Exploring adult daughter relationships with their mothers: A study of relational well-being

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"Your son is your son till he gets him a wife: but your daughter's your daughter all the days of her life" – (17th century English proverb)

Are we bonded to our mothers for life?

I do not think there can be any doubt that the answer to this question will always be a resounding yes, and as adult daughters, irrespective of our age, we want nothing more than our mothers' approval and unconditional love. So, my deepest gratitude goes to all the mothers of the world.

No one accomplishes anything alone and I had more than my fair share of reliable, competent, and supportive people standing with me on this journey. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to thank the following people:

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Making our dreams come true is only possible when we surround ourselves with people who share in our vision, who support us in the simplest of ways, and who are truly selfless. Pippa Capstick is one of these people. Thank you, Pippa, for your endless encouragement, you are an absolute pillar of support.

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Declaration

I Philippa-Anne McAlister, declare that the dissertation titled "Exploring adult daughters' relationships with their mothers: A study of relational well-being" is my own work and that the interviews reported on, and the opinions expressed in this work are those of the author and are in line with relevant literature references as indicated in the list of references.

I furthermore declare that the contents of this research have not and will not be submitted for any other qualification(s) at any other institutions.

Philippa-Anne McAlister October 2019

Permission of Supervisor

I, Chrizanne van Eeden, hereby give permission to Philippa-Anne McAlister to submit this document as a mini-dissertation for the qualification MA in Positive Psychology.

Furthermore, I confirm that this mini-dissertation has been written in the article format that is in line with the 2019 General Academic Rules (4.4.2 and 4.10.5) of the North-West University.

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Exploring adult daughter relationships with their mothers: A study of relational well-being

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Summary

This qualitative study explored the relationship between adult daughters and their mothers, and particularly how this relationship influenced the daughters' well-being. A framework of relational well-being was adopted, and the constructs of flourishing and languishing were used to structure the factors that contribute to the well-being of adult daughters.

A literature study informed the problem statement. The available body of literature seems rather clinically focused and much has been written on the languishing aspects in the mother–daughter relationships, as well as on tension, ambivalence and chronic conflict and its effects on the adult daughter (Birditt, et al., 2009; Pickering, et al., 2015). However, while research on the positive aspects of relationships is undoubtedly important particularly within the field of positive psychology, no relationship can be fully understood by focusing only on the positive or only on the negative elements.

Whereas many studies focus either on the conflicting aspects of this relationship (e.g. Fingerman, 2000, Pickering et al. 2015) or on the positive aspects, a major strength of this study is that it offers a broader perspective on the relationship as a whole. This study gave equal credence to flourishing and languishing aspects and the effect they each had on the well-being of the adult daughter.

As such, the theoretical views on both aspects and the factors that contribute to either flourishing or languishing within the relationship were explored, discussed and reported. The concepts of mother–daughter attachment, relational well-being and culture and attachment, as well as the construct of flourishing were researched and their relationship to mother–daughter relationships was explicated. The literature overview then led to the formulation of the research question: What factors of relational well-being or the absence thereof (flourishing or languishing) emerge when exploring women's experiences of the mother–daughter relationship and from their responses to the Adult Daughter Mother Relationship Questionnaire? (ADMRQ, Cwikel,2016).

The research aims that followed from this research question was to qualitatively identify factors in the mother–daughter relationship that promote flourishing in adult daughters; qualitatively identify factors in the mother–daughter relationship that lead to languishing in adult daughters; and to measure, score and give feedback to participants about their responses

to the ADMRQ and to use the scores to identify women possibly flourishing or languishing in the mother–daughter dyad.

The study was conducted using a pluralistic approach with an exploratory qualitative descriptive design seeming most suitable for this study as the personal narrative and the shared lived experiences of the participants were a key source of data. Qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted to gather data. The ADMRQ was administered to explore the phenomenon of the mother–daughter relationship and its complexities, while not seeking to resolve the tensions, but to constructively explore the flourishing and languishing aspects of the mother–daughter relationship. The questionnaires were qualitatively evaluated as an additional resource, but they were not statistically analysed.

The results of the thematic content analysis of the transcribed interviews and the participants' responses to the ADMRQ confirm the fact that this relationship cannot be fully understood by only focusing on either the positive or the negative aspects. Specifically, it would seem that the languishing aspects of the relationship have led to reflection, meaning-making and then the reframing of their experiences. It is especially this mechanism that has been of most benefit to adult daughters and that contributed most to the improvement of their well-being as adults. This finding means that positive psychology should not merely involve the study of positive aspects, but also the study of how negative aspects can be reframed to make a positive contribution.

The study concludes with an outline of the conclusions and findings of the research, together with the limitations of the study. On this basis, several recommendations are proposed for future research and for the practical application of the findings.

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CHAPTER 1

LITERATURE BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Keywords: **flourishing, languishing, mother–daughter attachment relationship, relational well-being**

Introduction

This study aimed to research the well-being of adult daughters in the mother–daughter attachment relationship by exploring possible factors that have led to the flourishing or languishing of the relationship. The study is presented in three chapters. The first chapter discusses the problem statement and offers a literature review of the available research on this topic. The second chapter describes the research results in article format, and the last chapter presents the conclusions, limitations and recommendations drawn from the study.

Early theories about the relationship between mothers and daughters tended to focus on the dominant role of biology in determining the form that these relationships will take. There was an assumption that the mother and daughter would be symbiotic, sharing a natural attachment. In 1986, Adrienne Rich brought to light the silence that for many years surrounded the most formative relationship in the life of every woman, the relationship between a daughter and her mother. Rich also described the mother–daughter bond as the great unwritten story (Rich, 1986).

There is an extraordinary bond between mothers and daughters, and whether this bond is cherished or despised, the bond endures. The entanglement of mothers and daughters continues into old age as mothers struggle to satisfy the demands of their daughters, while daughters continue to perform duties for their mothers to retain the approval and affection they need. There is often a reversal of roles as mothers age and become more dependent on their daughters. Martha Weinman Lear (1975, p. 13) suggests that as mothers age their identities merge with that of their daughters in a “murderous entanglement” that is passed on from generation to generation.

Despite some negative views on this primary attachment relationship, Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2009) describe healthy adult children–parent relationships as key ingredients for the lifelong well-being of both parties. Extensive intergenerational research supports this perspective (Cooney & Dykstra, 2013). Seligman claims that flourishing is the gold standard for measuring well-being (2011, p.13). These different research perspectives inspired this study to explore the flourishing or languishing of adult women in their mother–daughter attachment experiences. Furthermore, research literature on normative mother–adult daughter relationships is quite limited, and while there is existing and evolving theoretical literature, it is grounded in a clinical empirical database (Shrier, Tompsett & Shrier, 2004).

Problem Statement

The first binding relationship between mother and daughter becomes the model for much of a woman's adult relationships and her behaviour and attitudes. The core of her selfhood stems more or less overtly from the relationship with and the example set by her mother. It is difficult to deny the psychosocial relevance of this relationship between a mother and her daughter (Birditt & Fingerman, 2013). The nature of the mother–daughter bond is seen as a symbiotic one that transitions from often idealized interconnectedness during the daughter's youth to complex interdependence in later life as both women pursue separate identities and (re)negotiate their roles (Miller-Day, 2004).

According to Washington, Burke, Joseph, Guerra and Pasick (2009), mothers and daughters establish patterns of communication that shape their sense of self and the perceived quality of the relationship throughout the lifespan of this relationship. Communication and interaction processes between daughters and their mothers and the boundaries that govern such communication and contact are usually defined when daughters are very young. However, these parameters or boundaries, or lack thereof, may lead to difficulties in the adult daughter and her mother's relationship as they both mature and establish their own separate identities and life contexts. Fingerman (1996) examined mother–daughter dyads and identified intergenerational bonds and areas of tension, as well as other unique aspects of these relationships. To date, however, little has been written about communication and interaction processes in mother–adult daughter relationships that relate to health behaviour (Cicirelli, 1991; Fingerman, 2001; Williams & Nussbaum, 2001) and even less about flourishing and/or languishing of either party in such relationships.

While this study's focus is primarily on the relational well-being or flourishing aspects in the mother–daughter relationship, in particular for adult daughters, in line with the principles of positive psychology, it will also consider the antithesis of flourishing in this relationship and the possible negative effects of this on adult daughters, i.e. languishing. Keyes and Lopez (2002) view someone who is languishing as a person who is showing signs of low well-being and who has no significant mental health issues but is nevertheless dissatisfied or unfulfilled in life.

Present literature on the mother–daughter dyad seems rather clinically focused and much has been written with regard to the problematic and languishing aspects, as well as about

tension, ambivalence and chronic conflict and its effects on the adult daughter in the mother–daughter relationship (Birditt, Miller, Fingerman, & Lefkowitz, 2009; Pickering et al., 2015).

Conversely, this study aimed to describe the factors that contribute to relational well-being or flourishing, the latter viewed by Seligman and Csikszentmihali (2000) as valued subjective experiences, well-being, contentment and satisfaction with the past; hope and optimism for the future; and flow and happiness in the present. Furthermore, Miller, Perlman and Brehm (2007) found that characteristics of close attachment relationships include knowing and being known, mutual trust, concern and caring, we-ness and mutuality and commitment. In positive relationships between mothers and their daughters typical memes that are established according to Fincham and Beach (2010) also include some of the following: commitment, forgiveness, sacrifice, acceptance, trust, emotional connectedness, and support.

The mother–daughter relationship is central in the development of a woman's self-related well-being and her relational competence and health. It serves as a model for her to perform optimally as a partner and parent. This, together with the scarcity of more recent research on this dimension of relational well-being, makes this research study valuable. This study explored the factors that contribute to flourishing of an adult daughter in the mother–daughter relationship, as well as the aspects of the relationship that could result in languishing. The research question that emerged from a literature review on the topic of mother–daughter attachment is: What factors of relational well-being or the absence thereof (flourishing or languishing) emerge from exploring women's experiences of the mother–daughter relationship, as well as from their responses on the Adult Daughter Mother Relationship Questionnaire? (ADMRQ, Cwikel, 2016).

Literature Framework

This section discusses selected literature on the mother–daughter attachment, flourishing and languishing factors in such relationships, relational well-being, as well as culture and attachment. A review of the literature is aimed at contributing to a clear understanding of the nature of and meaning attributed to this particular dyad, the factors that contribute to flourishing or languishing in the relationship, and the effect that these factors may have on adult daughter well-being.

Mother–daughter Attachment

Daughters need secure attachment with their mothers from birth. They also need to know that the mother is physically and psychologically available, not only during childhood, but

throughout their lives (Teasdale, 2014). It is generally an accepted truth that the longest relationship most women have is with their mother. According to Fingerman (2001), daughters form an attachment bond with their mothers in infancy and they rarely end the relationship with their mothers, irrespective of the quality of the bond. Boyd, Eggert and Yates (1990) define attachment in the mother–daughter relationship as a theoretical concept described as a daughter's emotional bond and her need for closeness to her mother. It can lead to feelings of belongingness and security and continues throughout a woman's lifespan (Ainsworth, 1989).

Clearly, mothers and daughters are connected in many ways. Their bodies are similar, and they have physical experiences in common. The mother–daughter pair shares intense early attachments and later multiple projections, identifications, and internalizations (Shapiro, 2006). Since mothers and daughters are so similar, their boundaries sometimes become so porous that they may feel as if they are one. This subjectively perceived merger is known as symbiosis (Shapiro, 2006). What is often referred to as symbiosis is a state better characterized as a combination of the terms boundary-less, un-differentiation and merger (Pine, 2004). According to Amsel (2016), for mother and daughter to be separate and different, rather than the same and enmeshed, facilitates a stronger experience of attachment.

Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space. Bowlby defines it as a "lasting psychological connectedness between human beings" (1969, p.194). Bowlby views attachment as a psychosocial behavioural system that guides how individuals manage their need for emotional security. This system is first evident early in life as children interact with their primary caregiver. When they are physically or psychologically threatened, children turn to their caregiver for comfort, and ideally their caregiver responds with immediate, positive and consistent support. However, attachment does not have to be reciprocal, as one person may have an attachment to an individual that is not shared. Birditt and Fingerman (2013) found that attachment styles to mothers predict the quality of future relationships, while interdependence and emotional connection was higher in mother and daughter relationships than in any other dyads.

Furthermore, Fingerman (2000) states that in relation to other intergenerational pairings, mother–daughter attachments in middle and later life is often an individual's closest bond, both psychologically and emotionally. The literature regarding the mother–daughter relationship (as cited in Miller-Day, 2004) promotes the image of this relationship as a unique bond in which daughters are seen as extensions of their mothers. Consequently, according to Jung (1969, p. 162), "every mother contains her daughter within herself, and every daughter her mother." In

terms of the transmission of attachment across generations, one of the most striking pieces of evidence in attachment research is that attachment security is transmitted from one generation to the next (Bowlby, 1969). However, because of the restricted number of studies available, Cassibba, Coppola, Sette, Curci and Constanini (2017) suggest that it is unknown whether the continuity of attachment across generations might vary depending on cultural background.

According to Fingerman (1996), not all mother–daughter relationships are cooperative or supportive, although the majority seem to be (Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Despite the positive benefits from these ties, women experience more negative emotions in such relationships than men do in their intergenerational relationships (Fingerman, 1996) and findings suggest that while older mothers and daughters have strong and binding relationships, they also report negative feelings for each other (Fingerman, 2001).

Tensions can arise between mothers and daughters as they negotiate interactions with one another (Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). Accordingly, Fingerman (1996) states that mothers can create problems with their adult daughters when they intrude upon or are critical of their daughters' lives. Amsel (2016) describes that struggles with issues of separation, autonomy and differences may occur in the mother–daughter relationship when adult children desire to individuate and develop autonomy. They may struggle to trust their choices and may fear being unable to withstand their mothers' influence. Often to avoid feelings of criticism or incompetence, the adult daughter will pull away, and as the daughter moves into adulthood, both may have difficulty with the daughter developing an identity that differs from a past shared view of being alike. Some mothers may experience this as a rejection of their character, worldview, values and opinions (Amsel, 2016) and for some mothers and daughters, this can be an emotionally intense and sometimes highly ambivalent period (Shrier, Tompsett, & Shrier, 2004). Shrier et al. also note that as part of the daughter's development processes, there may be elements of fusion or strong feelings of attachment, connection and mutuality, as well as increasing psychological separation and attachment ambivalence. It would seem that attachment dynamics forged in childhood continue to influence the child–parent relationship later in life (Carpenter, 2001). The flourishing of adult daughters in the mother–daughter dyad, which is part of the focus of this study, is described below.

Flourishing

A literature search of mother–daughter relational well-being and specifically of flourishing in such a dyad, yielded few results. Keyes (2005, 2007) in his study of flourishing

youth found that such youths had good relationships with their parents in general. Seligman (2011) identifies the PERMA-model in his conceptualizing of flourishing and indicates that relational well-being is inherent to living a flourishing life. Seligman describes a flourishing life as characterized by positive emotions, engagement, relational wellness, meaning and accomplishment. Huppert and So (2009) also extensively research flourishing and defined the construct as having the core features of positive emotions, engagement, interest, meaning and purpose, as well as any three of the following: self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality, self-determination and positive relationships.

However, it was Keyes (2002, 2005, 2007) who essentially conceptualized flourishing as including feeling good and functioning well. He introduced the mental health continuum model, which explains functioning on a positive health and well-being dimension. The continuum consists of emotional wellness, personal/psychological wellness and social well-being. Well-being in this dimension may exhibit elements of languishing or low levels of emotional, personal and social well-being; of moderate mental health; or of flourishing or high levels of emotional, psychological and social, well-being, therefore of feeling good and functioning well (Keyes, 2006, 2010).

As far as flourishing in the mother–daughter relationship is concerned, research indicates that the nurturing aspects of the mother–daughter relationship help to build a daughter's sense of self (von der Lippe & Møller, 2000) and self-esteem (Turnage, 2004). Self-esteem, as defined by Turnage, is "the individual's attitude about herself, including her estimate of how capable, worthwhile, and successful she feels she is as a person" (p. 156). The mother plays a vital role in shaping the daughter's self-esteem. Identity-building and self-esteem affect the daughter's life well beyond adolescence and a mother who supports, believes in and cares for her daughter paves the way to a relationship that both will enjoy in later life (Scott & Amason, 2008).

Healthy interactions between mothers and daughters who enjoy connections that feature elements such as mutuality, reciprocity, devotion, emotional closeness and honest disclosure, prove that it is possible for mothers and daughters to experience relationships where mothers are mentors and cheerleaders who model and encourage a sense of self-exploration and self-confidence (Goldwasser, 1993; Lovas, 2005; Power & Shanks, 1988; Turnage, 2004). Added to this, when a mother provides her daughter with a secure, safe place to express herself, she enables her daughter to experience a sense of mastery over her life that fuels and propels the

daughter's feelings of proficiency in her talents and abilities and gives her the confidence to overcome setbacks (Turnage, 2004).

Of further interest is the fact that Diener and Diener-McGavran (2008) reviewed research on subjective well-being in families and they found that relationships between parents and children grow and change as children grow and change. They also found that maintaining a positive continuity of care throughout the lifespan is central to creating consistently higher subjective well-being in both adult children and their parents. Moreover, due to the open borders between mothers and daughters, styles of mothering and motherhood can be transmitted from generation to generation. This can be either fortunate or harmful (Freud, 2011).

Autonomy seems to be a key factor in the avoidance of mother–daughter symbiosis and mutual over-dependency, which impedes the normal maturation process (Amsel, 2016). In such an enmeshed bond between mother and daughter there is not enough room for independence and other relationships, whereas autonomy would strive for the experience of freedom of choice in carrying out activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy is described by these authors as a basic psychological need accompanied by competence and relatedness. It is a core component of self-determination and intrinsic motivation. Within these theoretical constructs, autonomy is strongly associated with flourishing (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

This study explores relational well-being in the developing field of positive psychology, therefore relational well-being is described below.

Relational Well-being

Relationships with family and friends have been found to consistently influence adult well-being (Fuller-Iglesias, Webster, & Antonucci, 2013) and even when they do not live close to each other, most middle-aged adults and their parents have warm, affectionate relationships based on frequent contact, mutual help, feelings of attachment, and shared values (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009). Additionally, positive relationships with parents contribute to a strong sense of self and to emotional well-being during the midlife (Blieszer & Roberto, 2006). Daughters and older mothers tend to be especially close, although about one-third of baby boomers report mixed feelings about their parents (Fingerman & Dolbin-MacNab, 2006).

Relationships between older parents and their adult children are important for the psychological and physical well-being of both generations. Accumulating evidence suggests that such well-being is linked to the mutual assistance that flows between family members at

each stage of the life span (Fingerman, Miller, Seidel, 2009). According to numerous studies (Merz & Consedine, 2009; Reinhardt, Boerner, & Horowitz, 2006; Zunzunegui, Béland, & Otero, 2001), consistent emotional support from family is associated with improved well-being in later life, yet interestingly, increased instrumental support from family is associated with lower well-being.

Furthermore, aging mothers generally choose their daughters over their sons as a source of emotional closeness and support (Suitor & Pillemer, 2006). Added to this, mothers and daughters are more likely to stay in close contact than any other combination of family members (Lee, Dwyer, & Coward, 1993). Daughters who have a good relationship with their parents are more likely than those with a poor relationship to report a sense of well-being and are also less likely to suffer anxiety or depression. However, elderly parents whose adult children have serious problems are more likely to be depressed themselves (Pillemer & Suitor, 1991), and similarly, for older mothers the most stressful relationships are those in which a daughter had broken off contact with the family (Greenberg & Becker, 1988).

As indicated above, despite evidence of high positivity in family relationships there is also evidence of negativity, suggesting a prevalence of ambivalence in the family relatedness of some families (Fuller-Iglesias, Webster, & Antonucci, 2013). Negativity in family relationships has a strong adverse impact on well-being (Krause & Rook, 2003) and such negativity is thought to be more frequent in family relationships with greater frequency of contact as it increases the potential for strained interactions (Akiyama, Antonucci, Takahashi, & Langfahl, 2003). Family relationships tend to be obligatory and permanent compared to friendships because they are legally or biologically based (Litwak, Silverstein, Bengtson, & Herst, 2003). As a result, they are more likely to be sustained regardless of negative qualities (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Takahashi, 2004).

Nonetheless, according to Wissing (2014), flourishing families show family strengths that are similar across cultures (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Mberengwa & Johnson, 2003). Such strengths are among others warmth and appreciation, respectful communication patterns, commitment, humour, play and laughter, shared spirituality and well-being, effective coping with conflict, stress and life crises. Further strengths characterizing healthy family relationships are stable marriages, clear rules and boundaries, negotiations in decision making, support for individuality, responsibility and separateness, warmth in communication, fostering instrumental competencies. Flourishing families are united by strengths such as having a private and communal space for the family to socialize, rituals, traditions, celebrations of their

own unique stories that show their family identity and that bind them together, and utilizing their own and other resources and assets (DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Wissing, 2014). Finally, Delle Fave, Wissing, Brdar, Vella-Brodrick, & Freire (2013) refer to extensive empirical research that established that relationships are the most important source of meaning in life and that relationships and meaning are strongly associated with many indices of well-being in various cultural contexts. They state that meaning, at its core, is about connectedness and relatedness and that both meaning and positive relatedness are core components of eudaimonic well-being (Wissing, 2014).

Culture and Attachment

In their definition of culture, Samovar and Porter (2003, p. 8) describe culture as:

> *"the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving."*

Multigenerational approaches (as cited in Miller-Day, 2004) include the basic assumptions that family patterns are shared, transformed and manifested through transgenerational transmission. Families have boundaries that are hierarchical in nature, and they develop functional and dysfunctional patterns based on the legacy of previous generations and here-and-now happenings (Hoopes, 2007).

Dominant cultural ideals require women to be compassionate, caring and selfless (Cross & Madson, 1997). As a result, mothers and daughters may expect extensive self-sacrifice from one another without the balancing expectation that both mothers and daughters have ambitions and independent needs of their own (Donorfio & Sheehan, 2001). According to Streep (2009, p. 6), "mothering is instinctual and automatic – even though mothering, for our species at least, is very much learned behaviour, and definitions of what constitutes good mothering are no more than cultural constructs." The strength of the mother–daughter relationship is crucial and obvious in every culture, yet the child-rearing practices and the nature of family functioning may differ from culture to culture (Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). With limited exceptions, human interdependence is regarded as pivotal and connection to family and community takes precedence over or is at least as important as the needs of the individual (Shrier, Hsu, & Yang, 1996).

Of all the roles that women play, according to Streep (2009), parenting is considered to be the one that promises the greatest personal and social rewards, and the author suggests that culture understands motherhood to be one of the most fulfilling roles of a woman's life, if not the apex of fulfilment. However, there is little scientific evidence to support this cultural trope. Not only is mother love a sacred cultural concept, but like all things sacred, it has a philosophy of its own as it is very clear from the biblical instruction that "thy shalt honour thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20, verse 12, King James Bible). Streep (2009) states that there is no room in the ideal of "mother" for the mother who does not love her child. She illustrates this by adding that Western fairy tales never make clear, cruel or uncaring mothers biological mothers, they are interlopers or stepmothers instead. Perhaps it is for this reason that adult daughters often feel deep shame when confronting the challenges in their relationships with their mothers. Streep adds that such shame is both personal and cultural, since challenging your mother is culturally unacceptable due to the cultural promotion of the pastel-tinted portrait of motherhood that asserts that mothering is instinctual and that all women are, by definition, nurturing. At the same time, women's reactions to criticism of mothers highlights the power of cultural taboos and it is almost an unwritten and acceptable norm that this relationship dyad between a mother and her daughter is seen as sacred and that it is considered unacceptable to talk about your mother in a critical way. It is taken as a given that every mother does the best she can with the resources at her disposal at the time (Streep, 2009). Notwithstanding this aspect of the mother–adult daughter relationship, of notable interest is a cultural acceptance that parents in different nations may have different expectations, values and beliefs about parenting (Bornstein & Lansford, 2009). Rohner, Khaleque, and Cournoyer (2003) estimate that about 75% of parents world-wide are warm and loving to their children, while the remaining 25% are characterized by at least mild rejection.

The above exposition presented the available literature on the constructs relevant to this research. Flowing from the literature exploration, the research question and aims are explicated below.

Research Question and Objectives of the Study

The literature about the mother–adult daughter relationship gave rise to the following research question: What factors of relational well-being or the absence thereof, (flourishing or languishing), would emerge when exploring women's experiences of the mother–daughter relationship as well as from their responses to the Adult Daughter Relationship Questionnaire? (ADMRQ, Cwikel, 2016).

The research aims were to:

- qualitatively explore factors in the mother–daughter relationship that promote flourishing in adult daughters;
- qualitatively explore factors in the mother–daughter relationship that lead to languishing in adult daughters;
- measure, score and give feedback to participants about their responses to the ADMRQ and to use the information from the questionnaire qualitatively in conjunction with the knowledge gained from individual interviews.

The research design and the methods used to reach the above objectives are discussed below.

Research Methodology

The research followed a pluralistic approach by including a literature study and a qualitative empirical study.

Research Design

The pluralistic approach used included a literature study and qualitative in-depth interviews to gather data and administering the ADMRQ, with a view to constructively explore the phenomenon of the mother–daughter relationship and its complexities. While not looking to resolve the tensions, the research intended to constructively explore the flourishing and languishing aspects of the mother–daughter relationship.

In pluralistic qualitative studies the research question is most important and should be the guide (Mason, 2006) when gathering data with which to answer the research question. According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative study is an assumption, a worldview and the possible use of a theoretical lens in the study, seeking the meaning that acts as a compass and map while exploring different perspectives (Barker & Pistrang, 2005).

An exploratory qualitative descriptive design was most suitable for this study as the personal narrative and the shared lived experiences of the participants were a key source of information. Primarily, in-depth exploratory interviews were used together with the ADMRQ, which was qualitatively evaluated as an additional resource.

Moreover, the qualitative research design provided a complex, in-depth and detailed understanding of the problem under study (Creswell, 2007). The data analysis performed according to the qualitative thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006).

The Researcher's Paradigm

The researcher's objective was to explore and interpret the well-being of adult daughters in relation to their experience of their relationship with their mothers. Each participant's unique experience of the relationship with their mothers was respected by giving each individual the space to discuss, in full detail, what factors either enabled the flourishing of their relationship and/or brought about languishing of their relationship with their mothers. In addition, the researcher encouraged the participants to narrate their stories from their own perspective and to meaningfully engage in the discussion process. The researcher noted contentious views expressed by the participants and at no stage did the researcher appear "all-knowing" or "expert". She made an effort to exude an air of openness and willingness to embark on a journey with the participants who allowed her into their world, their experiences and the creation of these realities. The personal paradigm from which the researcher approached the study was the social construction perspective, according to which truth is socially constructed within live contexts in which individuals interact as active social agents (Creswell, 2009).

Literature Study

A literature review was conducted to ascertain whether and where any gaps, limitations or shortcomings may exist in relation to the current understanding of the given topic. Such a study also demonstrates the underlying assumptions of the general questions in the field of research (De Vos, Strydom & Fouche, 2005). A literature review serves to guide the formulation of the research question, to clarify empirical constructs, to sensitize the researcher to the most appropriate methodological approaches for studying the topic and to provide a framework for interpreting the results of the study (Sarantakos, 2013). In this study, the literature review focused on academic literature related to adult daughters' relationship with their mothers, the flourishing and languishing aspects of such relationships, as well as relational well-being.

Qualitative Empirical Research

Participants and Procedures

Although participants in this study were selected purposefully to give information about their experiences of the mother–daughter relationship, convenience factors also played a role in the sense that the participants all came from the larger Johannesburg and Pretoria area. An independent individual who is known to the researcher recruited the participants for this study. The participants were approached via e-mail. The e-mail explained the nature of the study and

the women's rights as possible participants (by means of an information letter written by the researcher for this purpose). The independent individual then made contact via e-mail or telephonically with willing participants and requested their written consent by means of a signed consent letter. Thereafter she introduced the researcher to the participants. The only participants who took part in the study were those who had willingly agreed and who had signed the consent form. Additionally, the recruiter provided a private boardroom in which the interviews took place. Before the in-depth interviews, which were arranged at a convenient time for the participants, the researcher gave a short presentation to introduce the topic and the concepts of the study to each participant individually. All the participants were informed of their rights and the researcher's contact details were provided. Additionally, each participant was provided with refreshments as well as a small token of appreciation for their participation.

As this study is essentially homogenous given the fact that it studied adult women in a mother–daughter dyad, the researcher attempted to achieve maximum variation sampling as described by Patton and Cochran (2002). This involved selecting key demographic variables that are likely to have an effect on participants' views of the topic by including participants of different ages, cultures/ethnicity (White, Black, Coloured, Asian); careers (type of job); living arrangements (with a partner/alone); and parental status (having children or not). This proved to be useful in terms of minimizing sample bias (Patton & Cochran, 2002). The study included nine participants representing each life stage group of: 18–35; 36–50 and 50–plus years. Additionally, demographic representations were sourced and the researcher attempted to ensure that this was adhered to as much as possible until data saturation had been reached.

All participants were informed of their rights, including their right to terminate the interview at any time, and they agreed that the discussion could be audio-recorded. Nine participants were involved in the study, but if necessary, more participants could be included until data saturation could be reached for both flourishing and languishing factors linked to the well-being of the adult daughters. Further aspects regarding the participants are discussed in the section on ethical considerations.

The inclusion criteria were:

- English proficiency for an in-depth interview;
- English proficiency so as to be able to meaningfully complete the ADMRQ;
- willingness to openly discuss their mother–daughter relationship;
- relationship with a biological mother who is still alive.

Exclusion criteria included:

- inadequate English proficiency;
- not being willing to discuss the relationship with their mother or complete the ADMRQ;
- the mother being deceased.

Data Collection

A concise biographical questionnaire was used to obtain descriptive information from the participants. Personal information included age, culture, home language and level of education and additional information included whether the participant's mother is living/deceased, the mother's age, whether participant is single, married/partner, divorced or widowed, whether she has children and if she is working in her career field. The research was conducted in two phases: in-depth individual interviews were conducted and an adapted questionnaire based on the ADMRQ was also completed. The in-depth individual interviews were conducted before participants were requested to complete the ADMRQ. They were given feedback on the questionnaire in a further brief discussion that also served the purpose of concluding the session and debriefing the participants.

In-depth Individual Interviews

An in-depth individual interview was the primary means of collecting data from the participants and the duration of these interviews was between 60 to 90 minutes. The study made use of a qualitative in-depth interview process in order to gain an informed perspective on the topic of the research, namely the flourishing and languishing of adult daughters in the mother–daughter adult attachment relationship (Birditt & Fingerman, 2013). Qualitative interviews provide insight into a social phenomenon as they allow the respondents to reflect and to reason on the subject in different ways (Folkestad, 2008). Additionally, by bringing context and interpretation as well as reflexivity to the research process, the qualitative approach is distinct from the objective positivistic assumptions brought to quantitatively oriented research. This allows the researcher to access the meaning that the participants give to their experience of their relationship with their mother (Frost, 2011).

After the introductions and for the duration of the interview, the researcher participated in active listening with minimal encouragement and interruption. Additionally, the researcher offered emotional support. Given the nature of the relationship between adult daughters and

their mothers, the researcher remained cognizant of the possible sensitivity of discussing this relationship with someone unfamiliar to them. Studying relationships and private family life enters into the territory of what Gabb (2010) frames as sensitive topic research. An exploratory approach was used to obtain further information or to clarify a response and participants were encouraged to provide their own version of flourishing and/or languishing in their relationship with their mother, as well as their own view of relational well-being. On completion of the interview, the researcher inquired as to whether there was additional information the participant would like to add and requested the participant's view of the interview process and whether they were emotionally and otherwise comfortable after exploring the topic (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). If for any reason a participant indicated discomfort, she was assisted and offered a single follow-up counselling session with a professional counsellor who was willing to perform this service free of charge. The researcher offered to facilitate this.

The in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted in English and the participants were asked the following questions during the interview:

- Please describe the relationship you have/had with your mother.
- Please describe whether this relationship allowed you to flourish, grow, thrive and if so, please elaborate.
- What are the factors that you think contribute/d to it being such a positive relationship?
- If it is or was mostly negative and brings about distress for you, what are the factors that you think contribute/d to it being a troublesome relationship?

Throughout the process of interviewing the nine participants, the researcher kept a process journal that was used in conjunction with the data obtained from the discussions to reflect on the research context and any other information that should be considered.

Adult Daughter Mother Relationship Questionnaire (ADMRQ)

The ADMRQ was developed by Cwikel (2016) to assess the richness and the importance of the adult daughter–mother relationship, which is important in building self-identity and developing life skills. The ADMRQ has good psychometric properties, includes both positive and negative aspects of the mother–daughter relationship, draws on the changing relationship between mothers and daughters over time, and is applicable in both clinical and epidemiological research. Additionally, exploratory factor analysis revealed three major factors in the ADMRQ accounting for 49.4% of the variance, namely both positive and

negative affect, ambivalent feelings in the relationship and interdependency relationships. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of additive scales ranged from 0.63 to 0.93 (Cwikel, 2016).

The advantages of this scale are that it was developed based on rich descriptions given by women of how their relationship with their mothers evolved from childhood over adolescence and into adulthood. Conversely, the Mother–Adult Daughter Scale (MAD) developed by Rastogi (2002), is a measure that assesses the mother–daughter relationship as it is today, without including aspects of the mother–daughter relationship as it has developed over time. The ADMRQ was specifically developed for adult women and is applicable in a variety of settings (Cwikel, 2016). This measure draws on culturally embedded narratives of adult women on how their relationship with their mother developed over time, including both positive and negative aspects. The instrument was designed to be easily administered, scored and applicable in both self-report and interview formats and test-retest reliability was established with a subsample tested after 4–6 weeks (Cwikel, 2016).

For the purposes of this study, an adapted questionnaire was used with 36 questions of the original 54 questions. Questions about relations with siblings were excluded because these questions may not be consistently answered by all respondents, just as they were not included in the final analysis by Cwikel (2016). Respondents answered the 36-item measure on a five-point Likert scale from "strongly agree" (5) to "strongly disagree" (1), reflecting aspects of the daughter's relationship with her mother.

Data Analysis

The method of analysis chosen for the study was a qualitative approach using the thematic analysis model. This model focuses on the content of a narrative, on what is said more than how it is said, the told rather than the aspects of telling (Riessman, 2008). A rigorous thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, this approach facilitates an investigation of the interview data from two perspectives. The first is the data-driven perspective where coding occurs in an inductive way. The second is the research question perspective so as to check if the data is consistent with the research questions and provide sufficient information (Judger, 2016). Both these perspectives were considered in this study.

Braun and Clarke (2006) offer a description of how to identify themes and what could be defined as a theme. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents a patterned response or meaning within the data set.

According to Braun and Clark, themes or patterns in data can be identified in one of two primary ways during thematic analysis: an inductive or bottom-up way (e.g., see Frith & Gleeson, 2004), or in a theoretical or deductive or top-down way (e.g., see Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). For the purposes of this study, a data-driven perspective or the inductive bottom-up approach was adopted.

The Six Phases of Thematic Analysis

The researcher followed the six phases of the thematic model of Braun and Clarke (2006). The in-depth interviews were recorded (with permission from the interviewees). The data were collected and then prepared for analysis by transcribing the recordings into written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis. The researcher transcribed the recordings and in the process became familiar with the narratives that unfolded.

First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data. This immersion involved repeatedly reading and re-reading the data in an active way – searching for meanings, patterns, and so on (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Second, and once familiar with the data, the researcher began identifying preliminary codes. Codes identify a feature of the data that appears interesting to the analyst and that refers to the most basic segment or element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way (Boyatzis, 1998). According to Bryman (2001), a key aspect of this phase is to code for as many potential themes/patterns as possible.

The third step began when all data had been initially coded and collated and the different codes had been identified across the data set. This phase required searching for themes rather than codes and involved sorting the different codes into potential themes. This phase ended with a collection of candidate themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fourth step began when the researcher had devised a set of candidate themes, and it involved the refinement of those themes. This phase involved two levels of reviewing and refining themes with level one involving the reviewing of all the collated extracts for each theme and considering whether they appeared to form a coherent pattern. Level two of this phase required the researcher to consider the validity of the individual themes in relation to the data set. Additionally, it required the researcher to reflect on whether the thematic map accurately reflected the meanings evident in the data set as a whole. At the end of this phase, the researcher had a fairly good idea of what the different themes were and how they fitted together, as well as the overall story they told about the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Defining and naming the themes is the fifth phase. This began when the researcher had a satisfactory thematic map of the data. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), as part of this refinement of themes the researcher should identify whether or not a theme contains any sub-themes. Although the themes already had working titles, thought had to be given to ensure that these titles are immediately identifiable for the final analysis.

The final step of producing the report included drawing conclusions once the researcher had a fully worked-out set of themes in which the narrative content collected in each thematic category could be used to describe the meanings in the content of the narrative text. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the task of writing up of the thematic analysis is to tell the complicated story of the data obtained in a way that convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis. Additionally, Braun and Clarke advocate that the analytic narrative should go beyond description of the data and make an argument in relation to the research question.

After completion of the thematic content analysis, the data were handed to a co-coder for quality analysis. The co-coder first checked whether the thematic content analysis had been conducted in accordance with the topic, objectives and the question of the study. Secondly, she checked whether the thematic content analysis carried out by the researcher adhered to the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Once completed, the co-coder made recommendations to the researcher in the form of a report. These suggestions were then considered and the necessary changes were made to the thematic content analysis.

Validity, Trustworthiness and Rigour

According to Morse, Barret, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002), validity and reliability in qualitative research are achieved when the researcher rigorously follows a number of verification strategies in the course of the research process. Together, all these verification strategies incrementally and interactively contribute to and build good qualitative reliability and validity, thus ensuring rigour. Rigour is clearly the key to success. If the verification strategies outlined by Morse et al. (2002) are followed in a rigorous fashion, the result will be scientific evidence that could be integrated into the knowledge base. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that the responsibility for ensuring rigour lies solely with the researchers themselves, rather than with the readers of the research report.

Trustworthiness has been further divided into credibility, which corresponds roughly with the positivist concept of internal validity; dependability, which relates more to reliability;

transferability, which is a form of external validity; and confirmability, which is largely an issue of presentation (Graneheim & Ludman, 2004). Furthermore, the research findings should be as trustworthy as possible and to achieve this, every study must be evaluated in relation to the procedures used to generate findings. In this regard for example, the researcher ensured that the interviews of the present study that were conducted with participants were transcribed verbatim, that they were then analysed by means of a theoretical model designed for the purpose and sent to the supervisor and a co-coder for verification purposes thereby ensuring trustworthiness.

Added to this is the model of Tracy (2010), devised for quality in qualitative research that is uniquely expansive, yet flexible. This eight-point conceptualization explores eight key markers of quality in qualitative research, including a worthy topic, rich rigour, sincerity, credibility, resonance, a significant contribution, ethics and meaningful coherence.

The well-being of adult daughters as a consequence of the relationship with their mothers is regarded as a **worthy topic** due to the following rationale: according to Fuller-Iglesias, Webster, and Antonucci (2013), relationships with family have been found to consistently influence adult well-being. Additionally, positive relationships with parents contribute to a strong sense of self and to emotional well-being during the midlife (Blieszner & Roberto, 2006). Therefore, the study explored both the factors that enable flourishing and languishing within this relationship. The obvious benefit of this kind of study is that it could serve to not only empower participants with knowledge regarding the factors that enable the flourishing of this relationship, but also inform mothers regarding the pitfalls that lead to languishing and the detrimental effect that these factors have on the well-being of daughters across the lifespan. It can also lead to suggestions on how daughters can attain well-being in spite of languishing factors.

For qualitative research to be of high quality, it must be **rigorous** (Tracy, 2010). Rigor is also judged by the care and practice of data collection and analysis procedures. Researchers should provide evidence of their due diligence by exercising appropriate time, effort, care and thoroughness. The researcher ensured that the study size was appropriate and that saturation was reached. All appropriate and ethical measures were followed when recruiting and during the collection of data from the participants. Thematic analysis was the chosen approach for data analysis and this rigorous approach produced insightful results that answered the research question of the study.

Sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency. Sincerity as an end goal can, according to Tracy (2010), be achieved through self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency and data auditing. In this regard, the study was sensitive and care was taken to contain the vulnerability and to ensure the participants' well-being. The researcher remained cognizant by recognizing personal biases and steps were taken to mitigate these by presenting the research procedures and limitations in a transparent manner.

Credibility according to Tracy (2010) refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude and plausibility of the research findings. One of the most important means for achieving credibility in qualitative research is thick description. This was achieved and demonstrated by providing participants' perspectives through meaningful quotations that gave their narratives rich credibility. In addition to paying attention to the participant's voices during the data collection phase, the researcher took care to follow up with participants after the initial discussion to ensure member validation by ascertaining whether the results obtained from the data were accurate and truthful. This practice aimed towards demonstrating a correspondence between the researcher's findings and the understandings of the participants being studied (Tracy, 2010).

Resonance refers to the research's ability to meaningfully reverberate and affect an audience. Tracy (2010) notes that a key path to resonance and impact is aesthetic merit, meaning that the text is presented in a beautiful, evocative, and artistic way and that the way the qualitative report is written or presented is significantly intertwined with its content. This was achieved by presenting the data in a well-coordinated, suitable and interesting way in line with the research objectives. Additionally, the study provided theoretic resonance by supporting and contributing to disciplinary knowledge and heuristic resonance by making suggestions that could be further explored (Abbot, 2004). Furthermore, according to Tracy (2010), resonance also emerges from a study's potential to be valuable across a variety of situations or contexts and these are practices that have been called generalizability or transferability.

Theoretically **significant** research is "intellectually implicative for the scholarly community" (Tracy, 1995, p.210), extending, building and critiquing disciplinary knowledge. At its most basic, research may provide a theoretical contribution by examining how existing theory or concepts make sense in a new and different context. One of the aims of this research was to fulfil this mandate by qualitatively identifying factors in the mother–daughter

relationship that promote flourishing in adult daughters as a literature search of mother–daughter relational well-being and specifically of flourishing in such a dyad yielded few results.

Just as multiple paths lead to credibility, resonance and other markers of qualitative quality, a variety of practices address **ethics** in qualitative research, including procedural, situational, relational and existing ethics (Tracy, 2010). Procedural ethics indicates ethical actions, which include mandates such as to do no harm, the avoidance of deception, the negotiating of informed consent as well as ensuring privacy and confidentiality (Sales & Folkman, 2000). Accordingly, the researcher adhered to all these criteria of ethics. Situational ethics include both actions that may emerge in the field as well as an understanding by the researcher that each circumstance is different and that researchers must repeatedly reflect on, critique, and question their ethical decisions. In short, this approach suggests that ethical decisions should be based on the particularities of a scene (Tracy, 2010). Relational ethics are related to an ethic of care that "recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched" (Ellis, 2007, p.4). Finally, the data collection phase is not limited to how researchers leave the scene and share the results as ethical considerations continue beyond this phase. While researchers never have full control over how their work will read, they can consider how best to present the research so as to avoid unjust or unintended consequences (Tracy, 2010). This too was carefully considered by the researcher.

According to Tracy (2010), a **meaningfully coherent** study makes use of the concepts that fit the paradigm and research goals. Meaningfully coherent studies achieve their stated purpose; accomplish what they espouse to be about; use methods and representation practices that partner well with espoused theories and paradigms; and attentively interconnect the literature review with research foci, methods, and findings. This was achieved by ensuring that the objectives of the study were reached, appropriate methods were applied and proper procedures were followed, while at the same time ensuring that the literature was researched and integrated with the identified themes. Tracy (2010) adds that it is essential to include a clear purpose statement at the outset of the study and to ensure its due diligence thereby making certain that the reader is made to feel that the study delivered on its promise, which was always the researchers intended objective.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations need extra care in narrative research and perhaps more so in South Africa where there is a diversity of cultures. It is incumbent on the researcher to ensure that the

participants are treated with dignity and respect at all times. Additionally, it is also of paramount importance that the researcher is mindful of the participant's rights. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2002) states that a researcher in the field of psychology shall develop, maintain and encourage high standards of professional competence and ensure that research participants are protected from professional practices that fall short of international and best practice standards. Ethical issues are not restricted to the design stage of a study, but occur throughout the entire research process (Kvale, 1996). Kvale proposes five ethical questions that a researcher should ask before conducting a study. The first question relates to the benefits of the study. Kvale posits that a piece of research should not only contribute to advancing our knowledge of a topic, but should also contribute to enhancing the human condition. The second and third questions relate to informed consent and confidentiality. The fourth question refers to the consequences of the study and the fifth question relates to the researchers role in the study, specifically how the researcher engages with issues relating to the scientific quality of the study and the independence of the research. In line with the above criteria, this study obtained ethics approval from the North-West University research ethics committee (NWU-HS-2018-0103).

Beneficence and Non-maleficence

The concept, "first do no harm" or non-maleficence, which is derived from the maxim, is one of the precepts of bio-ethics. Beneficence or "doing good" ensures that there is benefit for people so as to contribute to their welfare. The researcher of this study ensured that the participants were not exposed to any harm during the research process and that each participant provided written consent to participate in the study. When participants experienced emotional unease during the discussion, they were supported and offered a free follow-up counselling session, if needed.

Respect and Dignity

In line with the HPCSA ethics rules, the researcher ensured that the dignity and human worth of each participant was respected. Additionally, the researcher respected the right of every participant to hold values, attitudes, beliefs and opinions that differed from her own. The researcher remained respectful of the participants' cultural background at all times and ensured that she honoured the trust that the participants placed in her by ensuring confidentially at all times.

Autonomy

The researcher of this study ensured that all participants partook voluntarily in the process and that they were aware that they were free to withdraw at any stage if they so wished. Participants' autonomy or self-determination, being their right to make their own choices, was respected at all times. Participants were also free to voice their opinions regarding the study to the supervisor if they felt the need to do so. Additionally, personal feedback was provided to each participant if they so desired.

Chapter Layout

Chapter 1: Literature overview and methodology.

Chapter 2: Research report as a manuscript: The flourishing or languishing of adult daughters in their relationships with their mothers.

Chapter 3: Conclusions, limitation and recommendations.

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CHAPTER 2

THE MANUSCRIPT: THE FLOURISHING OR LANGUISHING OF ADULT DAUGHTERS IN THEIR RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR MOTHERS

Keywords: **flourishing, languishing, mother–daughter attachment relationship, relational well-being**

Abstract

There is an extraordinary bond between mothers and daughters that is either cherished or despised, and this entanglement is often passed on from generation to generation. This study explored adult daughters' relationships with their mothers. Its aims were to qualitatively identify factors in the mother–daughter relationship that promoted flourishing and factors that led to languishing in adult daughters. This was achieved through in-depth interviews that were analysed thematically. The ADMRQ was included to measure, score and give feedback to participants on their responses to the ADMRQ and to use the information from the questionnaire qualitatively in conjunction with the knowledge gained from individual interviews. The information obtained from the ADMRQ corresponded to what was shared in the interviews. The findings are discussed and integrated with the relevant literature, and the limitations of the study are indicated, together with recommendations for future research. A collection of identified themes comprising of candidate themes and sub-themes included the factors that enabled flourishing, namely a good relationship with a sub-theme of a relationship that improved over time; we could communicate; connectedness; supportive closeness, parenting style that cares and guides; our relatedness was my choice; and sibling relatedness. Factors that contributed to languishing included a difficult relationship; we could not communicate; disconnectedness; lack of support; a parenting style that hurt; frustrated, negative relatedness; and sibling unrelatedness.

Keywords: flourishing, languishing, mother–daughter attachment relationship, relational well-being

Introduction

This study aimed to qualitatively study the relationship between adult daughters and their mothers by exploring experiences that contributed to the daughters' flourishing and also what led to their languishing in the relationship.

Theories about relationships between mothers and daughters tend to focus on the dominant role of biology in determining the form that these relationships will take. There is an assumption that the mother and daughter will have a symbiotic relationship, sharing a natural attachment. In 1986, Adrienne Rich brought to awareness the silence that for many years surrounded the most formative relationship in the life of every woman, the relationship between daughter and mother. Rich also describes the mother–daughter bond as the great unwritten story (Rich, 1986).

There is an extraordinary bond between mothers and daughters and whether this bond is cherished or despised, the bond endures. Even into old age, the entanglement between mothers and daughters continues as mothers struggle to satisfy the demands of their daughters, while daughters continue to perform duties for their mothers to retain the approval and affection they need. Often, a reversal of roles occurs as mothers age and become more dependent on their daughters. Martha Weinman Lear (1975, p. 13) suggests that as mothers age, their identities merge with that of their daughters in a "murderous entanglement" that is passed on from generation to generation.

Despite many negative views on this primary attachment relationship, Papalia, Olds and Feldman (2009) describe healthy adult children–parent relationships as key ingredients for the lifelong well-being of both parties and much intergenerational research supports this perspective (Cooney & Dykstra, 2013). Seligman claims that flourishing is the gold standard for measuring well-being (2011, p.13). The research mentioned above inspired this study to explore the flourishing of adult women in their mother–daughter attachment experiences. Furthermore, research literature on normative mother–adult daughter relationships is quite limited. While there is existing and evolving theoretical literature, it is grounded in a clinical empirical database (Shrier, Tompsett & Shrier, 2004).

The study was based on positive psychology as a theoretical framework. Positive psychology can be described as "the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions" (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 103). Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life worth living. It is

the study of human flourishing, an applied approach to optimal functioning. It is also the positive science and practice concerned with people's strengths that enable them to cope with life optimally. Positive psychology is not interested in repairing the worst in people, but rather in making the lives of people fulfilling and healthy (Peterson, 2008). It contributes by detailing the behaviours necessary to build fulfilling, happy and meaningful close relationships in ways that are far more than just getting rid of negative behaviours. For a long time, psychology focused on enhancing relationships by getting rid of the negative behaviours and feelings associated with conflict, but now positive psychology focuses on understanding and building positive behaviours and experiences that are conducive to flourishing relationships (Wissing, Potgieter, Guse, Khumalo, & Nel, 2014). Positive close relationships are at the heart of bio-psychosocial health and well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2001) and are key to high-quality living across all cultures and time. Empirical studies show that close interpersonal and family relationships are the primary sources of the experience of happiness and meaningfulness in many cultural contexts (Delle Fave, Wissing, Brdar, Vella-Broderick, & Freire, 2013). Yet, despite its focus on the overall well-being of people, positive psychology does not deny or negate negative feelings, experiences or circumstances in people's lives (Hogan & Peterson, 2007).

Since well-being is a construct in the positive psychology scientific framework and given that positive psychology has rarely studied the factors that contribute to flourishing in adult daughters' relationships with their mothers, the broad research question of this qualitative study was as follows: What factors of relational well-being or the absence thereof (flourishing or languishing) emerge when exploring women's experiences of the mother–daughter relationship as well as from their responses to the Adult Daughter Mother Relationship Questionnaire? (ADMRQ, Cwikel, 2016).

Literature Framework

The study aimed to qualitatively explore adult daughters' relationships with their mothers and how it influenced their well-being. The concepts of the mother–daughter attachment, flourishing and languishing, relational well-being, culture and attachment are briefly discussed below.

The first binding relationship between mother and daughter becomes the model for much of a woman's adult relationships and her behaviour and attitudes. The core of her selfhood stems more or less overtly from the relationship with and the example set by her mother. It is

difficult to deny the psychosocial relevance of this relationship between a mother and her daughter (Birditt & Fingerman, 2013). The nature of the mother–daughter bond is seen as a symbiotic one that transitions from often idealized interconnectedness during the daughter's youth to complex interdependence in later life as both women pursue separate identities and (re)negotiate their roles (Miller-Day, 2004).

This study's focus is on the flourishing aspects experienced in the mother–daughter relationship and in particular that of adult daughters, in line with the principles of positive psychology. However, daughters often develop towards well-being despite, or even because, of languishing aspects. This study therefore also considers the antithesis of flourishing in this relationship and the possible negative effects this has had on adult daughters, i.e. languishing. Keyes and Lopez (2002) describe someone who is languishing as showing signs of low well-being. Such a person scores low on mental illness and has no significant mental health issues, yet is dissatisfied or unfulfilled in life. Features of the mother–daughter relationship that may lead to languishing may include the power, domination, control or manipulation of a mother over her adult daughter. According to Teasdale (2014 p.123) "it is the vulnerable daughter who gets most of the mother's abusive tongue and 'power over' where she creates a power-domination paradigm". Teasdale (2014) adds that it is also a known fact that conflicts and the long-term result of defeating mother–daughter relationships are the main reasons for symptoms of psychopathology in women and are often what propels women to seek therapy.

The mother–daughter relationship is central in the development of a woman's self-related well-being, her relational competence and health, and it serves as a model for her to perform optimally as a partner and parent. However, there is a paucity of more recent research in this dimension of relational well-being. This makes this research relevant and valuable.

Throughout the lifespan of this relationship, patterns of communication are established between mothers and their daughters that shape their sense of self and the perceived relationship quality (Washington, Burke, Joseph, Guerra & Pasick, 2009). At the same time the parameters that govern communication and interaction processes between daughters and their mothers are usually well defined at a young age. However, these parameters or boundaries, or lack thereof, may lead to difficulties in the relationship between the adult daughter and her mother as they both mature and establish their own separate identities and life contexts. Fingerman (1996) examined such mother–daughter dyads and identified intergenerational bonds and areas of tension, as well as other unique and enabling aspects of these relationships. To date, however, little has been written about communication and interaction processes in

mother–adult daughter relationships that relate to health behaviour (Cicirelli, 1991; Fingerman, 2001; Williams & Nussbaum, 2001) and even less about flourishing and/or languishing of either party in such relationships.

Mother–daughter Attachment

It is an established fact that daughters need secure attachment with their mothers from birth. They need to know that the mothers are physically and psychologically available, not only during childhood, but throughout their life (Teasdale, 2014). One of the longest relationship most women have is with their mothers. According to Fingerman (2001), daughters form an attachment bond to their mothers in infancy, and they seldom end the relationship with their mother despite the quality of the bond. Boyd, Eggert, and Yates (1990) state that attachment refers to a daughter's emotional bond with or need to be close to her mother and attachment can lead to feelings of closeness and security and continues throughout the life course (Ainsworth, 1989).

Mothers and daughters are connected in many ways and because their bodies are similar and they have physical experiences in common, the mother–daughter pair shares intense early attachments and later multiple projections, identifications, and internalizations (Shapiro, 2006). Since mothers and daughters are so similar, their boundaries sometimes become so porous that they may feel as if they are one. This subjectively perceived merger is known as symbiosis (Shapiro, 2006). What is often referred to as symbiosis is a state better characterized as a combination of the terms boundary-less, un-differentiation and merger (Pine, 2004). According to Amsel (2016), for mother and daughter to be separate and different, rather than the same and enmeshed, facilitates a stronger experience of attachment.

The attachment behaviour that is formed in childhood often continues to play a role in adulthood (Brown & Schlosberg, 2006; Frayley & Shaver, 2000). Bowlby (1973, p. 202) assumes that "confidence in the availability of attachment figures, or lack of it, is built up slowly during the years of immaturity and whatever expectations are developed during those years tend to persist relatively unchanged throughout the rest of life."

Attachment is a deep and enduring emotional bond that connects one person to another across time and space. Bowlby views it as a lasting psychological connectedness between human beings (1969). Bowlby considers attachment as a psychosocial behavioural system that guides how individuals manage their need for emotional security. This system is first evident early in life as children interact with their primary caregiver. When they are physically or

psychologically threatened, children turn to their caregiver for comfort, and ideally their caregiver responds with immediate, positive and consistent support. However, attachment does not have to be reciprocal, as one person may have an attachment to an individual that is not shared. Bowlby (1973) recognizes three different attachment styles as part of his attachment theory, namely secure, anxious and avoidant.

Birditt and Fingerman (2013) found that attachment to mothers predict the quality of future relationships, while interdependence and emotional connection was higher in mother–daughter relationships than in any other dyads. Relative to all other intergenerational pairings, mother–daughter ties in middle and later life can be characterized as being the closest, both psychologically and emotionally (Fingerman, 2000). The literature surrounding the mother–daughter relationship (as cited in Miller-Day, 2004) promotes the image of this relationship as a unique bond in which daughters are seen as extensions of their mothers. Consequently, according to Jung (1969, p. 162), "every mother contains her daughter within herself, and every daughter her mother." In terms of the transmission of attachment across generations, one of the most striking pieces of evidence in attachment research is that secure attachment is transmitted from one generation to the next (Bowlby, 1969). However, because of the restricted number of studies available, Cassibba, Coppola, Sette, Curci and Constanini (2017) suggest that it is unknown whether the continuity of attachment across generations may vary depending on cultural background.

As mentioned above, attachment dynamics forged in childhood continue to influence the child–parent relationship later in life (Carpenter, 2001) and tensions can arise between mothers and daughters as they negotiate interactions with one another (Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). Accordingly, mothers can create problems with their adult daughters when they intrude upon or are critical of their daughters' lives (Fingerman, 1996). Struggles with issues of separation, autonomy and differences, may occur in the mother–daughter relationship when adult children desire to individuate and develop autonomy. Adult daughters may struggle to trust their choices and may fear being unable to withstand their mothers' influence. Often, to avoid feelings of criticism or incompetence, the adult daughter will pull away, and as daughters move into adulthood, both may have difficulty with the daughter developing an identity that differs from a past shared view of being alike. For some mothers, this can be experienced as a rejection of the mother's character, worldview, values and opinions (Amsel, 2016). For some mothers and daughters, this can be an emotionally intense and sometimes highly ambivalent experience (Shrier, Tompsett, & Shrier, 2004). Shrier et al. further state that as part of the daughter's

development processes, there may be elements of fusion or strong feelings of attachment, connection and mutuality, as well as increasing psychological separation and autonomy.

Flourishing

Flourishing was essentially conceptualized by Keyes (2002, 2005, 2007), who described it as feeling good and functioning well. He introduced the mental health continuum model that explains functioning in a positive health and well-being dimension as consisting of emotional wellness, personal/psychological wellness, and social well-being. Levels of well-being in this dimension may range along the continuum from elements of languishing or low levels of emotional, personal and social well-being, to moderate mental health, or to flourishing, which is characterized by high levels of emotional, psychological and social well-being, in other words feeling good and functioning well (Keyes, 2006, 2010).

A literature search of mother–daughter relational well-being and specifically of flourishing in such a dyad, yielded few results. What little empirical quantitative and qualitative research exists focuses more on pathological mother–daughter relationships, on mother–daughter relationships at the extremes of life, mother–daughter relationships during the daughter's infancy, childhood, and adolescence, or on elderly mothers and their caretaking daughters. Searches on mother–daughter relationships during the longest span of a woman's life (between the end of adolescence and old age) or on non-clinical, non-pathologic mother–daughter relationships, generated little research (Shrier, Tompsett and Shrier, 2004)

Keyes (2005, 2007) in his study of flourishing youths found that such youths had good relationships with their parents in general. Seligman (2011) identifies the PERMA-model in his conceptualizing of flourishing and indicates that relational well-being is inherent to living a flourishing life. Seligman describes a flourishing life as characterized by positive emotions, engagement, relational wellness, meaning and accomplishment. Flourishing was also extensively researched by Huppert and So (2009), who define the construct as having the core features of positive emotions, engagement, interest, meaning and purpose, as well as any three of the following: self-esteem, optimism, resilience, vitality, self-determination and positive relationships.

Notwithstanding the lack of literature regarding mother–daughter relational well-being and in particular the flourishing of this relationship, healthy interactions between mothers and daughters who enjoy connections that feature elements such as mutuality, reciprocity, devotion, emotional closeness and honest disclosure, prove that it is possible for mothers and daughters

to experience relationships where mothers are mentors and cheerleaders who model a sense of competency in their daughters by encouraging self-exploration and self-confidence (Goldwasser, 1993; Lovas, 2005; Power & Shanks, 1988; Turnage, 2004). Added to this, when a mother provides her daughter with a secure, safe place to express herself, she enables her daughter to experience a sense of mastery over her life that fuels and propels the daughter's feelings of proficiency in her talents and abilities and gives her the confidence to overcome setbacks (Turnage, 2004). Additional research also indicates that the nurturing aspects of the mother–daughter relationship assists in building a daughter's sense of self (von der Lippe & Møller, 2000) and self-esteem (Turnage, 2004). Turnage (2004) views self-esteem as the individual's attitude about herself, including her estimate of how capable, worthwhile, and successful she feels she is as a person. The mother plays an important role in helping to shape the daughter's self-esteem. Identity-building and self-esteem affect the daughter's life well beyond adolescence. A mother who supports, believes in and cares for her daughter paves the way to a relationship that both will enjoy in later life (Scott & Amason, 2008).

Of further interest is that Diener and Diener-McGavran (2008) reviewed research on subjective well-being in families and found that relationships between parents and children grow and change as children grow and change. They also found that maintaining a positive continuity of care throughout the lifespan is central to creating consistently higher subjective well-being in both adult children and their parents. Moreover, due to the open borders between mothers and daughters, styles of mothering and motherhood could be transmitted from generation to generation, and this can be either fortunate or harmful (Freud, 2011 p. 3).

While the connection between adult daughters and their mothers is all-important, separateness is crucial to protect the bond. Autonomy is therefore a key factor in the avoidance of mother–daughter symbiosis and mutual over-dependency that impedes the normal maturation process (Amsel, 2016). In an enmeshed bond between mother and daughter there is not enough room for independence and other relationships, whereas autonomy would strive for the experience of freedom of choice in carrying out activities (Deci & Ryan, 2000). These authors describe autonomy as a basic psychological need together with competence and relatedness and as a core component of self-determination and intrinsic motivation. Within these theoretical constructs, autonomy is strongly associated with flourishing (Gagné & Deci, 2005).

Pickering, Mentes, Moon, Pieters, and Phillips (2015) caution against only focusing on the flourishing aspects of mother–daughter relationships and those characterized by affection,

support and intimacy, as this creates a bias that suggests only these characteristics contribute to caregiving, cohesion and solidarity in later life. They add that this approach ignores the equal role that characteristics such as aggression, resentment, and jealousy may also play in the relationship between a mother and her adult daughter. The contribution of this study lies in the fact that it considers both flourishing and languishing aspects.

Relational Well-being

This article reports on a study of relational well-being in the developing field of positive psychology and the factors that contribute to adult daughters flourishing as a result of the relationship with their mothers. Accordingly, Sheridan and Burt (2009) indicate that family-centred positive psychology sets a framework for research on children and families that explores the strengths and capacity-building capabilities of individuals and systems, rather than focusing on the resolution of problems or remediation of deficiencies.

The evaluation theory was formulated by Diener and Lucas (2000) and it posits that well-being is determined by how we evaluate the constant flow of incoming information. Relationships between older parents and their adult children are important for the psychological and physical well-being of both generations and accumulating evidence suggests that such well-being is linked to the mutual assistance that flows between family members at each stage of the life span (Fingerman, Miller, & Seidel, 2009). According to numerous studies (Merz & Consedine, 2009; Reinhardt, Boerner, & Horowitz, 2006; Zunzunegui, Béland, & Otero, 2001), consistent emotional support from family is associated with improved well-being in later life, yet interestingly, increased instrumental support from family is associated with lower well-being.

Relationships with family and friends have been found to consistently influence adult well-being (Fuller-Iglesias, Webster, & Antonucci, 2013) and even when they do not live close to each other, most middle-aged adults and their parents have warm, affectionate relationships based on frequent contact, mutual help, feelings of attachment, and shared values (Papalia, Olds, & Feldman, 2009). Additionally, positive relationships with parents contribute to a strong sense of self and to emotional well-being during the midlife (Blieszer & Roberto, 2006). Daughters and older mothers tend to be especially close, although about one-third of baby boomers report mixed feelings about their parents (Fingerman & Dolbin-MacNab, 2006).

Furthermore, aging mothers generally choose their daughters over their sons as a source of emotional closeness and support (Suitor & Pillemer, 2006). Added to this, mothers and

daughters are more likely to stay in close contact than any other combination of family members (Lee, Dwyer, & Coward, 1993) and daughters who have a good relationship with their parents are more likely than those with a poor relationship to report a sense of well-being and are also less likely to suffer anxiety or depression. However, elderly parents whose adult children have serious problems are more likely to be depressed themselves (Pillemer & Suitor, 1991). Similarly, for older mothers the most stressful relationships were those in which a daughter had broken off contact with the family (Greenberg & Becker, 1988).

As indicated above, despite evidence of well-being in family relationships, there is also evidence of discord, suggesting an ambivalence in family relationships (Fuller-Iglesias, Webster, & Antonucci, 2013). Negativity in family relationships has a strong negative impact on well-being (Krause & Rook, 2003). Negative relatedness is thought to be more frequent in family relationships with greater frequency of contact as it increases the potential for strained interactions (Akiyama, Antonucci, Takahashi, & Langfahl, 2003). Family relationships tend to be obligatory and permanent compared to friendships because they are legally or biologically based (Litwak, Silverstein, Bengtson, & Hirst, 2003). As a result, they are more likely to be sustained regardless of negative qualities (Antonucci, Akiyama, & Takahashi, 2004).

According to Wissing et al. (2014), flourishing families show family strengths that are similar across cultures (Fincham & Beach, 2010; Mberengwa & Johnson, 2003). Such strengths are among others warmth and appreciation, respectful communication patterns, commitment, humour, play and laughter, shared spirituality and well-being, effective coping with conflict, stress and life crises. Further strengths characterizing healthy family relationships are stable marriages, clear rules and boundaries, negotiations in decision making, support for individuality, responsibility and separateness, warmth in communication, and fostering instrumental competencies. Strengths that unite families include having a private and communal space for families to socialize, having rituals and traditions, celebrating their own unique stories that show their family identity and bind them together, and utilizing their own and other resources and assets (DeFrain & Asay, 2007; Wissing et al., 2014). Finally, Delle Fave et al. (2013) refer to much empirical research that established that relationships are the most important source of meaning in life and that relatedness and meaning are strongly associated with many indices of well-being in various cultural contexts. The authors stated that meaning, at its core, is about connectedness and relatedness and that both meaning and positive relatedness are core components of eudaimonic well-being (Wissing et al., 2014).

Culture and Attachment

Contemporary cultures have a number of conflicting expectations for mothers and daughters. In some, daughters are expected to be submissive to and always respectful of their mothers' desires, while in others, young women are expected to move away from their mothers' influence and develop their own independent goals and interests (Barth, 2019). Barth adds that often these mutually exclusive expectations come into conflict.

Samovar and Porter (2003) describe culture as the general volume of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, sense of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. Multigenerational approaches (as cited in Miller-Day, 2004) include the basic assumptions that family patterns are shared, transformed and manifested through transgenerational transmission. They have boundaries that are hierarchical in nature and they develop functional and dysfunctional patterns based on the legacy of previous generations and here-and-now happenings (Hoopes, 2007).

Mother–daughter relationships often have different meanings and may be given different power in a person's life, but according to Barth (2019), one of the important things to remember is that as daughters mature into adulthood, these connections must, in some ways, be dealt with like any other relationship between two adults. The dominant cultural ideals require women to be compassionate, caring and selfless (Cross & Madson, 1997). As a result, mothers and daughters may expect extensive self-sacrifice from one another without balancing the expectations that both mothers and daughters have ambitions and independent needs of their own (Donorfio & Sheehan, 2001). According to Streep (2009), mothering is instinctual and automatic, although for our species at least, it is basically learned behaviour, and definitions of what constitutes good mothering are no more than culturally-based constructs.

Streep (2009) suggests that most cultures understand motherhood to be one of the most fulfilling roles of a woman's life. Parenting is often considered to be a role that promises great personal and social rewards. However, Streep posits that there is little scientific evidence to support this cultural trope. Not only is mother love a sacred concept in culture, but like all things sacred, it has a philosophy of its own as it is very clear from the biblical instruction that "thy shalt honour thy father and thy mother" (Exodus 20, verse 12, King James Bible). Perhaps it is for this reason that adult daughters often feel deep shame when confronting the challenges

in their relationships with their mothers. According to Streep, such shame is both personal and cultural, since challenging your mother is culturally (and biblically) unacceptable. At the same time, women's reactions to criticism of mothers, highlights the power of cultural taboos. It is almost an unwritten and acceptable norm that this relationship dyad between a mother and her daughter is seen as sacred and that it is considered unacceptable to talk about your mother in a critical way. The assumption is that it is a given that every mother does the best she can with the resources at her disposal at the time (Streep, 2009).

Notwithstanding such overly optimistic views of the mother–adult daughter relationship, of notable interest is the cultural acceptance that parents in different nations may have different expectations, values and beliefs about parenting (Bornstein & Lansford, 2009). Rohner, Khaleque, & Cournoyer (2003) estimate that about 75% of parents world-wide are warm and loving to their children, while the remaining 25% are characterized by at least mild rejection. The strength of the mother–daughter relationship is crucial and obvious in every culture, yet the child-rearing practices and the nature of family functioning may differ from culture to culture (Onayli & Erdur-Baker, 2013). With limited exceptions, human interdependence is viewed as central. Connection to family and community takes precedence over or is at least of equal importance to the needs of the individual (Shrier, Hsu, & Yang, 1996).

Research Question and Objectives of the Study

Based on the literature considered, the following research question was formulated: What factors of relational well-being (flourishing or languishing) emerge from exploring women's experiences of the mother–daughter relationship as well as from their responses to the Adult Daughter Mother Relationship Questionnaire? (ADMRQ, Cwikel, 2016).

Research aims included qualitatively identifying the factors in the mother–daughter relationship that promote flourishing in adult daughters, as well the factors that lead to languishing in adult daughters. An additional aim included measuring, scoring and giving feedback to participants on their responses to the ADMRQ (Cwikel, 2016) and to use the information from the questionnaire qualitatively in conjunction with the knowledge gained from individual interviews. The research methods adopted to reach the aims are briefly described below.

Research Methodology

The Literature Study

A review of the literature aims to guide the formulation of the research question, so as to clarify theoretical constructs, as well as to sensitize the researcher to the most appropriate methodological approaches for studying the topic and to provide a framework for interpreting the results of the study (Sarantakos, 2013). In this study, the literature review focused on academic literature related to the relationships of adult daughters with their mothers, the flourishing and languishing aspects of such relationships, as well as relational well-being.

The Empirical Study

Research Design

A pluralistic approach was used with an exploratory qualitative descriptive design. This method was most suitable for this study as the personal narrative and the shared lived experiences of the participants were a key source of data. Qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted to gather data, and the ADMRQ was administered with a view to constructively exploring the phenomenon of the mother–daughter relationship and its complexities. While not looking to resolve the tensions, the research intended to constructively explore the flourishing and languishing aspects of the mother–daughter relationship.

In pluralistic qualitative studies the research question is most important and should be the guide (Mason, 2006) when gathering data with which to answer the research question. According to Creswell (2007), a qualitative study is an assumption, a worldview and the possible use of a theoretical lens in the study, seeking the meaning that acts as a compass and map while exploring different perspectives (Barker & Pistrang, 2005).

Moreover, the qualitative research design provided a complex, in-depth and detailed understanding of the problem under study (Creswell, 2007). The analysis of the data was performed according to the qualitative thematic analysis approach of Braun and Clarke (2006).

Participants and Procedures

Although participants in this study were selected purposefully to give information about their experiences of the mother–daughter relationship, convenience factors also played a role in the sense that the participants all came from businesses in the larger Johannesburg and Pretoria area. An independent individual recruited the participants of this study. The participants were approached via an e-mail that explained the nature of the study and their

rights as possible participants by way of an information letter written by the researcher for this purpose. The independent individual then contacted interested women via e-mail or telephonically and requested their written consent by means of a signed consent letter. Thereafter she introduced the researcher to the participants. The only participants who took part in the study were those who had willingly agreed and signed the consent form of the proposed study. Before the in-depth interviews, which were arranged at a convenient time for the participants, the researcher gave a short presentation to introduce the topic and the concepts of the study to each participant individually. All the participants were informed of their rights, including their right to terminate the interview at any time. The participants agreed that the discussion could be audio-recorded. Additionally, each participant was provided with refreshments as well as a small token of appreciation for their participation.

As this study is essentially homogenous as it involved adult women in a mother–daughter dyad, the researcher attempted to achieve maximum variation sampling as described by Patton and Cochran (2002). This involved selecting key demographic variables that are likely to have an impact on participants' views of the topic by including participants of different ages, cultures/ethnicity (White, Black, Coloured, Asian); living arrangements (with a partner/alone) and parental status (having children or not). This proved to be useful in terms of minimizing sample bias (Patton & Cochran, 2002).

This study included nine participants representative of each developmental age group: 18–35; 36–50 and 50–plus as depicted in Table 1. Additionally, demographic representations were sourced and the researcher ensured that this was adhered to as much as possible until data saturation had been reached.

Table 1:
Biographical information of the participants (N = 9)

Participants Interviewed	**Gender**	**Age**	**Culture**	**Marital Status**	**Children**
1	Female	32	Afrikaans	Single	No
2	Female	32	Afrikaans	Divorced	No
3	Female	43	Afrikaans	Divorced	Yes

4	Female	32	Shona	Single	No
5	Female	26	Zulu	Single	No
6	Female	49	English	Single	No
7	Female	61	English	Married	Yes
8	Female	33	Sepedi	Single	No
9	Female	38	Zulu	Divorced	Yes

The inclusion criteria were:

- English proficiency for an in-depth interview;
- English proficiency to be able to meaningfully complete the ADMRQ;
- willingness to openly discuss their mother–daughter relationship; and
- a relationship with a biological mother who is still alive.

Exclusion criteria included:

- inadequate English proficiency;
- not being willing to discuss the relationship with their mother; and
- the mother being deceased.

Data Collection

A concise biographical questionnaire was used to obtain the descriptive information from the participants. The research was conducted in two phases. During the first phase, in-depth individual interviews were conducted guided by the following questions:

- Please describe the relationship you have/had with your mother.
- Please describe whether this relationship allowed you to flourish, grow, thrive, and if so, please elaborate.
- What are the factors that you think contribute/d to it being such a positive relationship?
- If it is mostly negative and brings about distress for you, what are the factors that you think contribute/d to it being a troublesome relationship?

During the second phase, an adapted questionnaire based on the Adult Daughter Mother Relationship Questionnaire (Cwikel, 2016), was completed.

In-depth Individual Interviews

An in-depth interview was the primary means of collecting data from the participants and the duration of these interviews was between 60 and 90 minutes. The study made use of a qualitative in-depth interview process in order to gain an informed perspective on the topic of the research related to the flourishing and languishing of adult daughters in the mother–daughter attachment relationship. Qualitative interviews provide insight into a social phenomenon as they allow the respondents to reflect and to reason on the subject in different ways (Folkestad, 2008).

After the introductions and for the duration of the interview, the researcher participated in active listening with minimal encouragement and interruption so that the researcher's view could not be imposed on participants. Additionally, the researcher offered emotional support. Given the nature of the relationship between adult daughters and their mothers, the researcher remained cognizant of the possible sensitivity of discussing this relationship with someone unfamiliar to them. An exploratory approach was used to obtain further information or to clarify a response and participants were encouraged to provide their own version of flourishing and/or languishing in their relationship with their mother, as well as their own view of relational well-being. On completion of the interview, the researcher inquired as to whether there was additional information they would like to add and requested their view of the interview process. The researcher also made sure whether they were emotionally and otherwise comfortable after exploring the topic (Heppner & Heppner, 2004). If for any reason a participant indicated discomfort, she was assisted and offered a single follow-up counselling session with a professional counsellor who was willing to perform this service free of charge. The researcher offered to facilitate this. Equally important and throughout the interviewing process, the researcher kept a process journal of her observations and awareness of the unfolding process.

The Adult Daughter–Mother Relationship Questionnaire (ADMRQ)

The ADMRQ was developed by Cwikel (2016) to assess the richness and the importance of the adult daughter–mother relationship, which is important in building self-identity and developing life skills. The ADMRQ includes both positive and negative aspects of the mother–daughter relationship, draws on the changing relationship between mothers and daughters over time, and is applicable in both clinical and epidemiological research. Additionally, exploratory

factor analysis revealed three major factors in the ADMRQ accounting for 49.4% of the variance, namely positive and negative affect, ambivalent feelings in the relationship and interdependency relationships. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of additive scales ranged from 0.63 to 0.93 (Cwikel, 2016).

The ADMRQ was specifically developed for adult women and is applicable in a variety of settings (Cwikel, 2016). This measure draws on culturally embedded narratives of adult women with respect to how their relationship with their mother developed over time, including both positive and negative aspects. The instrument was designed to be easily administered, scored and applicable in both self-report and interview formats and test-retest reliability was established with a subsample tested after 4–6 weeks (Cwikel, 2016). For the purposes of this study, an adapted questionnaire was used with 36 questions from the original measure of 54 questions. Questions about relations with siblings were excluded because these questions may not be consistently answered by all respondents, just as they were not included in the final analysis by Cwikel (2016). Respondents answered the 36-item measure on a five-point Likert scale from *"strongly agree"* (5) to *"strongly disagree"* (1), reflecting aspects of the daughter's relationship with her mother.

The ADMRQ was presented to every participant after conclusion of the interview, together with a break and refreshments. The scale was scored by the researcher in the participants' presence and feedback was given in a brief discussion that also served the purpose of concluding the session and debriefing the participant. The ADMRQ has not previously been used within a South African research context.

Data Analysis

The method of analysis chosen for the study was a qualitative approach using the thematic analysis model. This model focuses on the content of a narrative: What is said more than how it is said, the told rather than the aspects of telling (Riessman, 2008). The reason the researcher chose this method is that a rigorous thematic approach can produce an insightful analysis that answers particular research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In addition, this approach facilitates an investigation of the interview data from two perspectives. Firstly, from the data-driven perspective by coding in an inductive way; and secondly, from the research question perspective so as to check if the data is consistent with the research aims and provide sufficient information (Judger, 2016). Both these perspectives were considered in this study.

Braun and Clarke (2006) offer guidance on how to identify themes and what counts as a theme. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question and represents some patterned response or meaning within the data set. According to Braun and Clark, themes or patterns within data can be identified in one of two primary ways in thematic analysis: In an inductive or bottom-up way (e.g., see Frith & Gleeson, 2004), or in a theoretical, deductive or top-down way (e.g., see Boyatzis, 1998; Hayes, 1997). For the purposes of this study a data-driven perspective or the inductive bottom-up approach was adopted.

The phases of thematic analysis

The researcher followed the six phases of the thematic model of Braun and Clarke (2006). The in-depth interviews were recorded (with permission from the interviewees). The data was collected and then prepared for analysis by transcribing the recordings into written form in order to conduct a thematic analysis. The researcher transcribed the recordings and in the process became familiar with the narratives that unfolded.

The following six phases of thematic analysis were used:

First, the researcher familiarized herself with the transcriptions of the interviews. This immersion involved repeatedly reading and re-reading the data in an active way, searching for meanings, patterns and so on (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Second, once familiar with the data, the researcher began identifying preliminary codes, which are the features of the data that appear meaningful and interesting. The third step began when all data had been initially coded and collated, and the different codes had been identified across the data set. This phase required searching for themes rather than codes and involved sorting the different codes into potential themes. This phase ended with a collection of candidate themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The fourth step began when the researcher had devised a set of candidate themes, and it involved the refinement of those themes. Defining and naming the themes was the fifth phase and this began when the researcher had a satisfactory thematic map of the data.

Once this stage had been completed, the researcher met with the co-coder, and the transcripts, their coding, and the themes identified were handed to her. The co-coder checked whether the thematic content analysis had been conducted in accordance with the topic, objectives and the question of the study. She also verified whether the thematic content analysis carried out by the researcher adhered to the steps suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Once completed, the co-coder made recommendations to the researcher in the form of a report. These

suggestions were then considered and the necessary changes were made to the thematic content analysis.

The final step of producing the report included drawing conclusions once the researcher had a fully worked-out set of themes in which the narrative content collected in each thematic category could be used to describe the meanings in the content of the narrative text. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the task of writing up the thematic analysis is aimed at telling the complicated story of the data in a way that convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis. Additionally, Braun and Clarke advocate that the analytic narrative should go beyond description of the data and make an argument in relation to the research question.

Trustworthiness

The interpretative paradigm from which the researcher approached the study was the social construction perspective, according to which Creswell (2009) describes the truth as socially constructed within live contexts, and in which individuals interact as active social agents.

Trustworthiness was further divided into credibility, which corresponds roughly with the positivist concept of internal validity; dependability, which relates more to reliability; transferability, which is a form of external validity; and confirmability, which is largely an issue of presentation (Graneheim & Ludman, 2004). Graneheim and Ludman (2004) indicate that the research findings should be as trustworthy as possible and that, to achieve this, every study must be evaluated in relation to the procedures used to generate findings. In this regard for example, the researcher ensured that the interviews that were conducted with participants were transcribed verbatim from the audio files, and that they were then analysed and sent to the study supervisor and co-coder for verification purposes thereby ensuring trustworthiness.

Another aspect of trustworthiness is rigour. According to Tracy (2010), there must be alignment between the literature review of the study and the findings obtained from the interviews. In this regard, the researcher ensured that the sample size of the study was appropriate, with data saturation occurring with nine participants. All appropriate and ethical measures were followed when recruiting, as well as with respect to the collection of data from the participants. Equally important was ensuring that due to the sensitive nature of the topic of the study, care was taken to protect not only the vulnerability of the participants, but also their well-being. Therefore, an appropriate referral service was made available to participants if required. In addition to paying attention to the participant’s voices during the data collection

phase, care was taken by the researcher to follow up with participants after the initial discussion to ensure member validation by ascertaining whether the results obtained from the data were accurate and truthful. This practice aimed to demonstrate a correspondence between the researcher's findings and the understandings of the participants being studied (Tracy, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

The present study was evaluated and approved by the NWU ethics committee (Ethics number: NWU-HS-2018-0103). There are more ethical considerations in narrative research and perhaps more so in South Africa where there is a diversity of cultures. It is incumbent on the researcher to ensure that the participants are treated with dignity and respect at all times. Additionally, it is also of paramount importance that the researcher is mindful of the participant's rights. The Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA, 2002) states that a researcher in the field of psychology shall develop, maintain and encourage high standards of professional competence and ensure that research participants are protected from professional practices that fall short of international and best practice standards. Ethical issues are not restricted to the design stage of a study, but can occur throughout the entire research process (Kvale, 1996). In this regard, participants were informed that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, and they were assured of their right to withdraw from the research at any time without penalty. Informed, signed consent was obtained from the participants, and they were made aware of the nature and scope of the study. Participants were also assured that all aspects of the process would be confidential and that all identifying particulars would be removed from any reports of the findings. No physical, psychological or social harm was anticipated to occur as a result of the study, and no such eventualities arose during the course of the study. Participants were supported, risks mitigated and further assistance was offered where needed.

Results and Discussion

Relationships with family and friends have been found to consistently influence adult well-being (Fuller-Iglesias, Webster, & Antonucci, 2013) and relationships between older parents and their adult children are important for the psychological and physical well-being of both generations. Accumulating evidence suggests that such well-being is linked to the mutual assistance that flows between family members at each stage of the life span (Fingerman, Miller, & Seidel, 2009). Accordingly, and of particular interest, was the effect that this relationship has had on the well-being of the adult daughters in this study, from aspects of flourishing to

languishing. Both factors that enabled flourishing and factors that contributed to languishing in adult daughters in the mother–daughter relationship were explored in an effort to get a truly balanced view of the adult daughter–mother relationship. Since the construct of relational well-being formed the theoretical framework of the research, the results obtained from the participants in the ADMRQ for both flourishing and languishing were integrated into the discussion. The data obtained from the interviews with N=9 participants offered the following results:

The Factors That Enabled Participants to Flourish

Theme 1: Good Relationship

Among the earliest psychologists to qualify healthy family life was Alfred Adler in the 1920s and 1930s. He declared that a psychologically healthy family exhibits four vital characteristics: (1) warmth and respect among family members; (2) democratic rather than authoritarian decision making; (3) emotional maturation and autonomy; and (4) friendly and constructive relationships with other families and the wider community (Hoffman, 1996). Years later, Diana Baumrind (1973) conducted now-classic research studies on what makes a healthy family and in her influential view, the authoritative parenting style characterized by reasonable rules, high demands, high communication, high warmth and support are most effective. Historically, daughters who enjoy good relationships with their mothers reported aspects of Baumrind (1973) and Hoffman's (1996) findings. However, only one participant (P7 – age, 61) in this study reported to have experienced a consistently flourishing relationship with her mother that has had continuity throughout the lifespan.

(P7) has had a very positive relationship with her mother throughout the life course:

I have always had a wonderful relationship with my mother and she really was a role model…She was always a mother you could run to with anything…She was always positive and taught me how to love…She always highlighted the good things in life.

(P7) *I have got a lovely, wonderful, and good relationship with my mother…My mother was a role model…She really does have a legacy to leave for us.*

Sub-Theme: A Relationship That Improved Over Time

Research suggests that as children mature to adulthood and their mothers become older, their relationship becomes the object of reflection and meaning-making for both mothers and daughters (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Thus Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson and

Kaufman (2011) argue that exploring how mothers and their adult daughters evaluate and reframe their childhood experiences is the best way to understand how their relationship in adulthood is linked to earlier periods of their life courses.

Despite the fact that several of the participants spoke of still having either anxious and/or avoidant attachment styles with their mothers, particularly when they were growing up, four of the participants reported that their relationship with the mother had matured and improved over time. This may have been a result of reflection, meaning-making and reframing of their childhood experiences.

Comments that supported these results include the following:

(P1) *I believe I have a very unique story in the way that my mom changed towards me, as in the past we didn't get along and we had nothing in common...The 2nd phase was new to her and it was a learning curve for both of us.*

(P5) *I understand her more now because I see her good habits and her weaknesses and I can see, I'm like, oh my gosh I do that too…Things changed a lot, I think more than her changing I changed a lot – that is what kind of helped.*

(P6) *When I was little my relationship with my mom was very different to how it is now, I was scared of my mom when I was little…Now I have become the parent and the roles have sort of changed – so the relationship is completely different as to how it was as a child…My older brother moved to New Zealand and I think that may have had an impact on my mom and my relationship now too, because now there is just me…So our relationship is more positive now and I could actually speak to her now about certain things if I needed to.*

(P8) *Growing up I had a tough relationship with her – maybe I was rebellious child but when I compare it to what it is now – it's evolved so much…We have moved on and I saw it as a bad thing at the time but it actually moulded me into what I am today, so I can't really say it was negative…Building a relationship is not an overnight thing it takes a lot to build a relationship and it shows the growth, and actually this woman is not that bad.*

Theme 2: We Could Communicate

Communication is a dynamic process in which organisms strive to convey meaning to one another (and to oneself, one can argue). It is fundamental in gaining understanding of events, objects, and other people (Slater, 2001). The importance of communication style in a parent–adolescent relationship has not gone unnoticed. Since any relationship is based on

strong and effective communication, it can be said that the kind of communication style the parents use while interacting with their child may influence certain characteristics, which may show up noticeably in their personality.

According to Barbato, Graham and Perse (2003), conversation-oriented family communication patterns (including pluralistic and consensual types) are represented by relationally-oriented motives for communicating with their children, that is, to show affection, for pleasure and relaxation. Additionally, conversation-oriented families engage in communication that encourages openness and supportive participation. Defined in the most practical way, communication is the natural process of transmitting ideas, information, emotions and feelings from one person to another. Rucan, Constantineanu, Ielics, & Popa (2012) suggest that communication is the engine of social relationships and upon it depends the quality of the relationships or its bankruptcy. Mothers and daughters who are able to talk about how they are feeling can create stronger connections.

Examples of the significance of effective, open and caring communication were shared by several daughters:

(P1) *We started having a cup of tea together every morning and just started talking and we learnt to respect each other through that…Now I can talk to my mom and tell her you did this to me and it hurt me…Now I love the openness and honesty and it gives a sense of trust.*

(P3) *With children the main thing is communication, if you can't teach your child how to communicate and trust you, you have nothing…It doesn't help to have love because if a child has got this thing she wants to discuss with you which she can't because she doesn't know how to – it damages that person forever.*

(P6) Shared that the relationship with her mother had improved mostly due to the fact that their communication pathways had vastly improved:

My mom is much more diplomatic now and I can communicate with her which is much more positive…Our roles have sort of changed and I am more the parent now.

(P6) *I think now I can say things to her and it makes the relationship more positive for me because I don't have this thing on my chest that I can't get off.*

(P7*) I could go to my mother with anything and communication was always open…Some things are private that I won't share with my mother but with the mother–daughter relationship we were always open and honest. I have never heard my mother screaming or shouting or*

swearing…I could tell her things and she could tell me things…I have never cursed my mother, I have never crossed that boundary.

(P8) *We became quite close and we could talk without fighting…There were things that I could talk to her about that I couldn't talk to her about in my younger days…We talk about everything and its nothing like it was 10/15 years ago…My mother's words pushed me to be a successful woman, and it does make me work hard, it does make me want to be a better version of myself. I would like to believe that it helped me flourish.*

Theme 3: Connectedness

According to Wissing et al. (2014) our close relationships are the source of our greatest joy and deepest meaningful experiences in life. An important distinguishing characteristic of close relationships includes shared intimacy. Miller, Perlman and Brehm (2007) pointed out that knowing and being known, mutual trust, intertwined lives, concern and caring, we-ness and mutuality, and commitment are characteristics of close relationships.

The following examples illustrate the positive aspects of participants' connection to their mothers:

(P1) *She is my best friend, my go-to person and she knows me better than I know myself, and I trust my mom….Now my mom wants that physical touch and gives it to me in return…When I started making big decisions about my life and my future and I would doubt myself she would be the voice in my head saying that I have it in me, that I can do it.*

(P2) *I have been able to grow…I have a very strong sense of self and a very strong personality…The things that my mom did throughout my childhood allowed me to get to know myself for who and what I am and accept myself.*

(P4) *I do love my mother and I do respect my mother.*

(P5) *Our relationship has actually become a good place for me to learn…Now that I am grown up I decided that I do want my mom in my life – as a young person I didn't care – I was like I'm going to finish my studies and never see her again…A relationship is something you pursue, it's not automatic because you are my biological mother – it is something you have to work on if you want it to be long lasting.*

(P6) *When I moved out we sort of became more friends than mother and daughter so we could get together and have lunch or whatever.*

(P7) *We have had a wonderful friendship that is how I respect her and we have a tremendous respect for one another…I think there has got to be boundaries between children and the parents….I have really grown as a person and through the positive input I have received in life, hearing it, reading it, seeing it.*

(P8) *Now we are almost like best friends…I am the only daughter so I think by default the mother and daughter become friends, because you share common things.*

Both (P1), (P5) and (P8) made use of the word now, referring to the fact that their relationship had undergone a change and had improved over time. This shows the importance of also considering "well-being in spite of…" as part of positive psychology.

Theme 4: Supportive Closeness

For many women, a healthy adult sense of self comes from a growing capacity for ever more complex relationships. Empathy and mutual support are two of the key components of such connections (Baumrind, 1973).

The evidence stated here clearly supports a relationship between positive parenting approaches and a mother who is warm, loving and supportive. Such a relationship creates a framework in which to thrive with the knowledge and tools necessary to approach life as a fully capable individual:

(P1) *My mom was there for me emotionally and the only person I could turn to…When I did something she didn't agree with, she would still support me…She encourages me, motivates me and gives me advice…She supported me and my decisions and started trusting me to make my own decisions…When I didn't succeed or if I fell she was always there for me…We learnt to respect and trust each other…Now she gets me and she supports me being me…She provides me with emotional safety and offers advice…My mom encourages and motivates me…She is very aware of her past mistakes.*

(P7) *Growing up we were poor but my mother was positive, she made us clothes, and she taught us about love…If I was cut off, lonely or depressed I could always go to her and I sat and cried…My mother was just like a little mother hen – she protected us…My stepfather didn't like us but she sheltered us from that too…She would always take our side but she wouldn't allow us to be mean about that other person.*

(P8) Highlighted supportive closeness and how their communication had improved over time:

When I got out of varsity we became quite close and I can talk to her now about things I couldn't talk to her about when I was younger.

Theme 5: Parenting Style that Cares and Guides

A recurring theme in the positive parenting literature is that a warm, yet firm parenting style is linked to numerous positive outcomes and the mother–daughter dyad is no exception. Such an authoritative parenting approach as was described by Baumrind (1991) includes a good balance of the following parenting qualities: assertive, but not intrusive; demanding, but responsive; supportive in terms of discipline, but not punitive.

While this study focused on adult daughters, when evaluating their mothers the participants tended to discuss childhood experiences, for example:

(P1) *I realized the power of a mothers' attitude in our household… Mom isn't an emotional person but I have seen her cry while apologizing to me for her past behaviour.*

(P2) *I have been able to grow because there are a lot of things she taught me and I still use today…She taught me morals.*

(P4) *She was quiet, loving and kind and I don't remember a day that she raised her voice.*

(P5) *When I am a mom I would like to be an example.*

(P7) *My mother gave us all the good lessons, and she left the negative out but she did tell us about the negative because if you don't tell children the right path they are going to choose their own path…My mother taught us to love people and not to look down on them – not to judge them…My mother had all these things on the wall, 'love covers a multitude of wrongs, love one another and I believe a positive attitude determines your altitude,' so we were fed positive information…I try to be joyful, my mother taught me that.*

(P8) *My mom taught me that I have to make my own money and be independent, not to rely on my parents and to stand on my own two feet… My mother put a lot of pressure on me but she only had my best interest at heart because she wanted her child to be successful.*

(P9) *One of the things I admire about her is that she will fight for her family, she encouraged education and she was able to spot my talents. She was also able to identify opportunities because I got a scholarship from her company.*

Theme 6: Our Relatedness was my Choice

Research suggests that as children mature to adulthood and their mothers become older, their relationship becomes the object of reflection and meaning-making for both mothers and daughters (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). Mother–daughter relationships often have different meanings and may be given different power in a person's life, but one of the important things to remember is that, as daughters mature into adulthood these connections must, in some ways, be dealt with like any other relationship between two adults. This observation by Barth (2019) was supported in the following statements:

(P1) *She needs to get over her guilt feelings because I have forgiven her.*

(P2) *There are a lot of good things that she has taught me and I have been able to grow, like morals, I got my morals from her and the way that I treat strangers…So I am very friendly and open which I learnt from my mom…How to react to the outside world and how to treat people in the outside world, I learnt from my mother.*

(P3) *No matter what she had done she is still my mother, and I love her and respect her…I am proud of the passionate way in which other people talk about her.*

(P4) *I do love and respect my mother…She is shy and quiet but loving and kind.*

(P5) *I made a decision some time ago that I want my mom in my life…I decided to learn about her and why she is the way she is…our relationship has become a good place for me to learn…I understand her more now…When I was at varsity she tried to be a good parent by ensuring that I was in a good school, in a good area, with a good apartment and a reliable car… The relationship is something we have to work on if we want it to be long lasting.*

(P5) *I've realized why she is the way that she is and because of that our relationship has actually become a good place for me to learn…I made a decision that I want her to know my husband and my kids one day, so I've stopped being frustrated with her and I have decided to learn about her.*

(P7) *I believe that if my mother had never had these experiences in life I wouldn't flourish in life as a person…I have grown as a person through this relationship.*

Even (P9) who has had a particularly challenging relationship with her mother expressed aspects of relatedness:

My mother is a practical, super-organized, and resourceful woman who is a survivor, and I have no doubt that she loves me and is proud of me…I have learnt resilience from her and I can be independent.

Theme 7: Sibling Relatedness

Diener and Diener McGravan (2008) note that positive relationships with siblings are important and that positive relationships between parents and young children often evolve into positive relationships between parents and their adult children. The results of this study with regard to sibling relatedness were incongruent with Diener and Diener-McGavran's (2008) findings in that only (P7) has had a consistently flourishing relationship with her mother and her siblings and as an adult reported having an ongoing positive relationship with her siblings:

(P7) *I was brought up the eldest child because of my personality, my eldest sister was more reserved. I have taken on my mothers' role of looking after my siblings now…I am thinking like my mother worried about her family now I am always worrying about my brothers and sisters.*

Conclusion of the Factors that Enabled Flourishing

Notwithstanding the lack of literature regarding mother–daughter relational well-being, and in particular the flourishing of this relationship, healthy interaction of mothers and daughters who enjoy liaisons that feature mutuality, reciprocity, devotion, emotional closeness and honest disclosure, prove that it is possible for mothers and daughters to experience a relationship in which mothers are mentors who model and encourage self-exploration, confidence, and a sense of competency (Goldwasser, 1993; Lovas, 2005; Power & Shanks, 1998; Turnage, 2004). While some of the participants had challenges within the relationship with their mothers, all participants confirmed that there were aspects within the relationship, throughout the life course, associated with flourishing.

In this study the subjective well-being of adult daughters was strongly related to their perceived experience of the relationship with their mothers. Additionally, their well-being was strongly related to the relative number of subjectively interpretable positive to negative events that the participants indicated as having experienced, and this pattern is indicative of a relationship between subjective well-being and positive interpretations of life events (Seidlitz & Diener, 1993). Not only did all the participants articulate that they have grown as a direct result of the relationship with their mothers, but also that they have found ways in which to flourish to advance their own well-being. This was repeatedly expressed by the participants in

this study and reminded one of the theory of self-actualization developed by Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), which refers to the process of fulfilling one's full potential. For Maslow, self-actualization was not a state, but rather an ongoing process of development, which was indicated by participants of this study and illustrated by statements that included them being able to grow as a result of this relationship.

Participants (P1), (P3), (P4), (P5), (P6), and (P8) all held the view that flourishing is an inner thing and that they had made a choice to flourish on their own. (P7) felt that she was flourishing in life as a direct result of her mother's love and support and the fact that she was close to her.

The Factors That Contributed to Languishing of Participants

Theme 1: A Difficult Relationship

Although the abundant research on the positive aspects of relationships is undoubtedly important, it must also be recognized that relationships, even good ones, cannot be fully understood by focusing only on the positive elements (Caughlin & Huston, 2010). It is known that sometimes there are toxic mother–daughter relationships that cannot be repaired, no matter what you do. Yet, according to Barth (2019), there are troublesome relationships that, with some changes, can become healthy positive connections between adult daughters and mothers. The findings of this study support this to be the case in certain relationships, as was reported by four of the participants who suggested that their relationship with their mothers had improved as a result of them being able to reflect on and then reframe the events of their childhood experiences.

Despite Barth's (2019) assertion, some of the experiences participants shared related to the difficulty of the relationship when growing up and the present relationship that they have with their mothers:

(P1) *Growing up I didn't have a good relationship with my mother.*

(P2) *I have a very strained relationship with my mother…The relationship with my mother was definitely not a positive one.*

(P3) *I don't have any kind of relationship with my mother, I think our relationship is fake.*

(P4) *I think what contributed to it being a troublesome relationship was that my mother had too many kids and also how she herself was brought up.*

(P5) *I still feel like our relationship is superficial.*

(P6) *I would like to think that I have grown but it is not because of the relationship with my mother.*

(P8) *It's been quite a journey with my mother – most mother–daughter relationships are a bit rocky.*

(P9) *I have a terrible relationship with my mom and a lot of my trauma comes from her neglect and abuse.*

Theme 2: We Could Not Communicate

There are a number of theoretical frameworks that characterize the communication that occurs in the family (Baumrind, 1971). According to Barnato, Graham and Perse (2003) conformity-oriented families (including protective types) report engaging in communication for the purposes of seeking control, escaping, and excluding others. Some of the participants' comments illustrate these negative communication patterns, that often keep this dyad bogged down in a relationship stalemate characterized by a complete lack of communication or attacking, accusatory and critical communication:

(P1) *When I was younger the things I shared with my mom in confidence she would just run and blurt it out.*

(P2) *I feel I cannot be honest with my mother.*

(P3) *There was no interest in me at all and no communication...It doesn't help to have love because if a child has got this thing she wants to discuss with you which she can't because she doesn't know how to – it damages that person forever.*

(P4) *I can't tell her what I am going through in my life, I would rather tell somebody else… Some information like about boys and periods and stuff I was told to get from my father's sister, my aunt…I will definitely try and have a close relationship with my daughters, especially communication so that your child can come and talk to you about anything.*

(P5) *I just wanted to talk to her but she would get very defensive…Communication is not her strong point and she criticizes… If my mom could communicate with me – I would love that.*

(P6*) If I had issues, I wouldn't ask my mom I would just leave it, I would probably ask my brother more…There wasn't the openness to discuss the difficult things that girls go through…I couldn't discuss certain things with my mother and you sort of feel very alone.*

(P9) *My mom and I don't talk at all, we talk about very superficial and practical things but we don't talk about serious issues.*

Theme 3: Disconnectedness

Trust can be defined as one person's willingness to be vulnerable to another person based on the belief that the latter person is reliable, open, competent and compassionate (Mishra & Mishra, 2012). The type of connection developed between a mother and her daughter is generally attributed to the warmth and affection they provide for each other. However, some of the participants described an inability to trust their mothers based on their past behaviour and a lack of closeness in the present relationship. This was evidenced in these reflections:

(P1) *Mom would say, stop being so clingy and push me off her, she didn't like me being in her personal space…When I was younger, I very much wanted to be held and hugged.*

(P2*) I love my mother, but I don't like my mother…She is unapproachable…I act the way I am supposed to and then when she is gone, I can go back to being me.*

(P3) *We didn't click at all…I couldn't bear being in the kitchen when she was there.*

(P4) *One-on-one time with my mother would feel awkward because we don't have that connection…I wouldn't say my mother was a very loving person…I would also say that if you asked me would you like to be like your mom I would say no, for my girls I will definitely try to have a close relationship with them.*

(P5) *My mother got divorced when I was two and I was moved in with my grandmother so from age two to sixteen I lived with my grandmother. I didn't know my mother as a child…I was close to my grandmother, but I was not close to my mother.*

(P6) *There wasn't any major huggy, kissy, lovey it wasn't that way at all.*

(P9) *I went years without speaking to my mother…I don't doubt that my mother loves me, but I know that she doesn't like me.*

Equally important, some of the participants spoke of an intergenerational model of disengagement where their mothers just repeated a pattern. Examples included:

(P5) *When I look at my mothers' relationship with her mother it is also very cold.*

(P4) *Maybe she didn't know how to because that was how she was brought up too, that was what my mother knew.*

(P9) *We have not been able to have a relationship because she is a broken person herself…I think access to education and opportunities will make it easier – so that our realities are different to that of our mothers – we can end the cycle.*

From the shared experiences of some participants it would seem that they have managed to reflect and then reframe their thoughts to reach a level of understanding as to why their mother is possibly so reserved:

(P5) *My mom was very cold, but I understand it's because circumstances made her to be like that.*

Theme 4: Lack of Support

The basis for well-being is different for girls. Measures of emotional involvement such as receiving enough love, support, feeling close to parents and wanting to imitate parents, are expected to have a stronger positive association to the well-being measures of girls, than does behavioural involvement (Wendk, Hardesty, Morgan, & Samson, 1994). A lack of perceived support from parents has been associated with higher rates of depressive symptoms and with the onset of major depressive disorder (Stice, Ragan & Randall, 2004). For one of the adult daughters in this study the effect of the relationship she has had with her mother and the lack of a support structure has severely affected her well-being as illustrated by these comments:

(P9) *I have survived two suicide attempts and I live with chronic depression, I don't think that is flourishing, I think that is just fighting – that's surviving, I think I am surviving. I would have done a lot better if I didn't have to deal with that kind of wreckage…When I got divorced, I needed somewhere to catch my breath, so I went home. My mom reminds me that this is her house and that it is not my home. It's a very precarious way to live and I have mental health issues as a result.*

Some participants expressed their feelings of abandonment due to their mothers' emotional absence as evidenced by these reflections:

(P3) *When looking back on my childhood I can't see my mother in my life. I can't even visualize her there – she was not in my life emotionally….This relationship forced me to start growing and to grow emotionally and teach myself how to cope without my mother.*

(P5) *My friend fell ill when she was writing exams and her mom came from Swaziland to be with her – when I was sick my mom just put money in my account and told me to sort myself out.*

They also reflected on the impact that a lack of emotional support has had on them:

(P1) *My friends' moms' would always support them when they were in trouble, with us it was always our fault.*

(P2) *I felt isolated and shunned by my mother…When I confided in my mother, she always took my ex-husbands' side.*

(P3) *When I told my mother I had been sexually abused, she told me to stop looking for attention.*

(P5) *My mom wasn't an emotional support, she wasn't the person who validated me, she didn't help build my self-esteem. I had to learn to do that myself, which I did.*

Theme 5: Parenting Style that Hurt and Frustrated

As a result of failed maternal role obligations, daughters often feel detached from their mothers. The title of *mother* should be earned by actually *mothering* (Pickering et al., 2015). Unfulfilled maternal role obligations also formed the basis for many of the ways in which daughters felt that their mothers did not live up to their expectations of what a good mother should be. These daughters felt cheated that they have missed out on the love and support that they felt their mothers should have shown them as demonstrated by the following statements:

(P1) *My mother said she didn't know how to be a mom…Mom sometimes tries to control me unconsciously. She is very nosy, too involved and wants to have too much of a say.*

(P2) *My mother's behaviour created a barrier to accepting myself…Because of our relationship – she made me realize who I don't want to be.*

(P4) *My mother was not very encouraging. When you are a mom you should praise and encourage your children. I push myself to be better so that one day I can give my child a better life that is different to the one I had.*

(P5) *My mom is not afraid of emotional blackmail.*

(P9) *It's one thing to nurture talent, but then you also need to nurture the individual…She has been very good at making sure we get a head start, like looking after our bodies. Nutrition, she does that 100%, but it's just that it's on the side of narcissism and that is where it unravels and falls apart…My mom has to leave a lasting impact and it has to be a painful one.*

Some daughters shared the contradictions in their mothers, saying that there was a good mother the public saw and the critical and judgmental mother they knew in their private family lives:

(P2) *My mother was not the same in the home as she is outside... She is obsessed with her work for 'CANSA', but she is only empathetic and caring with other people.*

(P3) *She's a good person towards other people, but towards me it's a big black hole.*

Additionally, some daughters indicated that they were often at the receiving end of their mothers living vicariously through them, coercing and steering them in a certain direction as illustrated by the following:

(P5) *My mom pushed me into studying accounting.*

(P8) *My mom is a bookworm and she wanted a replica of her… I think she pushed me in the wrong way, it was a forceful one…We had a lot of fights because there was a lot of comparison. She wanted me to achieve more and I felt it was forced onto me and it wasn't even a choice, I think there are ways where she could have said growing up what do you see yourself becoming? Not, your cousin is studying medicine so you must study medicine.*

According to O'Reilly (cited by Kingston, 2019), discussing maternal regret raises ethical dilemmas, but it is necessary. The author added that learning about regretful mothers up-ends binary thinking that women who regret having children must be neglectful or substandard parents, when the reality is that it is motherhood these women tend to regret, and not the children.

Some daughters saw unfulfilled potential, being robbed of opportunities, and children seen as obstacles in mothers' marriages as barriers in the relationship as illustrated by these comments:

(P1) *Mom resented that we were taking her place in his (dad's) life. I think us children were a barrier for her in her marriage.*

(P3) *My mother was 19 when she had me and I don't think she was ready to have a child.*

(P9) *My mother has said many times that she never wanted to have children. She is incredibly cruel…A lot of women don't want to be mothers and they simply don't have the capacity to be mothers – they are not capacitated in terms of social support and stuff to be mothers. So the girls end up carrying that burden and they end up being the psychological*

punching bags for their moms. Mothers then look at their daughters and there is resentment on the part of the mothers because they have been robbed of opportunities.

Theme 6: Negative Relatedness

Although mother–daughter relationships are often idealized in our minds, in reality they are frequently complex and surprisingly complicated. According to Barth (2019) they are also highly varied. The author adds that there are cultural differences in how mothers and daughters relate to one another as they get older. Every relationship between a mother and daughter changes over time, but they also take many different forms, even within the same culture — or the same family.

Several of these daughters described their tireless efforts to do the right thing and gain their mothers' approval and validation but that nothing seemed good enough for their mothers. Daughters often sought validation from their mothers as illustrated by these comments:

(P1) *My first priority was always how do I get her approval.*

(P2) *I know every time she phones me she is going to ask how it is going with my weight.*

(P3) *She was never happy with me – she always wanted to change something about me…She could never accept me for who I am. I feel I can't live up to her expectations.*

(P8) *I am not an A student and I felt like I was a disappointment to her…I started resenting her for expecting me to become something that I am not.*

(P9) *My mother doesn't recognize me as an adult and that I've got feelings and I'm a person.*

Some of the participants got their beliefs about what constitutes a normal mother from observing friends' relationships with their mothers or watching television programmes or movies.

(P4) *As a young person it is distressing because you don't have any guidance. I didn't have a role model that I could go to for advice or to ask questions.*

(P5) *I had to hypothetically create what a mom is from watching what my friends have or in the movies.*

(P9) *I had a lot of white friends because we could talk about our crazy mothers because black kids are not allowed to say bad things about your mother – it's a big taboo.*

Some mothers demonstrated their power through physical and verbal abuse and daughters described being scared and anxious when in their mothers' company and that they felt judged. Added to this were feelings of unpredictability and control, which are enforced through manipulation and fear.

(P1) *I didn't show any emotional vulnerability in front of her because I got hurt.*

(P2) *I don't like the person she is when she is alone with me…My mother's behaviour hurts me so much you have no idea… My mother judges, belittles me and runs me down to my fiancé in front of me.*

(P3) *I was just an unhappy soul and I couldn't bear sitting with my mother…When she phones me I get anxious, when I go to her place, I get anxious.*

(P5) *I don't let my mom make me sad anymore – that side I have taken away from her now.*

(P6) *I would never show anger or get cross when I was a child – I just had to hold it all in or I would get clapped (hit) or shouted at.*

(P9) *We were hyper-sexualized as kids by our own mothers – they think they are being strict but actually they are just cruel.*

Theme 7: Sibling Unrelatedness

Recollections of maternal favouritism in childhood were more important than perceptions of current favouritism in predicting tension among adult siblings, regardless of age (Suitor et al., 2009). Suitor et al.'s findings were consistent with childhood studies showing that siblings have better relationships when they believe that they are treated equitably by their parents.

Most of the participants in this study shared perceived maternal favouritism of their siblings. Statements included the following:

(P1) *Growing up I felt left out and I felt my sister was being favoured.*

(P2) *My mother is more emotional with my sister – she is exactly the same as my mother, so they are much closer.*

(P3) *My mother was the boys' mother and she would do anything for them – if somebody had to get blamed for something she would blame me.*

(P4) *I think the child my mother had the strongest relationship with was the last child in our family.*

(P5) *My mother always gravitated towards my brother.*

(P6) *I always saw my brother as the favourite, he would do things and not get into trouble.*

(P8) *My brother was also another level of comparison – he was an A student so there was also a lot of comparison there…I think that when I am a mother I will allow my child to let me know what they want and not have me compare them to their siblings or other relatives and family.*

(P9) *I think I was an outsider as my siblings played along with the family drama.*

One daughter described her discontent with having to be the mother for her younger siblings:

(P5) *I had to mother my brothers because she took on the role of the daddy – she provided. I had to be the mother.*

Conclusion on the Factors That Contributed to Languishing

The resultant aspects of languishing that occurred as a consequence of the relationship that adult daughters had with their mothers appears to have provided the participants with an opportunity for adversarial growth that includes positive coping, while at the same time it opened up opportunities for additional positive psychology constructs such as self-awareness, self-knowledge, self-compassion and authentic self, and identity.

The participants all gave examples of how significant their personal and emotional growth had been and said that the relationship with their mother had been a good place to learn. Participant 8 illustrated this point by revealing that the relationship with her mother had taught her to work hard to be a successful woman and that this had galvanised her into being a better version of herself. At the same time, some of the participants attributed the relationship with their mother to their successes in life.

According to Ryff (2014), prior conceptions of resilience have been stressed in work on the importance of relationships. Yet these formulations have given limited attention to the essential activities of self-realization and meaning-making when confronted with life adversity. Ryff adds that those who sustain or deepen their well-being as they deal with adversity show better health profiles, thereby underscoring the broader benefits of eudaimonia, including how

meaning is made and personal capacities realized in the confrontation with the challenges. This was succinctly evidenced by the participant narratives.

Some of the experiences conveyed by the participants tended to be childhood experiences. Their present perceptions of inadequacy may be linked to the past and not a true reflection of the present, as the adult daughters in this study are all accomplished women who are all actively working on ways to flourish, not only within their careers but also outside of the relationship with their mothers. One of the participants provided an illustrated example of how she compensated for her unmet needs by investing her energy in others. The participant is a successful presenter and media expert and she is currently a consultant within academia. Her statements included the following:

(P9) *I found that the work that I did in radio and around literacy, reading and talking about mental health was that a lot of young people and even people from different generations and diverse backgrounds always find ways that they can relate to me and part of the way that I can deal with the trauma and the depression I suffer due to the loss of connectedness with my mother is to find ways of connecting with other people as well as creating a social network of people who are seeking to connect in authentic ways.*

According to Compton and Hoffman (2013), exploratory narrative processing, which involves a willingness to fully understand a difficult situation and to analyse it with openness and full recognition of the emotional impact that events have on the lives of people, leads to a process of greater depth and understanding in a person's life. Pals (2006) adds that subjective well-being is associated with the capacity to construct a coherently structured narrative about the difficulties, of which the ending emphasizes the restoration of the positive in the person's life and also a sense that the person has moved on emotionally. This was confirmed by most of the participants in the study.

Results of the ADMRQ

The ADMRQ was included firstly to complement the data obtained from the discussions with participants. The measurement was developed by Cwikel (2016) to assess the richness and the importance of the adult daughter–mother relationship and its role in building self-identity and developing life skills. The ADMRQ also draws on culturally embedded narratives of adult women on how their relationship with their mother developed over time, including both positive and negative aspects.

Secondly, completing the questionnaire after the discussion gave some of the participants the opportunity to debrief and to regain personal control and emotional containment. It also served as a good way to conclude the interview session.

ADMRQ Results

Each sub-scale of the ADMRQ is indicated at the end of an item: PA for Positive Affect; NA for Negative Affect; AR for Ambivalent Relationship; IR for Interdependent Relationship. The researcher calculated the scores for the scales using the methodology prescribed by Cwikel (2016).

Respondent's responses on the ADMRQ, qualitatively considered, corresponded with what was shared in the interviews. While the ADMRQ was used as a feedback tool for participants, most of the participants indicated that the questions in the questionnaire corroborated their feelings (both positive and negative) regarding the relationship they have with their mothers as expressed during the in-depth interview.

Positive Affect

Being married was associated with greater PA, while being divorced or separated was associated with greater negative aspects in the mother–daughter relationship. Specifically, one participant in this study who is married (P7) scored highest in terms of positive affect and low on negative affect towards the mother.

As suggested by attachment theory (Fonagy, 2008), the impact of ambivalent or insensitive maternal care is expressed by low levels of PA towards mothers in adulthood. The ADMRQ scores of participants (P2), (P3) and (P9), who scored low positive affect towards a mother, attested to their shared life experiences with their mother.

Additionally, statements describing mothers who did not understand, protect, or have time for their daughters or whose behaviour was confusing and inconstant, were associated with less PA in relationships.

Negative Affect

As could be expected, anger was related to a lack of protection and attention as was featured on the NA Scale. This was particularly so of (P3), who shared in the in-depth interview that her mother had not protected her when she was sexually abused by a family member and that her anger was caused by her mother's lack of attention and failure to acknowledge that she was being abused.

Ambivalent Relationship

Ambivalent Relationship (AR) was associated with PA and NA responses, but in opposite directions. A combination of high maternal expectation and demands and of blocking opportunities resulted in a distinct AR with high expressed anger. It was characterized by ADMRQ statements with which (P5), (P6) and (P9) strongly agreed: when I was growing up, I never knew how my mother would react when I was in trouble, and/or my mother lived vicariously through me.

Interdependency

Interdependency (IR) is not associated with the affective scales, but according to Cwikel (2016) is associated with ambivalence.

The ADMRQ clearly emphasizes the empowering aspects inherent in the healthy mother–daughter relationship and respondents (P1), (P3) and (P8) gave strong PA reactions to their mothers when scoring statements such as: being proud of one's mother and her accomplishments, confiding and sharing secrets, wanting to spend time with her.

The relationship that the adult daughters in this study have with their mothers appears to have provided a fundamental context for the development of flourishing and/or languishing and would appear to have set in motion life pathways for the women, with either enabling or defeating characteristics.

Concluding Discussion

This exploratory qualitative study focused on individual adult daughter narratives with regard to their relationship with their mothers. By examining the relationship narratives of adult daughters, the researcher was able to establish the quality of that relationship and the factors that either enabled flourishing or contributed to languishing, as well as its effect on the well-being of the adult daughters. Whereas many studies (e.g. Fingerman, 2000, Pickering et al. 2015) focus solely on the conflicting aspects within this relationship, a strength of this study was that it gave a broader perspective on the relationship as a whole.

The aims of this study were achieved, namely to qualitatively explore experiences in the mother–daughter relationship that promoted flourishing and also what led to languishing in adult daughters. This was obtained through in-depth interviews that were analysed thematically. The ADMRQ was included so as to measure, score and give feedback to participants on their responses to the ADMRQ and to use the scores to identify, in combination

with the interviews, women possibly flourishing or languishing in the mother–daughter dyad. Scores on the ADMRQ were qualitatively interpreted and showed continuity and were consistently aligned with what participants shared in the interviews.

While the findings of this study revealed that most of the participants did not experience the relationship with their mothers as conducive to flourishing, aspects of flourishing were certainly identified, such as having a good relationship, having a relationship that improved over time, the ability to communicate, connectedness, supportive closeness, a parenting style that cares and guides, relatedness that was a choice, and sibling relatedness.

Four of the participants reported that their relationship with their mothers had matured and improved considerably over time, which may have been a result of reflection, meaning-making and reframing of their childhood experiences (Bretherton & Munholland, 1999). According to Wong (2012b), having positive feelings about one's past includes self-acceptance as a precondition for self-transformation. The author views it as a vehicle for meaning-making and meaning reconstruction. Wong (2012b) states that it is an important thread in the conversation with the self and an important step on the path to well-being to ask questions such as, how can I re-author my life? Moreover, communication featured prominently as a theme and communication that encouraged open and supportive participation effectively created stronger connections. Conversely, communication for the purpose of attacking, seeking control, manipulation and accusatory and critical communication, was reported as prohibitive as far as not only the effect it has on the relationship, but the effect it has on the well-being of adult daughters.

Furthermore, seeking validation is, according to Pickering et al. (2015), a daughter's desire for their mothers to acknowledge that childhood events actually happened as the daughter perceived them. Participants reflected on the effect that a lack of emotional support had on them. Several of these daughters described their tireless efforts to behave correctly in order to gain their mothers' approval and validation. Equally important is an observation during the interview process that participants' still long for a close and meaningful connection with their mothers, although a few of them have given up any hope of that being the case. The evidence the participants in this study gave clearly supports a relationship between positive parenting approaches and a mother who is warm, loving and supportive. A healthy mother–daughter bond could provide a relational framework in which adult daughters can thrive, with the knowledge and tools necessary to approach life as a fully capable individual. The opposite was, however, also shared as a relational reality by some of the participants. The need for

acknowledgement, validation and connectedness that emerged so succinctly in this study, seemed to align with Baumeister and Leary's (1995) (see Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker & Garbinsky, 2013) theory on a sense of belonging as a basic human motive and a deep and pervasive drive. This theory has its roots in Bowlby's (1988) work and the later conceptualization of basic human needs in which relatedness is crucial (Ryan & Deci, 1995). According to Baumeister and colleagues (2013) a sense of belonging is at the bedrock of the ability to find meaning in life. The authors agree that the genesis of belongingness lies in the primary relationship between a mother and child.

Another finding of this study was the relatedness of siblings and the effect that perceived maternal favouritism of their siblings has had on the well-being of daughters. Suitor et al. (2009) found that recollections of maternal favouritism in childhood were more important than perceptions of current favouritism in predicting tension among adult siblings, regardless of age. Their findings were consistent with childhood studies showing that siblings have better relationships when they believe that they are treated equitably by their parents.

This study provided a fuller picture of both the flourishing and languishing aspects of the mother–daughter relationship. The importance of relationships to personal health and well-being is well established, and having a good quality relationship with their mothers was central to the participants in this study. Of relevance to this finding is the view of Sheridan and Burt (2009) that the mother–daughter relationship should in some ways be dealt with like any other relationship between two adults. Factors that contribute to languishing could be addressed in much the same way as in family-centred positive psychology, which provides a framework for working with families that promotes strengths and capacity-building within individuals and systems, rather than focusing on the resolution of problems or remediation of deficiencies (see Sheridan & Burt, 2009).

Theoretically, the findings of the study reminded strongly of Bowlby's (1988) original and classical attachment theory and of Cassidy and Shaver's (2008) more recent conceptualization of adult attachment dynamics and relational features. The narratives of women who experienced flourishing in the mother–daughter dyad evidenced them as adaptable and flexibly connected, while maintaining their autonomy. Carr (2011) associates such characteristics with secure attachment relationships and succinctly explains how secure attachment bonds underpin emotional intelligence by providing internal working models and cognitive relationship maps that serve as templates for the development of all relatedness in life, also self-relatedness. Carr further indicates that such secure attachment-based working

models allow people to make predictions about their own and others' behaviour in life situations. On the contrary, however, anxious-ambivalent attachment results in preoccupied individuals, avoidant attachment in dismissing individuals, and disorganized attachment leads to fearful individuals. This was depicted in the narratives of women who experienced languishing in the bond with their mothers.

Although the aims of this study were met and served to answer the research question, there were also some limitations in the research.

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Research

Adult daughters of different ages and ethnic diversity were recruited through maximum variation sampling procedures. However, while saturation was reached, future research is needed to further explicate the flourishing aspects of this relationship, given the importance of positive personal relationships to positive psychology. Therefore, as this study was conducted with a small number of adult daughters, a larger sample size is recommended.

While it is fortunate that there is a growing tradition within positive psychology of studying relationships that flourish, very little has been researched specifically with regard to flourishing adult daughters' relationships with their mothers. Shrier, Tompsett and Shrier (2004) state in this regard that mother–daughter relationships during the longest span of a woman's life (between the end of adolescence and old age) or non-clinical, non-pathologic mother–daughter relationships, has generated little research. It is thus recommended that further research is conducted in this regard.

Additionally, while the present study was representative in terms of ethnic diversity research, some researchers suggest that the quality of the mother–daughter bond varies as a function of cultural background (Blieszner, Usita, & Mancini, 1996). It is therefore possible that interactions vary by cultural background as well. This was illustrated by one of the participants in the study when she stated, that it is a cultural taboo for black daughters to criticize their mothers because it is seen as letting their mothers down. For this reason, research into the cultural influences on mother–daughter adult attachment bonds is recommended.

As also evidenced in this study, the fluctuation within the relationship between a mother and her daughter is well documented. It is thus recommended that longitudinal research involving the same group of participants be conducted over the life course in order to document whether changes in life events such as the mother aging, suffering a health setback and

requiring care and support, alter not only the dynamic of the relationship, but the viewpoint of adult daughters.

Further research is also recommended with regard to therapeutic interventions to assist adult daughters with ways to mitigate the negative effects that the relationship with their mothers has had on their well-being. Self-compassion, which according to Neff and Beretvas (2012) and Yarnel and Neff (2012) benefits interpersonal relationships, is of specific importance. Sheridan and Burt (2009) advise persons in complicated relationships to approach such bonds as they would all others. This could also be used in an intervention aimed at improving difficult mother–daughter bonds. Research is recommended in this regard.

Conclusion

This study achieved what it aimed to do and the research question about flourishing or languishing in the mother–adult daughter relationship was answered. Each maternal relationship has a story, and the narrative that flowed from the shared life experiences of the participants in this study confirmed that the nine participants who openly shared their lived experiences are the unsung heroines of the study.

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CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE STUDY

Keywords: **flourishing, languishing, mother–daughter attachment relationship, relational well-being**

Introduction

This chapter gives an overview of the study by discussing the conclusions drawn in line with the research aims and the limitations of the study, and offering recommendations. First, following a brief summary of the study, the most significant conclusions drawn from the findings are discussed. Thereafter, the factors acting as limitations in relation to the study's findings are outlined. Finally, on the basis of these conclusions and limitations, recommendations for future research are proposed.

Main Conclusions from the Research Study

This exploratory qualitative study focused on individual adult daughters' narratives about their relationships with their mothers. By exploring the relationship narratives of adult daughters, a representation emerged of a lifelong relationship that is often complex and seldom perfect (Streep, 2009). The present study sheds light not only on the current quality of the relationship, but also on the ways in which adult daughters re-examine, re-evaluate and subsequently understand and reframe their past.

The research question that informed this study was: *What factors of relational well-being or the absence thereof (flourishing or languishing) emerge from exploring women's experiences of the mother–daughter relationship as well as their responses on the Adult Daughter Mother Relationship Questionnaire? (ADMRQ*, Cwikel, 2016). The aims were to answer the question by:

- qualitatively identifying factors in the mother–daughter relationship that promote flourishing and contribute to languishing in adult daughters;
- measuring, scoring and giving feedback to participants on their responses to the ADMRQ and to use the scores to identify women possible flourishing or languishing in the mother–daughter dyad.

The research question was satisfactorily answered by successfully reaching the two aims. The main conclusions include the following:

The present study provided equal credence to both flourishing and languishing and the effect that these factors have on the well-being of adult daughters. It became clear from this that even daughters who experience languishing aspects can experience well-being. Positive psychology can therefore not only contribute by studying the positive aspects in this

relationship, but also by studying the strengths that allow some women to reframe these languishing aspects to such an extent that they can experience well-being.

The results of this study confirm the fact that the mother–daughter relationship cannot be fully understood by only focusing on the positive aspects. Specifically, and according to Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson, and Kaufman (2011), it would seem that it is the languishing aspects of the relationship that lead to reflection, meaning-making and then the reframing of their childhood experiences that has been of benefit to adult daughters and contributed to the improvement of their well-being as adults. This was also true for some of the participants in this study. Bojczyk et al.'s (2011) finding also reflects the recognition that each dyad partner is now an adult. This means the mother–daughter relationship is an adult-adult bond, with the physical, cognitive, and power asymmetries characteristic of adult—child relationships (Bojczyk et al., 2011). They posit that the daughter is perceived as an autonomous individual making decisions about life choices. In the present study, this recognition was accompanied by several of the participants acknowledging changes in the relationship with their mothers over a period of time, in particular from childhood to adulthood. This included taking responsibility for their own life choices, self-awareness and self-knowledge, and their development of an authentic self. Additionally, this is in line with the findings of Kernis (2003), who states that authenticity consists of four interrelated components, namely awareness, unbiased processing, behaviour and relational orientation.

Taken together, these findings suggest that some of the most significant psychological benefits associated with both the flourishing and languishing factors in the relationship between an adult daughter and her mother emerged in the themes in the present study. These included the factors that enabled flourishing: a good relationship, with a sub-theme, a relationship that improved over time; we could communicate; connectedness; supportive closeness; a parenting style that cares and guides; our relatedness was my choice; and sibling relatedness. Factors that contributed to languishing included: a difficult relationship; we could not communicate; disconnectedness; lack of support; parenting style that hurt and frustrated; negative relatedness; and sibling unrelatedness. Equally important, these themes formed the framework for the factors that contributed to the well-being of adult daughters and the effect this relationship has had on them and continues to have on them throughout the life course.

The research revealed that a primary barrier to flourishing, particularly for the adult daughters in this study, was a lack of trust within the relationship and a platform that left the daughters feeling vulnerable. According to Brown (2012), it is vulnerability that lies at the

centre of the family story and it defines our moments of greatest joy, fear, sorrow, shame, disappointment, love, belonging, gratitude, creativity, and everyday wonder. Brown (2012) states that without vulnerability, parenting is turned into a competition that's about knowing, proving, executing and measuring, rather than being.

Given the impact that this relationship has on the well-being of adult daughters across the life course, this study provided a balanced overview of flourishing and languishing outlining a framework of relational well-being for adult daughters in the study. Some of the participants were able to arrive at a sense of well-being despite languishing in the relationships. The relationship has enabled them to take responsibility for their own life choices, including being able to thrive and grow through adversarial growth. This indicates the presence of strengths within women that could be valuable for positive psychology.

Conclusions Drawn from the Literature Study

Whereas much of the existing literature (Fingerman,1996 Pickering, Mentes, Moon, Pieters, & Phillips, 2015) focuses on the conflicting and contentious aspects of this relationship, a major strength of this study is that it gave a broader perspective of the overarching themes in the relationship as a whole.

The results of this study suggest that a flourishing mother–daughter relationship is one of a range of ways to arrive at well-being. The results indicate that the factors that contributed to languishing had varied effects on adult daughters' well-being, ranging from interdependency and/or ambivalence to negative affect. Keyes (2002) stated that languishing and depression is often associated with significant psychosocial impairment in terms of perceived emotional health, which limits the activities of daily living. This was true for one of the participants, but a number of the participants reported well-being despite experiencing languishing aspects in their relationships with their mothers. This suggests that these women possess strengths that allow them to flourish despite adversity.

Dysfunctional generational maternal patterns featured in the present study as a narrative thread as some of the participants shared that their own mothers were often parented in the same negative way that they were parented. Only one participant prized generational continuity by stating that she has tried to emulate the positive role and legacy left by her own mother. Bowlby (1988) indicates that woman's attachment to her mother plays an important role in her future parenting. A mother's secure attachment pattern has been found to be associated with their ability to adjust to the tasks of caregiving and parenthood, while an insecure attachment

pattern has been reported to constitute a significant risk factor. This has led many of the participants to reflect on and re-evaluate how they will parent their own children so as to reverse historical patterns. This finding is linked to the finding that many of the participants report well-being despite adversity in that some of the participants are making an effort to overcome the generational continuity, a decision that shows the presence of strengths in these women.

Conversely, the results of this study at least partially confirm the view that childhood experiences continue to influence adult relationships (Fuller-Iglesias, Wester, & Antonucci, 2013). Only one of the participants in the present study had both a flourishing relationship with her mother and a healthy, successful marriage. All other participants are either single or divorced.

On a theoretical level the findings of the present study on mother–daughter relationships also serve as an example of the interconnectedness of hedonic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being. The findings demonstrate that the eudaimonic construct of positive relationships and connectedness to others is positively related to the hedonic construct of subjective well-being. Moreover, the construct of resilience featured significantly throughout participant's narratives in the study. Masten and Reed (2002) define resilience as a "pattern of positive adaptation in the face of significant adversity or risk" (p.75). Several of the participants have been able to respond positively to adverse conditions within this relationship at times, thereby showing resilience and mitigating any significant negative affect to their well-being.

Limitations and Future Research

Adult daughters of different ages and ethnic diversity were recruited through maximum variation sampling procedures. However, while saturation was reached, future research should further explicate the flourishing aspects of this relationship, given the importance of personal relationships to positive psychology. While it is fortunate that there is a long and growing tradition of studying relationships that flourish within positive psychology, very little has been researched specifically with regard to adult daughters relationships with their mothers. Shrier, Tomsett, and Shrier (2004) state that mother–daughter relationships during the longest span of a woman's life (between the end of adolescence and old age) or non-clinical, non-pathologic mother–daughter relationships have generated little research.

Additionally, while the present study was representative in terms of ethnic diversity, research suggests that the quality of the mother–daughter tie varies as a function of cultural background (Blieszner, Usita, & Mancini, 1996). It is therefore possible that interactions vary

by cultural background as well. This was illustrated by one of the participants in the study who stated that it is a cultural taboo for black daughters to criticize their mothers because it is seen as letting their mothers down.

In addition, within an African and specifically a South African context, inadequate research appears to have been conducted on this topic and South African adult daughters seem to be a significant gap in existing research.

Furthermore, as evidenced in this study the fluctuation within the relationship between a mother and her daughter is well documented. It is thus recommended that longitudinal research involving the same group of participants be conducted over the life course in order to document whether changes in life events such as the mother aging, suffering a health setback and requiring care and support alters not only the dynamic of the relationship, but the viewpoint of adult daughters.

Future research is also recommended on the strengths of women who show well-being and resilience despite a languishing mother–daughter relationship. This can in turn spark research on therapeutic interventions to assist adult daughters with mitigating effects that the relationship with their mothers has had on their well-being. Interventions that address compassion, which can be described as an "aspect of humanity that involves looking outside oneself and thinking about others as we care for and identify with them" (Snyder et al., 2011, p.35), and self-compassion, which according to Neff and Beretvas (2012) and Yarnel and Neff (2012) benefits interpersonal relationships, could be especially useful.

Researcher's Reflections

This journey began just as many quests do: I wanted to find a path to understanding one of the most complex and surprisingly complicated relationships known to man – or in this case woman – our relationship with our mothers.

I set out to do this from the perspective of adult daughters. Much has already been researched and written about mothers and their young daughters, but this gap in the research interested me.

It is for this reason that I would like to thank the adult daughters who placed their trust in me, who gave so generously of their time and emotional energy and for being so open and honest. Your willingness to share the inner workings of your relationship provided a small window into the relationship you have with your mother. The enthusiasm you displayed when sharing your personal stories will not only add to an existing body of knowledge, but hopefully

provide further insight into the workings of a relationship that is often misunderstood and seldom spoken about.

What is relatively unique about this study is that the research participants provided evidence of both the languishing and flourishing aspects. As a researcher I now have a foundation on which to expand. From a positive psychology point of view, the strengths of this relationship provide a platform upon which to broaden and build as I prepare for the next step in my academic journey, that of a PhD study. Knowledge of the weaknesses in this relationship are equally valuable, as they point to strengths hidden within women that may teach us valuable lessons. I learned from the participants and the research related to my studies that irrespective of age and whether a woman has a good relationship with her mother or not, this relationship is deeply personal. It shapes her as a woman, and most importantly, it lays a foundation for a woman's other close relationships as an adult.

At times it was deeply upsetting to have to bear witness to the visible emotional pain that some of the participants experienced when disclosing to the researcher their experiences in the relationship with their mothers. I experienced their anguish and longing for a meaningful relationship with their mothers on a visceral level. I was reminded of the findings described by Verrier (1993) that the resultant experiences within the relationship has in some cases been indelibly imprinted upon their unconscious minds, causing the primal wound.

As an observer I was struck by the fact that irrespective of the state or the nature of the relationships these adult women have with their mothers, they all seemed to have a need for their mothers' approval, irrespective of their age. They seemed motivated to remain in the relationship not only due to validation seeking, but also with the hope that it will improve.

At the same time, I was astounded by the lack of autonomy and independence of some these women, and the boundarylessness that seems to feature in the adult daughter–mother dyads. This relationship would have a much better chance at success and flourishing if it was treated like all adult relationships, rather than a societal expectation of placing mothers on a pedestal as *the ideal mother* rather than *the real mother*.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not admit that I have a vested interest in seeing more relationships within the mother–daughter dyad flourish. If this study contributes to the improvement of the well-being of just one daughter or one mother, or better still, their relationship as a whole, I will have accomplished what I set out to achieve.

Conclusion

The study answered the research questions by revealing several themes related to flourishing and languishing in the mother–daughter relationship. Although some daughters in the study are still negotiating difficulties within the relationship, they have experienced meaningful growth as a result of the relationship with their mothers. Although women who have a flourishing relationship with their mothers are undoubtedly in possession of a wonderful gift that serves them in many ways, the study revealed that it is possible for women who have had a languishing relationship with their mother to use inner strengths to overcome this and to attain a good level of well-being. Positive psychology can therefore learn from both these groups. A suitable conclusion to this study may be found in the wisdom of a 17th century English proverb that states, “Your son is your son till he gets him a wife; but your daughter is your daughter all the days of her life.”

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