CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

“Methodology” refers to the philosophical framework, view of being human, epistemological perspective and assumptions that are associated with a specific research method; it is the theory underlying a method (Van Manen, 1997:27-28).

The Greek term for “method” refers to the road one needs to take in order to reach a desired goal. The goal (purpose) determines which road (method) should be taken. Research methods outline investigative journeys. It is the plans and modes of inquiry used in the pursuit of knowledge. The important principle is that the unique demands of the problem should indicate the method to be followed, rather than a pre-selected method which limits the kind of problem to be investigated. However, one must remember that any specific method is but one attempt to comprehend the inexhaustible richness of human life (Kruger, 1988:145-147; Polkinghorne, 1989:41; Van Manen, 1997:28).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study followed a qualitative research design based on a psycho-educational programme development structure. This structure consists of four basic stages: Situation analysis, development, implementation and evaluation (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003).

3.2.1 Situation analysis

The research process starts when you become aware of some problem, whether it be an individual, group or contextual factor, that can be addressed through the presentation of a psycho-educational programme. The initial awareness is followed by a phase, formally known as a situational analysis, where information is systematically gathered to determine the existence and extent of specific needs and problems. The situation analysis usually
involves an open inductive approach that relies on purposive sampling to collect the data and an open coding approach for the data analysis (Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003; Roos & Taljaard, n.d.:15-18, 25).

The most important situation analysis components of this project were fieldwork and literature control. Ultimately, the fieldwork formed the major part of this study (see sections 3.3 to 3.7). A phenomenological approach that used collages as narrative facilitators was followed to come to an understanding of late adolescents’ experiences, meaning-making and coping patterns in the aftermath of a significant other’s completed suicide (see Chapter 4). Also, it was used to gain insight into their experiences of using collages during a phenomenological interview (see Chapter 5). The phenomenological approach posed specific research process challenges:

- The researcher required a solid grounding in the philosophical and methodological assumptions of phenomenology (see section 2.3);
- The research participants were limited to individuals who have actually experienced the phenomenon (see section 3.3.1); and
- The researcher had to bracket personal experiences and presuppositions as far as possible (see section 3.5.5) (Creswell, 1998:21, 55; Kruger, 1988:155; Moustakas, 1994:93, 101; Van Manen, 1997:23).

The results and insights gained from the fieldwork and literature control components of the situation analysis provided the material that could then be used to address the second stage of this study, namely the development of a psycho-educational programme as a postvention and educational resource for adolescent suicide survivors and supporters of adolescent suicide survivors.

### 3.2.2 Programme development

Programme development involves a deductive approach that is based on the results and concepts derived from the situation analysis. These results and concepts are then compared, enriched and recontextualised within the available literature (Poggenpoel &
Myburgh, 2003).

In essence, psycho-educational programmes do not directly focus on changing behavioural patterns, but rather on the way that individuals perceive and interpret their environment (physical and social lifeworlds) and their responses to it. The direct effects between a programme and its outcomes are believed to be primarily as a result of changes in an individual’s attitude, insight and/or behavioural skills - collectively known as the programme mediators. Also, one needs to be cognisant of the contextual factors (moderators) that influence the effectivity and strength of the programme outcomes. It includes qualitative factors (such as gender, cultural values, religion, cognitive style) and quantitative factors (such as duration and frequency of programme interventions) (Donaldson, 2001:472-478).

The following social and intrapersonal mediators play an important role in most psycho-educational programmes:
- **Social skill.** The ability to interact with one’s social environment;
- **Social support.** The availability and perceived appropriateness of relationships that can support one in difficult times (friends, family, support groups);
- **Social norms.** Values and principles that steer and motivate one’s behaviour;
- **Cognitive skills.** Ability to interpret, comprehend, analyse and integrate information;
- **Self-control.** The ability to set personal goals and the ability to decide between desirable and undesirable verbal and nonverbal behaviour; and
- **Outcome expectancies.** An individual’s believes regarding the outcomes of certain behaviours (Donaldson, 2001:512-514).

A crucial component of systematic programme development is the formulation of a conceptual framework (programme theory). Such a framework provides clear indications of how the programme is conceptualised to address the problems that has been identified during the situation analysis (see Chapter 6). It conceptualises the process through which programme components are believed to influence outcomes, as well as the conditions under which these processes are deemed to operate. The conceptual framework can also
be used to perform different functions during the subsequent stages of psycho-educational programme development, namely: To comprehend the success or failure of programme implementation; as a basis for choices about programme evaluation methods; and to analyse the programme applicability in a specific context (Donaldson, 2001:470-473, 480).

### 3.2.3 Programme implementation

Programme implementation involves the actions and methods that are employed to ensure that the psycho-educational programme’s content is delivered, understood and internalised in a way that lead to long-term change in the programme receivers and/or users. It includes issues such as how to create an awareness of needs related to the programme’s theme, presentation style of the programme, sequencing of themes and/or activities within specific contexts, follow-up sessions and feedback evaluation (D’Onofrio, 2001:160-161; Roos & Taljaard, n.d.:48-49).

### 3.2.4 Programme evaluation

Programme evaluation is an integral and important, but often neglected, aspect in the process of psycho-educational programme development. It involves the systematic assessment of the programme’s conceptualisation, content, design, implementation and usability; it assesses whether the programme is actually meeting its initial objectives (De Vos, 1998:367; Roos & Taljaard, n.d.:15, 38).

Evaluation is a continuous activity during every stage of the psycho-educational programme development process. Without adequate evaluation it is impossible to make valid judgements regarding the extent to which a programme is effective, valuable or applicable. Two important sources of programme evaluation are key informants and programme participants. In the case of key informants, the opinions are asked of a small number of people known to be involved with the programme theme, current interventions and target group/s. The extend to which a programme is reaching, or potentially may
reach, the appropriate target group can be evaluated by prospective participants and programme users (De Vos, 1998:369-373; Roos & Taljaard, n.d.:38).

Systematic evaluation provides invaluable information regarding programme areas that need to be revised, improved or omitted. Some of the fundamental questions that need to be answered during programme evaluation include the following:
- Does the programme facilitate the development of human potential?
- Does the programme contribute to making individuals’ lives more meaningful?
- Is the programme addressing the needs of the target group?
- Is the content appropriate for the target group for whom it has been developed?
- Which skills, insights and potential of the individual in particular are developed in this programme?
- Is the programme presentation appropriate and efficient? (Roos & Taljaard, n.d.:14, 37).

The rest of this chapter describes the different research methodology components of the situation analysis stage (see section 3.2.1), namely: Research participants; data collection; data analysis and synthesis; verification and ethical principles.

### 3.3 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

A phenomenological study requires criterion sampling of research participants. The aim of criterion sampling is to include only individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and can provide rich descriptions of the phenomenon being investigated. Research participants need to be naive with respect to the following two aspects: The researcher’s philosophical and theoretical approach; and phenomenological naivety - the participants describe their experiences as they really believe it happened (Creswell, 1998:118; Giorgi, 1989:47; Morse, 1998c:734; Polkinghorne, 1989:47-48).
3.3.1 Sample selection and inclusion criteria

This study has set a number of general and specific inclusion criteria for potential research participants. The general inclusion criteria focus on some general requirements for individuals to participate in qualitative research, namely:

- They could effectively articulate their experiences in Afrikaans or English;
- They were willing to participate in a lengthy interview and follow-up interviews;
- They were willing to create a collage that could act as narrative facilitator during the phenomenological interview;
- They were willing to reflect on the nature and meanings of the specific phenomenon being investigated;
- They were willing to be open and share thoughts and emotions regarding their intimate and often distressing experiences; and

Some specific inclusion criteria were defined to ensure a relatively cohesive sample of research participants. It included the following:

- They have experienced the phenomenon of being a suicide survivor - the suicide victim could be any significant person, such as a close friends, relative or direct family member with whom the research participant had had a meaningful relationship (McIntosh, 1996:149);
- The most recent suicide event should not have occurred within the six month period prior to the phenomenological interview;
- Female research participants. Hoffmann’s study (2002:50) amongst a sample of South African undergraduate tertiary students found that more females than males report “being close to suicide a victim” as a traumatic experience; and
- Late adolescent research participants. The age span for late adolescents was set between late-teens (minimum 17 years old) and early-twenties (maximum 22 years old) (Gerdes, Moore & Van Ede, 1988:24; Nash, Stoch & Harper, 1990:141; Stillion
The concept of “vested interest” was relevant in this study as I was also a lecturer at the tertiary academic institution that served as the primary data collection setting. Creswell (1998:114) indicates that conducting research in a site in whom one has vested interests establishes participant expectations during data collection that may compromise the value of the data. Research participants may withhold information or slant information to what they think the researcher want to or need to hear. On the positive side, the advantage is that the researcher has extensive knowledge of the dynamics and structure of the setting.

In order to minimise and control the negative effects of my vested interest, the following principles were adhered to in the study:

- Research participants were recruited from study courses and academic departments other than the ones in which I was involved at the time of the study;
- Students who were personally known to me prior to the study were excluded from the study as potential research participants; and
- I did not indicate on the information document to potential research participants (see section 3.3.4) that I was a lecturer at the specific tertiary academic institution. Rather, I explicitly indicated my research affiliation as a doctoral student at the Rand Afrikaans University (see section 3.7 for a discussion of “Ethical principles”).

### 3.3.2 Sample size and data saturation

There is no objective measure for an *a priori* estimation of the sample size required to reach saturation. Data saturation predominantly depends on the following factors: Quality and richness of data; scope of study; nature of topic; amount of useful information obtained from each participant; comprehensiveness of the results; and the researcher’s intuitive skills and experience. The basic principle is that concurrent phenomenological data collection and data analysis are conducted until a point of sufficient data saturation (data adequacy) has been reached (Barry, 1996:422; Groenewald, 2004; Laverty, 2003:18; Morse, 1995:147-149; Morse, 2000:3).
In this study, the following aspects played a significant role to ensure a manageable sample size and comprehensive data saturation:
- The inclusion criteria for research participants were specific and clearly delineated (see section 3.3.1);
- The quality of the interview data was enhanced by the use of collages as narrative-facilitators (see sections 3.4.2 to 3.4.4); and
- The scope of the study was formulated in such a way as to be sufficiently narrow and specific (see section 3.4.1) (Morse, 2000:3-4).

3.3.3 Recruitment strategy

Direct access to potential research participants at a tertiary academic institution was gained through formal permission and support from the relevant dean, residence managers, house committee primaria, student counsellors and academic departments (Annexure C).

The actual recruitment of potential research participants in the research setting was personally conducted by myself. It involved a 10-minute presentation during normal residence meetings or lecture times in which the background, rationale and aims of the study were briefly explained. An open invitation was then extended to any interested individual to take one of the information documents (see section 3.3.4) that were left in the room. Additionally, invitation posters were posted on selected academic departments’ and ladies residences’ general notice boards.

The following indirect recruitment strategies were employed in the research setting:
- A news flash regarding the research project was posted on the staff members’ official electronic communication channel (Annexure F);
- I made appointments with a number of counsellors, psychologists and ministers of religion who were directly involved with adolescent mental health in private enterprises or tertiary academic institutions. A number of information documents were provided to each of these individuals for distribution to potential research
participants known to them; and

- I gave a number of invited talks regarding suicide to adolescents at Christian youth groups and youth camps.

Ultimately, most of the research participants who eventually took part in the study were recruited after short oral presentations at student residence meetings.

### 3.3.4 Information document

The information document that was distributed to all interested individuals during the recruitment of research participants contained the following information (Annexure D):

- Researcher’s particulars: Name, title of study, study supervisors and academic institution where study was registered;

- Study theme information: Background, problem statement and objectives;

- Indications of what would be required from the research participants during the study in terms of the phenomenological interview, collage creation and time investment;

- Indications of the potential negative emotional impact on the participants as a result of engaging in an in-depth phenomenological interview;

- Ethical principles: Psychological support, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity and feedback; and


The information document formed an integral part of obtaining informed consent (Annexure E) from the individuals who eventually agreed to participate in the study. As such, the information document adhered to important ethical principles (see section 3.7).

### 3.4 DATA COLLECTION

The “data” of human science research can broadly be described as human experiences that are expressed and recorded in various forms. The process of data collection is an act
performed by the researcher that provides a deeper understanding and exploration of lived experiences (Mezquita, 1994:304; Polkinghorne, 1989:50; Van Manen, 1997:63).

Phenomenological data are descriptions of lived experiences as it presents itself to the research participant, not descriptions of objects and actions as they are assumed to exist outside of personal experience as an independent reality. The aim and purpose of data collection is then to gather naive descriptions of lived experiences in order to produce clear and accurate descriptions of a particular aspect of human experiences. The participants’ descriptions are naive in two aspects. Firstly, with regards to the researcher’s theoretical and philosophical assumptions. Secondly, it is phenomenological naive as the participants relate their experiences from their personal perception (Giorgi, 1989:46-48; Laverty, 2003:18; Polkinghorne, 1989:44,46,49-50).

3.4.1 Specific research question

A carefully formulated research question to be posed to the research participants is an important guide in the data collection process. Every word should be carefully chosen and ordered in such a way that the question is open-ended and non-directional. The key words should be clear in order to facilitate the exploration and reflection on lived experiences (Creswell, 1998:99; Moustakas, 1994:59, 104-105).

The specific research question for this study was formulated as follows: “Tell me the story of how you experienced the suicide of someone close to you, for example a good friend or close relative? Also, tell me how you coped or made sense of this experience since it happened?” The following instruction was provided in addition to the question: ”In order to make it easier to tell me about this experience, I’d like you to make a collage before we meet for the interview. The collage may include anything you like - some examples include the following: personal photos, magazine pictures, drawings, written words or poems”.
The adequacy of the research question is reflected in the presence of the following important elements:

- The research theme, namely the lived experiences and coping behaviour during and after the suicide of a personally significant person;
- Primary data gathering method: Face-to-face phenomenological interview;
- Nature of the research interview: Conversational (interactive), collage-facilitated narrative; and
- Pre-interview task: Request to create a personalised collage that can facilitate the research interview (Kruger, 1988:151-152; Moustakas, 1994:114-118).

The salient aspects of this study’s main means of data collection will now be discussed in the following paragraphs. It includes the phenomenological interviews and its associated collage-facilitated narrative components, as well as the use of diaries and fieldnotes.

### 3.4.2 Phenomenological interviews

The focus of the phenomenological interview is on the research participants’ lived experiences. However, the interview is not merely a method to gather lived experiences. Since languaging is a reflective process it can also serve as an occasion to reflect on the experiences. The articulation of meaning during an interview changes that which was somehow vaguely known at a preverbal level to become more clearly evident. The interview turns increasingly into a collaborative dialogue with the research participant in an attempt to accurately understand his/her lived experiences (Jorgensen, 1995:166; Polkinghorne, 1989:49; Valle, King & Halling, 1989:10; Van Manen, 1997:63).

The phenomenological interview involves an interpersonal engagement within a relationship of safety and trust. Thus, rapport is an important component of optimal research interviews. Participants are encouraged to share nuanced descriptions of their experiences with the researcher, while the researcher takes care to be sensitive to the presence of new and unexpected aspects in these descriptions (Jorgensen, 1995:166;
An important aspect of the phenomenological interview is its theme-orientation. It aims to describe and understand the personal meaning, interpretation and evaluation of central themes in the research participant’s lifeworld. The researcher’s task is to facilitate certain themes, but not to guide the research participant towards specific opinions. In order to accomplish this, the style of the interview involves an informal, non-directive, interactive process that utilises open-ended interview questions; the researcher does not shape the questions as tests of prior-created categories or schemes of interpretation. The interview questions should aim to prompt the use of metaphors, imagery and other perceptually rich expressions that can broaden the basis from which participants make meaning. However, the flow of the interview should be led by the participant rather than the researcher. This allows ample opportunity for them to express their viewpoints extensively. It encourages the participant to provide a detailed description of lived experiences and actions as faithfully as possible (Clark-Keeffe, 2002; Giorgi, 1997:245; Kruger, 1988:151; Kvale, 1983:173-176; Laverty, 2003:19; Moustakas, 1994:114; Polkinghorne, 1989:49).

The face-to-face, personal, in-depth interview was used as the interview mode in this study. The advantage of this interview type is that it allows the researcher some control over the line of questioning without being directive. However, some of its limitations are the following: It provides information in a designated “place”, usually the researcher’s office, rather than the natural field setting; the researcher’s presence may bias responses; and not all research participants are equally articulate and perceptive (Creswell, 1994:122,150-151).

All interviews were audio-recorded with the research participants’ permission. Each interview was recorded on a separate cassette/s. The interview settings were chosen to be as free as possible from background noise and interruptions. A very sensitive microphone was used to enable the recording of very soft and unclear utterances. The interviews were conducted in Afrikaans or English. The transcription of the interviews took place some time after the actual interview (see section 3.4.7). Direct interview
quotations are reported in translation in Chapters 4 and 5 when the interview was conducted in Afrikaans.

3.4.3 Narratives

When we ask individuals to describe a particular phenomenon during a phenomenological interview, we are structuring the interview into an occasion for storytelling. It allows for the investigation of lived experiences and contextually relevant meanings that individuals attach to their experiences. In the act of turning experiences into stories, the participants are interpreting and expressing the meaning of their lives. The initial research question acts as an activating narrative construction which indicates the researcher’s openness to a conversational narrative response. It indicates that the emphasis of the researcher is on listening to whatever the participant has to tell, instead of guiding and controlling the conversation. The narrative focus requires that the researcher acknowledges each research participant’s unique story. A story doesn’t merely provide information, it is a performance of a contextually relevant lived experience. Thus, the researcher needs to pay close attention to the use of fine linguistic nuances during data collection and data analysis (Banks-Wallace, 1998:21; Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000:60-61; Frank, 2003a; Mkhize & Frizelle, 2000:4; Rapmund & Moore, 2002:25; Sandelowski, 1991:162; Von Eckartsberg, 1989:146).

3.4.4 Collage facilitation

Sometimes there are things that interviewees can not tell or things that they don’t want to tell. It may be due to a fear that the content may not be acceptable or because the information is deemed unimportant or not applicable. In other cases the interviewee may have forgotten something. Sometimes the content is just too painful to talk about. In these cases researchers are challenged to make use of creative ways in order to facilitate the conversational flow of the interview. This can enhance a better understanding of the individual since the creative instrument serves as a “scaffold” for the interviewee’s narrative. It provides an alternative entry opportunity into the interviewee’s point of view.
Arts-based principles and practices in the data collection process offer several sensory points of entry for patterns, complexities, connections and ideas that a narrative-only strategy may not reveal. Arts-based narratives are listener-centered rather than vision-oriented. This means that the narratives can come into their own through an open, conversational dialogue. In addition, the art objects are meant to be expressive and evocative; they have the ability to show rather than tell. This enhances an understanding of the participant’s lived experiences (Clark-Keefe, 2002; Conrad, 2002:258).

In this study, I included participant-created collages as narrative facilitators during the phenomenological interviews. The research participants were provided with a standard white page (50.5 cm x 64 cm) on which to create a collage of their own choice. Research participants who needed stationary (for example scissors and glue) were provided with the necessary items. They were encouraged to be creative in the production of the collage and to make use of any type of image and media they felt comfortable with. As a result, each collage was uniquely individualised. Since the research participants chose their own collage images and collage composition before the phenomenological interview, they gained a rich symbolic vocabulary and insight for self-expression during the interview. The technique of interviewing participants on the basis of personal, self-created collages allowed them to talk and focus on their images, rather than having to focus on the researcher. Their narrative accounts could be routed through the “familiar” images, as it were, to create a less anxiety-provoking context. Also, the images could facilitate memory recall (Radley & Taylor, 2003:79; Turner, 2003).

3.4.5 Diaries

Documentary materials should be regarded as data in their own right and not just as secondary material to support data from interview data. Diaries and letters can be very informative texts of critical and in-depth lived experiences. Its style is usually very personal and confidential. It helps us to reflect on significant aspects of our past, present
and future life. Furthermore, written accounts seem to transcend the social barriers to descriptions of stigmatised behaviours which may pertain in a face-to-face interview situation. It might be far easier and less painful to write about intense emotional and/or traumatic experiences than it is to talk about it in a face-to-face interview (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994:421; Harris, 2002:2-3,5; Van Manen, 1997:73).

In this study, one research participant, Ilze (see section 4.1.1), granted me access to undated diary notes she wrote over a period that approximately stretched from one year before her mom’s suicide until a year after the events.

3.4.6 Fieldnotes

Fieldnotes serve as a document of the researcher’s mind processes, philosophical position, bases of decisions and construction of meaning within the research process and the researcher-participant relationship. As such, it is already a step towards data analysis. Fieldnotes perform a number of important functions:

- It is used to record non-verbal aspects of the interview that are not evident from the audiotape of the interview, such as body language, tone of voice and environmental distractions;
- It provides the researcher with an opportunity for reflexivity and self-evaluation;
- It is used to record the researcher’s theoretical hunches, ideas, insights, reflections, confusions and identified data patterns during the research process;
- It helps to tract the researcher’s understandings, interpretations and decisions; and

I made numerous fieldnotes during this study. It represented important elements of my observational, theoretical, methodological and analytical thoughts (Groenewald, 2004).
3.4.7 Transcription

An interview transcript is not a neutral, simple and exact copy of audio-recorded words. The process of transcription is always one of “translation”; an audio-recorded speech event is “translated” into a written text that are then used as the base document during data analysis. The transcription process requires one to make decisions concerning punctuation and intonation. This is done so that the reader of the transcript may “hear” the actual interview. No single method of transcription is ultimately sufficient to every analytic task. There is no single completely correct transcribed version of verbal material. Any transcription is necessarily incomplete. However, verbatim transcripts with strict notations of speech, such as pauses, repetitions, false starts, interruptions, sighs, crying and laughs, are often utilised (Macleod, 2002:21; Potter, 1998:23-24; Sandelowski, 1991:163).

I have adhered to the following basic principles and notations in the transcriptions of the audio-recorded interviews:

- All identifying information (names and places) were changed without compromising important narrative characteristics, for example, gender and social relation;
- Every audible word was transcribed as accurately as possible;
- Three dots (...) were used to indicate relatively long pauses within seemingly coherent phrases and sentences;
- **Underline** was used to indicate that the specific words or phrases were emphasised by the research participant;
- Quotation marks (“ ”) were used to indicate directly quoted utterances by the research participant or other persons, for example, I told her “Leave me alone”;
- (‘ ’) was used to indicate the research participant’s direct thoughts or self-talk, for example, I was thinking ‘Why did I do this?’;
- Round brackets ( ) was used to indicate non-verbal acts [for example, I was drawing this (indicate with hand to collage image)], to indicate that the research participant uttered words which could not be clearly heard on the audiotape, [for example, I was going through a tough time and (unclear words) before it got better], or to contain...
Qualitative data analysis requires from the researcher to become an intellectual entrepreneur (Cutcliffe, 2003:146-147); and
- Square brackets [ ] were used to indicate additional clarifying information within the conversational flow, for example They [his parents] went to a party.

The transcription process is very demanding and time consuming. However, if the researcher is willing to invest personal attention, time and close engagement with it, he/she will often be rewarded with revealing analytic insights. It has enabled me to make analytic fieldnotes in parallel to, or even on, the actual transcription (Potter, 1998:23-24).

3.5 DATA ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

Qualitative data analysis requires from the researcher to become an intellectual entrepreneur (Cutcliffe, 2003:146-147)

3.5.1 Phenomenological data analysis

Phenomenological praxis offers processes and methods that require effective sensing and analysis of phenomena in terms of the meanings that the phenomena have for the experiencing individual. It is a way of utilising descriptions and reflections in arriving at an understanding of what is (Giorgi, 1997:237; Moustakas, 1994:175).

Inductive data analysis is a core element of the research efforts in a phenomenological study. Its aim is to reveal and unravel the meaning structures, logic and interrelationships from the research participants’ naive descriptions. The data analysis is usually simultaneously conducted with data collection, data interpretation and report writing (Creswell, 1994:153; Giorgi, 1989:58; Poggenpoel & Myburgh, 2003; Polkinghorne, 1989:50).

Phenomenological data analysis involves a number of aspects: Reduction, recording of significant statements, a search for all possible meanings, and the development of
descriptions. Reduction refers to the researcher’s attempts to place common sense and scientific foreknowledge regarding the phenomenon into brackets in order to arrive at the essence of the experience. Depending on the specific form of phenomenology followed by the researcher, this essence (structure) may be sensitive to the contextual limits intrinsic to the meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998:52, 236; Giorgi, 1997:256-257; Kvale, 1983:184; Polkinghorne, 1989:42; Valle, King & Halling, 1989:11).

The hallmark of the phenomenological method in psychology is its description of how an individual “co-constitutes” the world of lived experiences as described in naive self-report data or other forms of expression. A psychological “phenomenon” is understood here not as an event “in itself” but rather as something that occurs “for someone”. The psychological work involves that the researcher enter into a dialogue with the data. This dialogue is an attempt to engage in a narrative act of understanding an individual’s life situation. The understanding process is circumscribed by the researcher’s perspective of the data which is made explicit in the form of a set of research questions and guiding principles. Phenomenological psychologists acknowledge the impossibility of presuppositionless knowledge. Also, they accept the notion that all description is already an interpretation (Churchill, 2000; Groenewald, 2004).

Many qualitative data analysis methods involve some kind of synthesis. Such a synthesis aims to reduce the individual’s experiences to a formula, theory or saturated category - many voices are condensed into one voice. However, narrative principles require one to stay with the postmodernistic notion of multiple voices. As a result the complexity and open-endedness of human stories and experiences are acknowledged and recognised (Frank, 2003a).

and the Thematic Apperception Test (Du Toit & Piek, 1987:41-42) were integrated in Giorgi’s method to strengthen and support its psychological inclinations. The data analysis approach I used in this study, can essentially be described in four steps (see Annexure H for an exemplar of the analysis steps for one specific transcript section):

- **Step 1: Get a holistic sense of the whole text.**

  Read the entire text with an open mind, with no special attitude, in order to understand the language and experience of the participant and to get a holistic sense of the transcript. It involves nothing more than a simple reading of the text and the ability to understand the research participant’s narrative. The text should be read as often as is necessary to get an encompassing grasp of the whole. This indicates the Gestalt-phenomenological perspective of Giorgi’s method. The assumption is that all parts of the transcript are related to each other and that one cannot understand the relationships among the parts unless you have a global sense of it.

- **Step 2: Demarcate meaning units.**

  In order to analyse a transcript it must be broken down into manageable units. Step 2 is largely anticipatory of the later analysis steps which focus on the thematisation of the text. The units of analysis are “meaning units”. Once a sense of the whole has been grasped, the researcher reads through the text once more with the specific aim of demarcating meaning units. These units express a self-contained meaning from a psychological perspective. An unit stands as a distinguishable moment. Since lifeworld descriptions are richer and contains more than a researcher can ever analyse, he/she assumes a psychological attitude that focuses on the phenomenon being researched.

  The meaning units that emerge in this way are spontaneously perceived discriminations within the research participant’s account; a kind of lived spontaneity. The meaning units emerge whenever the researcher, upon rereading the text, becomes aware of a psychologically sensitive meaning change of the situation for the research participant. It takes place within a “context of discovery” and an attitude open enough to let unexpected meanings emerge. The meaning units are determined in such a way that it is context-laden. The task of this step is to articulate the central meanings which characterise the research participant’s account. The meaning units do not exist
in the text as such, but are constituted by the researcher’s attitude, perspective and judgment of the relevant units - meaning-units-for-the-researcher. Each researcher has a preferred way of delimiting part-whole relationships. The researcher must discriminate the revelatory parts that will inform an understanding of the phenomenon under study. The implications are that the emerging meaning units are neither univocal nor arbitrary, and that it is possible for one researcher to not regard a specific text part as relevant which another researcher would regard as highly significant. However, what matters is the natural coherency of the units in the text rather than those imposed by the expectations of the researcher’s theoretical position. The meaning units can be quite varied in length. In the researcher’s description of the meaning units, the participant’s own phraseology are used. Ultimately, the aim of this step is to assist the researcher in organising the protocol into workable parts for the next analysis step.

- Step 3: The researcher reflects on the meaning units and transforms the relevant expressions into psychological language.

In practice this step means that the researcher goes through all the meaning units and express the psychological insight contained in them more directly in a transformed meaning unit. It is a transformation of everyday expressions and experiences into psychological language with a focus on the phenomenon being investigated. In this step the researcher’s comprehension and understanding of the participant’s account is challenged in order to find relevance and coherence. The researcher attempts to express in an explicit way the implicit psychological aspects of each meaning unit by recognising the importance of word choice, sentence construction and narrative style (Du Toit & Piek, 1987:42). These transformations are necessary because the research participants’ naive descriptions express multiple realities in a cryptic way. The researcher’s task is to elucidate in depth the psychological aspects appropriate for the understanding of the phenomenon through reflection. Making the psychological explicit entails a transformation of the participant’s own words. Additionally, the researcher can add theoretical memos that contain insights or ideas of the theoretical relationships as they emerge during the data analysis (Cutcliffe, 2003:145). The language used to describe the transformed meaning units is the language of common
sense enlightened by a phenomenological perspective of psychology. Thus, the researcher’s psychological insight involves both a discovery and creation process.

**Step 4: Synthesise the transformed meaning units into a consistent description of the psychological structure in the research participant’s experience.**

The researcher synthesises and integrates the insights contained in the transformed meaning units into a consistent and systematic narrative description of the psychological structure of the experience. It involves an intuitive “grasping” of the essential psychological elements that incorporate the redescribed psychological meanings. In this sense, description involves a *pointing to* something, as well as a *pointing out* the meaning of something. It is more than just a mere list of the elements, but rather a description that expresses an understanding and creative insight into the whole experience. The results of this phase are no longer expressed strictly in the participants’ own language. The concepts and terms used in expressing the intuitions gained through the analysis should be phenomenologically grounded. Appropriate disciplinary terms can be introduced in phenomenologically grounded ways (Creswell, 1998:32, 150; Du Toit & Piek, 1987:43-44; Groenewald, 2004; McLaren, 1999:73).

Two types of descriptions can be compiled, namely specific and general descriptions. Specific descriptions are idiographic in nature and remain more faithful to the participant’s concrete content and specific context. General descriptions are nomothetic in nature and departs from the specific meanings to communicate the most general meaning of the phenomenon. It centers on those aspects of the experience that are transsituational. The researcher has the freedom to express the research findings in multiples ways and styles. The audience to whom one is reporting co-constitutes the way one expresses the interpretation.

Phenomenological data analysis requires the utilisation and application of certain phenomenological skills to reveal meaning, structure and coherence. These skills include intuition, empathy, reflection, bracketing and literature control. The following paragraphs briefly discuss each of these skills.
3.5.2 Intuition

Intuition is regarded as a skill directed towards producing solid judgements concerning everything that presents itself. It involves developing one’s consciousness through looking and listening. This means that intuition can be regarded as the starting place in deriving knowledge of human experience (Morse & Field, 1995:153; Moustakas, 1994:32; Poggenpoel, 1998:337; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:49).

3.5.3 Empathy

In the world as a community of persons, each individual can experience and know other individuals in the sense of empathy and co-presence. Empathy is the stance through which the co-presence of other individuals becomes accessible to me; the ability to sense the individual’s private world as if it is your own; a thereness-for-me of other individuals. It comprises an experience of others’ experiences in interaction with their world. The researcher directs attention to the subtleties contained in verbal and non-verbal language, through which others’ experiences are revealed (Churchill, 2000; Cutcliffe, 2003:141; Du Toit & Piek, 1987:39; Moustakas, 1994:37-38, 57-58).

3.5.4 Reflection

Reflection is a process through which the stream of experience with all its manifold events can be grasped and analysed in the light of its own evidence. It involves a careful reading of an expression to answer the questions “What is truly being described in the meaning unit?” and “What is the dynamic operating here?” Reflection continues until one feels satisfied that you have arrived at a comprehensive and integral meaning which embraces the experience. It results in descriptions which include thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas and situations that portray the essence of an experience (Moustakas, 1994:32, 47, 52, 74; Polkinghorne, 1989:55; Van Manen, 1997:10).
The terms “phenomenological reduction” and “bracketing” are synonymous. It is often used interchangeably by different authors (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:26-27).

Wertz (1985:174-178) and Polkinghorne (1989:55-56) emphasise the following basic attitudes and activities that contribute to psychological reflection within the phenomenological approach:

- Empathic immersion in the research participant’s description is a point of access to the participant’s lifeworld and lived experiences;
- Spend adequate time with the participant’s description in order not to miss subtle details of the description. Dwelling on the research participant’s description elicits a magnification and amplification of its full significance;
- During the analysis process, the researcher should take a step back from the original empathic engagement with the research participant during the data collection process in order to focus on the description’s origin, relations and structure;
- The researcher should not be concerned with the objective reality of the described experiences, but should rather focus on its meanings for the research participant; and
- Stay attuned to the coherence of the participant’s description with a focus on temporal, spatial and social factors.

Reflection is facilitated by keeping fieldnotes which forces the researcher to take the time to reflect and critically consider various issues. Through a self-conscious reflexive stance the researcher is aware of his/her participation in data collection, data analysis and representation of results (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000:88-89; Laverty, 2003:17).

3.5.5 Bracketing

Phenomenological research emphasises that a phenomenon be approached afresh without preconceived notions about what one will find in the research process. During data analysis, bracketing refers to the process by which the researcher explicitly sets aside, as far as is humanly possible, all preconceived experiences, preconceptions, beliefs, biases, prejudices and ideas to understand the research participant’s experiences as it is presented. The purpose of bracketing is to open up experience of the world by discarding all limiting

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1 The terms “phenomenological reduction” and “bracketing” are synonymous. It is often used interchangeably by different authors (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:26-27).
theories and presuppositions. It is an attempt to place common sense and scientific foreknowledge about the phenomena into “parentheses” in order to arrive at the essence of the phenomena. Bracketing enables the researcher to be fully present to the experience as presented by the research participant’s description (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000:86-88; Creswell, 1998:235; Dukes, 1984:199; Giorgi, 1997:240, 244; Kvale, 1983:184; Moustakas, 1994:22, 85-87; Polkinghorne, 1989:47; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990:26, 48).

Bracketing ensures that researchers’ biases are reduced and made explicit in both data collection and analysis. If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already “know”, we may find that the presuppositions persistently creep back into our reflections. The process of bracketing is one that is never complete. Thus, complete reduction is obviously impossible. However, through bracketing the researcher attempts to approach data analysis from a position of conceptual silence (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000:38; Groenewald, 2004; Kruger, 1988:142; Valle, King & Halling, 1989:10-11; Van Manen, 1997:47).

Bracketing can also be viewed as a task-related tool that is used to meet the ethical dictum of phenomenology. This ethical component of phenomenology centers on accurately portraying the fullness and reality of the phenomenon under study as it is lived and described by the research participants (Beck, 1994a:500; Creswell, 1998:147; Giorgi, 1997:240; Moustakas, 1994:33, 85, 90-97).

### 3.5.6 Literature control

Literature control refers to the process of comparing and contextualising a study’s research results with that of similar projects and relevant published research articles. This enables the researcher to identify the similarities, differences and unique aspects that the study contributes to the body of academic knowledge and everyday insight in human experiences (Smith, 2000:50).
3.6 VERIFICATION

“Verification” refers to the process of checking, confirming and ensuring the rigour of research. It is the process that indicates how a study remains true to its chosen ontology and epistemology. The term “verification” instead of “validity” is usually preferred as it supports qualitative research as a distinct process in its own right. The verification process proceeds throughout the whole research process. The implication is that rigour can not merely be relegated to one section of a post hoc reflection in the research report, but should be evident throughout all research activities and in the pervasive quality of the research report. The verification strategies employed in a phenomenological study should ensure the adequacy of the descriptions across various dimensions, especially with a focus on bracketing and researcher integrity. Such a study is regarded as rigorous when the understanding of a phenomenon is arrived at through honest and contextual descriptions that make possible the comprehension of specific lived experiences (Churchill, 2000; Fieldnotes, 7 December 2002; Laverty, 2003:23; Morse et al, 2002; Moustakas, 1994:84).

Depending on the specific verification model followed by a researcher, the verification strategies may be focused on either an external standard (for example member checking and peer examination) or an internal standard (for example reflexivity). In this study I have primarily relied on Guba’s model to establish rigour (Krefting, 1991). However, McLaren (1999:90-91) has reported six guidelines for assessing the worthiness and effort of postmodern research that I have also adhered to in this study:

- **Verite**: Does the results ring true? Is the research intellectually honest and truthful?
- **Integrity**: Is the research structurally sound in terms of logical flow and its philosophical approach?
- **Rigour**: Is the research of sufficient intellectual depth?
- **Utility**: Is the research useful and relevant? Does the presentation of results communicate powerfully?
- **Aesthetics**: Is the results enriching? Does it touch my spirit in some way?
- **Ethics**: Has the privacy and dignity of participants been upheld? Has the research been conducted in a careful and responsible way?
Guba’s model represents an effort to reconceptualise the positivistic concepts of “reliability”, “validity” and “generalisability” to assess the quality, rigour and trustworthiness of qualitative research. This model’s guidelines for assessing the trustworthiness (authenticity) of research consist of four basic aspects, namely truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality (Beck, 1994b:262-263; Krefting, 1991:215; Morse et al, 2002).

3.6.1 Truth value

Postmodern researchers do not seek objective truth, but rather aims to be truthful in reporting the realities of the research participants. Based on this, some authors regard “truth value” as the most important criterion for the verification of qualitative research. This criterion asks whether the researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the research participants and for the context in which the research was conducted. As such, it corresponds to the “verite” criterion in McLaren’s (1999:90) study. Truth value is located in the discovery of human experiences as it is lived and perceived by research participants. It refers to how vivid and faithful the analysis conforms to what the research participants were trying to convey (Beck, 1994b:261; Conroy, 2003:33; Krefting, 1991:215-216; Kruger, 1988:216-217; Laverty, 2003:23; Schurink, Schurink & Poggenpoel, 1998:331).

Credibility strategies ensures that the research was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the lived experiences of the phenomenon was accurately and truthfully identified and described (Poggenpoel, 1998:251). The following credibility strategies were implemented in this study to ensure its truth value:

- **Reflexivity.** It involves an indication of the influence of the researcher’s background, perceptions and interests on the research process. This process will always be incomplete due to life’s dynamic character and to limitations on the level of self-awareness. Reflexivity manifests in an explicit clarification of the researcher’s philosophical position, values, theoretical perspectives, beliefs, a priori knowledge and biases or assumptions that may impact on the study (see Prologue, Chapter 2 and
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Epilogue). However, even the most complete reflexive effort cannot account for all the effects of these aspects on data analysis and other research elements (Creswell, 1994:202,208; Cutcliffe, 2003:137-139,144; Krefting, 1991:218; Kruger, 1988:143);

- **Member checking.** Member checking involves taking the interpretations and descriptions of the data analysis back to the research participants to verify its accuracy and credibility. The aim of member checking is to decrease the chances of misrepresentation by obtaining feedback from the research participants as coresearchers. However, the researcher must be cautious in the choice of research participants to involve in this strategy. Some of the research participants may not be conscious of the information discovered by the researcher, and may become troubled if made aware of it. An ethical responsibility rests on the researcher to ensure that sensitive information should not be provided to individuals that might be harmful to their psychological well-being. I involved all the research participants in establishing the truth value of my data analysis by providing them with their transcribed interview/s and a full written report of the analysis. They were then offered the choice to respond to the accuracy and content of the report, either by post, e-mail, telephone or feedback interview. None of them made use of this invitation.

Some qualitative researchers argue that the researcher is exceeding the role and skills of the research participants when they are asked to evaluate the analysis of their lived experiences. It holds that research participants describe their lived experiences from an everyday perspective, while the researcher seeks the psychological meaning of the experiences (Beck, 1994b:259-261; Creswell, 1998:140, 203, 207; Krefting, 1991:219; Morse, 1998b:443-444; Polkinghorne, 1989:56);

- **Peer review.** It involves an external validation and review of the research process by expert judges. The function of peer reviewers is to critically review specific credibility aspects of the researcher’s methods. As a result of peer review feedback, the researcher may engage in deeper reflexive analyses. In this study I have used an experienced independent coder to review the analysed data. This person is a psychologist who is experienced in phenomenological data analysis (see Annexure G for the review report) (Beck, 1994b:259; Creswell, 1994:202; Krefting, 1991:219);

- **Interview technique.** The credibility of this study was increased by employing
appropriate in-depth interview skills, such as using open-ended questions, being non-directive and being empathic (Cutcliffe, 2003:141-142; Krefting, 1991:220);

- Structural coherence. This strategy ensures that there is no unexplained inconsistencies between the data and its interpretation. It is influenced by the way in which the researcher integrates and reports the masses of relatively loosely connected data into a logical and encompassing description in order to account for all aspects of the original account. Chapters 4 and 5 contain a systematic and coherent report of this study’s findings (Creswell, 1994:207; Krefting, 1991:220); and

- Establish the authority of the researcher. This strategy requires that a researcher exhibits the following personal characteristics: A strong interest in ideological-theoretical knowledge; a cognitive ability to conceptualise large volumes of qualitative data; an ability to engage in a multidisciplinary approach; and good investigative skills and interview techniques. The Prologue and Epilogue provide information regarding my personal skills, training and integrity (Krefting, 1991:220).

3.6.2 Applicability

Applicability involves the degree to which the research findings can be applied to other contexts or with other groups outside the study situation. As such, it corresponds to the “utility” criterion mentioned by McLaren (1999:90). Assessment of applicability is to a large extend the responsibility of the individual who wants to transfer the findings of one study to a situation or group other than that of the original study. Thus, the usefulness of the research is determined by the readers and users of the research (Beck, 1994b:261; Conroy, 2003:33; Creswell, 1994:197-198; Krefting, 1991:216; Munhall, 1994:186; Schurink, Schurink & Poggenpoel, 1998:331).

One transferability (fittingness) strategy was implemented in this study to increase its applicability: Dense background information and vivid descriptions of the research participants and research context are provided in Chapters 3 and 4 (Krefting, 1991:220).
3.6.3 Consistency

Consistency involves the way in which the research findings would be reproducible if the inquiry was replicated with the same research participants or in a similar context. Dependability strategies ensure that the variability between replicated studies can be accounted for in terms of known sources, for example increased insight on the part of the researcher, research participant fatigue, maturation effects, or changes in the research participants’ lifeworlds (Beck, 1994b:261; Krefting, 1991:216; Morse et al, 2002).

Two dependability strategies were implemented in this study to increase its consistency:

- **Description of research methods.** This strategy requires the provision of dense, vivid descriptions of the methods for research participant recruitment, data collection, data analysis and synthesis, and verification. The methodological coherence of this study is reported by means of extensive documentation (a detailed thesis), procedural rigour (Chapter 3) and ethical rigour (see section 3.7) (Krefting, 1991:221; Munhall, 1994:186-187); and

- **Peer review.** It involved my regular discussions with the study promoters to check the design, implementation and progress of the research plan (Krefting, 1991:221).

3.6.4 Neutrality

Neutrality refers to the degree that the research findings are a function of the research participants and the research context, rather than that of the researcher’s biases, presuppositions and perspectives. Strictly speaking, the neutrality aspect of trustworthiness is not pertinent to phenomenology and postmodern approaches. These approaches view reality as a dynamic entity in which the researcher is an integral part of the data and research process. However, the principles contained in two confirmability strategies were implemented in this study without violating its philosophical axioms (Beck, 1994b:261-262; Morse et al, 2002; Schurink, Schurink & Poggenpoel, 1998:331).
The two confirmability strategies that were implemented to increase this study’s neutrality are as follow:

- **Reflexive analysis.** It involves an explicit awareness and clarification of the researcher’s influence on the study (see Prologue and Epilogue) (Creswell, 1994:202, 208; Krefting, 1991:221); and

- **Auditing of the research process.** The audit process involves an independent evaluation of the formal thesis by examiners. The tasks of the auditors are to examine the process and product of the study, to assess the accuracy of the research findings, and to establish whether the research findings, interpretations and conclusions are reasonably supported by the data (Creswell, 1994:197-198, 203, 207; Krefting, 1991:221; Munhall, 1994:190).

### 3.6.5 Guba’s model of “trustworthiness”: Critique

Morse et al (2002) hold that Guba’s model focuses primarily on verification strategies and external standards that establish trustworthiness at the end of the study (post hoc reflection), when it is too late to correct it, rather than focussing on processes of verification during the study. These external standards are thought to be an unobtainable gold standard that ultimately results in clashes between the “ideal” and the “real” situation. They also argue that Guba’s strategies of trustworthiness may be useful to evaluate rigour, but is not necessarily enough to ensure rigour. The following strategies are then proposed to ensure research rigour: Investigator responsiveness, methodological coherence, sampling adequacy, active analytic stance, thinking theoretically and theory development. Investigator responsiveness refers to the researcher’s creativity, sensitivity, flexibility and skill in using various verification strategies. Methodological coherence refers to the congruence between the research question and the components of the study method (data collection and data analysis). Sampling adequacy refers to effective recruitment strategies which will lead to efficient data saturation. Active analytic stance refers to an iterative interaction between data collection and data analysis.
I agree with some of Morse at al’s (2002) concerns, such as the reliance on evaluating a study against idealistic standards as an indication of its rigour. However, on the one hand it seems to me as if they have very narrowly interpreted the Guba model’s verification strategies as if it is only utilised *retrospectively* at the end of research projects. “Reflexivity”, “peer examination” and “interview technique” (see section 3.6.1) are but some examples of trustworthiness strategies that clearly suggest a verification *process* throughout a study. On the other hand, some of the Morse group’s proposed alternative strategies seem to be very similar to existing strategies in the Guba model; one such example is that “investigator responsiveness” corresponds to “establishing the authority of the researcher” (see section 3.6.1) (Krefting, 1991:220). Despite these reservations, some of the group’s other proposed ideas and strategies can significantly contribute to the rigour of “good” qualitative studies, for example “methodological coherence” and “active analytic stance”. As such, both these strategies have been implemented in my study. The issue of methodological coherence have been addressed in the correspondence between the study’s ideological assumptions (Chapter 2) and its chosen research methods (Chapter 3). Lastly, I support the group’s suggestion that the responsibility for ensuring the rigour of a study needs to be with the researcher rather than with the external judges of the final research report.

3.7 ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

All ethical principles are based on a reverence for human beings and their experiences. It serves to safeguard the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of each research participant. Also, it guides the conduct of high quality research that will offer benefits and advantages to the research participants and the wider community (Creswell, 1998:19-20; Munhall, 1994:150; West & Bassett, 2002).

The phenomenological perspective requires from researchers to be particularly sensitive to ethical considerations involving the sharing of lived experiences. They have specific responsibilities and obligations to ensure process consent, sensitivity to interview issues and authentic interpretation and description of lived experiences (Munhall,
The following ethical issues are relevant for this study: Ethical clearance, recruitment of research participants, informed consent, obligation for respect, implicit vulnerability and deception.

3.7.1 Ethical clearance

This study’s formal research protocol was approved by the Faculty Academic Ethics Committee (Rand Afrikaans University) on 28 May 2002 (Annexure A). Additional formal ethical clearance was granted by Technikon Pretoria’s Ethics Committee2 (Ref No: 2002/05/001) on 28 May 2002 (Annexure B) as the research participants were predominantly recruited from that institution’s student population.

3.7.2 Recruitment of research participants

The following ethical principle was adhered to during the recruitment of research participants:

“... no coercion, overt or covert, of anyone to volunteer for research, whether the pressure be financial, for academic or employment advantage ... or for other reasons. Initial recruitment should be through circulars, notices or announcements to groups and not by individual approach” (MRC, 1993:25).

Since potential research participants were predominantly recruited from the same tertiary academic institution as where the researcher holds a permanent position, the following principles for a “special group” were adhered to:

- It was recognised that students are particularly vulnerable to academic, personal and financial pressures. Thus, no monetary incentive or reward was offered during any stage of the recruitment process (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000:43);

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2 Technikon Pretoria merged with two other tertiary institutions on January 1, 2004. It is currently known as the Tshwane University of Technology
- The research participants were recruited in such a manner as to ensure that the researcher was in no way involved in their tuition;
- A clause was included in the informed consent which stated that a research participant may withdraw from the study without fear of any discrimination;
- Care was taken to ensure that no impression was created which could suggest that participation in the study may benefit the studentship of a research participant, or that non-participation would result in discrimination; and
- No form of coercion was applied (MRC, 1993:28).

3.7.3 Informed consent

An information sheet (Annexure D) was provided to all potential research participants during the various recruitment presentations. During these presentations I did not seek or accepted any commitments to partake in the study. All interested individuals were provided with an information sheet in either English or Afrikaans, and then requested to only contact me after carefully reading and considering the content of the information sheet. The sheet provided the following information: Personal information of the researcher, information regarding the theme of the study, objectives of the study, procedures and time commitment of the investigation, the specific research question, potential benefits of the study, potential emotional impact and discomfort as a result of participating in the research project, ethical principles (voluntary participation, freedom to withdraw without penalty, confidentiality clause, masking of identifying data), consent (use of collages and quotations from transcripts, dissemination and publication of findings), contact details of the researcher and supervisor, and an assurance of feedback (Cleaton-Jones, 2001; Creswell, 1998:124; Groenewald, 2004; Moustakas, 1994:110; MRC, 1993:34; Munhall, 1994:154-157; Strydom, 1998:25; West & Bassett, 2002).

Five specific ethical aspects of the informed consent in this study are addressed in the following paragraphs: Emotional impact of participation in the research project; voluntary participation; confidentiality and anonymity; researcher credibility; and deception.
**Potential emotional impact of participation in the research project.** The nature of this study’s research theme required that the research participants be thoroughly informed about the potential emotional impact of participation in the study. I was especially sensitive to the fact that having to recall emotions, thoughts and actions during the study could, for some participants, be the beginning of a renewed personal trauma. The nature of the phenomenological interviews required that research participants expose and share intimate information about themselves. Following the ethical principle that the therapeutic imperative takes precedence over the research imperative, I made specific arrangements with a resident psychologist to be available for counselling as needed. This arrangement was explicitly conveyed to all the research participants at the onset and closure of each phenomenological interview, together with the psychologist’s contact details (telephone number and on-campus office location). A research interview would be terminated when, to my professional discretion, the emotional impact on the research participant exceeds ethically acceptable levels. In such cases, immediate professional psychological support was offered. Ultimately, no research interview had to be terminated for such a reason (Munhall, 1994:151,154-155; Strydom, 1998:25; West & Bassett, 2002).

**Voluntary participation and freedom to withdraw.** This aspect required that the research participants were not induced to partake in the study by means of any incentive or a desire to please the researcher, and that no hint of coercion or pressure was present at any time. The research participants were assured that they would be free to withdraw from the study at any time, that no reason need be provided, and that the withdrawal would be accepted without any penalty or future disadvantage. During the course of the study a number of potential research participants did indeed chose to not continue with their initial inclination to be part of the study (MRC, 1993:32, 34; Strydom, 1998:25; West & Bassett, 2002).

**Confidentiality and anonymity.** This aspect required that access to the research data be restricted, that it be properly stored and handled, and that the research participants would be non-identifiable in the project report. It also implied that the data would not be used in any way that the research participants hadn’t agreed to. Apart from myself, the raw
data sets were only shared in confidential discussions with the independent reviewer and the promoters of this study. Any interview data that I considered private and potentially damaging to any individual, were removed or disguised during transcription to protect the identity and integrity of the specific research participant. Anonymity of the research participants and any individual explicitly mentioned during the interview was ensured by changing their identity and location names (Creswell, 1998:124; Morse, 1998a:301-302; Moustakas, 1994:110; West & Bassett, 2002).

Researcher credibility. I have undergone extensive postgraduate training in psychology and qualitative research methods, both locally and internationally. Previous research projects provide evidence of my specific and proven research interest in adolescent emotional trauma. This has significantly contributed to my professional skills to adequately identify and cope with the different aspects of this study’s research context (Strydom, 1998:25).

Deception. I want to unequivocally state that I did not engage in any form of deception regarding the nature, content or aim of the study. The objectives, procedures, risks and expected benefits of the study were explicitly disclosed to all the research participants in the information sheet. However, I did engage in a form of passive deception by not explicitly stating in the information sheet or the consent form that I was a full-time lecturer at the research site. I merely introduced myself as a registered doctoral student at the Rand Afrikaans University. However, in the interest of authentic rapport, I did not engage in any active deception in this regard when the issue arose during an interview (Creswell, 1998:132).

This concludes the description and discussion of this study’s research methods. The next chapter describes and discusses the results of the situation analysis regarding the research participants’ experiences of “being an adolescent suicide survivor”.