CHALLENGES FOR THE EMERGING ADULT IN BECOMING AN AUTHENTIC ADULT

by

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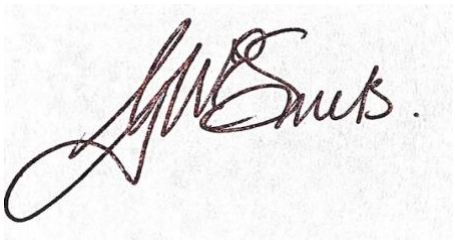
DECLARATION BY THE STUDENT

I, Gezina Wilhelmina Engelbrecht-Smuts, declare that ***CHALLENGES FOR THE EMERGING ADULT IN BECOMING AN AUTHENTIC ADULT*** is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I have submitted the thesis to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality (see Appendix G).

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

Name in Print **Gezina Wilhelmina Engelbrecht-Smuts**



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DEDICATION

First and foremost, I dedicate this thesis to God Almighty.

I also dedicate this work to my late husband, Mr Pieter Smuts, who passed on before seeing this great achievement. Thank you, Pieter, for your inspiration and your constant belief in me.

I further dedicate this work to my dear children, Carla-Me, Jardo, Hermie and Carlo who encouraged me to push through during this tough season of my life. May God bless you abundantly.

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ABSTRACT

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental phase preceding adulthood. Young individuals move through a transformational stage between adolescence and adulthood and must form new identities. The most prominent identity changes are social and occupational identities. Emerging adulthood is, therefore, associated with active identity exploration. Emerging adults are faced with questions such as: who am I? where am I going? how do I get there? The exploration of these questions result in various challenges.

The researcher followed a qualitative research approach according to an exploratory phenomenological design. The interpretivist paradigm supported the use of phenomelogy and social constructivism. The participants were purposefully sampled from institutions of higher learning and data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews. Through observation and conversation, the researcher tried to understand the emerging adults' world and the challenges they face and attempted to determine the type of guidance they need to become authentic adults. Data were analysed in accordance with Tesch's method of content analysis for qualitative research.

The findings revealed that a lack of self-knowledge is one of the major challenges young individuals often face. Other challenges include the complexity of interaction with individuals who have different worldviews; rapid changes; altered roles; new-found independence; feeling lost; and fear of rejection. In industrialised countries, the traditional unfolding of milestones has changed. These milestones are less noticeable and are often achieved in different sequences.

No guidelines and support structures assist emerging adults in this challenging transitional phase. Parents, counsellors, mentors, spiritual leaders, and institutions should provide stability and emotional support but, in many cases, are not equipped to meet the unique needs of young individuals. The aim of this research was to provide these stakeholders with guidelines to mentor and guide emerging adults through their unique challenges.

KEY TERMS: Emerging adult; Challenges; Authenticity; Transition; Self-knowledge; Identity; Life Goals; Independence; Guidance; Support

OPSOMMING

Jong volwassenheid is ’n kritieke ontwikkelingsfase wat volwassenheid voorafgaan. Jong individue bevind hulle tussen adolessensie en volwassenheid en moet nuwe identiteite vorm. Die mees prominente identiteitsverandering is die jong volwassene se sosiale en werkidentiteit. Die jong volwassene ondersoek dus nuwe identiteite en stel kritiese vrae soos: “Wie is ek?”, “Waarheen gaan ek?” en “Hoe kom ek daar?”. Hierdie soeke na nuwe identiteite stel verskeie uitdagings.

’n Kwalitatiewe benadering word saam met ’n ondersoekende, fenomenologiese navorsingsontwerp gevolg. Die interpretivistiese paradigma ondersteun ook die gebruik van die fenomenologie en sosiale konstruktivisme. Deelnemers aan die studie is doelbewus uit tersiêre instellings geselekteer, en data is versamel deur semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude met hulle te voer. Die navorser het gepoog om deur onderhoude en waarneming van hulle gedrag en lyftaal ’n grondige kennis van die jong volwassene se leefwêreld op te doen. Inhoude is met behulp van Tesch se metode geanaliseer.

Verskeie uitdagings is geïdentifiseer, waaronder ’n gebrek aan selfkennis, komplekse interaksies met individue wat ’n ander wêreldbeskouing huldig; vinnig veranderde omgewings; nuwe rolle; nuutgevonde vryheid; koersloosheid; en vrees vir verwerping. In geïndustrialiseerde lande word die mylpale van volwassenheid boonop nie meer in die tradisionele volgorde bereik nie. Mylpale is minder duidelik en kom in ’n ander volgorde voor.

Geen riglyne en ondersteuning bestaan egter vir jong volwassenes nie. Ouers, voorligters, mentors, geestelike leiers en instansies behoort hulle te begelei, maar is dikwels nie daarvoor toegerus nie. Die oogmerk van hierdie navorsing is om hierdie rolspelers toe te rus om leiding te gee aan jong volwassenes wat met vele uitdagings worstel,

KERNBEGRIPPE: Jong volwassene; Uitdagings; Outentiek; Oorgang; Selfkennis; Identiteit; Lewensdoelwitte; Onafhanklikheid; Begeleiding; Ondersteuning

KAKARETSO

Ho kena boholong ke mokgahlelo wa bohlokwa wa ntlafalo ya pele ya ho hoba motho e moholo. Batjha ba feta mohatong wa phetoho o dipakeng tsa botjha le ho ba motho e moholo mme ba tlameha ho theha boitsebahatso bo botjha. Diphetoho tse hlahelletseng ka ho fetisisa tsa boitsebahatso ke boitsebahatso ba phedisano le ba mosebetsi. Ka hona, ho kena boholong ho amahanngwa le tlhahlobo e matla ya boitsebahatso. Batho ba kenang boholong ba tobane le dipotso tse kang: ke mang? ke ya hokae? ke fihla jwang moo? Tlhahlobo ya dipotso tsena e hlahisa diphephetso tse sa tshwaneng.

Mofuputsi o latetse mokgwa wa patlisiso ya boleng ho latela moralo wa patlisiso e itshetlehileng tlwaelong ya boiphihlelo bo phetsweng ba sehlopha se itseng. Mohlala wa tlhaloso o tsheheditse tshebediso ya tlwaelo ya boiphihlelo bo phetsweng ba sehlopha se itseng le ho hlahiswa ha tsebo e tswang boiphihlelong le maikutlong a batho ha phedisano. Bankakarolo ba tswang ditheong tsa thuto e phahameng ba hlophisitswe ka disampole ka boikemisetso mme dintlha di bokelletswe ka mokgwa wa dipuisano tse batlang di hlophisitswe. Ka ho shebella le ho qoqa, mofuputsi o lekile ho utlwisisa lefatshe la batho ba kenang boholong le diphephetso tseo ba tobanang le tsona mme a leka ho fumana mofuta wa tataiso eo ba e hlokang hore e be batho ba baholo ba sebele. Dintlha di manollotswe ho latela mokgwa wa Tesch wa manollo ya ditaba bakeng sa patlisiso ya boleng.

Diphumano di senotse hore ho hloka tsebo ke e nngwe ya diphephetso tse kgolo tseo batjha ba atisang ho tobana le tsona. Diphephetso tse ding di kenyelletsa ho rarahana ha tshebedisano le batho ba nang le maikutlo a fapaneng a akaretsang; diphetoho tse potlakileng; dikarolo tse fetotsweng; boipuso bo botjha; ho ikutlwa o lahlehile; le tshabo ya ho kgeswa. Dinaheng tse tswetseng pele diindastering, mehato ya bohlokwa eo dintho di etswang kateng ka tlwaelo e fetohile. Mehato ena ya bohlokwa ha e hlokomelehe haholo mme hangata e fihlellwa ka ditatellano tse fapaneng.

Ha hona ditataiso le mekgatlo ya tshehetso e thusang batho ba kenang boholong mokgahlelong ona o thata wa phetoho. Batswadi, baeletsi, batataisi, baeta-pele ba semoya, le mekgatlo ba lokela ho fana ka botsitso le tshehetso ya maikutlo empa,

maemong a mangata, ha ba hlomelwa ho fihlella ditlhoko tse ikgethang tsa batho ba batjha.

MANTSWE A SEHLOOHO: Motho ya kenang boholong; Diphephetso; Bonnete; Phetoho; Boitsebo; Boitsebahatso; Dipheo tsa Bophelo; Boipuso;Tataiso; Tshehetso

LIST OF ACRONYMS

EGRIS	Members of the European Group for Integrated Social Research
SAAIR	South African Association for Institutional Research
SIT	Social Identity Theory
SCT	Self Categorization Theory
SDT	Self Determination Theory
MCM	Multicomponent Conceptualisation Model

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INTRODUCTORY ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Young adults in a transitioning phase (starting tertiary studies or entering the workplace) 'feel lost' and 'confused' about where they belong and what is expected of them (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:453; Dannefer & Phillipson, 2010:309; Song, Wang & Zhao, 2021:1126; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:221). They either lack skills (such as self-knowledge), need to adjust or do not know what adjustments to make to become authentic, balanced individuals (Hattie, Myers & Sweeney, 2004:354; Yanhong, Zhenrong & Yiping, (2021:619). Young adults do not know themselves well enough in terms of personality (Eaves, Rabren & Hall, 2012:30), strengths, weaknesses, values and passions. As a result, they find it difficult to set and fulfil realistic future goals (Noble et al., 2007:160; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:2).

Little research about positive development during the transitional phase from adolescence to emerging adulthood is available. Positive development refers to social competence (empathy, self-control and responsibility), life satisfaction (how happy an individual is with their life) and social capital (civic engagement and trust in the community). Young adults find themselves in a critical developmental period, and guidance towards becoming an authentic (the ability to be true to the self, despite external factors) individual, seems to be essential (English, 2006:1030; Hawkins *et al.,* 2011:89; Song *et al.,* 2021:1126; Booker, Dunsmore & Fivush, 2021:3261).

Furthermore, it is difficult to define authenticity during emerging adulthood, as challenging transitions in this life stage seem to be frequent and complicated (Wyn & Woodman, 2006: 495-514; Yanhong*et al.*, 2021:619) and researchers differ in opinion about what is needed to assist young adults in this transitional phase (Eaves *et al.,* 2012:30; Shulman & Ben-artzi, 2003:217). Parents and their young adult children often disagree about future expectations. However, both parties usually agree that a transitional plan, in other words, a plan guiding the young adult through the different transitional phases he/she goes through towards adulthood, is necessary (Powers, Geenen & Powers, 2009:134; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:221).

A transitional plan cannot be implemented before the young adult understands him/herself (Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:221). A young adult must first come to a deep sense of self, his/her values, core beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, before focusing on other aspects of development. It is, therefore, important that the young adult understands him/herself before he/she can develop into an authentic individual (Davis & Buskits, 2008:392; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126).

The emerging adult, therefore, must find answers to:

- Who am I?
- Where am I going?
- How will I get there?

1.2 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

1.2.1 Defining the emerging adult (Who am I?) in transition (linear vs non-linear process)

Jeffrey Jenson Arnett, a professor of psychology at Clark University, Massachusetts, is known as one of the most prominent authors on emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2006:121). Arnett (2006:121; 2013:9; 2016:220) distinguishes between 'young adulthood' and 'emerging adulthood'. The latter indicates a stage of development in progression, while the first suggests that adulthood is already reached (Arnett, 2006:121).

According to Arnett (2000:469), emerging adulthood stretches from late adolescence to early adulthood (18 to 25 years). It is mainly associated with the exploration of the self to determine a new sense of self. Bundick (2011:90) describes this phase of instability and self-focus as one of the most critical stages of development for fulfilling one's life purpose. Young adulthood, late adolescence or emerging adulthood describe the confusing stage a young individual goes through in becoming an adult. This phase is often associated with a confusion of 'who am I', ‘Where am I going' and 'How will I get there' (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:453; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126).

Emerging adulthood invites successful identity formation but may include risk behaviours, such as substance abuse, unprotected sex and drunk or drugged driving Forster, Vetrone, Grigsby, Rogers & Unger, 2020:379). Central to this developmental

stage is the young adult's exploration of the possibilities in their lives in areas such as love (social and romantic identity) and work (occupational identity) (Arnett, 2000:469). If the young adult can cope with the challenges of this confusing age, he/she will be able to make healthy, positive choices when entering adulthood (Brown *et al.,* 2009:52; Meca *et al.,* 2015:328; Salmela-Aro, Aunola & Nurmi, 2007:692; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126). As young adults in transition often feel 'nowhere', 'in-between' and 'lost', (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:221), they need guidance (Booker *et al*., 2021:3261) through this uncertain phase as they first need to learn who they are (Arnett, 2000:473; Members of the European Group for Integrated Social Research (EGRIS, 2001) as cited in Shulman, Kalnitzki & Shahar, 2009:243; Oyserman, Elmore & Smith, 2012:74).

Positive identity formation is described as functional aspects of human behaviour such as assets or strengths and measured in successful outcomes (for example, employment) (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:221). Using data from a longitudinal study, O'Connor *et al.* (2011:861) constructed a multidimensional model identifying five positive development domains during early adulthood. '*Social competence'* describes the ability of the young adult to meet everyday demands concerning relationships. '*Life satisfaction'* reflects contentment regarding needs, wants, resources or accomplishments of the individual. *'Trust and tolerance in others'* describe the emerging adult's ability to work harmoniously with others and his/her ability to accommodate differences according to culture and background. '*Trust in authorities and institutions'* reflects the attachment to community or society and *'civic engagement' reflects* the willingness of the person to become an active, positive citizen of the country.

Concerning one's inherited psychological characteristics, a person learns as he/she grows and emotionally matures, and experience is gained (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:221). Therefore, a young adult must develop optimally in all five domains mentioned above to understand the self and others (Davis & Buskist, 2008: I-392).

Transitioning from adolescence to adulthood is a dynamic and challenging phase – starting tertiary education, entering the world of work, becoming independent from parents and forming new relationships form part of emerging adulthood (Donnellan, Conger & Burzette, 2007:238-239; Granger, 2012:9; Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:219). It is a time of active identity exploration in a context offering an array of possibilities and

options (Arnett, 2000:474). Education or training is gained, which lay the foundation for future occupations and occupational identity. In industrialised countries, exploration is prolonged, which impacts and changes the nature of development to adulthood. Leaving school, getting trained, starting an occupation, marrying and starting a family unfolds in a non-linear sequence. Emerging adults leave school, start tertiary studies or a career, go back to training (and often back to the parents' house) and sometimes again create a new occupation. Marriage and starting a family become a delayed milestone (Arnett 2013:9).

According to Merriam (2005:4) and Eaves *et al.* (2012:31), transitions are changes in a person's life at a given time alternating with periods of stability. Adjustments are a fundamental part of life. When changes occur, one's life patterns and frame of reference are questioned and often changed (Eaves *et al.,* 2012:31; Merriam, 2005:4).

Merriam (2005:4) identifies two transitions from adolescence to adulthood, namely 'anticipated transitions' and 'unanticipated transitions'. Anticipated transition links closely to the historical, linear transition process. It unfolds in a relatively predictable way where different milestones are reached sequentially, such as leaving school, starting education, finding a job, getting married and starting a family. Unanticipated transitions reflect the unfamiliar, non-sequential unfolding of adulthood milestones and are associated with industrialised countries.

Linear perspective:

According to Arnett (2000:469), emerging adulthood commences when the young individual leaves school. According to the linear perspective, the socially expected next step typically implies that the emerging adult leaves the parents' home and starts education or work. The next step would usually be to become financially independent by entering the world of work, getting married and starting a family (Arnett, 2000; 469). Thus, the unfolding of adult milestones happens in an 'anticipated' way (Merriam, 2005:4-5). Transitions are generally awaited and planned. For example, when the young individual leaves school, he/she prepares for the next step – education – and therefore, applies for particular programmes offered by institutions, searches for accommodation and attains finances (Merriam, 2005:4-5). According to McLellan (2014:57), a 'timetable' that determines the linear unfolding of significant life changes during emerging adulthood is typically prescribed by society. This 'clear-cut' way in

which transitions unfold is strongly age-related and determined by the expectations of the social context. A prescribed normative pattern determines specific times to particular milestones, such as 'a time to finish school and commence tertiary studies', 'a time to start a first job' and 'a time to marry and have children'. Although the norms based on socio-economic status, religion or ethnic group may differ, the unfolding of adult milestones is linear and predictable.

According to Levinson's 'Life structure' theory (McLellan, 2014:7), ‘life structure' refers to the underlying, orderly, sequential mode of a person's life at a particular time. Two crucial processes are associated with 'life structure', namely, 'structure building' and 'structure changing'. An emerging adult makes choices, determines values and sets goals during the 'structure building' process. This phase typically lasts five to seven years and precedes 'structure changing'. During the 'changing phase', the emerging adult terminates or changes some of the 'structures'. According to Levinson, there are two particular phases relevant to emerging adulthood: 'early adulthood' and 'entry to life structures for adulthood'. 'Early Adulthood (17 to 22 years) forms the bridge between pre-adulthood and early adulthood (the next phase). During this period, the emerging adult leaves his/her parent's home and enters education or work. Key choices with regards to 'structure building' is made, such as 'who am I?' and 'where do I fit in?'. 'Entry to life structure for early adulthood (22 to 28 years)' is a phrase associated with 'building' existing choices by re-evaluating recent decisions and discarding or changing them.

According to Bridges (1980:107-166), an individual has to 'let go of something' before he/she can embrace what is new. This process unfolds in three phases. Firstly, during the ‘letting go’ phase, the emerging adult needs to separate from the familiar such as the parents' home, school, school friendships, church and view of 'self'. 'Letting go' can unfold over time or can be abrupt. Young individuals experience different emotions that vary from painfully letting go to grasping onto new possibilities excitingly. The next stage, 'neutral zone', refers to 'no man's land', where the emerging adult finds him/herself between the old and the new. What was familiar, like the school environment, school friendships and the parental home's familiarity, is now left behind, but the 'new' is also still unfamiliar. Thus, emerging adulthood is an in-between phase of no longer being part of what lies behind and not fully part of what lies ahead. New

and different relationships are to be formed, new roles to be explored and unknown possibilities await. The last stage is referred to as 'consciously launch into the new'. During this stage, new identities are formed, new values and norms embraced and a new sense of the self is discovered and established. Finally, the emerging adult starts to explore new identities actively and commit to what makes sense to him/her (Bridges, 1980:107-166; Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:218).

Arnett states that the linear, sequential format in which transition to adulthood used to unfold no longer exists (Arnett, 2006:469). Demographic shifts resulting from industrialisation, residential changes, demographic diversity, and pro-longed education, among others, form a new, non-linear perspective on the transition to adulthood.

Non-linear perspective:

The transition to adulthood is an extended (prolonged) process in industrialised countries, where adult milestones do not sequentially follow one another (Arnett 2006:8; 2006:116). Influencing factors include extended periods of tertiary education and longer periods of financial dependence, starting work with insufficient income, returning to training or changing jobs to gain experience. Therefore, this lengthy process may result in later commitment to a career and marriage, extended periods of financial dependence on parents, and later entrance into parenthood (Anderson & Mounts, 2012:91; Arnett, 2006:8, 16; McLellan, 2014:57). The prolonged process results in later identity formation and more extended periods of exploration. As a consequence of the industrialised society, young adults only become independent between the ages of 25 and 30 years, instead of around 20 years of age, as indicated in previous studies (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013:382). Arnett (2006:296) states that the timeframe in which this exploration takes place may differ from ‘individual to individual and culture to culture’.

Studies done by Reis and Sprecher (2009:650) and Roberts *et al.* (2016:319-320) indicate that it is still common for young adults in their mid-twenties to stay with their parents. In a census survey done in 2000, 50% of emerging adults were still living with their parents. Only one out of every four individuals had left their parents' homes before the age of 22 years. It is, furthermore, not unusual for emerging adults to return to their

parent's house after a period of work or study (Reis & Sprecher, 2009:650; Roberts *et al.,* 2016:320).

'Un-anticipated transitions', as referred to by Merriam (2005:5), describe events that happen unexpectedly, outside the anticipated time. Examples such as the death of a loved one, being a victim of crime, getting retrenched at work or being diagnosed with a terminal illness happens unexpectedly and causes a lot more stress than anticipated changes. Unfortunately, most individuals are unprepared to deal with transitions that are not expected.

Concerning the transitional phase to adulthood, the emerging adult, for example, has to adapt to multiple changes from adolescence to adulthood, such as unfamiliar adult-like roles, decision making, setting life goals (to name but a few). As a result, milestones associated with adulthood unfold unpredictably (Arnett, 2006:116).

Furstenberg (2015:16) states that the transition to adulthood is complex. Although finishing school, leaving home and starting work/studies are still prevalent milestones for adulthood, the transition is prolonged. Marriage and having children are no longer universal prerequisites for the accomplished transition towards adulthood. Tendencies, like getting married later, childless marriages, living together relationships, more extended studies, moving out and back to parent's houses, parenthood during studies and non-marital parenting, became popular during the late 20th - and early 21st centuries. Based on comparison census tabulations created by Furstenberg and Sheela Kennedy (Furstenberg, 2015:17-18), the following changes have occurred over time:

- 1965: 50% males and 75% females completed education, left their parent's home, and entered the world of work, got married and started a family by the age of 25
- 2010: Only 8% of men and 16% of females had reached the same milestones by the age of 25

According to Furstenberg (2015:16), the tendencies mentioned above are further impacted by several factors. Firstly, many unskilled or semi-skilled workers lost their jobs at the end of the industrial era. Moreover, the start of a knowledge-based

economy emphasised tertiary education and made entrance into the labour market harder for less-educated individuals. As a result, emerging adults were forced to become more skilled, and marriage and family onset were delayed. Secondly, emerging adults often move back to their parents because of the financial burden of full-time or part-time studies. Many young individuals enter the labour market for a short period, then go back to tertiary institutions to further their education and, as a result, sometimes become financially dependent on parents or caregivers once again (Furstenberg: 2010:67; 2015:18). According to Danziger and Ratner (2010:133), trends like job instability, extended low-wage work and lacking annual increased earnings contribute to unsuccessful launching into financial independence. The emerging adults who are less skilled find it extremely challenging to compete in a market of well-skilled applicants and are forced to improve their skills. As a result, parents bear a greater burden in supporting their young adult children, and independent living is postponed until much later than anticipated.

'Nuclear families' (traditional marriages where the wife stays home and attends to domestic responsibilities while the husband works) began to make way for 'post-modern families' and shared responsibilities about household chores and finances. In married households, one or both spouses have to quit their jobs to return to university or college, which places a burden on the family of origin. In addition, both men and women compete in the labour market, and therefore both need to be skilled and educated. As a result, young adults started living together instead of marrying or getting married only in their late 20s or early 30s (Furstenberg, 2010:68; 2015:18-20).

Many of the transitional changes mentioned have long-term effects and consequences and include advantages and disadvantages (Furstenberg, 2015:16-21).

Advantages include:

- Marriage, if it happens, is postponed offering the emerging adult sufficient time to explore his/her social identity, commit to more formal and intimate relationships and search for a suitable partner (Furstenberg, 2015:17).
- The slower pace toward adulthood offers parents more intense parenting time, which result in more intimate relationships, trust and mutual support (Furstenberg, 2015:17).

- More extensive, more specialised education and the financial support of parents or caregivers equip the emerging adult for promising careers without the burden of financial stressors (Furstenberg, 2015:17).

Disadvantages include:

- Working-class or poor parents suffer enormous financial and emotional burdens when their young adult offspring fail to become autonomous. Parents now must support their young adult children for extended periods, which may, in some cases, depletes parents' savings for old age (Furstenberg, 2015:18).
- In the past, families, schools, religious and social organisations guided emerging adults into work and marriage. These organisations are not equipped and designed to manage emerging adults in the same way as they did in adolescence. Colleges and universities became essential navigators into the economy (although primarily a privilege for the affluent), leaving most young adults in a highly vulnerable position. Many school leavers lack sufficient preparation for tertiary studies resulting from poor marks and a high dropout rate. Preparing for financial autonomy goes as far back as pre-school years where middle class and more impoverished families had to rely on alternative care such as family members and friends. Furthermore, many schools are not equipped to form a buffer of support for those learners with special emotional, social or academic needs (Furstenberg, 2015:19).

According to Settersten and Ray (2010:22) and Bustamante (2019:1-6), statistics state that only 40% of enrolled students in a four-year degree are likely to earn their degree within six years. However, for South African students, the picture looks even darker. According to Nicolene Murdoch (http://www.iol.co.za/lifestyle/family/kids/only-15-of-sa-university-students-graduate-1531809), executive director for teaching, learning and quality at Monash South Africa, the graduation rate for students is 15%. Murdoch, the South African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR) president, said that university bridging programmes are insufficient and lack non-academic support needed to assist students and, therefore, contribute to a prolonged transition to financial independence. Furthermore, if students complete their studies later than expected, they may be behind in their skill levels as the industry develops at a constant

rate and strains institutional resources (http://www.iol.co.za/lifestyle/family/kids/only-15-of-sa-university-students-graduate-1531809).

1.2.2 Who am I?

To form identities, the emerging adult has to discover 'Who am I?' as an individual apart from significant others such as parents, family, peers and people with whom he or she is in a relationship (Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:219). Therefore, knowledge about the self (self-knowledge) discovered through self-awareness and feedback from peers, parents and society and forming identities based on meaning-making is an essential milestone for authentic adulthood (Arnett, 2000:469; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126).

According to Oyserman *et al.* (2012:74-75), the terms' self', 'self-knowledge' and 'identity' are 'nested elements', defining elements of identity formation.

Self-knowledge refers to the understanding of one's own 'sensations, thoughts, beliefs and other mental states' (https://www.sciencedirect.com/referencework/9780080430768). Benson, Johnson and Elder (2012:1753) and Kärchner *et al.,* 2021:320) state that early experiences of adulthood and how the young adult perceives their life leading to a sense of self and, therefore, knowledge of the self. The authors further suggest that this ability will most probably influence the way later challenges are seen.

According to Shulman (2005:580) and Meca *et al.* (2015:329), the ability to know oneself is crucial for decision-making and choices. Previous life patterns have to be confronted with exploring new possibilities, which is only possible if the young individual knows who he/she is.

A person may also experience a 'multiplicity of self-states', meaning that he/she might be different in various circumstances (Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:218-219). For example, the emerging adult will act according to the norms of other groups in various life situations (not necessarily according to who they authentically are) to be accepted. It is therefore essential to study how the young adult organises his/her thoughts and analyses and understands him/herself, as well as others (Shulman, 2005:581; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:3-5;). Aspects of the self that might influence how a person

can organise, coordinate, examine and understands the self in different situations include:

- *'Unity'* as an ability to interrelate different experiences with others
- *'Continuity' (authenticity)* to stay true to one's nature in different situations (Shulman, 2005:581; Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:3-5;).

If the young adult is willing to learn the lessons life teaches him/her, and in this process, he/she becomes less self-centred and more people orientated, great wisdom and insight can be gained through personal experiences. Moreover, these life lessons may mould the young individual into an authentic self (Dannefer & Phillipson, 2010:312; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:229).

Self-esteem: According to Morris Rosenberg, a self-esteem expert, self-esteem can be defined as 'one's attitude toward oneself' (Rosenberg,1965). He described it as a 'favourable or unfavourable attitude toward the self' (https://positivepsychology.com/self-esteem).

According to Orth, Trzesniewski and Robins (2010:645,646) and Kärchner, Schöne & Schwinger, (2021:322) healthy self-esteem is essential. It predicts better health, less possibility to get involved in criminal behaviour, better academic and social achievement and a better chance to excel financially. They also stated that changes in self-esteem might be possible in response to life transitions and that no significant, normative changes in self-esteem are expected. The transition can redirect one's behaviour, cognition and affect. It might cause a drop in self-esteem due to rapidly changing roles, demanding relationships and maturational changes such as becoming financially independent.

Identity: According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, identity refers to 'the distinguishing character or personality of an individual https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity. Although researchers agree about the importance of identity formation during emerging adulthood, they differ in opinion on the extent and nature of this developmental need.

Relevant to identity development, a few critical theorists with their theories will be discussed:

Erikson (1953):

Identity formation is a central development task of emerging adults (Erikson, 1953:100) and is defined as an ‘internal sense of continuity and coherence across time and life domains’. It is furthermore a life-long process and influences change and exploration. Some individuals may form transparent and integrated identities, while others may end up confused. The social context (family, society, historical events) of an individual plays an essential role in the identity development of young individuals. Erikson's Theory of Psychosocial Development asserts that individuals experience eight 'psychosocial crisis stages' in life. Crisis are psychosocial … and correspond to a person's psychological needs at a particular stage of life (see Figure 3.1). 'Psycho' refers to the 'mind/brain/personality', and 'social' refers to 'relationships and environment.' Crisis' involves two opposing emotional-driven forces or 'contrary dispositions.' 'Syntonic dispositions' is the term used to explain the positive outcome of a crisis, while 'dystonic disposition' refers to the negative result. If the individual successfully passes through a stage, 'basic virtues' or 'basic strengths' are obtained, and a ‘balance between the two opposing forces’ is reached. Basic virtues refer to 'strengths' of character, which can be used when resolving crises to follow.

Conversely, if the individual fails to complete a stage successfully, less healthy personality strengths and virtues may result. This is because the psychosocial stages are not sharply defined into steps and overlap with previous or next stages. (Erikson, 1953:100).

Stage	Psychosocial Crisis	Basic Virtue	Age
1	Trust vs. mistrust	Hope	Infancy (o to1 ½)
2	Autonomy vs. shame	Will	Early Childhood (1 ½ to3)
3	Initiative vs. guilt	Purpose	Play Age (3 to 5)
4	Industry vs. inferiority	Competency	School Age (5 to 12)
5	Ego identity vs. Role Confusion	Fidelity	Adolescence (12 to 18)
6	Intimacy vs. isolation	Love	Young Adult (18 to 40)
7	Generativity vs. stagnation	Care	Adult hood(40 to 65)
8	Ego integrity vs. despair	Wisdom	Maturity (65+)

Source: adapted from http://braungardt.trialectics.com/projects/psychoanalysis/erik-erikson/

Figure 1.1: A person's psychological needs at a particular stage of life

Concerning Erikson's theory (Erikson, 1953:100), two psychosocial stages are relevant for emerging adulthood, Stage 5 and Stage 6.

- Stage 5: Identity vs Role Confusion (12 – 18 years of age)

During Stage 5, the adolescent has to transition from childhood to adulthood and is confronted with many changes such as physical changes, separating self from parents and forming own identity. The adolescent has to become independent, become future-oriented about a career, education and relationships. It is also a stage in life where the adolescent and emerging adult need to learn the 'roles' he/she will occupy as an adult later in life. Active exploration of new identities precedes identity formation. Previously formed identities are re-examined in search of 'who am I?'. Two identities (relevant to this stage) are involved, namely the 'social' identity and the 'occupational' identity. 'Confronting dispositions' required during Stage 5 is' commitment to identity' consistent to the core self or 'confusion of roles' reflecting the 'dystonic disposition'. Successful completion of Stage 5 leads to the 'virtue fidelity'. Fidelity is the ability to commit oneself to others while accepting others for who they are and allowing for ideological differences. If the young individual cannot commit to identity formation, he/she will experience role confusion and might not be sure about their role or place in society.

- Stage 6: Intimacy vs Isolation (18 – 40 years of age)

According to Erikson, the core strength of Stage 6 is 'intimacy' as the 'syntonic disposition.' The young individual begins to share him/herself intimately with others. Relationships are actively explored and result in long-term relationships outside the family circle. If the emerging adult cannot commit to another person intimately, 'isolation' is the 'dystonic disposition'. Erikson believes that 'intimacy' is only possible if preceded by a strong sense of identity. Successful completion of Stage 6 can result in relationships depicted by commitment, safety and care. If not, the emerging adult may fear commitment and avoid intimacy and relationships, leading to loneliness, isolation, and depression. The primary virtue of Stage 6 is 'love' (Erikson, 1953:100).

Marcia (1966):

According to Marcia (1966:551-553), adolescence and emerging adulthood is a phase associated with the active search for meaning. Marcia attempt to put Erikson's theories

into a more workable formation. According to Marcia's 'Identity Status Paradigm', the processes of ‘exploration' and 'commitment' are relevant to adulthood. Marcia furthermore focuses on individual differences in approaching and resolving identity issues. Decision-making forms an integral part of the exploration and commitment process. Exploration refers to the process where the emerging adult questions previously developed identities and searches for new alternatives. During the process of commitment, the emerging adult commits to what makes sense from explored content. Two action steps are therefore required, namely:

- questioning prior (shared with parents and significant others) beliefs such as religion, politics, worldviews and socially accepted behaviour, and
- commitment to new (altered) beliefs or perspectives, if former beliefs seem outdated.

Marcia identified four dynamic stages or 'statuses' of identity formation (1966:551-553):

- 'Foreclosure statuses' refer to identities formed without an active exploration of alternatives or questioning of prior beliefs (shared with parents or significant others). Firm commitments are made without proper exploration. Foreclosure can be linked to Stage 1-4 of Erikson's Psychosocial Theory (Erikson, 1953:99). Suppose the emerging adult is desperate to 'fit in'. In that case, he/she may fall into the trap of conforming to a particular group without adequately exploring the group's values, norms, and principles.
- During the next stage, the 'Moratorium stage', the adolescent challenges prior beliefs and perspectives and actively explores alternatives. During the moratorium, young individuals actively explore to find answers to 'who am I?' (Loevinger, 1966:199). The moratorium can be a prolonged process, according to Arnett (2000:470), because of the non-linear unfolding of development. The moratorium is characterised by active exploration without a commitment to a particular identity.
- When firm commitment is made, 'Identity' achievement is attained. A strong commitment follows active exploration. Identity achievement can be linked to the Fifth Stage of Erikson's Theory, 'identity formation' and is seen as the most mature status of identity formation.

- If the young person becomes overwhelmed and is unable to commit to identity and does not actively explore possibilities, he/she may be stuck in the 'Diffusion status'. The diffusion status of Marcia can be linked to the negative outcome or 'dystonic disposition' of 'Role confusion', as described by the Fifth Stage of Erikson's Theory (Erikson, 1953:99) and is seen as the least mature identity status.

Luyckx *et al.,* 2005:606-608) divided 'exploration and commitment' from Marcia's theory (1966:551) into two different dimensions or cycles. The first cycle captures the exploration of various identity possibilities and commits firmly to what makes sense. Both 'commitment making' and 'exploration in breadth' represent Marcia's commitment dimensions. Commitment making refers to the choices an emerging adult makes after an active process of exploration. Options are based on relevant and essential identity issues such as the young individual's beliefs, values, goals and norms. 'Exploration in breadth' depicts the active process of gathering information about various possibilities and guiding the emerging adult in the choice-making process (Crocetti, Rubini, Luycks & Meeus, 2008:986). During the second cycle, the individual re-evaluates former choices and identities. This cycle reflects the degree of the integrated self. 'Identification with commitment' and 'exploration in-depth' represent information about the existing identity commitments and guide the young individual when re-evaluating and maintaining these identities and choices (Luyckx *et al.,* 2005:607-608).

According to Luyckx *et al.* (2008:59-61), individuals stuck in the 'moratorium phase' (Marcia, 1966:551-553) are trapped in a 'ruminative cycle of continued exploration' and are unable to form firm commitments. According to Luyckx *et al.* (2008:60), a fifth identity process is added to the model of Luyckx *et al.* (2005:607) and is referred to as 'Ruminative exploration.' Ruminative exploration is the process that hinders healthy identity development. The emerging adult who finds it tough to find answers to identity questions, makes insufficient progress with the exploration process, feels uncertain and incompetent about a commitment to identity formation and is stuck in ruminative exploration.

Erikson (1968) as cited by Johnson *et al.* (2010:258), stated that adolescence is the ideal time for free exploration of different identities before taking up the responsibilities

of adulthood. However, he further believed that this period of experimenting, for some individuals, may be prolonged due to economic and/or social reasons and therefore could result in delayed exploration on a trial-and-error basis when aged, based opportunities become available.

According to Arnett (2006:8), emerging adulthood is an important developmental stage characterised by 'active exploration' in identity seeking. Young adults need to know what they like or dislike, what they enjoy doing, what they are good at and how their worldview is similar or different to that of their parents before making choices about career, partners and beliefs. He agrees with Erikson's opinion that emerging adulthood can be a prolonged process due to extended periods of education for some young people and thus later commitment to a career, later marriage and later entrance to parenthood (Anderson & Mounts, 2012:91; Arnett, 2006:8). Arnett (2006:296) further states that the time frame in which this exploration takes place might ‘differ from individual to individual and from culture to culture’. For example, suppose this stage is delayed for economic or social reasons. In that case, the young adult will wait longer for opportunities such as entering the world of work, forming intimate love relations and becoming financially independent before creating an adult identity.

The role of parents and family relationships in the identity formation of the young adult cannot be overlooked (Yanhong *et al.*, (2021:619). As cited in Johnson *et al.* (2010:281), Cote states that parents' acceptance of the young adult as an individual and connectedness between the young adult and parents, contributes to active identity exploration. Young adults participating in this study, reported autonomy and individuality as important elements in their identity formation.

1.2.3 Where am I going? Identity Forming based on Exploration

Emerging adulthood is a phase associated with active identity exploration. The young individual is challenged to find meaning without the influences of significant others such as parents, peers and society's expectations. Many identities are explored, such as 'civic identity', 'spiritual identity', 'cultural identity', 'gender identity', 'social identity' and 'occupational identity' (to name but a few). Civic identity means the service to the broader society and community, in other words, the individual's civic role. With this developmental task in mind, many organisations developed service-learning

programmes to help students develop a service orientated mindset (McAdams & Cox, 2010:20). Spirituality can be defined as 'based in a mystical sense of a personal relationship to an entity larger than one's self' (Kobayashi, 2008 as cited in Provenzo & Provenzo, 2009:750; De Bruin-Wassinkmaat, De Kock, Visser-Vogel, Bakker & Barnard, 2019:193). De Bruin *et al*., (2019:193) described spiritual identity as 'sorting through various identity elements such as goals, values and beliefs and making meaning out of this on a personal level. According to De Klerk (2005:64), spirituality and well-being are interlinked in psychological well-being, and young individuals have to be guided through this process. Cultural identity can be explained through Marcia's interrelated processes of 'exploring alternatives' and 'making a commitment' (Marcia, 1966:553), where emerging adults explore other cultures and ethnicity along with/without having an understanding of their own culture and ethnicity (Cohen & Kassan, 2018:134-135). Cultural identity is strongly influenced by the expectations of significant others such as parents, peers and society (Syed & Azmitia, 2008:1013). The way a person thinks and feels about who he/she truly is, the self-knowledge he/she gained through self-awareness, and a person's self-esteem plays a role in gender identity formation (Wagner *et al.,* 2013:150).

Most central to emerging adulthood is the young adult's exploration of two identities, **love** (intimate relationships, being part of a social group, getting married and starting a family) and **work** (education opportunities and career options). Moreover, love and work are the most critical indicators of adulthood (Arnett, 2000:469). The researcher will accordingly focus on 'social identity' and 'occupational identity' for this study.

1.2.3.1 Social and romantic identity

According to Gorbett and Kruczek (2008:58) and Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:230), social self-esteem can be defined as a person's ability to communicate, relate to other people, display confidence and be open to others. In addition, Tajfel 1979 (as cited in Dovidio *et al.,* 2011:180 and Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:219) postulates that an individual's perception of 'belonging to a certain social group' strongly influences a person's social identity.

Why is it essential for a young adult to develop a social self? Dovidio *et al.* (2011:579) and Yanhong *et al.*, (2021:619) state that young adults need to define themselves

socially, to belong to social groups and attain new relationships outside the familiar borders of the family. Close relationships outside the family are crucial for adjusting to and forming social relationships with significant others in the emerging adult's transition towards adulthood (Shomaker & Furman, 2009:580); Song *et al.*, 2021:1126). According to Lansu and Cillessen (2011:134), social decision making might be influenced by peer status. Although almost everybody belongs to a social group, the status and level of inclusion in a particular group varies. Young adults are more likely to choose a social group based on their status in a specific group (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:218). A lot of research about peer status during adolescence is available, but little research is found about the peer status of emerging adults. A possible explanation may be that research becomes more challenging when young individuals are no longer part of structured school groups.

Involvement in and the quality of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood is significant for social experiences and impacts either positively or negatively on the social-identity formation of the young individual (Dulmen *et al.,* 2007:337).

1.2.3.2 Occupational identity

Occupational identity during emerging adulthood seems to be an identity that is not well researched. According to Anderson and Mounts (2012:90), emerging adults often find jobs they do not like or where they do not fit because they did not actively explore various work-related environments. Anderson and Mounts (2012) further suggest that although identity formation is a lifelong process, some determining factors should intersect to form this critical identity. These factors include:

- Flexibility in thinking about the self and options (being open to new experiences),
- Perceiving the self as separate from the family and as a unique individual,
- Normative events such as finishing secondary school and entering a new environment that promote self-exploration, and
- Exposure to new backgrounds and various worldviews encourage the development of different skills (Anderson & Mounts, 2012:90).

Observations were done by Shulman *et al.* (2009:243) who state that young people 'may oscillate between transitory and inconsistent states'. For example, they often

decide on an occupation, find a job and then leave it again to return to training or change to a different profession. Others might switch between working and periods of unemployment and even go and live with their parents again. Therefore, the emerging adult must adopt an occupational identity to prepare them for this 'adult role'.

Young individuals must set future work goals (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:7-8) to form strong occupational identities. Future work goals will help the emerging adult focus on the future ‘occupational self' and motivate him/her to find meaning in life. Goals assist the emerging adult to obtain a sense of urgency to find the meaning of 'where am I going?' (Yeager & Bundick, 2009:424-429).

1.2.3.3 Goalsetting – an essential part of identity-forming

Goalsetting is a crucial part of identity formation. While actively exploring different identities, the emerging adult is also confronted with new roles, discovering own values (apart from parents' views), finding purpose and forming altered relationships. Goals create road maps for the future and must therefore be realistic and not static to adjust to life's changes and challenges (Salmela-Aro *et al.,* 2007:691; Booker, Dunsmore & Fivush, 2021:3261).

The advantages associated with finding meaning and purpose in life include personal growth, self-actualisation, life satisfaction and psychological well-being. In discovering life purpose, a platform for goal setting is being laid from where realistic future expectations can be navigated (Bundick, 2011:91). Meaning-making and finding his/her life purpose is closely linked to authenticity. As part of becoming an independent, authentic adult, the emerging adult is expected to take up the responsibility to attain goals defined by own insights and expectations (Shulman 2005:582; Shulman *et al.,* 2009:245).

1.2.4 How do I get there?

There is an essential need for further research relating to positive development during emerging adulthood, specifically during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Positive development can be defined as social competence (empathy, self-control and responsibility), life satisfaction (how happy the individual is with life, work and

relationships) and social capital (civic engagements and a sense of authenticity) (Hawkins *et al.,* 2011:89).

1.2.4.1 Becoming the Authentic self

The 'true self' (authentic self) can be described as the image of what/whom a person strives to become, apart from others. The emerging adult has to see him/herself in a desired future state based on core identity strengths (Belle, Ragins & Kram, 2008: 456); Song *et al.*, 2021:1126). According to Scharf and Mayseless (2010:85) and Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:218-219), authenticity is to be 'true to own qualities despite the influence of others'. Authenticity implies self-knowledge and an ability to differentiate oneself from others. Every person has an 'ideal self'. If this ideal self is compared to the 'real self' or the present self and the comparison is congruent, it can be considered a strength. If there is a gap, it is regarded as a growth area. Striving authenticity reflects a strong individualistic accent, but many researchers define authenticity as 'finding a balance between autonomy and connectedness' (Scharf & Mayseless, 2010:85). Discovering the 'true self' almost always requires in-depth personal discussions with others, such as peers, parents and/or a mentor. Feedback forms an essential part of becoming an authentic individual (Belle *et al.,* 2008:451; Yanhong *et al.*, (2021:615).

Many researchers agree that emerging adults need guidance to become the authentic self as they experience many challenges during the transitional phase to adulthood (Wurdinger & Enloe, 2011:85).

1.2.4.2 Challenges that impact authenticity during emerging adulthood

Erikson (1963:70) states that young adults may experience identity crises when they recognise that they are no longer adolescents and have to meet adult-like expectations, to which they do not know how to respond. Although Erikson assumes that this identity crisis occurs typically at ages 18 – 24 years, later research showed that this could be a prolonged process due to changes in economic, social and cultural environments. Impacting factors such as extended studies (getting more than one degree), semi-autonomy or longer financial dependency on parents and later marriage in industrial societies, to name but a few, may delay adult identity formation (Arnett, 2000:469).

During identity formation, the young adult is bombarded with questions such as: *'What career path best suits me?', 'What religious, moral and political values can I call my own?', 'Who am I as a male or female and as a sexual being?' 'How important is marriage and raising children to me?', 'Just where do I fit into society?'* (Arnett, 2000:468; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:218-219). These questions have to be answered during the confusing time of coping with many changes such as body image, academic demands and social challenges (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:453). Emerging adulthood is the time when the individual is confronted with the most altering life decisions ever. According to Shulman and Nurmi (2010:2), these transitional challenges include aspects such as career demands, involvement in intimate relationships, the need for family planning, selection of social groups to belong to and taking up civic and social responsibilities.

According to Shulman and Nurmi (2010:3), three major development tasks are associated with the transitional phase to adulthood. Firstly, emerging adults have to consider normative expectations of others (Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:219), understand new (unfamiliar) developmental tasks related to the transition to adulthood, and try to meet institutional requirements. Secondly, they must measure norms, values and perceptions gained from significant others (parents, peers and society) (Smith, Cobb, Reed-Fitzke, Ferraro, Duncan & Lucier, 2021:53) against those obtained through interactions with diverse peers. Thirdly, they must form secure identities based on all of the influences mentioned above.

Challenges require goal setting, decision making, planning and commitment. These challenges take an enormous amount of effort from the emerging adult, who often has limited assistance from support structures (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:7). The lack of support coupled with challenges may lead to discomfort and confusion (Shulman & Ben-artzi, 2003:217). Abilities such as coping with change, feeling contented, managing stress, problem-solving abilities, accurate decision-making and effective communication are skills young individuals often lack but need during emerging adulthood and, therefore, they need guidance (Belle *et al.,* 2008:448; Wargo, 2007:3).

1.2.4.3 Emerging adults need guidance to form authentic identities

Emerging adulthood is associated with challenges such as fluctuations, frustration, discontinuities and uncertainty. Young individuals feel as though they 'stand-alone' and therefore need guidance (Shulman, 2005:579). Emerging adulthood is also a time to stop, reflect and make changes while actively exploring identity possibilities. The young adult needs guidance to overcome challenges such as expectations of significant others, future dreams and aspirations, lack of self-awareness and adaptability to unfamiliar situations. Through guidance, adaptive skills can be discovered and behavioural changes made (Belle *et al.,* 2008:448; Johnson *et al.,* 2010:263). Shulman *et al.* (2009:244) proclaim that skills and environmental support facilitate 'successful transitions'. The emerging adult needs skills such as self-motivation, flexibility and has to be purpose-driven. Without the help of family, peers, teachers, counsellors and supervisors, the transition to adulthood can be challenging (Shulman *et al.,* 2009:244). O'Connor *et al.* (2011:861) state that it is crucial to identify challenges to address in this process of transitional changes during emerging adulthood.

According to Johnson *et al.* (2010:263), emerging adults need contexts that provide high levels of support during identity exploration because each social context in which the young individual finds him/herself (university, college, amongst unfamiliar peers and many more) has its own norms, values and rules which impact the development of the individual. These interactions provide valuable opportunities to discover abilities, strengths and self-relevant information. Still, it can also be overwhelming to figure out 'who I authentically am' without merely integrating and adjusting to the influences of the context. Some social contexts may be less structured, provide fewer clear roles, norms and rules and contribute to the emerging adult's feeling of being 'lost' (Johnson *et al.,* 2010:264).

Emerging adulthood is a time of active exploration (free from the more structured supervision during adolescence), and therefore risk-taking may occur. (McCabe, Modecki & Barber, 2016:2291). Emerging adults often think they are immortal and invulnerable to harm and often engage in risky behaviour, such as excessive drinking, sexual promiscuity, illicit drug use and dangerous driving. Therefore, poor decision-making skills can have prolonged consequences for the individual, their parents and

the broader society. Coping skills such as goal setting, proper decision-making skills, and cognitive awareness are only a few skills young adults need to guide them through this risky stage of development (McCabe *et al.,* 2016: 2291; Wargo 2003:1).

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

As a psychologist in private practice, the researcher often consults with emerging adults who want to change careers, are uncertain of former career choices and do not have sufficient self-knowledge to make life decisions. As a result, they are experiencing frustration and sometimes feel depressed because they do not know who they are, where they are heading and how to get there.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The emerging adult may find it challenging to form authentic relationships due to prejudice from others or when perceiving others, who are 'different from the self, as not worthwhile to form relationships. This positive or negative comparison impacts the sense of the self and commitment to different identities (Dunning, 2007:787; Krayer, Ingledew & Iphofen, 2008:893; Shulman *et al.,* 2005:58). Emerging adults generally lack adequate self-knowledge and therefore, rely on significant others such as parents, peers and society members for feedback to form identities. Significant others may have different expectations of emerging adults than their expectations of themselves, resulting in less committed identity formation (Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2014:13). The complexity of new and different interactions with others, rapid changes (such as altered roles, relationships, and new-found independence), fear of rejection and seeking approval from significant others may lead to 'being who others want me to be' and not to 'becoming my authentic self' (Kaniušonytė & Žukauskienė 2018:42).

Self-knowledge precedes a strong sense of the self and may also negatively impact the emerging adult's ability to 'plan for the future and to set goals'. A strong sense of the 'self' forms the basis for self-motivational behaviour (Lee, Porfelli & Hirschi, 2016:125; Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:69-70). The emerging adult, therefore, needs to understand who he/she is (strengths and weaknesses) and where he/she is going (self-motivational behaviour) but often needs guidance to form a strong sense of the self to be able to become an authentic adult (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:69-70).

1.5 THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTION, SUB QUESTIONS AND MAIN AIM AND OBJECTIVES

The main research question is: *What challenges does the young emerging adult face in becoming an authentic adult?*

The main research question necessitated the formulation of sub research questions:

1. What are the identities the young adult needs to become an authentic adult eventually?
2. What are the challenges the young adult faces in developing identities for authentic adulthood?
3. What guidance does the young adult need to become an authentic adult?

The researcher aims to research the challenges emerging adults face in becoming authentic adults. The following objectives will be studied through a literature review as well as an empirical study, namely:

Objective 1: To study the identities formed during emerging adulthood that eventually precedes authentic adulthood.
Objective 2: To understand the challenges emerging adults face during the transformation phase to become an authentic adult.
Objective 3: To supply possible guidelines to assist emerging adults going through the transitional phase to authentic adulthood.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

1.6.1 Research Paradigm

A research paradigm refers to the general method and approach used by the researcher to gain insight and knowledge about a particular focus of research. Different philosophies determine a specific paradigm (Dudovskiy, 2016:39-40).

According to Dudovskiy (2016:39), a research paradigm is determined by the philosophy chosen by the researcher. Philosophies like 'positivism', 'interpretivism' 'realism', or 'pragmatism' guide a particular paradigm. Positivism is based on facts and

accurate data interpretation, free from subjectivity. Pragmatism aims to interpret through different perspectives and consider the big picture. Realism is of the notion that human behaviour is determined by its essence or nature and repetitive patterns of the past. Interpretivism is based on the influence of human subjectivity in research findings. Different approaches such as symbolic interactionism (shared meanings in different cultures), phenomenology (direct experience with a particular phenomenon) and hermeneutics (understanding) form part of interpretivism.

For this study, the researcher used interpretivism as paradigm with the emphasis on phenomenology and social constructivism. As cited in Flick *et al.* (2004:81), Edmund Husserl describes phenomenology as an approach/paradigm to psychological work that tends to study the person or self in relation to its world. According to Krysik and Fynn (2010:118), phenomenology aims to describe the world of the phenomenon.

Following a phenomenological paradigm, the young adult in transition as a phenomenon was studied to understand the underlying reasons and motivations for their behaviour and the challenges that they face in becoming an authentic adult. The young adult in a transitional phase of his/her life was explored to understand what can be done to assist him/her during this life-changing stage in become an authentic adult and successfully adjusting to challenges.

Emerging adults were interviewed. Then, through observation and conversation, the researcher tried to develop an understanding of the emerging adult's world, the challenges they experience and then determine what guidance he/she needs to become an authentic adult.

1.6.2 Research Approach

The researcher has to decide whether she is going to use a qualitative or quantitative research approach. According to Krysik and Fynn (2010:49), these two processes differ in terms of the purpose of the planned research. Quantitative research aims to generalise its findings based on a hypothesis, while qualitative research, which is used in this study, aims to come to a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon.

Krysik and Fynn (2010:103) and Hennik, Hutter & Bailey, (2020:42) refer to the goal of qualitative research as 'to develop an explanatory theory based on grounded reality.

In other words, the researcher looked for meaningful, repeated themes in collected data, which were coded and categorised.

The qualitative research approach aims to uncover prevalent trends, themes and patterns. Qualitative research aims to comprehend the whole picture as well as the interaction between phenomena. In other words, the researcher will try to come to accurate reflections of the emerging adult's beliefs, feelings, actions and reactions (Donley & Grauerholz, 2012:8; Flick, von Kardoff & Steinke, 2004:3; Sansone, Morf & Panter, 2008:466; Hennik *et al.,* 2020:44).

A qualitative research approach was used for this study as the researcher aimed to come to an understanding of:

- the difficulties young adults face during the transitional stage of their lives,
- new identities that need to be formed,
- identified challenges to be met during the transitional phase, and
- the guidance emerging adults need to overcome above mentioned challenges.

1.6.3 Research Design

The researcher has to determine what research design, research approach and data collection methods were needed to address the research question. Research design is a method through which the researcher plans to answer the research question. According to Dudovskiy (2016:66) and Hennik *et al.,* (2020:29-33), research design can be divided into exploratory- and conclusive research designs. For this study, the researcher preferred an exploratory design. An exploratory design does not aim to find definite answers. Instead, it seeks to find insight into a particular phenomenon, in this study, the emerging adult's identities and needs by exploring the research questions, therefore an exploratory, phenomenological design.

1.7 RESEARCH METHODS

1.7.1 Sampling

According to Vogt, Haeffele and Gardner (2012:115) as well as Hennik *et al.,* (2020:91), a sampling method in qualitative research could be purposeful (where interviews are held for a specific purpose) or convenient (doing what the easiest is).

In this research, purposeful sampling was used because certain determining factors guided the selection. The researcher's purposeful target age group included students aged between 18 and 25 years. In addition, participants needed to be in a transitional phase, namely, recently started studies or in their final year of study and planning to start work shortly. The target sample represented gender (males and females) and race (black, Indian, white, and coloured individuals). The researcher asked for volunteers at a university conveniently near to her and advertised through various forums on the campus, for example, Student Facebook page, Student publication, at the offices of the Student Advisors and at the residences on campus.
The researcher planned to interview 16 University students - eight students in their first year of study, comprising 2 White, 2 Black, 2 Indian and 2 Coloured students, one male and one female and eight students in their final year of study, comprising 2 White, 2 Black, 2 Indian and 2 Coloured students, one male and one female.

For this study, the following guidelines were followed when selecting participants:

- The sample was heterogeneous (maximum variation) with regards to gender and race
- The ages of participants varied between 18 and 25 years of age

The sample included students in their first year of study and students in their final year of study who were about to start working. They represented the sample of emerging adults in transition (between school and tertiary studies or tertiary studies and work).

1.7.2 Data Collection

According to Donley & Grauerholz (2012:44), the individual interview is the most commonly used data collection method in qualitative research. In this study, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. Krysik and Fynn (2010:113) and Hennik *et al.,* (2020:116) define semi-structured interviews as interviews 'guided by a list of topics' and conducted with the 'aid of probes'.

In this research, the researcher uses an interview schedule with semi-structured questions to guide the interviews (Appendix D-E). Specific concepts were researched, and therefore all interviews used an interview schedule with main questions and probes (Krysik & Fynn 2010:113; Hennik *et al.,* (2020:116).

Firstly, the researcher gained permission from Unisa Ethics Review and Clearance Committee. She also obtained written consent from all participants after explaining the purpose of the study and asking for voluntary participation in the research. She discussed logistics, the significance of the research and the value of participation. Aspects such as length of interviews and place of interviews were discussed to ensure participants were well informed. Interviews were held after class hours when the student/s were available. Before the interviews commenced, the researcher again explained the purpose of the study. Open-ended questions with probes (Appendix D-E), as well as techniques such as paraphrasing (stating what is heard in a different form), clarification (ask for clarity when vague responses are given), encouragement (probing participant with statements such as 'tell me more') and acknowledgement (showing interest and attention) were used throughout the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in the research process as it allows the researcher to explore deeper and ask more questions when interesting information emerges. Therefore, a set of open-ended questions with probes was prepared in advance on an interview schedule as guidelines to allow maximum flexibility.

Video recordings of all interviews were made. Permission was obtained from all participants (Appendix C). No concealed media (hidden cameras, one-way mirrors, or hidden microphones) were used, and all media used was discussed with each participant. Videos and tapes are being kept in a safe place and destroyed when no longer in use after five years to ensure the participant's privacy and anonymity. To get individuals to contribute to a free-flowing conversation, they were assured that their shared information would be kept confidential and only be used for academic purposes. Faces were blurred after recording and transcribing the content.

1.7.3 Data Analysis and Representation

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:397) and Hennik *et al.,* (2020:207), the purpose of data analysis is, in essence, to find common themes and contradictions and to compare findings with the literature review done. Therefore, the researcher must first reduce the large volume of data by discriminating between what is significant and what is not. Secondly, a framework to communicate what is discovered, must be

constructed. Finally, by doing so, order and structure are created. Data analysis is thus a process of critical thinking and reasoning.

In this study, collected data were transcribed verbatim. Tesch's method of data analysis for qualitative research was used to analyse the data for themes and categories (thematic analysis). According to Tesch's method, as explained in Creswell (2014:198) and Tesch (1990:142-145), the following steps should be followed:

1) The researcher reads through the transcriptions to get an overall idea and note emerging themes (Creswell, 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:142).
2) The next step is to read through all transcriptions thoroughly and the researcher makes notes of the underlying meanings of participants (Creswell, 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:142).
3) The researcher notes emerging themes and topics, and then clusters and codes these after reading and re-reading transcription (De Vos et al., 2011:409).
4) The next step determines the most descriptive codes and to group these codes to form categories (Creswell, 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:143).
5) All relevant data is then assembled in the relevance of the different sub-questions (Creswell, 2014:198).
6) If there is a need to re-code some of the themes, the researcher re-codes those particular themes (Creswell 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:145).
7) Lastly, research findings are compared to the objectives and aims of the study (Dudovskiy 2016:135). The researcher then compares the results to the literature research.

After transcribing the data, themes and concepts (coding) are grouped so that central themes emerge to make conclusions.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The researcher used the social constructivism and eco-systemic framework as the theoretical frameworks. Social constructivism refers to an approach where an individual 'constructs' his/her reality by his/her own experiences through interaction with others. It fits well with Interpretivism. According to Vygotsky (1978:85-87), cognitive functions have their origin in social interactions. In other words, children learn through social negotiation. Interaction with others, differences in culture and society

are constructs of learning. New learning is integrated into existing knowledge and pre-existing frames of reference and is therefore subjective. In social constructivism, problem-solving and learning occur through 'shared experiences'. In other words, new knowledge (gained through interaction with others) is 'matched' against pre-existing knowledge and integrated to make sense of the world. In this study, the identity formation of the emerging adult is influenced by interaction and feedback from significant others and the impact of social contexts such as culture and society (Elliott *et al.,* 2000:256); Cohen & Kassan, (2018:134-135)., therefore social constructivism works well with this research.

According to the American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology (http://www.apa.org/), an eco-systemic approach can be defined as 'an approach to therapy that emphasizes the interaction between the individual or family and larger social contexts, such as schools, workplaces, and social agencies'. It, therefore, focuses on the 'interrelatedness and interdependency' of a phenomenon and its broader environment. An eco-systemic framework refers thus to the many ways in which the social context influences an individual's cognition and identity formation (Singal, 2006:239). According to the social-contextual impact on the perceived self, a person incorporates feedback from all the different levels, namely the 'macro-level' (broader society), 'middle-level' (family and friends) and 'micro-level' (daily experiences) (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:-76). For example, in this study, the emerging adult's identity formation will be influenced by his/her culture group, the society (school, neighbourhood and friends) he/she grew up in, and the daily experiences he/she encompasses.

1.9 ISSUES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

Given and Saumure (2008:896-897) explain 'Trustworthiness' as measuring what is supposed to be measured and is made up of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

1.9.1 Credibility

Credibility is associated with the richness and the accurateness to which the phenomenon is described in the study. Thus, the researcher aims to use obtained data to accurately describe the young adult in his/her transitional phase in terms of specific

components studied and accurately capture the collected data (see Given & Saumure 2008:138).

1.9.2 Transferability

Transferability refers to the researcher's awareness of his/her scope of study and ability to apply conclusions to this scope. The range of research, in this case, is the young adult in a transitioning phase of his/her life. Therefore, all data collected regarding this phenomenon applied to this specific phase of the young adult's life (see Given & Saumure 2008:886).

1.9.3 Dependability

Methods and procedures must be described accurately to ensure similar outcomes for further studies regarding the same phenomenon, namely the authenticity of the young adult (see Given & Saumure 2008:209).

1.9.4 Confirmability

The data obtained must accurately match all interpretations. All statements must be validated by literature. The researcher aimed to ensure that all findings were supported by collected data (Given & Saumure 2008:113).

1.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Sansone *et al.* (2008:45-71), the main ethical issues to be considered are informed consent, privacy, confidentiality and anonymity as well as the right of participants to withdraw.

1.10.1 Informed Consent

The researcher explained the research process and expected outcomes to participants to gain trust, a working alliance and willingness to participate. The researcher, therefore, informed all participants in advance about the research purpose, motives and why they were selected**.** Procedures and measures were fully explained. No information about the research was withheld from the participants (see Sansone *et al.* 2008:58).

1.10.2 Privacy

As in any therapeutic situation, as well as in research, participants' privacy must be respected (Sansone, Morf & Panter, 2008:58).

1.10.3 Confidentiality and Anonymity

According to Smith (2011:43), any identifying information needs to be removed, and videos and tapes must be kept safe to ensure the participant's confidentiality and anonymity**.** To get participants to contribute to a free-flowing conversation, they need to be assured that their shared information will be kept confidential. The researcher must, therefore, ensure participants that personal data will be kept confidential. Furthermore, it is essential to set limitations and boundaries within the group to establish a therapeutic working alliance (Gardner & Coombs, 2011:83). For this research, all research information was handled with confidentiality. Without written consent from participants no information can be disclosed (Sansone *et al.,* 2008:61).

1.10.4 The Right to Withdraw

The right to withdraw refers to a participant's right to withdraw from the research and his/her right to remove information (Smith, 2011:43). All participants took part voluntarily and had the right to withdraw at any research time. However, the researcher built a trust relationship with each participant in terms of ethical issues.

1.11 DELIMITATIONS

For this study, the sample included only students in their first year of study and students in their final year of study who were about to start working. They represented the sample of emerging adults in transition (between school and tertiary studies or tertiary studies and work).

The researcher interviewed White, Black, and Indian students of both genders. Unfortunately, no coloured volunteers could be found.

The researcher focused only on social and occupational identity development, the most prominent identities of emerging adulthood.

It was not possible to discuss all challenges for emerging adulthood – the researcher, therefore, focused on the following:

- Difficulties in adjusting to emerging adulthood
- The non-linear unfolding of milestones and influence thereof on studies
- Experienced pressure and feelings of being lost and confused
- Ineffective management of time and finding balance
- Difficulties connecting socially/romantically
- Lacking self-knowledge and being inauthentic
- Difficulties making choices and setting goals

The Self Help Guide for emerging adults, as part of the recommendations, is still in the process of development as a digital application

1.12 CONCEPT CLARIFICATION

Emerging adult: Emerging adulthood stretches from late adolescence to early adulthood (18 to 25 years) (Arnett 2000:469), and typically describes the confusing stage associated with searching for 'who am I' (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:453; (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:218).

Challenges: According to the Cambridge Advanced learner's Dictionary (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/challenge), challenges refer to the mental or physical effort needed to successfully do something. For the emerging adult, challenges include gaining self-knowledge, finding support during the unfamiliar unfolding of adult milestones, forming new identities and adjusting to adult roles and responsibilities (Shulman *et al.,* 2005:579; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:218-219).

Authenticity: Authenticity refers to 'the extent to which individuals are true to their qualities, despite external influences and pressures' (Scharf and Mayseless, 2010:85). Self-knowledge is needed to differentiate the self from others to act and behave

according to one's 'true self' (Kernis & Goldman, 2006:293; Ryan & Deci, 2000:68-72; Smith, *et al.,* 2021:53).

1.13 PRELIMINARY CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Introduction to research. An overview of what the researcher planned to do in the research was unpacked. An intensive look at who the emerging adult is, what identities must be formed through emerging adulthood and what challenges the emerging adult experience when exploring new identities was presented in this first chapter.

Chapter 2: In this chapter, a literature survey and theoretical background of the phenomenon 'Emerging adult' and the development of identity (Self, Self-esteem) are discussed.

Chapter 3: comprises a literature survey of the psychological aspects related to the development of authenticity in young adults in transition. Challenges and guidance needed are identified.

Chapter 4: In this chapter**,** the theoretical framework, research design, data collection trough semi-structured interviews and ethical issues such as trustworthiness and the right to withdraw will be discussed.

Chapter 5: presents the analysis and interpretation of obtained data using Tesch's method of data analysis for qualitative research. An interpretation of the data with the use of categorisation (themes and coding) will be presented.

Chapter 6: The last chapter consists of conclusions, guidelines for stakeholders to assist young adults, recommendations for further study, and limitations attained.

1.14 SUMMARY

The young emerging adult in transition to adulthood experiences many challenges in becoming an authentic adult. Many do not know themselves well enough to make choices and form identities. The two identities mostly formed during emerging adulthood are social identity and occupational identity. Emerging adults find it challenging to become authentic as others, such as parents and society, influence

how they see themselves; as a result, they feel confused and 'in between' and need guidance and support during this journey towards authentic adulthood.

CHAPTER 2

IDENTITY FORMATION DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

WHO AM I?

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is a transitional time in the life of a young individual. It is a time of feeling 'in-between'. Adolescence is left behind, but adulthood is still not reached. It is a time of active exploration and searching for meaning. The old identities formed during the playful childhood interactions are not relevant anymore as the young individual finds him/herself in new uncertain circumstances with new roles that are still unclear. Emerging adulthood is fraught with new challenges and sometimes painful discoveries of 'who am I?' and 'where am I going?'. The familiar school, families and friendships are left behind, and unfamiliar territories await – territories without 'manuals'. The young individual cannot return to the familiar but is sometimes not ready for what lies ahead. The only way forward is by finding 'who am I' within the new context of life. To form identities, the self-knowledge gained through self-awareness is thus crucial.

2.2 SELF, SELF-CONCEPT AND IDENTITY ARE NESTED ELEMENTS

According to Oyserman *et al.* (2012:74-75) and Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:219)

, the terms ‘self', 'self-concept' and 'identity are 'nested elements' (Figure 2.1).

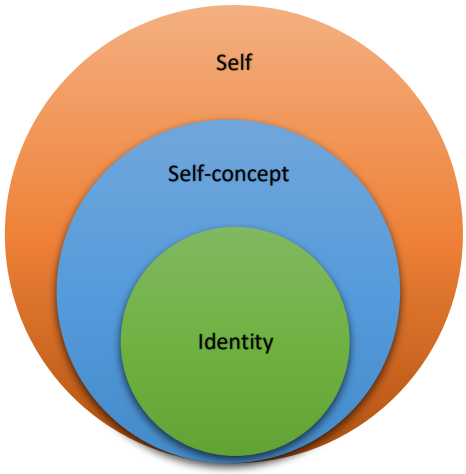


Figure 2.1: The 'self,' 'self-concept' and 'identity' as nested elements

The 'self' encompasses an individual's experience of being an independent unit, different and separate from others. The 'self' includes both a complex array of emotions and the totality of physical traits such as skin, hair and eye colour of an individual. 'Self-concept' refers to the intellectual content of mentioned experiences, in other words, the content of what an individual 'thinks' and 'believes to be true' about the self. 'Identity' or 'identities' are part/s of an individual's self-concept and define 'who a person is'. An individual's identity represents those characteristics and personal traits that separate an individual from others. To understand 'who am I?' an individual must have a secure sense of self, based on self-awareness and self-knowledge to form identities (Oyserman *et al.*, 2012:74-75; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:219; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126).

2.2.1 The Self

Oyserman et al. (2012:71) define the 'self' as a 'warm feeling' a person experiences about 'me' or about 'us.' A person tends to think about the self (to make sense of the self actively) and usually is aware of the thinking process about the self. This simultaneous 'thinking about' and awareness of the thought process is called 'reflexive capacity.' The object of thinking, 'me', is created either as a total of memories (outside particular social or other contexts) or within specific moments and social settings. The individual can, therefore, reflect on the self in more than one way. The self can be perceived as 'separate from others' or 'in association with others' (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:219). When the self is viewed as different or separate from others, an 'individual sense' of self is established compared to a perception of similarity where a collective sense of 'us' is created. The ability to perceive the self from different perspectives (or different selves) and within different time frames (moments over time) allows for prediction on how social interactions will impact individuals in the future (Ungvarsky, 2019:3).

According to Frederick Rhodewalt (1949-2011), the 'self' consists of many 'linked memories' (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:669; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:219). The content of memories is based on an individual's knowledge of whom he/she is, his/her values, preferences and goals, is influenced by his/her past experiences and includes a person's present, 'self-ascribed' traits. Early memories (18 to 24 months of age) already affect the definition of the self (Neilsen, Suddendorf & Slaughter, 2006:177).

According to Oyserman *et al.* (2012:75-76), developing language (semantic) capacities during childhood fosters 'autobiographical' memories through which the child makes sense of the self and can articulate how he/she sees the self in different contexts such as school, at home and with a peer group.

Social context encompasses the self within a particular time and place. Three levels of social context are identified (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:-76; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126) in line with the eco-systemic approach. On a 'macro-level,' the broader society and a particular cultural group to which the individual belongs form the individual's sense of self. In this regard, a person sees him/herself as a part of a bigger group, for example; a black, Zulu-speaking, South-African. The 'middle-level' refers to the impact family members, the neighbourhood or particular school has on the perceived self of the individual. The young boy, for example, who attends a boys-only school will develop a 'self', based on the 'brotherhood' experienced. On a 'micro-level,' daily and momentary happenings influence the way the self is formed. The young adult, for example, may develop a self-perception of inadequacy if exams are continuously failed in the broader social context (university as part of the middle-level social context). According to the social-contextual impact on the perceived self, a person incorporates feedback from all the different levels, namely the 'macro-level' (society), 'middle-level' (family and friends) and 'micro-level' (own experiences).

Oyserman *et al.* (2012:-75), Ungvarsky (2019:3) and Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:219) also postulate that the self and identities are products of a social context. An individual tends to define the 'self' based on expectations and prescriptions of significant others. Expectations that others have of the emerging adult are 'rules', prescribed by religion, gender roles, cultural traditions and society. The created self will be strengthened if endorsed by significant others. Approval provides the individual with a positive feeling about the self. Individuals might change behaviour to align with the views of significant others. The emerging adult, for example, will comply with institutional rules to align others' views with his/her self-perception of being a responsible person.

Dunning (2005 as cited in Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:785) postulates that the self can be perceived as an acting agent or a 'doer'. The self is influenced by and reacts to the environment. This acting self is referred to as 'I'. On the other hand, the self is also perceived by looking 'inward'. Nested in this self-contemplation are one's skills,

opinions and feelings. This self is referred to as 'me'. This self-experience changes over time as one grows older – adolescents experience themselves as individuals with personalities and characteristics. The 'self' impacts on thinking processes and emotional reactions. It guides behaviour (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:785). Emotions involve self-consciousness, and to experience emotions, a sense of self is required. For example, if a person worries that others will negatively perceive his/her behaviour or actions, emotions like embarrassment or shame can be triggered. The sense of self furthermore impacts the way one acts. A person is more likely to act in ways that will not affect his/her sense of self. For example, if the young individual's experience of 'self' is a person with high moral values, actions will usually align with this self-experience and reflect high moral values.

The self is generally stable, but changes in mood and motivation may occur, depending on experiences. Momentary changes are thus possible, although there is stability in the 'self', based on memory. If the individual's knowledge of the 'self' (based on memories) is expanded, his/her self-concept may change. For example, a person experiences him/herself as an introvert, and people respond to him/her accordingly. Suppose this person is exposed to parties and others start responding to him/her differently, in which case, his/her self-experience may change momentarily as new information about the self may emerge and be added to memory content. This person may thus have a revised and adjusted sense of the self (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007:669).

2.2.2 Self-Concept – The Cognitive Structure of 'Me.'

Self-concept refers to the **cognitive content** of the self – in other words, it involves the process of thinking (I think) and the object of the thinking (me). This knowledge about the 'self' contains information such as beliefs, abilities, limitations, personality traits, motivating values, goals and the different roles that a person takes on in various spheres of life (Wilkinson, 2020:8). Self-knowledge predicts the way a person behaves, is motivated and makes sense of the world (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:69-70; Kärchner *et al.,* 2021:320). Yet, the young individual's self-concept contains far more than the knowledge or the beliefs he/she has about the self. Self-concept also portrays a perception of how one 'feels like' or 'smells like'. A person's concept of self thus also includes sensory information (Schlegel *et al.,* 2009:473; Wilkinson, 2020:9).

Therefore, a person's total mental image of the 'self' is called self-concept (MacKinnon, 2020:21). Self-concepts are used to make sense of the self in the world (Who am I?), direct attention to the future ('Whom will I become' and 'Where am I going?'), and protect the person's fundamental self-worth or self-esteem. A person, therefore, needs to become 'self-aware' (thinking component) and form feelings about the self (self-esteem) as well as identities based on knowledge about the self. Self-concept portrays those traits that 'are true to oneself' or the authentic self, in other words, qualities considered descriptive to the 'real, true self' (Schlegel *et al.,* 2009:473; Wilkinson, 2020:7; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:219).

According to research done by Shulman (2005:581) and Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:221), more than one self-concept or self-state (multiplicity of self-states) is possible. The multiple self-states are adjustable in different life situations and can take on different roles in different circumstances. Multiple self-concepts may include gender, religious, race, ethnic, sexual orientations and political self-concepts, to name but a few. Other examples of multiple self-concepts include the different roles people take on. For instance, a woman can have a self-concept as a mother, child, colleague, sister, friend and citizen of her country. As a young person transits to adulthood, he/she experiments with different self-concepts and forms identities based on the feedback he/she gets from others. Therefore, the self-concept includes a judgement of the self individually and within a social context. The content of individual judgement includes what a person knows about the self – whether he/she can adjust emotionally, what physical strengths or weaknesses are available and other physical aspects (attractive, tall, short, fat or thin).

Judgement within a social context refers to the self in relationships with others such as family, peer groups, colleagues or members of society (Kärchner *et al.*, 2021:320). Koole (2007:789) further distinguishes between 'complexed self-complexities' and 'simple self-complexities.' 'Complexed self-complexity' refers to the ability of a person to make a distinction between many dimensions of the self. In contrast, 'simple self-complexity' relates to a few broad aspects of the self only. For example, a person being retrenched from work will be able to differentiate between his/her work-self-concept and other self-concepts (such as being a dad, having additional skills or expertise, being a husband and having the ability to make plans). The person will

realise that not all dimensions of the self are involved and overcome setbacks. If the same person has a simple 'self-complexity', a setback such as retrenchment impacts all or nearly all aspects of his self-concept. He might feel worthless in more than just his occupational self-concept and therefore be more prone to stress and less able to overcome a setback in a particular domain of self (Koole, 2007:789).

The thinking component of a person's self-concept is referred to as self-awareness. An individual actively gathers information about the self and become aware of different aspects of the self. This process of information gathering is best explained in research done by Mateeva and Dimitrov (2013:206). According to Mateeva and Dimitrov (2013:206), self-awareness is a person's availability to as much knowledge as possible about an individual's feelings, motives, desires, and cognitions. 'Knowing' includes information about an individual's strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, 'knowing' includes emotions and conflicts with the self and influences emotions and conflicts on behaviour. Self-awareness develops through feedback from significant others like parents, caregivers, peers and teachers and forms an integral part of self-knowledge (Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2014:9-13; Yanhong, Zhenrong & Yiping, (2021:619). As adolescents continuously seek feedback for self-definition, they compare themselves with others (Krayer *et al.,* 2008:893). Therefore, self-awareness can be a private 'looking inward' (introspection) concerning an individual's emotions, beliefs, thoughts and feelings and also includes a public 'looking outwards' and gathering information through others' perceptions (O'Connor, 2011:50-51).

As a response to life transitions, changes in self-awareness may be possible, but no substantial, normative changes are expected. Emerging adulthood's rapid change in roles, demanding relationships and maturational changes, such as becoming independent, may cause a less favourable self-awareness (Orth *et al.,* 2010:645,646). Self-awareness can, therefore, be linked to behaviour. Apart from the emerging adult's genetic predisposition and his/her inherited psychological characteristics, the emerging adult learns whilst maturing emotionally through life experiences (eco-systemic theory). It is, therefore, important that a young adult understands the self first to be able to understand others (Davis & Buskist, 2008:I-392; Yanhong *et al.,* 2021:619). Early experiences (role experimenting) and how the young adult perceives these experiences, contribute to self-awareness. If the young adult, for example, sees

him/herself as more mature than peers, this perception may motivate more mature behaviour, like the uptake of financial responsibility. This ability will most probably influence how the following challenges will be perceived (Benson *et al.,* 2012:1753). Furthermore, the self-concept serves as an essential motivator of behaviour and plays a substantial role in choices and goal setting during emerging adulthood (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012; 69-70). To be able to 'plan for the future' and 'set goals' primarily stems from the self-concept as it allows a person to consider the self in different stages of life and circumstances (Booker *et al*., 2021:3262).

Self-awareness reflects the 'knowing' part of the self. At the same time, self-esteem encompasses the subjective, emotional evaluation or 'feeling part' of what the individual knows about the self (positively or negatively). Self-esteem is, therefore, the affective response to what an individual knows about the self (self-concept) and forms an individual's feelings of self-worth and acceptance of self (MacKinnon, 2020:66-67).

Self-esteem furthermore predicts the young individual's reaction to life situations and determines his/her sense of personal worth (Orth *et al.,* 2010:645,646); (Yanhong *et al.,* 2021:619). According to White (2009:3), a person's self-esteem is formed by experiences and the interpretation of these experiences (eco-systemic theory) and is a life-long process. The two predicting aspects for positive self-esteem are competence and worth (MacKinnon, 2020:66). Orth and Robins (2014:381) define positive self-esteem as a 'feeling of being good enough', having respect for the 'self' and accepting the 'self.' The emerging adult with positive self-esteem can deal more competently with different life situations compared to an individual with negative self-esteem who might experience challenges doing so. Positive self-esteem furthermore predicts better health, a smaller possibility to get involved in criminal behaviour, better academic and social achievement, more employment success and satisfaction, as well as a better chance to excel financially (Orth & Robins, 2014:383; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3261; Yanhong *et al.,* 2021:619; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126).

Baumeister and Vohs (2007:820) and Booker, *et al.*, (2021:3261) found that the emerging adult with positive self-esteem appears to have a more in-depth knowledge of him/herself. He/she has information about preferences, strengths and dislikes and is more likely to be confident. The opposite applies to someone with negative self-esteem who seems to have negative moods and is emotionally less stable than those

with positive self-esteem. Furthermore, Baumeister and Vohs (2007:819), MacKinnon (2020:67) and Song *et al.*, (2021:1126) distinguish between 'general self-esteem' and 'domain-specific self-esteem'. General self-esteem refers to the general feeling or attitude the young individual has about him/herself. In contrast, domain-specific self-esteem links self-esteem to a particular component of life, such as work-esteem, social self-esteem or academic self-esteem.

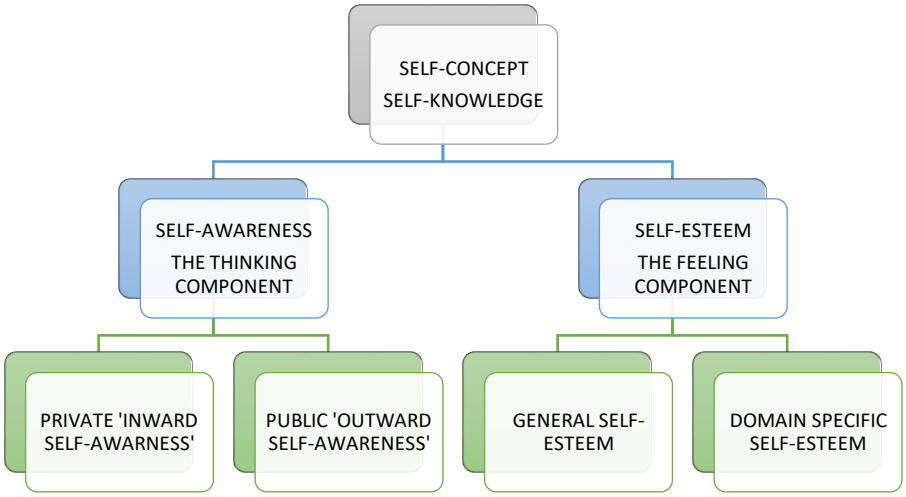


Figure 2.2: Self-concept, self-awareness and self-esteem

2.2.3 Forming of Identities (Who am I?)

Identity formation is when an individual defines the self as different and unique (Erikson, 1953:99). Torres, Jones and Renn (2009:557) postulate that identity formation is based on self-knowledge and, broadly, consists of different roles, traits or characteristics (own effort) in interaction with others and within context (Kärchner *et al.*, 2021:320). The young person forms beliefs through social interaction, social roles and social memberships and, based on the feedback they receive, form identities (social constructivism). Identities are furthermore based on past experiences. Identity formation can reflect one's fear of rejection and may contain future aspirations and possibilities (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:69; Torres *et al.,* 2009:557).

Exploration and commitment are two critical processes of identity forming. Exploration refers to the active search for answers regarding 'Who am I?' and commitment defines the firm decision about what direction to take (McLean, Syed & Shucard, 2016:356-357).

According to Shulman and Nurmi (2010:3-5), identity formation takes place within a 'complex interplay' between socio-cultural environments and the emerging adult's own effort (exploring identities, committing to identities and setting life goals)

2.2.3.1 Identity forming – an active effort of the emerging adult

The emerging adult is exposed to an array of possibilities and alternatives such as various career paths from which to choose, new relationships to explore and exposure to worldviews that may differ from those previously experienced, to name but a few (Schwartz et al., 2005:202). In modern societies, the normative, linear structures (school, marriage, starting a family) have changed, leaving the young individual to make independent choices. The process of exploration is, furthermore, prolonged as a result of economic changes. For some people, the 'freedom' and the accompanying lack of support may put them under pressure that they cannot handle. Furthermore, the young individual experiences strain resulting from responsibility for relationships, academic pressure, too many choices and a lack of ability to define life goals (Schwartz *et al.,* 2002:574; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3262). On the other hand, if emerging adults make enduring commitments for career choices and romantic relationships, they can form viable identities. Therefore, planning for the future, educating oneself and taking responsibility for relationships should be an important mission of the young individual (Schwartz et al., 2005:202; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3261).

Côtè and Schwartz (2002:573) use the term 'Individualisation' to describe the emerging adult's sole responsibility to form identities. 'Individualisation' refers to 'the extent to which culture leaves people to their own devices regarding meeting their survival needs, determining the directions their lives will take, and making a myriad of choices along the way' (Côtè & Schwartz 2002:573; Cohen & Kassan, 2018:134-135). Some emerging adults, on the contrary, may follow a passive or procrastinating approach to identity formation in the extended moratorium. This procrastination and passive identity exploration process is called 'default individualisation' (Schwartz *et al.,* 2005:204). Default individualisation describes a pathway prescribed by 'circumstance and impulse' with little or no effort for the emerging adult. Emerging adults who adopt a default individualisation style might fail to improve themselves in areas such as attaining competencies and getting more skilled in building relationships. Default individualisation might furthermore result in unpreparedness to make meaningful

choices and set future goals. Moreover, it will leave the emerging adult untrained to undertake adult roles such as marriage, parenthood and employment (Schwartz *et al.,* 2005:204). Developmental individualisation precedes the responsibility of individualisation and actively seeks opportunities to explore and develop. Developmental individualisation refers to the active process of finding continual growth possibilities in intellectual, social and occupational areas, setting future goals and preparing the emerging adult for authentic adulthood. Developmental successes in the psychosocial moratorium are strongly influenced by the extent to which an emerging adult uses strategies such as goal setting and critical decision making (Schwartz *et al.,* 2005:204-205; see Section1.2.3).

2.2.3.2 Goalsetting a vital part of identity-formation

Considering that the emerging adult is in a transitional phase, planning a future direction is important for a successful transition. Goal setting and pursuing goals are perceived as a mechanism that directs the emerging adult to future expectations (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:7). Schwartz *et al.* (2009:131) see identity exploration as a process of 'sorting through various identity elements to identify a set of goals, values, and beliefs'. Psychological factors associated with successful identity formation include personal goal setting, ability to make meaningful decisions during exploration of possibilities and commitment to what makes sense (Kaniušonyté & Žukauskiené, 2018:4; Salmela-Aro *et al.,* 2007:690).

According to Scharf and Mayseless (2010:84), goals are 'what individuals want to achieve in their life, reflect their values and organise and direct behaviour over extended periods'. Therefore, goals are future representations of what the emerging adult would like to achieve or avoid in the future. Goals set during emerging adulthood are essential markers for adulthood and are the first representatives for future expectations. Many essential goals for personal development in adulthood are established during emerging adulthood (Krings *et al.,* 2008:93-94). During emerging adulthood, the young individual is future-oriented and goal setting is expected to be future-directed. For example, the challenges the emerging adult faces during the transition to adulthood are related to future education, future occupation, future intimate relationships and future economic security. Goal setting during emerging

adulthood must be able to address these future expectations and match available opportunities (Salmela-Aro *et al.,* 2007:693-394).

Expectations of the emerging adult seem to guide goal setting, exploration and commitment to identities. Berzonsky (1994:427) proposed three identity-processing orientations that represent the possible ways the emerging adults approach identity-related issues to set goals: 'Informational orientation', 'normative orientation' and 'diffuse-avoidant orientation'. The content of exploration and goal setting can be linked to Berzonsky's orientations. During the 'Informational orientation', the emerging adult considers various alternatives and is open-minded when exploring possibilities. Emerging adulthood is a phase of active exploration (Arnett, 2000:473). The young individual actively involved in exploration and commitment to identities will set goals according to exploration possibilities (Ranta, Dietrich & Salmela-Aro, 2014:17). For example, when exploring relationships, plans will include the end goal, namely marriage or intimate connection to someone, and shorter-term exploration goals, such as who to date, where to meet someone, and what to do on a date. If the emerging adult follows a 'normative approach' (Berzonsky, 1994:427), significant others' norms, values and expectations will influence identity formation. Young adults will rely on the expectations and prescriptions of others, such as parents, society and culture, before committing to an identity (Cohen & Kassan, 2018:134-135). Goals will be set according to norms, values and expectations of significant others (eco-systemic framework). Parents' expectations of their emerging adult children become a measure for successes or failures (Messersmith *et al.,* 2008:213). Parents, as role models, transfer their perceptions and experiences to their children. Messersmith *et al.* (2008:213) state that young individuals internalise what is transferred by their parents. Aspects such as occupational expectations, differences in gender ability and ethnic differences are examples of what is transferred and internalised. 'Diffuse-avoidant orientation' refers to individuals who procrastinate or avoid commitment to identities. During ‘diffuse avoidance' (Berzonsky, 1994:427), the emerging adult tends not to set goals and relies on 'the spur of the moment' experiences. Diffuse avoidance can be linked to default individualisation (Schwartz *et al.,* 2005:204).

The socio-historical context wherein goals are set has changed dramatically. Linear development processes, as predicted by society's expectations, such as completing

school, starting tertiary education, commencing a career, committing to a long-term relationship, getting married and starting a family, have changed. The emerging adult now finds him/herself in a prolonged moratorium characterised by non-linear development processes and less structured development expectations of society. Goalsetting inevitably has also changed within the new context (Krings *et al.,* 2008:95). Scharf and Mayseless (2010:85) state that the linear changing process of development during emerging adolescence has brought about a new attitude towards identity formation, namely, finding the authentic self. The large variety of possibilities and choices, coupled with less societal constraints and the heightened self-focus of the emerging adult, result in individuation and autonomy-goals.

According to Krings *et al.* (2008:95), goal setting within the domains of family and occupation have shifted from the traditional linear development outcomes to more self-focused goals. Goals are less age bound and less dictated by society. The young individual is challenged to be more self-focused, find his/her pathway to future expectations, and have many decision possibilities. For example, goals such as getting a partner to marry and starting a family become less critical during emerging adulthood. They are replaced with goals about the self, such as 'understanding oneself' and 'having an exciting life'.

Goals are furthermore linked to self-mastery and well-being (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:5). Attaining one's goals sets the stage for future development. As a result of feedback gained from others, the emerging adult can adjust goals if not reached and therefore 'master' outcomes. For example, the emerging adult whose romantic relationship broke down, can amend future dating goals (social constructivism). Krings et al. (2008:96) postulate that 'perceived control over goal attainment is essential for well-being'. If an individual can have personal influence and power over goal attainment, he/she will be more satisfied with life in general. As individualisation increases, the emerging adult is more in control of personal goal setting and attainment. Successful goal attainment leads to progress and enhances feelings of well-being (Krings *et al.,* 2008:96; Shulman & Nurmi 2010:8; see Section 1.2.3.3).

2.2.3.3 Identity – shaped by the socio-cultural context (Eco-systemic framework and social constructivism)

Emerging adulthood is a time dominated by identity issues, an array of possibilities to explore (career options, romantic opportunities, different worldviews and new roles) as well as uncertainty about the self (Arnett, 2000:470). Socio-cultural factors such as expectations of significant others (parents), cultural prescriptions and societal norms and values influence identity formation. Institutional tracks such as educational opportunities and employment possibilities expand the vast majority of options for the emerging adult (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:3-5). The various social contexts with normative views, prescribed rules and predicted roles cannot be overlooked (Beyers & Çok. 2008:148; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126). According to Erikson (1953:99), identity is a product of the interaction between the individual and the social context, as also seen in social constructivsm.

Considering that exploration is crucial to assess strengths, abilities and interests and gain feedback from different interactions, emerging adulthood provides ample opportunities for identity exploration (Johnson *et al.,* 2010:261). The emerging adult is challenged to match his/her goals and expectations with what is available. Environments such as universities, colleges or workplaces provide their own rules, norms and roles which may impact the identity formation of the emerging adult. Some environments might provide less structure than others, forcing the emerging adult to become even more involved in their future development and forming their different identities (Johnson *et al.,* 2010:262).

Lippman and Greenwood (2012:753) argue that past experiences influence identity formation. The young adult needs to 'look backwards' to have an evident self in present situations. A person needs to know 'who he/she was in the past' to understand the present and predict future expectations and behaviour. In Lippman and Greenwood's research (2012:754), music was used as an activating agent to recall past experiences. One can recall memories of past loved ones and former romantic partners and remember particular previous periods (positive and negative memories) through music.

Pro-social (obeying the rules and conforming to socially accepted behaviours) maturity, a milestone for adulthood (Arnett, 2006:116), is linked to the young

individual's ability to understand the long-term consequences of actions in a social context (Kärchner *et al.*, 2021:320). According to Iselin, DeCoster and Salekin, (2009:465), emerging adults need to manipulate and reshape past behaviours and apply gained information to future situations. For example, the young adult uses feedback (positive and negative) gained from prior experiences to build or reshape new social identities. In addition, pro-social abilities are needed to establish romantic relationships (a milestone for adulthood), according to Arnett (2006:116). Dulmen *et al*. (2007:337) postulate that romantic relationships and their quality are linked to several positive or negative experiences and lessons learned in the past. An example of gained knowledge and skills of history is illustrated in research done by Rarick (2011:23). According to Rarick (2011:23), past experiences can help overcome obstacles and difficulties when applied to new situations. For example, strong family relations can assist and support the emerging adult to overcome the challenge of making new friends.

Significant others (those people surrounding an individual who have a positive or negative influence on an individual) impact identity formation directly (Erikson, 1953:68; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3263). **Parents** and family members play a critical role during identity formation of the young adult. As cited in Johnson *et al.* (2010:281), Cote states that parents' acceptance of the young adult as an individual and moderate connectedness between the young adult and his/her parents contributes to active identity exploration. Parents are vital role-players in ego and identity development during young adulthood (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013:382; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3263). Positive outcomes such as autonomy, academic success, general well-being and emotional regulation are benefits from parental involvement during identity formation. Parents that challenge young individuals to develop and provide a warm, supportive environment are active agents in the higher ego-development of emerging adults (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013:374; Kärchner *et al.*, 2021:320). Young adults raised in families without two biological parents perceive themselves as adults much earlier compared to young adults raised by two biological parents (Benson & Elder, 2011:1648). Young adults from single-parent households seem to have more responsibilities and autonomy than young adults with both parents. Furthermore, if a lack of warmth and affection is experienced, the emerging adult may leave home earlier than expected. This 'premature' separation from parental figures may lead to

detachment and age-inappropriate behaviour such as sexual promiscuity, risk behaviours and experimenting with alcohol, drugs and other substances (Benson & Elder, 2011:1648; Forster *et al.,* 2020:379).

Parent and family support seems necessary for healthy personal development during identity formation (Benson & Elder 2011:1648; Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013:380; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126). Parents' expectations of their emerging adult children become a measure for success or failure (Messersmith *et al.,* 2008: 213). Parents, as role models, transfer their perceptions and experiences to their children. Messersmith *et al.* (2008:213) found that emerging adults internalise what is transferred to them by their parents. Aspects such as occupational expectations, differences in gender ability and ethnic differences are examples of what is transferred and internalised. For instance, if parents foster a view that a particular occupational field is better (money-wise or career-wise) than others, young adults' expectations and areas of interest align with their parents. On the other hand, emerging adults can de-identify with parents if perceived as controlling, over-protective and supervisory. As a result, over-identification with idols, such as professional sports stars, musicians or actors, may occur while the young individual tries to find a new sense of identity (Guiffrida, 2009:2434).

The social context (others) shapes individual development regarding roles, norms and rules relevant to the group (Johnson *et al.,* 2010: 262). 'Others' include social groups and the broader social environment. Social groups refer to direct or indirect friendship groups with whom the young adult relates. The broader social environment includes educational institutions, places of work, different social classes, gender and various ethnic groups. Aspects, as mentioned, impact personal beliefs about the self. These beliefs are based on feedback gained through interactions (O'Connor *et al.,* 2011:861-863; Torres *et al.,* 2009:557). Relationships are often demanding and complex and impact the 'social competence' of the young adult (O'Connor *et* al., 2011:861; Yanhong *et al.,* 2021:619). The young individual can learn to adjust to and recognise the needs of others. It also teaches them to have tolerance for the differences of others (Benson & Elder 2011:1647; O'Connor *et al.,* 2011:861). As a result of the complexity of different relationships and interactions with the world in which the young adult evolves, multiple identities are possible. According to Benson and Elder (2011;1647), an

emerging adult may take on an identity based on either the expectations of others, who he/she truly is or based on the ideal person he/she wishes to be. Different identities may therefore be possible based on fear of rejection and a need for approval from influential people (parents, teacher or loved ones) in the emerging adult's life (Loevinger, 1966:101; Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:74; Yanhong *et al.,* 2021:619). Because of the modern, non-linear exploration and identity process, together with the vast array of possibilities and choices and the heightened self-focus during emerging adulthood, finding the 'authentic self' has become the focus of the emerging adult (Scharf & Mayseless, 2010:85). Developmental events (such as leaving school, starting a career and getting married) used to be sequentially structured. Individualisation and society's lack of guidance leaves the emerging adult to make decisions on his/her own (Schwartz *et al.,* 2005:205; see Section 1.2.4.1).

2.3 SOCIAL AND OCCUPATIONAL IDENTITIES, THE TWO MOST PROMINENT IDENTITIES FORMED DURING EMERGING ADULTHOOD

Most central to emerging adulthood is the young adult's exploration of possibilities (intimate relationships, being part of a social group, getting married and starting a family) and **occupation** (education opportunities and career options). Moreover, finding the person you want to spend your life with and choosing your career is amongst the most critical indicators of adulthood (Arnett, 2000:469). Thus, forming a social - and work identity is crucial during emerging adulthood.

2.3.1 Social Identity (Social constructivism)

Social identity is a person's ability to communicate, relate to other people, display confidence, and be open to others. It is 'the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of this group membership' (Dovidio *et al.,* 2010:180; Gorbett & Kruczek, 2008:58,590.

This first social framework provided by parents is of significant value for relationship development and, therefore, social identity. Healthy family relationships precede favourable social identity formation with peers and romantic partners later in life. Attachment (and trust) seems to play a significant role in the emerging adult's willingness to engage in relationship exploration and commitment to intimacy

(Shomaker & Furman, 2009:580; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3261; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126). Attachments develop during early relationships with parents. Parents provide a mirror reflecting the young child's self as worthy of love and belonging (or not) and represent 'others' to be reliable, caring and providing (or not) for secure attachment. These representations of relationships are mental images guiding a person's beliefs about relating to others. The depictions of relationships the young child forms with parental figures shapes the way he/she sees the self but also affect how he/she forms close relationships and friendships with others (Shomaker & Furman, 2009:580). If early attachment representations with parents are secure, social competence, a positive sense of self, willingness to attach to others and positive social expectations will follow (Shomaker & Furman, 2009:580). Young children who have insecure attachments with parents or caregivers are expected to lack social competence and are more likely to form negative friendships. Attachment to parents provides the social framework through which the emerging adult will test and explore relationships outside the family of origin and determine the emerging adult's connection with his/her parents (Shomaker & Furman, 2009:580); (Smith *et al.,* 2021:53; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3263). McLean and Jennings (2012:1457) postulate that mothers especially foster meaning-making during early childhood by providing feedback, supporting the child to organise his/her thoughts and paving the way for similar patterns later in adolescence and emerging adulthood.

A positive sense of self plays a vital role in forming social identities (Pittman *et al.,* 2012:1487; Yanhong *et al.,* 2021:619). Gorbett and Kruczek (2008:59) emphasise that high social self-esteem (and social identity as a nesting element of self-esteem) is an essential milestone for social development during emerging adulthood. High social self-esteem refers to an individual's ability to relate and communicate, show confidence and openness towards others and the capacity to build relationships. Communication skills and the capacity to relate to others are essential during emerging adulthood for making new friends, getting a job and continuing further education, if preferred. Conversely, emerging adults with low self-esteem may be more vulnerable to rejection and criticism, leading to depression and lower confidence in career aspirations. According to Pittman *et al.* (2012:1487), negative representations of the self are associated with anxiety and feelings of worthlessness and negative portrayals of others related to avoidance to explore and commit to

relationships. Furthermore, a negative representation is linked to patterns of distancing from others, difficulty trusting others and fear of closeness.

A positive social identity is crucial for continued development and success with family and career goals (Gorbett & Kruczek, 2008:59; Song *et al.*, 2021:1126). O'Connor *et al.* (2011:861) proposed a 'Multidimensional Model' to measure positive social identity development of five domains. The first domain, social competence, refers to the successes in social relationships, the ability to meet social demands in day-to-day life, the ability to participate socially and the capacity to take responsibility for others and self. The second domain, life satisfaction measures the perceived quality of life and underpins a sense of congruency between what an individual wants or needs and available resources. Trust and tolerance of others and trust and tolerance of authorities and institutions, the third and fourth domain, reflect the attachment of the individual to society and are vital aspects of social capital. Working harmoniously and having tolerance for working with others from different backgrounds and cultures are capacities portraying these domains. The last domain, civic engagement, portrays the ability of an individual to take up the role of citizenship willingly and is vital for socialisation in a democratic society. Shared activities, mutual self-disclosure, deep conversations and companionship are characteristics of close friendships and pave the way for more intimate, romantic relationships (Gorbett & Kruczek, 2008:58,59; Shomaker & Furman, 2009:580). These features are based on the multidimensional model of O'Connor *et al*. (2011:861) and can be linked to the domain described as 'social competence'.

An integral part of social contact is through communication. Through communication, group identity, norms and values are formed, worldviews are conveyed and cultural and historical heritage are shared. Communication is the vehicle for emotional closeness and intimacy (Reid & Giles, 2005:212). Peer relationships provide feedback and reflection. Feedback from friends assists the emerging adult to see the self outside the family of origin and in a new, more mature context. Peers furthermore help emerging adults to make sense of their feelings and thoughts and challenge prior beliefs (McLean & Jennings, 2012:1456). A significant transit from childhood friendships to adult friendships is characterised by increased intimacy, which develops

through self-disclosure. The emerging adult often relies more on friends for emotional support than parents (McLean & Jennings, 2012:1456-1457; Smith *et al.,* 2021:53).

According to Tajfel (1979 as cited in Dovidio *et al.,* 2010:180), social identity is strongly associated with 'the individual's knowledge that he/she belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him/her of this group membership'. The young adult conforms to specific others based on 'self-categorisation'. Two significant theories from Tajfel (1997 as cited in Dovidio *et al.,* 2010:180) underpinning social identity formation include 'Social Identity Theory' (SIT) and 'Self-Categorization Theory' (SCT). SIT focuses on identity formation within a particular group, such as nationality, gender, sports teams and more and the impact of a specific group on an individual's self-concept. SCT concentrates on the cognitive processes (evaluation and categorisation of such a group). Tajfel (1997 as cited in Dovidio *et al.,* 2010:180) postulates that people tend to categorise others regarding similarities and differences they believe correlate with the categorisation. The categorisation is based on perception and behaviour discrimination. For example, if young individuals perceive themselves as part of the 'in-group', they tend to overlook particular matters of concern about the 'in-group' and derogate the 'out-group'. This fundamental cognitive bias paves the way for understanding 'stereotyping' (the notion of individuals categorising themselves as like fellow group members and different from the members of other groups). The emerging adult's sense of the self is gained through interaction with and formed by feedback from one's social context including significant others, institutions (education, work) and systems of power (race, social class, or gender) (Torres *et al.,* 2009:578). Social belonging to a group reduces self-uncertainty. The group determines behaviour (what to do and what not to do) within the group. It brings about a 'sense of consensus', which predicts how the group 'will' and 'ought to' perceive the world. Norms and beliefs are prescribed by the group (Dovidio *et al.,* 2010:185). Although most young individuals belong to a social group, the 'status' of the individual in the group and the level of inclusion in such group vary. An individual's status in a group can range from 'central to high' or 'peripheral or low'. A high status involves aspects like popularity and preference. Popularity describes the impact or influence a person has on his/her peers. To be popular, an individual is visible and seems to add prestige to the group. Preference refers to the likeability of the young person by most of the group. During emerging adulthood, autonomy and

independence are developed. The emerging adult faces the challenge of forming an identity without losing his/her status in the group. Functioning in a group and being accepted as part of a group seems important during and beyond emerging adulthood. Social relations and social hierarchy appear to be influential throughout life and prioritising popularity over other social goals appears to be still of significant value during adulthood (Lansu & Cillessen, 2011:133; Yanhong *et al.,* 2021:619). Although friendship quality has a considerable impact on social identity (Jones *et al.,* 2014:64-65), over-identification with a particular group might hinder identity development during emerging adulthood. When emerging adults accept and integrate the values and norms of a specific group without critical evaluation, they will no longer explore and commit to alternative identities. Commitment to the values and standards of a particular social group prevent the emerging adult from testing own beliefs, norms, and values, against the view of others. The moratorium is the ideal time for active exploration before committing to social identity and is, therefore, an essential phase of development to adulthood (Guiffrida, 2009:2424).

Krayer *et al.* (2008:892-893) distinguish three processes through which self-information is gathered. The first process, 'self-evaluation comparison', provides opportunities through which the emerging adult compares him/herself with others to understand his social status in the group. For example, to gain self-knowledge, questions such as 'do I lack social skills?' or 'how do my social expectations compare to the group?' are asked. A second process, self-improvement comparison, is used to change specific areas; for example, 'how can I learn from others to be more socially skilled?'. The third process, self-enhancement comparison, is used during times of uncertainty and aims to protect the emerging adult's views of the self to maintain self-worth. Methods used to assert self-worth include discarding information not relevant by describing others as 'inferior' or 'less advanced'.

The emerging adult uses socio-cognitive identity styles (Doumen *et al.,* 2012:1418-1419). A socio-cognitive identity style reflects how an individual 'processes, utilises, structures and revises' identity-relevant information to make well-integrated and well-informed identity choices and approach identity-relevant problems. Berzonsky (2011:58) identified three different socio-cognitive identity styles: information-oriented, normative and diffuse-avoidant styles.

Information-oriented style - Individuals using this style intentionally seek and process identity-relevant information to make identity choices. These individuals are open to new learning and knowledge and are willing to evaluate the self accordingly to gain accurate information. Participants in Berzonsky's study with high scores in information-style, reflect pro-social behaviour, describe the self as tolerant and receptive towards others and develop high-quality friendships. They tend to understand inner thoughts and feelings better and can express these feelings. Well-differentiated and well-integrated identities are formed based on the information-oriented style. Concerning peer relationships, information-oriented individuals can form intimate friendships based on mutual respect and acceptance.

Normative style - Individuals using this identity style automatically adopt identity information found on the expectations and prescriptions of significant others such as parents, authority figures and society when confronted with identity problems. According to Berzonzky's (2011:58) study, participants who use this style describe themselves as 'more conservative' and 'less flexible'. Individuals using this style are less open to expressing feelings and thoughts. Furthermore, the normative style is associated with higher aggression and lower intimacy, openness and trust in friendship relationships than the information-oriented style. This is because it will conform to the conservative and traditional opinions of others.

Diffuse-avoidant style - Individuals using this style procrastinate identity formation until they are forced to make identity choices or when a situation demands an identity choice. Identity formation is based on immediate situational rewards and not on informed decisions. According to Berzonsky's study, individuals using this style are generally perceived as close-minded and defensive and also experience difficulty in forming and maintaining friendships. They are less aware of their feelings and views and accordingly hesitant to express feelings and thoughts. Identity formation is fragmented or loosely integrated. This style is associated with less guidance, less nurturance and low levels of emotional support from parents (Berzonsky, 2011:58).

Many young individuals do not know themselves well enough and therefore overly rely on the feedback from others (normative style). In some cases, no identity choices are made (diffuse-avoidant style) and, as a result, many emerging adults miss the opportunity to discover authentic self.

According to Doumen *et al.* (2012:1418-1419), 'attachment' can be defined as a 'tendency to establish close relationships with significant others. Close relationships consist of closeness, support, help and companionship but also lack conflict, which can negatively impact the emerging adult who does not learn skills for constructive conflict resolution. In addition, these early relationships are based on attachment and the quality of these relationships is strongly associated with romantic relationships later in life (Pittman *et al.,* 2012:1487).

A crucial aspect of social identity-forming is having quality intimate and romantic relationships and is seen as an important milestone for the emerging adult's transition to adulthood (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:392). During earlier years, the transition to adulthood seemed more natural. However, in industrialised countries, the transition to adulthood takes longer, is more complex and is not as clearly defined as in previous years (Arnett, 2008:6). As a result, forming intimate/romantic identities and commitments is often postponed (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:392).

Positive experiences like parental involvement and high-quality friendships contribute to an emerging adult's willingness to get romantically involved. The opposite is also found to be true. A lack of parental involvement in young people's social development and low-quality friendships will negatively impact on forming romantic relationships (Dulmen *et al.,* 2007:337). The role of parents seems to be of significant value for romantic exploration during emerging adulthood. According to Pittman *et al.* (2012:1488), the quality of the parent-child relationship predicts emerging adults' romantic relationships. Young adults with supporting parents explore romantic relationships more actively. If parents try to control and 'police' youthful adult relationship exploration, it can result in anxiety and avoidance of relationship exploration (Song *et al.*, 2021:1126). The young child who experiences him/herself as worthy of care will have higher expectations of future relationships (Pittman *et al.,* 2012:1487). Aspects essential for close relationships like trust, commitment and sharing, are first tested in relationships with significant others like parents, siblings and childhood friends. According to Erikson (1966:99), the young adult should have a clear sense of 'oneness' that must be established before an individual has a clear understanding of 'two-ness' (Erikson, 1966:99). According to the 'Intimacy vs Isolation

phase' described by Erikson (1966:99), the young adult who fails to create a certain sense of the self, will find long-lasting close relationships challenging.

There is a significant difference in exploring romantic relationships between adolescence and emerging adulthood. The young person explores love and intimate, romantic relationships more seriously than during adolescence (Arnett, 2000:473). Adolescents explore a relationship in groups. For example, attend parties and take part in group recreational activities. During emerging adulthood, the young individual explores 'emotional and physical intimacy' with another individual and less in groups. Relationships during emerging adulthood usually also last longer and include sexual exploration, which is generally not the case during adolescence (Arnett, 2000:473). Adolescent relationships typically are the stepping stones for future romantic relationships. Romantic experiences during adolescence are the training grounds for adult relationships and become more intimate during emerging adulthood. Although romantic relationships are characterised by closeness and intimacy, emerging adults might start and end relationships repeatedly due to lack of in-depth knowledge about romantic relationships. Matured relationships are characterised by an ability to commit to 'mutuality' in relationships, sensitivity to each other's needs and the ability to find a balance between both partners' competencies. Non-mature romantic relationships are associated with a tendency to have both partners' needs fulfilled. Mature romantic relationships are, in contrast, characterised by an ability to regulate intense emotional experiences and the capacity to handle non-desired outcomes (Atzil-Slonim *et al.,* 2016:328; Yanhong *et al.,* 2021:619). According to Shulman and Connoly (2013:28), emerging adults find it challenging to maintain personal independence, negotiate the needs of both the partner and self, and develop relationships to a deeper level (Shulman & Connolly, 2013:28). Unless the young adult is able and willing to explore feelings, become aware of preferences and understand behaviour, commitment to a romantic social identity might be challenging. The emerging adult needs to understand priorities, have some degree of autonomy and explore romantic relationships. Through knowledge and feedback, the emerging adult can compare him/herself with others to make sense of social identity (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:392).

According to Shulman and Connolly (2013:29), the natural next step in developing a romantic relationship is to commit to a 'long-term partnership' that can endure through

adulthood. This is, however, not always the case. Many emerging adults fluctuate between romantic relationships. Many young individuals in close relationships do not get married and experiment with other romantic and sexual encounters. Moreover, students have many sexual encounters (Gute & Eshbaugh, 2008:26-28). 'Hooking up' (sexual interactions without emotional commitment) or a 'one-night-stand' (sexual activity without any obligation) seem to be typical behaviour for many college students. Challenging factors associated with ‘hooking up’ often include alcohol or other substances. Another form of 'hook up' behaviour is the 'friends with benefits' phenomenon. ‘Hook-ups’, friends with benefits and emerging adulthood's associated 'freedom from supervision' may result in extreme sexual behaviour where sexual needs are met without commitment to long-term, stable relationships (Gute & Eshbaugh, 2008:27; see Section 1.2.3.1).

2.3.2 Occupational Identity

Occupational identity exploration seems to be a lifelong process. Young children often dream about what they will become when they grow up. Adults often re-visit their occupational identities. Occupational satisfaction and personal growth are aspects that are never stationary and remain dynamic. During late adolescence and early adulthood (18 to 21 years), the young person actively searches for occupational meaning by exploring different options about work and education. Emerging adulthood is a peak period for self-focus and the young individual has ample opportunities to focus on personal and occupational development (Negru, 2012:364).

Many benefits of a clear occupational identity have been reported. Young adults who have a clear occupational identity seem to have lower frustration levels, are less prone to depression, are more resilient and have higher self-esteem (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:7). An essential part of occupational identity is formulating work goals, an integral part of adult occupational identity. The ability to make occupational decisions determines work success. Work goals direct the emerging adult's focus on the future. If this objective has its origin in specific skills and interests, combined with a determination to succeed, this may lead to a solid occupational identity. The young adult not only wants to know ‘Who am I?’ but further asks ‘Why am I?’ in other words, how can he/she create a meaningful impact in life, using his/her personal skills or talents.

Furthermore, setting work goals helps the emerging adult perceive future occupations as significant contributions to the world. Young individuals, who reach set work goals, demonstrate 'eudemonic well-being'. 'Eudemonic' refers to the knowledge that life is meaningful and motivates potential achievement. If the emerging adult thinks about what they want to become workwise, motivation to reach work goals is generated. If the emerging adult knows his/her 'why' in life, it motivates to create the 'how'. In other words, purpose precedes the process (Yeager & Bundick, 2009:424-429).

To accomplish a clear occupational identity is easier said than done (Benson *et al.,* 2012:1752; Rappazzo, Seagrave & Gough, 2022;2). Emerging adults are exposed to more uncertainty and instability in the labour market environment than in past generations. Qualifications and related experience have become more important to get appointed for particular jobs. As a result of higher labour market expectations, higher levels of stress and competition are experienced, which result in delays in occupational identity formation. Occupational exploration often happens through a 'trial-and-error' process. The emerging adult experiments with different preferences and choices about particular identities before committing to an ideal set of beliefs (Callanan, Siegel & Luce, 2007:6). When it comes to occupational identity, the same rule applies. Rapid changes in the economy and society and increased uncertainty about employment cause the emerging adult to select a job based on availability and not necessarily on choice or preference. Considering mentioned instabilities, emerging adults require adjusting their aspirations and becoming more flexible to cope with change and disappointment (Salmela-Aro *et al.,* 2014:329; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2).

Therefore, career choices and occupational identities are influenced by significant others like parents, teachers and peers. Parents are important role players when it comes to the choices their children make career-wise (eco-systemic framework). Involvement in occupational activities and experiences like informal work during holidays or job-shadowing also contributes to forming occupational identities as young adults discover what they want to do and what not. Such experiences provide valuable sources of interest and allow the emerging adult to feel efficient. An informal environment offers opportunities to learn valuable skills (Messersmith *et al.,* 2008:219; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2). If young adults do not actively explore all the different possibilities of work-related settings, they may end up in jobs they do not like and or it

may result in non-commitment or weak commitment to occupational identity (Anderson & Mounts, 2012:90). Emerging adults often 'oscillate between transitory states'. They may decide on an occupation, find a job and then leave it again to return to training or choose a different occupation. Others may switch between work and periods of unemployment or even live with their parents again. It is, therefore, important that the emerging adult develop a secure occupational identity to be prepared for adult life (Shulman *et al.,* 2009:243; see Section 1.2.3.2).

2.4 SUMMARY

Young adulthood, late adolescence or emerging adulthood describe the confusing stage through which a young individual goes in becoming an adult. Emerging adulthood is a time of increased exploration of identity possibilities. The young individual often feels 'lost', 'confused' and does not know what is expected of him/her. Identity formation is a significant task of emerging adulthood, of which the most prominent identities are social and occupational identity. Life goals are essential in creating a transitional plan towards adulthood. However, unless the emerging adult understands who he/she is ('Who am I?'), it will be challenging to determine the way forward ('Where am I going?'). Self-knowledge based on self-awareness is an essential part of identity formation. Identities are furthermore shaped by the socio-cultural context of the young individual. The transitional phase between adolescence and adulthood is a prolonged process in industrialised countries particularly as adult milestones unfold in a non-linear sequence and result in a challenging time for the young individual who actively explores possibilities for meaning-making.

CHAPTER 3

THE JOURNEY OF THE EMERGING ADULT TOWARDS AUTHENTIC ADULTHOOD

WHERE AM I GOING?

3.1 INTRODUCTION

To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day,
thou canst not then be false to any man.
William Shakespeare

During the transition phase from adolescence to adulthood, the emerging adult actively explores different identities (Who am I?) and roles, such as social identity (relationships), occupational possibilities and experiments with various worldviews (Scharf & Mayseless, 2010:84; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2). Multiple opportunities are available to explore (Arnett, 2000:473). In a less constrained environment (less parental supervision), the emerging adult must form identities and define life goals about what he/she wants to achieve in the future. Life goals are representations of an individual's desired status in future (Krings *et al.,* 2008:95). They must be balanced with the expectations and restraints of the social context (society, parents and culture) in which the emerging adult finds him/herself. Because of the expectations of significant others such as society and parents, identity formation is an essential milestone for development to adulthood. To discover the authentic self, the young individual often needs to distance him/herself from these expectations and focus on the self to find out who he/she authentically is.

Identity exploration and formation used to develop in a traditional, linear way but has been replaced by a non-linear, different development pathway (Arnett, 2000:473). The conventional path subscribed to a linear process of leaving school, starting studies or a career, getting married and starting their own family. However, the non-linear unfolding of developmental tasks unfolds in an unfamiliar way. For example, the emerging adult studies for extended periods, starts a career, goes back to further

education, moves back to parents' house, goes back to a career, changes jobs and starts a family of his/her own much later (Krings *et al.,* 2008:95; see Section 1.2.1).

The heightened self-focus, active identity exploration and search for meaning (distanced from influences of significant others) challenge the emerging adult to find out 'Who am I?' This active search for the authentic self seems to be an essential step in successfully transforming into adulthood (Arnett, 2000:473).

3.2 DEFINING AUTHENTICITY

Scharf and Mayseless (2010:85) define authenticity as 'the extent to which individuals are true to their qualities, despite external influences and pressures'. To be true to oneself, an individual must have self-knowledge and the ability to differentiate the self from the world and others (Song *et al.,* 2021:1126). Furthermore, self-determination theorists (Kernis & Goldman, 2006:293; Ryan & Deci, 2000:68-72) explain authenticity as the 'action or behaviour that reflects an individual's 'true self', in other words, the 'unobstructed operation of one's true- or core-self in a daily enterprise'. Therefore, an individual's actions must be autonomous and self-determined and not be influenced by others' perceptions or expectations.

According to Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (2000:68-72), an individual's behaviour is prescribed by others (parents, teachers, community, church and society) (eco-systemic framework). If the emerging adult accepts and values these inputs, behaviour becomes internalised and integrated without further exploration. The motivation to accept can either be 'intrinsic' or 'extrinsic'. 'Intrinsic motivation' refers to behaviour that stems from inherent satisfaction. In other words, an individual's behaviour is based on his/her values, is autonomous and reflects self-determination. 'Extrinsic motivation' is based on others' expectations and is externally regulated (actions without intent, based on approval by others or to avoid punishment or rejection). According to the Self-Determination Theory, an individual has three basic needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. Authentic behaviour, therefore, reflects internal motivation and is not based on external rewards. Self-knowledge gained through self-exploration is necessary for organising one's actions and behaviour. Self-knowledge is, therefore, an essential component of self-determined, autonomous behaviour.

Characteristics of an authentic, fully functioning individual thus include the following aspects:

- 'Openness to experiences': Authentic individuals are open to new experiences and can perceive events accurately (without distortion or avoidance). In addition, they exhibit honesty in their interpersonal relationships.
- 'Live fully in the moment': The individual can be flexible and adjust to unexpected changes.
- 'Trust their inner experiences': Behaviours are autonomous and guided by inner experiences rather than influences of others.
- 'Experience freedom': The young individual can choose his/her responses to situations.
- 'Creative': The emerging adult is creative in his/her own beliefs and approaches to life and does not merely follow others' beliefs and plans (Kernis & Goldman, 2006:293).

Kernis and Goldman (2006:295) identified four components of authenticity based on the 'Multicomponent Conceptualisation Model' of Deci and Ryan (2000:74-75);

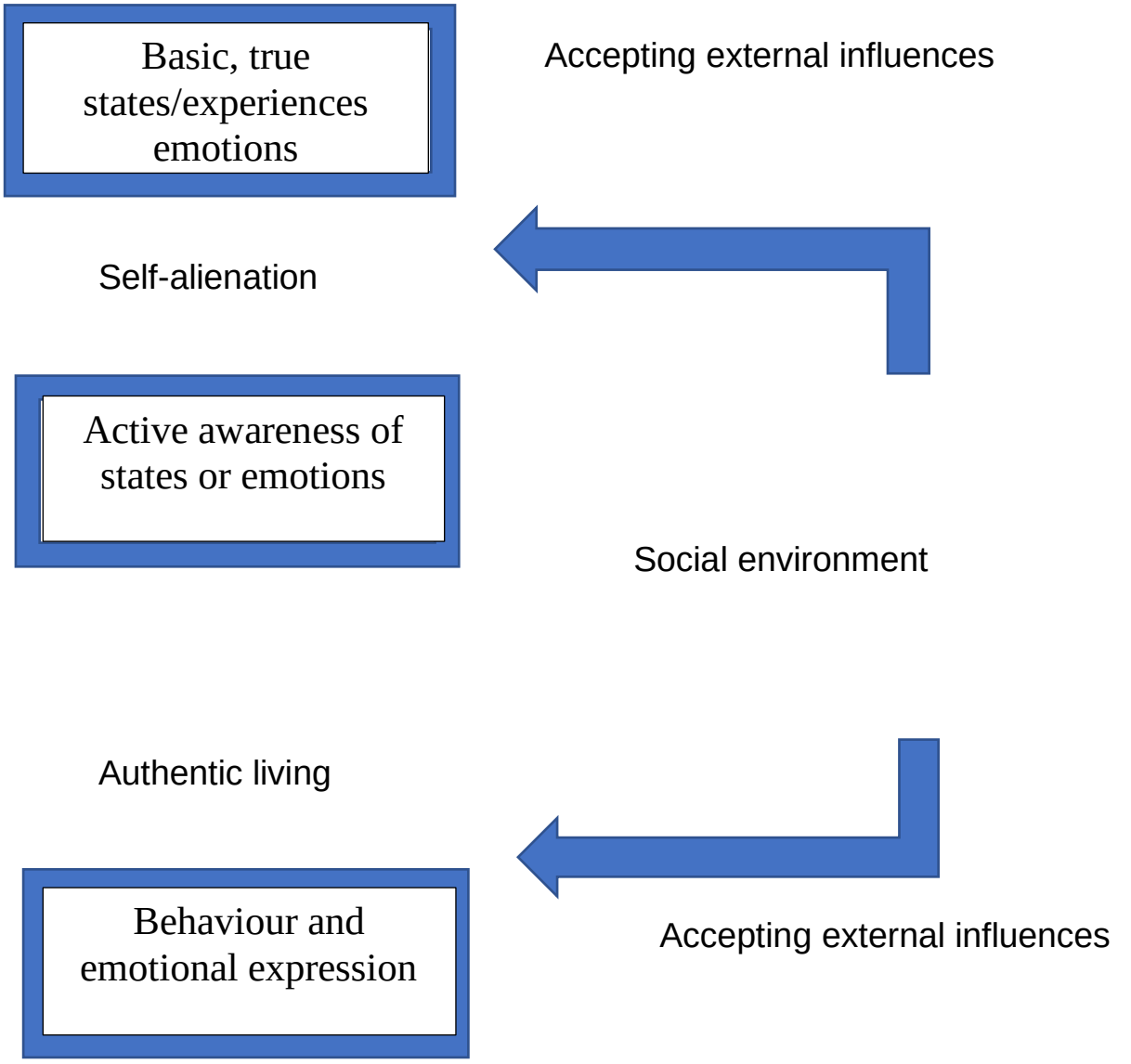
- 'Awareness' - The authentic emerging adult knows and trusts his/her self-knowledge. Self-knowledge includes likes and dislikes, the ability to self-motivate to achieve goals and being in touch with real unmasked emotions (anxiety, depressive moods, or happiness, to name but a few). To have self-knowledge, the emerging adult must know his/her needs and preferences and who he/she is as a person. The emerging adult with self-knowledge understands his/her strengths and weaknesses and the role of strengths and weaknesses in behaviour and can integrate and accept polarities (such as introvert vs extrovert, feminine vs masculine) into a multifaceted awareness of the self. In other words, an authentic individual can be introversive and extroversive in specific situations. For example, in the presence of strangers, an introvert may be reserved to observe before they become more talkative. Self-awareness is therefore essential for healthy functioning and is based on self-knowledge and self-acceptance (Brunell, Kernis, Goldman, Heppner, Davis, Cascio & Webster, 2010:900; Goldman, 2004:6; Kernis & Goldman, 2006:295; Mateeva & Dimitrov, 2013:205; Scharf & Mayseless, 2010;85).

- 'Unbiased processing' - The authentic person processes self-relevant information (attributes, qualities and potentials) in a non-distorted and unbiased way. The most significant benefit of unbiased processing is that the authentic individual has an accurate sense (without denial, exaggerating or ignoring some knowledge) about the self, without externally based evaluative information (Goldman, 2004:7). A real sense of the self is furthermore necessary for behavioural choices. For example, when an individual has to choose between different options such as finding a job, choosing between two desirable outcomes, selecting friends or deciding how to spend time, accurate processing of relevant information is based on self-knowledge. On the contrary, when using biased processing, self-knowledge is ignored. When self-knowledge is ignored, numerous psychological and interpersonal adjustment problems may occur, such as maladjustment and defence mechanisms (Brunell *et al.,* 2010:901; Goldman, 2004:7; Kernis & Goldman, 2006:295; Wood *et al.,* 2008:386).
- 'Authentic behaviour' entails behaving according to one's core values, characteristics, emotions, needs and preferences. Therefore, the authentic practice is finding a balance between the 'true self', what the environment dictates and the possible implications of behaviour. Behaviour is guided by an accurate assessment of the mentioned self-aspects through optimal awareness and unbiased information processing. An authentic individual tends to act in a consistent (according to own values, preferences and needs) way, based on choices made through awareness and self-knowledge, not according to pressures from parents, peers or the society, or to please them, get rewarded or to avoid punishment. Authentic behaviour reflects self-determination. Inauthentic behaviour, on the other hand, stems from weak self-awareness and results in pleasing behaviour. It depends on externally derived information and preferences of others (Brunell *et al.,* 2010:901; Goldman, 2004:6; Kernis & Goldman, 2006:295; Scharf & Mayseless, 2010:85; Wood *et al.,* 2008:386; Song *et al.,* 2021:1126).
- 'Relational orientation' - The authentic individual lives according to his/her true self in relationship with others, in other words, continually striving for truthfulness and openness in relationships and allowing others to see the 'real'

self. Being authentic in relationships is also about being honest to the self and others in actions and motives. Preceding authentic relationships is a high level of self-awareness and self-knowledge. Authentic relations indicate an active process of mutual self-disclosure, intimacy and trust. It opens relationships up for honest expression of the self without being judged or criticised. According to Wood *et al.* (2008:385-386), authentic living is characterised by behaviour and expression of emotions based on an individual's values and beliefs. Although all human beings as social beings are affected by the social environment in which they live (social constructivism), authentic individuals will not conform to the expectations of others. When individuals are uncertain of who they are or resist self-evaluation, inauthentic relations follow. Individuals in inauthentic relations sometimes have fragile or insecure self-feelings, which may result in self-enhancement. Self-enhancement is the process of boosting oneself and own ideas and denying undesirable aspects of the self (Kernis & Goldman, 2006:295; Wood *et al.,* 2008:386; Song, *et al.*, 2021:1126).

According to Wood *et al.* (2008:386), authenticity can be defined according to the Person-Centered Conception of authenticity, based on a 'tripartite' (Song *et al.,* 2021:1126) between self-alienation, authentic living and accepting external influences (Figure 3.1). It can be categorised on three levels:

A) Basic, real, but unconscious experiences (Primary experiences)
B) Cognitive awareness. The states, emotions and thoughts an individual is aware of (Secondary experiences)
C) Behaviour and expressed emotions (Lived experiences)



(Source: Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis & Joseph, 2008:386; Song *et al.,* 2021:1126)

Figure 3.1: 'Tripartite' between self-alienation, authentic living and excepting external influences

Suppose there is an incongruency between an individual's primary experiences (the true self, true emotions and true beliefs) and cognitive awareness, the individual experiences self-alienation. Self-alienation is 'estrangement from oneself, typically accompanied by significant emotional distancing. As a result, the self-alienated individual is frequently unaware of or largely unable to describe his or her own intrapsychic processes (https://dictionary.apa.org/self-alienation). On the contrary, an individual who stays actively aware of his/her beliefs, emotions and values, while exposed to the social environment and can express him/herself, is an authentic human

being (Song *et al.,* 2021:1126; Brunell *et al.,* 2010:901; Goldman, 2004:6; Kernis & Goldman, 2006:295; Scharf & Mayseless, 2010:85 - See Section 1.2.4.1).

Authenticity, however, cannot be seen as a static phenomenon but rather a dynamic process of development (Mateeva & Dimitrov, 2013:205). An individual needs autonomy and self-actualisation based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943:386). There is thus a connectedness between self-knowledge, experiences and interactions with the social environment. The individual is constantly exploring his/her potential, emotions, characteristics, values and motivations. Healthy adjustments are made inter-personally and intra-personally, meaning that the individual is continuously getting feedback from his/her social environment (eco-systemic theory). These adjustments should reflect the core self for authentic individuals and life goals should be set accordingly.

3.3 THE EMERGING ADULT EXPERIENCES CHALLENGES IN BECOMING AN AUTHENTIC ADULT

During emerging adulthood, the young individual is confronted with many transitions. Education possibilities, future career paths and different relationships are only a few of the emerging adult's unfamiliar challenges. Through intense exploration, identity commitments made during adolescence are re-evaluated and challenged and may leave the emerging adult in an uncertain phase about self-concept. The emerging adult has to find a way to adult life, make new choices and set different future goals. Young individuals have to find new unique ways to deal with the challenges they face during the transition and can no longer only rely on adolescent social networks and family support. Peers with various backgrounds and worldviews furthermore challenge prior identity commitments. New identities are formed through active exploration (making sense of the unknown, different world) and commitment to what makes sense. The process of making sense entails the gathering of information and fostering of an awareness of the self (self-knowledge and self-awareness) within different contexts such as tertiary education, the world of work, new and diverse friendships and independent living (Luyckx *et al.,* 2013:159-160).

Emerging adults have to form new identities based on exploration and feedback of others (parents, peers, society), resulting in pressure to behave in socially appropriate

ways (Abel, 2014:8). Parents, peers and society may have different expectations of the emerging adult, which may confuse who he/she truly (authentically) is. According to Abel (2014:9), most emerging adults are preoccupied with social acceptance. They will experience less self-worth or feelings of lower self-esteem if not accepted by significant others such as parents, peers and society (Theran & Han, 2013:1097). If the emerging adult becomes preoccupied with being accepted, it may lead to self-alienation (a state where social expectations and self-awareness are conflicting) (Theran & Han, 2013:1097).

Emerging adults are furthermore expected to become responsible adults and take up responsibility for their own lives and need support and guidance doing so (Shulman *et al.,* 2009:246). To become accountable, responsible adults, young individuals need realistic life goals to navigate towards successful futures. In industrialised countries, where economic independence for young individuals has moved to a much later phase in their lives, coupled with the non-linear unfolding of adulthood milestones, emerging adults may feel 'lost and in-between'. Many challenges, such as lacking self-knowledge, overly relying on feedback from others, lacking support during the unfamiliar unfolding of adult milestones and forming new (and different) relationships are faced by these young individuals. As a result, young individuals often feel alone, confused and search for appropriate social roles (Shulman *et al.,* 2005:579).

Accordingly, a few of the most prominent challenges of emerging adulthood are explored in the subsequent sections.

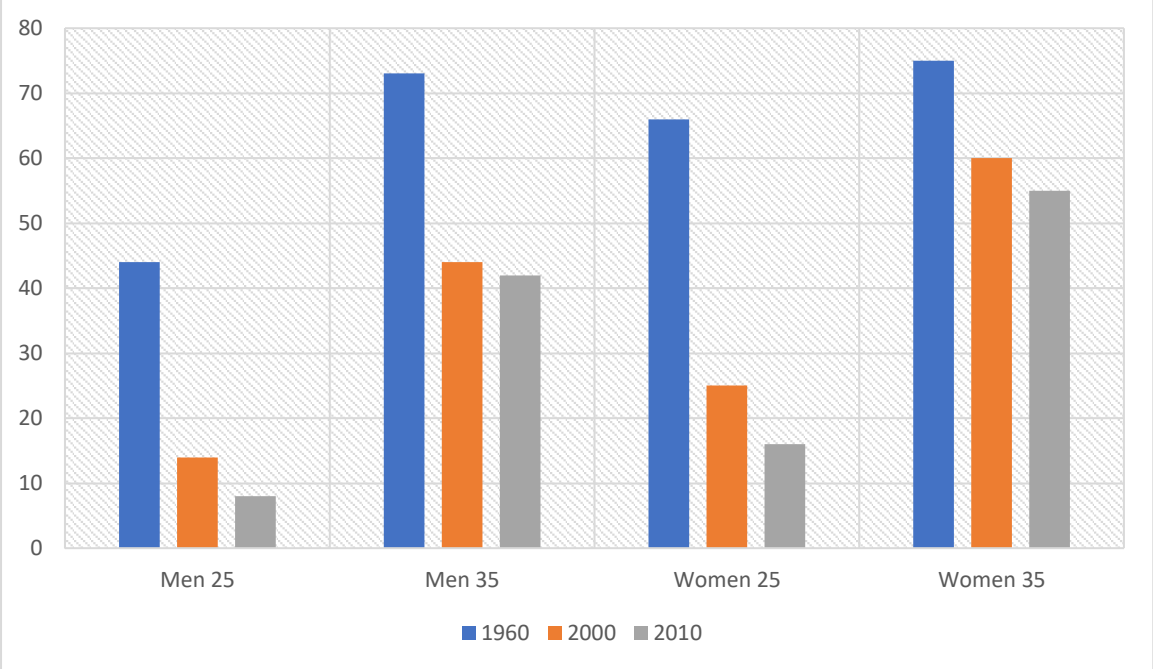
3.3.1 The Impact of the Prolonged Transition to Adulthood and Non-Linear Unfolding of Adult Milestones

Emerging adults in industrialised countries take much longer to transit from adolescence to adulthood, and milestones for adulthood unfolds in a non-linear way. The linear unfolding of milestones implicates that young adults complete tertiary education, leave their parents' home and live independently, enter the workforce, get married and start a family of their own (Setterson & Ray, 2010:21). Relative freedom from limitations such as parental supervision, adult responsibilities and family obligations allow emerging adults to be actively involved in their development through exploration. For some emerging adults, the prolonged moratorium is seen as an

exhilarating experience and offers opportunities to commit to identities fully. For others, this can be a confusing, intimidating period with limitless opportunities and possibilities. Combined with society's pressures and limited support, creating a future and commitment to an adult identity can be a stressful experience for some individuals. The potential, therefore, exists for some people to become 'stuck' in exploration and a lack of commitment to identities (Côtè & Schwartz, 2002:575).

Many young individuals have less clear occupational goals resulting in 'job-hopping' where he/she finds a job just to leave it again and goes back to training, or just work to gain experience without getting paid. Many students are also not 'accepted' for academic programmes of their choice and temporarily apply for a different field of study. They re-apply later, causing them to switch between educational programmes.

In Figure 3.2 below, Furstenberg (2015:S15) indicates the changes in emerging adults' completion of traditional milestones as it has occurred over time. According to this study, most emerging adults completed education, entered an occupation, married and had children by the age of 25 years during the 1960s, compared to 2010 (and might even be lower now), where only 8% men and 16% women completed the same milestones at a particular time.



Source: Furstenberg (2015:S15)

Figure 3.2: Percentage completing the transition to adulthood in 1960, 2000, and 2010 using traditional benchmarks, ages: 25 and 35

One of the challenges associated with the prolonged transition to adulthood is families and society's financial and emotional strain. Most middle-class families do not have the resources to support their young adult children for extended periods, resulting in emotional stress to both parents and their emerging adult children.

According to Furstenberg (2015:17), tertiary education is furthermore an essential pathway into economic success but is not necessarily available for every emerging adult. Universities and other institutions became selective in who is admitted (academic record and numbers) and fees became too expensive for most middle-class families. Research shows that better educational and social outcomes will be possible if tertiary institutions find ways to provide efficient support for their students (on a remedial, emotional and a financial level) but lack sufficient guidance and support (Brock, 2010:110).

The absence of support and guidance results in the experience of stress and unexpressed dissatisfaction due to living 'divided lives', in other words, having to cope with aspects of adolescence and adulthood simultaneously. Furthermore, the transitional phase is not predictable and characterised by many 'uncertainties, fluctuations, reversals and discontinuities'. Therefore, emerging adults are confused and continually searching for appropriate roles – socially and occupationally. Emerging adults falsely try to cope with unfamiliar demands of situations such as relationship-building, goalsetting (both occupational and life goals), as well as independence from parents, and try to find meaning between what was traditionally required and the unfamiliar demands of the non-sequential unfolding of life events (Furstenberg 2015:17; Shulman et al., 2005:579; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2).

3.3.2 Lack of Self-Knowledge and Pre-Occupation with being accepted may result in Self-Alienation and Inauthentic, False Selves

Based on the three basic psychological needs for authenticity (autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000:72), and the active exploration of new identities in search of independence (Arnett, 2000:469), emerging adults must gain a strong sense of self through self-awareness (Kernis & Goldman, 2006:295). Emerging adults

strive for achievement and self-definition (Shulman *et al.,* 2016:259). Emerging adults have to trust self-knowledge gained through self-awareness and value the input of significant others (parents, friends, society) without transforming to the expectations of such others (social constructivism).

Most adolescents and emerging adults are preoccupied with social approval (Theran & Han, 2013:106) and might experience pressure to conform to the expectations of others. This pressure to conform is identified as 'existential anxiety' (Goldman & Kernis, 2006:288). Emerging adults experience 'existential anxiety' if they struggle to understand 'how to be' while expected to behave according to others' expectations and may dread the responsibility of making identity choices (which may turn out to be wrong choices if based on others' expectations). If the emerging adult experiences conflict between self-knowledge and others' expectations and is preoccupied with social approval, he/she may become detached from the true (authentic) self and become self-alienated (Goldman & Kernis, 2006:288).

Self-alienation may lead to psychological problems such as low self-esteem, high levels of stress and inauthentic behaviour (Song *et al.,* 2021:1126). A young individual, for example, may be 'reserved' in the presence of his/her parents but 'outgoing and spontaneous' in the company of peers because of conflict between others' expectations and the true self (Theran & Han, 2013:106). Self-alienation may therefore result in 'multiple selves' (Stryker & Burke, 2000:285). Multiple selves are the different 'selves' an individual portrays when interacting with significant others with their various expectations (see Chapter 1, Section 2.2.1). On the other hand, authenticity is stable in identity and behaviour over time, although input from others might be accepted. For example, when young individuals enter the place of study or work, new groups and peers provide opportunities to test previous beliefs such as religion, world views and identities formed. Although self-knowledge and self-identity (authenticity) generally remain stable, the emerging adult can slightly change behaviour and beliefs according to new information and experiences. When self-knowledge is compared with further details, the young individual might alter his/her self-meanings based on self-knowledge. For example, suppose a young individual meets fellow students with different worldviews than what he/she integrated from significant others, he/she may either adopt (and alter own beliefs) or reject the

difference in views (based on social constructivism framework) (Arnett, 2000:469; Stryker & Burke, 2000:286).

Authenticity is formed through validation and support from significant others like parents (Theran, 2010:251). During the adolescent years, close relationships with friends help to form the basis for later relationships. Later relationships in life might be false if early relationships were based on inauthentic behaviour. According to Theran (2010:251), inauthentic relationships have their origin in losing connection with the inner self; in other words, they comply with what others want. In contrast, authentic relationships are characterised by the individual's ability to focus on self-sufficiency and, as a result, give up relationships that no longer benefit the individual. Emerging adults develop essential aspects such as empathy, sympathy and self-discovery through interpersonal relationships. However, if there is a mismatch between the views of significant others (parents, peers, society) and self-awareness, it may lead to a false self to gain approval and avoid rejection (Deci & Ryan, 2000:228; Theran, 2010:251). Conditional acceptance and support from parents may also result in false behaviour. Parents' unconditional support and validation form a fundamental basis for authentic relationships later in life (Deci & Ryan, 2000:230; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3263).

Emerging adults who uncritically accept influences from others may lose a sense of who they are. Although emerging adults continually strive for self-definition and stay open for advice and help from others, they must remain aware of their inner aspirations without merely adjusting to the influences of others. Open, self-determined individuals can learn from challenging life events and integrate learnings without changing who they are. On the contrary, individuals who are less open for self-exploration and self-improvement may perceive influences from others in a biased way, which may cause young individuals to become highly dependent on approval from others and may result in inauthenticity (Shulman *et al.,* 2016:259).

3.3.3 Altered Relationships

Because of the prolonged transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood (Arnett, 2000:473), traditional markers for adulthood such as stable romantic relationships, preceding marriage, parenthood and financially rewarding jobs are postponed. According to Mayseless and Keren (2013:65), these traditional markers are replaced

with new ones such as 'being responsible for own actions and choices' and have shifted from external motivations to the self, self-development and what works for the new realities. Emerging adults' romantic relationships have transformed accordingly. Although commitment is still seen as an important marker for marriage, the young individual caught in this prolonged transition is less likely to commit prematurely and delay committed romantic relationships accordingly. Romantic relationships are characterised by altered perspectives such as 'friends with benefits' or 'stay-over relationships'. Sex, in this case, does not necessarily lead to commitment. Even steady relationships do not automatically include definite plans (Mayseless & Keren, 2013:65).

Nevertheless, relationships (both friendships and romantic relationships) are characterised by greater closeness and intimacy during emerging adulthood than during adolescence. Closer and more intimate relationships result from the emerging adult's focus on self-development (Mayseless & Keren, 2013:65). Being authentic and displaying authentic behaviour, therefore, play a more significant role. Brunnel *et al.,* (2010:901) postulate that authentic individuals have healthier and happier relationships. More authentic relationships are furthermore characterised by destructive ways to resolve conflict. According to Brunnel *et al*. (2010:901), emerging adults who engage in 'true self behaviour' feel more confident and have positive expectations about closeness and support from others.

Authentic individuals strive to be more open and 'truthful' in relation to others. Lopez and Rice (2006:369-370) identified two characteristics of authentic relationships: 'ability of deception' and 'intimate risk-taking'. 'Unacceptability of deception' refers to committing not to take part in false-self behaviour. 'Intimate risk-taking' is the intense open, intimate and less inhibited disclosure to each other. Lopez and Rice (2006:370) positively associate these two characteristics with relationship satisfaction and overall well-being. Individuals who commit to the unacceptability of deception strive for honesty and openness and are less defensive when confronted with information that contradicts self-knowledge and will have more intimate relations based on self-disclosure. Individuals who do not commit to the unacceptability of deception will furthermore be less open to positively resolving conflict. Relationship qualities such as being more accommodating and willing to share more deeply are associated with

individuals with a higher commitment to the unacceptability of deception. Therefore, it is crucial to be authentic based on the self-knowledge gained through self-awareness and not overly dependent on the approval of significant others (parents, society and peers) and not 'being who others want me to be'. The emerging adult spends ample time in the presence of peers from various social and cultural backgrounds (and different worldviews) and tests roles and identities based on what he/she discovers from these interactions. It is crucial for authenticity that the emerging adult does not overly identify with and uncritically accept the norms and values of significant others (Erikson, 1953:64; Shulman *et al.,* 2016:259).

3.3.4 Lacking Goals

According to Gabrielsen, Ulleberg and Watten (2012:1054), goals are 'essential components of a person experiencing his/her life as meaningful'. Searching for meaning is positively linked to having a purpose, but the absence thereof leaves people feeling empty and frustrated. According to Krings *et al.* (2008:93), life goals are 'future-oriented representations of one's desired state', in other words, it represents what an individual wants out of life and what he/she wants to achieve. Goals are furthermore mechanisms that direct future expectations (Kaniušonyté & Žukauskiené, 2018:4).

The normative expectations of society (cultural beliefs, values, norms, institutional tracks, history) impact the emerging individual's thinking, motivation, behaviour and goalsetting (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:3). During emerging adulthood, the focus of personal goals has shifted to self-development (Krings *et al.,* 2008:95). To find the authentic self within the socio-context of upbringing, the emerging adult must distance him/herself from all role players to focus on and explore the self (Scharf & Mayseless, 2010:83). He/she must also find a balance between influences of society (family, culture, historical time) and own expectations (Deci & Ryan, 2007:71; Rappazzo *et al.*, 2022:2). Autonomy from parents is essential, although many emerging adults might still be financially dependent on their parents due to the prolonged transition to adulthood (Reis & Sprecher, 2009:651). Goalsetting inevitably has also changed within the new context (Krings *et al.,* 2008:95). Parents are important role players in the negotiation between dependence and independence of their emerging adult children and must support their emerging adult children's life goals of future financial

and residential independence from parents. Possibilities such as having to pay for own studies, taking up a part-time job, to name but a few, are some of the future options that should be negotiated. Former beliefs (beliefs inherited from parents and society) must be re-evaluated, adjusted or even discarded to commit to own goals for the future. This re-evaluation involves active exploration and learning as well as adjusting where necessary. It is, therefore, crucial that future goals (personal, relationship and financial goals) and commitments are set. If the emerging adult cannot become independent from parents to a certain extent, it will be challenging to accomplish developmental tasks and set goals for the future (Reis & Sprecher, 2009:651; Shulman *et al.,* 2005:582).

To attain one's life goals is positively linked to overall well-being and life satisfaction (Krings *et al.,* 2008:95). Therefore, the emerging adult needs life goals and future expectations to provide some structure to navigate to the future self and not to 'feel lost' and 'nowhere' (Shulman *et al.,* 2005:582; Rappazzo *et al.*, 2022;2).

3.4 GUIDANCE NEEDED

The emerging adult's prominent task is to become independent and build a strong sense of self (Benson & Elder, 2011:1646). With the prolonged transition to adulthood and the unpredictable, non-linear unfolding of adult milestones, guiding norms and support have weakened. The transition is now less structured and therefore, the emerging adult needs social and psychological help more than in the past. According to Arnett (2005:204), psychosocial maturation (healthy self-esteem, responsibility and independence) is essential to cope during this unstructured development time, using psychological resources as fundamental coping mechanisms (Benson & Elder, 2011:1646). Foster, Hagan, and Brooks-Gunn (2008:163) postulate that healthy self-esteem as a psychological resource may reduce the stress associated with all the challenges emerging adults face. Young individuals feel 'alone and confused' in their search for appropriate roles (Shulman, 2005:579) and therefore need guidance. According to Settersten and Ray (2010:36) and Rappazzo *et al.*, (2022;2)., emerging adults need networks, programmes, opportunities to 'explore the selves' in a new society and skills. In addition, they have to contribute to communities and develop a larger sense of purpose. Benson and Elder (2011:1647) postulate that the challenges and needs of emerging adults are not supported or guided by institutions and society.

According to Lavoie, Pereira and Talwar (2014:1), emerging adults in the transitional phase need resilience (the ability to recover from hardship quickly). Aspects of resiliency to be addressed in the guidance include socio-emotional skills, supportive environments, quality sleep and genetic or physiological profiles that suit the environment. Socio-emotional skills and self-regulation refer to the young individual's ability to identify, regulate and control his/her emotions. Being able to communicate effectively and having positive self-esteem (based on self-knowledge) are linked to resiliency. Most young individuals who have difficulties regulating emotions, struggle with social stressors when they are confronted with multiple changes and challenges (typical of emerging adulthood). If young individuals can be trained to communicate more effectively and can regulate their emotions, they will be more able to cope with complex socio-emotional challenges and stressors. The next aspect, namely supportive environments, is seen as a key contributor to resiliency. The emotional support by parents (as primary support givers) becomes less direct during the transition to adulthood, and young individuals expand their need for support to the broader society – which is often not equipped or available to support the distinct needs of the emerging adult. Emerging adulthood is associated with extended hours of studying and socialising. Many young individuals do not get enough quality sleep which may lead to more difficulty coping with the stressful stage of life. Parents do not monitor bed-times and the use of technology during night times, which impacts on the number of quality sleep hours for the emerging adult (Lavoie *et al.,* 2014:1).

Wickham, Williamson, Beard, Kobayash and Hirst (2015:61) proclaim that emerging adults who lack self-awareness and self-knowledge are often biased in their processing of information (Kernis-Goldman Authenticity model - Kernis & Goldman, 2006:293; see Section 1.2.4.3). Unbiased processing (the ability to trust own motives, feelings and knowledge) is strongly linked to authenticity and positive self-esteem, which is important for authenticity. If the emerging adult gets guidance to develop autonomy, relatedness and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000:229), he/she will be more self-aware, have self-knowledge and will be able to process information in an unbiased way. Therapists, educators and managers can assist young individuals by supplying support (Wickham *et al.,* 2015:61).

According to Brock (2010:119), many students lack the guidance to figure out what course to follow. Remedial assistance is furthermore often needed to bridge the gap between school and tertiary education regarding study methods, time management and planning (Brock, 2010:120). Future career exploration is also sometimes neglected. Many young individuals are so focused on the outcome of their studies (diploma or degree) that they postpone exploring career possibilities after college or university. These individuals will significantly benefit from programmes assisting 'in-depth' (divertive)and 'in breadth' (specific) career exploration. In breadth exploration involves more flexibility when choosing a particular career path but is also associated with a lack of planning in a prolonged transition. In-depth exploration allows for better goalsetting based on knowledge about a specific career path. Still, it can become a barrier when career paths have to be changed in rapidly changing contexts (transforming life roles, study limitations or job-losses) (Lee *et al.,* 2016:133).

Emotional support is crucial during the challenging exploration phase of emerging adulthood (Luyckx *et al.,* 2013:717). Young individuals in the prolonged transition often feel overwhelmed and experience feelings of hopelessness and uncontrollability. High standards are set but sometimes without proper guidelines and assistance, leaving the young individual confused and frustrated (Luyckx *et al.,* 2013:718; see Section 1.2.4.3).

3.5 SUMMARY

Scharf and Mayseless (2010:85) define authenticity as 'the extent to which individuals are true to their qualities, despite external influences and pressures'. The emerging adult must have self-knowledge and differentiate the self from significant others to become a 'person true to the self'. Awareness and openness to new experiences are important, but the ability to process this information in an unbiased way assists the young individual in making sense of the self. External influences and information must be evaluated and not merely integrated. Furthermore, the emerging adult must be able to behave in ways that reflect his/her norms, values, and needs. Honesty and being true to the self are crucial components of authentic relationships. To become authentic, the emerging adult experiences various challenges. Expectations of significant others may differ, and the young individual must separate from the inherited

beliefs of parents, peers and society and find the true self. Self-alienation to prevent rejection can withhold the young individual to live authentically.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental phase for adulthood. Young adults moving through the transformational stage of development (leaving school, start working or starting tertiary studies) need to form new identities. The most significant identity changes are social and occupational identities. Not only are emerging adults actively exploring new identities, but they also face challenges in doing so. A prolonged, non-linear unfolding of significant milestones (getting a qualification, starting work, going back to study, moving back to the parent's house, starting a new job, getting married and starting a family) are some of the difficulties the emerging adult faces. During the exploration phase, where emerging adults actively search for meaning and explore different possibilities, new identities are formed based on feedback from significant others like peers, parents, romantic partners and society. Thus, developing identities during emerging adulthood is essential for authenticity in adulthood.

The researcher aimed to understand the challenges that the emerging adult experiences while developing new identities during the transitional phase between adolescence and adulthood. It is also essential that the researcher understands who the significant others are that provide feedback and support to assist emerging adults with identity formation. To understand the mentioned challenges, the researcher collected data from selected participants to gain insight into these challenges. The emphasis of the study was on how to guide young people through possible challenges to become authentic adults.

According to Flick *et al.* (2004:80 and Hennik *et al.,* (2020:29-33), a research design is 'a plan for collecting and analysing evidence to allow the researcher to answer questions posed'. Using an exploratory research design and a qualitative research approach, the researcher tried to answer the research question: *'What challenges does the emerging adult face in becoming an authentic adult?'* Following a qualitative approach to this research, the researcher aimed to understand how emerging adults perceived their journey towards authentic adulthood and its challenges. She tried to

elicit accurate reflections of the emerging adult's beliefs, feelings, actions and reactions, as well as their need for guidance during their journey and aimed to understand

- the difficulties young adults face during the transitional stage of their lives,
- new identities that need to be formed,
- challenges to be met during the transitional phase, and
- guidance emerging adults need to overcome the above challenges.

The collection of data was done through semi-structured interviews, and Tesch's method was used to analyse. The chapter also describes the ethical considerations that guided the researcher.

4.2 THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Based on the literature study (Chapter 2), the emerging adult faces different challenges during identity formation while transitioning to adulthood. It is essential to form secure identities to become a person true to the self, in other words, an authentic person. Emerging adults generally lack self-knowledge. They do not know their strengths and weaknesses well enough and overly rely on feedback from others. Self-knowledge precedes a strong sense of self and may also negatively impact the emerging adult's ability to 'plan for the future and set realistic goals'. A strong understanding of the 'self' forms the basis for self-motivational behaviour (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:69-70). Therefore, the emerging adult needs to understand who he/she is and where he/she is going but often needs guidance to become an authentic adult (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:69-70).

4.2.1 The Main Research Question

The main research question for this study was: *What challenges does the emerging adult face in becoming an authentic adult?*

4.2.2 Sub-Research Questions

The sub-research questions following from the main research question were:

1. What are the identities the young adult needs to become an authentic adult?

2. What are the challenges the young adult faces in developing identities for authentic adulthood?
3. What guidance does the young adult need to become an authentic adult?

The researcher tried to find answers in the literature, as well as from the empirical study.

4.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM, APPROACH AND DESIGN

4.3.1 Research Paradigm

All research studies begin with the selection of a research paradigm. Research is guided and shaped by paradigms and refer to the general ways of thinking and gaining of knowledge. According to Berg (2008:827), a paradigm is the framework of methods, values and beliefs to guide the research practice. The chosen research paradigm will largely determine **where** the researcher looks for answers and shape the researcher's understanding of **what** is found. Different paradigms offer different ways of interpreting social life and are neither true nor false but serve as guidelines when researching a specific problem (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:297; Johannesson & Perjons, 2014:167-179).

The nature of the research furthermore impacts the choice of a particular paradigm. According to Dudovskiy (2016:39), different research philosophies guide different paradigms. Philosophies distinguished include Positivism, Pragmatism. Realism and Interpretivism.

- *Positivism*, in essence, is based on scientific methods and scientific research as the only way to prevail in the truth. 'Facts' are gained through measurement and observation and are accurate. The researcher collects data, interprets it and quantifies findings. Statistical analysis is used to make predictions, and conclusions are observable. The researcher is independent and no provision for human subjectivity is made (Dudovskiy, 2016:41-45).
- *Pragmatism* claims that many different interpretations of the world are possible and that the entire picture is necessary before an explanation can be given (Dudovskiy, 2016:45-46).
- *Realism* is based on a scientific approach and divided into 'direct realism' and 'critical realism'. Direct realism follows a strategy of what is found in reality, whereas critical realism follows a notion of human subjectivity that may

influence the objectivity of research findings. Direct realists perceive the world as unchanging and focus on one level of study, either individual, group or organisation. In contrast, the critical realist prefers a multi-level study where the individual in its totality is researched (Dudovskiy, 2016:46-47).

- *Interpretivism* is based on the interpretation of researched data but also accommodates human subjectivity in the findings. Interpretive researchers aim to understand an individual's actions (Dudovskiy, 2016:47-48).

Diverse approaches, such as symbolic interactionism (philosophy of shared cultural meanings attached to social objects), phenomenology (philosophy of explanation through direct experience with the phenomenon), social-constructivism (philosophy of the impact of social interaction on identity formation) and hermeneutics (philosophy of interpretation and understanding) form part of interpretivism (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2015:26-28). These approaches reject the view that meaning can only be explained objectively and independent of consciousness. Instead, Interpretivism acknowledges differences between people and focuses on the meaning given to an individual's lifeworld. Multiple methods are used to reflect various aspects of the phenomenon (Dudovskiy, 2016:47-48). Within interpretivism, the researcher used a phenomenological paradigm. According to Krysik and Fynn (2010:118), phenomenology aims to describe the world from the phenomenon's view – in this case, the world of the emerging adult. Phenomenology refers to the 'philosophical tradition that seeks to understand the world through directly experiencing the phenomena' (Dudovskiy, 2016:48).

Smith (2011:68) defines phenomenology as the study that aims to 'explain those studied'. Understanding is gained through unbiased descriptions of experiences, also referred to as 'lived experiences'. The researcher, in this study, therefore, ensured that she captured and described not only words and sentences but also tried to explain the full context in which the semi-structured interviews took place. Race (2008:489-491) refers to lived experiences as individual and uniquely recognised experiences. Through language, different possible lived experiences are mapped. The researcher of this study intended to research unique, personal experiences of the emerging adult, such as how social experiences as an emerging adult differs from those during adolescence. All lived experiences can become possible phenomenological topics for

research. The researcher tried to expose how language (words/concepts) gives structure or distorts experiences through phenomenology. Although lived experiences cannot be returned to, they can be described (Race, 2008:491). In this study, the researcher could richly and expansively tell what was revealed by participants through words, meanings, body language, gestures, attitude and intonation. Experiences revealed by emerging adults as lived moments were illustrated as richly and expansively as possible.

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:316), phenomenology is the 'description of human experience experienced by the subjects'. The focus is thus on the meaning and not on the thing itself. Therefore, the biggest challenge for the researcher in this study was to distance herself from her subjective judgements and perceptions and present the data in raw form to demonstrate authenticity.

Dudovskiy summarised phenomenology as follows:
The fundamental notion of phenomenology is that the world is subjective and socially constructed. Therefore, although the researcher in this study could not be entirely objective due to her own experiences and challenges as experienced during her emerging adulthood, it was of utmost importance that research findings were captured and coded as unbiased possible (2016:45).

In phenomenology, the term 'bracketing' is used (Tufford & Newman, 2012:83). Bracketing refers to the researcher's open-mindedness (free from pre-perceptions, prior-knowledge and pre-assumptions) (Tufford & Newman, 2012:83-84). The responsibilities of the researcher are to focus on meanings to understand events better. The totality of circumstances needs to be considered, and not only parts.

Following an exploratory phenomenological design, the young adult in transition as a phenomenon was studied to understand the underlying reasons and motivations for behaviour and the challenges that the emerging adults face in becoming authentic adults. In addition, the young adult in a transitional phase of his/her life was explored to understand what can be done to assist him/her during this life-changing stage to become an authentic adult and successfully adjust to challenges. The researcher sought to understand the emerging adult's challenges while exploring and forming new

identities for adulthood. Through interviews, the researcher was able to access the reality as seen by the emerging adult and tried to understand meanings given to actions.

4.3.2 Research Approach

A research approach refers to the researcher's assumptions, beliefs, or stance as a guiding principle. A research approach is a detailed plan for the research and guides the researcher when deciding about data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods. Three typical research approaches are qualitative-, quantitative- and mixed-method (Creswell, 2014:3-6; Hennik *et al.,* 2020:42).

4.3.2.1 Qualitative versus quantitative research

Gardner and Coombs (2011:45) differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research approaches. According to Gardner and Coombs (2011:45-47), the significant difference in choice between qualitative and quantitative research is determined by the aim and outcome of the research, in other words, what the researcher wants to achieve. The research method of preference will determine how data will be collected and how to interpret and analyse collected data. Quantitative research is used to test a hypothesis or generalise about a particular topic and is expressed in numbers and graphs. A qualitative approach will be better if the research goal is to understand concepts (thoughts or experiences) to change or improve a social construct. The qualitative approach describes a particular phenomenon, whereas quantitative research measures or calculates physical entities. A qualitative research approach aims to uncover common trends, themes and patterns (Donley & Grauerholz, 2012:8; Dudovskiy, 2016:45; Flick *et al.* 2004:3; Sansone *et al.,* 2008:466; Hennik *et al.,* 2020:44).

Given and Saumure (2008:896-897) differentiate between qualitative and quantitative research by comparing the parallel concepts of both research types, emphasising the qualitative approach, which the researcher used for this study.

a. *Transferability* (qualitative) and *generalisability* (quantitative): Findings from quantitative research can be applied across broad contexts (generalisability). In contrast, qualitative researchers need to describe the scope of the study so

that it can be used in different contexts. The worthiness of a study is determined by how successful others can apply findings to alternative settings (Given & Saumure, 2008:896).

b. *Objectivity* (quantitative) and *confirmability* (qualitative) Quantitative data is considered to be accurate, unbiased and objective. Qualitative data, on the other hand, is interpreted by the researcher and cannot be unbiased. However, all findings must match obtained data and no claims without the support of data findings may be made (Given & Saumure, 2008:896).
c. *Credibility* (qualitative) and *validity* (quantitative): A study is considered valid if it accurately measures what it is supposed to measure in quantitative studies. If the qualitative researcher describes the phenomenon of study richly and truthfully, it is considered credible research. Findings and data are accurately represented through credible qualitative research (Given & Saumure, 2008:896).
d. *Reliability-reproducibility* (quantitative) and *dependability* (qualitative): Quantitative findings are reliable if they can accurately be replicated when used in the same context with the same procedure. Unfortunately, regarding reproducibility, qualitative research results can generally not be repeated in the same or different contexts because of the constant social changes in the phenomenon's world. However, findings can be dependable if the researcher's methods and procedures are used so that other researchers can collect data in similar ways. Furthermore, if the researcher uses similar methods and techniques, predictions to find similar explanations for the phenomenon should be possible (Given & Saumure, 2008:897).

A qualitative research approach was followed in this study. The researcher aimed to research the phenomenon (emerging adults in transition) to understand the phenomenon better. According to McCusker and Gunaydin (2015:537), qualitative research is defined by the aim of the study, which is to understand the social aspects of people and is, therefore, contextual. A qualitative research method aims to answer 'How?' 'Why?' and 'what?' instead of 'How much?' or 'How many?' compared to a quantitative method. Thematic analysis is used as a preferred analysis method. The focus is on how individuals perceive specific issues and interactive processes. In this study, the researcher explored aspects of the emerging adult in transition. Aspects

explored included exploration of identities to be formed, challenges the emerging adult experiences during the transitional phase from adolescence to young adulthood and the kind of assistance the emerging adult needs to live an authentic life.

The data collection methods in this qualitative research, namely semi-structured interviews, were focused on the 'quality' or 'essence' of a phenomenon (the emerging adult in the transition to adulthood). Qualitative research asserts that humans interpret their social world and share these interpretations through mutually understood symbols such as language. The qualitative researcher's task is to carefully observe people's words, actions and interactions and then identify patterns of meaning through the interpretation of observations. Following a qualitative approach, the researcher seeks emerging trends in collected data (how meaning is given to things and what the implications are) to understand better the phenomenon in particular circumstances (Berg, 2008:827). During semi-structured interviews, the researcher of this study aimed to look for emerging patterns in meaning, perceptions and experiences of emerging adults as they explore and form new identities for authentic adulthood.

4.3.3 Research Design

An essential part of any research is clarity about the research design, approach and data collection methods to address the research question (Hennik *et al.,* 2020:29-33) The research design refers to the 'general plan' about how the researcher intends to answer the research question. Dudovskiy (2016:66) divides research design into exploratory and conclusive research designs. For this study, the exploratory design was preferred, as indicated below.

4.3.1.1 Exploratory research versus conclusive research

The significant difference between exploratory research and conclusive research is that an exploratory research design leaves room for further study and does not aim at providing a conclusion to the research question, as in the case of conclusive research. Instead, exploratory research seeks to find insights and understanding about a situation. In contrast, conclusive research aims to verify the particular study, tests hypotheses and therefore uses precise, well-defined data and data sources. Furthermore, when collecting data, conclusive researchers use structured methods on relatively large, selected samples and analyses data quantitatively, compared to the

open-ended, small, subjective selected data analysis of exploratory research (Dudovskiy, 2016:69-70).

In this study, the exploratory research design was used. The exploratory design is typically used to gather new ideas, essential details and insights about a phenomenon and aims to address research questions such as 'what?', 'why?' and 'how?' and provides opportunities to clarify existing concepts (http://lynn-library.libguides.com). Exploratory research intends to explore the research questions and to determine the nature of the problem. This type of study does not intend to provide conclusive evidence or provide the final answer but helps the researcher explore and understand the problem better. An exploratory research design is used when little previous research has been conducted, and in some cases, it forms the basis of more conclusive research. The research questions were explored through semi-structured interviews and aimed to gather insight into the phenomenon (emerging adult) under study.

4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Several data-collection methods are used to explore different aspects of the phenomenon (Dudovskiy, 2016:45). The goal of the study determines the type of research method a researcher chooses. Whatever method is selected, must relate to the research question (and sub-questions) of the research. Therefore, the researcher should have a clear sense of the intended outcome of the study before specific research methods can be considered which will determine the most appropriate method(s) of data collection to use (Dudovskiy, 2016:45).

4.4.1 Sampling

Sampling refers to particular selection processes used when selecting participants for a study. Researchers choose a smaller representation out of the large population to find representing elements, if any (Dudovskiy, 2016:84). According to Vogt *et al.,* (2012:121), two crucial factors determine sampling: **who** must be included and **how many** participants to include. Suppose the researcher plans to generalise from the bigger population. In that case, the sample must represent the bigger population regarding culture, particular age group and gender, to name but a few. When selecting

participants, two essential criteria apply: firstly, participants must be **able** to participate, and secondly, they must be **willing** to participate (Hennik *et al.,* 2020:91).

Dudovskiy (2016:98-105), Vogt *et al.* (2012:122), as well as Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016:1-4) discriminate between probability sampling and non-probability sampling in qualitative research. When using probability sampling, any member of society has a chance to be selected. Therefore, participants have an equal opportunity to be chosen. An example of probability sampling is 'simple random sampling', where random participants are selected to participate in the research. Non-probability sampling entails selection based on the judgement of the researcher and is often referred to as judgement sampling. Participants are selected by choice of the researcher based on what he/she wants to know about a phenomenon. Participants who are willing and available to provide information (based on the research question) are selected. Dudovski (2016:109) postulates that the most important advantage of non-probability sampling is that the researcher can 'reflect the descriptive comments' of participants. Biases of the researcher is also a possibility.

The selection of participants is based on availability and willingness to take part in the research. Selection can thus be done with convenience (convenience sampling) in mind or based on a particular purpose (purposive sampling). Convenience sampling refers to the availability and trouble-free access of participants. In contrast, purposive sampling is based on the research question and depends on what is important about the particular study (Etikan *et al.,* 2016:2).

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. A representative sample of students (first year and final year of study) was selected as representatives of emerging adults between 18-25 years of age (Arnett, 2006:121). For purposeful sampling, determining factors such as 'Who is going to be interviewed?', 'How many participants will be included?' also, 'Where will the interviews take place?' were considered.

Who was selected?

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:391), researchers deliberately seek participants, groups and environments where the specific phenomenon of study is likely to occur. The researcher's purposeful target age group included criteria like tertiary education students between 18 and 25 years of age. In addition, participants had to be in a

transitional phase, namely, recently started with studies or in their final year of research and planning to start work shortly. The target sample was representative of gender (males and females) and race (black, Indian, white, and coloured individuals). The study included students from a higher education institution in Gauteng, South Africa. The researcher placed an advertisement on several social media platforms, requesting students who were in their first and/or final year of study to participate. The researcher also used snowball sampling for the selection of participants. Snowball sampling refers to the process of selecting other possible participants through recommendations from participants who originally applied to be part of the study. Thus, they meet the requirements of the research project on the referral of an existing participant (see De Vos *et al.,* 2011:233).

How many participants were included?

The researcher planned to interview 16 University students - eight students in their first year of study, comprising 2 White, 2 Black, 2 Indian and 2 Coloured students, one male and one female and eight students in their final year of study, comprising 2 White, 2 Black, 2 Indian and 2 Coloured students, one male and one female. It did not work out like mentioned, because of for instance not getting any coloured students who responded – see table 4.1 below.

De Vos *et al.* (2011:350) postulate that the number of participants is determined by 'sufficiency' and 'saturation'. A sample is considered sufficient if it represents the population outside the sample group. Others who are not part of the sample will connect experiences to those of the representative sample. Saturation refers to the minimum number of participants needed to create stability and ensure maximum coverage of the research topic. The researcher must, therefore, carefully consider the sample size and the compilation of participants. For this study, the following guidelines were followed when selecting participants:

- The sample was heterogeneous (maximum variation) with regards to gender and race
- The ages of participants varied between 18 and 25 years of age
- The sample included students in their first year of study and students in their final year of study who were about to start working. They represented the

sample of emerging adults in transition (between school and tertiary studies or tertiary studies and work).

Table 4.1: Profile of participants

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS				
	First-year students		**Final-year students**	
Race	**Female**	**Male**	**Female**	**Male**
White	1 Afrikaans 1 English		2 Afrikaans 1 English	1 Afrikaans
Black	1 English	2 English		
Indian	1 English			1 English
TOTAL	**4**	**2**	**3**	**2**

Unfortunately, no coloured volunteers could be found.

4.4.2 Data Collection

De Vos *et al.* (2011:383), Dudovskiy (2016:75), Hennik *et al.,* (2020:116) and Hox and Boeije (2005:593) distinguish between secondary data collection and primary data collection. Secondary data refers to available data published in journals, books and other places; in other words, data collected previously for different purposes. Secondary data can add valuable new insight to data that already exists. Publication date, the reliability of the source and the author's credentials are significant indications to consider when using secondary data. An intensive literature review (secondary data collection) of available information and previous research about emerging adulthood was done and accurately cited in Chapters two and three of this study.

Primary data collection, as defined by De Vos *et al.* (2011:383), Dudovskiy (2016:75) and Hox and Boeije (2005:593) refers to data collected for a particular research question. Several data collection methods are used to explore different aspects of the phenomenon (Dudovskiy, 2016:45). Semi-structured interviews as the primary method were employed in this research and were videotaped to ensure close observation of participants. In addition, aspects such as body language, intonation, pauses and expressions guided the researcher to better understand the participants.

In every research design, the researcher is confronted with the following two questions:

- How should the data collection and analysis be set up?
- How is the selection of participants to be made? (Dudovskiy, 2016:75).

The researcher used individual interviews as a qualitative primary data collection method.

4.4.2.1 Individual Interviews

According to Donley & Grauerholz, (2012:44), the individual interview is the most commonly used research method in qualitative research. However, three types of individual interviews are differentiated by Dudovskiy (2016:80), namely structured interviews (quantitative research), semi-structured interviews (qualitative research) and unstructured interviews (qualitative research).

The structured interview is a typical quantitative data collection method. It consists of pre-determined questions (in the form of questionnaires) answered by all participants in a particular order (Dudovskiy, 2016:80; Hennik *et al.,* 2020:115).

Unstructured interviews are conducted informally, and no questions are prepared before the interview. Instead, the researcher determines the flow of unstructured interviews. No prior experience or opinions precede the interview. The purpose is not to evaluate or test hypotheses but to have a 'conversation with a purpose' with the only interest to understand (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:348). The biggest challenge of unstructured interviews is maintaining a balance between flexibility and consistency (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:349).

Semi-structured interviews are a combination of 'structured and unstructured' interviews as they contain elements of both. Sets of open-ended questions are prepared in advance and are answered by all participants. In addition, however, the researcher can further research particular questions or expand on specific answers through probes on an interview schedule (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:364).

For this research, semi-structured individual interviews as a method were used. According to De Vos *et al.* (2011: 344-351), Donley & Grauerholz, (2012:44), Dudovskiy (2016:80) and Krysik and Fynn (2010:113), semi-structured interviews are guided by a list of topics and include probes to research particular questions. Interviews are 'social relationships' that aims to exchange information. A great deal of

the success of an interview relies on the skills and creativity of the researcher as the participants may have competing points of view, specifically where complex issues are addressed or when the problem is controversial or personal. Semi-structured interviews are typically used to tap into a participant's beliefs and perceptions about a particular topic. Although the researcher prepares a few leading questions, the interview itself will guide the process. According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:344-351), essential aspects of the interview technique as a data collection method need to be considered. Participants are the experts and are allowed to have maximum opportunity to share. Conversations must be natural and spontaneous and interruptions should be avoided. Open-ended questions should be used to probe, and the researcher should ask questions if an answer is not entirely understood. The researcher should start with general questions and end with a general question such as 'Is there anything else that is important or left out?' Other important communication techniques to be considered include paraphrasing (stating what is heard in a different form), clarification (ask for clarity when vague responses are given), encouragement (probing participant with statements such as 'tell me more;') and acknowledgement (showing interest and attention).

In general, semi-structured interviews are used to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's perceptions, attitudes and beliefs of a particular topic (De Vos *et al.* 2011:351). Furthermore, semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in the research process as it enables the researcher to explore deeper and ask more questions when new information emerges (probing). Researchers use a set of written, pre-determined open-ended questions (referred to as an interview schedule) as guidelines to allow maximum flexibility. An interview schedule ensures critical thinking about what the researcher wishes to cover during the interview and assists the researcher in identifying possible difficulties such as wording issues about sensitive questions. Questions guiding the researcher when drafting pre-determined questions are

- What is the most logical order in which to address areas?
- Which is the most sensitive area? (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:352).

The researcher also needs to make sure he/she addresses all areas in a particular study with appropriate questions ensuring a logical sequence of questions, ranging from general, less complicated to more complex issues. Open-ended questions allow

for in-depth exploration and invite honest answers. Questions should furthermore be neutral, free from bias, judgement and values. Participants should feel comfortable and relaxed. The researcher and participant should expose mutual attentiveness and responsiveness to ensure maximum engagement (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:352).

The researcher for this study used semi-structured interviews to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about identities formed, challenges faced, and guidance needed during the transition to authentic adulthood. The research aimed to understand who the emerging adult in the transition to adulthood is, what identities are formed during this phase, what challenges they experience, and to determine what guidance he/she needs during this transitional phase.

Five main open-ended semi-structured questions with probes (Appendix D-E) were used during the interviews:

1. Describe yourself as a person.
2. How do you think others (parents, peers, close friends and classmates) see you?
3. How do you see yourself as an adult?
4. What challenges do you foresee to become the adult you want to become?
5. What guidance do you think you need to overcome the challenges on your way to authentic adulthood?

The researcher explained the reason for this study (Appendix B), the participant's right to withdraw and confidentiality beforehand and allowed for questions. Each participant gave his/her consent (Appendix C).

Where were the interviews held?

An informal, quiet environment, free of interruptions, was used to conduct the interviews. The researcher ensured that it was a private, comfortable and non-threatening environment of the participant's choice. Most of the interviews took place at coffee shops close to the participants' residences or homes. Interviews commenced after class hours when the students were available at a time agreed upon by both parties. Apparatus for video and audio recording were used with the aid of interview

notes written down during interviews (see De Vos *et al.* 2011:423). No covid protocols were needed as interviews were held pre-covid.

4.4.2.2 Field notes and tape recording

Field notes are written notes made by the researcher while collecting data and include what the researcher observes visually and auditory and experiences and thoughts during data collection (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:423). Field notes summarise what happened through the process of data collection and answers questions such as 'Who was involved?', 'What occurred during the process?' 'What impacted the process?' Also, 'What issues occurred and need to be followed up on?'. Field notes provide a rich source of information about which further research questions should be selected and the behaviours of participants. In addition, field notes must include reflections, such as the researcher's assumptions, concerns such as conflicting values between researcher and participant, the successes or failures of the process and speculations about the outcome of the process (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:423). For example, the researcher speculated that students would experience challenges with adjustment away from home, challenges concerning self-knowledge that affect identity formation, forming of relationships, motivation and goal setting and occupational uncertainty, which might cause a lack of authentic behaviour.

Video recordings of interviews with participants' permission (Appendix C) were made to capture all responses to optimise collection. De Vos *et al.* (2011:423) recommend that electrical and battery-operated recording apparatus should be used to prevent loss of information due to apparatus malfunctioning or power failures. Videotapes and recorders should further be of high quality and supported with external microphones. Transcriptions were made for closer analysis. For data analysis, video recordings were used in conjunction with field notes.

4.4.2.3 Managing and storing the data

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:408), researchers should manage and organise data to make it easier to analyse. Labelling tapes and documents are some of the methods that can be used. Transcriptions were made of all recorded data. The researcher made sure that all transcriptions were appropriately labelled. Index cards were initially used to group particular codes (words or phrases). An inventory of the data was obtained

to determine any gaps in the information and verify if further research was necessary. All field notes were typed to get an overall view of what was obtained. A master copy was kept in a safe for security purposes, another copy was used to work on and a final copy was safely stored for future reference. The researcher ensured participants of protection of their privacy and confidentiality and that all recordings will be destroyed after five years.

4.4.3 Data Analysis and Representation

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:397), the purpose of data analysis is to find common themes and contradictions and to compare findings with the literature review done. Therefore, the researcher must first reduce the large volume of data by discriminating between what is significant and what is not. Secondly, a framework to communicate what is discovered must be constructed. Finally, by doing so, order and structure are created. Data analysis is thus a process of critical thinking and reasoning – an art that allows the researcher to be creative when designing a framework.

Tesch's method of analysis for quantitative research was used to analyse data in this research study to obtain to categories, themes and sub-themes. According to Tesch's method, as explained in Creswell (2014:198) and Tesch (1990:142-145), the following steps were followed:

1. The researcher developed an overall sense of the whole by reading through all transcriptions. If ideas or themes such as particular identities or challenges emerged, it was written down (recorded) (Creswell, 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:142).
2. Every transcript was thoroughly read to get an understanding of the content. In addition, thoughts about the underlying meaning (in this study, identities, challenges and the need for guidance) were written down (Creswell, 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:142).
3. After a few transcripts had been read, emerging themes and topics were written down in columns and clustered together. Topics or themes were then coded with an appropriate coding system (Creswell, 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:143).

According to De Vos *et al.* (2011:409), the researcher must read and re-read collected data to identify patterns and themes. During coding, obtained data is broken down,

conceptualised and put back together in different ways. A helpful hint is to write notes in the margins of the transcripts to assist the researcher in identifying particular patterns and themes. Other coding methods can be used, such as keywords, coloured dots, numbers or software programmes. Xu and Storr (2012:8) warn that the researcher should work forward and backwards through transcripts to look for repetitive themes and unforeseen new themes that arise from the transcripts. By doing so, codes are assigned to specific themes and particular themes are grouped.

The researcher used abbreviations to code themes or topics, then categorised the data by applying codes in this research. Codes are representations of themes and could consist of a word or short phrases. For example, Identities were coded ID S (self), ID R (relationships) and ID Sx (Sexual identity). Non-quantitative qualities such as attitudes, behaviours and meanings must be coded to bring structure and reduce data volumes (Dudovskiy 2016:132). During coding, obtained data were broken down, conceptualised and put back together in different ways. Notes were written down in the margins of the transcripts to assist the researcher in identifying particular topics and themes. The researcher worked forward and backwards through transcripts to look for repetitive themes and unforeseen new themes that arose from the transcripts (Xu & Storr, 2012:8). When assigning codes, the researcher was aware of general pitfalls, such as applying codes to themes that are ambiguous and not straightforward and understandable. The researcher was cautious that code dimensions did not overlap and therefore removed unnecessary words, for example, 'happiness' and 'joy' which have the same meaning. Another pitfall to avoid is to specify when to assign a code and when not to, for example, when a statement almost but not quite fit the particular code (Sansone *et al.,* 2009:185).

4. Next, the researcher selected the most descriptive codes and grouped these codes to form categories. Next, topics or themes were arranged to reduce the list of potential categories. Finally, the researcher looked for themes or topics that were interrelated. For example, themes related to identity formation were grouped, themes related to challenges experienced during the transition were arranged and themes related to future role uncertainty were grouped. The application of critical and analytical thinking skills is of utmost importance during data analysis (Creswell, 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:143).

5. After forming categories, the researcher designed new codes by abbreviating each category and organising abbreviations alphabetically for easy access (Creswell, 2014:198). Dudovskiy (2016:134) identifies techniques to assist the qualitative researcher when identifying common themes, patterns or relationships:
    - Word and phrase repetition: The researcher must look for repetitive words and phrases and also for words and phrases with an intense emotional load to identify possible themes or conflicts.
    - Primary and secondary data comparisons: Findings of interviews and observations must be compared to the conclusions of the literature review. Differences must be analysed and discussed (Chapter 5).
    - Metaphors and analogies: Primary research findings must be compared to phenomena from different areas, culture groups and gender. The researcher looked for differences and similarities and compared outcomes with literature research done (Chapter 2).
6. The data material belonging in a particular category was then assembled (Creswell, 2014:198). The researcher assembled all relevant data concerning 'Identity formation', 'Challenges experienced during the transformational phase from adolescence to adulthood' and 'Future expectations for adulthood', which included possible guidance needed. Relevant data were searched and summarised to make sure that essential information was captured.
7. Re-coding can be done but was not necessary for this research (Creswell 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:145).

Research findings must be compared to the objectives and aims of the study. Noteworthy quotations from interview transcripts can be used to highlight findings or contradictions (Dudovskiy 2016:135). The researcher compared the conclusions of the empirical research with the literature review (Chapters 2 and 3) to see whether the main research question and sub-questions were addressed. Similarities and contradictions are narratively discussed in Chapter 5. Participants are entitled to feedback and the researcher will ensure that research findings are available to participants in the form of a written summary. The dissertation of this study will also be available in UNISA's library. The researcher will inform participants that she may be contacted via email if more information about research findings is required.

Guidelines to assist emerging adults in becoming authentic individuals will be made available to all participants. Data may also be used in journal articles to share the findings with a broader audience.

4.5 ISSUES OF TRUSTWORTHINESS

Vogt *et al.* (2012:122) state that before trustworthiness is possible, potential contexts for transferability should be carefully considered. The researcher should, therefore, select a sample based on causal homogeneity. Causal (referring to the cause of the study) homogeneity (sameness or stability across all cases) determines how widely the findings of the researcher can be applied (Vogt *et al.,* 2012:116). In this study, the causal homogeneity group consisted of emerging adults in transition to adulthood. In-depth knowledge of the phenomenon of study should, therefore, be obtained. For example, the researcher should know what is typical, usual or expected of the phenomenon to find out what is unusual, atypical or unexpected by comparing research findings to the literature research (see Vogt *et al.* 2012: 123).

Given and Saumure (2008:896-897) explain 'trustworthiness' as measuring what is supposed to be measured. Concepts typically associated with trustworthiness in qualitative research include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

4.5.1 Credibility

Credibility refers to the level of consistency in the description of the obtained data. Credibility is associated with the richness and accuracy of explaining the studied phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie, Leech & Collins, 2012:9). The researcher aims to capture and describe the obtained data accurately. Both the reader and participant must understand why a particular research model was chosen and how the sampling took place. Further considerations include the data collection method, the validity of responses and the appropriate selection of participants (Given & Saumure, 2008:138). For example, the accuracy in representing the context of the emerging adult referred to age, culture and gender (the study included male, female, black, white, Indian and coloured first and final year of study students).

4.5.2 Transferability

The nature of qualitative studies does not allow for large samples from the population (Vogt *et al.,* 2012:121). Transferability refers to the researcher's awareness of the particular scope of the study and the ability to apply conclusions to this scope (Yin 2016:21). The scope of the study, in this case, was the young adult in a transitioning phase of life.

Given and Saumure (2008:886) suggest two strategies a qualitative researcher should use to ensure transferability: 'thick description' and 'thoughtful sampling'. The description refers to the detailed and complete description of the context of the study so that the reader can decide if the study can be transferred to other contexts. Thoughtful sampling refers to the effort made to obtain a purposeful sample of participants; in other words, the sample must represent the purpose of the research. In the case of this study, careful consideration of whom to include was taken into account. The aim was to determine which identities were formed during the transition to adulthood and what difficulties the emerging adult experienced during identity formation and transition to adulthood. Participants represented gender, race and transitional phase between adolescence and adulthood.

4.5.3 Dependability

In qualitative research, the biggest challenge researchers face is the constant changes in the study phenomenon. To be prepared for these changes in context, the researcher must be aware of what to expect. A thorough literature review is, therefore, essential. The researcher will be able to predict changes in context and also be able to choose appropriate methods of research. For example, if interviews were to be used, alterations about some interviews or types of the interview can be made if needed. Other researchers should be able to get similar research findings within the same context. Research findings should, therefore, be compared to literature findings. Care should furthermore be taken to express the meanings of participants accurately. If the study is too unique and cannot be replicated, there will be no dependability (Given & Saumure 2008:209; Onwuegbuzie *et al.,* 2012:9). Methods and procedures used were described accurately to ensure similar outcomes for further studies about the same phenomenon, namely the authenticity of the young adult. For this study, field notes (with the aid of recordings) accurately explained the process of data collection to ensure transparency for increased dependability.

4.5.4 Confirmability

During qualitative research, all actions, expressions and perceptions of participants are analysed to search for meaning. The data obtained must accurately match all interpretations. Literature must validate or reject all statements. The researcher aims to ensure that the collected data can support all findings. Confirmability has two goals, namely, to understand the phenomenon from the participant's perspective, as well as to understand others' experiences and meanings better.

Confirmability, therefore, accurately reflects the congruency between findings and research purpose and is not affected by the researcher's bias. Although confirmability does not deny the biases of researchers, it challenges the researcher to openness to better select particular methods to respond to research bias. Transparency and explicit descriptions of all processes and procedures are of utmost importance to ensure confirmability (Given & Saumure 2008:113). Confirmability provides proof that interpretative statements of the researcher are congruent to participants' meanings. The researcher in this study aimed to look for themes that confirmed what was obtained through previous literature review insights. Statements made about findings should affirm current knowledge.

4.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics are of utmost importance in any research. When data is collected, interpreted, and research findings stated, ethics should guide the research. Aspects such as permission, confidentiality, freedom to withdraw and how the research is conducted should meet fundamental moral requirements to ensure the dignity of participants. In the case of this research study, no covid protocols were needed as interviews were held pre-covid.

4.6.1 Informed Consent

To gain trust and willingness to participate, the researcher explained the research process in detail to participants. Participants were informed about who authorised the research, what was expected of them, what type of information was requested, and what happened to the obtained data (Gardner & Coombs 2011:42). De Vos *et al.* (2011:117) emphasise aspects such as the aim of the research, duration of

involvement of participants, the totality of processes and procedures, all advantages/disadvantages/dangers involved and the credibility of the study. The researcher explained to participants that the study aimed to collect valuable information that could guide and assist emerging adults in becoming authentic adults and in understanding and identifying potential challenges experienced during the transitional phase towards adulthood. Furthermore, she emphasised there were no foreseeable risks in participating in the research and that they had a right to withdraw without penalty (Appendix B: Participant information; Appendix C: Written consent to participate). The researcher explained why particular participants were selected (between 18 to 24 and either in their first year or final year of study)**.** All methods (interviews, videotaping, semi-structured interview questions) were explained, and participants were allowed to ask questions during and before the process started. Although not all possible problems could be foreseen, great care had been taken to handle any problems in the most ethical manner possible. Therefore, written consent is of utmost importance. Not only did both parties benefit from a full explanation of the research, but it also ensured cooperation. It broke the resistance or tension of participants down (see Appendix C) (see Sansone *et al.,* 2008:58). Furthermore, written consent aims to address participants' concerns with regards to aspects such as confidentiality ('Who else will see my replies?) and whether the videotapes will be kept or destroyed afterwards (Gardner & Coombs, 2010:31).

4.6.2 Privacy, Confidentiality and Anonymity

As in any therapeutic situation, the private lives of participants must be respected. In essence, privacy means to withhold information of a personal nature to protect the person's right to privacy. Therefore, no names, personal information or any information that could lead to recognition of the participant was disclosed and had been removed from interview transcriptions (see Sansone *et al.,* 2008:58). While privacy refers to personal privacy, confidentiality relates to how the information of participants is handled. When information is shared anonymously, caution should be taken to ensure participants' privacy. The key was to select participants in a proper, scientific way through ethical sampling processes. Therefore, participants for this study were chosen from an advertisement on different social media platforms. The researcher did not include participants known to her, friends, family or colleagues. This could cause

wavering of ethical standards of anonymity and could become very challenging and complex to sustain. The basis of privacy, confidentiality and anonymity stresses that no concealed media (hidden cameras, one-way mirrors, or hidden microphones) are to be used under any circumstances. The researcher discussed all media to be used with every participant. All possible means to protect privacy, anonymity and confidentiality has always been applied (see De Vos *et al.,* 2011:119).

Videos and tapes must be kept in a safe place or must be destroyed when no longer in use to ensure the participant's privacy and anonymity (Smith, 2011:43). To get individuals to contribute to a free-flowing conversation, they were assured that their shared information would be kept confidential and only be used for academic purposes and stored on password-protected computers. Participants were also ensured that research outcomes would be made available after the research is concluded (see Smith, 2011:43). The researcher prepared a summary of the findings available to each participant and answered questions after the study was completed.

Limitations, such as not being over-familiar, were set to ensure work alliance and protect participants' privacy (see Gardner & Coombs, 2011:83). In addition, participants were assured that all information would be handled with confidentiality unless the researcher gets the written consent of participants to disclose parts of the information (see Sansone *et al.,* 2008:61). Finally, sensitive aspects, such as questions about participants' relationships, were treated anonymously to protect the privacy of individual participants.

4.6.3 The Right to Withdraw

Participation in any research should always be voluntary. No participant should ever feel forced or obliged to participate in any study. Even voluntary participation must be negotiated by the willingness to complete the study (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:117). The researcher clarified that if a participant did not feel comfortable during interviews, the right to withdraw information or participation would be granted without penalties (see Appendix B) (Smith, 2011:43). All participants in this research participated voluntarily. The researcher aimed to build a trust relationship with each participant in ethical issues (see Gardner & Coombs, 2011:83). The researcher informed all participants of their rights and explained the value of sharing their information towards the end-goal of the

study, determining what guidance the emerging adult needs to become an authentic person.

4.6.4 Debriefing

Debriefing after research sessions is of utmost importance. Both participant and researcher will benefit from debriefing sessions. On the one hand, the researcher gets the opportunity to identify and rectify any misconceptions that occurred during sessions. On the other hand, the participant gets the chance to work through the research experiences and is granted the opportunity to ask questions (De Vos *et al.,* 2011:123). A qualified person was appointed to address possible challenging emotions evolving from the process during this study. Participants were informed of any potential risks in advance, although no risks were foreseen during the research process (see Gardner & Coombs, 2011:83). Time was set aside for any questions or clarification of misconceptions that arise from the interviews.

4.7 SUMMARY

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental phase preceding adulthood. Young adults moving through the transformational stage of development need to form new identities of which the most significant identity changes are social and occupational identities. This critical developmental phase is associated with potential challenges experienced by a young, inexperienced emerging adult. The research aimed to understand what challenges the emerging adult faced and identify what guidance was needed during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. A qualitative research approach was used. An exploratory, phenomenological design was used to understand the world through the lived experiences of the phenomenon, namely the emerging adult in the transition to adulthood.

Eleven participants (representative of age (18-24), race and gender) were selected to participate in the research. Participants consisted of students in their first year of study and students in their final year of study (all in a transitional phase between school and studies or studies and starting work). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and probes were used to guide open-ended questions. The interviews aimed to understand the participants' perceptions during the transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood.

CHAPTER 5
DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is a critical developmental phase preceding adulthood. Young adults moving through this transformational stage of development (leaving school, starting with a career or starting tertiary studies) need to form new identities. The most significant identity changes are social and occupational identities (Arnett, 2006:121). Not only are emerging adults actively exploring new identities, but they also face challenges in doing so. Forming adult identities during emerging adulthood is essential for authenticity in adulthood. The non-linear unfolding of adulthood milestones (taking up a job, becoming financially independent, marrying and having children) and the prolonged period to adulthood often result in 'feeling lost' or 'in-between'. This is particularly true for industrialised countries where economic independence for young individuals moved to a much later phase in their lives.

As a psychologist in private practice, the researcher often meets emerging adults who, because of not knowing who they authentically are, make wrong choices; for example, choosing a career, choosing a life partner or planning their future. Self-knowledge precedes a strong sense of the self and may also negatively impacts the emerging adult's ability to plan for the future and to set goals. A strong sense of the 'self' forms the basis for self-motivational behaviour (Lee *et al.,* 2016:125; Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:69-70). The emerging adult, therefore, needs to understand who he/she is (strengths and weaknesses) and where he/she is going (self-motivational behaviour), but often needs guidance to form a strong sense of the self to be able to become an authentic adult (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:69-70). Emerging adults who lack self-knowledge overly rely on the feedback of significant others (parents, peers and society) when forming identities. Significant others may have expectations of the emerging adult that differ from the expectations he/she has of him/herself, resulting in less committed identity formation (Spies Shapiro *et al.,* 2014:13). The complexity of new and different interactions with others, rapid changes (such as altered roles, new relationships, and new-found independence), fear of rejection and seeking approval

from significant others, may lead to 'being who others want me to be' and not to 'becoming my authentic self' (Kaniušonytė & Žukauskienė, 2018:42).

According to Shulman *et al.* (2009:246), emerging adults are expected to become responsible adults, taking up responsibility for their own lives. However, they may need support and guidance from parents, peers and society (social constructivism framework). To become accountable adults, young individuals need life goals. Social support during the unfamiliar transitional phase is outdated. The needs of young individuals in transition may change or alter as they develop (Shulman *et al.,* 2005:579).

The researcher aimed to understand the challenges emerging adults face in becoming authentic adults. The objectives of the study were:

Objective 1: To explain the forming of identities and identity challenges during emerging adulthood
Objective 2: To understand the challenges emerging adults face during the transformation phase in becoming authentic adults.
Objective 3: To give possible guidelines to assist emerging adults going through the transitional phase on their way to authentic adulthood.

5.2 DATA COLLECTION

A qualitative research approach was followed in this study. The researcher aimed to research the phenomenon (emerging adults in transition) to understand the phenomenon better. According to McCusker and Gunaydin (2015:537), qualitative research is defined by the study's main aim: to understand what challenges the emerging young adult faces in becoming an authentic person. Qualitative research uses thematic analysis as a preferred method of analysis. The focus is on how individuals perceive specific issues and interactive processes. Through semi-structured interviews the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the participants' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs about identities formed, challenges faced, and guidance needed during the transition to authentic adulthood.

5.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Tesch's method of data analysis for qualitative research was used to analyse data in this research study, as explained in Chapter 4 (Section 4.4.2) (Creswell, 2014:198; Tesch, 1990:142-145).

The following themes and categories were identified through the semi-structured interviews with their probes, keeping in mind that the main research question and sub-questions needed to be answered.

Table 5.1: Categories and Themes

CATEGORIES AND THEMES
Category 1: Who am I? Identity formation and challenges with identity formation (ID Unc)
Theme 1: Lack of self-awareness and self-knowledge (Inauthenticity)
1.1 Self-uncertainty (ID Unc Slf)
1.2 Wearing a mask (not authentic) NA
1.3 Social uncertainty (ID Unc Soc)
Theme 2: The role of feedback from others in identity formation: Feedback (FB)
2.1 Feedback from parents (FB p) peers/friends (FB f)
2.2 Feedback from others (friends (FB f), peers (FB f), family (FB fm) and society (FB s)
Theme 3: Changes in identity from adolescence to emerging adulthood
3.1 Reported changes in social identity (C ID soc)
3.2 Reported changes in romantic identity (C ID r)
3.3 Reported changes in self-awareness and identity of 'who am I?' (C ID slf)
Category 2: Where am I going?
Theme 1: Challenges associated with emerging adulthood (CH)
1.1 Difficulties adjusting (CH a)
1.2 Non-linear unfolding of milestones in industrialised countries sometimes results in more extended periods of study and switches between fields of study
1.3 Experience a lot of pressure (CH pr) and feeling confused and lost (CH c/l)
1.4 Ineffective time Management (CH tm) and seeking balance (CH b)
1.5 Difficulties in connecting socially/romantically (CH soc/rom)
1.6 Lacking self-knowledge and self-confidence (CH sk)
1.7 Making choices (CH c)
Theme 2: Ideal (authentic) self (IS) and life goals to be set for authentic adulthood
2.1 Lack of goalsetting (L g)

CATEGORIES AND THEMES
2.2 Independence (IS i) and financial security (IS fs)
2.3 Stable and mature (IS s/m)
2.4 Strong social connections (IS soc)
2.5 Marriage and family (IS m+f)
2.6 Career success (IS cs)
2.7 Self-care and -growth (IS slf) Goals shifted from traditional linear development to more self-focused goals based on self-care and -growth (IS g)
Theme 3: Skills (SK) needed to become an authentic adult
3.1 Self-knowledge, -growth and emotional support (SK sk/gr)
3.2 Academic support (SK ac)
3.3 Planning, goalsetting (SK p/g) and resiliency
3.4 Occupational and Financial skills (SK f) as part of occupational identity
3.4 Social skills (SK soc) as part of social identity
Category 3: How do I get there? Guidance and assistance needed (G)
1.1 Academic Mentor (G am)
1.2 Emotional Mentor (G em)
1.3 Spiritual guidance (G sp)
1.4 Decision Making (G dm)
1.5 Financial Guidance (G f)
1.6 Parental Guidance (G p)

5.4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The researcher compared the literature research (Chapters 2 and 3) with the findings from the open-ended questions in the semi-structured interviews. Similarities and contradictions are narratively presented and discussed below.

5.4.1 Category 1: Who am I? Identity formation and challenges with identity formation (ID Unc)

The transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood is characterised by active exploration of different identities (who am I?) and roles, such as social identity (relationships), occupational possibilities and experiments with varying views of the world (Arnett, 2016:220; Scharf & Mayseless, 2010:84; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2). A broad range of opportunities is available to explore (Arnett, 2007:473). In a less

constrained environment (less parental supervision), the emerging adult must form identities and define life goals about what he/she wants to achieve in future.

Emerging themes (and authenticity challenges) were found and compared to literature findings.

5.4.1.1 Theme 1: Lack of self-awareness and self-knowledge

Sub-theme 1.1: Self-uncertainty

According to Arnett (2000:473), emerging adults actively explore new identities in search of autonomy. Autonomy and competence are essential components of authenticity (Deci & Ryan, 2000:73). To gain autonomy and competence, the emerging adult needs a strong sense of the self. Based on the studies done by MacKinnon (2015:66-67) and Kernis and Goldman (2006:295), a real sense of self is gained through self-awareness.

According to Mateeva and Dimitrov (2013:206), self-awareness is a person's knowledge about one's feelings, motives, desires and cognitions. 'Knowing' includes information about an individual's strengths and weaknesses. It also includes emotions and conflicts with the self and influences emotions and conflicts on behaviour. As a response to life transitions, changes in self-awareness may be possible. For example, during emerging adulthood, and due to rapid changes in roles, demanding relationships and maturational changes such as becoming independent, may result in less self-awareness (Orth *et al.,* 2010:645,646).

Many of the young participants in this study reported that they do not know themselves well (lacking self-knowledge) and are not self-aware enough. In addition, participants in this study (especially students in their first year of study) reported uncertainty about who they are in an unfamiliar environment while experiencing new challenges (tertiary studies away from parental home). Feelings such as '*being lost';' needed to adjust'; 'uncertain of who I truly am';* and *'I need to find my strengths and weaknesses'* (Participants 1,2,4,6,7,8,10, and 11) were shared.

Conflict between self-knowledge and self-awareness was expressed by Participant 7, indicating that: *'I am an extrovert. To be more specific, I am uncomfortable with crowds and anti-social, but at the same time, I am talkative (which is a bias). I like spending*

time alone. As I said, I am anti-social. I am in the process of discovering myself. I thought I knew who I was until I went to university, then I realised that I was lying to myself. As I said, I am an extrovert, but I don't enjoy the company of too many people. I am still in a state of discovering myself'. Participant 1 reiterated the above sentiments by saying: *'Ek weet nie…. Ek is 'n mens wat baie balans in my lewe wil he, al is ek baie sosiaal wil ek my doelwitte bereik maak nog steeds baie wil' social '….' (Translated: 'I don't know…. I am the type of person who wants a lot of balance in my life, even though I am very social. I want to achieve my goals but still socialise a lot…').* Participant 10 agreed by describing himself as follows: *'At times I see myself as confident and hardworking but then other times I feel that I don't put in enough effort, that I'm slacking. Sometimes I am so motivated, and then other times, I lose motivation. I am definitely wearing a mask because I always try to look as if I am having a good time like someone without trouble. Especially if they are not your close peers'.*

Baumeister and Vohs (2007:820) state that the emerging adult with secure self-esteem appears to have more in-depth knowledge of him/herself. He/she has information about preferences, strengths and dislikes and is more likely to be confident. The contrast seems true for young individuals lacking in-depth knowledge, as seen from Participant 3's interview excerpt: *'I am not self-aware enough; I don't know myself well enough.* Participant 7 agreed to this: *'We need to discover ourselves because what we were at the age of 16,17 are not who we are right now. We are absolutely not the same people. We grow more, we lost interest in some things. So, we need to work on discovering ourselves and be comfortable with who we are.* Participant 4 also contends that: *'Compared to how I was in high school and how I am now, my personality changed a lot. In High school, I was very outgoing, social and always going out with my friends, my academic side took more of a back seat, where now, at university, I am always studying, and my social life takes a back seat. It almost switched around; I do not know who is the real me…'.*

Lacking self-knowledge was reported by Participant 6: *'I couldn't wait to get to varsity; although I was a bit narrow-minded, I didn't know some of the things I do know now, so when I got here, my mind was opened to people and a lot of new information. I also learned a lot of things about myself, things I didn't know about myself'.* Participant 7 stated that she is also not sure that she has figured life out yet.

It is evident that many young individuals are still discovering new aspects about themselves, in other words, they still lack self-knowledge, as seen from the excerpts from Participants 6, 7 and 8: *'I now learn a lot of new things about myself, things I did not know…'* (Participant 6)*;* '*I am an extrovert, but I am uncomfortable with crowds and very anti-social'* (Participant 7) and *'I don't see myself as funny, but everyone else sees me as funny…'* (Participant 8).

Sub-theme 1.2: Wearing a mask (Inauthenticity)

According to Abel (2014:9), most emerging adults are preoccupied with social acceptance. They will experience less self-worth or feelings of lower self-esteem if not accepted by significant others such as parents, peers and society (Theran & Han, 2013:1097). If the emerging adult becomes preoccupied with being accepted, it may lead to self-alienation (a state where social expectations and self-awareness are conflicting) (Theran & Han, 2013:1097).

Inauthentic behaviour was also reported. According to Participant 1*,* she would instead put on a mask, pretending to be happy rather than hurting others' feelings. Participant 4 said, '*My parents still see me as they saw me when I was in school, but I am not the same person now',* and *'a part of me is still scared because I lost a part of who I am – like who am I? I don't know'.* Participant 5 agreed that she *'looks confident, but I am not really...'* Participant 1 indicated that *'I hide my emotions from others, I do not allow others to see who I am'.*

This contention is shared by Participant 1 in saying: *'– ek hou nie daarvan om ander seer te maak of teleur te stel nie, soos mense het my al seergemaak, maar ek het nog nooit iemand seergemaak nie' (*Translated: '– *I don't like hurting or disappointing others like people have hurt me before, but I've never hurt anyone.)* Participant 2 agrees with the notion of being preoccupied with acceptance from friends: *'Ek doen te veel vir my vriende en skeep myself af. Ek se moeilik nee. My vriende sien ook die mislike deel van my maar my klasmaats dink ek is baie stil. Ek dra partykeer 'n masker voor hulle'.* (Translated: *'I do too much for my friends and neglect myself. I have a hard time saying no. My friends also see my rude side, but my classmates think I'm very quiet. I sometimes wear a mask when I'm with them'.)*

Pre-occupation with parent's approval may lead to inauthenticity, as declared by Participant 7: *'I needed to tell them (parents) that, but I felt like I was creating an excuse or let them down because of what they expected of me is to succeed. They have put me in the best university in South Africa, so hearing that I don't cope would disappoint them'.* Participant 10 agreed with the notion of not disappointing your parents: *'With my parents – I try to make them proud. They see me as a happy-go-lucky person. I try to keep everyone happy at home. I try to keep everyone on a good note. My peers see me as a normal, average student. They see me as a happy person. I never show anger or other emotions, I don't think it is fair to burden other people unless they are willing to listen'.* Participant 11 also admitted that he wears a mask: *'I feel I put others' happiness before my own, and I think that is sometimes too much. I feel that if I show my weakness to others like my family, it affects them'.*

Sub-theme 1.3: Social uncertainty

According to O'Connor et al.'s (2011:861) multidimensional model, 'social competence' describes the ability of the young adult to meet everyday demands concerning relationships, which are often demanding and complex and impact the 'social competence' of the young adult (O'Connor *et al.,* 2011:861).

Gorbett and Kruczek (2008:58) define social self-esteem as a person's ability to communicate, relate to other people, display confidence, and be open to others. Participant 8 seems to realise the importance of communication skills for good social relations by expressing the following wish: *'I would like to better my communications skills to be comfortable around people, met new friends…'.*

The balance between quantity of friends and quality of real friendships is expressed by Participant 9: *'Op Universiteit het ek baie meer vriende maar ek het baie minder goeie vriende. Ek sukkel hiermee…' (Translated: 'At University I have a lot more friends, but I have a lot fewer good friend. I struggle with this…').* The need for social skills was expressed by Participant 5: *'We also need to develop more social skills because we meet different people, more than in school, so we need to be more sociable to accommodate them and try not to be biased stereotypical. Some people can be very biased',* as agreed to by Participant 6*: 'We also need to develop more social skills because we meet different people, more than in school, so we need to be more sociable to accommodate them and try not to be biased and stereotypical'*

Self-uncertainty impacts social belonging, as reported by Participant 3: *'…there has been a time when people from the outside respond negatively to my sensitivity, and that portrays it as a bad thing, and maybe it is'.*

5.4.1.2 Theme 2: The role of feedback from others in identity formation

Sub-theme 2.1: Feedback from parents

The young adult uses feedback (positive and negative) gained from prior experiences to build or reshape new social identities (Iselin et al., 2009:465). Parent and family support seems necessary for healthy personal development during identity formation (Benson & Elder 2011:1648; Syed *et al.,* 2013:380). Parents are vital role-players in ego and identity development during young adulthood (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013:382). Parents' expectations of their emerging adult children become a measure for success or failure (Messersmith et al., 2008: 213). Parents, as role models, transfer their perceptions and experiences to their children. Messersmith *et al.* (2008:213) found that emerging adults internalise what is transferred to them by their parents.

Many participants indicated that their parent's role in their lives is of great value, as proclaimed by Participant 7: *'What my parents think of me is more important than what anyone else thinks. I don't want to disappoint them. Even if I'm not certain that I study what I want, I will push through because of them. I needed to tell them that, but I felt like I was creating an excuse or letting them down because they expected me to succeed. They have put me in the best university in South Africa, so hearing that from me would disappoint them.* Participant 10 agreed that his parents have expectations regarding behaviour: *'I try to make them (my parents) proud..'.*

Positive outcomes such as autonomy, academic success, general well-being and emotional regulation benefit parental involvement during identity formation. In addition, parents that challenge young individuals to develop and provide a warm, supportive environment are active agents in the higher ego-development of emerging adults (Syed *et al.,* 2013:374).

When asked about significant others who influence their lives, many participants indicated the importance of a parent or both parents. Participants 2,3 and 4 all stated the importance of their mothers. Participant 2 said: *'My ma en my een vriendin se raad is vir my belangrik. Ek het 'n kort humeur en as ek afpak by hulle sal hul gou vir my*

se; 'stop net 'n bietjie en dink wat jy nou eintlik se', so ek dink hulle het nogal 'n groot invloed op my' (Translated: The advice of my mother and my one friend is important to me. I am short-tempered, and when I vent on them, they'll be quick to tell me; 'wait just a minute and think about what you're actually saying', so I think they have quite a big influence on me.')

Several participants indicated that their dads are not very involved in their lives. For example, Participant 3 mentioned: '*…my dad is not very involved in my life, so his opinion falls short of priority, but my mom, definitely…'* For others like Participant 11, her father plays an important supportive role in her life*: 'Definitely my father. He is my number one supporter. He tells me how proud he is and that makes me feel I have achieved something in life, and that is my main purpose – to achieve. I am living for my father – to make him happy and my parents and my family'.*

Sub-theme 2.2: Feedback from others (family, friends and society)

Socio-cultural factors such as expectations of significant others (parents), cultural prescriptions and societal norms and values influence identity formation (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:3-5). In addition, the social context (others) shapes individual development regarding roles, norms of the group and rules relevant to the group (Johnson *et al.,* 2010: 262). 'Others' include social groups and the broader social environment. Social groups refer to direct or indirect friendship groups within the broader social environment, including education institutions, places of work, different social classes, gender and various ethnic groups. Aspects, as mentioned, impact personal beliefs about the self. These beliefs are based on feedback gained through interactions (O'Connor *et al.,* 2011:861-863; Torres *et al.,* 2009:557).

Both Participants 1 and 2 indicated that they have a best friend to confide in and with whom to discuss matters. Participant 1 stated that she listens to her friend and values her advice: *'Ek luister nogal na my vriendin, sy is baie, eg ook, ek vra nogal haar raad'. (Translated: 'I listen to the advice of my friend, I rely on her advice')* Participants 3 and 4 agreed that feedback from others is important: *'… a few people from all interactive circles (peers, parents and so forth), and my sister definitely and then some adult friends, my lecturers. I want feedback…'* (Participant 3*); 'I obviously enjoy getting feedback from people. I think it is important to hear how other people perceive you and who you are becoming. It is a way of getting to know who you are because you*

may not be aware of it' Participant 4. Feedback from friends seemed to be relevant, as indicated by Participant 10 when he said that *'also my close friends. Their feedback is important to me…'*

Some participants prefer feedback from siblings and other family members, as indicated by Participant 6, who said: *'..my older sister, my cousin and my dad'*, and Participant 8: *'I think my brother. I look up to him. If he says I am a good person, I believe him. He is older than me, so if he says I am doing the right things, I know I am doing the right things. Whatever he tells me, I stick to and do exactly as he tell me. Also, my mom. She will tell me how to interact with others and what not to do, and I also stick to that'.*

The social context (others) shapes individual development regarding roles, norms of the group and rules relevant to the group. 'Others' include social groups and the broader social environment (Johnson *et al.,* 2010: 262). According to Shulman and Nurmi (2010:3-5) and Cohen and Kassan, (2018:134-135), identity formation occurs within a 'complex interplay' between socio-cultural environments and the emerging adult's effort. Participant 11's feelings about the importance of the values within his specific cultural group came to the fore in the following excerpt: *'As part of my religion and my culture, as a person, I want someone who values me. I don't really want to date because, for me, I feel like I am a precious diamond. So, I want to keep myself as pure as I can for that special person. I want to try everything for the first time. With religion, there are different parts to it, but for me personally, I only want to get to know someone if they are serious about it. It wants to stick to what my religious values'*. Participant 10 agreed: *'I think out of a cultural perspective there is a lot of grabbing from other cultures and do not stick to their own cultures. In my culture, you are thought to become a decent adult, and if you at least try 50% of the time, you will become a good adult. From a cultural perspective, many young people go astray without listening and thinking what it will do to their future…'*

Cultural prescriptions are valued and acknowledged, as seen in the remarks of Participants 11 and 9: *'In my culture, you don't date until you meet that special person. I listen to what culture prescribes and will wait with choices to adhere…*' (Participant 11) and *'Religion wise I am not allowed to have romantic relationships because you have to marry soon after you have met the right person'* (Participant 11).

Contradictory, over-identification with a particular group might hinder identity development during emerging adulthood. When emerging adults accept and integrate the values and norms of a specific group without critical evaluation, they will no longer explore and commit to alternative identities. Commitment to the values and standards of a particular social group prevents the emerging adult from testing own beliefs, norms and values against the views of others (Guiffrida, 2009:2424; Cohen & Kassan, 2018:134-135). A few participants share this contention. '*I grew up in Limpopo, so I am kind of a village girl, and then I went to boarding school, so most of my friends are there. We are not like the others in university'* (Participant 8) and '*Afrikaanse mense is net anders, ons doen dinge anders….' (Translated: 'Afrikaans people are just different; we do things differently….')* (Participant 9*)* and *'I don't know about forming relationships. Religious wise I am not really allowed to have relationships because you have to marry soon after you have met the person'* (Participant 10)*.*

5.4.1.3 Theme 3: Changes in identities from adolescence to emerging adulthood

The emerging adult has to find a way to adult life, make new choices and set different future goals. Most young individuals can no longer rely on previous social networks of friends and family when dealing with the diverse challenges they face during their transition to adulthood. Peers with various backgrounds and worldviews furthermore challenge prior identity commitments. New identities are formed through active exploration (a way of making sense of the different unknown world) and commitment on what makes sense, as mentioned by Participants 8 and 9: *'I think we live in different environments now that changed the way we think and operate and that makes a difference. I think you change when you are on your own and no longer do things like kid's stuff. You are more adult now and therefore want different things from relationships'* (Participant 8), and *'At school, I only interacted with my race. Now in university, I am living with different races and cultures. I am open to new things and experiences and a new environment. That definitely changed the way I see life and also changed my character'* (Participant 11).

Making sense entails gathering information and fostering an awareness of the self within different contexts such as tertiary education, the world of work, new and diverse friendships and independent living. Commitment to new social and occupational identities seems to be a prominent identity task during emerging adulthood but may

also leave the emerging adult non-integrated (not knowing who they are) (*Luyckx et al.,* 2013:159-160). A lack of self-awareness was mentioned by Participant 4: *'I think I wasn't self-aware, so I would just do my thing and hope that it will work out. Now I shape the way I communicate with others. I wasn't introspective enough, and I wasn't aware of my feelings and those of others. Just self-awareness that is what is important.'* Self-awareness also creates a sensitivity to others, as noted by Participant 5: *'Dit verskil baie. Ek is nou baie meer sensitief oor die verhoudings wat ek aanknoop. Mens raak meer bewus van wie jy is en die values wat jy heg aan verhoudings met mense.' (Interpreted: 'It differs a lot. I am much more sensitive about the relationships I invest in. You become more aware of your identity and the values you attach to relationships with people.')*

Relationships are often demanding and complex and impact the 'social competence' of the young adult (O'Connor *et al.,* 2011:861). It is evident that emerging adults often lack confidence when forming new relationships, as remarked by Participant 11: '*One other challenge is overcoming my fears like confidence (being able to open up a little more to people)'.* Participant 11 reflected on the way his relationships changed from adolescence to emerging adulthood: '*Op Universiteit het ek baie meer vriende maar ek het baie minder goeie vriende. Soos ek sal almal in die koshuis groet en vra hoe dit gaan maar ek het min mense wat na my kamer sal kom en vra hoe gaan dit hier. Ek sukkel hiermee. As ek dink aan my pa, hy het nou nog vriende wat hy gehad het uit die koshuis en ek weet nie of ek sulke vriende gaan he nie' (Translated: 'At University I have a lot more friends, but I have fewer good friends. Like I will greet everyone in the hostel and ask them how they've been, but I have few people who'd come to my room and ask me how I've been. I struggle with this. If I think of my father, he still has friends he had from the hostel, and I don't know if I'll have friends like that.')* According to Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.* (2012:312-214), the emerging adult needs to practise self-disclosure, openness, communication and willingness to attach to others to develop intimacy in romantic relationships. Unless the young adult is able and willing to explore his/her feelings, become aware of his/her preferences and understand behaviour, commitment to social and romantic identities may be challenging. Openness and willingness to attach to others were reported by Participant 2 when saying: *'toe ek jonger was, het ek net my eie opinie ingesien. Nou is ek baie meer gemoedelik en probeer ander beter verstaan.'* (Translated: *When I was younger, I just*

followed my own opinions. Now I am much more accommodating and try to understand others better.')

Through intense exploration, identity commitments made during adolescence are re-evaluated and challenged and may leave the emerging adult in an uncertain phase about self-concept (Luyckx *et al.,* 2013:159-160). Many of the participants in this study reported changes in social identity. Participant 4 commented that she used to form friendships on a popularity basis only: '*Also, in school that whole popularity thing – you are part of a group, but they are not supportive to you – you are just in that relationship for the popularity'.* Many participants agreed with this remark.: '*My friendships with schoolfriends changed a lot. It became distant not as close as it used to be'* (Participant 6), and *'op skool wou ek met almal vriende wees. Daar was baie fake vriendinne en jy wou in wees by die cool groupie. Nou besef ek eers wat egte vriendskappe is. My vriendinne nou is eg want jy kompeteer nie meer nie. My vriendnne nou is met my vriende want hulle hou van my en hulle doen moeite met my…'* (Participant 1) *(Translated: 'At school, I wanted to be friends with everyone. There were many fake friends, and you wanted to fit in with the cool kids. I only realise now what true friendships are. Now my friends are genuine because you are no longer competing. My friends now are only my friends because they like me and put in the effort with me…')* and *'My relationships changed a lot from school to now. I was part of a big group then. Now I have only three close friends. I am more myself now and I start to know myself better'* (Participant 7).

Relative freedom from limitations such as parents' supervision, adult responsibilities and family obligations allow emerging adults to be actively involved in their development through exploration (Arnett, 2000:470). According to Participant 10, his independence from his parents was important for successful intimate relations:*'I am now free to be me. At school, I had to depend on my parents for everything, but now we have the freedom to explore. When I enter a romantic relationship now, it will be more serious'.*

Attachment issues that stem from early childhood seem to impact relationship exploration negatively. According to Pittman *et al.* (2012:1486), intimate relationships are preceded by healthy attachments to primary caregivers (especially mothers) during pre-adolescent years. The young child who experiences him/herself as worthy

of care will have higher expectations of future relationships (Pittman *et al.,* 2012:1487). Aspects essential for close relationships like trust, commitment and sharing, are first tested in relationships with significant others like parents, siblings and childhood friends. Young adults would find it difficult to experiment with romantic relationships if they experienced attachment issues during childhood.

Moreover, he/she might become preoccupied with seeking approval and positive affirmation from romantic partners. Some parents are not always available or supportive enough to guide the young adult and might negatively impact the young person's ability to form close relationships (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:392). Participants who have difficulties developing intimate relationships reported 'absent' parental figures during childhood. According to Participant 4: '*I had to fight my own battles 98% of the time. That can be very hard on people, but life is not fair. You need to be able to fight your own battles. I think that we as teens struggle with responsibility and accepting our mistakes and taking up responsibility and not shifting the blame can make relationships hard…'*

Problems in parental relationships and relationships between participants and parents influenced intimate relation-building: *'If my parents were still married, I think I would be better with relationships. I didn't have many male adult figures in my life, and that makes me scared of romantic relationships'* (Participant 2); '*My dad wasn't around when I was little, so it makes relationships difficult*' (Participant 3); and *'Ek sal graag beter menseverhoudings wil he, soos ek is nie close met my pa nie. Ek dink dit het 'n invloed' (Translated: 'I would like to have better human relations like I am not close to my father, and I think that has an influence')* (Participant 4).

5.4.2 Category 2: Where am I going?

5.4.2.1 Theme 1: Challenges associated with emerging adulthood

Sub-theme 1.1: Difficulties adjusting

The young individual is confronted with many transitions and maturation invitations during emerging adulthood. Education possibilities, future career paths, and different relationships are only a few unfamiliar challenges emerging adults face (Luyckx *et al.,* 2013:159-160). For some emerging adults, the prolonged moratorium is seen as an exhilarating experience and it offers opportunities for a commitment to identity

formation. For others, this can be a confusing, intimidating period with limitless options and possibilities that they cannot cope with (Arnett (2000:470). The process of making sense entails the gathering of information and fostering of an awareness of the self (self-knowledge and self-awareness) within different contexts such as tertiary education, the world of work, new and diverse friendships and independent living (Luyckx *et al.,* 2013:159-160).

The difficulties to adjust during this confusing time come to the fore in the lamentations of many participants. Participants 1, 4, 6, 7 and 8 all disclosed such difficulties: *'Dit is 'n baie groot stap tussen skool en universiteit. Dinge verskil major. Ons het nie genoeg tyd om aan te pas by die Universiteit nie. Almal moan oor dit…' (Translated: 'It's a huge step from school to university. Things are major different. We don't have enough time to adapt to university. Everyone moans about it...')* (Participant 1); *'Last year I was terrified, but you go through a whole lot of emotions and ups and downs. I was scared of not succeeding and not fitting in. When I first joined my residence, I was so scared. I was walking in and not knowing a single person. That is scary…'* (Participant 4)*; 'Well, people say it is a transition between high school and university, but it is more like to be thrown into the deep end….'* (Participant 6); *'I came here being clueless. I did not know I had to adjust my sleeping hours, I had to develop a specific routine, having to accommodate everything in my life like studying, spending time alone and all that. This transitional phase is not easy. We come across many obstacles, like peer pressure, we are exposed to 'freedom' which we are not ready for etc. We need to make decisions that have no setback and consequences afterwards. That is difficult and scary'* (Participant 7), and '*Also, to adapt to new environments. People come from different environments...*' (Participant 8).

Sub-theme 1.2: Non-linear unfolding of milestones and the influence on studies

Emerging adults in industrialised countries take much longer to transit from adolescence to adulthood, and milestones for adulthood unfold in a non-linear way. The linear unfolding of milestones implies that young adults complete tertiary education, leave their parents' home and live independently, enter the workforce, get married and start a family of their own sequentially (Setterson & Ray, 2010:21). The non-linear unfolding of adult milestones, more prevalent in the current age, is reflected by a comment from Participant 9: '*Dis moeilik…ek wil my lewe soveel geniet as wat*

ek kan. Ek wil nie 'n slegte werk he nie, ek wil nie te veel tyd spandeer aan werk nie, en wil nie net geld maak nie. Ek wil my lewe en tyd soveel geniet as wat ek kan. Maar ek voel ook ek moet nog baie volwasse word voordat ek nou 'n regte grootmens is. Ek dink by voorbeeld aan onafhanklikheid. Ek kan nog nie regtig insien hoe ek in 'n woonstel kan bl yen vir myself kan sorg nie. Ek dink ek gaan eers nog bietjie verder studeer vir nou… ek is nog nie reg nie' (Translated: *'It's difficult… I want to enjoy my life as much as possible. I don't want to have a bad job, I don't want to spend too much time working, and I do not just want to make money. I want to enjoy my life and time as much as I can. But I also feel that I still have to grow up a lot before being a real adult. I think, for example, of independence. I still can't really see how I can stay in an apartment and provide for myself. I think I will study a little longer for now… I'm not ready yet.')*

Many students are also not 'accepted' for academic programmes of their choice and have to apply for a different field of study temporarily and re-apply later, causing them to switch between educational programmes (Setterson & Ray, 2010:21). Participants 3, 6 and 11 indicated that they want to switch between educational programmes: '*I am already receiving a lot of negativity for applying for medicine. My sister didn't get in after six months, and she is already telling me that if I do not come in after a year, I must stop applying, and a friend of hers had tried for four years and did not get in. But I am not going up, even if it takes a few more years…'* (Participant 3); '*Long- or medium-term goal is to move to medicine, I was not accepted at first, so I am doing a different course now – that was my initial plan to study medicine'* – (Participant 6); and '*I was not accepted for medicine after Grade 12. I had to do several other programmes first. I am the first one that goes into medicine. I know it will take a lot longer than I plan, but it is not easy to get into medicine or other programmes of your choice. That was a big step as I come from a family that doesn't have a lot of doctors. So, me, wanting to become a doctor and be accepted, makes my family very proud*' (Participant 11).

The uncertainty regarding studies and study choice is also reflected in what Participant 10 remarked: *'I do have a few goals career-wise, but I am not exactly sure that is what I want to do.'*

Sub-theme 1.3: Experience a lot of pressure and feel confused and lost

According to Shulman, Kalnitzki and Shahar (2009:246), emerging adults are expected to become responsible adults, taking up responsibility for their own lives, which causes a lot of stress. Participant 5 expressed the concern of taking responsibility without guidance: *'Hierdie 'n baie relevante topic. Ek weet glad nie hoe werk dinge daar buite nie. Daar word van ons verwag om verantwoordelikhied te aanvaar vir onself, maar ek weet nie presies hoe werk dinge in die lewe nie. Ons het leiding nodig' (Translated: This is a very relevant topic. We don't know at all how things work out there. It is expected of us to take responsibility for ourselves. But we don't know exactly how the things of life work. We need guidance')*

Combined with society's pressures and limited support, creating a future and commitment to an adult identity can be a stressful experience for many individuals. The potential, therefore, exists for some people to become 'stuck' in exploration and a lack of commitment to identity formation (Côtè & Schwartz, 2002:575). According to Marcia (1966:551-553), these individuals find themselves in 'diffusion' and experience identity confusion and dissolution. In addition, many of the participants express the stress of becoming a responsible person in a confusing world with little guidance (Participants 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11). *'Die druk wat jou ouers op jou sit is ook moeilik… baie mense dop die eerste semester omdat hulle by die diepkant ingegooi word. Ek voel hul verduidelik goed baie min. Die verwagting is baie groot. Dit veroorsaak baie stress'* (Translated: *'The pressure your parents place on you is also difficult… Many people flunk the first semester because they are thrown into the deep end, and I feel they explain things very insufficiently. The expectation is too great. It causes a lot of stress.')* (Participant 1). Participant 2 agreed that although parents mean well it causes tension in the relationship: *'Familie, ouers, hul het 'n manier om jou te probeer guide en as jy dit nie wil doen nie is daar mos bietjie friction daaroor...' (Translated: 'Family, parents, they have a way of trying to guide you, and if you do not want to do it, there is a bit of friction about it...')* (Participant 2).

Participants 6 and 7 expressed perceived pressure: *'There is such a lot of pressure on us'* (Participant 6), and *'The transition was so bad, the amount of pressure was so bad that at a point I felt like giving up because the workload was just too much. I thought I had anxiety attacks, and also it was caused because I was not enrolled in*

the course that I wanted to do, so that caused a little bit of a setback, I was giving my all' (Participant 7).

According to Participant 8, the workload contributes to emerging adults' pressure: *'Furthermore, the workload is challenging. High school was chilling, but now we are in the real world, we have practicals, tutorials and many other academic works. Sometimes we lose focus';* while Participant 9 expressed a need to still be without the pressure of adulthood: *'Ek is eintlik maar nog tussen kindwees en grootmens wees. Ek wil nog steeds eerder rondhardloop en die bal skop eerder as om in 'n kantoor te sit' (Translated: 'I am actually still between being a child and being an adult. I still prefer to run around and kick a ball rather than sit in an office.')*

The difficulty of taking up responsibilities of adulthood was expressed by Participants 10 and 11: *'It is difficult sometimes because you don't know what you are looking for. You feel very lost. How it started for me, I asked myself the question, "how would you like your father to be" that started it off for me. A lot of young people do not know how to do introspection. The question you should ask yourself is "What do I know about myself?' and also "What do I need to know about myself'* (Participant 10); and *'I sometimes push myself way over the limit and do not allow myself enough personal time' (*Participant 11).

Sub-theme 1.4: Ineffective time management and seeking balance

Assistance is often needed to bridge the gap between school and tertiary education regarding study methods, time management and planning (Brock, 2010:120). Participants 1, 5 and 11 expressed concerns about time management: '*Ook dalk meer tyd – of beter tydsbestuur' (Translated: 'Also maybe more time – or better time management.')* (Participant 1); *'Ook om my tyd te kan bestuur en te kan cope met alles. Partykeer is daar soveel goed en ek weet nie lekker hoe om dit te handle nie' (Translated: 'Also to manage my time so that I can cope with everything. Sometimes there are so many things that I don't know really know how to handle them') (*Participant 5); and *'When it comes to myself, I would like to have an ability to manage my time better, it is something I lack from a young age. I think if I have that in place, all the other things will fall in place'* (Participant 10).

The need for better planning skills came to the fore in comments made by Participants 2 and 6: *'Doen te veel vir my vriende en skeep myself af. My eksamen is dieselfde tyd as hulle sin dan help ek hulle eerder. Ek se moeilik nee'* (Translated: *'I do too much for my friends and neglect myself. My exams are on the same time as theirs, but then I rather help them. I have a hard time saying no.)*' (Participant 2) and *'I need to develop more discipline in terms of waking up earlier to have more time, and also the discipline to do what I said I'll do…'* (Participant 6).

Sub-theme 1.5: Difficulties connecting socially/romantically

Involvement in and the quality of romantic relationships during emerging adulthood is significant for social experiences and impacts either positively or negatively on the social-identity formation of the young individual (Dulmen *et al.,* 2007:337).

Participant 2 disclosed a lack of parental guidance to form close relationships with the opposite sex: '*Partykeer dink ek as ek nog albei my ouers gehad het wat nog getroud was sou ek dalk beter in die romantiese area gevaar het. Ek het hulp nodig om verhoudinge te bou. Ek het nog nie baie manlike figure in my lewe gehad nie. Ek het een ou gehad vir 4 maande en laasjaar het ek ook een gehad maar hy het gese ek probeer te veel almal help en ek is te vriendelik…'* (Translated: *'Sometimes I think if I still had both my parents who were still married, I might have fared better in the area of romance. I need help to build relationships. I haven't had many male figures in my life. I had one boyfriend for four months, and last year I also had one, but he said I want to help everyone too much and that I am too friendly...').*

Participants admitted that they have difficulties forming close relationships: *'There has been a time where people from the outside respond negatively to my sensitivity, and that portray it as that is a bad thing, and maybe it is, and then I obviously had to explain where it comes from, I think I just didn't know myself that well, sometimes still not...'* (Participant 3); and *'A friend helped me uncovered that to me a few years ago. She asked me what I know about myself and why I try to be something that I am not…. That really made me think. I thought about it, and I realised I try to hide the sensitive side of myself because I feared that people would not accept me for what I am, instead of accepting myself for who I am'* (Participant 10).

Social identity is a person's ability to communicate, relate to other people, display confidence and be open to others (Dovidio *et al.,* 2010:180; Gorbett & Kruczek, 2008:58,59). Participant 6 and 8 both expressed the need to develop his/her social skills as a pre-requisite to form relationships: *'We also need to develop more social skills because we meet different people, more than in school, so we need to be more sociable to accommodate them and try not to be biased and stereotypical. Some people can be very biased. I couldn't wait to get to varsity. However, I was a bit narrow-minded, I didn't know some of the things I do know now, so when I got here my mind was opened to people and a lot of new information'* (Participant 6); and, *'I would like to better my communications skills to be comfortable around people, meet new friends…. But then I also don't want to open up too much to people, and then they are just passing by. I don't want to spend a lot of energy on people if they are not there.'* (Participant 8).

Unless the young adult is able and willing to explore feelings, become aware of preferences and understand behaviour, commitment to a romantic social identity might be challenging. The emerging adult needs to understand preferences, have some degree of autonomy and explore romantic relationships. Through knowledge and feedback, the emerging adult can compare him/herself with others to make sense of his/her social identity (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:392).

Knowledge of own preferences forms the emerging adult's romantic identity, as noted by Participants 5, 3 and 7: *'In die verlede was dit maar net los en vas uitgaan maar nou is dit meer real – dis eg. Mens besef eintlik nou dat jy het eintlik daai persoon nodig om jou te help om 'n beter mens te word op die einde van die dag…'* (Translated: *'In the past, I've gone out on a loose and fast basis, but now it is more real—it is genuine. You truly realise now that you actually need that person to help you become a better person at the end of the day…');* and it is difficult to *'…not being able to set a boundary towards people and myself – not to feel so much, to be able not to overexpress, to overthink. I do that a lot. I respond with emotions, and I have been working on that for a long time to regulate'* (Participant 3). Participant 7 said: *'I am anti-social, and I would like to see myself more social. I want to change that because I feel that I isolate myself from a lot of things. It is a problem for me because even when I spend time with my family or cousins, they say I am too quiet';* whilst Participant 9

expressed his need for a relationship as: *‘Ek soek basies ‘n meisie met wie ek wil trou. Ek wil nie iets aanhe met iemand as ek weet dit gaan nie uitwerk nie. Wat ek doen, is ek gaan drink koffie met ‘n meisie en dan besluit ek dadellik ‘ja’ of ‘nee’. As dit ‘n ‘nee’ is dan gee ek dit nie genoeg kans om die meisie beter te leer ken nie maar ek voel ek mors nie my tyd as iets nie potensiaal het nie’ (Translated: ‘I’m basically searching for a girl whom I’d want to marry. I don’t want to be involved with someone if I know it will not work out. What I do is I go for coffee with a girl and immediately decide ‘yes’ or ‘no’. It’s mostly ‘no’, I don’t give it enough chance to get to know the girl better, but I feel I don’t waste my time if something does not have potential’).*

Feedback from a potential romantic partner furthermore impacts on the romantic identity of an emerging adult as confirmed by Participant 5: *'Soos my kerel – ons was baie goeie vriende voor ons begin uitgaan het en hy het my baie geleer van verhoudings, by voorbeeld, soos jy hoef nie heeltyd oulik te wees nie, jy kan net jouself ook wees'* (Translated: *'Like my boyfriend—we were very good friends before we started dating. He taught me a lot about relationships, like, for example, you don't have to be sweet all the time, you can just be yourself too.')*

Many participants reported a change in expectations of romantic relationships based on self-knowledge as seen by the remarks of Participants 6, 10 and 11: *'I am not in a romantic relationship at the moment and if I meet someone now it will be different because I will know what to look for and how to read a person' (*Participant 6); *'I always plan on having a long serious relationship. IT WILL BE MORE SERIOUS when I enter a relationship now because now it can lead to marriage'* (Participant 10), and *'At school, I only interacted with my own race. Now I interact with different races and cultures. I had the same friend groups throughout my high school life. But when I went to university, and now I am living in residence, I am completely away from my family and my friends back home, so now I make new friends, and I am open to new things and experience a new environment. Now you sit next to a complete stranger in lecture halls, you go to meetings with complete strangers, so I am more open to connecting to others.*' (Participant 11).

During earlier years, the transition to adulthood seemed more natural. In industrialised countries, the transition to adulthood takes longer, is more complex and is not as clearly defined as in previous years (Arnett, 2008:6). Forming intimate/romantic

identities and commitments are often also postponed (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:392). Some of the participants commented on not wanting to commit to a romantic relationship too soon: '*I am also not in a romantic relationship at the moment – I was but then realising it is distracting me from my academics, and where I am now, I just want to focus and get into medicine. I just also realised that I am kind of too young to be in a serious relationship, so I enjoy my good group of friends, also a good group of male friends, I think it is good to have that kind of balance'* (Participant 4); *'I don't want to be romantically attached too soon. Life is too difficult now…'* (Participant 7); *'I grew up in Limpopo, so I am kind of a village girl, and then I went to boarding school, so most of my friends are there. We are not like the others in the university. We don't like going out'* (Participant 8); and *'Ek het nog nie 'n meisie of so nie, dis iets waarmee ek sukkel…. Ek is dalk te perfeksionisties, ek weet nie' (*Translated: *'I don't have a girlfriend or anything, it's something I struggle with…. I may be too perfectionistic, I don't know.')* (Participant 9).

Sub-theme 1.6: Lacking self-knowledge and wearing masks (being inauthentic)

As a result of the complexity of different relationships and interactions with the world in which the young adult evolves, multiple identities are possible **(also refer to Category 1, Theme 1)**. According to the research below, a young adult may take on an identity based on what others require from him/her, who the person he/she truly is or who he/she wishes to be. Thus, different identities may be possible, but because of fear of rejection and a need for approval from significant people (parents, teachers or loved one's) in the young person's life, many emerging adults become whom others want them to become (Loevinger, 1966:101; Oyserman *et al.,* 2012:74). For example, Participant 1 indicated that she wears a 'mask', thus not being authentic because she does not want to hurt others' feelings. She also pretends to be happy at times when she does not feel that way.

On the probing question: 'Do your view of yourself differ from the way others see you?', most of the participants admitted that they are 'wearing a mask' and do not reveal who they truly are. Furthermore, many participants confirmed that they want to *'fit in'* and do not want to *'stand out'* (Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 8 and 9). Confirmations included: *'Ek weet nie hoe ander my sien nie, ek hoop goed. Ek probeer maar goed voor te kom maar ek is ook nie seker wie is die ware ek nie'.* (Translated: *'I don't know how others*

see me; I hope it's good. I try to look good, but I'm also not sure who the real me is.') (Participant 1); *'My klasmaats sien my as baie stil. Ek dra maar 'n masker voor hulle want as ek vir hulle wys wie ek regtig is sal hulle dit dalk teen my gebruik'* (Translated*: 'My classmates see me as very quiet. I wear a mask when I'm with them because if I show them who I really am, they might use it against me.')* (Participant 2); *'I think everyone sees me differently, my school friends see me as a clown, light-hearted positive person that always makes jokes, very sociable and not taking things to serious and my university friends see me as a nerd – always working – sometimes light-hearted but they sometimes tell me not to take things too seriously and that I just need to relax. My parents – I think they still see me as I was in school because I stay in res and do not go home that often, but I think they haven't really seen this side of me now as to how I am this year – which is sometimes frustrating – because I think they don't understand that I can go from not being academic to being now so focussed and academic'* (Participant 4); *'Mense sien my half as 'n sekere soort person, soos ek kom confident voor, maar diep binne is ek eintlik nogal onseker van baie goeters en besluite wat mens moet maak'* (Translated: *'People see me as a particular person – for example – I look confident, but deep inside I am uncertain about many things such as decisions')* (Participant 5); and *'My classmates think I am funny and fun to be around with. I don't see myself as funny'* (Participant 8).

Scharf and Mayseless (2010:85) define authenticity as 'the extent to which individuals are true to their qualities, despite external influences and pressures. To be true to oneself, an individual must have self-knowledge and the ability to differentiate the self from the world and others. Self-determination theorists (Kernis & Goldman, 2006:293; Ryan & Deci, 2000:68-72) furthermore explain authenticity as the 'action or behaviour that reflects an individual's true self', in other words, the 'unobstructed operation of one's true- or core-self in a daily enterprise'. Therefore, an individual's actions must be autonomous and self-determined and not be influenced by others' perceptions or expectations.

Participant 9 mentioned that the environment places pressure on him to behave in a way that is not true to his character and to avoid rejection, he complies: *'Ek is ook op die HK (Huis Kommitee) wat beteken dat daar baie aandag op jou geplaas word wat nie noodwendig daar was nie. Dis ook 'n baie moeilike ding. Nou word daar sekere*

goed van jou verwag wat ek nie noodwendig is nie'. (Translated: *'I am a member of the House Committee, which also means that people expect particular things (which is not really who I am) of me').* And also: *'…ek weet nie of ek my altyd daaraan sal steur nie. Ek sal wel luister maar niks se nie want ek doen nie konflik nie, ek sal maar net die vrede bewaar en 'n balans probeer vind' (Translated: 'I don't know if I will be bothered by what others tell me, I will listen but say nothing in return. I don't like conflict, so I will just try to find a balance'.)*

Many of the young participants admitted that they are influenced by what others want from them and, instead of being who they genuinely are, try to be who others want them to be. According to Participant 3: '*I am not always able to set boundaries to others. I do what they want me to do'.* Participant 11 disclosed that others' happiness is more important to him than his own happiness: '*I feel I put others happiness before my own, and I think that is sometimes too much. I feel that if I show my weakness to others like my family, it affects them. I am the first one that goes into medicine. That was a big step as I come from a family that doesn't have a lot of doctors. So, me, wanting to become a doctor and been accepted, makes my family very proud'*

Participants 4, 8 and 10 admitted that their parents' expectations influence their behaviour and that they behave inauthentically from time to time: *'My mom sees me as a superwoman who can do anything, and I don't want to disappoint her'* (Participant 4); *'My parents say I am a very quiet child, they think it is difficult to communicate with me sometimes. They think I am very conservative and don't go out too much' (*Participant 8), and *'With my parents – I try to make them proud. They see me as a happy-go-lucky person. I try to keep everyone happy at home. I try to keep everyone on a good note. My peers see me as a normal, average student. They see me as a happy person. I never show anger or other emotions, I don't think it is fair to burden other people unless they are willing to listen. I always try to look as if I am having a good time like someone without troubles'* (Participant 10).

Studies by Stryker and Burke (2000:285) show that society prescribes behaviour patterns that shape the individual. According to this study, these prescriptions can shape behaviour, leading to 'multiple' selves. Multiple selves are the different 'selves' of an individual when interacting with various groups, institutions, or individuals in a

society, based on these groups' expectations for 'appropriate' behaviour (Stryker & Burke, 2000:285).

Participants 2, 4 and 5 admitted that they are different people in various situations: *'When I was still in school, I used to be selfish and close-minded. Now that I have matured a little more, I tend to be more open-minded towards others and can adjust to situations, although I don't always agree with stuff' (*Participant 2); *'So, I think a part of me is still scared because of that I lost a part of myself. So that was also scary – like – 'who am I? I am different in different situations'* (Participant 4), and *'Sjoe!! Dit verskil baie in die sin van hoe sosiaal ek was. Ek was baie meer sosiaal op skool sou ek se waar ek nou baie meer introvert is. Ek hou van mense maar ek is nou meer introverties'* (Translated: '*Wow! It differs a lot in terms of how social I was. I was a lot more social at school, I'd say, whereas now I am a lot more of an introvert. I like people, but I am a lot more introverted now.')* (Participant 5).

'Authentic behaviour' entails behaving according to one's core values, characteristics, emotions, needs and preferences. The authentic practice is, therefore, finding a balance between the 'true self', what the environment dictates and the possible implications of behaviour (Brunell *et al.,* 2010:901; Goldman, 2004:6; Kernis & Goldman, 2006:295; Scharf & Mayseless, 2010;85; Wood *et al.,* 2008:386). According to Participant 4, she receives negativity from her family but is determined to stay true to what she wants: '*I am already receiving a lot of negativity for applying for medicine, my sister didn't get in after six months, and she is already telling me that if I do not come in after a year I must stop applying and a friend of hers had tried for four years and did not get in. But I am not going up. So, negativity towards my dream. And a part of me keeps telling me what if I do not get into medicine then I lost my youth and I kind of don't really want to lose my youth, so I try to prioritise and then still now and then be able to go out, so I do not lose my youth. That is a big challenge to find a balance'.*

Sub-theme 1.7: Difficulty making choices and setting goals

(refer to Category 2, Theme 2)

5.4.2.2 Theme 2: Authentic (ideal) self (IS) and life goals to be set for authentic adulthood

Sub-theme 2.1: Lack of life goals

Psychological factors associated with successful identity formation include personal goal setting, making meaningful decisions during exploration of possibilities and commitment to what makes sense (Salmela-Aro et al., 2007:690).

Goal setting and pursuing goals are perceived as a mechanism that directs the emerging adult to future expectations, while the lacking of goals may reflect unclear future expectations (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:7).

A challenge expressed by many participants is the lack of goalsetting or sticking to goals they set. Participant 1 admitted that she does not stick to the goals set: *'Ek stel doelwitte maar ek hou nie altyd daarby nie…. dis klein stupid goed, soos om bv te begin oefen. Elke maand besluit ek om te oefen maar dan hou ek nie daarby nie. Ek moet oefen, maar ek het nie die selfdissipline nie. Partykeer het ek 'n deadline vir 'n taak dan stel ek dit uit en stel my wekker vir drie uur in die oggend dan is ek spyt dat ek nie deurgedruk het die aand nie'* (Translated*: 'I set goals, but I don't always stick to them….it is small stupid things, like, for example, to start exercising. Every month I decide to exercise, but then I don't stick to it. I must exercise, but I lack self-discipline. Sometimes I have a deadline for an assignment, then I postpone and set my alarm for three am then I regret that I did not push through that night.')*

Many participants proclaimed that they do not set goals. Participant 9 said that emerging adults need guidance to set goals: *'Elke fase van die lewe het ander challenges en wat dit verg, verskil. Daar is ook nou 'n klomp nuwe goed wat vir my voorle. Ek dink dit sal baie makliker wees as mens weet wat om te verwag. Ek het as eerstejaar daar ingestap, naief, nie geweet wat om te verwag nie. Ek dink nie genoeg aan 'n toekoms sodat ek weet wat om te verwag nie. Ek dink dis baie moeilik vir mense van my ouderdom om in die diepkant ingegooi te word en toekoms-doelwitte te stel'* (Translated: *'Every phase of life has different challenges, and what it involves is different. There are also a lot of new things ahead of me now. I think it would be a lot easier if you knew what to expect. I walked in there as a first-year, naïve, not knowing what to expect. I don't think about the future enough to know what to expect. I think it's very difficult for people my age to be thrown into the deep end and to set future goals'.)* Participants 8 and 10 agreed that they do not set goals: *'I don't have any goals set to become an adult'* (Participant 8) and *'I do have a few goals career-wise, but I am not exactly sure that is what I want to do. I think young adults need to see the*

*bigger picture and not just live day to day as many do. They need to figure out what they want to be as well as who they want to be. From a cultural perspective, many young people go astray without thinking about what it will do to them in the future. In our culture, you are thought to become a decent adult, and if you at least try 50% of the time, you will become a good adult, but a lot of young people I know don't do it. They take a lot of the learnings for granted, and then they don't end up the way it was supposed to be' (*Participant 10).

To 'plan for the future' and 'set goals', primarily stems from self-awareness as it allows the young individual to visualise him/herself in different stages of life and circumstances (Oyserman *et al.,* 2012; 69-70). During emerging adulthood, the young individual is future-oriented, and goal setting is expected to be future-directed. For example, the challenges the emerging adult faces during the transition to adulthood are related to future education, future occupation, future intimate relationships and future economic security. Goal setting during emerging adulthood must be able to address these future expectations and match available opportunities (Salmela-Aro *et al.,* 2007:693-394). Participant 5 shares that she needs clear goals in the following excerpt: *'Doelgerig – ek hou nie daarvan om iets te begin en net go with the flow nie. Ek is iemand wat my goals duidelik wil he'* (Translated: *Goal-oriented—I dislike starting something and just going with the flow I am someone who wants to reach my goals').*

Sub-theme 2.2: Independence and financial security (IS i) (IS fs)

The ability to make occupational decisions determines work success. Work goals direct the emerging adult's focus on the future. If this objective has its origin in specific skills and interests, combined with striving to succeed, it may lead to a solid occupational identity. The young adult not only wants to know "Who am I?" but further asks "Why am I?" in other words, how can he/she creates a meaningful impact in life, using his/her personal skills or talents. Furthermore, setting work goals helps the emerging adult perceive future occupations as a significant contribution (occupationally and financially) to the world (Yeager & Bundick, 2009:424-429; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2).

Many participants share a common goal, namely to become financially independent. Participants 2, 6 and 7 expressed a need for such independence: *'I want to be financially independent. I want my own house and great friends. I want to be financially*

stable and make solid choices financially' (Participant 2*); 'I want to find a job and start taking care of myself'* (Participant 6); and *'One thing that I want to see is myself being independent. I am not independent now. Independent so that I do not need to ask anybody for anything or relate to anyone, I should have what I need. I also want to see myself love more and care more for others, and probably try to be more social. At the age of 25, I want to own my car from my pocket, not financed by anyone. So, I've set myself a couple of goals that I want to achieve on my own. I also want to learn not to cry about everything and also open up to the next person because I feel I hold back all the time'* (Participant 7).

Sub-theme 2.3: Becoming stable and mature

Participant 3 noted that she wants to find solutions for past problems and become more mature in handling situations*: 'I want to find solutions for stuff that I had to endure in the past, set goals to apply principles that can become habitual to better handle situations'.* Participant 5 agreed that she doesn't want to live a mediocre life*: Ek wil graag my ideale bereik, soos ek wil nie te mediocre physio wees nie, ek wil iemand wees wat goals het en nie net deur die lewe float nie, ek wil doelgerig wees. Iemand wat connection kan maak met mense, goeie vriende he met wie jy close is, mense wat jy weet jy op kan staatmaak'* (Translated*: 'I really want to achieve my ideals, like I don't just want to be a mediocre physio, I want to be someone who has goals and not just float through life, I want to be goal-oriented. Somebody who can connect with people, have good friends with whom you're close, people you know you can rely on.*') Participant 11 added to the above notion: *'I want to complete my degree in the best way, I want my social life to be good and want to be happy with those that are around me and I want to find a good person which I want to spend the rest of my life with'.*

Sub-theme 2.4: Having strong social connections

Many participants expressed a need for more decisive social connections with others: *'Iemand wat connection kan maak met mense, goeie vriende he met wie jy close is, mense wat jy weet jy op kan staatmaak'* (Translated: *'Somebody who can connect with people, have good friends with whom you're close, people you know you can rely on.')* (Participant 5). Participants 7, 10 and 11 agreed with this*: 'I also want to see myself love more and care more for others and have closer relationships'* (Participant 7); *'I would like to be someone that people can look up to and say I want to be like him and*

have close relationships with others' (Participant 10); and *'My main goal is to become an adult, have a family, have children, have a stable life, many friends…'* (Participant 11). Participant 6 expressed a need to have a closer relationship with God: *'Another goal is to have a closer relationship with God and people'.*

Sub-theme 2.5: Marriage and family

Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.* (2012:312-214) postulate that forming romantic and intimate relationships depends on goals set by the young individual. Therefore, the emerging adult needs to understand their preferences, have some degree of autonomy and be willing to explore romantic relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.,* 2012:312-214).

Participant 3 expressed the need for young people to take responsibility in general and for marriage: *'Young people need to learn to take up responsibility. Marriage is all about responsibility'.* It is evident that many young participants have their future goals set, which in many cases includes a family of their own: *'Om 'n ma te wees is ook vir my nogal' n ideaal, ek wil graag 'n familie he. Familie doelwitte is ook vir my belangrik'* (Translated: *'to be a mother and have a family is important to me. Family goals are essential'*) (Participant 5); *'I want to be an approachable adult. I don't want people to be scared of me. I want to be able to support others that need help. If I have kids, I want to be a good mother'* (Participant 8), and *'My main goal is to become an adult, have a family, have children, have a stable life, stable job and love what I do'* (Participant 11).

Although Participant 4 had her life goals set and expressed a need for marriage, she doesn't want a family of her own*: 'I want to be someone that is very career orientated, I don't want children, like in my childhood there was stuff that I was unable to do because like financial reasons and stuff like that, and I think I don't want children if I can't give them the opportunities that they deserve, not necessary spoil them maybe like opportunities and so. So, I want to be married and career orientated. I want to be fit and healthy and mature'.*

Sub-theme 2.6: Career success

Many participants indicated that their future careers are important to them and have already set career goals such as*: 'Professionalism in my career...'* (Participant 3); and Participant 4 indicated: *'…to first get my career – at this moment - to first get into*

medicine. I haven't set goals further than that, like maybe specialising. I think it is important just to get in. I have only a career goal set that is my main focus'; whilst Participant 6 added: *'My long- or medium-term goal is to move to medicine – that was my initial plan, that is what I set my eyes upon'*; and Participant 11 indicated: *'I do have a few goals career-wise, but I am not exactly sure that is what I want to do—maybe working as a sports physio at the Proteas. This is a long-term goal'* and *'I want to be a successful person in medicine'.*

Sub-theme 2.7: Goals shifted from traditional linear development to more self-focused goals based on self-care and -growth (IS g)

According to Krings *et al.* (2008:95), goal setting within the domains of family and occupation shifted from the traditional linear developmental outcomes to more self-focused goals. Goals are less age bound and less dictated by society. The young individual is challenged to be more self-focused, find his/her pathway to future expectations and have many decision possibilities. For example, goals such as getting a partner to marry and starting a family become less critical during emerging adulthood. They are replaced with goals about the self, such as 'understanding oneself' and 'having an exciting life.

Participant 3 expressed these sentiments in the following words: *'I set goals mostly about working on myself internally, finding solutions for stuff that I had to endure in the past, I set goals to apply principles every day so that it can become habitual to handle situations better. I like to say that I would like to be a better version of who I am now. I think there are things that I still want to learn and perfect in terms of my personality and who I am, but I am quite happy with who I am and work to become; I would just like to apply all of those things into an adult context. And I think resilience is a huge thing because adults require resilience and strengths to handle adult life. So, I want to do adult life without all falling and falling apart things. I want to be a little bit stronger and a little bit more tolerant. If I have to face tax right now or a crazy bill or children, I wouldn't be able to handle it. So, I want to gain a little more strength.'*

Participants 5, 6 and 7 indicated they set self-focused goals such as health, confidence and emotional growth: Participant 5 said she/he needs *'- to stay fit and healthy, to eat healthily and to keep my body healthy and to have healthy relationships with people – not necessarily like committed (boyfriend) but I want to get married. Also, to keep*

mentally healthy, like studying nursing this year – I don't enjoy and is stuck in this for now- but to just take the rest of the year in stride and learn from it – there is no way to dump it and learn and grow as much from it as I can'. Participant 6 indicated that '*… my goal is to have a more fit body because I want to have confidence. I am not as confident as I want to be'* and Participant 7 concurred *'So, I've set myself a couple of goals that I want to achieve on my own. I also want to learn not to cry about everything and also open up to the next person because I feel I hold back all the time'*.

Although Participant 9 is a student in his final year of study, the traditional markers for adulthood such as getting a job after studies, is not important to him as indicated: *'Ek dink almal is maar onseker oor die toekoms. Meeste mense my ouderdom begin nou werk en ek dink dis 'n baie groot aanpassing want almal is nog jonk. Studente is maar eintlik net ouer kinders en nou moet almal ewe skielik begin werk, van 09:00 tot 17:00 werk en nou is almal skielik in die grootmenswereld, so dit forseer jou om baie vinnig volwasse te raak terwyl jy nie eintlik is nie. Ek dink baie jong volwassenens is bang vir daardie verantwoordelikheid maar hang seker ook maar af wie jy is, party kan nie wag om bietjie geld te begin maak nie maar ek dink nie hulle besef altyd teen waste koste dit kom nie'* (Translated*: 'I think everybody is uncertain about the future. Most people my age is starting to work now, and I think it's a very big adjustment because everyone is still young. Students are really just older kids, and now everyone suddenly has to start working from 09:00 to 17:00. Now everyone is suddenly in the adult world. Hence, it forces you to become mature quickly while you actually are not. I also think that many young adults are afraid of that responsibility. But it probably also depends on who you are, some can't wait to make some money, but I don't think they always realise at what cost it comes.'). 'Ek wil my lewe soveel geniet as wat ek kan. Ek wil nie 'n slegte werk he nie, ek wil nie te veel tyd spandeer aan werk nie, en wil nie net geld maak nie. Ek wil my lewe en tyd soveel geniet as wat ek kan. Maar ek voel ook ek moet nog baie volwasse word voordat ek nou 'n regte grootmens is. Ek dink byvoorbeeld aan onafhanklikheid. Ek kan nog nie regtig insien hoe ek in' n woonstel kan bly en vir myself kan sorg nie. Dalk sal ek eers terugtrek huistoe…. ek weet nie'* (Translated: *'I want to enjoy life as much as possible. I don't want a 'bad' job, and I also don't want to spend too much time at work. I also don't want to make money only. I want to enjoy my time and life as much as possible. I also need to grow up before I*

can be a true adult. For example, I can't see myself moving into a flat and taking care of myself. Maybe I will move back home for now, I don't know…').

5.4.2.3 Theme 3: Skills needed

Sub-theme 3.1: Self-knowledge, -growth and emotional support

According to Settersten and Ray (2010:36), emerging adults need networks, programmes, opportunities to 'explore the self' in a new society. They furthermore need life skills (such as self-knowledge, financial planning, time management, social skills and many more).

Participant 4 expressed the need to gain financial budgeting skills by saying: *'… Ek moet ook kan compromise en beplan. Ook budgeting want jongmense het nie altyd die vermoe om te beplan nie. Ek was bevoorreg genoeg dat my ouers vir my kon betaal maar dink daar is ook baie jong volwassenes wat glad nie met geld kan werk nie'* (Translated: *'…Must also be able to compromise and plan. Also, budgeting because young people can't always plan. I was privileged enough that my parents could pay for me, but I think many young adults can't work with money at all.')*

Emotional support is crucial during the challenging exploration phase of emerging adulthood (Luyckx et al., 2013:717). Young individuals in the prolonged transition to adulthood often feel overwhelmed and experience feelings of hopelessness and uncontrollability. High standards are set but sometimes without proper guidelines and assistance, leaving the young individual confused and frustrated (Luyckx *et al.,* 2013:718).

Many participants revealed a need for emotional support. For example, Participant 3 disclosed that she was very depressed and almost suicidal: *'There are so many important things in your life that need equal opportunity and priority. I was totally focused on my studies, and my social life fell away; my emotional health went down, I was very depressed last year, I was suicidal, and I had an eating disorder that I am still dealing with'*.

Participants 4, 5 and 7 agreed that they also needed emotional support and felt lost: *'I was terrified, but you go through many emotions and ups and downs. I was scared of not succeeding and not fitting in. When I first joined my residence, I was so scared. I*

was walking in and not knowing a single person' (Participant 4); *'Ek sou baie graag 'n sielkundige wat vir my objektiewe raad kan gee wou kon gaan sien. Dan ook geestelike ondersteuning…'* (Translated: *'I would very much like to see a psychologist who can give me objective advice. Then also spiritual support…')* (Participant 5); and *'First of all, I think we need a lot of emotional support. It is difficult for me to reach out to others and talk about difficulties, so if I had someone who would reach out to me and ask me what I need, then that would be super. I struggle to go to someone and talk to them, so if we had someone that reached out to us, that would be a lot better. I feel that life would be different for me if I had that someone…*' (Participant 7).

Wickham *et al.* (2015:61) proclaim that emerging adults who lack self-awareness and self-knowledge are often biased in their information processing (Kernis & Goldman, 2006:293). Unbiased processing (the ability to trust own motives, feelings and information) is strongly linked to authenticity. Foster, Hagan and Brooks-Gunn (2008:163) postulate that healthy self-esteem as a psychological resource may reduce the stress associated with all the challenges emerging adults face. Young individuals feel 'alone and confused' in their search for appropriate roles (Shulman, 2005:579) and therefore need guidance. Scharf and Mayseless (2010:85) define authenticity as 'the extent to which individuals are true to their qualities, despite external influences and pressures'.

Self-awareness seemed to be an essential aspect of self-knowledge as expressed by Participant 3: *'Being self-aware and aware of the other people around you'* are important aspects. Participant 4 touched on emotional intelligence as an essential part of emotional maturity when she said: *'Ek dink emotional maturity is 'n groot ding wat nodig is. Emosionele intelligensie'* (Translated: *'I think emotional maturity is a big thing that is needed. Emotional intelligence.')*

Participants 5 and 6 asserted that self-knowledge is an important component for authenticity: *'…know how your mind works, if you can find out how your mind works you are halfway there in terms of studying, know how to control your mind, not the other way around. I used to study by writing things down. It was not that effective; I tried it when I first got here, I tried recording and listening to myself. That was not effective, so I had to learn how my mind works, so now I use speech cards and write down what I have to learn and recite them'* (Participant 5); *'We need to work on*

discovering our own selves and be comfortable with who we are. Just that self-discovery is very important. Know who you are, know what you like and do not be thrown from side to side by the things of life' (Participant 7).

Sub-theme 3.2: Academic support

Research shows that better academic and social outcomes will be possible if tertiary institutions find ways to provide efficient support to their students (on an intellectual, emotional and financial level). Still, they are lacking in giving sufficient guidance and support (Brock, 2010:110).

A need for academic guidance and support was expressed by Participants 6 and 1: *'The education system kind of upsets me because in high school we were taught to cram stuff, we were told that this is the answer and there is only one answer if you don't know it, it is wrong and that kind of narrows one's mind, but now in varsity, we discovered there are several answers, and we want one because that is how we were taught, so that's why people can't thrive in varsity because you have to make up your own mind and find out your own identity'* (Participant 6); and *'Dit is 'n baie groot stap tussen skool en universiteit. Op skool het jy nie baie take gehad nie. Jy hoef ook nie te 'reference' nie. Jy moes net 'n bronnelys he, maar niemand het daarna gekyk nie en nou as jy dit nie reg doen nie trek hul sommer 20% af. Ons het nie genoeg tyd om aan te pas by die Universiteit nie. …Ja die stres van die studies, want mens weet nooit hoe dit gaan gaan nie. Ons kort hulp daarmee. Baie mense dop die eerste semester omdat hulle by die diepkant ingegooi word en ek voel hul verduidelik goed baie min. Die verwagting is te groot. Dit veroorsaak baie stress. Jy dink jy gaan druip en baie mense se ouers betaal net een keer en jy wil dit nie opfoeter nie'* (Translated: *'It's a very big step from school to university. At school, you didn't have many assignments. You also didn't have to reference. You just had to have a source list, but nobody checked it, and now if you don't do it correctly, they'd just deduct 20%. We don't have enough time to adapt to university…. Yes, the stress of the studies, because you never know how it will go. We need help with that. Many people flunk the first semester because they are thrown into the deep end, and I feel they explain things very insufficiently. The expectation is too great. It causes a lot of stress. You think you're going to fail, and many people's parents only pay once, and you do not want to waste your chances*') (Participant 1).

Sub-theme 3.3: Planning, goal setting and resiliency

According to Lavoie et al. (2014:1), emerging adults in the transitional phase need resilience (the ability to recover from hardship quickly). Aspects of resiliency to be addressed in the guidance include socio-emotional skills, supportive environments, quality sleep and planning skills. Many participants acknowledged the value of resiliency to overcome difficulties. Participant 3 expressed that she needs to develop resilience and patience.

The emerging adult needs skills such as self-motivation, flexibility and has to be purpose-driven. Without the help of family, peers, teachers, counsellors and supervisors, the transition to adulthood can be challenging (Shulman *et al.,* 2009:244). O'Connor *et al.* (2011:861) state that it is crucial to identify the factors that need to be addressed in this process of transitional changes during emerging adulthood.

Participant 1 expressed a need for planning skills and self-discipline to stick to goals: *'…dis klein stupid goed, soos om bv te begin oefen. Elke maand besluit ek om te oefen maar dan hou ek nie daarby nie. Ek moet oefen, maar ek het nie die selfdissipline nie'* (Translated: *'… it is small stupid things, like, for example, to start exercising. Every month I decide to exercise, but then I don't stick to it. I have to exercise, but I lack self-discipline.'*) Support from the new environment will also make a considerable difference to adjust better: *'We also need assistance with our studies. They used to tell us that it is a lot easier out there (university) at school, but it is not. I think if we could get an orientation session, just to tell us what to expect because I came here being clueless'* (Participant 7).

Emerging adulthood is associated with long hours of studying or socialising. As a result, many young individuals do not get enough quality sleep, leading to more difficulty coping with stress. Furthermore, parents are not there to monitor bedtime and technology during night time, which impacts the number of quality sleeping hours the emerging adult gets (Lavoie *et al.,* 2014:1). Participants 1 and 7 mentioned a need for a better sleep-work balance: *'I did not know I have to adjust my sleeping hours, I have to develop a specific routine, having to accommodate everything in my life like studying, spending time alone and all that'* (Participant 7); *'Partykeer het ek 'n deadline vir 'n taak dan stel ek dit uit en stel my wekker vir drie uur in die oggend dan is ek spyt dat ek nie deurgedruk het die aand nie'* (Translated: *'Sometimes I have a deadline for*

an assignment, then I postpone and set my alarm for three am then I regret that I did not push through the night.') (Participant 1).

Sub-theme 3.4: Occupational- and financial skills

Rapid changes in the economy and society increase uncertainty about employment, causing the emerging adult to select a job based on availability and not necessarily on choice or preference (Salmela-Aro *et al.,* 2014:329). To accomplish a clear occupational identity is easier said than done (Benson *et al.,* 2012:1752; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2). Emerging adults are exposed to more uncertainty and instability in the labour market environment than past generations. Qualifications and related experiences have become more important to get appointed for particular jobs. As a result of higher labour market expectations, higher levels of stress and competition are experienced (Benson *et al.,* 2012:1752). This uncertainty was revealed by Participants 2 and 3: *'If you don't study, you can't earn good money. That is really stressful'* (Participant 2), and *'I think many young adults need skills to improve professionalism and also have uncertainty about what to expect in the workplace'* (Participant 3). Nevertheless, many benefits of a clear occupational identity have been reported. Young adults who have a clear occupational identity seem to have lower frustration levels, are less prone to depression, are more resilient and have higher self-esteem (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:7; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2).

Other particular skills such as budgeting and planning for success was mentioned by Participant 5: *'Ek sal graag ook meer wil weet oor budgeting want jongmense het nie altyd die vermoe om te beplan vir die toekoms nie'* (Translated: *'I would also like to know more about budgeting because young people don't always have the ability to plan for the future'). Participant 11 agreed that financial goalsetting is an important skill to gain: 'I want to be a successful person in medicine. My number one goal is to help others worldwide; the financial goal will be last but is still important, and I need help with that….'*

Sub-theme 3.5: Social skills

Socio-emotional skills and self-regulation refer to the young individual's ability to identify, regulate and control his/her emotions. Being able to communicate effectively and having positive self-esteem (based on self-knowledge) are linked to resiliency. Most young individuals who have difficulties regulating emotions struggle with social

stressors when confronted with multiple changes and challenges (typical of emerging adulthood). If young individuals can be trained to communicate effectively and can regulate their emotions, they will be more able to cope with complex socio-emotional challenges and stressors (Lavoie *et al.,* 2014:1). A need for better communication skills was expressed by Participants 2, 3 and 4. Participant 2 revealed that she *'wants to get angry less quickly'.* Participant 3 agreed that being more socially aware will better her social skills: *'…Just being socially savvy, just socially aware so that I can manage situations, especially conflict situations. Social skills. You've got to master the skill of interacting with others. Effective communication, listening skills…'.* According to Participant 5, social skills will benefit her to accommodate different people: *'We also need to develop more social skills because we meet different people, more than in school, so we need to be more sociable to accommodate them and try not to be biased and stereotypical. Some people can be very biased'.*

5.4.3 Category 3: How do I get there?

5.4.3.1 Theme 1: Guidance and assistance needed

The emerging adult's prominent task is to become independent and build a strong sense of self (Benson & Elder, 2011:1646). With the prolonged transition to adulthood and the unpredictable, non-linear unfolding of adult milestones, guiding norms and support have weakened. The transition is now less structured, and therefore the emerging adult needs social and psychological support more than in the past.

According to Shulman *et al.* (2005:579), emerging adults experience stress and unexpressed dissatisfaction due to living 'divided lives', in other words, having to cope with aspects of adolescence and adulthood simultaneously. As a result, many emerging adults feel 'lost' and 'nowhere'. The transitional phase is, furthermore, not sequential, manageable and predictable. Moreover, the transitions are characterised by many 'uncertainties, fluctuations, reversals and discontinuities'. Therefore, emerging adults are confused and continually searching for appropriate roles - socially and occupationally. Parents and institutions, such as universities, lack the skills for guidance in an unpredictable unfolding of life tasks, experiences, leaving the young individual to stand on his/her own feet concerning the future (Shulman *et al.,* 2005:579).

The researcher identified a few areas where emerging adults need guidance and support. Broader guidelines for guidance and support are discussed in Chapter 6. A few areas where guidance and support are needed were identified by the participants in this research, namely:

Academic guidance and support: The academic transition from school to university seems to be overwhelming for many young participants: '*Well, people say it is a transition between high school and university, but it is more like to be thrown into the deep end...because the work is a lot, most lecturers don't teach, they just read from the slides, you don't have extra classes, everything is money (textbooks, lab coats, scrubs etc), you are overwhelmed'* (Participant 6); *'The transition was so bad, the amount of pressure was so bad that at a point I felt like giving up because the workload was just too much. I thought I had anxiety attacks, and also it was caused because I was not enrolled in the course that I wanted to do, so that caused a little bit of a setback; I was giving my all. We also need assistance concerning our studies. They used to tell us that it is a lot easier out there (university) at school, but it is not. We could get an orientation session just to tell us what to expect because I came here being clueless. I did not know…'* (Participant 7); *'Last year second semester I failed a subject, and because I am an introvert, I did not know what to do and where to ask for help. You need to speak about it. I told myself that I did not want to involve others because it would affect them emotionally, and I kept it to myself, tried to sort it out by myself. So, if you have someone who can support you and give you resources from their own experience, it will benefit you. If you can start your foundation in the right way and make it strong, you will benefit from it'* (Participant 11); and *'The education system kind of upsets me because in high school we were taught to cram stuff, we were told that this is the answer and there is only one answer if you don't know it, it is wrong and that kind of narrows one's mind, but now in varsity, we discovered there are several answers. We want one because that is how we were thought, so that's why people can't thrive in varsity because you have to make up your own mind and find out your own identity'* (Participant 6).

Emotional guidance and support (as identified by Participant 7): *'First of all, I think we need a lot of emotional support. It is difficult for me to reach out to others and talk about difficulties, so if I had someone who would reach out to me and ask me what I*

need, that would be super. I struggle to go to someone and talk to them, so if we had someone that reached out to us, that would be a lot better. I feel that life would be different for me if I had that someone'.

Participant 6 disclosed that she felt depressed because of a lack of guidance: *'I don't cope like now I don't have time to sleep and eat properly, lose weight, and feel depressed because I don't know what is expected of me'.* Participant 3 agreed that she also felt depressed and even was suicidal because of not having support: *'I was very, very depressed last year, I was suicidal, I had an eating disorder which I am still dealing with. I had a friend that was just admitted into a psychiatric institution, and it is not all about it. I realised that mental health is the number one thing and bringing special people closer into your space before you go out there and try to reach your career and goals and people lose sight of that.*

Several participants expressed a need for emotional support regarding self-esteem. Participants 5 and 11 said they needed confidence: *'Partykeer is daar soveel goed dat ek nie lekker weet hoe om dit te handle nie. Ek wil self-confidence he. Soos om confidence te he in jou eie ability. Dis iets wat ons nie altyd op Universiteit leer nie'* (Translated: *'Sometimes there are so many things that I don't really know how to handle them. I want to have self-confidence. Like having confidence in your own ability. This is something we don't always learn at university.')* (Participant 5); and *'When you go into the university, you are scared. You need confidence. You are fragile then, so you just need someone who will tell you everything will be fine. Also, to believe in yourself, be open to new things, know your value. That is why so many young people don't have self-confidence. Young adults know who they want to become, but they do not know who they are. They don't believe in themselves; they do not believe that they can become the person who they want to become, so they put a mask on and try to hide it'* (Participant 11).

Support and guidance with social skills and relationships were mentioned by Participants 2, 3 and 6. Participant 2 disclosed that she does not know how to approach romantic relationships because she lacks communications skills. Participants 3 and 4 agreed with this: *'I want to be able to manage social situations, especially conflict, and I need guidance in doing so. Also, to effectively communicate and listen'* (Participant 3); and *'I need help to communicate better (especially when*

working with others). Now we have to do group assignments, and I find it difficult because some people do not have the same work ethics as I have, and then I try to do everything because I don't know how to communicate. When I try to communicate, they do not understand me because we are different, which frustrates me a little – so I think better communications skills. I also need to develop more social skills because we meet different people more than in school, so we need to be more sociable to accommodate them and try not to be biased and stereotypical. Some people can be very biased.' (Participant 6).

Guidance for decision making and goal setting: As decision making and having goals is such an important part of becoming the person an individual is supposed to become, the emerging adults need guidance and support in this process: *'I want to be able to handle situations better, and not end up crying at home, binge eating ice cream but rather find a solution to handle the situation. But it is hard because all those principles and things you try to tell yourself are not necessarily the right process. Young people like me also need responsibility for choices and mistakes'* (Participant 3); *'People come from different environments. Sometimes they don't make good choices and then end up with bad friends. So, I think it is partly poor planning and also a lack of self-knowledge because, in High school, you did not have the freedom to explore and take charge. Now in university you are running your own life. During High School, you were managed by your parents, but now you are doing your own thing'* (Participant 8); and *'Ek wil by my keuses kan hou, ek kon nog nooit, ek wil dit graag kan doen en myself beter kan vertrou…'* (Translated: '*I want to be able to stick to my decisions, I've never been able to, I really want to have the ability to do it and trust myself more…)* (Participant 2).

Occupational and financial guidance: Participant 4 reported that she is already taking up the occupation responsibilities although she does not feel ready and prepared for it: *'And what is also hard is our nursing students work in the hospitals in our holidays, and we hardly don't get any holidays whatsoever or weekends. Everyone is living up their student lives while we are at res working. It takes a part from your youth'*

Participant 10 agreed that he also needs many skills to prepare himself for an occupation: *'I think I lack many skills still. Especially in the work area, like handling patients but also to hold back your emotions when you are angry and frustrated'*

Parental guidance and support: According to Participant 7, her parents are letting go of her a bit more than it used to be, although she finds it difficult to cope without their input: *'…with my parents, it also changed. We are deviating a bit from each other because I am becoming an adult now, so I think they are letting go compared to back then, where we were very attached. I think they are now letting go a bit. I am more myself now, but I still allow them to invade my personal space. It is not a good thing, though, because I feel I still need them. I still need them emotionally. I need to be talking to them about everything that is happening in my life, like my transition from high school to university. I went through a lot; I was emotionally drained. I was so miserable'.*

5.5 SUMMARY

Emerging adults need guidance and support to understand who they authentically are and how to make sense of the transformation process to adulthood. They furthermore lack self-knowledge, which is an essential part of becoming an authentic adult. Therefore, parents, society and institutions (educational - and places of work) have to play a crucial role in guiding emerging adults to authentic adulthood.

CHAPTER 6

GUIDELINES AND SUPPORT

HOW DO I GET THERE?

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Emerging adulthood is a period of rapid changes and new possibilities (Arnett, 2000:471). As a result, the young individual is often thrust into new, unfamiliar, adult roles and responsibilities to cope with various demands (emotional, physical and social) (Galambos, Barker & Tilton-Weaver, 2003:254; Song *et al.,* 2021:1126; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:217).

According to Benson and Elder (2011:1646), the emerging adult's primary task is to become independent and build a strong sense of self. With the prolonged transition to adulthood in industrialised countries, guiding norms and support have weakened due to a non-linear unfolding of adult milestones (leaving parents' house, education towards a future occupation, getting married and starting a family). The transition is now less structured, and the emerging adult needs social and psychological support far more than in the past (social constructivism). According to Arnett (2000:476) and Kärchner *et al.*, 2021:321), psychosocial maturation (healthy self-esteem, responsibility and independence) is essential to cope during this unstructured development time. Benson and Elder (2011:1646) indicate that psychological resources are fundamental coping mechanisms during this unstructured and stressful time of emerging adulthood. Foster *et al.* (2008:163) and Song *et al.,* (2021:1126) postulate that healthy self-esteem, as a psychological resource, may reduce the stress associated with all the challenges emerging adults face. Young individuals feel 'alone and confused', searching for roles that fit their life circumstances and their personalities (Shulman, 2005:579). Emerging adults also need support structures (Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3259) and role models to identify roles and responsibilities on the road of emerging adulthood (social constructivism as framework).

Support structures include more than just shelter and health care (Settersten & Ray, 2010:36). The young adult also needs social networks (whether online or networks of

friends and family), developmental programmes and opportunities to 'explore' themselves in a new society (eco-systemic framework) (Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:229).

They furthermore must attain new skills, contribute to communities and develop a sense of purpose. Yet, according to Benson and Elder (2011:1647) and Booker, *et al.*, (2021:3259), institutions and society provide little or no support for the challenges and needs of emerging adults.

This study was conducted to see how the researcher could contribute in suggesting assistance to emerging adults on their journey of finding themselves. After synthesising the empirical and literature finding, which mainly indicated challenges for the young adult in becoming an authentic person, the researcher will give some recommendations to assist.

6.2 SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS – EMPIRICAL AND LITERATURE FINDINGS

The researcher in this study aimed to find similarities in both literature and research findings. The three objectives, namely to explain the forming of identities and identity challenges during emerging adulthood (Who am I?), to understand the challenges emerging adults face during the transformation phase in becoming an authentic adult (How do I get there?) and to give possible guidelines to assist emerging adults going through the transitional phase on their way to authentic adulthood (Where am I going?) are reported on below and include a comparison between literature and this empirical finding.

6.2.1 Category 1: Who am I? Identity formation and challenges with identity formation

Theme 1: Emerging adults feel very uncertain because they lack self-awareness and self-knowledge and, as a result, act inauthentically.

Many of the young participants in this study expressed lacking self-knowledge and self-awareness. Feelings such as 'being lost' and 'not knowing who I truly am' were shared. Some participants expressed conflicting behaviours compared to expressed self-knowledge. Baumeister and Vohs (2007:820) and Song *et al.,* (2021:1126) state that the emerging adult with secure self-esteem appears to have more in-depth knowledge of him/herself. He/she has information about preferences, strengths, and

dislikes and is more likely to be confident. Unfortunately, many of the young participants in this study reported that they lack self-confidence due to *'not knowing themselves well enough and are still in the process of discovering themselves'* (Participants 6, 7, 8 and 11).

As a result of not knowing who they authentically are (self-knowledge), some conceal their true identity to embody another which they feel is more appropriate to the context in which they find themselves. According to Theran and Han (2013:1097) and Song *et al.,* (2021:1126), the emerging adult who becomes preoccupied with being accepted may become self-alienated (a state where social expectations and self-awareness are conflicting). A few participants reported that they would *'put on a mask, pretending to be happy, not to hurt other's feelings'* (Participant 4) and thus hide their emotions. Inauthentic behaviour stems from uncertainty about the self and being preoccupied with '*being who others want me to be'.* Approval from parents seems to be another driver of inauthentic behaviour. Participants 7, 10 and 11 disclosed that they would do what their parents expect from them rather than disappoint them, even if they disagree with their parents' expectations.

Furthermore, different participants expressed the need to develop social skills such as communication skills and skills to build relationships with others. Gorbett and Kruczek (2008:58) as well as Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:217) define social self-esteem as a person's ability to communicate, relate to other people, display confidence, and be open to others.

Theme 2: The role of feedback from others (parents, family, friends and society) in identity formation (social constructivism)

Parent and family support seems necessary for healthy personal development during identity formation (Benson & Elder 2011:1648; Syed *et al.,* 2013:380; Smith *et al.,* 2021:53). Parents are vital role-players in ego and identity development during young adulthood (Syed & Seiffge-Krenke, 2013:382). Parents' expectations of their emerging adult children become a measure for success or failure (Messersmith *et al.,* 2008:213; Smith *et al.,* 2021:53). The positive role parents play in the identity formation of emerging adults was expressed by several participants. For example, Participants 2, 7 and 10 indicated that they value their parents' input and advice. Remarks such as

'What my parents think of me are more important than what anyone else thinks' (Participant 7); *'I try to make them (my parents) proud.'* (Participant 10); and '*The advice of my mother is important to me.'* (Participant 2) are an indication of parents' roles. Siblings, friends and other family members' advice is also welcomed, as expressed in remarks such as*. 'I look up to my brother; he plays an important role in my life"* (Participant 8) and *'..my older sister, my cousin, my best friend and my dad are important soundboards'* (Participant 6).

Cultural influence cannot be ignored as a relevant role player in identity formation. Participants 11 and 9 expressed substantial impacts of cultural prescriptions in their identity forming. According to Participant 11, '*I listen to what culture prescribes and will wait with choices to adhere…*'. Guiffrida warns that over-identification with a particular group might hinder identity development during emerging adulthood (Guiffrida, 2009:2424; Cohen & Kassan, 2018:134-135). Remarks such as: *'I grew up in Limpopo, so I am kind of a village girl, we are not like the others in university'* (Participant 8); *'Afrikaans people are just different; we do things differently….')* (Participant 9*)* and '*Religious wise I am not allowed to have relationships'* (Participant 10) confirm Gruiffida's idea of over-identification with particular groups as a barrier to identity exploration and identity-forming.

Theme 3: Emerging adults experience changes in identity from adolescence to emerging adulthood

New identities are formed through active exploration (a way of making sense of the new world of the emerging adult) and commitment to what makes sense. The process of making sense entails the gathering of information and fostering an awareness of the self within different contexts such as tertiary education, the world of work, new and diverse friendships and independent living (Luyckx *et al.,* 2013:159-160; Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:217). Participants 8, 9 and 11 indicated that they experience changes in how they think and act and are open to new experiences. For example, Participant 11 said that he is *'open to new things and experiences and a new environment. That definitely changed the way I see life and also changed my character'* (Participant 11).

A lack of self-awareness and a lack of awareness of the feelings of others impact social adjustment, as mentioned by Participants 4 and 5. Participant 5 reported a

significant change from adolescence to emerging adulthood concerning social adjustment: *'It differs greatly. I am much more sensitive about the relationships in which I invest. You become more aware of your identity and the values you attach to relationships with people.'*

Freedom from parental supervision also plays a significant role in identity changes from adolescence to emerging adulthood. Many participants reported that they feel freer to be themselves and actively explore new roles and identities (Participants 7,10, and 11). Arnett (2000:470) states that relative freedom from limitations such as parents supervision, adult responsibilities and family obligations allows emerging adults to be actively involved in their development through exploration (Arnett, 2000:470).

6.2.2 Category 2: Where am I going?

Theme 1: Challenges associated with emerging adulthood

Many emerging adults experience life as complex and very different from what they expected. They had the idea that they would study, get a job, marry and have children, but it does not work for young adolescents in this way anymore. Instead, they feel confused and lost, stressed and without proper guidance regarding handling all these challenges.

Luyckx *et al*. (2013:159-160) as well as Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:217) state that young adults are confronted with many transitions and maturation challenges during emerging adulthood. The difficulties to adjust during this confusing time come to the fore in the lamentations of many participants. Participant 1 expressed it in the following words: *'It's a huge step from school to university. Things are major different'.* Many young adults furthermore said that they feel lost, experience a lot of pressure and do not know how to plan for their lives at the moment, but also the future. Remarks made by several participants (Participants 3,5,7,11) showed that they feel pressured and do not know what is expected of them. Participant 5 expressed the sentiments of many participants when stating: '*It is expected of us to take responsibility for ourselves. But we don't know exactly how the things of life work. We need guidance'*.

Uncertainty regarding future expectations (after completing studies) were reported. Many young individuals still do not feel ready to enter the world of work and instead consider furthering their studies as explained by Participant 9, a student in his final

year of study: '*I want to enjoy my life and time as much as possible. But I also feel that I still have to grow up a lot before becoming a real adult. I think, for example, of independence. I still can't really see how I can stay in an apartment and provide for myself. I think I will study a little longer for now… I'm not ready yet.')* According to Setterson and Ray (2010:21), emerging adults in industrialised countries take much longer to transit from adolescence to adulthood and milestones for adulthood unfolds in a non-linear way. The linear unfolding of milestones implies that young adults complete tertiary education, leave their parents' home and live independently, enter the workforce, get married and start a family of their own sequentially (Setterson & Ray, 2010:21).

Forming new relationships is another challenge for many emerging adults. Young adults often lack 'social competence', and relationships are demanding and complex during the emerging adult years (O'Connor *et al.,* 2011:861; Song *et al.,* 2021:1127). Emerging adults need to practise self-disclosure, openness, communication and willingness to attach to others to develop intimacy in romantic relationships (Zimmer-Gembeck *et al.,* 2012:312-214). Young individuals often lack skills, as reported by many participants (Participant 2, 4, 9,11). Another challenge for exploring romantic relationships is attachment issues during childhood (Pittman *et al.,* 2012:1487; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3260). Participant 2 said that she *'didn't have many male adult figures in my life, and that makes me scared of romantic relationships'.*

Forming intimate/romantic identities and commitments are often postponed because of the longer and more complex transition to adulthood (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010:392). For example, Participants 4 and 7 expressed a delay in committing to a serious relationship too soon: '*I am also not in a romantic relationship at the moment, I was, but then it was distracting me from my academics, and where I am now, I just want to focus and get into medicine* (Participant 4); and *'I don't want to be romantically attached too soon.* (Participant 7).

Authenticity forms the basis of strong relationships and provides the young individual with a platform on which to build all future navigations (Song *et al.,* 2021:1125). Scharf and Mayseless (2010:85), Song *et al.,* (2021:1125) and Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:218) define authenticity as 'the extent to which individuals are true to their qualities, despite external influences and pressures'. For example, Participant 9 mentioned that the

environment places pressure on him to behave in a way that is not true to his character: *'People expect particular things (which is not really who I am) of me'.* Parents' expectations may also result in inauthentic behaviour, as expressed by some participants: '*My mom sees me as a superwoman who can do anything, and I don't want to disappoint her'* (Participant 4).

Parents are not the only external influence emerging adults experience when exploring authentic selves. Studies by Stryker and Burke (2000:285); Čapek & Loidolt, (2021:229) and Song *et al.,* (2021:1126) show that society also prescribes behaviour patterns that shape individuals. Participants 2 and 4 admitted that they comply with what is expected, even to the extent of not being authentic. Authentic behaviour entails behaving according to one's core values, characteristics, emotions, needs and preferences. The authentic practice is, therefore, finding a balance between the 'true self, what the environment dictates and the possible implications of behaviour' (Brunell *et al.,* 2010:901; Goldman, 2004:6; Kernis & Goldman, 2006:295; Scharf & Mayseless, 2010; 85; Wood *et al.,* 2008:386; Čapek & Loidolt, 2021:229; Song *et al.,* 2021:1125).

Theme 2: Ideal (authentic) self (IS) and life goals to be set for authentic adulthood

Emerging adults have an image of what they would like to be as adults. In the literature review and the responses from the participants, it is indicated that young people would like to be financially independent; they would like to become more stable in all aspects of their lives. For many participants, this entails good relations, marriage, having their own family, and a successful career are critical (Marrone, 2013:583-584).

To become the ideal, future self, goal-setting is an important skill to acquire. The pressure many emerging adults experience often stems from an inability to set goals and plan appropriately. Goal setting and pursuing goals are perceived as mechanisms that direct the emerging adult to future expectations, while lacking goals may reflect unclear future expectations (Shulman & Nurmi, 2010:7; Booker, *et al.*, 2021:3260). A challenge expressed by many participants is the lack of goalsetting or sticking to goals they set. Remarks included: *'I set goals, but I don't always stick to them…'* (Participant 1); '*I think it's tough for people my age to be thrown into the deep end and to set future goals'* (Participant 9); *'I don't have any goals set to become an adult'* (Participant 8);

and *'I do have a few goals career-wise, but I am not exactly sure that is what I want to do'* (Participant 10).

Theme 3: Skills (SK) needed to become an authentic adult

Participants in this research study identified important skills required to become authentic adults. Self-knowledge was mentioned to be one of the most important aspects of stable and matured adulthood. Self-knowledge is also an essential building block for social identity and the ability to build strong relationships. Goalsetting, planning and resilience were mentioned as important skills needed to achieve on a personal and occupational level. Financial knowledge is required as part of occupational identity and readiness to take up occupational roles and include aspects such as financial planning and budgeting.

6.2.3 Category 3: How do I get there? Guidance and assistance

Different stakeholders are involved in the guidance process, of which the emerging adult is the primary stakeholder. Other stakeholders include parents/caregivers, spiritual leaders, life orientation teachers, school and student counsellors (eco-systemic approach) (see recommendations).

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In the light of the research findings mentioned above, it is evident that emerging adults need guidance. Not only do they experience specific challenges with regards to identity-forming, but they also lack self-knowledge. Therefore, different stakeholders need to guide these young adults to help them on their way to authentic adulthood. This study concentrated on first and final year students, so the suggested guidance will mostly apply to tertiary institutions. Still, many of the guidelines will apply to all emerging adults. Therefore, the stakeholders below have been identified to give guidance in line with the identified categories as deduced from the research questions, literature review and responses from participants:

Parents/caregivers (social constructivism framework)

- Strong relationships with their emerging adult children are of utmost importance. Good communication- and parenting skills are very important in this regard. Parents could play a guiding role on all levels required from young

people if they built strong relationships. Insecure attachments, on the other hand, play a significant role in emerging adults' relationships with others, and parents should seek advice from psychologists, if necessary. Parenting roles should shift from disciplining to encouragement and support as the young adult finds him/herself in an insecure, unfamiliar new stage in life. If parents are positive and encouraging, emerging adults will experience more security and support.

- Parents can be proactive by seeking study and career guidance for their adolescent children at the school level or at the first-year level if the emerging adult is still unsure about studies. Student counsellors, Life Orientation teachers and many online assessments can assist in this regard and may prevent uncertainties about study or future work.

- Young people need guidance and emotional support from their parents to move towards independence. Parents should be careful when to nurture and when to step back and when to gradually remove their levels of control and allow more freedom for their children to make own decisions. Some parents often tend to rescue their emerging adult children which may delay emotional and financial independence. Parents can also guide their adolescents and emerging adult children towards financial freedom by teaching them financial management and budgeting skills. Assistance from educational psychologists or school counsellors could be valuable.

- Parents can assist adaptability by stop focusing on what their emerging adult children 'should accomplish', 'should study to be successful', 'whom they should marry by a particular time', how they 'should earn a living or what they 'should do'. The world of emerging adults has changed dramatically in comparison to when parents grew up years ago (when they were emerging adults). As a result, emerging adults face different realities and need support rather than direction based on outdated perspectives.

- Parents should become more aware of the different realities and influences of social media and the role of the digital world of their emerging adult children.

For example, online dating and social media in relationships play a significant role in young individuals' lives and have redefined dating for emerging adults. Parents can assist by being more aware of the influence of social media on their children's perception of the self. For example, the more introversive emerging adult may feel left out when he/she does not have as many Facebook friends compared to peers or when others comment less favourable on their posts. Parents must firstly understand and secondly assist by providing realistic feedback and advice when noticing emotional difficulties.

Ministers/pastors/spiritual leaders (eco-systemic framework)

- Spiritual leaders must be aware that emerging adulthood is a time of confusion and feeling 'in-between' and should focus on connection. Activities to support the inclusion of newcomers and assist newcomers to feel 'at home' and 'welcome' should be an integral part of spiritual communities. Emerging adults that feel lost can benefit immensely if they experience belonging in a spiritual environment.

- As emerging adulthood is a time of active searching for identity, spiritual communities can assist with finding a deeper meaning in life. Personal life purpose on a deeper level may help the emerging adult feel less confused and lost. Personal transformation is an important aspect of emerging adulthood, and spiritual leaders and communities can play a profound role in this transformation.

- Spiritual leaders can assist with personal problems and insecurities by providing pastoral counselling to spiritual group members. In many cases, counselling provided by the church or spiritual leaders is free of charge for members who cannot afford paid counselling.

- The researcher plans to ensure that 'Self-Help Guide' she has developed is available to different spiritual groups serving the students on campus to assist in their task of guiding emerging adults.

Life Orientation teachers in schools (eco-systemic framework)

- Life orientation teachers can provide career guidance by hosting career expos or taking learners to career exhibitions. Teachers can also arrange for educational psychologists to do career assessments, provide guidance, and make recommendations for study-related uncertainties such as where to study, programme requirements and how to apply for tertiary studies.
- Life skills such as planning, financial management, communication skills, study methods and preparation for adult life/college or university, or starting a job can form part of the life orientation teacher's assistance at the school level.
- Furthermore, life orientation teachers can provide support groups for parents to assist them in guiding adolescents to emerging adulthood. Professionals such as educational psychologists, spiritual leaders, experts in particular fields (finances, planning, goalsetting etc.) can form part of such groups.

Educational psychologists and student counsellors:

- Educational psychologists can assist with study and career guidance so that the adolescent has ample time to explore different careers (through job-shadowing and talks by experts in different work areas) and, if necessary, make changes before attending formal tertiary education and wasting time and money.

- Both Educational psychologists and student counsellors can help the adolescent/emerging adult gain self-knowledge through different assessments, counselling and guidelines. As seen from the literature study and research study, self-knowledge forms the basis of almost all aspects of emerging adulthood. Many challenges stem from lacking self-knowledge. Emerging adults must get to know themselves, their strengths and weaknesses and set life goals based on self-knowledge. In addition, self-image and self-esteem problems should be addressed.

- First-year students experience a significant life transition and may experience anxiety or depression. Student counsellors should be very aware of these transitional stressors and address these by running support groups, free intervention programmes and information sessions as early as possible in the academic year. Topics to address through these interventions can include time

management, stress and burnout, goalsetting and planning, relationship building, communication skills, social and academic adjustment and self-discovery (for example, strengths, weaknesses, values). Appropriate study methods for tertiary studies should also form part of the orientation programme for first-year students. Academic mentors can form part of this intervention and be appointed according to the student's field of study. Peer mentors seem to be a great supporting network for first-year students, being students themselves and having experienced similar challenges in their first year of study.

- Students in their final year of study have different needs to be addressed. For example, many students in their last year of study do not feel ready for work and adult responsibilities. Others may have fears associated with adult roles, getting a job, starting a career path, leaving friends behind. Student counsellors can address these challenges by hosting workshops or information groups.

- Educational psychologist and other counsellors can significantly support emerging adults with relationship-building. Aspects like trust, self-disclosure, vulnerability, the influences of social media and communication should be included in such interventions. Many emerging adults experience break-ups (and break-ups through social-media platforms), which might negatively affect overall well-being.

- The researcher plans to make the 'Self-Help Guide' (in process of development) available to student counsellors to assist in guiding emerging adults. In addition, she plans to contact the Student Affairs offices on different campuses to explain the benefits of the guide and discuss possibilities to avail this to students.

Emerging adults:

- Emerging adults, as the primary stakeholders, experience many challenges and need support and guidance. Stakeholders such as spiritual leaders, student counsellors, peer mentors and faculty mentors can support and guide

the emerging adult. Parents can also be a valuable source of information and guidance through emotional difficulties.

- The researcher would like to provide the young individual (as the primary stakeholder) with a ‘Self-Help Guide’ to guide and support them as emerging adults with their transition and challenges to authentic adulthood. The researcher is in process of developing the ‘Self-Help Guide’. In this self-help guide, challenging areas will be assessed (through questionnaires and self-insight), and possible guidance discussed. In addition, the ‘Self-Help Guide’ intends to answer the main questions many emerging adults ask, namely:
    - Who am I?
    - Where am I going?
    - How will I get there?

The ‘Self-Help Guide’ furthermore will focus on the main research objectives:

Objective 1: To explain the forming of identities and identity challenges during emerging adulthood. (Who am I? The authentic me) (Self-identity and social-identity based on self-knowledge)
Objective 2: To understand the challenges emerging adults face during the transformation phase in becoming authentic adults. (Where am I going?)
Objective 3: To give possible guidelines to assist emerging adults going through the transitional phase on their way to authentic adulthood. (How do I get there?)

Objective 1

The emerging adult firstly needs to find out who he/she authentically is. This self-discovery starts with self-awareness and precedes self-knowledge. Aspects of the 'self' include knowledge about:

- Strengths, weaknesses, and characteristics (based on personality style)
- Am I authentic?
- Values (as the driving force behind motivation, choices, and behaviour)
- Biases (to determine the role inherited beliefs from significant others play)
- Self-esteem (based on own beliefs)

During this critical development phase, the two prominent identities formed include social identity and occupational identity (Arnett, 2000:476).

Social identity is based on a solid sense of self which originates in self-knowledge and self-awareness. If the young individual lacks self-knowledge, inauthentic behaviour seems to be the result. Many participants in this study expressed social uncertainty and a need for social skills. The following aspects of social identity will be assessed to determine social identity:

- Social skills (or the lack thereof)
- The degree to which the emerging adult is willing to disclose him/herself and the role of social media on self-disclosure
- Communication style (own and others)

Strong occupational identity-forming has at its root a strong sense of 'Who am I?' and 'Who do I want to become?' (Skorikov & Vondracek, 2011:693; Rappazzo *et al.,* 2022:2). Emerging adults have to question beliefs, values and attitudes inherited from parents and society to create a secure sense of their own occupational identity (hence self-discovery questionnaires mentioned under the section 'Who am I?). Aspects of occupational identity-forming include insight in:

- Ambition and personal motivation
- Locus of control orientation
- Goalsetting abilities (addressed in 'where am I going?')

Furthermore, the young individual must understand 'where am I going?' (Objective 2) to identify challenges that hinder future aspirations and determine guidelines to accomplish this ('How do I get there?'). To understand where the emerging adult is heading ('Where am I going?'), the emerging adult must have a vision of what he/she wants to accomplish.

Objective 2

Challenges identified by many participants include aspects such as:

- Setting goals and sticking to them (self-motivation)
- Lacking coping skills and experiencing stress and overload
- Lacking skills to plan and manage time

Objective 3

The ‘Self-Help Guide’ will lead the emerging adult on his/her self-discovery journey and provide important information to help the young individual navigate his/her future.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is evident that emerging adults feel lost and need guidance. If adolescents receive guidance and self-knowledge in their final year of school (Grade 12), some negative outcomes may be prevented. If adolescents have more self-knowledge, more accurate decisions can be made, and if needed, counselling and support are provided in time. The possibility of such programmes should be further researched.

Many emerging adults do not have the privilege of attending tertiary studies. These individuals have to seek jobs and are thrust into adult roles immediately. They might furthermore experience the same challenges or might experience different challenges and also need support and guidance. This particular group’s needs and challenges should be further researched.

Although the researcher focused on emerging adults in their first year of study and those in their final year of study, emerging adulthood stretches over the whole spectrum of young individuals (18-29 years). Different phases of emerging adulthood might bring particular challenges and additional support needs. To fully understand emerging adulthood and the support needed, the challenges of the other age groups should also be researched.

A factor that may impact authenticity is the role of social media. Many adolescents and young individuals fall prey to cyberbullying and might, due to being accepted, become a person he/she is not (inauthentic). Social media, furthermore, may impact young people negatively if they compare themselves to peers who portray an idyllic life, posting only pictures and notifications of living the ‘perfect life’. This may cause self-doubt and anxiety and worsen the feeling of being lost and not fitting in. The notion of conforming to the group may also imply that the young individual might become less self-aware and has limited self-knowledge, and as a result, act inauthentically. The role of social media on identity formation should be further researched.

6.5 LIMITATIONS

This study did have limitations such as not including a range of cultural groups and not both genders of particular cultural groups, which may not be representative enough.

Another limitation was that this research was conducted with students (first year of study and final year of study) but excluded emerging adults who started working directly after school. These emerging adults may experience the same challenges and also need guidance.

Risk behaviour resulting from peer pressure, lack of self-knowledge and self-control has not been researched but merely mentioned. However, risk behaviour such as binge drinking, unprotected sex and substance abuse plays a significant role in emerging adults' lives and should be addressed (Forster *et al.*, 2020:379).

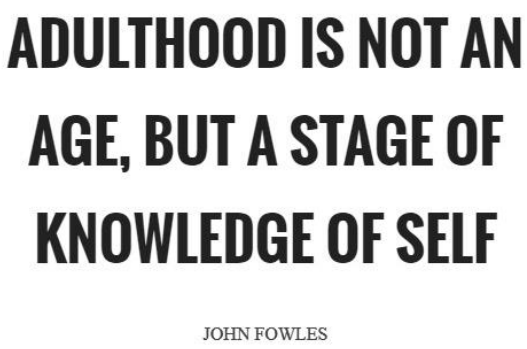
6.6 CONCLUSION

Emerging adults experience many challenges and difficulties during the transitional phase from adolescence to adulthood. Not only are they trapped between childhood and adulthood, but the milestones for adulthood are not unfolding in a sequential order in comparison to the past, where there were predictable milestones towards adulthood. In the past, the young individual left school, started tertiary education or applied for a job directly after leaving school, got married and started a family. This is no longer the case in Industrialised countries. Emerging adults are now faced with different challenges and possibilities. Many begin tertiary education and instead of working after graduation, might end up doing community work to gain experience and move back to his/her parents' home. Some might even go back to university for further studies or start a new field of study. Other milestones such as entering a committed relationship and getting married is, in many cases, postponed to much later in life.

Many emerging adults experience feelings such as being lost and being confused. They are uncertain about their identities, roles and have adjustment difficulties as a result of their uncertainties. An underlying factor that impacts almost all areas of the emerging adult's life is self-knowledge. However, in many cases this is lacking or is not sufficient enough and adds to the young individual's uncertainty and insecurity. Challenges such as difficulties with building new relationships, adjusting to life without

the supervision of parents, peer pressures to engage in behaviours that might be risky, such as binge drinking, unprotected sex and experimenting with drugs, are some of the challenges with which they are confronted. They furthermore struggle with planning, setting goals and managing time whilst the new academic environment is unique and challenging.

Emerging adults need support and guidance. Parents, counsellors, mentors, spiritual leaders and institutions are amongst the stakeholders that can provide stability and emotional support, but in many cases, are not equipped to support the unique needs of these young individuals. The researcher in this study is in a process of developing guidelines for the different stakeholders and also a 'Self-Help Guide' for the emerging adult as the primary stakeholder. Emerging adulthood is a challenging time and today's young individual needs support and guidance. To 'know' is to 'understand' and what one does not know causes insecurity. Entering adulthood can be an exhilarating experience if there are safety nets to support and catch young individuals and guide them to authentic adulthood.



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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethical Clearance

UNISA university of south africa

UNISA COLLEGE OF EDUCATION ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 2019/06/12

Ref: **2019/06/12/6891438/30/MC**
Name: Mrs GW Engelbrecht
Student: 6891438

Dear Mrs Engelbrecht

Decision: Ethics Approval from 2019/06/12 to 2024/06/12

Researcher(s): Name: Mrs GW Engelbrecht
E-mail address: wilnec@mweb.co.za
Telephone: +27 82 883 0480

Supervisor(s): Name: Prof E Venter
E-mail address: Venteel@unisa.ac.za
Telephone: +27 12 429 4751

Title of research:

Challenges for the emerging adult in becoming an authentic adult

Qualification: PhD in Psychology of Education

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for the period 2019/06/12 to 2024/06/12.

*The **medium risk** application was reviewed by the Ethics Review Committee on 2019/06/12 in compliance with the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the UNISA College of Education Ethics Review Committee.

University of South Africa
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane
PO Box 392, UNISA 0003, South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 429 4150
www.unisa.ac.za

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date **2024/06/12**. Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2019/06/12/6891438/30/MC** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Kind regards,

Prof AT Motlhabane
CHAIRPERSON: CEDU RERC
motlhat@unisa.ac.za

Prof PM Sebate
ACTING EXECUTIVE DEAN
Sebatpm@unisa.ac.za

University of South Africa

Appendix B: Information and Explanation of the Research Process

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Date: 20 February 2020

Title: Challenges for the emerging adult in becoming an authentic adult.

DEAR PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANT

My name is Wilna Engelbrecht-Smuts, and I am doing research under the supervision of Prof Elza Venter of the Department of Psychology of Education, towards a PhD at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled 'What guidance does the young emerging adult need to become an authentic person?'

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is expected to collect valuable information that could guide and assist emerging adults in becoming authentic adults. Many new identities are formed during emerging adulthood. Many emerging adults may experience this time of active identity exploration, challenging. My research project aims to understand and identify these potential challenges. By taking part in this study, you can become actively involved in assisting emerging adults by identifying these challenges and to get some way of handling them positively.

WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited because you fit the target participant group which consists of students in their first year of study, as well as students in their final year of study and represent heterogeneity such as gender and culture.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF YOUR PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves interviews that will be videotaped to assist a coding process in identifying themes. Although you will be videotaped, your identity will be protected, and no names or information that can reveal your identity will be disclosed.

Interviews will not exceed 60 minutes. For your convenience, interviews will be held at a place and time suitable for both of us.

CAN YOU WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary, and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Although you will be audiotaped, your identity will be protected, and no names or information that can reveal your identity will be disclosed.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

No potential level of inconvenience or discomfort to you as a participant is foreseen. If, however, you do need to debrief after the interview, a qualified person will be available to address emotional matters.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Your name will not be recorded anywhere, and no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give (*this measure refers to anonymity)*. Your responses will be coded, and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings *(this measure refers to confidentiality).*

A transcriber and external coder will have access to audiotaped responses and will sign a confidentially agreement. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that the research is done correctly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee.

Anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles or conference proceedings, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such reports or articles.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

The researcher will store hard copies of your answers for five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet in the researcher's private home in Pretoria for future research or academic purposes. All electronic information will be stored on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After the prescribed period of five years, hard copies will be destroyed through shredding, and electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive computer through the use of a relevant software program.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL?

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL YOU BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Wilna Engelbrecht- Smuts on 0828830480 or email **wilnae@mweb.co.za**.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Prof Elza Venter at 012-4294751.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Kind regards

Wilna Engelbrecht-Smuts

Appendix C: Written Consent

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY (Return slip)

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits, and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and conference proceedings, but that my identity will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree with the recording of the audio/visual recordings.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname (please print) _____

_____ _____

Participant Signature Date

Researcher's Name & Surname (please print) _____

_____ _____

Researcher's signature Date

Appendix D: Research Questions

The four main open-ended semi-structured questions (with probes) (Appendix C) that will be used during the interviews are:

1. Describe yourself as a person.
2. How do you think others (parents, peers, close friends and classmates) see you?
3. How do you see yourself as an adult?
4. What challenges do you foresee to become the adult you want to be?
5. Is there anything else that is important or left out?'

Appendix E: Probes for Research Questions

1. Describe yourself as a person. *(Who am I?)*
2. What do you consider to be your strengths and weaknesses? (to discover whether the participant truly knows him/herself, in other words, his/her self-knowledge)
3. How do you think others (parents, peers, close friends and classmates see you?
4. Does this view differ from the view you have of yourself? *(to understand whether the participant is authentic to him/herself)*
5. If so, in which way?
6. Whose feedback with regard to who you are is important to you? *(Who are the significant others that help shape identity formation of the emerging adult?)*
7. In which way does your social relationships with important others (like peers/parents/friends/society) differ from how it used to be when you were an adolescent (Secondary school)? *(to better understand social identity changes if relevant)*
8. How do you see yourself as an adult? *(Where am I going?)*
9. In which way does your 'ideal adult self' differ from the person you are now? *(to understand the 'gaps' between who the emerging adult is now and becoming an authentic individual)*
10. What are some of the goals you set to become the 'ideal adult self?' *(to understand the role of goal setting in identity formation and authenticity)*
11. What challenges do you foresee to become the adult you want to become?
12. Can you name a few skills you would like to master that would help you to become the person you envision in the future?
13. What kind of assistance do you need to make the transition between where you are now and your 'ideal future self' easier?

Is there anything else that is important or left out?

Appendix F: Proof of Editing

To whom it may concern

This letter serves to confirm that editing and proofreading was done for:

GEZINA WILHELMINA ENGELBRECHT-SMUTS

Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology

Psychology of Education

University of South Africa

CHALLENGES FOR THE EMERGING ADULT IN BECOMING

AN AUTHENTIC ADULT

Cilla Dowse
15 November 2021

Cilla Dowse PhD in Assessment and Quality Assurance in Education and Training: University of Pretoria 2014 Basic Editing and Proofreading: McGillivray Linnegar Associates 2008 Programme on Editing Principles and Practices: University of Pretoria 2009 Editing and Proofreading for Academic Purposes: McGillivray Linnegar Associates 2021 Professional Editors' Guild Associate Member, DOW003	Rosedale Farm P.O. Box 48 Van Reenen Free State cilla.dowse@gmail.com Cell: 084 900 7837

Appendix G: Turnitin Report

Turnitin Originality Report

- Processed on: 03-Nov-2021 16:09 SAST
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