him away, at the reformatory school he began to build on the lessons and developmental resolutions that he had begun in Mrs Brenda Profit's class. In relation to psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1950/1971), Fisher deciding to make the most of his opportunities at the reformatory school, set rules or boundaries for himself and work hard, all reflected his establishing an identity for himself that would aid him in

attaining a career and fulfilling his future desires (Capps, 2011; Hamacheck, 1988). In accordance with the theory Fisher began to develop a sense of will and increased his already developing sense of initiative, purpose and competence as was displayed by his going to the principal to discuss that he wanted to get his school certificate before leaving the reformatory and then completing Grade 11 and 12 in the same year (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Fisher's time at school, in particular in Mrs Brenda Profit's class and at the reformatory, had helped to counter the negative developmental effects of the Pickett home. However, Fisher's time at the YMCA and when he was homeless once again brought up the negative effects of his developmental crises, and threatened to disintegrate his sense of self and the stable identity that he was forming (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Fisher, 2010; Pfefferman, 2010). The two men attempting to assault Fisher at the YMCA along with the discovery that Butch was renting out people's children and Butch beating Fisher, reinforced that the world was unsafe and violent and that people could not be trusted (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Fisher, 2010; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher's shame and guilt were also reiterated when he feared the sex workers as well as with his realisation of the role he played when selling the cards with the children's addresses (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher's lack of outward identity could be seen by him not being able to apply for a job as he did not have an address or telephone number. He may have internalised his outward appearance of not having an identity, of being a nobody, and this could have negatively affected the healthy parts of himself that he had developed (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

While Fisher had not yet been able to permanently change his situation for the better he had developed ways to protect himself under the circumstances. In relation to the theory, this could be seen when he had to get away from the streets where Butch was and went back to his old neighbourhood and found Jessie as well as his staying with Mercy in exchange for helping her at home (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Fisher, 2010; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). But both of these events were disturbed, firstly by Jessie's death and then by Fisher leaving Mercy's home as he was unable to trust that things would work out there (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Fisher, 2010; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Despite his circumstances, Fisher had not lost all hope. This was

demonstrated with his ability to still protect and motivate himself through his imagination as could be seen when Dwight and Flo had given up that life could be better but Fisher thought that he would continue to dream even if it meant that he was immature. According to the theory Fisher did not give up wanting to establish a stable identity for himself as the hope that he had developed in the first stage was so resolute (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). In addition, Fisher's desire to form a stable identity was aided by his positive relationships and experiences that had helped him to develop the healthy aspects of himself (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This could be viewed with his thoughts that "if I figured out where the somewhere I belonged was, I'd figure out who the somebody was that I was meant to be" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 253). When Fisher saw the navy's recruiting poster he had a sense of where it was that he wanted to be.

Joining the navy provided Fisher with an opportunity to develop a more whole identity. This was possible as it provided him with a space to build on the strengths he had developed in Mrs Brenda Profit's class and at the reformatory school. He also realised that as long as he worked hard and remained committed, there would not be a time limit posed on his stay (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Fisher, 2010; Pfefferman, 2010). As there was unlimited time with no outside interruptions in the form of abusive experiences, he was able to focus on his development and begin to discover who he really was in the world (Capps, 2011; Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963). The navy provided Fisher with a sense of purpose as he had to become competent in the naval tasks in order to make it through boot camp. He also wanted to remain there as it provided him with a sense of belonging for the first time in his life (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963). Fisher's realisation that he was capable, both athletically and academically, in comparison to his fellow recruits, promoted the development of his self-esteem (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher also began to resolve his feelings of shame which was demonstrated by him feeling proud of himself for graduating (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Dealing with his shame and feelings of inferiority did not come naturally to Fisher but he had teachers (some idiosyncratic) along the way. In accordance with the theory Senior Chief Lott's expectations of Fisher may have seemed harsh at the time and caused Fisher some anxiety but he learnt to walk with his head held up, to look people in the eye when speaking to them and to not stutter, which all in turn increased

his confidence and self-worth and decreased his shame (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Fisher's shame was further decreased with the development of his identity as a seaman and discovering that he was able to accomplish tasks in line with his work and that he could make a positive difference (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This was demonstrated when Fisher did not want the responsibility of guiding the incoming aircraft to safe landing as he doubted his ability and feared he would get people killed but instead learnt that he could be responsible for other people and that he was a reliable person (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Through Fisher developing an identity as a seaman in the navy and being committed to his career and fellow sailors he developed the ego strength of fidelity (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

It is important to note that while Fisher was forming an identity in the navy and had developed a sense of fidelity he had a complicated adolescence as well as childhood and this still hindered his assimilation of the various parts of himself that are required to form a stable identity (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Therefore, while each of the developmental crises is present in every other stage, Fisher seems to have needed to particularly carry the developmental task of establishing a stable identity into the following stage (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

## **5.8 Stage 6: Intimacy versus isolation (20-35 years)**

### **5.8.1 Findings**

In 1980 Fisher was sent to Pearl Harbour. He served on two different ships while he was stationed in Hawaii as well as at the Naval Communications Station, Wahiawa. Contrary to the reports written about Fisher during his childhood, his naval report stated that he was a "young intellectual" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 278) and that he performed "duties in an orderly and professional manner" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 278).

**Table 5.5: Stage 5 timeline**

Year	Events and experiences
1971	Mrs Pickett makes Fisher bath in bleach. Does well in 5 <sup>th</sup> grade, passes. Fears that puberty will turn him into a woman.
1972	Visits Cleveland Health and Space museums. Mrs Pickett thinks VHF antennae is a bomb. Starts junior high school. Desires to develop a sense of style. Fisher accepts his dark skin. Thinks Mrs Pickett is crazy and mean. Fears he will become like her. Wants to become an artist.
1973	Dwight is removed from the Pickett home. Has a job playing records at school. Rev Pickett asks Fisher what his name is. Fisher is saddened by realisation that he did not have a bond with his foster father. Has a crush on Freda Smolley. Dreams about marrying her.
1974	Breaks his arm at school. Picketts do not take him to hospital for three days. Feels neglected by the Picketts.
1975	Grabs Mrs Picketts shoe from while she is beating him. Mrs Pickett sends Fisher back to Social Services. Receives his birth certificate. Sent back to orphanage. Feels hopeless and depressed.
1976	Goes to reformatory school. Sets life rules for himself. Enjoys being in nature. Does not want to be fostered again. Feels unworthy of Mrs Ewart's offer to foster him.
1977	Completes Grades 11 and 12 in same year. Becomes an emancipated minor. Lives at YMCA. Works for Butch in exchange for protection. Experiences dread about the work he did for Butch. Becomes homeless. Goes to Cleveland to find Jessie who gets shot. Joins the navy. Does not want to give up dreaming.
1978	Goes to naval boot-camp. Feels capable and proud of himself.
1979	Becomes a seaman apprentice. Guides airplanes to safe landing. Learns to trust his abilities.

While on the outside things were looking better, Fisher was struggling with his feelings. His medical record showed that he was depressed, having mood swings and was suicidal. Having merely one consultation did not help and Fisher became increasingly frustrated. Fisher remembered Ms Patricia Nees concern that he “was a walking pressure cooker in need of therapy to help [him] from exploding in an unprotected environment” (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 279).

Fisher became very introspective and would have bursts of anger. He began to lash out. Fisher was later grateful that this did not happen in an unprotected environment. Fisher was generally known to be fair and friendly but if someone treated him with disrespect or said something that was racist to him, he lashed out and fought. As a result of his fighting, Fisher was given penalties such as not being allowed to leave the ship and having money taken off his salary.

Fisher began to fight for the smallest reason. The only explanation for the navy not dismissing Fisher until this point had been the high quality of his work. The executive

officer was supposed to send Fisher to the captain's mast for his infringements, but he tried to protect Fisher by implementing the punishment himself. One day the executive officer could not take Fisher's fighting anymore. He could not understand why the usually easy-going, hardworking young man was having outbursts. He asked Fisher what was going on and what the problem was. Fisher tried to explain to his executive officer where the anger might be coming from. The executive officer then arranged for Fisher to see the navy psychiatrist, Lieutenant Commander Williams (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010). Fisher was feeling hostile and did not want to talk but realised that this was his last chance (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010). It was the first time that he told someone his story and he just wanted to cry. Fisher said that to "talk was liberation from the prison of silence, from the burden of my own secrets" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 284). According to Fisher the problem was that "by the end of the hour, I had only begun" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 284).

Lieutenant Commander Williams was not supposed to see Fisher for more than one appointment as this was navy policy. He arranged for a second official appointment so that they could discuss the situation. As Lieutenant Commander Williams could not see Fisher officially for therapy, over the next two years he became a mentor and confidant. Fisher felt that he was letting his pent up emotions out and that he was dealing with his past constructively through his conversations with Lieutenant Commander Williams (Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Pfefferman, 2010). Fisher was also supported by Senior Chief Akiona who always encouraged him. Fisher stopped fighting and improved with his naval duties and socially.

Fisher had taken a Japanese course at the Academia School of Language Hawaii. He did very well. Fisher became fascinated with language and began to love words and writing. Fisher read as much literature he could find in an attempt to educate himself. After reading the lyrics of a *Dramatics'* song he wanted to write something similar. Without even realising what he had done, he had written a poem. He showed it to one of his friends who was so impressed that he asked Fisher if he could send it to his wife. Other sailors began to buy Fisher's poems to send to their wives and girlfriends. Fisher developed a reputation as a writer of romantic poetry and one of the senior sailors nick named him "Sweet Mouth" (Fisher & Rivas, 2001, p. 291). Fisher's

writing and musings became so popular that he was given a monthly column in the ship's paper. According to Fisher poetry allowed him to be whoever he wanted to be (Fisher, 2003). He could dream of what he wanted for his life through poetry (Fisher, 2003). When Fisher was alone and felt that it was difficult to deal with the reality of his life and past he would write (Fisher, 2003). Poetry became his way of speaking to himself (Fisher, 2003). According to Fisher the "self-expression" that he found in poetry allowed him "a priceless freedom" (Fisher, 2003, p. xv).

When Fisher was 25 years old he went to Japan for two years. Fisher would hold Japan and the Japanese culture dear to him for the rest of his adult life. One day Fisher met Seiko Fukushima in a shop. She was also shy which lessened Fisher's anxiety. They spent months talking and getting to know one another. Fisher fell in love. His old fears came back when the relationship became physical. Seiko was patient with Fisher and he learnt to trust her. Even though Fisher knew that when his ship left Japan he would have to go and Seiko would stay as she had her career there, he was very heartbroken.

During Fisher's last years in the navy he continued to be known as a hard worker who was friendly with everyone. He had received many accolades. Fisher was also known for the off duty hours that he spent participating in orphanage rehabilitation projects in Korea and Hong Kong. When Fisher was 30 years old he left the navy. While the navy had provided him with security and a substitute family, he desired a new type of freedom (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher feared that he would struggle if he faced a sudden change of work so he trained to be a federal correctional officer. Fisher went to work on Terminal Island in California (Fisher, 2003, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). During his time as a correctional officer Fisher began to wonder about his biological family and where he had come from. Fisher thought a lot about his mother being pregnant with him and in prison.

When Fisher was almost 33 he took a job as a security guard at Sony Pictures Entertainment in Los Angeles (Dutka, 2003; Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Even though Fisher had an apartment and friends, he was still avoiding long term commitment. He first wanted to make something of himself. Fisher began to learn about show business through observation. He would also read the screenplay scripts

in the writers and producers' offices. To Fisher it felt like he was learning a new language.

One night in the summer of 1992 Fisher could not stop wondering about his roots. The following day Fisher phoned Social Services to request a copy of his file as a Ward of the State so that he could learn more about himself. As Fisher was never adopted it was approved that he may receive a copy of his file. Fisher then found the newspaper report about his father's murder from the local library. For a few weeks Fisher felt stunned by everything that he had read and was confused about what to do. He then decided to phone the funeral home that was listed in the article about his father's murder. The funeral home sent Fisher a copy of Edward Elkins' death certificate which also contained the address of his next of kin. When Fisher read the address, he saw that it was in the neighbourhood where he had grown up (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). In fact it was right next door to Freda's house. Fisher then went through the phonebook looking up the Elkins. He phoned an Annette Elkins, not knowing if she was any relation of his. To Fisher's surprise and relief, she was Eddie's sister. Fisher explained to Annette that he thought that he was Eddie's son and that he had grown up as a foster child. Annette told him that if anyone in their family had known about him they would have taken him in. Fisher and his aunt swapped numbers so that they could talk again in a few days time.

A few days went by and Fisher received a phone call from another aunt of his, Eda. She told Fisher that he had an uncle, Raymond, in California and that they should get together. One weekend Fisher went to visit his uncle Raymond. He could not believe that he was meeting someone who looked like him.

His family invited him to come and meet the rest of them in Cleveland. A month later Fisher went to Cleveland for Thanksgiving. As Fisher had not been at his new job for long he had to explain to his supervisor why he wanted the time off. Fisher told his supervisor some of his story. He did not know at the time what an impact this would make on his future career. When Fisher met the rest of his paternal family he was overwhelmed but happy. They told him stories about his father and grandparents and showed him photographs. Fisher also met his half-sisters and got on well with them.

An uncle, Spinoza, wanted to find Eva Mae Fisher. He found Fisher's uncle Jess Fisher, Eva Mae Fisher's brother. Spinoza took Fisher to meet Jess Fisher and he said that he would take him to Eva Mae and that she lived in the housing projects. Fisher was terrified to meet his mother. He had a speech planned for her, but when he saw the frail woman in her pajamas in the dark room he was shocked. She was unkempt and did not have any teeth. Eva Mae cried and ignored Fisher. She continued to ignore him until Jess Fisher said that they were leaving. She continued to stand with her back to them. Fisher went to hug her. As he did, she turned, looked away from him and ran out of the room.

Another visit was arranged with Eva Mae and Fisher got to know his half-sister, Melody, quite well. He only spoke a little with his mother on the next visit. She had had four other children and all five of her children had been wards of the state. Jess Fisher explained to Fisher that Eva Mae had been in and out of jail and hospital her whole life. Fisher tried to stay in contact with his mother for a while. The relationship was strained and he only spoke to her now and again until she died in 2011 ("Antwone Fisher biography," 2013; Fisher, 2010). While Fisher was in Cleveland, he went to see some of his old friends. He realised that he had been missing them far more than they did him. During this time Fisher also tracked Dwight down in jail. He went to visit him in an attempt to find closure. After the visit to Cleveland Fisher felt that he understood his life more. He flew back to California with one of his aunts. On the flight Fisher's feelings of being overwhelmed turned to tears.

When Fisher got back to work at Sony, his supervisor had told some producers about his story and they wanted to make a movie about his life. The catch was that they wanted a professional screenwriter to write the story. When Fisher suggested that he himself write the story he was politely dismissed. Fisher was offered \$50000 for his story, but he declined (Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher thought that while his story may not become a film he did not need permission to write (Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). So he began to write his own scripts about his life (Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). In 1993 a limo driver mentioned a free screenwriting course taught by Chris Smith (Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher spoke to Chris Smith and told him that he wanted to write. Smith introduced Fisher to a producer, Todd Black (Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher could not believe

that he was going to have a meeting with a producer. He showed Todd Black the beginnings of what he had been writing. Todd Black phoned Fisher a week later and asked him to come in again. At the meeting he told Fisher that he could not offer him a deal yet. Fisher was feeling disappointed, but Todd Black went on to tell him that he could offer him an office and a salary to work on the screenplay. Fisher could not believe what he was hearing. Todd Black tutored Fisher as he wrote 41 drafts of his first screenplay. After a year of writing Fisher had a final screenplay and Todd Black sold it to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox for \$250000.

Fisher feared that he would feel exposed and vulnerable with the production and release of the film. Todd Black, Randa Haines and Denzel Washington assisted Fisher through this process (Dutka, 2003). He felt this was a lesson in learning to trust others (Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher was not only motivated to carry on with the project because of the support of his friends but he also hoped that by telling his story it would help other people that might have had similar experiences (Dutka, 2003; Fisher, 2010). After the success of *Antwone Fisher*, which was directed by Denzel Washington, Fisher was hired to write more screenplays (Doty, 2003; Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). As he learned, he needed to write fewer drafts and could meet stricter deadlines (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). Fisher could not believe that he had become an artist after having dreamt about it since he was a young boy.

### **5.8.2 Discussion**

According to Erikson (1950/1973) the identity of young adults needs to have been reasonably well established in adolescence in order for them to form intimate relationships with others. Initially, Fisher was still focused on establishing his identity as opposed to a romantic relationship (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). He did, however, manage to develop a romantic relationship with someone during this stage as well as reconnect with his biological family and form friendships that he still has to this day. According to psychosocial theory (Erikson, 1950/1971) Fisher first needed to focus on learning to trust others as well as the development of his identity. This is because in an intimate relationship the two identities need to fuse together and if one of the partner's identity is not secure, this partner may fear becoming lost or may become diffused in the other person's identity (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

According to the theory the stability of adolescents' home environments is crucial to their emotional capacities to self-regulate, make life choices, and affirm their abilities and establish identities (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). Fisher did not have a stable home environment while he was an adolescent and at times did not even have a home. This along with his developmental difficulties from stages one and two such as his inability to trust people and assimilate the various parts of his ego, as well as his constant struggle to gain autonomy, possibly lead to his depression and fighting during this stage (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009; Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013).

Fisher's time in the navy was particularly integral to him resolving the developmental crises of the first stage such as mistrust and difficulty assimilating the various parts of ego. This resolution of these developmental crises seems to have aided his development of a stable identity, as well as being able to deal with the developmental crises of this stage such as forming intimate relationships (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While Fisher was in the navy, he traveled all over the world, but always remained safe and secure within the stability and consistency of the navy's boundaries. He was not only protected from others but also from himself. In accordance with the theory, these safe boundaries as well as stability helped Fisher to develop a sense of the world as being secure and reliable (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010).

In relation to the theory, Fisher's resolution of the crises of the first developmental stage which had hindered him until now was furthered by his relationships with people such as his executive officer, Lieutenant Commander Williams and Senior Chief Akiona (Erikson, 1950/1973; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Macfarlane, 2004; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Pfefferman, 2010). These three men all remained supportive of Fisher while he struggled with depression, lashing out and finding himself. They also showed him that people can be trustworthy and reliable (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010).

Even though Fisher struggled to assimilate the various parts of himself and would oscillate between being an easy-going hard worker to being depressed, angry and fighting, his executive officer was able to recognise that something was amiss. As

Fisher's executive officer was able to distinguish the healthy parts of Fisher from the less healthy (and did not merely view him as bad or deviant) and provided him with an opportunity and relationship where he could be safe and begin to integrate the various parts of his ego (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The beginnings of these developmental resolutions were furthered by Fisher's relationship with Lieutenant Commander Williams. This relationship seems to have been integral to Fisher not only learning to trust but to deal with his shame, pain and anger, which would later aid him in forming an intimate romantic relationship as well as close friendships (Erikson, 1963; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Hamachek, 1990; Macfarlane, 2004; Pfefferman, 2010; Studer, 2007). Through Fisher's relationship with Lieutenant Commander Williams he not only learnt to trust another person, but also himself as he expressed his darkest secrets, told his story for the first time and learnt to deal with his past (Erikson, 1950/1973; Fisher & Rivas, 2001; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010; Pfefferman, 2010).

While Fisher was learning to deal with his past and resolve previous developmental crises through his relationships with people such as Lieutenant Commander Williams and Senior Chief Akiona, he was also furthering the protective and healing function of his creativity and imagination by writing (Erikson, 1977; Fisher, 2003). Through writing Fisher learnt how (to a large extent) to deal with his emotions in his own capacity (Erikson, 1977; Fisher, 2003). Fisher not only further integrated developing creativity into his identity through its healing function for himself but also by these creative capabilities being recognised by others (Erikson, 1977; Fisher, 2003; Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Hamachek, 1990; Studer, 2007). This was seen by him being able to help his fellow sailors through writing poems for them to send to their loved ones, as well as Fisher's creative potential being more formally recognised by him being given a monthly column in the ship's newsletter (Erikson, 1977; Fisher, 2003; Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Hamachek, 1990; Studer, 2007). During this stage Fisher's creative capabilities were recognised by others. This possibly influenced him being able to pursue an artistic career as he had dreamed about doing since he was a boy.

With Fisher's increasing resolutions of previous developmental stages he was able to form an intimate relationship with Seiko Fukushima when he was stationed in Japan (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Probably as a result of the abusive experiences Fisher had in the past, the physical intimacy of the relationship was difficult for him (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As this relationship was a positive experience for Fisher, it possibly furthered his development with regard to trusting others, dealing with his shame, as well as preparing him to eventually be able to form a lasting intimate relationship (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

In order to develop the ego strength of this stage it is not only important for young adults to form intimate relationships but also to be committed to others and the pursuit of a career (Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Hamachek, 1990; Studer, 2007). Fisher displayed this commitment through his dedicated work in the navy as well as his work in the orphanages in Hong Kong and South Korea (Greene, Graham & Morano, 2010; Hamachek, 1990; Studer, 2007). Fisher's work in the orphanages may also be seen as the beginnings of generativity, which was probably influenced by his own experiences in orphanages and foster homes (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While Fisher did leave the navy and took on other jobs, such as working as a correctional officer at Terminal Island and as a security guard at Sony Pictures Entertainment, he seemed to pursue careers that allowed him to be an enforcer of boundaries as well as a protector (Fisher, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). According to psychosocial theory, these jobs possibly helped Fisher to finally establish a sense of autonomy, which he had struggled to gain since the second developmental stage (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Through more fully resolving the developmental crises of the second stage and gaining a sense of autonomy, will and belief in his own desires, Fisher seems to have been able to begin to pursue his creative career during this stage (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

The events of this stage were also integral to Fisher forming a more stable and coherent identity and understanding of himself and his beginnings, as well as dealing with the developmental crises of this stage by not becoming isolated but instead developing relationships with others (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al,

2009). This could be viewed by him searching for answers about who he was in terms of his biological family. By meeting his biological family Fisher became aware of the events mentioned in stage 0, which allowed him to discover more people that would care about him, as well as understand his feelings of abandonment and of being unwanted that developed in the first stage (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). For the most, Fisher's experience of meeting his biological family was positive. The exception being, meeting his biological mother. According to Fisher this relationship always remained strained ("Antwone Fisher Biography," 2013; Fisher, 2010). While this could have been because they were merely two very different people that did not really get along, the theory suggests that the strain of this relationship could possibly have been because this was a part of Fisher's identity that he was never able to assimilate (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This could possibly have been because Fisher needed to keep his mother at a distance because of the feelings she evoked in him or possibly because she represented how his life could have become (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

In terms of Fisher's creative career he had some good fortune. Firstly, his supervisor told producers about his history who offered to buy his story. Secondly, he per chance heard about a creative writing course, which led to him being introduced to producer Todd Black. It was not only the per chance happenings and opportunities that Fisher was afforded that enabled him to have an artistic career, but also the influence of his developing imagination and creativity since he was a young boy, as well as him having learnt at a young age to make the most of the opportunities that he was provided with (Dutka, 2003; Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher's developmental resolutions of learning to trust others, act autonomously and in his own interests, as well as believe in his own competence were necessary precursors to him being able to make the most of the opportunities that he was provided with in order to pursue the making of his screenplay (Dutka, 2003; Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher not giving up as Todd Black tutored him through 41 drafts of his manuscript was possibly influenced by two things. Firstly, by the lessons he had learnt in the Pickett home, Mrs Brenda Profit's class and the navy such as to work hard and persevere. Secondly, by the hope that he

had developed in the first stage that was nurtured through his imagination as he grew up (Dutka, 2003; Erikson, 1950/1973, 1977; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Through telling his story, Fisher not only established himself as a screenplay writer but he was further able to work through the events of his life and make meaning of them in the hope that sharing his story would help others in similar situations. While Fisher had not yet formed a relationship with someone to last into the following stages he did find and commit to a career that he loved and was passionate about which in turn influenced his generativity in the following stage (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

**Table 5.6: Stage 6 timeline**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Events and experiences</b>
1980-1984 (approx)	Stationed at Pearl Harbour. Becomes suicidal and fights with others. Sent to navy psychiatrist. Speaks about his life for the first time. Lieutenant Commander Williams mentors Fisher. Finds relief from relationship with Lieutenant Commander Williams. Enjoys languages. Starts writing poetry and learns Japanese.
1985-1988 (approx)	Travels to Japan. Has an intimate relationship for the first time. Learns to deal with his shame and trust a romantic partner. Works in orphanages.
1989-1991 (approx)	Leaves the navy to work as security guard at Terminal Island. Wonders about his biological family.
1992	Works at Sony Pictures Entertainment. Got hold of Ward of State File. Contacts / meets biological family. Relieved to have met family but is also drained. Visits Dwight in jail. Fisher is offered money for his life story. Wants to write his own script about his life.
1993	Goes on screen-writing course. Meets Todd Black. Gets a job writing his screenplay. Experiences excitement about new creative career opportunity.
1994	Fisher's screen-play sold to 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Fears feeling exposed during the making of film.

### **5.9 Stage 7: Generativity versus stagnation (36-60)**

As Fisher is currently in the seventh stage, he has lived and experienced some of this stage's findings, but some are still in process. Therefore, text may at times oscillate between the past and present tenses.

#### **5.9.1 Findings**

While Fisher was doing well in his career, he had given up on finding someone to share his life with. He kept in contact with his new family members, but his relationship with his mother remained strained as she felt like a stranger to him

(Dutka, 2003; Fisher & Rivas, 2001). In November 1995, after a meeting with Todd Black, Fisher stopped at the Sony Pictures Entertainment parking lot to speak to friends. He saw a woman walk past into the Sony store. According to Fisher, he thought that she looked like someone out of a movie and asked a friend, Carol, if she knew who the woman was. Carol said that she was LaNette Canister and that she was the account manager at Culver Studios. Fisher was shy and asked Carol if she would give LaNette Canister his telephone number. When Carol went to speak to LaNette Canister, she said that she would not phone but that she would come over and introduce herself. LaNette Canister asked Fisher if he would walk her to her car and gave him her number. Fisher phoned LaNette Canister that evening and they talked at length. Toward the end of 1996 LaNette Canister and Fisher got married. Toward the end of 1997 the couple had their first daughter, Indigo. They later had a second daughter, Azure (Fisher, 2003, 2010). According to Fisher fatherhood has allowed him to be imaginative and to feel worthwhile. Even though Fisher has experienced painful memories, he has felt loved and at home with his wife and children. Fisher has also regularly thought about Mrs Brenda Profit and how she believed in his potential when he could not, and the impact that she has had on his life (Fisher, 2010).

While Fisher's family is an integral part of his life so is his work. Fisher still writes poetry and believes that it has the potential to aid in healing (Fisher, 2003). To better understand the connection between writing and healing, he attended lectures on the subject before his first poetry book was published (Fisher, 2003). Fisher enjoys his career and believes that it is important to pursue work that incorporates one's ideas and feelings, and that can still be available when one has passed away (Fisher, 2010). He also enjoys that his job requires him to delve into his imagination and that he is then free from the harsh realities of the world for a while. An important aspect of Fisher's work is that it gives him a sense of control as he decides who his characters will be and what will happen in their lives (Fisher, 2010).

Fisher has received numerous accolades for his work such as the *Humanitas Prize*, the *Screenwriter of the Year Award* from the National Association of Theater Owners, the *Outstanding Literary Work Instructional* from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as well as an honorary Doctorate from the Cleveland, Ohio State University ("Antwone Fisher biography," 2013). Fisher

continues to work as an author, screenwriter, producer, director and motivational speaker (“Antwone Fisher biography,” 2013; Eaton, 2013; Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Rivas, nd.). Since Fisher left the navy he also became a keynote speaker for various branches of the military (Fisher, 2010). During a navy recruiting training event in 2009 he received the appointment of honorary Chief Petty Officer.

Even though Fisher had connected with his biological family, he remained closer to his foster siblings (Pfefferman, 2010). After living with Mercy, Flo went back to live with the Picketts before she died (Pfefferman, 2010). Dwight remained in prison until 2008 and has struggled with daily existence (Pfefferman, 2010). It is not known whether Keith is still alive, but as at 2010 he was suffering of kidney failure from heroin addiction (Pfefferman, 2010). According to Fisher, he is saddened by the difficulties in his foster siblings’ lives, and it not only reminds him of the path that his life could have taken, but also motivates him in his attempts at encouraging reform in the Foster Care and Child Welfare systems (Eaton, 2013; Pfefferman, 2010). Recently Fisher addressed the United States Senate with regard to problems in Social Services and Foster Care systems (“Antwone Fisher biography,” 2013; Eaton, 2013). In relation to his own experience and experience of working in orphanages and with other foster children, Fisher provided the senate with possible ways to improve the system (“Antwone Fisher biography,” 2013; Eaton, 2013).

### **5.9.2 Discussion**

It was during this stage that Fisher negotiated the previous stage’s developmental crisis of finding a life partner and developed the ego strength of love (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As with previous developmental resolutions finding a partner did not happen easily for Fisher. This may have been because of Fisher’s fear of rejection or not being wanted, that developed in the first stage (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This was possibly the reason why he was anxious to ask LaNette Canister for her telephone number, as even though Fisher had learnt to trust people and situations, this was uncomfortable for him (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). With LaNette Fisher, Fisher began to negotiate the developmental crisis of generativity by having two daughters (Erikson, 1950/1973; Haensly & Parsons, 1993; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Having a family also transformed Fisher’s identity as well as that it allowed him to be

the man he had imagined himself becoming when viewing Mrs Brenda Profit and Mr Milton Profits' relationship when he was a child (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

According to the theory it may not be necessary or sufficient to merely have children of one's own in order to be generative (Haensly & Parsons, 1993). Middle aged adults' attention should be directed toward contributing to society at large and the care of future generations (Dunkel, Mathes & Papini, 2010; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989). In relation to Erikson's (1950/1971) theory, Fisher has achieved generativity through his creative work as he has attempted to make work that will help or touch others, as well as be available for future generations (Evans, 1981; Fisher, 2003, 2010; McAdams, St Aubin & Logan, 1993; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989).

While Fisher's work has provided him with a way to express his generativity, his creativity and imagination have continuously helped him to cope with life (Erikson, 1977). This is because his creativity and imagination have provided him with a space away from harsh realities, as well as a sense of control which he lacked for so long (Erikson, 1977). The awards that Fisher has received confirm his contribution and ability within the film and literary fields and that his creative talents are recognised by others.

The stabilising effects of Fisher's work and home environments that have enabled him to be generative, and develop a coherent sense of self, possibly contributed to him being able to become generative on a societal level (Erikson, 1963; Irvine, 2013; McAdams et. al, 2001; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989). In accordance with the theory, Fisher is able to make a worthwhile contribution to society through his creative work, motivational speaking and pursuit of reforming the Social Services system as he believes that progress of the human species is possible and a worthwhile undertaking (Eaton, 2013; Erikson, 1963; Irvine, 2013; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989). Fisher's desire to aid the development of future generations is also possibly influenced by his realisation of the constructive impact that certain people such as Mrs Brenda Profit and Lieutenant Commander Williams had on his life and that he too may provide a similar experience for others (McAdams et. al, 2001). Fisher's commitment to the healthy development of future generations as well as the

development of the ego strength of care is demonstrated by him addressing the United States Senate with regard to problems within the Social Services and Foster Care systems and providing possible solutions (Eaton, 2013; Erikson, 1963; Irvine, 2013; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989).

**Table 5.7: Stage 7 timeline**

Year	Events and experiences
1995	Meets LaNette Canister. Feels loved in his relationship with LaNette.
1996	Marries LaNette Canister.
1997	Daughter, Indigo, is born.
1998-2001 (approx)	Daughter, Azure, is born. Fisher feels worthwhile as a father and husband. <i>Finding Fish</i> is published.
2002	Film <i>Antwone Fisher</i> is released. Establishes himself as a screenwriter.
2003	<i>Who will cry for the little boy?</i> is published.
2008	Dwight is released from prison.
2009	Receives honorary Chief Petty Officer award from the navy.
2010	<i>A boy should know how to tie a tie</i> is published.
2011	Biological mother, Eva Mae Fisher, dies.
2012	Experiences concern about what can be done to improve Foster Care system.
2013	Addresses the US Senate on Foster Care and Child Welfare systems.

### 5.10 Life summary

Fisher's life started in a women's prison as Ward Number 13644. He was passed between many caregivers and experienced physical and sexual abuse as well as neglect. He also lost a foster brother and a friend through death and found himself homeless and struggling with depression. Despite the traumatic experiences that Fisher lived through he grew to be a person that contributes to his family as well as chosen career and wider society. Fisher developed into a stable adult despite his traumatic childhood. This seems to be largely as a result of (i) Fisher's resilience, as well as (ii) his relationships with various people, (iii) the safety and support he experienced at the reformatory school and in the navy, and (iv) his imagination and creativity which aided his resolutions of developmental crises.

During the first stage Fisher learnt that the world was neither safe nor secure and developed a distrust of people that affected his ability to form close relationships into adulthood (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1964; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). As a result Fisher was not able to assimilate the various parts of his ego but nevertheless

developed ways of protecting himself such as ‘escaping’ into his head or imagination (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963, 1977; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). This along with developing the ego strength of hope which was probably due to the short lived security and love he received from Mrs Strange, seems to have been the initial influences of Fisher’s creative development.

During the second stage Fisher was placed in the Pickett home where he faced strict boundaries with harsh punishment as well as physical and sexual abuse. This affected Fisher developing a sense of will as well as autonomy. The abusive experiences also reinforced his mistrust in people as well as caused him to feel ashamed and doubt himself (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

As a result of Fisher’s inability to trust himself and others and his lack of autonomy, initiating activities and relationships during the third stage was complicated for him (Erikson, 1950/1973; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). As Fisher developed cognitively he thought more about the abuse he was experiencing as well as his difficulties at home. This led to Fisher developing guilt feelings as well as escaping more frequently into his imagination (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1977; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Fisher did however show the ability to initiate activities in his imagination through playing and pretending (Erikson, 1977). Through Fisher recreating scenarios that had happened in reality and finding ways to understand and deal with the trauma he was experiencing through pretending, his imagination provided him with a creatively autonomous space where he could initiate activities and self-protection as well as gain a sense of purpose (Erikson, 1977).

During the fourth stage Fisher initially struggled to gain competence in tasks as well as relationships. The abuse Fisher experienced, as well as the physical and emotional bullying by Dwight and Lizzie respectively aggravated the developmental difficulties that Fisher was already facing. During this stage Fisher also found out that the Picketts were not his biological family and he failed the fourth grade. Therefore Fisher’s development of industry was delayed, as well as that his feelings of shame and guilt were reinforced as he began to feel inferior (Hamachek, 1988; Studer, 2007; Thimm, 2010). During this stage Fisher’s creative energy began to have a grounding in reality and became more formally focused as was demonstrated through his ability

in art class, his interest in music and sketching, as well as designing scenes in the window of the thrift store (Hamachek, 1988; Van Manen & Whitbourne, 1997). Fisher's creative abilities not only aided him socially but his new found ability to create something artistic in reality also can be viewed as providing him with a developmental bridge between his self-belief, autonomy, sense of purpose and competence in the space of his imagination to that of reality (Erikson, 1977).

Fisher's relationships with Mercy, Keith, and Mrs Brenda Profit in particular aided Fisher's development and negotiations of previous developmental struggles (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1977; Miller 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The relationship Fisher had with Mrs Brenda Profit may be viewed as what Schultz refers to as a prototypical scene or as a "supersaliency" (Schultz, 2005b, p. 48). There may be more than one prototypical scene in an individual's life but the prototypical scene more specifically refers to one scene that greatly impacted the individual and may be viewed as a life changing person, situation or event (Schultz, 2005b). Until Fisher was in Mrs Brenda Profit class he struggled with his developmental crises to the point of not having any friends and failing at school. This relationship not only aided Fisher in resolving previous developmental crises but provided Fisher with an awareness of his own abilities and worth that he could refer to in his memory in the difficult times that lay ahead.

During the fifth stage Fisher had not fully resolved previous developmental crises but his healing relationship with Mrs Brenda Profit, as well as the safe space that his imagination provided him were helping him to counter the negative effects of his home environment (Erikson, 1977; Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013). Fisher showed particular resilience within this stage as he lost both Dwight and Jessie, was abandoned by Mrs Pickett and became homeless, but was nevertheless able to make the most of his time at George Junior Republic, get his school certificate, and join the navy. While the navy aided Fisher's identity development and provided him with a place to belong and feel safe, during this stage Fisher also furthered his own protective abilities and creative identity by purposefully seeking out music and sketching as well as developing a sense of humour (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1977). Fisher frequently incorporated being an artist into his identity. This was possibly related to his protective tendencies and coping mechanisms having involved his imagination and creativity from an early age (Capps, 2011; Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Luyckx et. al,

2013; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). The incorporation of this artistic view of himself also probably occurred as it helped him to develop positively and as a result he pursued creative endeavours with more vigour (Capps, 2011; Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Luyckx et. al, 2013; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

Initially during the sixth stage Fisher was still struggling to form a stable identity (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). This could be viewed with Fisher's difficulty in assimilating the various parts of himself which seems to have led to his depression and fighting (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). Within the navy's safe boundaries and healing relationships that Fisher formed during this stage with his executive officer, Chief Akiona and in particular Lieutenant Commander Williams, he built on the developmental lessons he had begun in Mrs Brenda Profit's class and to a certain degree resolved his difficulties with his sense of shame and distrust (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). During the sixth stage Fisher also further developed his coping mechanisms and learnt to deal with his emotions constructively through writing poetry. Fisher's writing ability was also formally recognised as could be seen by him having a monthly column in the ship's newspaper. This probably furthered Fisher's creative identity as well as gave him a platform to later develop as a screenplay writer. While the navy and security jobs that Fisher had pursued provided him with a sense of autonomy, establishing a stable identity and discovering more about his past through meeting his biological family enabled him to pursue a creative career which he had desired since he was a young boy (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963, 1977; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009).

During the seventh stage Fisher resolved the sixth stage's developmental crisis of finding a life partner and developing the ego strength of love as well as that he became generative (Erikson, 1950/1973, 1963; Miller, 2010; Sollod et. al, 2009). While Fisher and his wife LaNette had two daughters, Fisher's generativity extends to his creative work as well as pursuit of bettering the Foster Care and Social Services systems (Dunkel, Mathes & Papini, 2010; Van De Water & McAdams, 1989). The value of creativity extends to its adaptive functions and that creative individuals may be better able to cope with traumatic experiences or find ways to alter difficult circumstances (Capps, 2012; Diel, 2010; Richards, 2006). Throughout Fisher's life he

demonstrated the capacity for creativity and the imagination to provide the individual with a safe place to develop as well as aid in coping and healing. An individual may never fully resolve each psychosocial stage, and Fisher struggled in particular with resolving the developmental crisis of learning to trust, even into adulthood. However, at the age of 54, Fisher is nevertheless an example of creativity being associated with healthy personality development (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Kóváry, 2011; Maslow, 1999; Richards, 2006; Schultz, 2005c; Winnicot, 1971/2005). (For Fisher's life summary timeline see Appendix C).

### **5.11 Chapter summary**

This chapter dealt with the data processing concerning Fisher's life data as well as the analyses thereof in accordance with Erikson's (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development. The data display and analyses were followed by a life summary.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Chapter preview**

This chapter provides an overview of the study and focuses on the extent to which the research objectives were met, the value and limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for further research.

#### **6.2 Overview of the study**

This study began by providing an overview of psychobiography, its history, a critical discussion surrounding the controversies of using the approach for research and its current day use and value in academia. The reader was introduced to the research subject, Antwone Fisher, and provided reasons for the choice of Fisher as research subject. An overview of Erikson's (1950/1973) theoretical framework was provided as well as more detailed description of the eight stages of psychosocial development which were used to interpret Fisher's life data. With regard to the research methodology, Miles and Huberman's (1994, 2002) method for data processing and analyses was outlined. Both Erikson's (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development and Miles and Huberman's (1994, 2002) method of data processing and analyses were employed for the conduction of this study. This could be viewed in the form of the data collection and analyses of Fisher's life.

#### **6.3 Extent to which the research objectives were met**

The primary aim of this study was to describe and interpret the life of Antwone Fisher through the use of Erikson's stages of psychosocial development (Erikson, 1950/1973; McAdams, 2009; Miller, 2010). This objective was obtained through the use of the morphogenic nature of the psychobiographical method which requires a dialogical interaction between biographical and autobiographical data as well as the chosen theory (Allport, 1962; Runyan, 1982). The achievement of this objective made a contribution to our understanding of, (i) the psychosocial development of Antwone Fisher (which is discussed in more detail in section 6.4.1), as well as (ii) psychological knowledge and understanding of the development of extraordinarily creative individuals. The latter was enabled by investigating the development of Fisher's creativity during each developmental stage. Firstly, this revealed which

psychosocial experiences and events influenced Fisher's creative development. Secondly it came to the fore that Fisher's continuous use of his imagination to cope and understand his experiences encouraged the growth of his artistic abilities.

The second objective was to assess the suitability and usefulness of Erikson's theory (1950/1973) to interpret Fisher's personality development across his lifespan, in this way contributing to personality and developmental theories (Denzin, 1990; McAdams, 2009; Miller 2010). While there were certain limitations to Erikson's (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development with regard to the interpretation of Fisher's life data, which will be discussed in section 6.5.1, the theory was not only suitable and useful in the interpretation of Fisher's entire life thus far, but also (i) aided the morphogenic nature of the psychobiographical method, (ii) contributed to understanding Fisher's development as an extraordinary individual as well as (iii) the development of his creativity. Despite certain limitations the achievement of this objective illuminated situations and events that encourage healthy personality development despite traumatic childhood events and experiences.

The attainment of the first and second research aims in conjunction with the completion of this study made the final research objective possible, which was to make a contribution to the growing academic field of psychobiography in South Africa.

## **6.4 Value of the study**

### **6.4.1 The psychobiographical approach**

The value of the psychobiographical approach was discussed in detail in Chapter 2 (sections 2.7.2 and 2.7.3) and therefore will not be reiterated in this section. More specifically the use of the psychobiographical approach for this study provided a view of Fisher's life that has not previously been presented. A valuable aspect of this study is that the psychobiographical case study method using Erikson's (1950/1973) stages of psychosocial development can plausibly explain the development of a particularly creative individual, in this case Antwone Fisher. The value of the psychobiographical approach to this study is demonstrated by it providing insight into Fisher's development across his lifespan as well as the importance of considering the socio-cultural context of his life.

The morphogenic nature of psychobiography as well as its focus on long term development also provided an understanding of Fisher's creative development as well as how creativity contributed to his developing a stable identity and becoming generative in adulthood. This was enabled by the exploration of Fisher's creative development at each psychosocial stage, as mentioned in section 6.3 and how his creativity in turn aided his coping and healthy personality development. This was illustrated through Fisher's creativity aiding his resolution of developmental crises such as (i) when he was a young child and found a sense of autonomy and purpose in the safe space of his imagination and learnt to initiate activities through playing and pretending (Erikson, 1977), (ii) as a school aged child and adolescent found a creative grounding in reality as he designed scenes for the thrift store window and excelled in art class, which facilitated his social interactions (1950/1973), (iii) as a young adult learnt to deal with his emotions through writing poetry and his artistic abilities being formally recognised through his column in the naval newspaper, and (iv) as his creative identity developed, established himself as a screenwriter, poet, film producer and motivational speaker which also facilitated his generativity.

#### **6.4.2 Psychosocial theory of development**

Erikson's (1950/1973) theory of psychosocial development was of value to this study as it provided insight not only into Fisher's development on a more individual level and his creativity, but also the influence of his home environment, wider social context, his race and the role played by significant people in his life. The latter is also a significant finding as it revealed that despite a traumatic or unsatisfactory home environment significant people can have a positive effect on the individual's development and resolution of developmental crises. In Fisher's case such people were his school teacher Mrs Profit and the navy psychiatrist Lieutenant Commander Williams who mentored him.

With regard to this study, Erikson's (1950/1973) theory was appropriate as it provided a thorough understanding of Fisher's psychosocial development at each stage. Even though Fisher did not always resolve a specific stage's developmental crisis at the age suggested by Erikson (1950/1973), the theory compensates for this as any stage may be resolved at a later point in the person's life. This could be viewed by Fisher nevertheless progressing through each of Erikson's (1950/1973) stages, one to seven

(as Fisher is currently in the seventh stage), even though his development may have been delayed at times.

### **6.4.3 Creativity and healthy personality development**

There is research that suggests that there is a connection between creativity and the development of a healthy personality (Csíkszentmihályi, 1996; Kóváry, 2011; Maslow, 1999; Richards, 2006; Schultz, 2005c; Winnicot, 1971/2005). The findings of this study supports these research findings as well as contribute to the understanding of (i) how extraordinary or ‘big’ creativity (Feldman, Csíkszentmihályi & Gardner, 1994) may develop in an individual, as well as (ii) how creativity may aid in coping as well as healing and negotiating developmental crises. Some researchers also suggested that creative individuals may encompass adaptive characteristics (Capps, 2012; Murray & Johnson, 2010; Richards, 2006). This psychobiographical research of Fisher’s life supports this theory as he continuously found ways to cope or adapt which often involved the use of his imagination.

This study also revealed that there may be an association between the development of hope, resilience and creativity. The importance of studying an extraordinarily creative individual such as Fisher through an idiographic and long term developmental approach such as psychobiography was demonstrated by certain benefits of creativity to healthy personality development being discovered. The benefits of creativity to healthy personality development were in relation to (i) stable identity development, (ii) creating reflective knowledge, (iii) a coherent sense of self, and (iv) having a mastery effect on emotions (Diel, 2010; Dollinger, Dollinger & Centeno, 2005).

### **6.4.4 Data**

Fisher’s autobiography (Fisher & Rivas, 2001) as well as creative works (Fisher, 2003, 2010) were of value to this study. Firstly they provided insight into Fisher’s creative and emotional world. Secondly, most of the biographical articles focused predominantly on the extremes of Fisher’s trauma and success, while his autobiographical information provided insight into how he developed as well as significant and less significant people and events in his life. Therefore the autobiographical information provided a more comprehensive and life-like portrait of Fisher’s life to be interpreted through Erikson’s (1950/1973) psychosocial theory. The

reports from Fisher's caseworkers and psychologists that he included in his autobiography aided the objectivity of the study.

## **6.5 Limitations of the study**

### **6.5.1 Psychosocial theory**

The first limitation of Erikson's (1950/1973) psychosocial theory is that it does not provide a theoretical framework for the time spent in utero. Therefore in terms of this study the possible effects of Fisher's mother's experiences while she was pregnant with him on his emotional development as well how he came to be a Ward of the State could not be theorised. The events prior to Fisher's birth also seemed to be of significance as in his adulthood he incorporated them into his understanding of himself. The second limitation of the psychosocial theory with regard to this study is that it does not provide a framework for understanding how in the first stage Fisher could develop profound hope in spite of developing severe distrust.

### **6.5.2 Data**

A limitation of the data was the vast amount of information which could not all be utilised because of the limited scope of the Master's thesis. Therefore it may be considered a weakness of this study that greater emphasis was placed on Fisher's autobiography (Fisher & Rivas, 2001) as opposed to increasing the focus on his creative works as well as other biographical sources.

### **6.5.3 The researcher**

In relation to the limitations mentioned in sectioned 6.5.2 the researcher's inexperience could have contributed to some data not being recognised and therefore salient points being undiscovered and as a result not considered. The researcher's inexperience may also have affected the level or depth of the analyses of the life data.

## **6.6 Future research**

As this study may be viewed as merely a starting point to understanding Fisher's personality development, the initial recommendation is that a related study be conducted on a more intensive scale. This would enable (i) a more in-depth analysis of sources and a greater focus on Fisher's creative works, as well as (ii) additional

theoretical approaches to be used for interpretation of the data to provide further insight into Fisher's psychological development.

It is also recommended that (a) more psychobiographies are completed on extraordinarily creative individuals in general, as well as (b) extraordinarily creative individuals who experienced traumatic childhoods whose creativity aided healthy personality development. This would enable researchers to explore similarities and differences. This would also allow researchers to investigate if there are particular developmental stages that are integral to the development of extraordinary creativity. It could also further illuminate how creativity may aid in adaptation, coping and resolving developmental crises. With regard to the latter point such research may also be beneficial to the development or adaptation of therapy models

### **6.7 Concluding remarks**

This chapter provided an overview of this study, the value and limitations of this research as well as future recommendations. While in certain academic circles controversy surrounding the use of psychobiography for psychological research is still rife, psychobiography is no longer the silent underdog. It is nevertheless imperative to the future of psychobiography that it is allowed to rightfully establish itself as a research genre and methodology within psychology. Until this happens the full extent of the potential benefits that psychobiography may bring to the field of psychology will not be experienced or be able to be utilised. It is hoped that this study will contribute to a better understanding of the usefulness of psychobiographical research to developmental and personality psychology as well as research into the development of creativity.

It is no simple task to summarise any extraordinary life. The life of Antwone Fisher is clearly extraordinary, but his is also an unfinished life. But, if in concluding a final summation were needed, Fisher provided it aptly in *The Angels' Gift* (Fisher, 2003, p. 5):

We'll give Antwone no sister to smile  
And say to him, when I grow  
You must know, your name is my first child's.

We'll give Antwone no brother to share his

childhood days.

We'll give Antwone no mother, he'll go  
through life this way.

We'll give him no clear vision to see  
his way through strife.

We'll give Antwone no father to help  
guide him through life.

No, what we'll give Antwone,  
From time to time in life,  
To find his own, all on his own...  
We'll make this Antwone's life.

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## APPENDIX A

### SOUTH AFRICAN MASTER'S AND DOCTORAL LEVEL PSYCHOBIOGRAPHIES

	Subject	Researcher	Degree	Year
1	Cornelis Jacobus Langenhoven	Burgers, M.P.O.	M.A	1939
2	Louis Leipoldt	Burgers, M.P.O.	D.Litt	1960
3	Ingrid Jonker	Van der Merwe, L.M.	Ph.D	1978
4	Jan Christiaan Smuts	Fouche, J.P.	D.Phil	1999
5	Helen Martins	Bareira, L.	M.A.	2001
6	Bantu Stephen Biko	Kotton, D.	M.A.	2002
7	Balthazar John Vorster	Vorster, M.S.	M.A.	2003
8	Wessel Johannes (Hansie) Cronje	Warmenhoven, A.	M.A.	2004
9	Mother Teresa	Stroud, L.	D.Phil	2004
10	Albert Schweitzer	Edwards, M. J.	M.A.	2004
11	Cornelis Jacobus Langenhoven	Jacobs, A.	M.A.	2005
12	Karen Horney	Green. S.	M.A.	2006
13	Wessel Johannes (Hansie) Cronje	Warmenhoven, A.	Ph.D.	2006
14	Chris Barnard	Van Niekerk, R.	M.A.	2007
15	Ray Charles	Biggs, I.	M.A.	2007
16	Hendrik Verwoerd	Claasen, M.	M.A.	2007
17	Melanie Klein	Espinosa, M	M.A.	2008
18	Herman Mashaba	McWalter, M.A.	M.A.	2008
19	Isie Smuts	Smuts, C.	M.A.	2009
20	Helen Keller	Van Genechten, D.	M.A.	2009
21	Jeffrey Dahmer	Chéze. E.	M.A.	2009
22	Emily Hobhouse	Welman, C.	M.A.	2009
23	Ralph John Rabie	Uys, H.M.G.	M.A.	2010
24	Ernesto "Che" Guevara	Kolesky, C.	M.A.	2010
25	Frans Martin Claerhout	Roets, M.	M.A.	2010
26	Alan Paton	Greeff, M.	M.A.	2010
27	Paul Jackson Pollock	Muller, T.	M.A.	2010
28	Vincent van Gogh	R. Muller	MA	2010
29	Christiaan de Wet	Henning, R.	Ph.D.	2010
30	Bram Fischer	Swart, D.K.	M.A.	2010
31	Desmond Tutu	Eliastam, L.M.	M.Soc.Sci	2010
32	Brenda Fassie	Gogo, O.	M.A.	2011
33	Olive Schreiner	Perry, M.	PhD	2012
34	Winston Churchill	Moolman, B.A.	MA	2012
35	Friedrich Nietzsche	Booyesen, D.D.	MA	2012
36	John Wayne Gacy	Pieterse, J.	MA	2012
37	Josephine Baker	S. Eckley	MA	2012
38	Ellen Kuzwayo	Arosi, Z.	MA	2013
39	John Wayne Gacy	Coetsee, E	PhD	201?
40	Helen Suzman	Nel, C.	PhD	201?

41	Beyers Naude	Burnell, B.	PhD	201?
42	William Wilberforce	Daubermann, B.P.	MA	2013
43	Steve Jobs	Ndoro, T.	MBA	201?
44	Steve Jobs	Du Plessis, R.	MA	201?
45	Marie Curie	Roets, E.	MA	201?
46	Michael Jackson	Ruiters, J.	MA	201?
47	Charleze Theron	Prenter, T.	MA	201?
48	Helen Martins	Mitchell, D.	MA	201?
49	Antwone Fisher	Wannenburg, N.	MA	201?
50	Richard Tenton Chase	Nel, H.	MA	201?
51	Martin Luther King Jnr	S. Pietersen	MA	201?
52	Roald Dahl	Holz, T.	PhD	201?
53	Walt Disney	King, B.	PhD	201?
54	Angela Merkel	Mayer, C.	PhD	201?
55	Elizabeth Kubler Ross	Venter, E.	PhD	201?
56	Steve Biko	Bazana, S.	PhD	201?
57	Richard Branson	Preston, A	PhD	201?
58	Mevalana Jalaludin Rumi	Z. Julies	PhD	201?

**APPENDIX B**  
**CONSENT FOR RESEARCH**

Dear Dr Fisher

I am a post-graduate psychology student at Rhodes University in South Africa  
([www.ru.ac.za](http://www.ru.ac.za)).

I wish to conduct psychobiographical research on your life (focusing more specifically on your life experiences and psychological development) and therefore would like to send you a letter of request. In essence, psychobiographical research allows for the scientific study of life histories with the aim to discover and formulate the central story, structured according to psychological theory.

Do you have an email or postal address to which I may send a letter of request for consent to conduct this research?

Sincerely

Nicola Wannenburg

**APPENDIX C**  
**FISHER LIFE SUMMARY TIMELINE**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Events and experiences</b>
	<i><b>Stage 1</b></i>
1959	Born 3 <sup>rd</sup> August in a women's prison. Temporarily placed in an orphanage (Cleveland, Ohio). Abandoned by biological mother. Shares orphanage with many other children.
1960	Mrs Nellie Strange fosters Fisher. Experiences the foster mother's (Mrs Nellie Strange) love and security.
	<i><b>Stage 2</b></i>
1961	Temporarily placed in an orphanage. Placed in the Picketts' foster home. Physical abuse begins. Enjoyment of art.
1962	Sexually abused. Experience of shame relating to the abuse.
	<i><b>Stage 3</b></i>
1963	Meets his biological mother, Eva Mae Fisher. Starts to escape into his imagination. Notices people at Social Services are white.
1964	Older children set the house on fire. Starts Kindergarten. Fisher is too fearful of Mrs Pickett to leave his room when the house is on fire. Experiences a bond with his foster father.
	<i><b>Stage 4</b></i>
1965	Halloween-went trick-or-treating. Wonders why Mrs Pickett is different from other mothers. Learns the Picketts are not his biological family. Starts Grade 1. Wonders where his place is in the world.
1966	Wets the bed. Struggles in Grade 1. Fears that his penis will be cut off.
1967	Goes into hospital to be circumcised. Keith arrives. Steals money to buy sweets for other children. Feels that people at the hospital are nice and wants to stay there. Starts to feel inferior about his race.
1968	Bunks school. April: Views Martin Luther king being shot on tv. Neighbourhood becomes chaotic. Is psychologically assessed. Starts therapy with Dr Fisher. Hopes that Dr Fisher is his father and that he wants him. Wins an art competition. Fails the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade. Mrs Pickett sends Fisher out of the church. He announces he is never going to church again. Experiences competence in art.
1969	Moves to a new house. Repeats the 4 <sup>th</sup> grade with Mrs Profit as his teacher. Becomes known as Fish and likes it. Respects Mr Milton Profit. Starts to make friends.
1970	Prepares bridal scene display in the thrift store. Listens to music outside barber shops.
1971	Goes on school field-trips to wooded estate and Cleveland Orchestra. Sketches to deal with his feelings.
	<i><b>Stage 5</b></i>
1971	Mrs Pickett makes Fisher bath in bleach. Does well in 5 <sup>th</sup> grade, passes. Fears that puberty will turn him into a woman.
1972	Visits Cleveland Health and Space museums. Mrs Pickett thinks VHF antennae is a bomb. Starts junior high school. Desires to develop a sense of style. Fisher accepts his dark skin. Thinks Mrs Pickett is crazy and mean. Fears he will become like her. Wants to become an artist.
1973	Dwight is removed from the Pickett home. Has a job playing records at school. Rev Pickett asks Fisher what his name is. Fisher is saddened by realisation that he did not have a bond with his foster father. Has a crush on Freda Smolley. Dreams about marrying her.
1974	Breaks his arm at school. Picketts do not take him to hospital for three days. Feels neglected by the Picketts.
1975	Grabs Mrs Picketts shoe from while she is beating him. Mrs Pickett sends Fisher back to Social Services. Receives his birth certificate. Sent back to orphanage. Feels hopeless and depressed.
1976	Goes to reformatory school. Sets life rules for himself. Enjoys being in nature. Does not want to be fostered again. Feels unworthy of Mrs Ewart's offer to foster him.

1977	Completes Grades 11 and 12 in same year. Becomes an emancipated minor. Lives at YMCA. Works for Butch in exchange for protection. Experiences dread about the work he did for Butch. Becomes homeless. Goes to Cleveland to find Jessie who gets shot. Joins the navy. Does not want to give up dreaming.
1978	Goes to naval boot-camp. Feels capable and proud of himself.
1979	Becomes a seaman apprentice. Guides airplanes to safe landing. Learns to trust his abilities.
<b>Stage 6</b>	
1980-1984 (approx)	Stationed at Pearl Harbour. Becomes suicidal and fights with others. Sent to navy psychiatrist. Speaks about his life for the first time. Lieutenant Commander Williams mentors Fisher. Finds relief from relationship with Lieutenant Commander Williams. Enjoys languages. Starts writing poetry and learns Japanese.
1985-1988 (approx)	Travels to Japan. Has an intimate relationship for the first time. Learns to deal with his shame and trust a romantic partner. Works in orphanages
1989-1991 (approx)	Leaves the navy to work as security guard at Terminal Island. Wonders about his biological family.
1992	Works at Sony Pictures Entertainment. Got hold of Ward of State File. Contacts / meets biological family. Relieved to have met family but is also drained. Visits Dwight in jail. Fisher is offered money for his life story. Wants to write his own script about his life.
1993	Goes on screen-writing course. Meets Todd Black. Gets a job writing his screenplay. Experiences excitement about new creative career opportunity.
1994	Fisher's screen-play sold to 20 <sup>th</sup> Century Fox. Fears feeling exposed during the making of film.
<b>Stage 7</b>	
1995	Meets LaNette Canister. Feels loved in his relationship with LaNette.
1996	Marries LaNette Canister.
1997	Daughter, Indigo, is born.
1998-2001 (approx)	Daughter, Azure, is born. Fisher feels worthwhile as a father and husband. <i>Finding Fish</i> is published.
2002	Film <i>Antwone Fisher</i> is released. Establishes himself as a screenwriter.
2003	<i>Who will cry for the little boy?</i> is published.
2008	Dwight is released from prison.
2009	Receives honorary Chief Petty Officer award from the navy.
2010	<i>A boy should know how to tie a tie</i> is published.
2011	Biological mother, Eva Mae Fisher, dies.
2012	Experiences concern about what can be done to improve Foster Care system.
2013	Addresses the US Senate on Foster Care and Child Welfare systems.