



## Kiedis's Scar Tissue: A Phenomenological Psychobiography

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### Abstract

*This study uses a psychobiographic research method as a means to explore and describe the life of lyricist, Anthony Kiedis. Kiedis's history is investigated through the lens of Erik Erikson's theory of identity development. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a means to platform the psychobiographic methodology, this study explores Kiedis's creativity and writing as intrinsic aspects of his identity. In addition, the analysis attempts to understand how Kiedis resolved his identity crises, and puts forward a presentation of Kiedis's subjective experiences of his identity development. Through this in-depth analysis, the study concludes that Kiedis is engaged in an infinite moratorium, and in so doing demonstrates the value of using the combined methods of IPA and psychobiography to understand the human condition.*

Psychobiography and phenomenology have the same underlying intention: the qualitative study of individual life experience (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Schultz, 2005; Willig, 2008). With both these research methodologies the researcher attempts to understand the "inner essence" of individuals and how they make sense of and seek meaning in their lived experiences (Dyson & Brown, 2006; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This paper showcases the re-imagining of a psychobiography through a phenomenological lens. The psychobiographical element of the study explores the life of musician and lyricist Anthony Kiedis from the standpoint of Erikson's (1950, 1968, 1970) theory of identity development and creativity. The conditions of Kiedis's youth and the impact of these on his development, creativity, and hence also his lyrics, are analysed in terms of Erikson's (1968, 1970) theoretical perspective on creativity and its relationship to identity development. The psychobiography is further developed through the support of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2009) that engages with the experiential elements of Kiedis's life and attempts to understand how Kiedis himself experienced the development of his identity in relation to his roles, values and creativity.

Anthony Kiedis is the lead singer, lyricist and frontman of the band the *Red Hot Chili Peppers*. Kiedis's lyrics, starting from his first album in 1984, demonstrate a dedication to the punk/funk revolution of the 1970s and 1980s (Moon, 2002; Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1984). From his fifth album – *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* – and onwards, Kiedis's lyrics veer from the rebellious and adolescent towards the profound and meaningful for which he is famous today (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1991, 2011h). His lyrics touch on deep and sometimes existential issues that, whilst personal, simultaneously seem to resonate with the public consciousness of the punk/funk generation (Dolan, 2011; Moon, 2002). This, combined with the now recognisable plurality of experiences encapsulated by his lyrics, powerfully reflects Kiedis's creative talent, making him an appropriate target for psychobiographical study.

### Kiedis's Life

Kiedis was born on 1 November 1962 to John Michael Kiedis and Peggy Nobel (Kiedis, 2004). Kiedis's father was described as a creative rebel who often engaged in extra-marital affairs, while his mother is portrayed by

Kiedis as warm, loving, and the ideal mother figure (Kiedis, 2004). Kiedis's childhood was a tumultuous one. His father often took parental sabbaticals and his mother regularly moved him around to different cities. As a child, Kiedis had no control over his surroundings, and he never experienced a stable environment, routine or schedule. Kiedis's father, John, started developing a substance use problem when Kiedis was 11 years old, and shortly thereafter introduced Kiedis to the turbulent "drugs, sex and rock 'n roll" lifestyle that served as a model for, and fuelled, Kiedis's later blatant disregard of societal norms (Kiedis, 2004).

While at Peggy's house, Kiedis was treated like a child and was given appropriate rules and boundaries; John, in contrast, treated Kiedis as an adult throughout his childhood. He did not impose any rules and allowed Kiedis to behave as he wanted, with only John's own behaviour as a guideline. Kiedis's father fed his artistic and creative side by taking him to music festivals and viewings of classic movies, as well as by his (John's) own aspiration to become an actor (Kiedis, 2004). While under John's influence, Kiedis's interest in all things sexual and borderline illegal flourished. He developed his own behavioural guideline based on his father's guidance and actions, which became the basic moral code that Kiedis used to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Kiedis became accustomed to living lawlessly and recklessly, often committing petty crimes such as theft and vandalism of public property (Kiedis, 2004). Despite this moral code clashing with the actual law, Kiedis's values were a very important part of his life and were the only behavioural guide he ever used (Kiedis, 2004; Neely, 1994).

At the age of 12, Kiedis left his mother in Michigan to live with his father in California (Kiedis, 2004). During this time, Kiedis used marijuana for the first time. Kiedis loved the high and felt in control of his life while intoxicated. In addition, the drugs made Kiedis feel invincible and that anything was possible (Neely, 1994). Kiedis idealised his father and used his father's behaviour as an example on which to model his own identity (Kiedis, 2004). Kiedis admired his father's lifestyle and did utmost to perfect a replication of his father's image and mannerisms. This lifestyle included drug use and sexual promiscuity (Kiedis, 2004). Kiedis was living a dichotomous life; involved in parties, sex and drugs at night, but having to wake up for school every morning. Despite this, Kiedis still managed to achieve distinctions throughout his schooling and remained committed to his school subjects, particularly the more creative ones (Kiedis, 2004).

During the ninth grade, Kiedis experienced two major events that had a lasting effect on his life. The first was his introduction to cocaine and heroin, his drugs of choice for the next 20 years. For Kiedis, a self-titled

"control freak", the drugs gave him a sense of both self-control and free will (Kiedis, 2004, p. 200). The second meaningful event was a fight between him and his father. The fight caused a permanent shift in Kiedis's relationship with his father. Kiedis no longer idolised his father and strove to be different from him (Kiedis, 2004).

By the time Kiedis entered Fairfax High School, he felt more in control of his life despite his deteriorating relationship with John (Kiedis, 2004). Kiedis soon met Michael "Flea" Balzary, his lifelong friend and fellow band member for over 30 years, and Hillel Slovak, yet another band mate (Ehrlich, 2010; Sandall, 2011). Kiedis's close bond with Flea and Hillel, and the conflict with his father, allowed him to experience something akin to a normal teenage experience, albeit a drug-orientated version (Kiedis, 2004). Both Hillel and Flea offered Kiedis a relationship of understanding and acceptance – something he had never previously experienced with peers (Kiedis, 2004; Neely, 1994). The three boys bonded over a collective love of music, marijuana and their mutual "insanity", which provided Kiedis with the impetus to formulate his own identity, as opposed to the "semi-false sense of self" he had always occupied (Kiedis, 2004, p. 73, p. 294). He thus developed an identity that was independent of his attempts to mirror John's various personae. Kiedis's relationship with the two developed into an exploration of music that began to reveal his creative side and lyrical skills (Kiedis, 2004).

Later, while attending the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA), Kiedis took a class in expository composition, which further fuelled his writing ability (Kiedis, 2004). Kiedis credits the development of his writing talents to the biggest supporter of his creative efforts, Jill Vernon, his seventh grade English teacher (Kiedis, 2004). At the same time, Kiedis explored the bustling Los Angeles punk/funk scene with Hillel and Flea and progressively became more involved with drugs. By the summer of 1981, Kiedis had dropped out of UCLA, was unemployed, living in his car and drug-dependant. Kiedis's punk scene, "drugging-clubbing lifestyle" was born; and so was the beginning of his musical career (Kiedis, 2004, p. 96; Neely, 1994). In 1983, Kiedis had his first opportunity to be a frontman and lyricist when Kiedis, Flea, Hillel and drummer Jack Irons decided to have a music writing session to see whether anything would come of it. The result was Kiedis's first song, "Out in L.A.", and the start of his musical career and creative journey (Kiedis, 2004; Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1984). This first experience of creating a song through improvisation and "jamming" set the tone for how the *Red Hot Chili Peppers* would write all their songs (Kiedis, 2004, p. 109). Kiedis was a particularly skilled and creative writer, a quality he retained despite (and perhaps because of) his drug dependency. Kiedis also enjoyed performing live and

described this as “the greatest high ever” (Kiedis, 2004, p. 161). Holding the attention of an entire audience seemed to provide him simultaneously with a sense of control and adrenaline (Kiedis, 2004).

However, due to his constant drug binges, Kiedis would miss important practices and performances. By 1985, Kiedis had fallen further into the abyss of cocaine and heroin (Kiedis, 2004). By the time the band wanted to start working on songs for their next album, Kiedis was so drug-dependant that he was unable to contribute to the creative process. The band thus made the decision to fire Kiedis (Kiedis, 2004). This loss of access to the creative channel fuelled an attempt to become sober for the first time since he was 11 years old (Kiedis, 2004; Sandall, 2011). Kiedis’s sobriety was short-lived, lasting only a few months. However, he did take control over the frequency and amount of his substance use such that he was able to write again and to re-join the *Red Hot Chili Peppers* (Kiedis, 2004). At this stage, Kiedis’s life consisted of alternating between week-long drug-binges and attempts to limit his intoxication enough to contribute to the band. This pattern continued until Hillel died of a heroin overdose in 1988. Hillel’s death prompted a self-reflexive crisis for Kiedis. He no longer found solace or escape in being intoxicated, and he struggled to write (Kiedis, 2004; Sandall 2011). Gradually Kiedis began to realise that his drug dependency had eroded his identity and that this was further supported by his lack of introspection. Even his music was inspired by and based on the people in his life and the things that they did rather than any sense of self-insight (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1984, 1987). Hillel’s death therefore triggered Kiedis’s return to rehabilitation and sobriety and, in turn, a movement towards resolving the issues underlying his addiction and focusing his attention and energy on writing. The first example of this was the channelling of his anguish and grief into a song in tribute to Hillel, where he wrote: “If you see me getting mighty, If you see me getting high, Knock me down, I’m not bigger than life” (Kiedis, 2004; Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1989).

Kiedis stayed sober for five years before having one final relapse, after which he became permanently sober (Ehrlich, 2010; Kiedis, 2004; Sandall, 2001). During this five year period, Kiedis created an identity that was independent of the influence of drugs. He dedicated his life to writing and performing music and, by transforming his feelings into lyrics, used this to deal with underlying emotional issues (Kiedis, 2004; Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1999, 2002). This practice altered Kiedis’s lyrics from being superficial to having deep substance (Dolan, 2011; Moon, 2002). Kiedis also attributes this turn in lyrical focus to a more profound sense of self-knowledge that facilitated better relationships, a better understanding of himself, and a more synthesised, integrated and whole identity (Kiedis, 2004; Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1999, 2002).

## Creative Identity

Kiedis is a creative lyricist and musician who, for most of his early life, engaged in delinquent and lawless behaviour. Kiedis never developed an identity that was harmonious with societal expectations (Kiedis, 2004). Erikson’s (1968, 1970) theory provides an explanatory frame for understanding Kiedis’s identity development, particularly in so far as the focus of this study is on the stage of development Erikson (1950) conceptualises in terms of “identity versus role diffusion”. During this stage, adolescents form temporary teenage identities to avoid developments that would result in responsibilities and commitments associated with adulthood (Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1950, 1968, 1970) posits that the stage associated with adolescence is completed only once the individual has assimilated and integrated his or her childhood identity into a new “adult” identity. If the adolescent is unready or unwilling to take on this identity, he or she can enter into a latency period or intensified adolescence that Erikson (1968, p. 156) refers to as a “psychosocial moratorium”. While this may delay adult commitments and obligations, normal adolescent development continues, and the moratorium therefore simply offers the individual an extended time for this (Erikson, 1968). It is also a time during which the adolescent or young adult can engage in free role experimentation and find a role in society that is congruent with his or her identity (Erikson, 1968, 1970).

A possible outcome of a moratorium may be delinquent behaviour. This is often a form of resistance to barriers to the experience of free role experimentation associated with a psychosocial moratorium (Erikson, 1968). Yet another possible outcome of a moratorium is that of a creative resolution whereby creative or artistic people use their art as a method through which to resolve their identity issues (Erikson, 1968). Creativity is also often the result of various attempts to resolve identity crises (Dollinger, Dollinger, & Centeno, 2005; Erikson, 1968). Erikson (1970) claims that creativity flourishes while the individual engaged in a moratorium revisits the challenges of childhood in a new environment, such as an adult society. Creative people are more inclined towards the free play associated with childhood, as opposed to the institutionalised roles and rules associated with adulthood, and therefore take longer than other individuals to re-engage with each previous challenge (Erikson, 1970). This claim accounts for the extended length of moratoria associated with very creative people. Erikson (1970, p. 163) refers to this phenomenon as “retrogressive aspects of youth re-enactments”. Individuals who encountered issues in their initial childhood development may also take longer to work through the “identity versus role diffusion” phase as they not only need to integrate their old identities into new roles, but also have to deal with the developmental consequences of being unable to overcome certain challenges (Erikson, 1970).

Erikson (1970) maintained that creative adults often engage in the experimental and liberal lifestyle of an adolescent moratorium. This means that most creative people engage in extended moratoria that are prolonged throughout their entire adult life, allowing for continuous experimentation with different identities, delinquent behaviour or creative acts meant as ritualised rebellion and dissent against society. Erikson (1970) refers to such a lifestyle as an “infinite moratorium”.

## Method

The primary aim of this study is to analyse the life of the lyricist Anthony Kiedis in relation to his creative capacities. Kiedis’s life is explored from the perspective of Erikson’s (1950, 1968, 1970) theory of identity development, which offers a conceptual framework conducive to a comprehensive understanding of the circumstances that led to the development of Kiedis’s identity and lyrical talent. The focus of this study is on what Erikson (1950, 1968, 1970) referred to as the “identity versus role confusion” stage and the process and outcomes of a “psychosocial moratorium” delaying the assuming of an adult identity. The introduction of IPA as a method of data analysis broadens the scope and purpose of the study to not only exploring Kiedis’s life, but also to attempting to understand how Kiedis subjectively experienced his own identity development (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008).

Due to the fact that all the information about Kiedis that was utilised for analysis was publicly available, the conventional process for ethical considerations such as informed consent and confidentiality was not followed. Even so, Kiedis was contacted via the official website of the *Red Hot Chili Peppers* in order to inform him that the study was to be conducted and publicly available. In response to the contact, the page’s publicist duly acknowledged the research, but declined to provide any further information about Kiedis beyond what was publicly available. An ethical issue related to this study concerns the fact that Kiedis is still alive, and thus that any findings of this study that may be perceived as negative could cause harm to Kiedis or his reputation. This is taken into consideration in the results and discussion section of this study. During the process of analysis, the utmost care was taken to ensure that the findings were objectively based on evidence in the data, and that the reporting of these would not be in a manner that would be deleterious to Kiedis’s person or career. The initial study on which this paper is based was conducted under the Psychology Department at the University of Johannesburg and was therefore reviewed before completion.

Purposive sampling was used for this study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Kiedis has a published autobiography and multiple interviews that are publicly accessible (Ehrlich, 2010; Kiedis, 2004; Neely, 1994) and he is thus

an appropriate subject for psychobiographical study (Elms, 2005). Kiedis’s status as an artist provides a specific viewpoint from which to analyse his life, as the study of artists’ lives by way of psychobiography has long been common practice (Elms, 1988; Kőváry, 2011; Shultz, 2005). Finally, Kiedis’s lyrical material provides a secondary source for analysis that serves to complement his biographical information and helps to achieve a greater understanding of his creativity and identity development (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 2011).

The choice of a psychological theory in terms of which to analyse the subject’s life was also selected by way of purposive sampling (Elms, 2005; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Shultz, 2005). Erikson’s (1950; 1968; 1970) theory was chosen because it has the conceptual capacity to explicate Kiedis’s life given its specific focus on identity development, as well as creativity and delinquency.

The data consulted in the study was sourced from both biographical and archival sources (Ehrlich, 2010; Moon, 2002; Neely, 1994; Red Hot Chili Peppers, 2011; Sandall, 2011). While Kiedis’s (2004) autobiography functioned as the primary source for data collection, secondary biographical information sources were accessed through extensive web searches on the Google search engine and included interviews with Kiedis. Only interviews from well-known magazines – such as *Rolling Stone* and *Interview* – were used. This was to ensure the reliability and veracity of the information (Ehrlich, 2010; Neely, 1994; Sandall, 2011). To access Kiedis’s lyrics, and to ensure that these lyrics were accurate, the *Red Hot Chili Peppers* official website was consulted (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 2011). Reviews of particular *Red Hot Chili Pepper* albums in *Rolling Stone* magazine were also used to complement the collection of lyrics and to gain qualitative information regarding the quality and content of Kiedis’s songs (Dolan, 2011; Moon, 2002).

Psychobiography was used as the research method and design while IPA was used as the data analysis method.

### Phenomenology: A Unique Psychobiographic Turn

Psychobiography is the in-depth analysis of a person’s life story from the perspective of a specific psychological theory in an attempt to understand certain aspects of the subject or to reconstruct his or her life from a psychological perspective (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Kőváry, 2011). As the study of the collection of experiences that constitute an individual’s life, psychobiography is an appropriate research instrument in the study of personality and identity development (Kőváry, 2011; Schultz, 2005). Prototypical episodes, defined as “meaningful units of personality structure” (Alexander, 1988, p. 266), serve as the “primary unit of analysis” (Schultz, 2005, p. 61) used by psychobiographers to extract meaning from narrative data. These episodes or experiences function to describe the individual’s lived

experience (Alexander, 1988). They also function as the main point of analysis for phenomenological studies (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). Psychobiographical studies typically employ thematic analysis as their method of data analysis (Alexander, 1988; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Schultz, 2005). Thematic analysis is based on the researcher's interpretation of the data. As a result, the perspective of the individual regarding the way he or she makes sense of his or her own lived experiences is omitted (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2009).

Phenomenology aims to understand the lived experience of a person from that individual's perspective (Dyson & Brown, 2006; Smith, 2011). IPA, as a method of data analysis, allows for interpretation by the researcher of the narrative of an individual's lived experience, as well as for the analysis of how the individual dealt with specific experiences in his or her life and what these cognitive and affective reactions reflect about his or her personality (Denzin, 2001; Smith, 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). IPA comprises four stages. The first stage involves the reading and re-reading of the collected textual data. The second is the identification and labelling of themes that characterise each section of the data. During the third stage, some structure is introduced into the themes or meaning units identified by grouping them under headings and subheadings. The fourth stage of the process involves summarising and tabulating the analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Willig, 2008). Through this method of interpretation, a deeper understanding of an individual's lived experience can be gained and shared with an audience (Dyson & Brown, 2006). Based on the premise that Kiedis's (2004) autobiography functions as a written narrative of his own experience, it is an appropriate text to analyse using IPA (Smith, 2004; Willig, 2008).

Psychobiography is thus the study of an individual through the application of a particular psychological theory to the individual's life. Phenomenology, however, is the study of the subjective lived experience of an individual (Fouché & van Niekerk, 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Ponterotto, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). Whilst the primary characteristic of psychobiography is the application of psychology to biography (Ponterotto, Reynolds, Morel, & Cheung, 2015), phenomenology uses neutral narrative script, which is the telling of a life story with no thought for theoretical perspective (McAdams, 2005). Regarding data analysis, psychobiography applies a psychological theory to the salient episodes and the researcher interprets the episodes by organising these into themes (Alexander, 1988; Schultz, 2005). In contrast, the phenomenological researcher finds episodes or experiences within the narrative and organises them into themes without the application of a psychological theory (Smith, 2011). This paper thus represents an amalgamation of the two methods, which allows for a richer study, description and understanding of Kiedis's

life and the development of his creativity and identity. The salient episodes found in the narrative data were analysed according to the IPA method (Smith et al., 2009). Erikson's (1950, 1968, 1970) theory was then applied to the formulated themes, resulting in the present findings and discussion.

The aim of using a phenomenological data analysis method in a psychobiographical study is to attempt to delve deeper into the psychobiographic purpose of understanding an individual's life and personality development (Ponterotto, 2014; Smith et al., 2009). The combination of psychobiography and IPA enables the researcher to use the subject's own insight, as well as the application of a psychological theory to the narrative. This results in an analysis that is richer, as well as a more in-depth and enlightening discussion and representation of the individual's life.

### Findings and Discussion: Identity Integration

Using IPA (Smith et al., 2009), various themes were identified within Kiedis's autobiography (2004). The themes and sub-themes are based on recurrent motifs found within Kiedis's (2004) narrative and secondary data (Ehrlich, 2010; Moon, 2002; Neely, 1994; Red Hot Chili Peppers, 2011; Sandall, 2011).

**Table 1: List of Themes**

Themes	Sub-Themes
<i>Identity crises</i>	Paternal over-identification and inconsistent parenting
	Moratorium
<i>Creativity</i>	Creativity as a process
	Creativity as an outcome
	Physical manifestation of identity
	Music niche
<i>Unstable environment</i>	Infinite moratorium
	Unstructured childhood
<i>Substance use and crime</i>	Control issues
	Rebellion against society and paternal mirroring
	Control issues

#### *Identity Crises*

**Paternal over-identification and inconsistent parenting**  
Kiedis and his mother, Peggy, often moved around when he was very young, and Kiedis's childhood alternated between time spent with Peggy's family in Michigan and with his father in California. While Kiedis describes Peggy as caring, loving, and devoted, Kiedis's

home environment is consistently portrayed as unstable, lacking a fixed routine, characterised by unpredictability, and marked by the unreliability of his father (Kiedis, 2004). However, whilst John's presence in Kiedis's life was intermittent, Kiedis remembers their time together with fondness and clearly over-identified with him as a very young child (Kiedis, 2004). This over-identification may have been a reaction to the marriage between his mother and Scott St James, who was verbally abusive towards Kiedis and Peggy. It may also have been a reaction to the stark contrast between his mother's expectations of age-appropriate behaviour and his father's overly liberal attitude to childrearing (Kiedis, 2004). Regardless, Kiedis's over-identification with his father resulted in the modelling of his father's behaviours, which included substance use, criminal activities, and dedication to a beatnik, commitment-free lifestyle (Kiedis, 2004).

### ***Moratorium***

At the start of his adolescence, Kiedis moved to Los Angeles to live permanently with his father (Kiedis, 2004). John provided no structure, guidelines or rules for Kiedis to follow. Instead, he modelled a life of drugs, crime, and general disregard for the law and all normative societal rules (Erikson, 1968, 1970). John also failed to demonstrate any positive adult roles or commitments, which meant that Kiedis could never base his behaviour on these or add these to his repertoire of possible ways of behaving (Kiedis, 2004). Thus Kiedis, modelling his father, disregarded societal norms and was unwilling to deal with the responsibilities and commitments associated with adulthood. These were contributing factors to Kiedis's engagement in a psychosocial moratorium during his adolescence (Erikson, 1968).

### ***Creativity***

#### ***Creativity as a process***

Kiedis belongs to the collection of individuals who have used creative means as a psychological tool, he having used his writing to discover his identity. While working through a psychosocial moratorium, Kiedis started to write lyrics for songs (Kiedis, 2004). The content of his lyrics encompassed stories of his life, his environment and experiences with his friends. Some examples include: "We're all a bunch of brothers, Livin' in a cool way, Along with six million others, In this place called L.A." (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1984) and "Well I'm walkin' on down the road, But it can't be heaven, 'Cause the streets aren't gold" (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1987). Writing was a skill Kiedis had discovered and nurtured from his middle school years (Kiedis, 2004). It was a stable and positive aspect of his childhood identity. Kiedis's creative output allowed him to deal with his feelings and the challenges he was facing in a tangible manner (Kiedis, 2004).

#### ***Creativity as an outcome***

For individuals who use creative processes to work through their issues, their art becomes part of their identities (Dollinger et al., 2005; Kiedis, 2004). In this instance, creativity and artistic talent function both as a method with which to work through challenges that are encountered while in a moratorium, as well as an outcome of the experience of a moratorium and thus a core characteristic of the person's identity (Erikson, 1968). Kiedis's ability to transform his life stories into lyrics was his way of discovering, developing and experimenting with elements of his identity (Kiedis, 2004). His lyrics demonstrate the progression of his development and maturation by offering insight into how he felt at a particular stage of his life, how his current circumstances were affecting him and how he dealt with the integration of his identity and his environment to formulate a whole, coherent sense of self (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 2011). This integration and development of identity represents the core purpose of a moratorium (Coté, 2006; Erikson, 1968).

Initially, Kiedis wrote songs such as "Out in L.A." or "Police Helicopter" which simply related some of his and his friends' key life events. These earlier lyrics lacked any implication of psychological growth or development and portrayed primarily superficial aspects of Kiedis's life. In "Out in L.A." Kiedis writes about his own physical characteristics: "Antwan the swan from the pretty fish pond, Was a bad mother jumper, You could tell he was strong, He wore a cold paisley jacket, And a hellified ass" (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1984). The focus of Kiedis's lyrical endeavours later changed to dealing with his emotional turmoil and to showcasing his perspective on society. Songs such as "Walkin' on Down the Road" and "Fight like a Brave" are evidence of this progression from an initial focus on superficial subject matter to touching on emotional and psychological issues. For example, the lyrics of "Fight like a Brave" start to touch on Kiedis's drug dependence: "So give yourself a break, Get it through your head, And get it off your chest, Get it out your arm, Because it's time to start fresh, You want to stop dying" (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1987).

Kiedis's lyrics became more insightful as he gained a deeper sense of self-knowledge (Dolan, 2011; Kiedis, 2004; Moon, 2002). Gradually, Kiedis found psychological strength through the creative writing process, and this helped him to confront and overcome the challenges resulting from his psychosocial crises during his childhood (Kiedis, 2004). Kiedis learnt to identify and control his emotions by naming them in songs such as "Nobody Weird like Me" and "Under the Bridge" with lyrics stating: "The freakiest show I know, Is the show of my own ... Look and see, I think you'll agree, Nobody weird like me" (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1989).

Once he could identify his emotions, Kiedis applied his thoughts and feelings introspectively and insightfully to comment on his life and the circumstances that had produced his concept of self. Kiedis's final shift towards an independent, developed and integrated identity with defined origins, faults and strengths is represented in iconic songs such as "Breaking the Girl", "Otherside", and "Scar Tissue" (Moon, 2002; Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1989, 1991, 1999). Lyrics such as "Raised by my dad ... [h]e was my man" and "Once you know you can never go back, I've got to take it on the otherside" showcase the deep level of introspection and reflection present in Kiedis's later lyrics (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1999, 2002). These lyrics reflect that Kiedis understood his over-identification with his father and also acknowledged his self-directed plea for sobriety (Red Hot Chili Peppers, 1999, 2002).

### **Physical manifestation of identity**

Kiedis's live performances were a physical manifestation of his identity, as well as an opportunity to experiment freely with various aspects of his personal style and self-expression (Kiedis, 2004; Neely, 1994). Kiedis assumed that a link existed between the audience's reaction to his music and their reaction to his identity. If the audience liked his music and performance, it was an affirmation to Kiedis that they liked him and that he had found a niche in society in which his identity was not only accepted but also appreciated (Kiedis, 2004).

### **Music niche**

The punk rock scene Hillel and Flea introduced Kiedis to in high school provided the perfect niche subculture for Kiedis to engage in free role experimentation while working through his identity crises (Dollinger et al., 2005; Kiedis, 2004). The implicit social rules associated with being a punk rock musician were congruent with creativity and delinquency (Erikson, 1968, 1970; Kiedis, 2004; Neely, 1994). Thus, living within this punk rock, relatively rule-free environment made it unnecessary for Kiedis to adjust his identity to accommodate normative social rules and laws.

### **Infinite moratorium**

Erikson (1970) argues that creative individuals tend to reject normative adult commitments and roles and rather identify with the free role experimentation associated with a moratorium that allows for expressive styles and creative outlets. Creative adults therefore have a greater tendency to engage in extremely prolonged moratoria, sometimes extending across their entire lives. Kiedis shows a preference for and engagement in this type of lifestyle, which Erikson (1970) refers to as an *infinite moratorium*. Kiedis's role as a punk/funk musician, and the freedom which this subculture allows, is the optimal environment for an infinite moratorium (Erikson, 1968, 1970; Kiedis, 2004). Kiedis's lyrics are constantly changing in accordance with his identity, and vice versa. As long as Kiedis has the freedom to change his musical,

lyrical or personal style through being a part of the *Red Hot Chili Peppers* and writing and performing music, resolution of the moratorium in which he is engaged is not necessary, as he has found a role in society with which his identity is congruent.

### *Unstable Environment*

#### **Unstructured childhood**

Kiedis's unstable and inconsistently structured childhood hindered his ability to achieve a sense of control over his life and environment (Kiedis, 2004). This early lack of control manifested as an urgent need to control everything and everyone in his environment (Kiedis, 2004). Due to his deep mistrust of all aspects that were not under his control, Kiedis was always reactive to his environment. This is evident in his delinquent tendencies and the establishment of his own moral code that was incongruent with the law and other conventional social rules (Kiedis, 2004).

#### **Control issues**

Kiedis's attempt to control his environment and surroundings was his way of trying to regulate and stabilise his internal emotional and psychological turmoil resulting from his unstable sense of identity. Given that his identity was built upon his father's, Kiedis later struggled to avoid assimilating certain aspects of other people's identities into his own. He therefore attempted to regulate his weak and uncertain internal world through situational and environmental control (Kiedis, 2004).

### *Substance Use and Crime*

Kiedis's delinquent behaviour can be explained by a variety of interacting and multi-faceted factors in his life (Erikson, 1968; Kiedis, 2004). Issues mentioned previously, such as his unstable upbringing, his relationship with his parents, and his control issues, have an effect on, and overlap with, his substance use and his engagement in criminal behaviour (Kiedis, 2004).

### *Rebellion against Society and Paternal Mirroring*

Erikson (1968, 1970) points to engagement in delinquent behaviour, defined in this example as substance use and criminal activity, as linked to the rejection of adult roles and social rules. One of the contributing factors in Kiedis's criminal behaviour and substance abuse was the influence of his father, who both condoned and encouraged Kiedis's delinquency (Kiedis, 2004). The impact of this encouragement was further exacerbated by Kiedis's desperate need for his father's approval and admiration (Kiedis, 2004).

#### **Control issues**

During his first experience with drugs, Kiedis felt a sense of general well-being and contentment (Kiedis, 2004; Neely, 1994). Thus, what began as an approval-seeking activity and an attempt to mirror his father, later

became an effort to take control of his own life. In this way, drug use provided a sense of emotional regulation and allowed for an alternative experience of his environment. In addition, substance use had an empowering quality, as it made Kiedis feel autonomous in relation to his surroundings rather than being threatened by them. Beyond the physical substance addiction, the control Kiedis felt while intoxicated therefore also became an addiction. However, Kiedis only recognised this after Hillel's death, when he lost himself entirely to substance abuse (Kiedis, 2004).

### Conclusion

From a general perspective on Kiedis's life, it seems that the lyricist's major identity crises stemmed from his unstable childhood, the incompatible difference in his relationships with each parent, and his paternal over-identification. The consequences of Kiedis's experience of these crises are not necessarily all negative. Through his engagement with these critical periods during his developmental stages, Kiedis discovered his aptitude for writing and his creative musical talent, which led him to become an international celebrity. By portraying his life through his lyrics, writing became Kiedis's way of regulating his emotions and exerting a sense of control

over his life. Although unaware of it, Kiedis's passion for writing functioned as a psychological exploration and self-constructive process that allowed him to find a subculture of society in which he thrived. However, Kiedis's continued disregard for normative societal roles, his own admission that his self-concept is dependent on his writing, and the fact that he is still currently the lyricist for the *Red Hot Chili Peppers* at the age of 55, all provide evidence that Kiedis is engaged in an infinite moratorium. Erikson's (1950) conceptualisation of "identity versus role diffusion" thus provides an apt platform from which to understand Kiedis's creativity and identity development.

The use of IPA in this psychobiographical study allowed for a deeper exploration of Kiedis's life, the development of his creativity and identity, and his continued engagement in an infinite moratorium. This was further accomplished through the application of Erikson's (1950, 1968, 1970) theory of identity development to Kiedis's personal narrative.

*I'm still a little bent, a little crooked, but all things considered, I can't complain . . . I might have some scar tissue, but that's alright . . . (Kiedis, 2004).*

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