

**The Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood in First- and  
Continuous-Generation Students**

**by**

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**Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Social Science with specialisation in Psychology**

**University of the Free State**

**Supervisor: Prof. L. Naude**

**January 2018**

## Declaration

I, Constance Jessé Bekker, hereby declare that this study, *The Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood in First- and Continuous-Generation Students*, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of Social Science with specialisation in Psychology at the University of the Free State, is my own, original work. I have not submitted any part of this study to any other university to obtain a degree, and all sources used for this study are recognised in the reference list. I further concede copyright of the thesis to the University of the Free State, and all royalties with regard to intellectual property that was developed during the course of and/or in connection with the study at the University of the Free State will accrue to the University. This research may be published only with the dean's approval.

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Kind regards

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

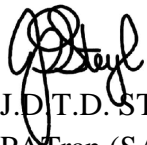
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*“In some parts of the world, students are going to school every day. It's their normal life. But in other part of the world, we are starving for education ... it's like a precious gift. It's like a diamond”*

*- Malala Yousafzai*

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## **Abstract**

Emerging adulthood is a distinct developmental stage that follows adolescence and precedes adulthood. This stage is regarded as a time of possibility, instability, identity exploration, self-focus, and feeling in-between. Views of the future are also prominent. In this study, the dimensions of emerging adulthood and the views of the future of emerging adult students were studied. South African universities are extremely diverse, and the student population consists of students with parents who were privileged to attend higher education (continuous-generation students) and students whose parents could not attend university (first-generation students). Gender was also considered in this study by investigating how experiences of emerging adulthood of males and females differ.

This study followed a mixed-methods research approach. In the quantitative section of the research, 1452 students of the University of the Free State between the ages of 18 and 25 completed an online survey. Data were analysed by means of multivariate analysis of variance. In the qualitative section of the research, participants were purposively recruited for focus group discussions, which were analysed using thematic analysis.

It was found that first-generation students experience the dimensions of emerging adulthood more intensely than their continuous-generation peers do and seem to be more positive about their future. Female students experience the dimensions of emerging adulthood more intensely. In the qualitative themes, it was evident that many similarities are found between first-generation and continuous-generation students. Among some of the similarities are how both groups identify with the developmental stage of emerging adulthood and how they view it as an unstable stage with many uncertainties. However, university poses greater challenges to first-generation students compared to their continuous-generation peers. Some of these challenges include facing pressure from home to perform academically, not having financial support from home, and having a sense of responsibility to “pay back” in life. First-generation students also experience difficulties with adapting to university life, as they have no knowledgeable other at home who has university experience. Although these challenges exist, students were still very optimistic about their higher education experience and their future.

This study contributes to the research field of emerging adulthood by extending research that mostly has been done in Western societies to a developing country, South Africa.

*Keywords:* emerging adulthood, views of the future, first-generation, continuous-generation, gender



## Opsomming

Ontluikende volwassenheid word vandag as 'n ontwikkelingsfase erken wat ná adolessensie en voor volwassenheid plaasvind. Hierdie fase word gesien as 'n tyd van moontlikhede, onstabiliteit, identiteitsontdekking, self-fokus en “tussen-in voel”. Toekomsbeskouings is ook prominent in hierdie fase. In hierdie studie was die aspekte van ontluikende volwassenheid asook die toekomsbeskouings van hierdie lewensfase ondersoek. Suid-Afrikaanse universiteite is uiters divers en die studente-bevolking bestaan uit studente met ouers wat hoër onderrig kon ontvang (deurlopendegenerasiestudente) en studente met ouers wat geen hoër onderrig kon ontvang nie (eerstegenerasiestudente). Geslagsverskille was ook oorweeg gedurende hierdie navorsingstudie deur die verskille tussen manlike studente en vroulike studente se ervarings van ontluikende volwassenheid te ondersoek.

Hierdie studie het van 'n gemengdemetodebenadering gebruik gemaak. In die kwantitatiewe afdeling van hierdie studie het 1452 studente tussen die ouderdom van 18 en 25 aan die Universiteit van die Vrystaat, 'n aanlynopname voltooi. Die data was volgens meerveranderlike variansie-ontleding ontleed. In die kwalitatiewe afdeling van die studie was deelnemers doelgerig vir fokusgroepbesprekings geïdentifiseer en deur middel van tematiese ontleding ontleed.

Die bevindinge het gewys dat eerstegenerasiestudente die dimensies van ontluikende volwassenheid met hoër intensiteit as hul deurlopendegenerasie-medestudente ervaar en dat eerstegenerasiestudente meer positief oor hulle toekoms is. Vroulike studente ervaar die dimensies van ontluikende volwassenheid met hoër intensiteit. In die kwalitatiewe temas was dit duidelik dat vele ooreenkomste tussen eerstegenerasie- en deurlopendegenerasiestudente bestaan. Beide groepe identifiseer met die ontwikkelingsfase van ontluikende volwassenheid en beskou dit as 'n fase wat onstabiel is en baie onsekerhede inhou. Universiteitslewe hou egter meer uitdagings in vir eerstegenerasiestudente in vergelyking met hul deurlopendegenerasie-medestudente. Sommige van die uitdagings wat eerstegenerasie-studente ervaar, sluit druk van hul families om te presteer, geen finansiële ondersteuning van hul families nie, en 'n verantwoordelikheid om “terug te gee”, in. Eerstegenerasiestudente ervaar ook uitdagings met aanpassing aan die universiteit, siende dat hulle geen ouers met universiteitservaring het nie. Alhoewel hierdie uitdagings bestaan, is studente steeds baie optimisties oor hulle hoëronderryservaring en hulle toekoms.

Hierdie studie dra by tot die navorsingsveld van ontluikende volwassenheid deur navorsing, wat grotendeels in Westerse samelewings gedoen is, uit te brei na 'n ontwikkelende land, Suid-Afrika.

*Sleutelwoorde:* ontluikende volwassenheid, sienings van die toekoms, eerstegenerasie, deurlopendegenerasie, geslag

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## **Chapter 1: Overview and Rationale of the Study**

*“Diversity is about all of us, and about us having to figure out how to walk through this world together” – Jacqueline Woodson*

In South Africa (SA), student populations are unique, considering the uniqueness of the country. Students from diverse backgrounds and cultures are found at institutions, where they learn and live together. First-generation and continuous-generation students are two categories that exist among student populations at universities due to their diverse backgrounds. In general, students find themselves in the emerging adulthood (EA) developmental stage, which is characterised by certain dimensions experienced especially in a higher education (HE) environment. Research involving students who are in the development stage of emerging adulthood is found globally. However, research among EA student populations is limited in SA. This study was aimed at exploring students’ perceptions of EA and the experiences of this stage among different generational and gender groups. In this chapter, the rationale for the present study, the theoretical framework, and the research design and methods used are presented. This is followed by a delineation of the chapters and a chapter summary.

### **1.1 Context and Rationale of the Study**

The theorist Jeffrey Arnett was the first to propose a new developmental concept called “emerging adulthood”, which describes the developmental stage of an 18- to 25-year-old person (Arnett, 2000a, 2000b, 2004a, 2004b). According to Arnett (2010), this life stage is a distinct and unique period that entails important life changes and decisions. Individuals in their EA years feel they have not entirely reached adulthood yet and state that they feel caught in between adolescence and adulthood (Arnett & Walker, 2015). EA consists of five primary components, namely the age of instability, the age of possibilities, the age of self-focus, the age of feeling in between, and the age of identity exploration (Arnett, 2000a). Having a view of the future is also considered a characteristic of EA, as important life choices take primacy during this stage (Arnett, 2014).

Even though the theory of EA is accepted widely (Syed, 2015), it has been criticised widely as a theory that does not apply across diverse cultural and social groups (Arnett, 2015a, 2016a). Therefore, it was deemed necessary to study EA in a developing country, more specifically in the SA context. Because of the unique history of SA, EAs live in a very different



SA than was known formerly. The EA theory, introduced by Arnett (2000a), was used as a framework for the current study. Arnett (2016a) views EA as a developmental stage that applies broadly to diverse EA populations from varying socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. However, Arnett (2015b) states that research in the field of EA is focussed on Americans from middle-class groups, and he emphasises the need for research in countries with diverse cultures. In this study, Arnett's theory was applied to a more diverse HE setting, namely the South African HE student populations. It is important to study these dimensions among EAs, as they lie central to this stage among individuals from various social classes and backgrounds (Arnett, 2014). With a view of the future also being regarded as a central characteristic of EA, it was necessary to study this phenomenon among EAs in SA to understand their HE experiences and EA experiences better.

Many HE institutions in SA are struggling to acknowledge and facilitate the difficulties students experience when going to university (Nomdo, 2017). Non-traditional student groups have become the object of great attention in research about HE (Wildhagen, 2015). These non-traditional students include 'first-generation students' (Wildhagen, 2015), who are students with parents who have had no HE experience. In SA, a great number of students who enter university are first-generation students (FGSs) from backgrounds with a low SES (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). Most HE institutions in SA have been operating under the assumption that FGSs will be able to adapt to HE and perform academically as their continuous-generation peers do (Nomdo, 2017). Unfortunately, high failure rates among FGSs in SA prove that these students are ill equipped to adapt to HE and deal with all the academic challenges that university entails (Nomdo, 2017; Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007).

Not enough is known about the characteristics and functioning of diverse EA student group populations in the SA context (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Heymann & Carolissen, 2011), and gender differences among EAs seem to vary across countries (Crocetti et al., 2015). Therefore, it was deemed necessary to study the dimensions of EA and views of the future among SA student populations from different generational and gender groups.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore students' perceptions of EA and the experiences of this stage among different generational and gender groups. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were investigated:

1. Are there significant differences in the dimensions of EA and views of the future of first-generation students (FGSs) and continuous-generation students (CGSs)?
2. Are there significant differences in the dimensions of EA and views of the future of male and female students?
3. How do FGSs and CGSs experience the dimensions of EA?
4. How do FGSs and CGSs perceive their future?

## **1.2 Research Design and Methods**

A concurrent or parallel form (Mertens, 2010) of the mixed-methods research design (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007) consisting of a quantitative section and a qualitative section was utilised to reach the aim of this study. A prominent strength of a mixed-methods approach is that it is considered more beneficial, trustworthy, and relevant than using approaches separately (Creswell, 2009). Mixed-method research assists in acknowledging the importance of context in a certain study together with focussing on attaining multidimensional results that entail both lived experience and magnitude (Greene, 2008). This form of research results in rich understanding of complex concepts (Harper, 2011). It also assists the researcher to recognise the general and particular when studying constructs in a certain field (Greene, 2008). For the reasons mentioned above, this approach was deemed most suitable to study the constructs of this study. The concepts that were studied in this research were the dimensions of EA and views of the future of different generational and gender groups.

Students of the University of the Free State, between the ages of 18 and 25, formed the population of interest. In the quantitative section of the research, a non-probability, convenience sampling method was used. Participants were recruited by means of an e-mail invitation that linked participants to an online survey to complete. In the qualitative section of the study, a nested sampling procedure (Mertens, 2010) was utilised to sample students purposively, based on their biographic information, to take part in focus group discussions.

Self-report measures were used during the quantitative section of this study and included a biographic questionnaire, the *Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood – Short Form (IDEA-8)* (Baggio, Iglesias, Studer, & Gmel, 2015), and the *Views of the Future Questionnaire*

(VFQ) (Arnett, 2000b). During the qualitative section of this study, focus group discussions were held, and a semi-structured interviewing style was used.

Parallel mixed data analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) was used in this study. To analyse the data for the quantitative section, basic descriptive statistics were utilised. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyse the data that were collected from the questionnaires. MANOVA allows a researcher to study the differences between different groups when more than one dependent variable is studied (Aron, Aron, & Coups, 2009; Stangor, 2011). In the current study, MANOVA was used to determine any differences in the experiences of EA and views of the future among different student groups, more specifically, whether significant differences between FGSs and CGSs, and between males and females, exist. Focus group discussions were analysed by means of thematic analysis. This process allows the researcher to identify, analyse, and report on themes that surface in a data set and provides a rich and detailed account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

This research was performed in an utmost ethical manner. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of the Free State. Informed consent was obtained from all participants during the quantitative and the qualitative sections of the study. The anonymity of participants was respected, and the data gathered were treated confidentially at all times. Participants could withdraw from the study at any given time without any negative repercussions, and participants were given contact information of counselling services, if the need for such services arose.

Rigour was ensured throughout this study in both the quantitative and qualitative sections. In the quantitative section of the study, rigour was ensured by adhering to the principles of internal validity, internal reliability, external validity, objectivity, and reflexivity. During the qualitative section, trustworthiness was established by applying the principles of credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and reflexivity.

### **1.3 Delineation of Chapters**

Chapter 2 includes an overview of the relevant literature that was utilised for this study. The main concept, emerging adulthood (EA), the dimensions of this stage, and the views of the future of EAs are conceptualised. EA in various contexts is discussed, and attention is drawn to the SA context and the diverse EA student populations. More specifically, the diverse student populations in SA, FGSs, and CGSs are discussed. Gender differences among EAs are also mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 3 consists of an overview of the methodology used in this study. The research aim and questions are presented, followed by a discussion of the research design and approach that was followed. The identification of research participants, the sampling procedures, and the procedures of collecting data are explained. Data analysis for both sections is discussed, as well as the relevant ethical aspects that had to be considered. Rigour and the techniques that ensure rigour are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4 contains the results of both sections of this study. The quantitative results are presented, including descriptive and inferential statistics. Next, the qualitative results of the thematic analysis are presented. The themes that emerged from the focus groups discussions are mentioned and supported by direct quotations by participants. The most significant themes that emerged are highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results of this study. The most significant findings are highlighted, and reference is made to how other research compares to the results of this study. Both quantitative and qualitative results are discussed. Similarities and differences found among the generational and gender groups are highlighted and compared to other research in the field. The unique themes that emerged and how the SA HE setting contributes to the findings are mentioned. The chapter concludes with a summary of the most significant results of this study that correlate with the findings of other research in the field of EA and student research.

Chapter 6 concludes this study with a brief summary of the most significant findings. The limitations that were faced during the course of this research and the possible reasons for the limitations that were experienced are discussed. Recommendations are made for future research in the field of EA and student development.

#### **1.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter aimed to introduce the current study by giving an overview of the rationale and the setting of this study. Specific attention was drawn to SA and the students at HE institutions. SA, as a developing country, is in dire need of more research among EA student populations and research on FGSs and their struggles. The research methods were discussed, and the sampling procedures and data analysis techniques used for the quantitative and qualitative sections were mentioned. A delineation of the chapters was presented to summarise the aim of each chapter and give a brief overview of what could be expected from each chapter.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, the aim is to give an overview of the literature that is relevant to the current study. The chapter begins with a general discussion of the theory relating to the research topic and then conceptualises the main phenomenon, EA. This is followed by a discussion of the dimensions of this life stage and the concept of views of the future. The rest of the chapter focuses on EA in various contexts. A chapter summary concludes the chapter.

### 2.1 The Theory of Emerging Adulthood

In the following section, EA is conceptualised as a developmental stage, followed by an explication of the five dimensions of this stage, as identified by Arnett (2000a). After that, views of the future of EAs are discussed.

**2.1.1 Conceptualising emerging adulthood.** Today, for the majority of young people in developed countries, the life stage of roughly 18 to 25 years of age appears to be very different from that of people in their 30s and early 40s (Arnett, 2016a). In the past half century, similar demographic changes took place in the lives of young people who live in different developed countries (Arnett, 2000b). For example, more young people attended HE, and full-time careers were postponed together with marriage and parenthood (Arnett, 2000b, 2004b, 2016a). These demographic changes created awareness of the need to identify a new life stage characteristic of the changes that were observed among these young adults in developed countries (Arnett, 2016a). Thus, the theory of EA was suggested.

In the past, developmental theorists termed the developmental stage from 18 to 25 years of age as either late adolescence, early twenties, or young adulthood (Arnett, 2007). Several theorists aimed to create a term for the developmental stage that follows adolescence but that is not yet considered as fully adult (Reifman, Arnett, & Colwell, 2007). For example, Erikson (1968) referred to the concept of “prolonged adolescence”, whereas Keniston (1970) proposed the term “youth” for this stage. The theorist Jeffrey Arnett was the first to propose a new developmental concept called “EA”, which has become a widely accepted term used to describe the developmental stage of a (roughly) 18- to 25-year-old (Arnett, 2000b, 2004a, 2004b). Although Arnett originally proposed the theory of EA to apply to the 18- to 25-year age range, he sometimes also made use of the 18- to 29-year age range (Arnett, 2016a). However, Arnett (2016a) considers the 18 to 25 range as the heart of EA. According to Arnett

(2010), this life stage is a distinct and unique period in which important life changes take place. Arnett (2000b) states, “Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet entered the enduring responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults (EAs) often explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews” (p. 469).

EAs respond to the question of whether they feel like they have reached adulthood already with neither yes or no, but that they rather feel they have reached it in some ways but not in others (Arnett & Walker, 2015). This gradual process of becoming an adult is a result of the criteria determining adulthood, which can be regarded as gradual processes (Arnett & Walker, 2015). The need for a stronger focus on this stage of development emerged from societal changes and the expectations and responsibilities that accompany these changes. Over the past half century, many factors have altered the nature of development (Arnett, 2000b). EAs regard commitment to long-term relationships, marriage, established careers, and having a family as some of the markers of adulthood (Molgat, 2007; Nelson & Barry, 2005). Full-time careers, marriage, and parenthood seem to have been postponed to the late twenties, which suggests that adolescence ends much later than it did in the past (Arnett, 2010). The EA years are considered more than just the years of vocational training, as EAs nowadays can explore different fields of study, change their directions of study easily, and are exposed to a multitude of possibilities for love (Arnett, 2016b). With career changes occurring more often and paths towards careers being unstable (Savickas et al., 2009), EAs postpone stable careers and study longer. As adulthood is traditionally marked as the stage when people marry or have children (Arnett & Walker, 2015), EAs, who are in a flexible and opportunity-filled stage of life, could view marriage and parenthood as daunting tasks.

Accepting responsibility for oneself, financial independence, and making decisions independently have also been suggested as markers for adulthood (Arnett & Walker, 2015; Nelson & Luster, 2015). The end of adolescence is characterised by moving away from the role of being a dependent child towards the role of being an independent member of society (Arnett, 2016b). EAs are in a life stage where they have to make decisions on their own, without their parents’ constant guidance. They have to be self-disciplined and live independently from their parents and their homes (Pitcher, 2005). They also have the responsibility to make independent choices that will benefit their academic endeavours (Modipane, 2011). These responsibilities are often too great and complicated for EAs who only recently were regarded as adolescents.

EAs experience confusion, as they are expected to be more independent, but rather still rely heavily on parents or other people for guidance (Arnett, 2014). Being independent, living independently, and accepting new responsibilities can be regarded as challenging tasks for EAs (Reifman et al., 2007); therefore, they often remain dependent on parents or others for financial security and guidance. Adulthood can also be postponed when EAs are not willing to take on these responsibilities, or when they cannot afford to be independent yet.

**2.1.2 Dimensions of emerging adulthood.** Arnett's (2000a) theory of EA has five primary components or dimensions that can be regarded as the developmental issues and tasks that take primacy during the EA developmental stage (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). Arnett describes EA as the age of instability, possibilities, self-focus, feeling in between, and identity exploration. These five distinctive features of EA proposed by Arnett (2004a, 2004b) are based on data from wide-ranging and extensive interviews.

**2.1.2.1 The age of instability.** According to Arnett (2014), the EA years are a time of excessive instability and might even be regarded as the most unstable of all the life stages. Arnett (2014) claims that this instability is because of all the changes that take place while EAs explore possibilities in education, work, and love. As change in itself is unsettling, and EA is regarded as a period in which change is inevitable, it is characterised as an age of instability (Reifman et al., 2007).

Many EAs might experiment with jobs, move around from temporary living situations, or negotiate friends and romantic partners (Arnett, 2004b). Residential mobility and exploring romantic possibilities are fundamental to EA (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). The frequent changing of plans and circumstances causes EA to be characterised as a highly stressful stage with high levels of uncertainty and instability (Kuwabara, Van Voorhees, Gollan, & Alexander, 2007). Instability can be experienced in one specific domain of life, for example work, or as a general feeling during EA (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). In addition to the joys of transition, it is likely that EAs will also experience some aspects of transition as negative and less pleasurable (Reifman et al., 2007).

**2.1.2.2 The age of possibilities.** According to Arnett (2014), EA is mostly a time of challenges and struggle; however, it is also regarded as a remarkable optimistic time of a person's life. EA is considered an age of possibilities because it seems to be a time of life when individuals are optimistic about their life partners, friends, careers, opportunities and other

available commitments or causes (Reifman et al., 2007). As these possibilities are explored, EAs accept more responsibility and independence than they did during their younger years (Reifman et al., 2007). Still, the amount of independence they enjoy is not associated with the major responsibilities found in adulthood. Therefore, the possibilities seem endless (Waters, Carr, & Kefalas, 2011).

EAs also often are in a life stage where there is access to unlimited information, multiple options for career paths, and a greater chance of being exposed to diverse cultures and social settings (Steyn, 2016). All of these aspects contribute to EA being a time filled with possibilities in work and relationships.

**2.1.2.3 *The age of self-focus.*** The qualities of greater independence and responsibility also relate to another dimension, called self-focus. Arnett (2004a) describes this dimension as how individuals' attention is focussed on themselves as they acquire the skills, knowledge, and self-understanding that are essential for adulthood. This independence and self-focus come to an end when one becomes committed to others, for instance by marriage and children (Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

As parenthood and marriage are more prevalent in the late twenties nowadays, people have relatively few obligations to others, which causes them to be more self-focussed (Arnett, 2014). While adolescents have to rely on adults to make decisions for them and adults again have to consider others when making decisions, EAs have the freedom and ability to make decisions focussing only on themselves (Syed & Mitchell, 2013). This emphasises the characteristic dimension of self-focus in this developmental stage.

Being oriented to others may be more evident among EAs than was thought previously (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016), and more attention has been given to studying EAs' orientation towards others. Although EA has been considered a "narcissistic" life stage in which EAs are labelled as "Generation Me" due the increase in narcissistic traits and selfishness (Twenge & Foster, 2010), Arnett (2013) dismisses this notion by proving that EAs do not score higher on narcissistic traits than they did in the past. Arnett (2013) even goes so far to say that this group should be labelled as "Generation We", as they are a "generous generation" who can greatly improve the state of the world. Although it is common in individualistic cultures to be self-oriented throughout adulthood, focusing on others and social



evaluation requires greater effort and is considered more virtuous than self-evaluation in identity exploration (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016).

**2.1.2.4 The age of feeling in between.** The majority of EAs believe they have moved on from adolescence but have not reached proper adulthood yet which leads to this life stage being characterised as the age of feeling in between (Arnett, 2001). Feeling in between can be caused by insufficient attainment of self-sufficiency when EAs continue to rely on their parents or others (Arnett, 2014). However, some completely self-sufficient EAs also believe they have not reached adulthood yet (Arnett, 2014). This suggests that feeling self-sufficient will not diminish the feeling of being in between, which is characteristic of EA. This dimension most likely stems from the dimensions of the age of instability, self-focus, and identity exploration and can be considered as the simplest of all the dimensions (Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

**2.1.2.5 The age of identity exploration.** In Erikson's (1950) theory, identity development and adolescence are associated, but today, identity development is regarded as more prominent in EA (Arnett, 2014). Although adolescence marks the beginning of identity development, identity issues are more intense during EA as these issues escalate due to major life choices that have to be made (Arnett, 2004b, 2015a). During the psychosocial moratorium described by Erikson (1968), which takes place during late adolescence, a person can try on several identities before committing to one specific identity. EA is the age of exploring one's identity (Reifman et al., 2007), as this stage is also often regarded as late adolescence. Therefore, identity formation and the deepening of identity processes that began during adolescence are of cardinal importance (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010; Jones & Abes, 2013), even in EA. This dimension is viewed as the most central aspect of the EA life stage (Arnett, 2004b), and some argue that all of the other dimensions can be regarded as characteristics of the identity development process (Syed & Mitchell, 2013).

**2.1.3 Views of the future.** In a time balanced by instability and possibility, EAs are in the process of constructing the quality and nature of their future. Their views of the future, including study and career prospects, personal relationships, and quality of life become important topics of reflection (Arnett, 2000a). EAs have the desire to imagine their future and think beyond their present life (Bishop & Willis, 2014). In fact, ruminating about the future is considered central to human life (Arnett, 2000a, 2014); therefore, EAs' views of the future can be regarded as an important aspect of their developmental stage. For many, this stage is characterised by important questions

regarding the future and speculating what life may look like years ahead (Arnett, 2014). Therefore, in essence, EA and important life choices are interconnected (Arnett, 2014). This seems like a valid statement, as people aged between 18 and 25 still have the major part of adult life ahead of them.

Even though EAs are somewhat concerned about the world and its current state, they are mostly optimistic about their future (Bishop & Willis, 2014). EAs are optimistic about their future because of having many possibilities and therefore seem to be confident in reaching their dreams (Waters et al., 2011). The majority of this age group also believe that they will achieve what they want in life; consequently, most EAs assume that their future will be more positive than their parents' lives are (Arnett & Schwab, 2012). More specifically, EAs consider their financial standing, career successes, relationships and their ultimate quality of life as more optimistic compared to those of their parents (Arnett, 2000a). Arnett and Walker (2014) indicate that 77% of the EAs in their study viewed their future as more promising than their parents' lives. Compared to EAs from high socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, EAs who come from low SES backgrounds to an even greater extent believe that their future will be better than their parents' lives (Arnett, 2000a).

## **2.2 Emerging Adulthood in Developing Countries**

In the following section, debates regarding the application of the theory of EA in developed and developing countries of the world are discussed. SA, as a developing country with specific historical challenges, is considered. The section aims to make connections between the theory of EA and the unique SA context.

**2.2.1 Debates regarding emerging adulthood in developing countries.** Although EA is now considered a widely accepted life stage, it does not necessarily indicate a universal life stage (Syed, 2015) as it emerged in industrialised societies where specific socioeconomic changes took place (Arnett, 2000b, 2011). This developmental stage has also been studied predominantly in developed countries and more specifically among middle-class Americans in America (Arnett, 2015a). Thus, the theory of EA has been criticised widely as a theory that does not apply across all cultural groups and social classes (Arnett, 2015a, 2016a). In fact, one of the debates among theorists surrounding EA is whether or not the theory applies to young people across different SES backgrounds (Arnett, Kloep, Hendry, & Tanner, 2011; Silva,

2013). It can be problematic when researchers generalise about EA, especially when one is interested in the study of EAs in developing countries.

According to Arnett (2016a), critics are of the opinion that it applies only to the middle- and upper-class youth who attend university, are financially supported by their parents, and experience leisure and freedom that the working class or poor seldom have the opportunity to experience. Also, Furstenberg (2010) and Silva (2013) refer to critics who argue that youth in the middle and upper classes can afford to experience a period of self-focus, identity exploration, and endless possibilities. In contrast to this, following adolescence, people from the lower social class experience a life stage not of possibilities but rather of struggling to earn a decent income to make a living (Furstenberg, 2010; Silva, 2013).

Arnett (2016a) responds to these criticisms by suggesting that such statements are often a misinterpretation or distortion of the EA theory. He (Arnett, 2016a) mentions that his original work stressed the importance of considering factors like social class when studying EAs and that enough similarity is found across social classes to apply the theory widely. , Arnett's (2004b) theory was based on a sample from a wide range of social class backgrounds. In even earlier work, Arnett (2000b) prides himself in the fact that the theory would draw specific attention to individuals who do not attend HE. Many commonalities are also found in the experiences of EA across different social classes in the United States (Arnett, 2016a). Therefore, according to Arnett (2014), EA is mostly a time of challenges and struggle across different social classes.

The five dimensions of EA, which were never said to be universal features, are based on research conducted among EAs in America from diverse regions, ethnicity, social class and SES backgrounds (Arnett, 2004b). This research indicates that enough similarity was found across different social contexts and that EA could be applied to the age group as a whole in America and therefore across the United States (US). Seeing that the US has the starkest social class differences and greatest levels of inequality of all developed countries (Malik, 2014), the features most likely are also applicable to many other developed countries across the world (Arnett, 2016a). EAs from lower social class are even more likely to perceive their future as more optimistic compared to their higher social class peers (Arnett & Walker, 2014). Therefore, EA can be applied comfortably across different social class groups in most developed countries, as many forms of the experiences of EA are likely to be found across different social classes, cultures, genders or even religions (Arnett, 2011).

As mentioned previously, SES is considered a vital aspect of the study of EA and should always be considered (Arnett, 2016b). EA should be regarded as a cultural theory (Arnett, 2011), as it is formed by various aspects like economics, ethnicity, class, religion, and gender (Syed, 2015). For EAs from both the lower and middle class, the EA years are characterised by exploring different identities in work and love and ultimately moving toward stable commitments. For both groups, these years are characterised by instability because of frequent changes (Arnett, 2016a). High hopes for the future are found among EAs from different socioeconomic groups, even though the reality of success for those with less educational experience is less promising (Arnett, 2016a). Thus, the experiences of EA go beyond developed countries. Therefore, it is important to explore the cultural and social aspects of this developmental stage (Arnett & Walker, 2015). This life stage can be a useful tool in understanding development only if it is rooted in cultural, historical, and social contexts (Arnett, 2016a).

**2.2.2 South Africa as a developing country.** As a developing country, SA is known as a country rich with diversity, specifically with regard to race, culture, ethnicity, language, and religion. In the following section, some of the aspects that contributed to the unique SA context are discussed, as well as how this context influences EAs in the country.

Unfortunately, SA is known as one of the most unequal countries in the world, which can be explained by considering the unique SA history (McKeever, 2017). SA is characterised by great levels of inequality and vulnerability to poverty (Davids & Gouws, 2013) and is still regarded as one of the countries with the highest level of income inequality globally (Nomdo, 2017). Although poverty levels in SA have been reduced, they remain high, and the gap between urban and rural poverty has remained extensive (Magombeyi & Odhiambo, 2015). This inequality originated from different cultural and racial groups having different rights and opportunities. After the victory of the National Party (NP) in 1948, the system of racial inequality became most established (McKeever, 2017). This system of laws was called Apartheid.

Apartheid was a system of legalised racial segregation that upheld earlier policies of separation by race. This legislation classified SA citizens into separate black, white, coloured, and Indian racial groups who had unequal civil rights. The system of apartheid benefitted the whites as they had more access to basic resources, were better educated, and had better living standards than all the other groups (Davids & Gouws, 2013; Lund, 2008). The Apartheid era

resulted in unequal development of cultural groups (Rautenbach, 2010); therefore, diverse cultures were now more diverse due to differing opportunities and resources available. After Apartheid, the people of SA tried to not only resolve conflict but also reunite as a nation (Lüdemann, 2009). The term “rainbow nation” was formed and used in SA to create unity among the citizens of the country, as the historic events had greatly divided the nation.

During the Apartheid years, only a very distinct group of individuals were allowed to receive HE, which was not at all representative of the diverse SA population. In an attempt to rectify the inequality of the past, the SA government introduced policies based on the premise that education is one of the most critical intervention platforms for creating a democratic SA (Schutz, 2010). Since then, HE has allowed EAs, regardless of SES, intellect, social, or emotional abilities, to apply and study at HE institutions (Steyn, 2016). The end of the apartheid era allowed HE and especially students of the EA populations to become more representative of the diverse, multicultural country (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011; Strydom, Mentz, & Kuh, 2010). Because of the great diversity found in SA, EAs are now exposed to diverse cultures and a broadening of knowledge about the world (Steyn, 2016). Today, EAs are living in a very different SA than was known by their parents, as the end of Apartheid resulted in SA youth of different races being allowed to interact with different cultures and races of their own country (Ferguson & Adams, 2016). However, this educational expansion does not diminish class inequalities (Arum, Gamoran, & Shavitt, 2012), and many differences can still be noted between students from diverse backgrounds. Unfortunately, the system of old continues to affect economic and educational inequality in SA, as it formed the early achievement of a great part of the population (McKeever, 2017).

Today, however, EAs in developing countries have the newfound opportunity to be exposed to a globalised world of countries that exposes them to many different cultures, including those of America (Arnett, 2002). Americanisation in SA is approximately twice as prevalent as it is in Jamaica (Ferguson & Bornstein, 2015), which indicates that acculturation also relies on the relative cultural influence of American culture in a local setting (Ferguson & Adams, 2016). Therefore, SA culture is already considered as more westernised compared to other developing countries; consequently, EA is viewed as a developmental stage found among 18- to 25-year-olds in SA.

The arguments above emphasise the unique circumstances SA as a developing country faced in the past and how this has paved the way for SA people and more specifically, education and EAs.

### **2.3 Emerging Adulthood in the Higher Education Environment**

Students, who are in the EA developmental stage (Arnett, 2000a) are regarded as a unique type of EA (Arnett, 2016b). Although university students do not represent all EAs, university is the ideal setting for EA dimensions to be experienced. University life creates opportunities for personal growth (Taylor & Baxter Magolda, 2015) and identity development (Arnett, 2016b). The university environment is considered a platform where all of the dimensions of EA are prevalent largely due to the many possibilities and challenges found with regard to professional, social and personal life (Arnett, 2016b). The transition to university life is also considered a central characteristic of EA, as this transition brings about many of the dimensions that are characteristic of this life stage. The “instability” and “feeling in between” are two of the dimensions that lie central to this major transition.

Years before Arnett’s theory of EA, Chickering and McCormick (1973) proposed seven vectors (developmental dimensions) that serve as a guide for student development. The work of Chickering and McCormick (1973) corresponds with Arnett’s views. Chickering and McCormick’s (1973) vectors include the following developmental tasks: developing competence; managing emotions; moving through autonomy toward interdependence; developing mature interpersonal relationships; establishing identity; developing purpose; and developing integrity. These vectors and dimensions of EA seem to correlate with one another and explain students’ experiences and development as they proceed in university life.

**2.3.1 Students experience instability.** Entering university is regarded as disruptive and anxiety provoking (Conley, Kirsch, Dickson, & Bryant, 2014). University students experience high levels of stress due to the uncertainty and instability they face with the multiple adjustments from high school to HE, as well as during HE towards their professional careers (Peila-Shuster, 2016). Students find themselves moving from their homes to temporary living situations and often changing living situations. Some might move into a residence and thereafter move in with a friend or romantic partner. Others experiment with career possibilities and relationships. Today’s students are living in unstable societies that often change frameworks for what is acceptable and creates meaning (Guichard, 2015). These HE students

also experience a world where career paths are not stable anymore and career changes are more frequent (Savickas et al., 2009).

Tension is sometimes experienced on campuses because of diverse student populations from different backgrounds who understand campus life differently (Cross & Johnson, 2008). The transition from being an adolescent to a university attending EA is associated with a decline in psychological and social well-being and an increase in psychological distress (Conley et al., 2014).

Instability in EA can be linked to Chickering and McCormick's (1973) vector of movement from autonomy to interdependence, as a student has to learn how to rely on others when faced with the many uncertainties found in this life stage. Being exposed to the diverse student population, individuals learn how to interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds and learn how to work with others and learn from one another. They ultimately learn to adapt to a very unstable life stage by being interdependent.

**2.3.2 Students have many possibilities.** At university, EA is especially regarded as a time when possibilities for social exploration and cultural exposure are inevitable (Cross & Johnson, 2008). The HE system is accessible, responsive, and consists of the opportunity to enrol in degree programmes that are flexible (Scott et al., 2007). Therefore, students can change their field of study more easily or adjust it according to their future career interests. Ultimately, this results in students having a broader perspective on the world, people, and all the possibilities that are readily available (Steyn, 2016). In addition, participation in university life and campus initiatives provides students with opportunities related to increased social and cultural awareness, leadership development, and replacement of familial support by new resource networks (Cross & Johnson, 2008).

Student populations have differing interests in social, cultural, leisure, recreation, and sporting activities and are therefore considered diverse (Cross & Johnson, 2008). Therefore, students are exposed to a great diversity that allows for many possibilities in social settings. Therefore, universities can be regarded as agents of change in that HE empowers students to consider new possibilities in terms of culture and interrelatedness (Cross & Johnson, 2008). Possibility in EA corresponds with Chickering and McCormick's (1973) vectors of developing mature interpersonal relationships and developing purpose. By making use of the opportunities found in this life stage, an individual has the opportunity to make a difference and ultimately

find purpose. With the vast amount of opportunities for social development, students have the opportunity to establish multiple, meaningful relationships.

**2.3.3 Students are self-focused.** Students at university find themselves learning about their future careers and even mastering the skills they might need to excel in certain jobs. Students are concerned about their own academic standards, as they need to pass their modules to complete their studies. Deciding to move from home to other residences, deciding on romantic partners, or what careers to pursue are all examples of steps that students take. These steps are taken without fully committing to anything or anyone (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016); thus, students remain in a stage where the focus is more on the self rather than on others.

To negotiate a new identity, great pressure is placed on the 'self' (Cornell & Kessi, 2017), which is regarded as the part of a person's identity that has to find a sense of purpose in the world (Giddens, 1991). Students at university experience pride, desperation, marginalisation, and alienation, depending on how they personally view university (Cross & Johnson, 2008). Students at university experience a multitude of personal changes including changes in their thought patterns, emotions, behaviour, values, and how they relate to others or themselves (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). When first-year students overcome challenges, they experience an increase in self-esteem (Liversage, Naudé, & Botha, 2017) and learn from past mistakes. For students to be able to pursue careers in today's world of work, they need to work harder, have greater self-knowledge and have even more confidence than in the past (Savickas, 2012, 2013). In essence, students are required to have greater self-knowledge and thus self-focus. Therefore, the vectors of developing competence and managing emotions introduced by Chickering and McCormick (1973) can be linked to the dimension of self-focus in EA. In essence, EA is considered a time of life when a person is expected to be self-focussed to find meaning, increase self-esteem, and become competent.

**2.3.4 Students feel in between.** Students have the tendency to feel in between as they move out of their homes, do not have stable careers yet, and are still attempting to complete HE. Adjusting to university life is said to be difficult for most students, and factors such as financial strain (Liamputtong, 2011) and being simultaneously dependent (i.e., with regard to finances) and independent (i.e., with regard to choice) can exacerbate this experience. Entering university often brings about new responsibilities with which students are not always familiar, for example the freedom to choose whether or not to attend class, complete assignments, study, and with whom to socialise (Modipane, 2011). For the first time in their lives, students are



away from home and have to make their own decisions, practise self-discipline, and lead an independent life without parents monitoring their every move and giving guidance (Pitcher, 2005). Because of this, students feel responsible to act as adults; yet, they are still dependent on their parents and have to adhere to their parents' demands as well. This causes them to feel in between.

A great responsibility to make wise choices rests on the student, as inappropriate choices may lead to poor academic performance or other consequences (Modipane, 2011). However, there is also a need to enjoy university life and the social aspects it provides. Students are expected to make wise choices, as adults are most often expected to make, yet also enjoy the university experience as youths with newfound freedom. Thus, the feeling of being in between life stages surfaces. Therefore, feeling in between in EA can be linked to Chickering and McCormick's (1973) vector of moving from autonomy towards interdependence, as students are simultaneously dependent and independent. Many students are forced to be autonomous when they enter university and have these new-found responsibilities. However, still being financially dependent on parents or institutions may help students realise how important interdependence in societies is.

**2.3.5 Students explore their identity.** University provides an environment that is dynamic and consists of new social groups that allow for greater self-discovery and identity development (Liversage et al., 2017). Students ask themselves the difficult questions Arnett (2004b) highlights, for example, "Who am I?" and "How can I find fulfilment and satisfaction in a career?" Students are expected to assimilate or acculturate into an established HE culture, which can include changing one's personal attributes (Cross & Johnson, 2008) and ultimately one's identity. Having a secure sense of identity is associated with higher self-confidence and learning (Mann, 2008), which are crucial aspects for students. Therefore, identity exploration is not only evident among students, but is critical for their success in HE.

Students are in a phase of identity exploration, as they have to make important choices that will affect their entire lives (Arnett, 2015a) for example with regard to which careers they will pursue, with whom they will associate, and what their values will be. They will then have to decide how these aspects will define their identities. All of these choices will form a person's identity, for example career identity, social identity, or personal identity. Compared with Chickering and McCormick's (1973) vectors, identity exploration in EA seems to be the most similar dimension to the vectors of establishing an identity and developing integrity.

The arguments above indicate that students are indeed in a unique life stage that is characteristic of EA.

#### **2.4 First-generation Students and Continuous-generation Students**

Since the early 2000s, non-traditional student groups such as ‘first-generation students’ (FGSs) have become the object of heightened attention in HE and research (Wildhagen, 2015). ‘First-generation student’ (FGS) is a term used to define a student who comes from a family where neither parents nor guardians have had further education after high school (Dumais & Ward, 2010) or whose parents or guardians attended HE but did not graduate (Jehangir, 2009; Soria & Gorny, 2012). In contrast, ‘continuous-generation students’ (CGSs) are students who have at least one parent or guardian who has completed university (Choy, 2001). Social class is mediated by school and family (Weiss & Dolby, 2012). Therefore, FGSs can be characterised by low social class, as their parents did not attend university, in contrast to the ‘privileged’ CGSs who have parents who attended HE and obtained a qualification.

Owing to the socio-political climate in SA, a great number of students who enter university are FGSs from a low SES background (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). Education in the SA democracy is specifically aimed at enabling access for previously disadvantaged groups into HE institutions (Nomdo, 2017). SA legislation even requires HE institutions to accommodate applicants who are part of previously disadvantaged groups and to make every effort to assist these students to succeed (Department of Education, 1997). In SA, previously disadvantaged students mostly refer to black students (Nomdo, 2017). Therefore, the term ‘previously disadvantaged student’ and ‘FGS’ are often used to refer to students whose parents did not attend university.

Not enough is known about the characteristics and functioning of FGSs in the SA context (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013; Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). However, FGSs face more challenges compared to CGSs and are at a great risk of dropping out (Martinez, Sher, Krull, & Wood, 2009; Strydom et al., 2010). One of these challenges is that FGSs are usually from a lower SES compared to CGSs (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). In SA, high levels of academic unpreparedness and frequent failing are found among especially black students because of low SES backgrounds (Nomdo, 2017). The transition from rural settings to urban HE institutions pose many challenges for students from these backgrounds (Vincent & Idahosa, 2014) and contributes to the high rate of failing. Financial strain results in a lack of support for academic

achievement and motivation from home and affects FGSs' studies negatively (Modipane, 2011). Because of not having financial support from home, FGSs view HE as a way to ensure a brighter future for themselves and their communities (Steyn, 2016). When families and communities make financial sacrifices for academic opportunities, which are part of black collectivistic culture (Van Bavel & Cunningham, 2012), FGSs experience a sense of responsibility to succeed (Steyn, 2016). CGSs tend to have financial support from home, as they have a parent or parents with academic qualifications and professional careers. In the light of the value placed on support from family, religion can also be regarded as a protective factor for students from diverse backgrounds in the HE setting. Compared to white students, black students mention religion more often when referring to academic experiences (Packard, 2011). It has been found that religion, and more specifically Christianity, is a source of perseverance, especially among FGSs (Steyn, 2016), which again supports the tendency found among these students for a greater need of support. In fact, FGSs struggle to find a balance between being independent, enjoying a newfound freedom, and the need they still have for support (Liversage et al., 2017).

FGSs are not as prepared for university as their CGS peers are and have different experiences at university (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). In a study of black first-year students in SA, the majority of the students experienced uncertainty, anxiety, and excitement during their first year at university (Liversage et al., 2017). A 'culture shock' (Thaver, 2006) is experienced, as there is a great contrast between an FGS's culture at home and the university culture. FGSs experience immense emotional trauma when attending universities that historically were for white privileged students (Nomdo, 2017), compared to CGSs who come from 'privileged' families that are familiar with the HE setting. For FGSs at historically white, privileged universities, the norm for academic achievement is based on white students' achievement, which causes high drop-out rates among FGSs with no HE backgrounds (Nomdo, 2017). This reveals some unpreparedness for university among FGSs. The traumatic transition from home to university often causes FGSs to negotiate a new sense of self to adapt to the new HE culture (Nomdo, 2017).

Another challenge that FGSs face because of not having an immediate family member who attended HE and who can act as a resource, is difficulty understanding what is expected of them at university level (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013). CGSs typically attend higher-quality secondary education (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, Johnson, & Covarrubias, 2012). However, a

great contrast is found between the HE and secondary education systems of FGSs (Badenhorst & Kapp, 2013). Acculturation is more likely to be evident among students whose parents are more educated (Ferguson & Adams, 2016) and is therefore more common among CGSs. While CGSs have academic role models to learn from, FGSs have never been exposed to role models with academic skills or academic discipline (Steyn, 2016). The knowledge and skills typically provided to CGSs by their parents when they enter HE are not available to FGSs (Liversage et al., 2017). FGSs' parents find it difficult to relate to their children's struggles and experiences at HE institutions, and FGSs often feel overwhelmed by the new environment and the amount of new aspects of university life to which they are exposed (Liversage et al., 2017). A lack of time management skills and a lack of self-discipline are also challenges that FGSs face, as opposed to CGSs who score higher on self-regulatory behaviour (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011).

HE is regarded as an investment for the future of a family, a means to improve social status (Ru-Jer, 2012), and an opportunity for personal and financial success (Kamper & Steyn, 2011). These sentiments are clearly found among FGSs and differ from those of CGSs, as their families most likely have many individuals with HE qualifications and professional careers. Although families are mostly important support structures for FGSs (Gofen, 2009), family dynamics can also cause pressure to perform academically. Many FGSs experience a great and often burdensome responsibility to succeed (Liversage et al., 2017), as they are often deemed the 'only hope' for their families. The majority of FGSs make decisions based on what would be beneficial for them and their families and are more focussed on achieving interdependence than independence (Stephens et al., 2012). These students have the desire to 'give back' to their communities. Gofen (2009) mentions the concept of sacrifice, where students feel pressured to succeed and not disappoint their parents because parents have sacrificed many things in order for them to attend HE.

Support from family can be regarded as a factor directly linked to academic performance among FGSs. FGSs have a strong sense of responsibility towards their families or even extended families and often have to take care of younger siblings (Steyn, 2016). This is most likely not the case among CGSs who have parents with professional qualifications who are able to provide and care for their families. Students who are first to enter HE, are usually the eldest child in a family, see themselves as victors who can inspire others to escape from their circumstances and lead successful lives (Gofen, 2009; Griffin, 2006). Consequently, they are

motivated to achieve academically, view the opportunity as a privilege, and are regarded as role models for young and old in their communities (Steyn, 2016). This is in contrast to CGSs who regard HE as an anticipated endeavour that is often the ‘next step’ in their educational paths.

Even though moving on to university is regarded as difficult (Conley et al., 2014), it is clear that FGSs have greater and different struggles than CGSs have and might experience university as more negative or more difficult to adapt to.

## **2.5 Gender Differences in Emerging Adulthood**

Gender differences regarding the dimensions of EA exist, but vary across cultures and countries (Crocetti et al., 2015). This emphasises the fact that gender differences are prevalent in EA, but not universally consistent. Therefore, it is important to study gender differences in different settings to fully understand gender patterns in the perceptions of EA (Crocetti et al., 2015).

When studying gender differences with regard to the dimensions of EA, Reifman et al. (2007) found that females scored higher on self-focus than males did. In a study on Austrian EAs, significant differences in all of the dimensions were found, with females scoring higher than males did on each of the dimensions (Sirsch, Dreher, Mayr, & Willinger, 2009).

The pathways to adulthood also differ between male and female EAs (Roberson, Norona, Zorotovich, & Dirnberger, 2017). In Swiss and American samples, male EAs followed a general pathway of firstly pursuing HE, followed by a working career, whereas female EAs’ pathway shifted more between school, work, and family (Osgood, Ruth, Eccles, Jacobs, & Barber, 2005; Widmer & Ritschard, 2009). Therefore, the pathway to adulthood for a female student is considered vague compared to a male student’s pathway (Sharon, 2016). However, both female and male EAs are more likely to establish a career identity first before committing to romantic relationships and starting a family (Roberson et al., 2017).

When considering the adjustment to university among female and male EAs, similar patterns are found for both genders during their first year, with only a few significant differences (Conley et al., 2014). In addition to experiencing the dimensions of EA more intensely, Conley et al. (2014) report that females are also more likely to experience greater levels of psychological distress during this transitional time than their male counterparts do.

More recently, a study of Romanian students revealed that females scored higher in the identity exploration and self-focus dimensions, whereas males scored higher on the remaining dimensions (Negru, 2012). However, male EAs show greater externalising behaviour and dropout rates, and are more likely to struggle with cognitive strength aspects like coping, compared to female EAs (Conley et al., 2014).

Females report less adult-like experiences across the dimensions of EA that can be explained by women having less status in societies and more options regarding identity, career, and family in the past (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016). Compared to males, females are more socially oriented, as females often define themselves in terms of socialisations with friends and goals that are communal in nature (Diekmann & Steinberg, 2013; Sharp, Coatsworth, Darling, Cumsille, & Ranieri, 2007). Having all of the options with regard to identity, career, and family but not having the social status of males, women may feel greater uncertainty about their positions as adults in today's society (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016). Therefore, the differences noted between female and male students can be explained by social status and gender roles.

## **2.6 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, the theoretical framework of the current research study was discussed. EA was conceptualised as a life stage following adolescence that is characterised by five dimensions. Views of the future of EA were also discussed, as having a view of the future lies central to EA and being a student. Students are often confronted with questions regarding their future and career prospects. EA in developing countries was then explained, with specific reference to unique challenges in SA as a developing country. This was followed by the argument that students at university are in fact in the EA life stage, as university creates the ideal platform for the EA dimensions to be experienced. FGSs and CGSs in SA and the challenges they face at university were also discussed. This chapter ended with a discussion of gender differences in EA and how gender differences are not consistent across studies.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter consists of an overview of the methodology followed in the current study. Firstly, the research aim and questions relating to the study are presented followed by a discussion of the research design and approach that informed this study. Thereafter, the research participants and sampling procedures are explained, followed by a discussion of the procedures of data collection. Data analysis is discussed as it pertains to this study, as well as the ethical aspects that were considered. The techniques employed to ensure rigour are presented next. The chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

### **3.1 Research Aim and Questions**

Considering the theory discussed in the previous chapters, the importance of development during EA and the need for research regarding the dimensions of EA, especially among SA students (FGSs and CGSs) were apparent. The dimensions of EA, as proposed by Arnett (2000a), with special reference to views of the future, were highlighted.

The aim of the current study was to explore students' perceptions of EA and the experiences of this stage among different generational and gender groups. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were investigated:

1. Are there significant differences in the dimensions of EA and views of the future of FGSs and CGSs?
2. Are there significant differences in the dimensions of EA and views of the future of male and female students?
3. How do FGSs and CGSs experience the dimensions of EA?
4. How do FGSs and CGSs perceive their future?

### **3.2 Research Design and Approach**

To investigate the above-mentioned research questions, a mixed-methods approach was followed with questions one and two pertaining to the quantitative section and questions three and four to the qualitative section. Mixed-methods research entails the collection, analysis,

integration, and interpretation of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study (Hadi & Closs, 2016; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007).

A mixed-method design results in a detailed understanding of complex concepts (Harper, 2011) and enables the researcher to explore a wider range of research questions (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2006). Mixed-method research requires the researcher to be an expert in quantitative and qualitative approaches (Mertens, 2010) and can be regarded as a daunting task for the lay researcher. Some weaknesses of this design are that it can be difficult for a single researcher to do, might be more time consuming, and some form of conflict is always involved, as methodological purists do not view the mixing of methods as acceptable (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The fact that this approach allowed the researcher to manage a wider range of questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) made it the best approach for this specific study – to fully analyse and explore the experiences of EA as they relate to different generational and gender groups. In this study, the quantitative data provided information regarding the statistical trends in the dimensions of EA and views of the future of male and female FGSs and CGSs, while the qualitative data provided rich data regarding the experiences of students as EAs.

A concurrent mixed-method design, also referred to as a parallel form design (Mertens, 2010) was utilised in this study, consisting of a quantitative section (utilising a self-administered online survey), followed by a qualitative section (with semi-structured focus group discussions). A concurrent mixed-method design consists of two independent, separate processes that are shaped by the specific research questions for the quantitative section and the qualitative section respectively (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Because concurrent research designs allow sections to occur either with some time lapse or simultaneously (Cronholm, & Hjalmarsson, 2011), data gathering in the two sections of this study could proceed independently.

### **3.3 Research Participants and Sampling Procedures**

A specific subgroup of the EA population, namely students between 18 and 25 years of age, was of interest to this study. This population was of importance, as Arnett (2000a) describes the EA period as a developmental stage when people explore various identities, possibilities, and future perspectives. However, Arnett (2015b) admits that research on EA is more focussed on middle-class Americans and that there is a need for more research in



countries representing diverse cultures. In addition to this, the rapidly changing HE environment (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011) provides fertile ground for this exploration. Therefore, undergraduate students of the University of the Free State in their EA years constituted the population of interest. Male and female students, as well as FGSs and CGSs, between the ages of 18 and 25 were included. Students from all faculties, gender groups, and racial groups were included. Students younger than 18 and older than 25 were excluded from the study.

**3.3.1 Quantitative sampling procedure.** In the quantitative section of the research, non-probability, convenience sampling was used. Non-probability sampling implies that the probability of a participant being selected for a study is unknown (Acharya, Prakash, Saxena, & Nigam, 2013). Convenience sampling refers to the method of selecting a sample based on the availability of the group (Stangor, 2011). It has been found that this method is the most popular sampling method in quantitative research, as it is efficient, convenient, and inexpensive (Acharya et al., 2013; Wilson & Maclean, 2011). However, some limitations to the method also exist, including the uncontrollability of bias and variability, as well as the fact that results cannot be generalised to populations beyond the sample (Acharya et al., 2013). Although these limitations exist, this method was deemed fit for the study, as it allowed the researcher to easily attain a large number of participants. All registered students at the University of the Free State were recruited through an e-mail invitation generated by the EvaSys online survey administration system (see Appendix A). Students who were willing to participate could follow a link that allowed them to complete the online survey. In total, 1452 students participated in the study. In Table 1, a summary of the biographic details of the participants that formed part of the quantitative sample is provided.

Table 1

*Biographic Characteristics of the Quantitative Sample*

<b>Biographic characteristics</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>18</b>	178	12.3
	<b>19</b>	384	26.4
	<b>20</b>	293	20.2
	<b>21</b>	236	16.3
	<b>22</b>	160	11.0
	<b>23</b>	106	7.3
	<b>24</b>	48	3.3
	<b>25</b>	47	3.2
	<b>Not answered</b>	0	0
<b>Total</b>		1452	100
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	497	34.2
	<b>Female</b>	945	65.1
	<b>Not answered</b>	10	.7
<b>Total</b>		1452	100
<b>Race</b>	<b>Black</b>	1039	71.6
	<b>White</b>	237	16.3
	<b>Indian</b>	28	1.9
	<b>Coloured</b>	84	5.8
	<b>Other</b>	10	.7
	<b>Prefer no answer</b>	49	3.4
	<b>Not answered</b>	5	.3
<b>Total</b>		1452	100
<b>Generation</b>	<b>FGS</b>	742	51.1
	<b>CGS</b>	691	47.6
	<b>Not answered</b>	19	1.3
<b>Total</b>		1452	100

From the table, it is clear that the highest percentage of participants that took part in the quantitative section of the study were aged between 18 and 21 ( $M = 20.39$ ;  $SD = 1.791$ ). With regards to the mean age of the generational groups, CGSs had a mean age of 20.23 ( $SD = 1.752$ ) and FGSs had a mean age of 20.52 ( $SD = 1.82$ ). More females (65.1%) than males took part in the study, and the majority of participants (71.6%) were from the black racial group. Participants were spread evenly with regard to generational status, with FGSs at 51.1% and CGSs at 47.6%. The remaining 1.3% of participants did not state their generational status.

**3.3.2 Qualitative sampling procedure.** For the qualitative section of the study, a nested sampling procedure was followed, which allows a portion of the participants from the quantitative section of a study, to be selected for the qualitative section as well (Mertens, 2010). Participants in the quantitative section of the study could volunteer to participate in the qualitative section, too, by providing their email addresses in the online survey they completed. Participants who volunteered were then purposively sampled using their biographic information. Purposive sampling refers to a sampling procedure where participants are chosen because they fit the specific inclusion criteria relevant to the aim of the research (Acharya et al., 2013). Seeing that this study explored differences between certain generational and gender groups, it was necessary to purposively sample participants to ensure that a diverse group was obtained. The aim was to include FGSs, CGSs, as well as male and female representatives. Emails were sent to invite sampled participants to attend focus group discussions. Four separate focus group discussions, consisting of between two and six participants each, were held. In Table 2, a summary of the participants in the qualitative sample is provided.

Table 2

*Biographic Characteristics of the Qualitative Sample*

		Focus Group				Total Sample	
		1	2	3	4	N	%
<b>Biographic characteristics</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Age</b>	<b>18-25</b>	2	3	6	7	18	100
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	1	3	4	1	9	50
	<b>Female</b>	1	0	2	6	9	50
	<b>Total</b>	2	3	6	7	18	100
<b>Race</b>	<b>Black</b>	1	3	6	7	17	94.44
	<b>White</b>	1	0	0	0	1	5.56
	<b>Total</b>	2	3	6	7	18	100
<b>Generational Status</b>	<b>FGS</b>	0	3	6	0	9	
	<b>CGS</b>	2	0	0	7	9	
	<b>Total</b>	2	3	6	7	18	100

Although the highest percentage of participants were between the ages of 18 and 21, FGSs (20.25) had a marginally higher mean age compared to CGSs (20.23). As with the quantitative sample, most of the participants in the qualitative sample were black (94.4%). There was a relatively equal distribution with regard to age, gender, and generational status.

### 3.4 Procedures of Data Collection

In this section, the procedures followed to collect data for this study are explained. Firstly, the procedures of data collection for the quantitative section of the research are discussed, followed by the data collection procedures for the qualitative section.

**3.4.1 Quantitative data collection.** For the quantitative section of this research, an online self-report survey was used to collect data. Self-report data is a term used to refer to information obtained from respondents, which they answer subjectively, and can be in the form of a paper-and-pencil questionnaire or online surveys (Chan, 2009). Some of the major

advantages of this type of measure is that it is efficient and inexpensive (Paulhus & Vazire, 2007). Thus, the use of self-report questionnaires allows researchers to collect a great amount of data inexpensively (Mertens, 2010). Self-report data have been used widely in many empirical studies, but some researchers question its validity (Chan, 2009). Some limitations of this type of data collection procedure are that it is impersonal, does not obtain rich data, and wording might be biased (Mertens, 2010). Therefore, one should always be cognisant of the risks involved in using self-report measures (Chan, 2009). For this research study, this method was deemed most appropriate, as it allowed the researcher to obtain data inexpensively and enabled the researcher to reach a large number of participants within a short period.

Online survey research has advantages and disadvantages and is not appropriate for all research projects (Sue & Ritter, 2012). When large sample sizes are being studied and there is a time constraint on the research project, online surveying is regarded as a good option (Sue & Ritter, 2012). Online survey research has the added advantage that a wide variety of participants from various geographical locations can be included (Lefever, Dal, & Matthíasdóttir, 2007). Although some limitations exist, this data-gathering method is regarded as a convenient method where data can be transferred easily to a database for analysis (Lefever et al., 2007). Online surveys usually result in lower response rates compared to paper-and-pencil surveys (Nulty, 2008). The use of an online survey in this study allowed the researcher to reach many participants at the University of the Free State; therefore, this method was regarded as the most efficient for data collection.

For the purpose of this study, data were collected via the online survey consisting of a biographic questionnaire, the *Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood – Short Form (IDEA-8)* (Baggio et al., 2015), and the *Views of the Future Questionnaire (VFQ)* (Arnett, 2000b) (see Appendix B).

**3.4.1.1 Biographic questionnaire.** A biographic questionnaire was completed by each participant, which allowed the researcher to gather information regarding the participants' age, gender, ethnic group, and generational status. A participant's generational status was determined by the level of education of his/her parents. Participants of parents who never attended an HE institution or never obtained a qualification were considered FGSs, whereas participants with parents who attended university or obtained an HE qualification were classified as CGSs.

#### **3.4.1.2 Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood – Short Form (IDEA-8).**

The *IDEA-8* is a shortened form of the original longer format called the *Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA-31)*, a self-report instrument that was developed to examine the developmental attributes of EA (Baggio et al., 2015). This inventory consists of eight items that are rated on a four-point Likert scale (“strongly disagree”, “somewhat disagree”, “somewhat agree”, or “strongly agree”). An example of one of the questions in the questionnaire is as follows: “Is this period of your life a time of many possibilities?” A high score on the *IDEA-8* indicates greater identification with the developmental trajectories associated with EA, whereas a lower score is indicative of less identification (Smith et al., 2015). The eight items on the measure can form a total score (ranging between 8 and 32), and can be grouped into four subscales, namely Possibilities, Instability, Identity Exploration and Feeling in Between (each with a subscale range between two and eight) (Baggio et al., 2015).

The internal reliability of the original *IDEA-31* for a group of middle-class European American EAs was established as .85 (Smith et al., 2015). The *IDEA-8* has been shown to reveal satisfactory results, high psychometric properties, strong empirical validity, and high convergence with the original scale (Baggio et al., 2015). The correlation between the *IDEA-8* and *IDEA-31* was established as .91 (Baggio et al., 2015).

To date, no SA studies have used this measure (EBSCOhost Search 2017). The reliability of the measure in the current study was determined and a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .643 was found which indicated acceptable reliability of the measure. The reliability of the subscales were also determined by the researcher (Possibility = .549, Instability = .659, Identity Exploration = .665 and Feeling in Between = .538).

**3.4.1.3 Views of the Future Questionnaire (VFQ).** The *Views of the Future Questionnaire (VFQ)* (Arnett, 2000b) aims to explore individuals’ perception of their future in comparison to their parents’ lives. This questionnaire comprises four items that are answered by participants with the responses “worse”, “about the same” or “better” (when considering aspect of their lives in relation to the lives of their parents). Scores of this scale range from a minimum of four and a maximum of 12 with low scores indicating negative views of the future, whereas high scores indicate views of the future that are more positive. The following is an example of one of the questions: “Overall, do you think the quality of your life is likely to be better or worse than your parents’ has been?”

The measure was used in the current study to get an indication of how participants felt about their future and whether or not they regard it as better or worse compared to their parents' lives. To date, no SA studies have made use of this measure (EBSCOhost Search, 2017). Therefore, it was deemed necessary to determine the reliability of this measure in the current study. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined as .586 for the four items on the scale. When one item (participants' views regarding personal relationships) was excluded, the reliability was slightly higher, with an alpha coefficient of .636. Since the improvement in reliability was only marginal, the decision was made to use all four items in subsequent analyses.

**3.4.2 Qualitative data collection.** For the qualitative section of the research, focus group discussions were used to collect data about participants' experiences of being emerging adults. In these focus groups, semi-structured interviewing was used.

Focus group discussions have been found to shift the power from the researcher to the participants and are viewed as highly collaborative (Patton, 2002). Focus groups facilitate depth of information in a short period and effectively convey the most important information about a topic (Mertens, 2010). The hallmark of focus group interviews is the explicit use of group interaction with data to explore insights that would otherwise remain hidden (Ho, 2006). Some of the challenges surrounding focus group work are that it can be difficult to analyse responses, focus groups are dependent on a skilled facilitator, and the scheduling might be difficult (Mertens, 2010). For the purposes of this study, focus groups were regarded as the most suitable interactive technique to ensure in-depth data about the research topic.

Ideally, focus groups should consist of six to eight participants but can be effective with as few as three participants (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). Some researchers are of the opinion that very small focus groups (VSFGs) can produce rich data (Toner, 2009). VSFGs also allow researchers to work with groups that are underrepresented in research; therefore, it is an important method of interviewing (Toner, 2009).

Qualitative interviewing styles encourage detailed answers, which enable researchers to obtain rich data (Howitt, 2010). In the current study, the researcher made use of semi-structured interviewing. This form of interviewing entails a structured but flexible interview approach with a range of open-ended questions in which answers can be in depth and spontaneous (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2009). How the researcher or facilitator conducts him- or herself is of

cardinal importance throughout an interview process in order to ensure success (Baumbusch, 2010). The interview is regarded as an informal interaction and therefore it is important for the researcher to create an atmosphere that encourages participation (Baumbusch, 2010). This form of interviewing was deemed most useful, as it allowed social interaction between the researcher and participants, while collecting focussed and rich data.

In this study, four focus group discussions were held to explore the unique experiences of participants pertaining to EA. Groups were assigned according to generational status (two FGS groups and two CGS groups) to assist participants to identify with one another and freely share experiences regarding their EA experiences and views of the future.

At the beginning of each focus group, participants were welcomed into the discussion room and requested to wait patiently for some last participants to arrive. They were also requested to read and sign the informed consent form (see Appendix C) handed out to them while they were waiting. After some time had been given for latecomers, the facilitator introduced herself and explained the events that would follow. As an icebreaker, some participants shared who they were and what they were studying. Throughout the focus group discussions, a light and humorous tone was established to make participants feel comfortable. A semi-structured interview schedule was followed (see Appendix D). The following are some examples of the questions raised in the focus groups: “How do you understand the term emerging adulthood?” and “Do you experience your life currently as being a time of stability or instability? Why?”

As certain specific questions were asked, leniency was shown in allowing participants to deviate from questions and elaborate on their experiences. After some set questions had been asked, the researcher also asked follow-up questions to fully understand a response or for the aim of elaboration. This allowed the researcher and other group members to understand what the participant was conveying and to ensure that clarity and depth were gained from the response. When participants were hesitant to answer, the researcher would rephrase the question to make sure participants fully understood what they were asked. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were also given refreshments to ensure that they felt welcome and that their basic needs were met.



After the four focus groups had been held, a point of saturation was reached. Data collected seemed to be a repetition of data already collected, which enabled the researcher to stop the qualitative data collection.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Parallel mixed data analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) was used in this study. This method of analysis consists of two separate processes, namely quantitative data analysis by means of descriptive and inferential statistics, and qualitative data analysis by means of thematic analysis (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). In the following sections, the various quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures used in this study are discussed.

**3.5.1 Quantitative data analysis procedures.** To analyse the data for the quantitative section of the study, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (IBM Corporation, 2013), was used. Firstly, all participants who had completed less than 90% of the items were eliminated from the data set. Items were coded (and reversed scored where needed), and total scores were calculated. Following this, the reliability of each questionnaire was determined by making use of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficient is the most commonly used objective measure of reliability and refers to the internal consistency or correlation among items in the test (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). There are different viewpoints on the acceptable values of reliability, and acceptable values of alpha can range from .70 to .95 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). A smaller number of questions in a questionnaire can result in lower alpha scores (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011).

Descriptive statistics refer to techniques used to organise and summarise data to enhance understanding of the data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010). Descriptive analysis yields statistics (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2010) regarding the general tendencies in the data (such as frequency distributions and the means and standard deviations on measures).

To determine whether significant differences in the dimensions of EA and views of the future exist between various generational and gender groups (Research Questions 1 and 2) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) (Field, 2009) was used. MANOVA is a statistical method used in the analysis of the differences between groups when there are multiple dependent variables (Aron et al., 2009; Stangor, 2011). In the current research, MANOVA was used to determine whether there were statistically significant differences between FGSs and CGSs, as well as between males and females in relation to the dependent

variables, namely the dimensions of EA and views of the future. Possible interaction effects were also investigated. Significant findings of the MANOVA were then followed by independent t-tests. The 1% and 5% levels of significance (*p* values) were considered.

**3.5.2 Qualitative data analysis.** The qualitative data from the focus groups, related to research questions 3 and 4, were analysed by means of thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a method of data analysis that identifies, analyses, and reports patterns (themes) in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This is done by following a systematic approach of familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and, lastly, producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some strengths of this method are that it organises and describes data in rich detail and that it is known as a flexible and useful method in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some criticisms of this method are that it lacks a transparent and reliable formulation and that it is a demanding task for a researcher to collect, transcribe, code, and interpret data on his/her own (Howitt, 2010).

In the current study, thematic analysis began with the researcher getting familiar with the data by reading through all the transcribed focus group discussions (see Appendix E) and making sure data were captured correctly. Thematic analysis was done separately for FGSs and CGSs, as this allowed the researcher to identify different nuances in the experiences of the two groups, as well as to identify themes in these separate groups. Participants' responses were coded to capture the essence of what a participant was saying. After the coding, the researcher searched for themes that arose from the coded data and constructed a mind map of these themes. Each theme then consisted of some of the tendencies found in the participants' responses. Subthemes emerged from several of the major themes and were added to the mind map. After carefully analysing and completing the mind-map, the researcher then wrote a report that captured all of the information found in the mind-map, explaining what the themes and subthemes were and what quotes were relevant from the focus group discussions (see Chapter 5).

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical clearance to conduct this study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities of the University of the Free State and the Research Desk of

the Vice-Rector Research (see Appendix F). Furthermore, the study respected the principles of non-maleficence, beneficence, and autonomy at all times.

Informed consent was obtained after participants had been fully informed about the aims of the study (see Appendix C). Consent relates to the principle of autonomy that Allan (2011) describes as the right that competent people have to make their own decisions about matters of importance. In the quantitative section of the research study, informed consent was obtained by inviting participants to take part in the study after explaining what the study was about (via e-mail). The e-mail invitation consisted of an information section where all information relevant to the study was shared. Participants were fully informed what the research entailed and what their participation would add to the research. In the qualitative section, each participant received an informed consent letter and signed it before taking part in the focus group discussion. This letter again stated in detail what the aim of the study was, what participation in the study would entail, and that discussions would be recorded. Confidentiality and its limits were explained, and participants were encouraged to contact the researcher or supervisor if they had any questions or if information was not clear. Participants were also allowed to ask questions at any time, and no information was deliberately kept from any participant. Participation was voluntary, and if a participant wished to withdraw from the study, this could be done without any negative repercussions.

Participants' anonymity was respected, and results were treated with utmost confidentiality. In the quantitative section of the study, participants' responses were reported anonymously, as no names were asked when completing the online survey. For administrative purposes, each participant had to provide his or her student number, but this student number was never used for identification purposes. In the qualitative stage, all transcribed responses were reported anonymously, and only generational and gender statuses were reported for each participant's response. With regard to the focus group discussions, all participants were aware of the fact that a group discussion would be held and that participation was voluntary. Introductions were done solely on a first-name basis, and no identifying particulars, for example student numbers or identity numbers, were exchanged, which ensured that participants' privacy was respected.

If the need arose for counselling, participants were referred to the Student Counselling and Development Centre of the University of the Free State. The contact information for such services was included on all informed consent documents. The contact details of the researcher

and supervisor were also included on all consent documentation, and participants were encouraged to contact either of the relevant parties if any issues arose or in case of uncertainty.

### **3.7 Rigour of the Study**

Rigour was achieved in the quantitative and qualitative sections of the study by adhering to various principles, which are discussed in the following section.

**3.7.1 Internal validity/credibility.** Credibility can be defined as the truthfulness of data or the accuracy of interpretation and representation of participants' views by the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2012). Credibility in qualitative research corresponds with internal validity in quantitative research and can be achieved by extended engagement with the research participants, careful observations, making use of peer debriefs, researcher reflexivity, participant validation, checks, or co-analysis (Marrow, 2005). Internal validity in the quantitative section of this research was achieved by performing data checks and using measures with acknowledged psychometric properties and a well-known statistical programme for data analysis. Data were also co-analysed by the researcher and the research supervisor.

Credibility in qualitative research is enhanced by the fit between the emerging analysis and data and by in-depth descriptions (Geertz, 1983). These principles were ensured in the qualitative stage of the research by constant validation of information shared in focus groups. For example, when a participant answered and did not elaborate, the researcher would ask the participant to explain what was meant by the response. This resulted in detailed responses and in turn ensured that "thick descriptions" were collected.

**3.7.2 Reliability/dependability.** Dependability can be regarded as the constancy of the research data across similar situations or similar conditions (Polit & Beck, 2012). Dependability in qualitative research can be linked to reliability in quantitative research (Marrow, 2005). These criteria deal with the issue of consistency (Gasson, 2004). This was achieved in the present study for both quantitative and qualitative sections by ensuring that the process of deriving findings was explicit and repeatable.

For the quantitative section of the study, reliability was ensured by using reliable and acknowledged questionnaires. Raw data were analysed solely by the researcher and the supervisor to ensure consistency. The researcher and supervisor worked closely to ensure that no data were analysed incorrectly.

For the qualitative section of the study, dependability was achieved by following a systematic method when conducting the focus group discussions. The use of a semi-structured interview schedule also contributed to the dependability of the qualitative research, as this allowed the researcher to clarify responses and make sure what was said by participants was understood fully. This minimised the risk of misinterpretation and allowed the researcher to reflect exactly what had been conveyed by participants. The researcher listened to recordings several times, and the supervisor checked the responses. The researcher kept a research diary of activities and processes, emerging themes, and influences on the data collection and analysis. The research supervisor examined this diary (see Appendix G).

**3.7.3 External validity/transferability.** The principle of transferability refers to results and interpretations that can be transferred and thus applied to other groups or settings (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Polit & Beck, 2012). Transferability in qualitative research has been found to correspond with external validity or generalisability in quantitative research (Marrow, 2005). These parallel criteria refer to the degree to which the reader can generalise the findings of the study to his/her own context and also whether or not the researcher may make claims of a general application of his/her findings (Gasson, 2004). Although the use of convenience sampling limits the generalisability of results, the inclusion of a large sample might improve representativeness in the quantitative section of the study.

Transferability was achieved in the qualitative section of the current study by providing sufficient information about the researcher, the research context, participants, and processes followed to enable the reader to make decisions on how the findings may be transferred.

**3.7.4 Objectivity/confirmability.** The principle of confirmability refers to how the researcher is able to demonstrate that the results represent participants' responses and not biases or opinions of the researcher (Polit & Beck, 2012). Confirmability in qualitative research corresponds with objectivity in quantitative research (Marrow, 2005). These two criteria are based on the assumption that the integrity of findings rests in the data and that the data are adequately tied together by the researcher, and the reader is able to confirm the adequacy of the research findings (Marrow, 2005).

It would be inaccurate to equate qualitative research with subjectivity and quantitative research with objectivity; therefore, it would be important to manage, limit, control, or even embrace subjectivity to enrich the research findings. In essence, all research is subject to

researcher bias (Marrow, 2005) and should be managed according to the approach used. Confirmability and objectivity was ensured in this study by having an audit trail. Subjectivity was managed by constant feedback between the researcher and the supervisor and by checking data throughout the study.

**3.7.5 Reflexivity.** Reflexivity can be regarded as the process of reflecting critically on the self and of analysing and taking note of personal values that can influence the data collection and interpretation process (Polit & Beck, 2010). Reflexivity, also called self-reflection, can be carried out by the researcher by keeping a self-reflective journal from the beginning to the completion of the research (Marrow, 2005). Reflexivity is usually associated with qualitative research methods (Walker, Read, & Priest, 2013), but can also be applied in quantitative approaches, for example by keeping meticulous records of the data-gathering, -capturing and -analyses processes. In the current study, reflexivity was ensured by a self-reflective journal of the researcher (see Appendix G). Discussions between the researcher and supervisor were valuable in this study and contributed to reflexivity.

### **3.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology employed in the current study. In this chapter, the specific research questions the study aimed to answer were formulated. The use of a mixed-methods approach was then explored and why this was the most suitable method for this study. Specific reference was also made to the use of a concurrent mixed-methods design and the value of using this design.

After this, the population of interest was discussed, as well as the sampling methods (convenience sampling for the quantitative section and nested and purposive sampling for the qualitative section) used to reach participants from the student population. Next, the data collection processes and the data analyses were mentioned and discussed. Following this, the ethical considerations of the study were highlighted. This chapter concluded with a discussion of some issues of rigour that entails the aspects of credibility, dependability, transferability, confirmability, and reflexivity.

## Chapter 4: Research Results

In this chapter, the research results of the quantitative as well as the qualitative sections of this study are presented. Firstly, the quantitative results, including both descriptive and inferential statistics, are presented. This is followed by the qualitative results that emerged from the thematic analysis. This chapter concludes with a chapter summary.

### 4.1 Quantitative Results

The two research questions pertaining to the quantitative section of the research were as follows:

1. Are there significant differences in the dimensions of EA and views of the future of FGSs and CGSs?
2. Are there significant differences in the dimensions of EA and views of the future of male and female students?

Before the inferential statistics pertaining to these research questions are presented, an overview of the descriptive statistics is provided.

**4.1.1 Descriptive statistics.** In this section, the descriptive statistics relating to the dimensions of EA and views of the future are presented. The mean scores, standard deviations, and score ranges for items, subscales, and total scale of the *IDEA-8* and *VFQ* are presented in Table 3. Although it is not customary to report the statistics of each item of a scale separately, the fact that both scales consisted of only a few items provided opportunity for this analysis.

Table 3

*Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Score Ranges for Items, Subscales and Total Scores of the IDEA-8 and VFQ (n = 1452)*

	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b><i>IDEA-8</i></b>				
Item 1	1	4	3.65	.572
Item 2	1	4	3.56	.638
Item 3	1	4	2.91	.899
Item 4	1	4	3.24	.825
Item 5	1	4	3.67	.615
Item 6	1	4	3.63	.687
Item 7	1	4	3.21	.751
Item 8	1	4	3.62	.633
Subscales				
Possibility	2	8	7.22	1.007
Instability	2	8	6.15	1.490
Identity	2	8	7.30	1.129
In between	2	8	6.83	1.149
<b>Total score</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27,49</b>	<b>3.039</b>
<b><i>VFQ</i></b>				
Item 1	1	3	2.82	.435
Item 2	1	3	2.72	.538
Item 3	1	3	2.84	.400
Item 4	1	3	2.55	.570
<b>Total score</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>10.93</b>	<b>1.943</b>

From Table 3, the following information was drawn: The high score (total score) obtained on the *IDEA-8* indicated a strong association with the dimensions of EA. Item 3 (a time of feeling stressed out) of the *IDEA-8* reflected the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.91$ ), while the mean score of Item 5 (a time of defining yourself) ( $M = 3.67$ ) was the highest compared to the rest



of the items of the measure. With regard to the subscale scores, identification with the dimensions of Identity were the highest, and with Instability the lowest.

For all items of the *VFQ*, participants' scores were above the midpoint (a score of two indicates that participants viewed their future to be the same as that of their parents). Therefore, participants consistently viewed their future more positively than they viewed their parents' lives. Compared to the first three items, Item 4 (related to personal relationships) reflected a lower mean score ( $M = 2.55$ ) than the rest of the items of the measure. The high mean total score on the *VFQ* ( $M = 10.93$ ) indicates agreement amongst participants that their future was going to be more positive than their parents' lives were.

In addition to the statistics above, one item was included in the survey where participants could indicate whether they regarded themselves to be adolescents, in between, or adults. Of the 1452 participants who answered this question, some participants regarded themselves as adolescents (11.8%), more regarded themselves as adults (39%), while the majority of participants regarded themselves as in between adolescence and adulthood (49.2%).

**4.1.2 Inferential statistics.** The MANOVA that was performed to investigate whether significant differences existed in the dimensions of EA and views of the future in various gender and generational groups, yielded the following: There was a statistically significant difference (on the 1% level of significance) between the two generational groups on the combined dependent variables ( $F = 39.305$ ;  $p = .000$ ;  $\eta^2 = .053$ ). There was also a statistically significant difference (on the 5% level) between the two gender groups on the combined dependent variables ( $F = 4.552$ ;  $p = .011$ ;  $\eta^2 = .006$ ). Interaction effects between gender and generational group were also tested, but yielded no significant results.

The dependent variables were then considered separately by making use of independent t-tests (see Table 4 and Table 5). For generational status, significant differences were found for the dimensions of EA, as well as views of the future. Mean scores indicated that FGSs related stronger to the dimensions of EA than CGSs did and that FGSs were more positive about their future than CGSs were. These results are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4

*Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and t-values Relating to the t-tests for Generational Groups*

Dependent variable	Generational status				<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	df
	FGS		CGS				
	(n = 742)		(n = 691)				
	M	SD	M	SD			
Dimensions of EA	27.69	3.172	27.31	2.832	2.408	.016	1428.450
Views of the Future	11.20	1.112	10.61	1.0425	8.819	.000	1304.261

For gender, differences were significant for the Dimensions of EA, but were not significant for the Views of the Future. After inspecting the mean scores (see Table 5) it became clear that female students seem to associate with the Dimensions of EA more intensely than male students did.

Table 5

*Mean Scores, Standard Deviations, and t-values Relating to the t-tests for Gender Groups*

Dependent variable	Gender				<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	df
	Male		Female				
	(n = 497)		(n = 945)				
	M	SD	M	SD			
Dimensions of EA	27.14	3.44	27.67	2.796	-2.954	.003	846.954
Views of the Future	10.94	1.383	10.91	1.257	.384	.701	928.457

In summary, significant differences were found between FGSs and CGSs with regard to the Dimensions of EA as well as Views of the Future, with FGSs identifying more with the Dimensions of EA and being more positive about their future compared to CGSs. Significant differences were also found among gender groups for the dimensions of EA, with females identifying with the dimensions of EA more intensely than males did.

## **4.2 Qualitative Results**

The two research questions pertaining to the qualitative section of the research, were as follows:

1. How do FGSs and CGSs experience the dimensions of EA?
2. How do FGSs and CGSs perceive their future?

Although the thematic analyses were completed separately for the two focus groups with FGSs and the two focus groups with CGSs, the overarching themes and subthemes are presented integratively (while highlighting similarities and differences between the two groups). Nuances with regard to gender are also presented. A summary of the themes and subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis is provided in Table 6.

Table 6

*Summary of Themes and Subthemes from the Thematic Analysis*

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
Theme 1: The idea of and identification with EA	Conceptualisation of EA as a developmental stage Personal identifications with EA
Theme 2: Relationships with others	Prioritising relationships with others Relationships with family and the community Finding new relationships Diversity in relationships with others
Theme 3: Self-discovery	Self-focus New and deeper explorations of self Hardships contributing to self-reflection and discovery Spirituality and the self Attending university and leaving home as facilitating factors
Theme 4: Priorities during this stage	Seeing opportunity Hoping to find happiness Taking responsibility Striving towards independence The importance of and challenges regarding decision making Living with uncertainty Facing expectations and pressure
Theme 5: A perspective on what's next	My opportunity-filled life compared to my parents' life To marry or not to marry?

In the following section, each of the themes and subthemes is presented. Verbatim quotations are included to substantiate the statements made. Identifiers are used after each quotation to indicate the gender and generational status of the specific participant. The number of the focus group the participant attended is also provided. A paragraph number is assigned to each quotation to enable the reader to trace quotes back the original focus group transcriptions (see Appendix E). Identifiers are placed in brackets, and quotations were shortened for the

purpose of relevancy by making use of ellipses points (...). Words or explanations that were added for the sake of clarity are indicated by square brackets: [ ].

**4.2.1 Theme 1: The idea of and identification with EA.** This theme captured participants' thoughts regarding the onset and completion of the EA developmental stage and whether or not they would classify themselves as EAs.

**4.2.1.1 Conceptualisation of EA as a developmental stage.** Most participants agreed that the developmental stage of EA is the stage after adolescence and before adulthood: "Usually the stage is after you have been in your adolescent stage and now you are entering adulthood" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.2). Participants were also inclined to believe this stage is a transition from a certain developmental stage to the next: "Emerging adulthood ... It's the transition when going into adulthood I guess" (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.2). Another participant said, "I think it is a transition from late 'teenagehood' to being an adult" (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.3).

Varied opinions were raised regarding the role of age in the onset and conclusion of EA. Some participants referred to age ranges. For example, one of the participants was of the opinion that EA was a stage in the early 20s: "I think it is in the early stages of your twenties, twenty, twenty-one" (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.2). However, the majority of participants were of the opinion that this stage was not necessarily defined by a certain age: "For some people it will happen sooner than for others. He [Arnett] is putting ages 18-25 to it, but then maybe you will find 26-, 27-year olds that are still going through that" (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.65).

Participants explained that factors such as a person's environment would determine whether maturity would be reached earlier or later in life, for example: "It has to do with the environment that you grew up in. When I was finished with high school, some of the children start being responsible and took care of their siblings, but some people start doing that in Grade 10 or Grade 11. It depends on the people you grew up with. If you grew up with older people, it might have an impact on you, you might mature on an earlier age" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.10). Another participant also highlighted the burden of early responsibilities as a factor that might cause a person to become 'adult' sooner in life when he mentioned, "I think it can happen earlier, but then you are still not in that stage. You may start having responsibilities, you are forced into it" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par.

4.13). This concept of becoming an adult at a stage that is still deemed too young for adulthood was mentioned only by first-generation male participants. Another example is “Because I grew up with my uncles and everyone and I learned a lot of things when I was still 13 to 15. I didn’t spend much time with people that are the same age than me. I spent more time with people that are 5-6 years older than I am ... so they taught me a lot of things when I was still young” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.16).

Participants identified a variety of markers that could be associated with adulthood, such as certain thinking patterns, abilities or actions, for example: “For me, I think we cannot say that age determines adulthood, but I think the way we react, our thinking pattern, our reasoning ability – that actually determines that we have reached the adulthood stage. ... I think entering the adulthood stage has to be visible by the way you react, by the way you handle things, but sometimes it comes to one’s surprise if a 16-year-old does things that can be done by an adult” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.40).

The participants agreed that this stage is characterised by learning to be an adult: "I think it is ...where you still learn how to be an adult” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.2). Learning to be an adult also included learning to be more responsible and independent, as a participant mentioned: “In my opinion, I think emerging adulthood can be like exploring the adulthood; for example, you do things differently from when we were young or when you were in the adolescent stage. It is here where the responsibility starts” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.3).

**4.2.1.2 Personal identifications with EA.** By exploring where participants placed themselves on the developmental spectrum, most participants identified themselves as EAs. While they did not consider themselves adults yet, they felt that they were in the process of growing towards adulthood. For example: “I think I am in this stage because I am, I wouldn’t say burdened with responsibility but yes, I am burdened with responsibility and that comes with being an adult or growing to be one” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.2) and “I also think I am getting there” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.62). One first-generation participant was unsure whether he had moved beyond EA: “For me, I am not quite sure yet ... I am just being honest with you guys ... I don’t know if I am in that stage or not” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.16). Being treated like a child at home although participants were already attending HE institutions was also considered a reason for not reaching adulthood yet, for example: “I think I am still very young, far from adulthood.

(Laughter). I just turned 21 this year, but I wouldn't see myself as an adult now. It is my first year at this university and I am still treated like a child at home" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.64).

Many participants felt that they would conclude EA and enter adulthood when they were financially independent or got married. For example: "I think I will reach adulthood when I get married or when I start to think about marriage" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.60) and "I don't think I have reached adulthood since I am still depending on other people financially and things like that. If I can do things by myself, that is when I will say I have reached adulthood" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.63). Their own financial stability or, more specifically, not relying on parents for financial support anymore, was regarded to be the end of EA: "The moment I don't have to call my dad and ask for some money on the 15th, I feel like I have made it! But I still need money sometimes" (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.55). A clear difference between the generational groups was evident with regard to financial support from family. For continuous-generation participants, financial support from their family was prevalent, for example: "Even though I still rely on her for financial reasons, right now it is a bit different, because I make my own decisions" (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.5). In contrast to continuous-generation participants, most first-generation participants mentioned having a lack of financial support from their families: "...with not having a source of income from parents so you have to make decisions that are going to impact your future" (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.39).

Another difference that was noted between the different generational groups was that there seemed to be some resistance to becoming an adult among some continuous-generation participants, for example: "I don't know, when I look at adulthood, it seems like a serious thing ... and who wants that" (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.112), and "Yes, I'm just very close to it. You don't want to get there!" (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.109). One continuous-generation participant even shared his wish of not wanting to be an adult yet, but rather staying a child: "I think I'm pretty much a child all the time (laughs)" (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.5). Even though most participants classified themselves as EAs, in first-generation participants, there seemed to be a greater sense of moving towards the responsibility of being an adult.

In conclusion, although there were some variations in participants' responses, the majority of the participants agreed that EA was a transitional stage between adolescence and

adulthood. Most participants agreed that they would regard themselves in the developmental stage of EA and ‘not an adult yet’. Most participants also agreed that EA is marked by learning to be an adult (such as taking responsibility) or the process of becoming an adult. Although both generational groups deemed financial independence as the start of adulthood, a difference noted was how first-generation participants mentioned a lack of financial support from home whereas continuous-generation participants still had parents who provided for them financially. Continuous-generation participants indicated some resistance to entering adulthood, compared to their first-generation peers who more readily accepted the responsibility of becoming an adult. Compared to female participants, male participants were more likely to tend to extend their childhood.

**4.2.2 Theme 2: Relationships with others.** In this theme pertaining to relationships, the prioritising of relationships, the value of family and community, meeting new people, and diversity in relationships emerged as subthemes.

**4.2.2.1 Prioritising relationships with others.** Some participants stated that relationships should be prioritised. Friends were considered valuable assets in life, as they contribute to the process of understanding the world and learning how to socialise. Peer relationships were regarded as instruments to understanding the environment, socialisation, and ultimately the self. One participant highlighted the views of the participants when he mentioned the role of friendships in the process of making sense of others and the self: “Friends, because you learn from people, you learn from friends. A lot about yourself and just how people are” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.142). Participants portrayed insight in aligning the values of their friends with their own to ensure that these relationships would promote their future endeavours rather than delay it, for example: “As you evaluate yourself, you start looking at the way you associate yourself: ‘Who shall I associate myself with? Are they going to contribute to what I am looking forward to or are they actually going to hinder me, stop me from getting to where I want to get?’” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.44). Many participants were of the opinion that feelings of being isolated when facing the challenges in their new environment could be mitigated by the support of their peers. A participant mentioned, “You realise you can’t be alone, you can’t say you don’t need friends, you don’t need anyone – you need to go out and meet people” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.34). In general, participants seemed to be focussed on how relationships would contribute



to their own well-being and adaptation. Their motivations were more self-focussed, and they made less reference to how they could contribute to the lives of others by means of friendship.

**4.2.2.2 Relationships with family and the community.** Participants emphasised the role played by family and the community in their developing into interdependent individuals of society. Some participants viewed parents and the communities in which they grew up as valuable resources that contributed to self-knowledge, for example: “Family, parents definitely ... formed who I am” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.140). Participants suggested that their upbringing formed the foundation of who they are today and that family was regarded as the platform from which relationships were viewed. Some participants said the following: “How your parents raise you also plays a big role in identity” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.57), and “My identity is based on a lot of external factors like my family. That is where I identify myself and share their history. I also identify myself with the people I spend a lot of time with. How you identify yourself is part of learning” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.76). The influence of the community in which participants were brought up, and how members of the community influenced their lives became clear in statements by some participants, for example: “I think the environment plays a central role in making up your identity – the people that you are surrounded with, churches, schools...” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.55). In these statements, participants acknowledged the role of relationships with family and community in their identity development.

Some participants mentioned being isolated at university and not having the familial support that was evident while still residing with parents. University and the major changes it entails seemed to cause some confusion for participants: “I think a challenge is like ‘Where do you head to?’. Parents are spoon-feeding you at home and then coming here to university it makes a big difference whereby you stay on your own, and you don’t have that contact with your parents. At some point, you could have some chat with your mother or your father on a daily basis, but now it has changed ... Those are some of the challenges” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.6). Thus, being away from family and not having the support that was readily available when living at home, was considered a challenge for participants who attended university.

**4.2.2.3 Finding new relationships.** Several participants emphasised the value of meeting new people in this stage of their lives. One participant shared her opinion of how

forming new relationships assisted her in adapting to a new environment with challenges: “You need to go out and meet people, so that ... because it is a different society and a different social context. Meet people who are doing the same things as you when you are going to varsity, I think that will make your journey much easier” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.34). Another participant mentioned how these relationships could promote academic performance: “Even if you met different people here, they can teach you how to perform well ... You meet different people, even in the faculty – they can help” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.22). New relationships were also met with excitement: “Great things! I always wanted to do new things, meet new people, and try out a sport or a hobby I’ve not done” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.35). In contrast to the optimism of the participants just mentioned, one participant experienced establishing new relationships as daunting: “You go out to a place where you don’t know anyone – that’s quite a challenge to go out and actually to meet new people” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.33). In general, however, participants valued the role new friendships could play in their general well-being.

**4.2.2.4 Diversity in relationships with others.** Exposure to a diversity of people and the opportunities this exposure created for cultural awareness and broadening of cultural knowledge, were mentioned: “You learn how to treat people, you meet different people with different colours, different nations, you even meet people from New York and they say ‘in New York we do this and this’” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.22). Participants also mentioned how the exposure to diverse peers and cultures benefited them by changing their values and ideological thinking and introducing them to new ways of viewing the world: “It is good. I get to learn who I am, without ... like before I came here I had a lot of ideals that was the result of the environment that I grew up in” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.27). This exposure also allowed participants to achieve greater success in life: “Yes, there are a lot of possibilities in this stage. We are meeting different people, people with different social economic backgrounds. Every day we get exposed to different opportunities out there. There are a lot of opportunities for a person to succeed out there” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.44). The opportunity to engage with an environment characterised by cultural, racial, and social diversity allowed for greater knowledge and understanding of the world: “In my hometown, I was never exposed to different races, except for school where we did English, we did everything else in our home language. When you get here, you stay with people from different colours, different cultures, different countries. You learn how they live, and about

their different cultures” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.27). This understanding of diversity resulted in changes towards becoming a more mature individual: “When I go home now, I am a different person from who I was in matric. Because certain ideals changed when I came to campus” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.27).

In essence, most participants regarded existing relationships, meeting new people, and finding new relationships as beneficial aspects of the EA life stage. Some of the benefits mentioned were the significant role family and the community played in forming an identity, how friends could be helpful assets at university, and how people from diverse backgrounds could be the key to learning about various cultures and developing broadened worldviews.

**4.2.3 Theme 3: Self-discovery.** In all the focus group discussions, the theme of self-discovery was prevalent. Participants mentioned the need for self-discovery and the various aspects of this process. The subthemes of self-focus and new explorations through hardships, spirituality, and university exposure arose.

**4.2.3.1 Self-focus.** The topic of self-focus was discussed in all the focus groups. With regard to this subtheme, different opinions between the generational groups were clear from the beginning. According to many continuous-generation participants, the self was of cardinal importance when making decisions as opposed to first-generation participants who focused on the effect decisions have on others. Continuous-generation participants were of the opinion that their decisions in the past, which were focussed solely on others, resulted in their personal well-being being neglected: “At first, I used to think of myself right at the bottom. I would be like ‘I decide to do this, what is my mom going to think, what is my dad going to think, how is it going to affect them, my brother or my friends?’ and then only ‘how will I feel about it?’. It didn’t work because now I’m making a decision for myself, based on other people and then they are satisfied and their lives are going on, but then I’m at the same place, so I’ve stopped that” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.93). This realisation encouraged participants to make choices with the aim of benefitting the self and paying less attention to what consequences their decisions held for others: “... and then I suffer at the end, so if it is going to benefit me, I’m going to make that decision instead” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.99). Most of the continuous-generation participants were concerned about how choices would affect them, and little was mentioned about how others would perceive their choices or the effect it would have on others. Several continuous-generation participants supported this tendency: “So I first think of myself” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1,

par. 1.93), “I agree, that’s what life is about, do it for yourself” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.94), and “...Most of the time I just put myself first, I don’t think about other people, I don’t think about the consequences. I just think of myself, where I want to be, where I am going, where my decision is going to take me” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.45). In contrast to the self-focussed view of continuous-generation students, most first-generation participants stressed how individuals needed to be cognisant of others. Some participants explained: “I have to think about others a lot when making decisions ... My decisions affect others so I can’t make them on my own” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.51), and “Like again for example, if you move from home, you are the first one. Maybe your mother is bragging about you: ‘I got my first child gone to university!’ but then afterwards, you are coming back: ‘I’m fed up with the university life’. That might give your mother a heart attack! Imagine how many lives you are affecting. Millions of millions. That’s why I’m saying – you have to consider the crowds, the environment” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.37). These first-generation participants clearly felt compelled to prioritise others’ well-being above their own desires. This view was particularly prominent in situations of financial strain: “When I get money, I have to think ‘this much is for this’ and ‘that much is for that’ so I can’t just make everything about me. I know there are people who need the money more than I do” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.52), and “When coming to clothes I can’t just say ‘I need clothes’, I have to think about others. I have to think about the small ones, what they are going to eat at school. I am old, I can survive hunger, but with them, they are too small, they can’t survive hunger. I think you have to consider other people when making decisions” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.55). To not be self-focussed when making decisions was considered an obligation for FGS, and ensuring others were not affected negatively was considered a necessity, for example: “When making a decision, I think you have to consider others, because like he said it influences a lot of people. It is the right thing to do. It is a necessity” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.54).

**4.2.3.2 *New and deeper explorations of self.*** The theme of self-discovery emerged as some participants mentioned how exploring personal values and beliefs formed a central feature of EA. Some participants stressed the value of learning through experimenting with endeavours that were new to them: “You will only learn new things about yourself if you leave your comfort zone” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.117), and “I think I try out things to get to know myself ... Being part of this study can be one example. So, I try out everything that I can” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.67). Constant evaluation

of the environment, internal values, and behaviour was also regarded as vital in discovering who a person is in relation to others. Some participants even viewed self-evaluation as an essential precursor to self-discovery, for example: “I think self-discovery is very important. At a certain stage, one needs to discover themselves, but before we discover who we are, I think we first need to consider self-evaluation ... evaluate our self, evaluate our surroundings. Then, self-discovery is very possible” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.44). Personal virtues and vulnerabilities would become evident because of evaluating and experimenting with the self and the environment. Participants stated, “I try out stuff to see my weaknesses and strengths and stuff (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.67), and “I think it is more important to do self-evaluation, you look at the people surrounding you, you look at the things hindering you to get to a stage where you fully discovered who you are, what you can do, what you are capable of doing” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.44). In essence, emphasis was placed on learning about the self and developing as an individual.

**4.2.3.3 *Hardships contributing to self-reflection and discovery.*** Participants were of the opinion that hardships could be regarded as a fundamental contributing factor in identity development. When asked what contributed to their identity formation, some participants answered, “My hardships – that is it” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.76), and “I believe my identity is formed by how I grew up, my surroundings, and by the challenges I faced along the way” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.73). These challenges or hardships seemed to be factors that shaped all participants’ identities, although the types of hardships they faced were often different. Hardships also facilitated growth and endurance for participants when they viewed it from a positive mindset and saw the potential it had to create resilience. The way in which one perceives hardships would determine whether the hardships assist in self-development or cause disintegration of the self: “I don’t look at a challenge and saw how much I suffered. I look at it and see how much it can build me, not how much it can break me. When I say, ‘my identity was built by my hardships’ I mean that the hardships have actually made me the strong person that I am today. I know I can face anything right now with boldness” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.81). Another participant highlighted the inevitability of challenges or hardships and how these served as opportunities for acquiring knowledge: “I just wait for challenges to come. Then I learn from them” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.65).

**4.2.3.4 Spirituality and the self.** Spirituality was regarded as a protective factor that motivated participants to endure and face difficult challenges. Spirituality was portrayed as a source of courage and support during difficult circumstances for example: “I know I can face anything right now with boldness. I know my God is behind me with anything that I do” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.81). University provides a variety of opportunities with regard to spirituality, as participants are exposed to different people with different beliefs. With regard to meeting locations or communities, multiple options are available when it comes to joining a certain spiritual group. One participant supported this statement when he said, “There are various churches in here [university], there are various fellowships in here” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.45). Spirituality seems to allow participants to explore and discover more about themselves. The following serves as an example of the spiritual effect in participants’ lives: “Everything that is happening now is a miracle. I never thought I’m this guy who loves church, who loves Christ, but when coming to this university, I have discovered myself because ... When I was in school I hated church, but now I have discovered myself and I am still busy to discover myself” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.45). The need for spiritual intervention in a life stage and environment where many uncertainties surface was evident in the focus group discussions. A participant captured the views of the group with the following statement: “We can only pray to the Lord that He intervenes in this nation. The things that we are experiencing day by day are actually a sign of instability” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.17). Ultimately, spirituality created stability and safety for participants during their EA years.

**4.2.3.5 Attending university and leaving home as facilitating factors.** University creates a platform where experimentation and challenges assist in negotiating a new self in relation to others and the world. The following are some examples of these personal explorations: “Like trying new things? Yes, I think that is what varsity is about as well. Try as many things as you can, meet new people” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.117). Participants mentioned that they experienced a transformation when they left home and entered HE. One participant added how the process of adapting to the university environment had caused him to change and grow as an individual. This transition allowed greater self-knowledge and ultimately greater insight into his academic potential: “I think I have started trying to figure out who am I, what do I like, because sometimes we tend to overlook things ... Ever since I got to university, I am passing with flying colours. All my first semester modules were distinctions and it seems like it is possible with my second semester modules as well. That only

took place after I discovered my possible potential levels, my capabilities, and myself. After I think, ‘you know what, I’m not the person I think I was. I’m a different person. I could do this.’ I thought I cannot get that far – I can even get beyond that” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.44).

Both generational groups mentioned the difficulties posed by the transition to HE. Some continuous-generation participants highlighted the challenges associated with attending HE institutions. Participants were also cognisant of the reality of the HE setting, for example: “Especially by being by yourself, like without your parents ... It’s a very big adjustment” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.16;1.18). However, it was clear that first-generation participants found the process of adapting to university more difficult than their continuous-generation peers did. This caused higher levels of anxiety among first-generation participants, as the responsibility for self-discipline was greater, for example: “I think there is something that I spotted from what he said, especially when he was speaking about the transition, uhm ... that takes place from home to university ... That transition I think when entering in an adulthood stage sometimes brings a lot of challenges because now you have to be on your own, independence like he emphasised, and you have to make sure that everything is done in time by yourself” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.7). The major issue concerning this transition, as mentioned by participants, was not having support structures that kept you accountable, which could lead to academic failure. In contrast to living at home and being motivated to succeed, the responsibility to practise study skills and self-discipline was now solely the participant’s responsibility: “That creates a bit of a problem because some of us could only study because our parents are reinforcing the attitude to study. Now you can even look at the achievement rate or the passing percentage, we can be cognisant with regard to that. The impact that is created by the transition is very great because we tend to drop with regard to marks because there is no one to see if the homework is done properly, no one to make sure the assignments is submitted in time, you are on your own ... There is no one to follow you, there is no one to tell you to do your homework, you are on your own...” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.7). Compared to continuous-generation participants, first-generation participants were more concerned about the transition to HE, the risks the transition involved, and the struggle of adaptation. In essence, university was considered not only an environment that needed to be adapted to, but also an environment that required greater independence, which participants found challenging.

A lack of having knowledgeable others at home who understand HE and the university environment could sometimes pose additional threats to the joys of EA. A participant mentioned, “If there were someone maybe who experienced varsity, maybe he would come back, maybe home, and give a bit back because at some point maybe in terms of books – NASFAS catered only for 6 books and I have to buy another one, they think maybe you are lying. They think you just want money for yourself. You see, if there were someone who has been there ...” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.8). This lack of knowledge about university resulted in confusion and also limited communication with the university: “Even at my home, they know me, I am at the University of the Free State, but they don’t even know where is that University of the Free State, so it becomes a challenge, a very big challenge because let’s say I need R4000, they can’t even get in contact with the university and see what is happening there” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.8). Some first-generation participants reckoned university was easier for continuous-generation peers who had the support and knowledge from home: “For the coming generation, that must be easy” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.8).

For both first-generation and continuous-generation participants, self-discovery was a very important and central feature in the developmental stage in which they were. Both groups stressed the need for greater self-discovery and thus self-knowledge. In their journey towards self-discovery, most participants perceived hardship as challenges that assisted in the process of identity formation. Several participants relied on spirituality when facing hardships, and spirituality also seemed to bring about change and growth. Some differences were noted between first-generation participants and continuous-generation participants with regard to the importance of self. First-generation participants were cognisant of the effect their choices would have on others, whereas continuous-generation participants tended to focus more on themselves and how decisions would benefit them personally. Both groups felt great excitement towards university life, however, they also mentioned that challenges were faced amidst the excitement. First-generation participants tended to find the adaptation to university life even more difficult than continuous-generation participants did.

**4.2.4 Theme 4: Priorities during this stage.** The fourth main theme focuses on the priorities experienced during the developmental stage of EA. Some subthemes that emerged were seeing opportunity, hoping to find happiness, responsibility, independence, decision making, living with uncertainty, and facing expectations and pressure.



**4.2.4.1 Seeing opportunity.** Numerous participants were of the opinion that EA was a life stage characterised by various opportunities that were not previously available to them, for example: “There are many possibilities at university” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.22), and “It [EA] is indeed a time of possibilities, everything is possible from now on” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.21). University seemed to create an ideal platform for participants to explore a variety of possibilities in terms of social development and academic endeavours. The following was mentioned: “Yes indeed. It is the stage of possibilities because being in the university itself, it exposes me to a different type of environment, different type of people, different type of opportunities ... It is a stage of possibilities, it is a stage whereby one can actually show people who they are, make sure that they get those best marks” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.21). However, participants demonstrated insight as they acknowledged the responsibility to embrace opportunities, for example: “... and it is up to the individual whether they grab those opportunities or let go of them” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.21). Participants suggested that the social, academic, and cultural exposure at university created opportunities for achieving success in the future. One participant summarised the groups’ thoughts when he stated, “Yes, there are a lot of possibilities in this stage. We are meeting different people, people with different social economic backgrounds. Every day we get exposed to different opportunities out there. There are a lot of opportunities for a person to succeed out there” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.44).

**4.2.4.2 Hoping to find happiness.** Reaching a state of happiness was something only continuous-generation participants regarded as a goal of EA. Many parents of continuous-generation participants also seemed to be more concerned about their children’s well-being rather than the level of success they achieved, for example: “It’s the same with me, I’m not under any pressure from home” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.175). Although some continuous-generation participants had parents who might mention success, the general tendency was that parents wanted their children to be happy. This was clear in the following statements by participants: “My parents always tell me, ‘We expect of you to be the best that you can be and to succeed and in the end, you are happy with what you have done’... They have given us clay to build some pots with it. I think their expectation is my expectation and maybe beyond, but because I know they are not pressuring me in any way or they do not show it, we expect the same. Be the best that you can be and be happy with what you have done” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.175), and “My family is not very

enthusiastic. As long as I am doing what I want, my family is fine” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.110). Something that was also quite prevalent among continuous-generation participants was how the ultimate goal in life was to be satisfied or happy. This goal was also the driving force behind decision-making, for example: “This is what will make me happy, that’s my core thing, I will always try to do things that make me happy” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.98). Thus, continuous-generation participants were more inclined to focus on their own success and well-being.

**4.2.4.3 Taking responsibility.** A few participants mentioned the responsibility that came with having the mentioned opportunities and possibilities. Participants also highlighted the competitiveness that these opportunities would elicit. For example: “I think possibilities are there ... opportunities are there, but it comes with responsibilities. But the competition is intense in everything. It is a 50/50 thing” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.46). Some participants showed insight into the characteristics of EA and adulthood. One of the characteristics identified was having newfound responsibilities, as participants no longer had the support they had been used to during the adolescent life stage. This was evident from the following statement of a participant: “Either it can be on the family side or the responsibility of yourself – being independent” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.3). The added responsibilities of EA were also deemed as arduous and another participant stressed the resistance to entering the new life stage following adolescence. He stated, “I don’t know ... It [EA] seems like a serious thing ... something that’s serious so like responsibilities” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.112).

Some first-generation male participants felt like they had the responsibility “to pay back” in life. One of these participants even expressed some guilt when he talked about the responsibility to persevere, which was caused by the guilt experienced because of sacrifices others made for participants: “It took my parents five years caring for me. Sometime I spend three years in hospital and they were there coming to see me so I don’t have a reason to quit. They did their best, so I have to do my best” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.82). The fact that parents sacrificed financially and emotionally also served as encouragement to endure. Again, a responsibility to “pay back” was evident: “Yes, because like I said earlier, it took my mom a bad, tough five years to raise me to get to primary school. It was hard for her. I was sick and we had to go from Qwa-Qwa to Bloemfontein two times a month. It took my parents five years caring for me. Sometime I spend three years in hospital and they were there

coming to see me so I don't have a reason to quit" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.82). Another participant stressed the concern for others' situations and how there was a responsibility to ensure that others' circumstances were improved: "I see that I have to work hard, otherwise things will be worse for them [parents]" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.77). Some first-generation participants felt obligated to be cognisant of others when making decisions. This came because of being the first individuals from a family to enter university. Great weight was placed on considering others in the decision-making process and the effect decisions would have on others: "That's why I'm saying – you have to consider the crowds, the environment" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.37). This responsibility to "pay back" or consider others was not evident among continuous-generation participants, who tended to focus on themselves and strived only for happiness, as was mentioned previously. It was also clear that first-generation male participants experienced greater responsibility to "pay back".

**4.2.4.4 *Striving towards independence.*** There was urgency among participants to be independent, free beings who fulfilled their own needs. Financial independence was one of the most significant forms of independence highlighted by participants and was regarded as the key factor to a comfortable life, free from worries: "Just living life comfortably, not just meeting my needs, but that and beyond. Not worrying about who is going to pay my sons' school fees, where am I going to get the money, knowing that everything is paid up and I want to have a stress-free life" (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.170) and "... since I am still depending on other people financially and things like that. If I can do things by myself, that is when I will say I have reached adulthood" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.63).

With this need for independence, some participants seemed to comprehend that it would bring about certain challenges, for example: "It becomes a very big challenge to us in university because at some point we can tell you 'we don't have money' and at that time maybe you urgently need something that will help you to be good or maybe help you to perform well, maybe again to contribute in your adulthood. Being independent is something different" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.6). A lack of financial support would lead to frustration and uncertainty, which in turn might even assist in becoming independent. One student complained, "I think a challenge is like 'Where do you head to?'... Now you have to get some airtime if there is no airtime and it will affect you also emotionally" (FGS, male participant,

Focus Group 3, par. 3.6). Socio-economic status was also considered a determining factor to financial support from home. Lack of financial support to participants who come from impoverished backgrounds also seemed to be a threat to academic success: “Even like performing here in your studies, it can still affect you. Then again, the background that you are from, the economy at home, the parents at home – maybe they are only capable, they only have money to supply for the family. If you are isolated in some place, they have to give a certain amount of their money and deposit it to you to survive where you are” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.6). From this, it was clear that, although participants insisted on being independent, they realised that independence also brought about challenges and especially financial strain.

Some first-generation participants mentioned the long-lasting effects associated with a lack of financial support, especially from family structures. The lack of financial support meant greater independence in making decisions but also greater dependence on other sources of financial support for academic pursuits, for example: “... with not having a source of income from parents so you have to make decisions that are going to impact your future” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.39). First-generation participants related to one another on this issue and regarded financial strain and being dependent on some form of financial relief, as a universal issue among them: “Like we are first-generation students and struggling financially” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.47).

**4.2.4.5 The importance of challenges regarding decision making.** Both generational groups agreed that the greatest challenge they were facing in EA was decision-making. The responsibility to make choices that will have lasting consequences intimidated participants. Some responded as follows: “For me it is decision making. It is very difficult to make decisions on your own and the products of choice kills me” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.16), and “I agree with the other three colleagues; the most significant challenge is the decision making. You have a lot of decisions in your hand like who to make friends with, with who are you going and if you make the wrong choice, it will face you directly. So, all I’m saying is decision making is most difficult challenge in this stage” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.21). Participants suggested that individuals should acquire the skill of making good decisions and that previous generations could serve as resources for learning how to make better decisions: “When I compare it [his future] with my parents, they did not have the opportunities but in terms of decision making, they were good. So we have to learn to make

good choices” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.83). As seen earlier, another challenge found among participants was the importance placed on others or the self as motives for making decisions: “I am a very selfish person when it comes to decision making. I always put myself first. That’s a situation where I have to be selfish” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.43).

**4.2.4.6 Living with uncertainty.** Most participants regarded the EA stage as an unpredictable stage of life during which many uncertainties surfaced. Some participants’ expressions were the following: “I think with students it is always going to be unstable” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.28), and “It is unstable. Every aspect in my life ... academically, emotionally, everything is just unstable, because I am still developing now. So it’s really unstable” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.37). Together with this life stage being unstable, one participant added indecisiveness as a characteristic of EA: “You can’t really explain how unstable this phase is and you change your mind just like this” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.31). Participants argued that this instability was due to multiple factors of daily life that were unavoidable, for example: “I think one would say this is a time of instability indeed, because as much as one wants to be stable, you have to consider all the aspects that actually encompass your life” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.17).

Various daily uncertainties that surface and that affect a person’s life were related to the country in which participants lived and their surrounding environment. A participant mentioned, “One could say for instance you look at the economic aspect, your academic aspect, social aspect and also political aspect but not in a certain context, but rather looking at the indirect influence that it has towards you. So ... I would say this is a moment of instability, because you look at the rand is dropping and doing this and that” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.17). Another participant mentioned the urgency with which one should face uncertainties: “Some of the things doesn’t affect us directly, but indirectly, so we cannot ignore them, we cannot neglect them because it doesn’t affect us directly, but we need to be cognisant that they do affect us. That brings a bit of an imbalance in our lives” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.17). Even though individuals were motivated to achieve academic goals and avoid any possible disruptions, some unforeseen circumstances could disrupt an environment completely and result in unaccomplished goals. An example of a disruption in the university environment mentioned by a participant was the possibility of a student protest:

“Recently we have been hearing about the upcoming strike, what would bring to you. You are keen to write your exams, you are ready to do everything, but now there is an upcoming strike. What does that imply? Now you can see there is current instability in our lives although we may try to stabilise some of the things” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.17).

Some participants insisted that the instability experienced was because of simultaneously experiencing characteristics of adolescence and adulthood: “For me, let me say I’m in between. Let’s call it a developmental stage. We are getting exposed to a lot of things so I won’t say my life is stable or not. I will just say I am in a development stage between a lot of things” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.36), and “I think that sometimes you can feel like ‘Woah, is what I’m doing right?’ or whatever. Or ‘Am I on the right track, am I going in the right place sometimes?’ And then, you have times where you feel like ‘I know I’m doing what I like’. It goes through stages for me, that’s what I found out” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.50).

Contradictory to the instability and uncertainty that most participants experienced, was the stability experienced during EA by two continuous-generation participants: “Joh ... Is life messy basically? I don’t know, I try to keep it as stable as possible” (CGS, male participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.45), and “I also feel if everything is basically just ... stable” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.48). However, most participants from both generational and gender groups seemed to agree that they were in a very unstable stage of life with many uncertainties. Some highlighted the different factors that contributed to this instability.

**4.2.4.6 Facing expectations and pressure.** Some participants acknowledged the expectations of family or the communities in which they were brought up. First-generation participants mentioned the importance of living up to expectations of others and the perseverance it took to live up to these expectations. The following quote serves as an example: “It means a lot to me that they believe in me, they want the best for me and believe that I will finish. They do believe in me so they are expecting a lot from me” (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.90). First-generation participants were focussed on living up to expectations and in essence not disappointing significant others. These expectations could sometimes pose great challenges, as pressure was experienced to live up to the expectations. A participant explained, “They [family] believe I am a leader. They always call me nicknames which are encouraging. Like they say ‘Hay Mr CEO, Mr CEO...’ It encourages me to work

hard. I don't want that nickname and end up being something else" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.88). First-generation participants felt great pressure from their families to perform well academically and mentioned the responsibility placed on them to succeed, for example: "My little brother always says, 'We are going to your house one day' ... They have these high expectations, so it is important to work hard" (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.87), and "From my family, I am the first one to enter university, I was the first one in the community to pass Grade 11 ... so my family is expecting a lot, more specifically, my father" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.91). The pressure participants experienced was not necessarily directly communicated by the family members. Participants, however, portrayed insight into family dynamics and the difficult positions in which they were with regard to unspoken expectations and pressure, for example: "My family is really expecting a lot from me. They haven't really said it, but you can see it from their attitude. They want me to be a successful person in life and earn a lot of money. They are really expecting a lot from me" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.89), and "Even though my parents don't give me encouraging words due to the fact that I am emotional, I know they are encouraging me in the way they act and the things they do" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.77). The great pressure and responsibility that comes with expectations from significant others was reiterated in the following words of a first-generation participant: "Even the community says, 'You are the one that is going to change the situation at home.' That is encouraging. I see that I have to work hard, otherwise things will be worse for them" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.77).

The issue of being treated like successful individuals who have achieved great success was also mentioned as a form of pressure in EA for first-generation participants. Two first-generation participants briefly highlighted the confusion and pressure experienced to live up to certain expectations when others viewed them as already accomplished individuals, for example: "Yes, they [family] put pressure on you. I know I am just a first year, but they are treating me as I am something big and I know I am only beginning this difficult journey" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.92), and "Like he said, it is how they treat you. It is different now from how it was" (FGS, female participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.94). This struggle was mentioned only by first-generation participants as something that was experienced because of having had an opportunity to become educated. Pressure from family was even generalised as a struggle faced by all first-generation students: "I think we share a common goal. All of our parents expect something from us" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par.

4.91). In essence, the pressure that participants faced and the expectations from their families and communities seemed to encourage them to persevere and to excel. However, it was clear that these expectations caused stress in participants' lives and that they experienced a sense of guilt that motivated them to endure.

In summary: Participants seemed to agree that many possibilities and opportunities were readily available in EA and that the university environment was the ideal environment to be exposed to those possibilities and opportunities. Most participants seemed to agree that EA had newfound responsibilities. Some participants were optimistic about the idea of more responsibilities, while others were not optimistic. Participants clearly had the need to be independent, especially financially, and almost all participants agreed that EA was still a time of some dependence. It was clear that students faced different challenges with regard to expectations and pressure from home and that the pressure and expectations sometimes burdened participants with a sense of guilt. One clear difference was noted as continuous-generation participants' focus was to find happiness and first-generation participants were more focussed on others. First-generation participants were focussed on working hard and being who their family believed them to be and "paying back" for what had been done for them. A gender difference was also evident among first-generation participants, as male participants clearly showed a greater degree of responsibility to "pay back" in life.

**4.2.5 Theme 5: A perspective on what is next.** Participants discussed various views of their future. They made comparisons with their parents' lives, and considered future success. They also contemplated the possibility of marriage.

**4.2.5.1 *My opportunity-filled life compared to my parents' life.*** Most participants were of the opinion that their lives would be filled with greater levels of success and more opportunities compared to their parents' lives, for example: "I think my future is going to be brighter than my parents' life" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.79), and "Humans are made to evolve so what is the point if you just keep doing things the same way. Our parents reached one thing, we always try to reach higher" (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.91). For most participants, obtaining an academic qualification would lead to several possibilities and contribute to a more attractive future. Academic achievements would allow individuals to pursue a variety of careers and be prosperous. Several participants stated, "... because I will graduate and get a degree while my parents couldn't graduate at all or get any certificate" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.79), and "Our future of this



generation is more productive; for example, our parents never go to school until this far, but I'm the one again who is going to school. It is a privilege and again it is positive. If I can have a degree, it is something else. The doors are open. It gives you a personal experience ... an exposure ... to different fields" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.63).

Another prevalent phenomenon noted among some first-generation participants was the opportunity to attain a qualification that was not yet held by anyone else in the community. These participants would possibly become "firsts" in their families or communities. These were some of their responses: "Ten years to come I think, or I know, I will be the first doctor, who was a patient to become a doctor, an upcoming neurologist, a surgeon. I will be the first one" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.72) and "I will be the first to finish university, from my community I will be the first and I will be a psychologist. That is the biggest opportunity I have received" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.73).

Many participants were filled with great optimism about their future because of the possibilities that were available to them in the HE environment, for example: "My future is good. When I compare it with my parents, they did not have the opportunities" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.83), and "My future is very positive, because I have been exposed to a lot of opportunities in life, getting to travel around the world – that is something that my parents never do" (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.82). The opportunities offered at university served as a motivational factor and inspired them to be proactive, for example: "Well, between the ages of 18 and 25 there shouldn't be anything that's stopping you to achieve anything you want, because you are still young and your mind is still fresh and you are not settled at some company and you know that's where you work and that's it. If you want to start a business or something, you should be able to get it on its feet, because you are still, I don't want to say you are still young ... you are still allowed to dream fully and achieve those dreams" (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.84).

The opportunity to create a more prosperous and successful future also served as encouragement to pursue greater goals. Not to disappoint significant others, participants were motivated to work hard and reach success. This was clear in statements like the following: "It is like being a millionaire – you have that fear of one day losing this money, so you keep on working hard. If you fail, you also fail other people, because other people are looking up to you. I view my future as positive because I get exposed to a lot of things. Not just from university, like I said I love to read a lot of books. That is how I learn a lot of things" (FGS,

male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.82). The chance to be an inspiration to others was also mentioned as a motivational factor: “In that process, you start to inspire other people and when you inspire other people you keep on working harder” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.82).

Participants shared their experiences of having many people who depended on them for financial aid. The pressure placed on these participants by their communities served as encouragement to persevere. The dynamics experienced by participants were captured by what this participant said: “I also get a lot of support from my family, even my community. The person that I am now, the person that I am back at home, are the same person I am in the future, because attitude and respect is firstly important. Even the community says, ‘You are the one that is going to change the situation at home’. That is encouraging” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 3, par. 3.77).

Although most participants agreed that their future looked more promising than that of their parents’ lives, first-generation participants seemed even more optimistic than their continuous-generation peers were.

**4.2.5.2 To marry or not to marry?** Some participants briefly mentioned marriage and the possibility of marriage in the future. A few female participants voiced their thoughts about marriage. They said, “... what else – marriage, I’m not a romantic, but I feel like I want to get married” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 1, par. 1.170), “Our class had a discussion today and said that after honours one will get married and I sat there and realised, ‘I don’t want to get married, I have a lot of plans for myself and I don’t think marriage fits into it’” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.95), and “Marriage and kids are not at all in my plan for the future for the next 20 to 25 years. I had this idea since Grade 7 and I still feel the same! I had a lot of experiences and realise I don’t want to have kids, cuz so much can go wrong and so much can go right ... and I don’t want to get married because marriage statistics in South Africa have not been promising” (CGS, female participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.97).

Male participants seemed to be more optimistic than females about the idea of marriage in the future. Some male participants spoke with greater assurance about the possibility of choosing a life partner and marriage in the future: “Next ten years – marriage, and one or two kids and success where I am working. That is where I see myself in ten years” (CGS, male

participant, Focus Group 2, par. 2.98), and “I think I will reach adulthood when I get married or when I start to think about marriage” (FGS, male participant, Focus Group 4, par. 4.60).

Thus, most participants agreed that their future would most likely be more attractive and successful compared to their parents’ lives and that this was because of being exposed to various opportunities. Most participants were enthusiastic about their future and regarded it as a time filled with opportunities and achievable goals. First-generation participants were even more enthusiastic about their future. Opportunity was also associated with the responsibility to succeed and support others. Only a few mentioned the possibility of marriage.

### **4.3 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, both quantitative and qualitative results of this mixed-methods study were presented. In the quantitative section, significant differences in the dimensions of EA and views of the future between the gender and generational groups were reported. FGSs identified more with the dimensions of EA and were more positive about their future compared to CGSs, while females identified with the dimensions of EA more intensely than males did.

The various themes and subthemes that emerged from the qualitative thematic analyses, as well as nuances between generational and gender groups, were presented. Various prominent themes emerged. Firstly, most participants associated with the life stage of EA, characterised by the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Secondly, participants acknowledged the role family, the community, friends, and new acquaintances played in their lives. Thirdly, participants prioritised self-discovery mainly through facing challenges, hardships, and university life. Fourthly, participants highlighted that EA was filled with opportunities and possibilities, but also greater responsibility, independence, instability, and pressure. Lastly, participants viewed their future as brighter than their parents’ lives and were optimistic with regard to all the opportunities that were readily available for them.

Although many similarities surfaced across generational and gender groups, some differences were noted. A slight resistance towards adulthood was evident among some continuous-generation participants, whereas their first-generation peers more readily accepted the responsibility of becoming adults. Continuous-generation participants were also more concerned about leading pleasant lives and did not experience the amount of pressure their first-generation peers faced. For first-generation participants, being “firsts” in their communities and families was a source of pride, motivation, and pressure. These participants

saw themselves as role models for others and did not want to disappoint those who had faith in them and who sacrificed to provide them with opportunities, and expected much from them. However, first-generation participants also mentioned a lack of financial support, resulting in emotional stress in adapting to and achieving at university. With regard to decision-making, first-generation participants reflected more cognisance of others and felt obligated to ensure others were not affected negatively by their decisions, whereas continuous-generation participants were more focussed on themselves. First-generation participants seemed especially enthusiastic about their future, compared to their parents' lives.

A few gender differences were also evident. Male (especially first-generation) participants showed a greater responsibility towards "paying back" in life. Also, the issue of entering adulthood at a younger age was mentioned only by first-generation male participants. This phenomenon of entering adulthood at a younger age was as a result of growing up around older family members or having greater responsibilities at a young age. Female participants were more optimistic about meeting new people, eager to learn from a diverse range of people, and to postpone marriage than male participants were.

These results are discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion of Research Results**

In this chapter, the results of this study are discussed by comparing the findings with literature in the field of EA and student development. Results regarding the identification with EA are highlighted and discussed. Next, the differences between FGSs and CGSs with regard to the dimensions of EA and views of the future are presented, followed by a discussion of the differences between gender groups. Unique experiences of EA and views of the future are compared with previous research. A summary concludes the chapter.

### **5.1 Tendencies Related to the Identification with the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood and Views of the Future**

In this study, a strong association with the dimensions of EA was evident. In the quantitative section of the study, all participants reported high scores on the IDEA. The qualitative results confirmed that the participants experienced the dimensions of EA and, consequently, regarded themselves as EAs. This was true for FGSs and CGSs, as well as males and females. When asked with which developmental stage they related, the majority of the participants (49.2%) regarded themselves as in between adolescence and adulthood. The qualitative discussion reiterated this, as participants frequently mentioned feeling in between, while vacillating between being dependent on others but also enjoying new-found independence. This concurs with findings of research studies among EAs, revealing that individuals feel like they have reached adulthood in some ways but not in others (Arnett & Walker, 2015). For example, in a study done among students, 69% of the participants indicated that they regarded themselves as adult in some ways, but not in others, thus in between (Nelson & Barry, 2005). Arnett (2001, 2014) states that feeling in between in EA is as a result of still being dependent on others for guidance, like adolescents, and simultaneously experiencing pressure to be more independent, like adults. Therefore, although some theorists (Silva, 2016; Syed, 2015) suggest that EA is not a universal life stage, the current study supports Arnett's (2014) statement of EA being a life stage evident among EAs from diverse backgrounds and SES.

Participants identified most with the identity dimension of EA, relating to 'a time of defining yourself'. Identity exploration was also a prominent theme in the focus group discussions. Participants highlighted the value of self-discovery, and university life, hardships, or challenges were said to facilitate identity exploration. Identity development is most

prominent in EA and is even regarded as the most central dimension (Arnett, 2014; Reifman et al., 2007). Universities provide a unique environment where identity exploration lies central to student development (Cross & Johnson, 2008; Liversage et al., 2017). This study confirmed the centrality of identity exploration during the EA years.

In this study, of all the dimensions, association with the dimension of instability (e.g. ‘a time of feeling stressed out’) was the lowest on the IDEA. Luyckx, De Witte, and Goossens (2011) also found only a moderate amount of instability among EAs. Instability is deemed greater when EAs do not view themselves as adults (Luyckx et al., 2011) and identity capital is viewed as a protective factor against instability (Hendry & Kloep, 2007). These studies seem to suggest that when EAs identify with adulthood and have greater identity capital, the experience of instability would be lower. The current study might confirm this statement: Although most participants regarded themselves as in between stages, the remaining participants were more inclined to the idea of being adults (39%) rather than adolescents (11.8%). In the qualitative section, however, participants frequently mentioned how many uncertainties surfaced during EA. For example, unpredictable factors of daily life, indecisiveness, simultaneously experiencing characteristics of adolescence and adulthood, decision-making, and pressure from family or significant others were regarded as contributing factors to the instability experienced during EA. This qualitative finding, high identification with instability, corresponds with previous research that highlights the tension and increased uncertainty when students live in unstable societies with uncertain career paths (Guichard, 2015; Savickas et al., 2009). In general, students are regarded as EAs who experience the dimensions of EA more intensely due to the university environment to which they are exposed (Arnett, 2016b). Arnett (2004b) even states how instability can be classified as the greatest distinguishing factor of EA.

With regard to views of the future, all participants were optimistic about what the future holds and seemed to believe that their lives would be greater than that of their parents. In the qualitative section of this study, this was confirmed. The optimism was said to be because of having many opportunities that participants’ parents did not have. Participants also believed that their future careers would be filled with success. Being positive about the future was confirmed in many studies among EAs (Arnett & Schwab, 2012; Bishop & Willis, 2014; Waters et al., 2011). Waters et al. (2011) also found that this optimism was due to the range of possibilities that are readily available during EA. Arnett and Walker (2014) found that as many

as 77% of the EAs in their study anticipated that their future would be better than their parents' lives. This can be explained by the tendency of EAs to believe they can do anything or become anything (Arnett & Schwab, 2012; Waters et al., 2011).

In the current study, although participants had doubts about SA and the challenges experienced in the country (such as economic instability, crime, and violence), they were still anticipating a bright future. This finding correlates with research by Bishop and Willis (2014), who state that EAs are positive about their future even though they have some concerns about the current state of the world. Therefore, the current study supports the perspective that the EA years are regarded as optimistic.

Of all the scores on the *VFQ*, participants scored lowest on the item related to how they view their future personal relationships in comparison with those of their parents. During the qualitative discussions, participants communicated the immense value of current personal relationships with family and friends but did not make much reference to future relationships.

## **5.2 Generational Differences Regarding the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood and Views of the Future**

The current study revealed that there were significant differences between the different generational groups in the association with the dimensions of EA. FGSs identified stronger with the dimensions of EA and experienced the different dimensions of EA more intensely than their CGS peers did. FGSs mentioned the struggles they faced at university, including experiencing financial difficulties, having difficulty adapting to university life, facing pressure from home, as well as being responsible for others in their communities.

Financial instability was one of the greatest forms of instability for FGSs, while CGSs reported financial support from home. The lack of financial support FGSs experienced was associated with a greater chance of academic failure and heightened levels of emotional stress. In previous studies, differing experiences of university life have also been reported (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). Compared to their CGSs peers, FGSs face greater challenges, which include higher drop-out rates, financial instability, and greater academic challenges (Martinez et al., 2009; Modipane, 2011; Steyn, 2016; Strydom et al., 2010). Financial difficulties and a lack of support and motivation from family, affect FGSs' academic achievement (Modipane, 2011). This financial strain is often due to low SES backgrounds (Nomdo, 2017). CGSs are usually from higher SES backgrounds (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011). Owing to university

being a traumatic experience for FGSs, they are also most likely to explore their identities to adapt to the new university culture (Nomdo, 2017). All of these findings correspond to the findings of the current study, which indicate how FGSs experience the dimensions of EA more intensely.

In this study, it was clear that FGSs experienced the transition to university more difficult than CGSs did. FGSs explained this tendency in the light of the contrasting environments they were exposed to at home and university. Together with this, FGSs mentioned how they often did not receive the needed support from home because their parents did not have knowledge about HE and the university environment. In the current study, it was evident that FGSs experienced difficulties in adapting to university because of this. This finding corresponds with a study done by Badenhorst and Kapp (2013), which indicated that FGSs had trouble at university due to not having knowledgeable others at home who could assist them with their HE challenges. Findings from another study also indicated that this experience was evident among FGSs, as their parents did not know how to relate to their university-attending child (Liversage et al., 2017). Previous researchers (Thaver, 2006; Vincent & Idahosa, 2014) also state that the transition from rural settings with established cultural practices to urban HE settings with diverse cultural experiences is difficult for FGSs. CGSs are considered more prepared for university, as they attend higher quality secondary education and find it easier to adapt to the academic standard of HE (Stephens et al., 2012). FGSs also feel in between, as they struggle to balance the independence and freedom that are found at university with the need they still have for support and being dependent on others (Liversage et al., 2017). Thus, the current study aligns with previous research on how FGSs experience greater challenges when they attend university compared to their CGS peers.

FGSs mentioned how their decision-making process entailed considering others and ensuring others were not affected negatively by their choices. These students stressed the necessity of ultimately benefitting others when they made choices. CGSs, on the other hand, were more focussed on themselves when making decisions and did not consider others as much as FGSs did. CGSs even mentioned how thinking of others only affected them negatively. In essence, CGSs were more self-focussed than FGSs were. This finding is in line with the views of Skulborstad and Hermann (2016), who suggest that westernised students (in this case CGSs) are self-focussed and make decisions without fully committing to others. In another study, the tendency of FGSs to make decisions while considering others and ultimately achieving greater



interdependence, is mentioned (Stephens et al., 2012). Being more focussed on others, as is observed among FGSs, may be more evident during EA than researchers previously believed (Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016). Arnett (2013) argues that the current EA generation is a generation that is “generous” and that these individuals can improve societies in which they are. This is supported by the current study and can be linked to the thoughtfulness and interconnectedness found among FGSs.

In both the quantitative and qualitative sections of this study, FGSs were even more positive than CGSs were about their future. FGSs scored higher on the *VFQ* and communicated their optimism about the future and the great contrast between their future and their parents’ lives. Slight resistance towards adulthood was reported among some CGSs, whereas FGSs were eager to enter adulthood and the responsibilities it entails. Many FGSs mentioned how they would be ‘firsts’ in their communities and how they would ensure a brighter future for their families. These students explained that they were often regarded as role models in their communities and that this encouraged them to create a brighter future. Some FGSs mentioned being the first medical doctor or person with a doctorate degree in their communities. Another finding among FGSs was how these students did not want to disappoint their family members or significant others, as they believed they owed the people who had made sacrifices for them to have the opportunity to study. This resulted in students wanting to ‘pay back’ in life and also experiencing a sense of guilt that served as motivation, especially among male FGSs. FGSs were proud of the role they fulfilled in their families and communities, who usually did not have a member with an HE qualification. FGSs also confessed to having many opportunities to succeed and bursaries made available for them to be able to study. These findings can be explained by looking at recent research among FGSs that confirms that these students view their academic opportunities as a means to creating a better life for the people in their communities (Steyn, 2016). Research among students also indicates that opportunities experienced at university enable students to create a brighter future for them and others (Kamper & Steyn, 2011; Ru-Jer, 2012). Also, in studies among FGSs, it is stated that these students view themselves as ambassadors for change in their communities and aim to inspire others to pursue a brighter future (Gofen, 2009; Griffin, 2006; Steyn, 2016). Making financial sacrifices for students’ academic opportunities is regarded as common practice among black, collectivistic cultures (Van Bavel & Cunningham, 2012), which reinforces the responsibility FGSs experience to be successful (Steyn, 2016). This finding concurs with another study that indicates that students feel pressurised to succeed due to the sacrifices made by others (Gofen,

2009). FGSs' tendency to be more excited about their future is also indicated by Arnett and Walker (2014) in that EAs from lower SES (thus FGSs) tend to be even more optimistic about their future compared to EAs from higher SES (thus CGSs). Previous research seems to correlate with the findings of the current study with regard to the responsibilities FGSs face and also the optimism with which they greet opportunities.

Together with the optimism FGSs in this study experienced during EA, they also experienced a great amount of pressure from home to be successful. Their families at home and the community place great pressure on them to be successful and pursue professional careers. CGSs were more concerned about being happy and were not pressured as much by family to be successful. Because of this pressure, FGSs face greater difficulties than CGSs do, as they have more stress that is emotional. In a previous study, Liversage et al. (2017) suggest that this is often a burdensome form of pressure FGSs experience.

### **5.3 Gender Differences Regarding the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood and Views of the Future**

In this study, compared to their male peers, female participants associated with the dimensions of EA more intensely. However, in the qualitative section, male and female participants mentioned similar experiences of EA. These findings are in line with other research. Crocetti et al. (2015) mention that the tendency of varying gender differences regarding the dimensions of EA among different cultures exists. Gender practices found among diverse cultures may explain this. Sirsch et al. (2009) indicate that females scored higher on all the dimensions of EA. Females also scored higher on the dimension of self-focus (Reifman et al., 2007). However, Conley et al. (2014) report that females and males have similar experiences during their first-year adjustment at university.

In the current study, prominent gender difference that was noted is that male students (especially FGSs) felt compelled to “pay back” in life and mentioned the phenomenon of entering adulthood at a younger age, which was because they were surrounded by older family members while growing up and having greater responsibilities at a younger age. These students took on adult roles earlier than their peers did and, as was evident in the current study, these students were mostly male FGS. This finding concurs with the findings of another study done among 19- to 25-year-old students where participants regarded themselves as adults based on

higher levels of interdependence, independence, role transitions and greater family capacities (Nelson & Barry, 2005).

Female students in this study were more optimistic about meeting new people and learning from diverse cultures and were more inclined to postpone marriage. The finding of females being more optimistic about social encounters supports other studies (Diekman & Steinberg, 2013; Sharp et al., 2007; Skulborstad & Hermann, 2016) that suggest that females are socially oriented and find their meaning in terms of social encounters and communal goals. Moving away from traditional constraints, such as raising children when you are a woman, removes the pressure and results in more freedom for young people to define their own lives (Silva, 2016). This allows young females to postpone marriage and childbearing (Silva, 2016). This study supports this finding as participants (especially females) are removed from their traditional environments and have the opportunity to explore with their own lives and aspirations.

#### **5.4 Experiences Regarding the Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood and Views of the Future**

In addition to the findings discussed above, some unique experiences of the dimensions of EA and views of the future were evident.

**5.4.1 Conceptions of adulthood.** Participants agreed that EA is the stage after adolescence and before adulthood. They also mentioned how this stage was not necessarily defined by a specific age but that external factors could cause a person to mature at an earlier stage. In this study, it was evident that participants longed for independence, especially with regard to finances. Participants mentioned that they wanted to live a life that was free from worries. Arnett and Walker (2015) highlight that EA, in fact, is the transition to adulthood. This study concurs with Arnett's (2001) theory of EA being an age when individuals feel in between. In the current study, participants viewed adulthood as a time of greater responsibility and independence. For the participants in this study, adulthood was marked by the ability to think and act independently and also by being financially independent. For many, adulthood begins when one is financially independent or gets married. This finding links to literature in the field of EA that reports that EAs use individualistic or internal qualities when conceptualising adulthood. These include making independent decisions, being financially independent, and taking responsibility (Arnett & Walker, 2015; Nelson & Barry, 2005; Nelson & Luster, 2015).

Arnett and Walker (2015) also suggest that marriage is one of the traditional markers of adulthood. Thus, the findings of this study correlate with other researchers who view marriage and independence as the markers of adulthood (Molgat, 2007; Nelson & Barry, 2005). The findings of this study also support Arnett's (2016b) theory that adulthood is marked by moving away from the role of an adolescent and becoming more independent.

**5.4.2 Higher education experiences.** Participants were of the opinion that the university environment contributed to feeling in between, as some situations require thinking independently and having new responsibilities together with being dependent on financial and social support. Some unique challenges that university life poses to participants are being away from home, being more responsible, and facing unforeseen circumstances. These findings correspond with those of previous studies that mention this dimension among EAs as students who are in a life stage where they have to make decisions independently (Pitcher, 2005) but are still financially dependent on others (Liamputtong, 2011). In general, students experience instability due to university being a time of challenging transitions from high school to higher education (Conley et al., 2014; Peila-Shuster, 2016).

Participants were optimistic about their HE experience and mentioned how university created an environment that enabled growth and greater self-knowledge. Self-discovery is deemed crucial for participants at university, and the HE setting allows them to experiment with new endeavours that assist in this process. Participants mentioned that hardships formed their identity and assisted in self-discovery. Attending university was considered a way of transformation and growing as an individual. This finding supports a study by Modipane (2011) that highlights the changes students experience at university. In previous research among students, it is also reiterated that the university environment provides opportunities for self-discovery by increasing social and cultural awareness, developing leadership, and forming new support systems (Cross & Johnson, 2008).

The EA university years were also considered a time of great possibilities and opportunities. Many possibilities were mentioned because of having endless opportunities and coming into contact with diverse cultures and environments. This finding supports other research where it is mentioned how students have the opportunity to study flexible career programmes and have many possibilities for diverse social interactions (Scott et al., 2007; Steyn, 2016). Social and cultural opportunities are endless, with university also providing opportunities for personal development and thus identity exploration (Cross & Johnson, 2008).

Arnett (2016b) also mentions how the EA student years are much more than just training for vocations and that many possibilities for the enjoyment of life arise.

**5.4.3 Diversity experienced.** Participants agreed that the university environment and societies with which they come into contact today consist of a diversity of people and cultures. Some participants mentioned how these encounters exposed them to different cultural practices and changed their mindsets. Many participants were optimistic about the chance they had received to live among diversity. Emphasis was placed on how this exposure led to cultural awareness, greater cultural knowledge, an opportunity to change personal values and ideologies, and ultimately, success. In a previous study among students, it was mentioned that being in an environment with diverse student populations was regarded as a stressful aspect of university life (Cross & Johnson, 2008). However, this is contradictory to the current study in that students were very optimistic about coming into contact with diverse cultures. The findings of this study seem to correlate with recent research done in SA. Most participants in a study of black first-year students in SA admitted to being exposed to great diversity at university and how diverse cultural experiences contributed to their being more open (Liversage et al., 2017). Today, it is reported that students in SA study in a country where there is access to unlimited information and numerous opportunities are available to interact with multiple, diverse cultures (Ferguson & Adams, 2016; Steyn, 2016). In general, student populations in SA are diverse, with FGSs being a unique group of students to attend universities (Heymann & Carolissen, 2011; Strydom et al., 2010). These students get the opportunity to receive HE, as education is considered a platform to create democracy in SA (Schutz, 2010). This study concurs with what other SA studies have found among EAs in the country and the optimism with which they greet diversity. The finding of this study also concurs with that of Arnett (2002), as he states that EAs in developing countries have a newfound opportunity to come into contact with a globalised world.

**5.4.4 Protective factors during emerging adulthood.** Participants mentioned spirituality as a protective factor in coping with the challenges of EA. Spirituality as a protective factor is also mentioned in research among EAs that revealed that students especially relied on religion as a source of perseverance (Steyn, 2016) and referred to religion when discussing academic challenges (Packard, 2011). Participants in the current study also considered relationships among families, communities, and friends as protective factors. Friends were considered a valuable asset in the EA years, as they assisted in learning more

about the world and being able to socialise and attain greater self-knowledge. The challenge of being isolated at university could be mitigated by peer support. Being away from home and not having the support that is available when living at home, was considered a major challenge. Meeting new people assisted with adaptation to university. Family played a pivotal part in students' academic successes and their adaptation to university. In SA, family structures of EAs have been shaped by the country's political, economic, and social factors, which have caused instability in family life and influenced the development of adulthood (Goldberg, 2013). The current study concurs with previous research that suggests that challenges cause students to rely on protective factors such as spirituality and relationships.

## **5.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter aimed to discuss the results of this study. Reference was made to the differences among FGSs and CGSs and among males and females with regard to the dimensions of EA and views of the future. There were clear differences between the generational groups, with FGSs experiencing the dimensions of EA more intensely. FGSs also faced many unique challenges that CGSs did not face. Although both groups regarded their future as more positive compared to their parents' lives, FGSs were slightly more optimistic. Females associated with the dimensions of EA more intensely than males did. Gender groups had mostly similar experiences of EA and future perceptions. However, females were more socially inclined during EA, whereas males had a greater tendency to feel responsible to "pay back" in life. No significant gender differences were found for views of the future.

After generational and gender differences had been discussed, the unique experiences that arose were mentioned. These included how EA viewed adulthood, their HE and diversity experiences, expectations that served as motivation, and protective factors during EA.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

This chapter aims to conclude the study by mentioning the most significant findings, the limitations experienced during this study, and recommendations for future research. The chapter is concluded with a chapter summary.

### **6.1 Summary of the Most Significant Findings and Contributions of the Study**

Participants identified with all five dimensions of EA. However, identity was the dimension with the highest association. This is in line with the theory of Arnett (2000a, 2004a, 2004b), which states that EA is characterised by the dimensions of instability, possibility, self-focus, feeling in between and identity exploration. This study also supports Arnett's (2004b) notion that identity exploration is the most central dimension in EA. Participants also agreed that their future was more positive than their parents' lives were. Again, this study supports Arnett's (2000a) view that EAs are more optimistic about their future. Students communicated a desire for independence, especially financial independence.

Differences were found among generational groups. FGSs experienced the dimensions of EA more intensely, which suggests that FGSs experience greater levels of instability, more possibilities, greater self-focus, greater feelings of being in between, and more opportunities for identity exploration. Familial pressure and decision-making were considered central contributions to instability among FGSs. However, financial instability was indicated as the most common and greatest reason for this instability. Another aspect that contributed to FGSs' difficult university adjustment was the lack of knowledgeable others. Students from families who had no member with an HE qualification often experienced a form of guilt due to the sacrifices made by family members in order for them to be able to attend HE. These aspects are important to consider when institutions want to assist all of their students in succeeding at university. Family support was regarded as a crucial protective factor at university and assisted FGSs in achieving academic success and adapting to university life. Unfortunately, these student groups experienced a lack of support.

With regard to decision-making, CGSs focussed on themselves when making decisions. On the other hand, FGSs demonstrated great consideration for others' well-being and needs, and it was clear that FGSs had a collectivistic outlook on life and the purpose of their lives.

This study seems to support previous studies that suggest FGSs face greater challenges at university (Martinez et al., 2009; Modipane, 2011; Steyn, 2016; Strydom et al., 2010).

Among gender groups, many similarities were found in their experiences of the dimensions of EA. However, female EAs experienced the dimensions of EA more intensely compared to male EAs. Therefore, female FGSs can be regarded as the population that associates most with the dimensions of EA, which emphasises the need for more research among this group to understand their functioning better.

Possibilities are evident and endless among EAs in SA. These possibilities stem from the diverse country and HE setting in which students are found. Great optimism is experienced because of having all the possibilities readily available. University is marked by diverse cultures and EAs, or more specifically, FGSs and CGSs are exposed to greater opportunities for diverse social experiences. Therefore, this finding is concurrent with research by Arnett (2002), who states that students from developing countries have the opportunity to come into contact with a globalised world.

This study adds to the field of research on EA and views of the future of FGSs and CGSs in the SA context. It also contributes to student development research of diverse generational and gender groups. Arnett's theory is applied to an HE setting that is more diverse, as it is applied to developing countries and SA HE student populations.

The findings of this study can be applied to assist FGSs and CGSs with the struggles they face at HE institutions. FGSs, more specifically, can be assisted in the transition to university. This study highlights the challenges faced by diverse student populations in SA and aims to encourage more research in the field of EA and students. This study specifically added to the small body of research on FGSs and CGSs in SA, and ultimately the world.

## **6.2 Limitations to this Study**

Some limitations were experienced during this research study and should be considered together with the significant findings that were mentioned previously.

For the quantitative section of this study, the questionnaires that were used were short with only a few items in each questionnaire. This resulted in the reliability of the questionnaires being lower, as longer questionnaires tend to have better reliability (Zhu & Han, 2011).



However, the *IDEA-8* was found to be reliable despite its short format (Baggio et al., 2015). For the *VFQ*, no reliability scores were stated in previous research or in the original questionnaire, which could have raised concerns about the internal reliability of the measure. In this study, the internal reliability of the measure was particularly low and results should thus be interpreted with caution.

The focus groups were the most challenging aspect of this study, as many students did not attend the discussions after confirming they would attend. This resulted in smaller focus groups than was anticipated. Bloor et al. (2001) suggest that a focus group should ideally consist of between six and eight students. The low attendance could have been because of time constraints, unpredictable class schedules or practical challenges with transportation to the location. However, focus groups can be effective with as few as three participants (Bloor et al., 2001), and very small focus groups (VSFGs) can present rich data, especially when working with underrepresented groups (Toner, 2009).

The focus group discussions were performed in English, which posed some limitations, as the home language of many participants and the researcher was not English. Speaking in a language that is not as comfortable as one's mother tongue could have caused participants to have difficulty expressing themselves. Language is considered a factor that influences the reliability of testing (Zhu & Han, 2011). Information could easily have lost depth, as participants could not express themselves as they would in their own language. The standard of English used also resulted in some difficulties with the transcribing and understanding of the data. This led to transcriptions consisting of incorrect tenses and phrases used, and slight difficulties in understanding meaning. However, the use of direct quotations presented the participants' own voices and cultural context. This ensured that the researcher remained true to the participants and not biased (Polit & Beck, 2012).

Irrespective of these limitations, the study still provides significant insights into EA, the experiences of the dimensions of EA, and future perspectives among student populations in SA.

### **6.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

Considering the findings of this study and the limitations just mentioned, certain recommendations might be beneficial for future research. Firstly, recommendations to assist

with the limitations mentioned are discussed briefly. Secondly, recommendations for future research in the field of EA and student development are made.

More comprehensive and reliable questionnaires would contribute to the reliability of research in the field of EA and views of the future. Use of longer questionnaires is recommended, as this will increase the credibility of a study. The language barrier that existed could have been avoided if focus group discussions were conducted with the aid of a translator. This would also have added a cultural perspective, as participants could answer in their home language.

An interesting approach to studying the experiences of FGSs and CGSs in SA could be to include participants' parents. This will enable future researchers to confirm student experiences in the light of parents' narratives. Future research can also aim to investigate the perceptions generational groups have about the other generational group. During this study, one FGS made a direct reference to how their lives differ from those of CGSs. This focus might even indicate how the two generational groups experience attending HE with a group that is different from themselves. Examples of incidents and incorrect perceptions might also surface from such an approach.

Upon reflecting on the results of the current study, the following interesting questions arose that might provide unique perspectives for future research: 'Would FGSs view their academic achievement greater than that of CGSs in the light of the challenges FGSs face?' and 'Do differences exist in the levels of gratitude towards HE among FGSs and CGSs?' Future research might be aimed at exploring students' attitudes towards HE and the responsibility they experience to complete their HE degrees.

Researchers can aim to investigate why certain gender differences exist in certain cultures and how gender differences affect the experiences of the dimensions of EA and views of the future.

#### **6.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter consists of a summary of the most significant findings of the current study. These findings are a contribution to the body of research on EA. Following the summary, some limitations that arose during this study were discussed, which was followed by recommendations for future research in this field.

In this mixed-methods study of the dimensions of EA among first- and continuous-generation students, many interesting findings were made. While the quantitative section of the study confirmed the tendencies regarding EA found in previous studies, the qualitative section added depth. Many variations of the experiences of EA arose, and cultural, social, and political aspects were voiced. Although various opinions and nuances came to the fore, the participants identified with the dynamics of EA while being at university.

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## Appendix A – E-mail Invitation EvaSys and Focus Groups

Letter of invitation: 15 August 2016

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in the present study. I would now like to invite you to take part in the focus group discussions of the research project:

Identity formation in first-generation and continuous-generation students.

We would like you to participate with us in the focus group discussions because you form part of a group of students that are either first-generation or continuous-generation students, between the ages of 18 to 25, and represent either the female or male student population.

The possible risks to you in taking part in these discussions are negative psychological or social impact, reputational damage or negative impact on relationships. We have, however, taken the following steps to protect you from these risks; all participation is completely voluntary; all research findings will be anonymous and if participants wish to withdraw from the study this can be done without any negative repercussions.

I am sure you will benefit from this experience as the findings of this study will form part of a larger study that will contribute to an existing research base.

As your participation is greatly appreciated and the offering of your personal time is highly valued, we will be providing refreshments during the focus group discussions. The focus groups will consist of a one-hour discussion between 8-10 participants. You are under no obligation to take part in this study and if you do choose to take part, and an issue arises which makes you uncomfortable, you may at any time stop your participation.

The dates for the focus groups are as follow:

DATE	TIME	VENUE
18 August 2016	15:00-16:30	Room 109, Psychology Building, Bloemfontein Campus
19 August 2016	08:00-09:30	Room 109, Psychology Building, Bloemfontein Campus

Please respond to this e-mail by stating what time would best suit you as I will have to prepare refreshments for participants.

Should any difficult personal issues arise during the course of this research, I will endeavour to see that a qualified expert is contacted and able to assist you. Participants are also free to contact Kovsie Counselling (051 401 2853) if the need for any counselling services arise.

Yours sincerely

Constance J Bekker

## Appendix B – Questionnaires

### *Short Form of Inventory of Dimensions of Emerging Adulthood (IDEA-8)*

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. Tick only one box as response for each question.

Think of this time in your life. By “time in your life” we refer to the present time, plus the last few years that have gone by, and the next few years to come, as you see them. In short, think of a roughly five-year period, with the present in the middle.

<i>Is this period of your life...</i>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
1. a time of many possibilities?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. a time of exploration?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. a time of feeling stressed out?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. a time of high pressure?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. a time of defining yourself?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. a time of deciding your own beliefs and values?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. a time of feeling adult in some ways but not others?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. a time of gradually becoming an adult?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

***Views of the Future Questionnaire (VFQ)***

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. Responses can be circled/ticked/stroked-through.

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1) Overall, do you think the quality of your life likely to be better or worse than your parents' has been?

	Better	Worse	About the same
--	--------	-------	----------------

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2) Overall, do you think your financial well-being in adulthood is likely to be better or worse than your parents' has been?

	Better	Worse	About the same
--	--------	-------	----------------

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3) Overall, do you think your career achievements are likely to be better or worse than your parents' have been?

	Better	Worse	About the same
--	--------	-------	----------------

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4) Overall, do you think your personal relationships in adulthood are likely to be better or worse than your parents' have been?

	Better	Worse	About the same
--	--------	-------	----------------

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## Appendix C – Informed Consent

Researcher:	Research Supervisor:
Constance J Bekker	Luzelle Naude
8 Blueberry Hill	205 Nelson Mandela Drive,
Woodland Hills	Park West
Bloemfontein	Bloemfontein
9301	T: +27(0)51 4012189
T: +27(0)76 6759027	naudel@ufs.ac.za
constancebekker@gmail.com	

INFORMED CONSENT: 17 April 2016

Dear Participant

I would like to invite you to take part in this research project:

*IDENTITY FORMATION IN FIRST-GENERATION AND CONTINUOUS-GENERATION STUDENTS.*

This study is about exploring emerging adults' identity formation experiences among different generational and gender groups.

We would like you to participate with us in this research because you form part of a group of students that are either first-generation or continuous-generation students, between the ages of 18 to 25, and represent either the female or male student population.

The reason we are doing this study is to contribute to the existing research base regarding identity development amongst students.

The possible risks to you in taking part in this study are the usage of your time, negative psychological or social impact, reputational damage or negative impact on relationships. We have, however, taken the following steps to protect you from these risks; all participation is completely voluntary; responses on questionnaires will be anonymous as well as all research findings; if participants wish to withdraw from the study this can be done without any negative repercussions.

I am sure you will benefit from this study as this study will contribute to the knowledge of student identity development and may even possibly be used to build on future research studies. Participants will also form part of a lucky draw where you stand the chance to win a flash drive or book-voucher.

While I greatly appreciate your participation in this important study and the valuable contribution you can make, your participation is entirely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part in this study. If you do choose to take part, and an issue arises which makes you uncomfortable, you may at any time stop your participation with no further repercussions.

If you experience any discomfort or unhappiness with the way the research is being conducted, please feel free to contact me directly to discuss it, and also note that you are free to contact my study supervisor (indicated above).

Should any difficult personal issues arise during the course of this research, I will endeavour to see that a qualified expert is contacted and able to assist you. Participants are also free to contact Kovsie Counselling (051 401 2853) if the need for any counselling services arise.

Yours sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Constance J Bekker

-----  
Please fill in and return this page. Keep the letter above for future reference  
-----

Study: Identity formation in first-generation and continuous-generation students.

Researcher: Constance J. Bekker

-----  
Name and Surname: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender:

Please circle response: Female Male

Generation:

Please circle response: First-generation Continuous-generation

Race:

Please circle response: Black White Other(Specify)

Contact number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned research study. I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what the risks and benefits are.

I give the researcher permission to make use of the data gathered from my participation, subject to the stipulations he/she has indicated in the above letter.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D – Focus Group Questions

### IDENTITY FORMATION IN FIRST-GENERATION AND CONTINUOUS-GENERATION STUDENTS.

#### *FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS*

Possible questions to be asked during focus group discussions:

- **Questions regarding the developmental stage of emerging adulthood**

1. How do you understand the term “emerging adulthood”?
2. What are some of the most significant challenges you have faced while being in this developmental stage of emerging adulthood? Please describe some of these challenges you currently face especially with regards to studies, family, finances, career and peers.
3. How do you experience the stage of life you are currently in? With regards to student life as well as your personal life?

- **Arnett described Emerging Adulthood as the age of “instability, possibilities, self-focus, feeling in between and identity exploration.**

1. Do you experience your life currently as being a time of stability or instability? Why?
2. What are the causes of instability and stability in your life currently?
3. Do you think of this stage of your life as a stage of possibilities? What possibilities come to mind?
4. When making important decisions, do you take others into consideration or do you feel like you are free to make choices that do not have consequences relating to others? Please elaborate.
5. Do you feel like you have reached adulthood yet? How do you feel exactly?
6. Are you trying out different possibilities in order to learn more about yourself? Why?

- **Questions regarding identity development**

1. What is identity? How do think identity is formed?
2. How would you describe your identity? What has formed your identity up until now?
3. What experiences do you have in dealing with challenges to your own identity development?

- **Questions regarding students’ views of the future**

1. How do you view your future in general? Do you perceive it as more positive or negative than, for example, your parents’ lives? Why?
2. What does your future have in store? How will your future look? For example, how does the next 10 years of your life look like?
3. How does the rest of your family perceive your future? What are some of the opinions of your parents, siblings or extended family members?

## Appendix E – Transcription of focus group discussions

### CGS Focus Group 1

- 1.1 **Interviewer:** The first question is how do you understand the term emerging adulthood?
- 1.2 **Male participant:** Emerging adulthood ... It's the transition when going into adulthood I guess ... I mean.
- 1.3 **Female participant:** I think I can add to it – it is being an adolescent or a teenager and just that ... processing to adulthood and that is when your responsibilities get more and you are just ... not a baby anymore (laughter).
- 1.4 **Interviewer:** Would you regard yourself as being in this stage?
- 1.5 **Male participant:** I don't know ... I think I'm pretty much a child all the time (laughs), I don't know, I don't really think about it like that, you know. I actually haven't give it a lot of thought. Uhm ... I don't know about you guys.
- 1.6 **Interviewer:** If you think about the definition you just gave, that it is the transition period – would you say that is something that you are in, like “transition into something” or would you say you are pretty much “in something” right now and you are not going out of it anytime soon?
- 1.7 **Male participant:** I don't know, I haven't really thought about it like that, to be honest.
- 1.8 **Female participant:** I think if ... back in my first year I would also think the same way, but now, I will say yes I am, because it is my final year, last semester. From first year until now, I haven't thought about graduation, getting a job, do I want to do my honours, and those are decisions my parents can't make – those are decisions I have to make on my own. So yeah ...
- 1.9 **Interviewer:** So, you say the difference in just a few years is that you are now definitely in emerging adulthood and you haven't really thought about it, which is perfectly fine, there is no right or wrong answers, it is just personal experiences. The guy who developed the term “emerging adulthood”, Jeffrey Arnett, defined it as a stage which you are in between the age of 18 and 25 ...
- 1.10 **Male participant:** Do you think it is like trying to find yourself in this world? Like is that what it is?
- 1.11 **Interviewer:** I think it is part of it – definitely.
- 1.12 **Male participant:** I definitely find that – I'm trying to find my feet, basically, I know that.
- 1.13 **Interviewer:** Yes and I think if you are thinking about something like adolescence, you are not trying to find your feet, you are just going with the flow.
- 1.14 **Male participant:** Yes, you are going through the motions.
- 1.15 **Interviewer:** Yes and now you are confronted with these things of “Who am I, what am I doing in this world?”
- 1.16 **Male participant:** Especially by being by yourself, like without your parents.
- 1.17 **Female participant:** It is a big adjustment.
- 1.18 **Male participant:** It's a very big adjustment.
- 1.19 **Female participant:** I still find myself homesick at times although my parents are living just around the corner.
- 1.20 **Interviewer:** Let's say we are in this stage of emerging adulthood, what are some of the most significant challenges you have faced while being in this developmental stage of emerging adulthood like you just mentioned, for example figuring out “Who am I?” – that sounds like a challenge?

- 1.21 **Male participant:** I don't know if it is a challenge, I think it is like a journey ... I guess. I don't know how to say it ... Uhm ...
- 1.22 **Interviewer:** What are some of the things that you've realized is different than from school like "This is a challenge"?
- 1.23 **Female participant:** I would say ...
- 1.24 **Interviewer:** Finding a job that you've just mentioned earlier?
- 1.25 **Female participant:** Yes, definitely and time-management also because in high school you are in school from 07:00 to 14:00 and after school you do your extramural activities for instance and ...
- 1.26 **Male participant:** It is set out for you.
- 1.27 **Female participant:** Exactly, between 17:00 and 19:00 you do your homework, bath, sleep, same thing every day for five days and then you come to varsity and you have one class on a Monday and you don't even feel like going – your mom is not going to say "Go to class, go to class!" , you just have to do it yourself.
- 1.28 **Male participant:** Ja you gotta have the drive to do it yourself ...
- 1.29 **Female participant:** With test weeks, and ... it seem so far away when the dates are on paper and when the time comes, you are just like "What do I study, what do I leave, which module do I focus on, which module do I don't focus on", and I think the skills we acquire in this stage is very important when we get in the workplace as well.
- 1.30 **Interviewer:** So that self-discipline, the "I have to get out of bed today, nobody is going to tell me to."
- 1.31 **Female participant:** I think peer pressure as well to a certain extent – it becomes a challenge. I'm not talking from experience, but from what I have observed. When I came to varsity, I stayed at res with a few girls who went to the same high school than me, and then, she was very smart, she was a bright student, and then ... just the thing of not having anyone telling you "Do this, do that" she started slacking and like "Nobody is going to tell me anything, because this is my life, I'm trying to find myself".
- 1.32 **Interviewer:** And what do you say about the challenges?
- 1.33 **Male participant:** I would probably say like going to like when you are in high school you know everyone and to your house you know everyone and you know all your friends and stuff and then you go out to a place where you don't know anyone – that's quite a challenge to go out and actually to meet new people.
- 1.34 **Female participant:** You realise you can't be alone, you can't say you don't need friends, you don't need anyone – you need to go out and meet people, so that ... because it is a different society and a different social context. Meet people who are doing the same things as you when you are going to varsity, I think that will make your journey much easier.
- 1.35 **Interviewer:** I know we have touched on it now, but how do you experience this stage of your life with regards to student life as well as your personal life – does your experiences differ at campus than your experiences at home for example? Like the way you relate to people or what people expect from you – do you feel like two different people at home and at university?
- 1.36 **Female participant:** No, definitely not, because ... I find it very difficult to be friends with someone who is one person here and then later you are a different person. Yes, at school or at work, you have to be professional, but ... you still have to be yourself, you shouldn't change and think okay which version of Ryan is this now. Obviously when I'm at home I don't study, because I'm at home, but everything else is the same, the responsibilities and stuff – yes I'm responsible back home. I don't want my parents to come to a point where they doubt what I'm doing when I'm here and when I'm home

- so I don't want them to be surprised when they visit me a surprise visit and think what happened to our child. You are not this person at home.
- 1.37 **Male participant:** I agree.
- 1.38 **Interviewer:** Same for you?
- 1.39 **Male participant:** Yeah
- 1.40 **Interviewer:** So you feel you can be this congruent person throughout the different places in your life – at home, at university ...
- 1.41 **Male participant:** I try to be – I would say just try to be who you are, that's what I would try to be.
- 1.42 **Female participant:** Ja ... Be yourself.
- 1.43 **Male participant:** Show it to people – let people see who you really are.
- 1.44 **Interviewer:** We have talked a little about, Jeffrey Arnett, who describes emerging adulthood – I want to know, do you experience your life currently as a time of stability or instability and why?
- 1.45 **Male participant:** Joh ... Is life messy basically? I don't know, I try to keep it as stable as possible.
- 1.46 **Interviewer:** What does it feel like?
- 1.47 **Male participant:** I don't know, I feel like it's right, everything is going well.
- 1.48 **Female participant:** I also feel if everything is basically just ... stable.
- 1.49 **Interviewer:** It's interesting because Jeffrey Arnett actually describes this stage as being the age of instability and possibilities, self-focus, feeling in between and identity exploration so it is interesting, but I think it is possible that some people can feel ...
- 1.50 **Male participant:** I think that sometimes you can feel like "Woah, is what I'm doing right?" or whatever. Or "Am I on the right track, am I going in the right place sometimes?" And then, you have times where you feel like "I know I'm doing what I like". It goes through stages for me, that's what I found out.
- 1.51 **Interviewer:** So going through stages – is that more stable or unstable?
- 1.52 **Male participant:** Ja, I don't know what you mean.
- 1.53 **Interviewer:** Like would you rather classify that as being stable or unstable? Like you said – you are going through these stages.
- 1.54 **Male participant:** Definitely there is times where I don't know what is going on and I am unstable, but there is also stages where you think you know what is happening and stuff.
- 1.55 **Interviewer:** And feel stable again?
- 1.56 **Male participant:** Ja, for sure.
- 1.57 **Interviewer:** So you say it is the differences between stable and unstable.
- 1.58 **Male participant:** Ja, I feel like you go through that two stages every now and then.
- 1.59 **Interviewer:** Almost like being on these water ...
- 1.60 **Male participant:** I think it's like a rollercoaster – up and down and flip.
- 1.61 **Female participant:** And eventually you land and you ...
- 1.62 **Male participant:** ... you are like "Thank goodness, I made it!" (laughter)
- 1.63 **Female participant:** I think even though we go through different stages, at the end, eventually, you ... will find your feet.
- 1.64 **Male participant:** Everything is going to be okay in the end.
- 1.65 **Female participant:** Eventually. For some people it will happen sooner than for others. He is putting ages 18-25 to it, but then maybe you will find 26-, 27-year olds that are still going through that.
- 1.66 **Male participant:** For sure.
- 1.67 **Female participant:** And a 24 year old is ... stable.
- 1.68 **Male participant:** Could you call it maturity?

- 1.69 **Interviewer:** I think maturity definitely plays a role and I agree with what you are saying and it is interesting, because the previous group also mentioned that emerging adulthood or adulthood doesn't necessarily need to be age related. You find some of the majority being adults between ...
- 1.70 **Male participant:** Age is just a number though.
- 1.71 **Interviewer:** Yes, you don't define adulthood as I'm 25 so I'm an adult now or I'm 20 so I'm an emerging adult now so it depends, each person differs.
- 1.72 **Female participant:** Hmm..
- 1.73 **Male participant:** Definitely
- 1.74 **Interviewer:** What would be the causes of this stability and instability in your life currently? Are there things that contribute to it being like a rollercoaster – up and down or things that contribute to it being ...
- 1.75 **Male participant:** I think it's just life hay ... I don't know how to answer that one – that's a tough one.
- 1.76 **Female participant:** I think ... with ... the instability you would question a lot of things and maybe have a lot of doubts and so much uncertainties so nothing is really stable and with the stability you have inner peace in your life like "It's okay".
- 1.77 **Interviewer:** What can contribute to instability and feeling like "Urgh I'm so confused and chaotic"?
- 1.78 **Female participant:** I think not knowing how to cope with certain challenges and uncertain situations because no one teaches you how to cope when something happens. When you go through something or suddenly everything is going well and you share a flat with someone and your flatmate is using drugs. That just change everything from you being stable to being completely unstable.
- 1.79 **Male participant:** I think loneliness as well, I think sometimes you need someone to chat a good chat to, just a deep chat to get your bearings right, know who you are, where you want to go.
- 1.80 **Interviewer:** Let's focus on another characteristic of this age or stage – do you think this stage of your life is a stage of possibilities?
- 1.81 **Male participant:** Definitely
- 1.82 **Female participant:** (Nods)
- 1.83 **Interviewer:** What possibilities come to mind? You nodded, so I assumed you also say yes!
- 1.84 **Female participant:** Well, between the ages of 18 and 25 there shouldn't be anything that's stopping you to achieve anything you want, because you are still young and your mind is still fresh and you are not settled at some company and you know that's where you work and that's it. If you want to start a business or something, you should be able to get it on its feet, because you are still, I don't want to say you are still young ... you are still allowed to dream fully and achieve those dreams.
- 1.85 **Male participant:** You shouldn't stop dreaming though ...
- 1.86 **Female participant:** Definitely not, you shouldn't. I think people from maybe 30 – that is when people really start settling down, getting married, starting a family – that time there isn't really time for you to do certain things so if you already achieved your goals, you just build on it at that time.
- 1.87 **Interviewer:** Do you agree with what she said?
- 1.88 **Male participant:** Yes, I agree.
- 1.89 **Interviewer:** You say it is very much a stage of possibilities. Like nothing should stand in the way of what you dream about. When making important decisions, do you take others in consideration or do you feel you are free not to take others in consideration?

- 1.90 **Male participant:** If I make a decision, I want one decision otherwise too many decisions plays in my mind. I want to have one decision and go with that decision. Do you know what I mean?
- 1.91 **Interviewer:** Do you think about the consequences it will have on others or is it something that you choose for yourself and it is like “This is necessary for me”?
- 1.92 **Male participant:** Ja, definitely ... and I try to look at it from a positive way, I wouldn't look as if there are consequences, like that is the negative side. I would always try to focus on the positive side.
- 1.93 **Female participant:** I agree with him because at first, I used to think of myself right at the bottom. I would be like “I decide to do this, what is my mom going to think, what is my dad going to think, how is it going to affect them, my brother or my friends?” and then only “how will I feel about it?”. It didn't work because now I'm making a decision for myself, based on other people and then they are satisfied and their lives are going on, but then I'm at the same place, so I've stopped that. So I first think of myself ...
- 1.94 **Male participant:** I agree, that's what life is about, do it for yourself.
- 1.95 **Female participant:** Exactly, you can't satisfy everybody.
- 1.96 **Male participant:** Not a chance! If you do, you'll be unhappy.
- 1.97 **Interviewer:** So you are making decisions based on “This is what I need now”?
- 1.98 **Male participant:** This is what will make me happy, that's my core thing, I will always try to do things that make me happy. I don't know if you feel differently.
- 1.99 **Female participant:** No I don't, because like I said now, if ... I make a decision, but I first think, “How is Sally\* going to take this and how are you going to take it” and then because you guys won't be happy I won't do it ... and then I suffer, at the end, so if it is going to benefit me, I'm going to make that decision instead.
- 1.100 **Interviewer:** What I'm hearing is that you are speaking out of previous experience and you feel like the times when you took others into consideration, that is when you got hurt so now you are more inclined to, when you make decisions, think about yourself first and you do that because you feel that is the right thing to do.
- 1.101 **Female participant:** Yes.
- 1.102 **Interviewer:** That is interesting. I admire your honesty. Be honest, that's the best response.
- 1.103 **Interviewer:** Do you feel like you have reached adulthood yet? I know this is going back to the first question a little bit.
- 1.104 **Male participant:** I don't want to.
- 1.105 **Interviewer:** Interviewer: How do you feel, where are you in terms of development?
- 1.106 **Male participant:** I don't feel like I've reached adulthood yet, I don't think I ever will be. (Laughs)
- 1.107 **Female participant:** I think that if I'm not already there, then I'm like 2 cm or 5 cm away. (Laughter)
- 1.108 **Interviewer:** So, you feel like you are not there yet, but you are heading towards it.
- 1.109 **Female participant:** Yes, I'm just very close to it. You don't want to get there!
- 1.110 **Male participant:** Not a chance! I mean Woh! Flippet! (Laughs)
- 1.111 **Interviewer:** I'm sensing a lot of, not negativity, also not fear, but a resistance towards this adulthood stage. Am I correct when I say we are talking about adulthood as a far away thing and not necessarily a good thing even?
- 1.112 **Male participant:** I don't know, when I look at adulthood, it seems like a serious thing ... something that's serious so like responsibilities ... and who wants that ...
- 1.113 **Female participant:** Yes, oh my goodness, not resistance, but it's just happening so quickly!
- 1.114 **Interviewer:** Like you don't have time to stop and smell the flowers?

- 1.115 **Female participant:** Exactly, like it was January just now ... and now I'm done with tests 1, I'm waiting for tests 2 and then it's exams and then I'm done. I think one thing I'm really scared of is working, not working, but like going to work and just like high school. Varsity brings some sort of comfort to you and it's nice even if you are stressing about tests and exams. It's okay until we have to leave this place as well and find work and if we feel that varsity is not nice then working even ... that was just the beginning. It won't be that nice. It's like a vicious cycle, you are at the bottom of the food chain again. (Laughs)
- 1.116 **Interviewer:** And again ... and again ... Let's think about this stage differently by considering, do you try out different possibilities in order to learn more about yourself and why?
- 1.117 **Male participant:** Like trying new things? Yes, I think that is what varsity is about as well. Try as many things as you can, meet new people. You will only learn new things about yourself if you leave your comfort zone.
- 1.118 **Female participant:** Exactly.
- 1.119 **Male participant:** The only way you can do that is by doing things you have never done.
- 1.120 **Female participant:** That's true.
- 1.121 **Interviewer:** So you both feel like you are definitely trying out new possibilities to learn more about yourself?
- 1.122 **Female participant:** Yes ...
- 1.123 **Male participant:** Definitely, I wouldn't be here if I wasn't.
- 1.124 **Interviewer:** Why, or you just said why. You wouldn't know yourself if you haven't tried these things so that's maybe the reason we try new things.
- 1.125 **Male participant:** Imagine going into the coffin and not knowing who you really are. You have to know at the end of your life who you are.
- 1.126 **Interviewer:** A more difficult question – what is identity and how do you think identity is formed? Whatever you think it is.
- 1.127 **Male participant:** Your reputation? The way people see you and perceive you?
- 1.128 **Interviewer:** That could be part of it – like I said there is no right or wrong answers, it's literally what you think identity is and how it is formed.
- 1.129 **Male participant:** Yes, it's wide variety of things ...
- 1.130 **Interviewer:** You were saying something about reputation, how people see you – does that form part of your identity?
- 1.131 **Male participant:** I don't know, I would like to know that who I am, my identity is formed in myself first, I don't know.
- 1.132 **Female participant:** I think identity would be ... how I see myself, acknowledging how other people see you as well, but not seeing myself through your eyes. You just keeping that in mind like people think I'm really down to earth and really quiet, but I know that I am outspoken. Don't allow that how other people see me is how I see myself, but at least knowing how other people see me. You know who you truly are, you know how you see yourself.
- 1.133 **Interviewer:** Do you agree?
- 1.134 **Male participant:** Yes
- 1.135 **Interviewer:** That makes sense. You seeing yourself, or knowing who you are firstly and then also just considering what others say about you. It might support what you think about yourself and then there are the things that might not correlate – the things you basically just throw away.

- 1.136 **Female participant:** I also think by knowing what other people think of me should not change how I see myself at all, because that is not how I see myself, I shouldn't try and change everything so that I am that person that you see.
- 1.137 **Interviewer:** How would you describe your identity and what has formed your identity up until now? What do you guys think?
- 1.138 **Male participant:** Hmm ... I don't know ... That's a tough one ... I haven't really thought of this.
- 1.139 **Interviewer:** It's good to know that this is new for you as well. Is there anything that contributed to who you are like in essence?
- 1.140 **Male participant:** Family, parents definitely ... formed who I am ...
- 1.141 **Female participant:** That's true.
- 1.142 **Male participant:** Friends, because you learn from people, you learn from friends. A lot about yourself and just how people are.
- 1.143 **Interviewer:** Anything else that has formed you or formed your identity up until now?
- 1.144 **Female participant:** I think the society we live in. If the people all around you have some kind of aura, you are likely to be that way. So, if you are around "happy chappy" people, you are also going to be a happy person. Just like you said, people and your friends.
- 1.145 **Interviewer:** What experience do you have in dealing with challenges to your own identity development? To make it more practical, I'm thinking in the line of you saying something like I'm an assertive, confident person and I can speak up, and then your culture expects you to be a submissive, quiet, introverted person. That is something that challenges your identity development. You feel like you have to develop this thing of being assertive. What has challenged the thing of "I should be who I am"? Any things that come to mind?
- 1.146 **Male participant:** I don't know? Like does the society want you to be who you really are?
- 1.147 **Interviewer:** It could be a challenge.
- 1.148 **Male participant:** Sjo, it's in my mind, but I can't explain that. It's difficult to explain.
- 1.149 **Interviewer:** Is society encouraging me to become who I want to be and not what they expect me to be or what the media say you should be or what the university management say you should be? Are there any challenges that comes to mind?
- 1.150 **Male participant:** I think if you know who you really are, then you don't have to worry about that. Then you know it's just how life is like. I don't know.
- 1.151 **Interviewer:** That could be a challenge – you not knowing who you truly are?
- 1.152 **Female participant:** That's true, ummm, I don't even know if this answers the question, but I have a two year old son, so when I fell pregnant, I gave birth in 2014. That should have been my final year, but I took a gap year, because I didn't want to come back because of the shock and after the baby I would come back. I came back last year second semester. I approached my parents because I think I found out a week before registration and then I said to them okay guys, I would like to take a gap year and then go to school after the baby is like one. Then my parents said oh no that's fine, that's good, you should want to go back to school, but my grandparents were very against it. They were like now that you are going to have a baby, why would you go back to school? That is the very reason why I have to go back to school.
- 1.153 **Male participant:** Yes, to get a job, that's definitely a challenge.
- 1.154 **Female participant:** A lot of people that knew about it, didn't really expect me to come back to school. Even some of my friends, last year when they see me, they were like what are you doing here? I was like what do you mean what am I doing here? They asked shouldn't you be at home and I said no.



- 1.155 **Interviewer:** Would you say a challenge to you identity development was other peoples' expectations of you?
- 1.156 **Female participant:** Definitely.
- 1.157 **Male participant:** Hmm
- 1.158 **Interviewer:** So what they expected you to do – your grandparents were like ...
- 1.159 **Female participant:** I think the only people who supported this was my parents, my siblings, my partner, his parents and everybody else was just like you can't go back to school. When I took my son to crèche, I think he was 7 months, my aunt was like you are really spoiling this child, he shouldn't go to crèche, he is suppose to be at home. I said no, he needs to develop from a young age. I will go back to school and I will come back and he will be happy. I feel that was one challenge I had.
- 1.160 **Interviewer:** We will end with these three questions and it is basically questions regarding students' view of the future. How do you view your future in general? Do you perceive it more positive or more negative as for example you parents' life and why?
- 1.161 **Male participant:** More positive
- 1.162 **Female participant:** Definitely more positive
- 1.163 **Interviewer:** Why would you say that?
- 1.164 **Male participant:** I feel like my parents have done what they can to get me to live a better life. They have given me all the possibilities, all the chances, now I got to go and make it myself, but they have given it to me.
- 1.165 **Interviewer:** So, your view of your own future in general is more positive than for example their lives.
- 1.166 **Male participant:** Yes, the life that they have lived.
- 1.167 **Interviewer:** What does your future have in store, how will your future look? For example, how does the next ten years of your future looks like?
- 1.168 **Male participant:** In terms of what, there is so many ... job-wise or where I'm going to stay?
- 1.169 **Interviewer:** How does your future look? What does it have in store – just the major things that you feel that it has in store for you? From now, up until ten years from now. You don't often think about these things.
- 1.170 **Female participant:** Ten years from now – I want to do my honours in sign language – so ten years from now I should have my masters in sign language. Uhm ... I see myself very successful and ... what else – marriage, I'm not a romantic, but I feel like I want to get married. Just living life comfortably, not just meeting my needs, but that and beyond. Not worrying about who is going to pay my sons' school fees, where am I going to get the money, knowing that everything is paid up and I want to have a stress-free life. I want to be the best I can be so whatever worries I've ever had, whether high school or varsity, my son wouldn't have it.
- 1.171 **Male participant:** Can I pass in this question?
- 1.172 **Interviewer:** You can if you feel this is too complicated to answer. I think these are questions that we don't always think about every day.
- 1.173 **Interviewer:** How does the rest of your family perceive your future? For example, what are some of the opinions of your parents, your siblings, or even your extended family members when they have a chat with you? How do you perceive their perception for your future is?
- 1.174 **Male participant:** All that I know with my family is that they want me to do the best that I can, they want me to give the best that I can.
- 1.175 **Female participant:** It's the same with me, I'm not under any pressure from home. My parents always tell me: "we expect of you to be the best that you can be and to succeed

and in the end you are happy with what you have done”, because just like he said – they have given us clay to build some pots with it. I think their expectation is my expectation and maybe beyond, but because I know they are not pressuring me in any way or they do not show it, we expect the same. Be the best that you can be and be happy with what you have done.

1.176 **Male participant:** Have no regrets ...

1.177 **Interviewer:** So it is more “We want you to be happy” than pressurising?

1.178 **Female participant:** Yes

1.179 **Interviewer:** The same for you?

1.180 **Male participant:** Ja

1.181 **Interviewer:** But still expecting, well not expecting but wanting you to do the best that you can do?

1.182 **Female participant:** Yes, because if you want to have the best things in life, you need to be the best you can be and do your best to make sure that you can get what you want that you don’t only get things that you need, but you can get things that you want also.

1.183 **Interviewer:** That is the end of our questions!

## CGS Focus Group 2

- 2.1 **Interviewer:** I am going to start with the first question: how do you understand the term emerging adulthood and do you think you are in this stage?
- 2.2 **Female participant:** I think it is a transition from late “teenage-hood” to being an adult. I think I am in this stage because I am, I wouldn’t say burdened with responsibility but yes, I am burdened with responsibility and that comes with being an adult or growing to be one.
- 2.3 **Female participant:** I wouldn’t necessarily say I am an adult because, I don’t know but I am still figuring things out, I don’t think there is a right or wrong way to do things, but I feel just not there yet. For me, adulthood is independence and I am not dependent yet so I would not consider myself an adult yet.
- 2.4 **Female participant:** Yes me, I would say I am transitioning from late teenage-hood to early adulthood because I am making more decisions by myself.
- 2.5 **Female participant:** I will also agree to what she says because, in the past, I would always rely on my mother for everything, but now I am a different person. Even though I still rely on her for financial reasons, right now it is a bit different, because I make my own decisions. I know she is not here to tell me what is wrong and what is right. I know what I should do and I presume that I am doing a good job.
- 2.6 **Interviewer:** So you are definitely in the phase of emerging adulthood?
- 2.7 **Female participant:** Yes
- 2.8 **Female participant:** Yes
- 2.9 **Female participant:** Don’t you think being far from home makes you independent – to a certain extent, not fully?
- 2.10 **Female participant:** Yes it does, but I am not exactly far from home. (Laughs)
- 2.11 **Interviewer:** What are some of the most significant challenges that you have faced in this developmental stage?
- 2.12 **Female participant:** Wow, adapting, for me. Adapting into the situation and realise that my mom is not here. In the first semester, I ran into problems with accommodation. I came here by myself, 300 km from home. I struggled with accommodation, my registration didn’t go well, and I had to do that myself. It was just adapting to the idea that you are going to do things yourself now, nobody is going to help you like your mother did. Back home, your mother did everything for you, but now I have to do everything for myself without any help from my mother.
- 2.13 **Female participant:** Can I just ask where are you from? (Laughter)
- 2.14 **Female participant:** I’m from Parys.
- 2.15 **Female participant:** For me, I would say it is being accountable – like there are some stages in your life where you are in financial debt and I just want to blame someone, like why am I short of groceries and looking for someone to blame and I am on my own and you don’t want to take everything on yourself.
- 2.16 **Female participant:** For me it is decision making. *Participants agree on this in unison.* It is very difficult to make decisions on your own and the products of choice kills me.
- 2.17 **Female participant:** I can’t really say that I have major issues ... I think it’s more like the daily things, like I should decide do I want to wake up and go to class? Yes, I probably should, my parents are paying, but do I? It’s more like daily stuff ... like I can always call my mom and ask her to help with stuff ...
- 2.18 **Female participant:** It is decision making for me too, because next year I have to choose out of three majors, either Biochemistry, Microbiology or Food Science and nobody is going to tell me if I should choose two of them I have to make the decision by myself because it will affect me later.

- 2.19 **Male participant:** They said everything, but it is all about decision-making. You make a decision and you do not know if the decision that you are making is right or wrong until the consequences come.
- 2.20 **Female participant:** Does it really bother you though? Like today if I want to switch a major or whatever, I decide and to me it's not really a big deal ...
- 2.21 **Female participant:** So what you're doing is basically just living for now? You don't think about the future?
- 2.22 **Female participant:** No that's why I am studying what I am studying, it is actually what I want to do. To me it is not really a big deal if I have to change subjects. I live for the future, but I don't put so much significance on it or stress about it.
- 2.23 **Female participant:** It won't really apply to you, but for instance, you have R200 and you have to buy groceries. This is just an example. You have to make sure that you buy all that you need. It is not so easy because you want everything. That's where decision making comes in.
- 2.24 **Female participant:** There is a difference between want and need.
- 2.25 **Female participant:** What I'm saying is you don't have much money, but you have to make sure you live with what you have.
- 2.26 **Interviewer:** Do you experience your life currently as a time of stability or instability and why?
- 2.27 **Female participant:** Major instability.
- 2.28 **Female participant:** I think with students it is always going to be unstable.
- 2.29 **Female participant:** I think it is unstable, because right now I am not even sure about the subjects that I am studying. That is why I say it is unstable. When I left home, my mother told me I am going into the wrong field and now that I am here, my mother was actually right, she knows me very well. I thought going in that industry was a bit too risky, and I chose the safe one so my life is very unstable right now.
- 2.30 **Female participant:** My lease is going to be up in a few months so that means I might not have a place to stay if I don't want to go back where I was. That is unstable and the idea of never having a permanent home bothers me.
- 2.31 **Female participant:** You can't really explain how unstable this phase is and you change your mind just like this.
- 2.32 **Female participant:** Yeah you change your mind about friends, about which clothes you want to wear today ... just like the weather is unstable. (Laughs)
- 2.33 **Interviewer:** Do you think of this stage as a stage of possibilities? What possibilities come to mind?
- 2.34 **Participants together:** Yes
- 2.35 **Female participant:** Great things! I always wanted to do new things, meet new people, and try out a sport or a hobby I've not done.
- 2.36 **Female participant:** It's a time for freedom, actually.
- 2.37 **Female participant:** For me it is opportunity in my field of study.
- 2.38 **Female participant:** KOVSIE FM had auditions the other day and I chickened out, because first I was scared and second I asked myself no one did apply before second year, so why I am here and I left. It was an opportunity and a possibility for me, but it wasn't meant for me at that time. I will put more effort in it next year, because I want it next year.
- 2.39 **Female participant:** I have a lot of ideas in my head regarding possibilities. I spoke about my mother earlier. I am currently doing education, but my mother said I will be better in the world of business because of all the ideas I have in my head. I have so many ideas. I am constantly thinking of things to make so that the general living of people can be better. I am seeing a lot of possibilities.

- 2.40 **Female participant:** Like why are you doing something you don't love?
- 2.41 **Female participant:** Yeah seriously, I have to change it.
- 2.42 **Interviewer:** Talking about decisions, when making important decisions, do you take other into consideration or do you feel you are free to make choices that do not have consequences relating to others?
- 2.43 **Female participant:** I am a very selfish person when it comes to decision making. I always put myself first. That's a situation where I have to be selfish.
- 2.44 **Female participant:** Do you do it in all situations?
- 2.45 **Female participant:** No, not in all situations, there are situations where I help other people. Most of the time I just put myself first, I don't think about other people, I don't think about the consequences. I just think of myself, where I want to be, where I am going, where my decision is going to take me.
- 2.46 **Female participant:** I am kind of lukewarm on the question because it depends on what situation I am in when I have to make that decision. With minor decisions, I would not mind but with major decisions I would wonder what would my parents think.
- 2.47 **Male participant:** It depends on what I have to decide on, because I know this friend of mine knows this a lot so in general if I want to decide something I will ask my parents that they should vote - my parents, my sister, and my best friend. Democracy!
- 2.48 **Female participant:** I always put myself first because sometimes I do things because I know I am capable of this. If you say you are going to do something and you don't, it is on you. Like I said – being accountable is my challenge. I like to make decisions selfishly and then be accountable for it. if someone help me, I may blame them if something goes wrong (joke).
- 2.49 **Female participant:** I also think it depends on the situation.
- 2.50 **Female participant:** And the type of decision too.
- 2.51 **Interviewer:** Do you feel like you have reached adulthood yet?
- 2.52 (Most of the groups said no)
- 2.53 **Female participant:** In a way, yes.
- 2.54 **Female participant:** I think I have reached independency, not adulthood. That's a different story right there.
- 2.55 **Female participant:** Am I the only person who sees adulthood as a financially stable stage? The moment I don't have to call my dad and ask for some money on the 15<sup>th</sup>, I feel like I have made it! But I still need money sometimes.
- 2.56 **Female participant:** I am never in a situation where I have to ask for more money. The allowance I'm given, I work with.
- 2.57 **Female participant:** I have enough, but there is always something extra that is coming up. My mother budgets for one extra social event a month.
- 2.58 **Female participant:** My mother doesn't do that, she sends me money for groceries and that is it! She told me she didn't send me here to go on outings with my friends, I am here to study.
- 2.59 **Female participant:** My mom also told me that, you are here to study, but study isn't always the only thing you are going to do. You have a 24h day. My mother always says if I am not giving you money, where will you get the money, so she rather gave me money than stressing about where I will get money.
- 2.60 **Female participant:** Some parents will give you an allowance – everything included. How you use it is your problem.
- 2.61 **Female participant:** My mom said if you want entertainment, go to school with your laptop, download a movie, go home, and watch the movie. That is it.
- (One female participant excuses herself)
- 2.62 **Interviewer:** Are you trying new possibilities to learn more about yourself and why?

- 2.63 **Female participant:** I am an adventurous person, so I think I try different possibilities. I think I know more about myself in this stage, because I want to prove myself wrong when I think I can't do something.
- 2.64 **Female participant:** I would say I am trying new things to discover possibilities to learn more about myself. Now that I am more of an adult, I know what I want, at least some of it I will know more when I grow up. When I am free, I do quizzes online to discover more about myself. I am less social than the people around me, so I have less opportunities to discover myself.
- 2.65 **Male participant:** I don't really try, I just wait for challenges to come. Then I learn from them.
- 2.66 **Female participant:** So you have never set yourself a goal like maybe this month I will go rock climbing?
- 2.67 **Male participant:** Those things just happen. When it is Friday, I just told myself I want to go somewhere. As long as you are financially stable. You are fine.
- 2.68 **Interviewer:** What is identity and what has formed your identity up until now?
- 2.69 **Female participant:** A multitude of things.
- 2.70 **Female participant:** There are two concepts to identity, it's what you think of yourself and then there is what other people think of you.
- 2.71 **Interviewer:** Do the rest of you think that is what identity is?
- 2.72 **Multiple participants:** Yes
- 2.73 **Female participant:** It can be a multitude of things. It can be your academic standard, your gender, your culture, a lot of things define who you are so it can't be a single thing all the time. It is complex -everyone is complex. There has to be a couple of things who make up who you are. Everyone has a different combination.
- 2.74 **Male participant:** Yeah, a different make up for different things.
- 2.75 **Interviewer:** What would you say – what has formed your identity up until now?
- 2.76 **Female participant:** My hardships - that is it.
- 2.77 **Interviewer:** The difficult times?
- 2.78 **Female participant:** Yes ...
- 2.79 **Male participant:** Yeah.
- 2.80 **Female participant:** I would say the successes – the successes that I had made me the person that I am as well as the failures. The people I have met, the experiences that I gained.
- 2.81 **Female participant:** I don't look at a challenge and saw how much I suffered. I look at it and see how much it can build me, not how much it can break me. When I say, "my identity was built by my hardships", I mean that the hardships have actually made me the strong person that I am today. I know I can face anything right now with boldness. I know my God is behind me with anything that I do.
- 2.82 **Interviewer:** It sounds like spirituality also formed part of your identity?
- 2.83 **Female participant:** Yes ... very much.
- 2.84 **Interviewer:** We have challenges, we have successes, we have spirituality, what you think of yourself, what others think of you, who you are – anything else?
- 2.85 **Female participant:** I think it includes the people around you – with whom you were growing up because you take a bit of each of them and then you form yourself out of that.
- 2.86 **Interviewer:** How do you view your future in general? Do you see it more positive or more negative than for example your parents' life?
- 2.87 **Multiple participants:** More positive.
- 2.88 **Female participant:** More optimistic and more positive.
- 2.89 **Interviewer:** Why would you say that?

- 2.90 **Female participant:** I think we are a different generation now. We are not what our parents used to be. I think our parents had a certain set of rules regarding marriage and kids ... but we are not like that. We make new rules. We break boundaries, we are bold, what we think is right, according to us ... I think we are very different.
- 2.91 **Female participant:** Humans are made to evolve so what is the point if you just keep doing things the same way. Our parents reached one thing, we always try to reach higher.
- 2.92 **Female participant:** Yeah.
- 2.93 **Interviewer:** What does your future have in store? How does the next 10 years look like?
- 2.94 **Multiple participants:** Like success, awesomeness, great, heartbreak ...
- 2.95 **Female participant:** Our class had a discussion today and said that after honours one will get married and I sat there and realise: “I don’t want to get married, I have a lot of plans for myself and I don’t think marriage fits into it”.
- 2.96 **Female participant:** Yeah!
- 2.97 **Female participant:** Marriage and kids are not at all in my plan for the future for the next 20 to 25 years. I had this idea since Grade 7 and I still feel the same! I had a lot of experiences and realise I don’t want to have kids, cuz so much can go wrong and so much can go right ... and I don’t want to get married because marriage statistics in South Africa have not been promising.
- 2.98 **Male participant:** Next ten years – marriage, and one or two kids and success where I am working. That is where I see myself in ten years.
- 2.99 **Interviewer:** How does the rest of the family perceive your future? What are some of the opinions of your parents, your siblings, or even your extended family members?
- 2.100 **Female participant:** My parents are all for it, my mom and my dad and my sister ...
- 2.101 **Female participant:** I believe they know that I am doing the right thing, I believe so, I don’t know, maybe they don’t. Most of my family do believe I will be successful in life.
- 2.102 **Female participant:** You talk about your mother a lot – do you think you have that bond? She already told you that you are studying the wrong thing?
- 2.103 **Female participant:** My mother didn’t have a good life and she is one of those people who will always feel she is in that stage. She wants me to be successful, but she doesn’t believe that I will, because she went to college. She studied business management, IT, but she struggles to have a job right now. The problem is when she gets offers or it comes to interviews, the men want something on the side – like with all women – and because she refuses, they always tell her she will never get a job. It is like that – she never found a job after that and I believe that is why she wants me to go into business to do things for myself instead of going looking for jobs.
- 2.104 **Female participant:** Don’t you think your mom’s experience kind of like puts pressure on your decisions in terms of ...
- 2.105 **Female participant:** Yes, it does, but I want to be the reason that she believes God lives and God can take you out of every situation that you are in, I want to be that for her ... so I accept the pressure that comes with it.
- 2.106 **Interviewer:** What are some of the opinions of your family members with regards to your studying?
- 2.107 **Female participant:** I never really take them into consideration, what opinions really matter is my close family – my mom, my dad and my siblings and my gran. Regarding my other family, whether you tell me that I am not going to be successful, it doesn’t matter to me. If my parents told me this is the right fields to go with, I am in the right paths – that is all that matters.

- 2.108 **Female participant:** With me, I chose something very different that they all expected, but I just wanted to work with people. They think I will not make it in studying programming, because it is a lot of studying. They think I don't have the ability, I don't have the brains to do that ... but I will prove them wrong. I'm not proving them wrong, I am just proving myself right.
- 2.109 **Male participant:** My family and my grandparents are just happy that I am studying. They just encourage me to study, not what to study. They just say "go to school, go"! As long as I am successful.
- 2.110 **Female participant:** My family is not very enthusiastic. As long as I am doing what I want, my family is fine.
- 2.111 **Interviewer:** Thank you guys! Any last remarks?
- 2.112 **Female participant:** I just think it is awesome that we can talk about our lives and our families. This is an adventure and spontaneous ...



### **FGS Focus Group 3**

- 3.1 **Interviewer:** The first question is how do you understand the term emerging adulthood?
- 3.2 **Male participant:** I will just define it as a certain stage in life where you actually enter into an adulthood stage. Usually the stage is after you have been in your adolescent stage and now you are entering adulthood and I think the definition will go beyond just the name itself, but it would come with all the characteristics that you need to acquire or the equipment that needs to take place as you enter into the stage. It is not only about the name adulthood, but it is about the new attitudes that you need to develop, it's about the new way of living, it's about responding to the responsibility that you are having now in adulthood and being accountable for everything that you do, so I believe that's adulthood.
- 3.3 **Male participant:** In my opinion, I think emerging adulthood can be like exploring the adulthood; for example, you do things differently from when we were young or when you were in the adolescent stage. It is here where the responsibility starts. Either it can be on the family side or the responsibility of yourself – being independent.
- 3.4 **Interviewer:** So, it is about the characteristics of this stage, the attitudes, dependency or independency. Related to that question – what are some of the most significant challenges that you have faced while being in the developmental stage of emerging adulthood? Would you agree that you are in that stage?
- 3.5 **Male participant:** Yes, we totally agree. Some of the challenges that we encounter is the pressure from our peers, because it is believed that when we reached this stage there are certain decisions that you need to take. Some people will decide to get married, some people will decide to start businesses and some of us don't know actually what it is that you need to do so I think the pressure is a bit harder. At the same time, we are trying to focus on our studies, we are trying to make sure that we attempt to the pressure that is been introduced to us. I think that is the challenges that we have been facing. Other than that, there are so many challenges that we are facing academically, socially, relationships and economically. There is actually a wide range of things that could actually serve as influences. Looking at these different aspects, one can say that it is very hard to attend to them, but as time proceed I think you will get used to the ways of adapting and you will actually manage to survive.
- 3.6 **Male participant B:** I think a challenge is like “Where do you head to?” Parents are spoon-feeding you at home and then coming here to university it makes a big difference whereby you stay on your own, and you don't have that contact with your parents. At some point, you could have some chat with your mother or your father on a daily basis, but now it has changed. Now you have to get some airtime if there is no airtime and it will affect you also emotionally. Even like performing here in your studies, it can still affect you. Then again, the background that you are from, the economy at home, the parents at home - maybe they are only capable, they only have money to supply for the family. If you are isolated in some place, they have to give a certain amount of their money and deposit it to you to survive where you are. It becomes a very big challenge to us in university because at some point we can tell you “we don't have money” and at that time maybe you urgently need something that will help you to be good or maybe help you to perform well, maybe again to contribute in your adulthood. Being independent is something different. You came in here, you have to know what do you want first. As I came from Qwa-Qwa to Bloem, I had to choose friends - those who are going with me, not those who are pulling me down. Those are some of the challenges.
- 3.7 **Male participant:** I think there is something that I spotted from what he said, especially when he was speaking about the transition, uhm ... that takes place from home to

university. That creates a bit of a problem because some of us could only study because our parents are reinforcing the attitude to study. Now you can even look at the achievement rate or the passing percentage, we can be cognisant with regards to that. The impact that is created by the transition is very great because we tend to drop with regards to marks because there is no one to see if the homework is done properly, no one to make sure the assignments is submitted in time, you are on your own. That transition I think when entering in an adulthood stage sometimes brings a lot of challenges because now you have to be on your own, independence like he emphasised, and you have to make sure that everything is done in time by yourself. There is no one to follow you, there is no one to tell you to do your homework, you are on your own. However, I think it is a good stage for us to start developing some skills – those skills that will make you survive independently. For some other people, it may work for bad, but for other people with a right attitude, it may work for good. This is a stage that actually trains us to another level.

- 3.8 **Male participant:** If there were someone maybe who experienced varsity, maybe he would come back, maybe home, and give a bit back because at some point maybe in terms of books – NASFAS catered only for 6 books and I have to buy another one, they think maybe you are lying. They think you just want money for yourself. You see, if there were someone who has been there. For the coming generation, that must be easy. Even at my home, they know me, I am at the University of the Free State, but they don't even know where is that University of the Free State, so it becomes a challenge, a very big challenge because let's say I need R4000, they can't even get in contact with the university and see what is happening there.
- 3.9 **Interviewer:** So it is very separate – the home environment and the university environment?
- 3.10 **Male participants:** Yes, that transition is very different, very big.
- 3.11 **Interviewer:** Would you say that you guys are finding this stage of your life difficult with regards to student life as well as your personal life?
- 3.12 **Male participant:** It is quite difficult, but like I have said in the beginning it goes with your attitude. I think a very central agent or a central factor is your attitude. If you know your situation, if you know where you are coming from, your background, you will make sure you work to your level best so that you can change. I think to some it is challenging, one must say it is challenging, but your attitude, your behaviour, and the way your handle things will only determine the adaptation.
- 3.13 **Male participant:** And the adaptation again. You have to adapt. Like at home you used to take breakfast, lunch, dinner, but here it is different, because you can maybe just leave by the room at 8 and come back by 8 in the evening without taking lunch. Again you have to adapt. Whatever you do, you just have to adapt. Even if it's hard, but you have to try in order for you to have a progress.
- 3.14 **Interviewer:** Would you say that you guys have adapted?
- 3.15 **Male participant:** I may say I'm still in the process of adapting. I'm from Wits. Wits, it is different than this university. Like the way they taught me at home – I can't let one of my friends or my roommates suffer while I am there, I made a sacrifice. For myself, like on my side, I can adapt, but this guy, he can't, I have to sacrifice for him. Just to be generous. We have to help each other because we are from different family backgrounds. Just help in what you see. Not like over the boundaries.
- 3.16 **Interviewer:** I don't know if you guys read about Jeffrey Arnett, he was the man who developed this term, - emerging adulthood – and he described it as a term of instability, possibilities, self-focus, feeling in between and identity exploration. Do you experience your life currently as a time of stability or instability and why?

- 3.17 **Male participant:** I think one would say this is a time of instability indeed, because as much as one wants to be stable, you have to consider all the aspects that actually encompass your life. One could say for instance you look at the economic aspect, your academic aspect, social aspect and also political aspect but not in a certain context, but rather looking at the indirect influence that it has towards you. So ... I would say this is a moment of instability, because you look at the rand is dropping and doing this and that. Some of the things doesn't affect us directly, but indirectly, so we cannot ignore them, we cannot neglect them because it doesn't affect us directly, but we need to be cognisant that they do affect us. That brings a bit of an imbalance in our lives. Recently we have been hearing about the upcoming strike, what would bring to you. You are keen to write your exams, you are ready to do everything, but now there is an upcoming strike. What does that imply? Now you can see there is current instability in our lives although we may try to stabilise some of the things. We can only pray to the Lord that He intervenes in this nation. The things that we are experiencing day by day are actually a sign of instability.
- 3.18 **Male participant:** I can say again on that point that at some point you decide on something like tomorrow I want to go to the university and study from the morning until late, but sometimes, other factors come and change it for example environmental factors. You want it to be stable, but then this comes. Sometimes you want to perform well, but then you got zero and then you have to change your decision. Maybe you want to do medicine, but then you face difficulties. Instability, it favours this thing of adaptation.
- 3.19 **Male participant:** Just to catch up on what he is been saying, as he was talking about being stable – I think instability comes with a lack of consistent personality. When we review personality with regards to consistency and distinctiveness, you can see that when we talk about consistency, you handle things in a similar way, even if you feel someone else will handle it in a different way, you still handle things in a similar way. No matter what comes your way, you are still content, you still flourish, there is nothing that stands in your way as a boundary so when it comes to instability, it is where you lack all these characteristics. You are wavering.
- 3.20 **Interviewer:** I heard you spoke about the causes of the instability and mentioned politics, your friends, your family and all of those things play a role regards to the instability of your life. Do you think this stage of your life is a stage of possibilities?
- 3.21 **Male participant:** Yes indeed. It is the stage of possibilities because being in the university itself, it exposes me to a different type of environment, different type of people, different type of opportunities, and it is up to the individual whether they grab those opportunities or let go of them. It is a stage of possibilities, it is a stage whereby one can actually show people who they are, make sure that they get those best marks, make sure that they get recognition, make sure that they are satisfied with everything that they are doing so that they can keep up the good work. It is indeed a time of possibilities, everything is possible from now on.
- 3.22 **Male participant:** Even if you met different people here, they can teach you how to perform well, it is all about possibility. You are unlocking all those unlocked doors. You meet different people, even in the faculty - they can help. You learn how to treat people, you meet different people with different colours, different nations, you even meet people from New York and they say in New York we do this and this. There are many possibilities at university.
- 3.23 **Male participant:** Once again, I think this issue of an attitude still prevails. What we see as possibilities, other people might see from a different perspective. I think, somehow development of attitude needs to take place. Having the right attitude towards

your goals and having the right attitude towards everything that you are facing. I think this is a bit of a controversy, because one may say you are just saying it is a stage of possibilities, what about me – I am encountering this and this and this. Then I will come with my own opinion and tell him this is a time of possibilities – look at what I have achieved, look at what I have, look at the recognition I have gained. I think it is about your attitude, it is about how hard you work, how hard you push, how hard you push to work beyond limits. I think the possibilities is what we need to realise and to reach the adulthood stage.

- 3.24 **Interviewer:** I can hear that you agree that this is a time of possibilities, but what specific possibilities come to mind?
- 3.25 **Male participant:** The specific possibilities that I'll refer to are that of having new explorations for instances we have mentioned working hard – there are quite a number of students that have been getting scholarships – they are overseas, they are in Moscow, in Russia, so those are the possibilities they were exposed to. They only have to play their part and get the recognition and be placed in the right places, so I think we don't have to be narrowed with regards to possibilities. Some people focus on academics, other focus on relationships. Some people for example come to university and they see beautiful people, and they are looking forward to have relationships with those people and therefore I think there are many aspects that should be considered with regards to possibilities. There are possibilities of making healthy and good friendships and relationships and gaining recognition academically. There are so many possibilities on all levels actually.
- 3.26 **Interviewer:** Do you agree?
- 3.27 **Male participant:** Yes, I agree.
- 3.28 **Interviewer:** I also hear you say the words “making decisions” – when you make decisions in this stage, do you take others into consideration or do you feel that you are free to make decisions for yourself?
- 3.29 **Male participant:** I don't believe it is a good or bad thing – what determines if it is a good or a bad thing is the environment and those people who are involved in it. When I make a decision, yes ... I take some people into consideration, maybe I make the decision on my own, but think how it will affect this guy. I am not doing everything for me – if I think let me quit this university, but there are some people that I'm inspiring working at the university, but they don't know deep down what I'm feeling inside me. When you make a decision, it must be based on the crowds. Some things can change tomorrow. I can't make the decision that I will never go back to school because it is raining. Tomorrow it is not raining – what will happen then? I have to take that aspects into consideration. What will happen tomorrow?
- 3.30 **Male participant:** I think I will hypothesise this a little bit. The influenced, influence decision making ... You look at two aspects. You look at the decisions that you make, being influenced by other people, and the decisions that you make to influence other people. When speaking about considering other people – do you consider other people when making decisions? Sometimes, you may make decisions because you have been influenced by people, only to find out that they want to serve their own purposes through you, but most of the decisions that I made with the intention to influence other people, were more likely decisions to change other people's lives with. When looking at considering people within our decision-making circle, you should look at the decisions you make being influenced by people or the decisions that we make to influence people. However, some decisions that we make influenced by other people turn out to be good, but I think when you make decisions, you need to make decisions on the ground whereby you are keen to influence other people's life in a positive way.

- 3.31 **Male participant:** Again, when you make decisions, there is this thing of reasoning. Your reasoning can affect your decision. Your perception can affect your decision. Your frame of reference can affect your decision like when you are deciding on something you say maybe we are used to it this way at home, why do we have to do it this way here. It is thus important to take into consideration your perception, your frame of reference – how you see things.
- 3.32 **Interviewer:** So, the just of it is that your decisions affect others?
- 3.33 **Male participants:** Yes ...
- 3.34 **Interviewer:** So, when you make decisions, you take others into consideration to certain extend?
- 3.35 **Male participants:** Yes ...
- 3.36 **Male participant:** I think that is more important than any other reason why one could make decisions. You still look at the influence that they are going to have to other people, and then, after that have been considered, you can make decisions – making sure, it doesn't negatively influence other people, but instead it brings change and transformation.
- 3.37 **Male participant:** Like again for example, if you move from home, you are the first one. Maybe your mother is bragging about you: "I got my first child gone to university!" but then afterwards, you are coming back: "I'm fed up with the university life". That might you're your mother a heart attack! Imagine how many lives you are affecting. Millions of millions. That's why I'm saying – "you have to consider the crowds, the environment". I don't think there is something wrong or right – the environment determines whether something is good or bad.
- 3.38 **Interviewer:** I just want to backtrack a little bit, but do you feel like you have reached adulthood yet?
- 3.39 **Male participant:** From my own point of view, I have not reached it yet, I'm in the process of reaching the adulthood. I think adulthood is whereby you take a decision on your own. Now we are just in the process of reaching adulthood.
- 3.40 **Male participant:** That's very true ... For me, I think we cannot say that age determines adulthood, but I think the way we react, our thinking pattern, our reasoning ability – that actually determines that we have reached the adulthood stage. Now, one would bring a discussion or an argument and say I got my 30-year-old sister ... but I think that will fall under disorders and stuff. I think entering the adulthood stage has to be visible by the way you react, by the way you handle things, but sometimes it comes to one's surprise if a 16-year-old does things that can be done by an adult. It is a debate that can be put on the table with regards to that. Now is that what you call adulthood, because as much as adulthood is concerned, it is not about age. It is about the way you handle things. It is about perception, your reasoning skills, dealing with abstract situations, being able to solve problems, flexible interpersonal relationships, being able to socialize in a right way. I think adulthood cannot be looked at from a perspective of age. It is about how you handle the specific challenges of that stage - its pressures and obstacles. You have to be able to adapt, you have to be attend to all the situations coming your way. The qualities that one must acquire are the ones that fully determine adulthood.
- 3.41 **Interviewer:** Would you also regard yourself as in the process of getting there?
- 3.42 **Male participant:** I also regard myself as a person who is in the process of getting there although technically I may have to be considered that I'm in that stage. The truth may be that I'm not yet in that stage, but I'm working my way to the stage. I make sure every day: "You know what, let me work on my temper, let me work on my aggression". As I'm looking forward to the stage, by the time I get there, I need to be fully responsible,

- fully accountable, make sure that I fit in the stage. I think the fit between the individual themselves and the stage need to be optimized by all means.
- 3.43 **Interviewer:** Would you say that you are trying out different things, different possibilities, to learn more about yourself and why are you doing this?
- 3.44 **Male participant:** I think self-discovery is very important. At a certain stage, one needs to discover themselves, but before we discover who we are, I think we first need to consider self-evaluation ... evaluate our self, evaluate our surroundings. Then, self-discovery is very possible. I think I have started trying to figure out who am I, what do I like, because sometimes we tend to overlook things. Yes, I've been me, I've known myself ever since I was born, so there is no issue discovering who I am. Most of the situations – the crime rates, divorce rates – they emanate from failure to discover oneself. For instance, once you have started self-discovery, there are things, a potential and capabilities that you have never known about yourself. I think I am a true witness with regards to that. I have been studying all my life, but I never got a distinction. Never in my life. Never. I would pass and everyone would be happy. Ever since I got to university, I am passing with flying colours. All my first semester modules were distinctions and it seems like it is possible with my second semester modules as well. That only took place after I discovered my possible potential levels, my capabilities, and myself. After I think, “you know what, I'm not the person I think I was. I'm a different person. I could do this”. I thought I cannot get that far – I can even get beyond that. Self-discovery is very important, but it can only begin after one has allowed self-evaluation to take place. As you evaluate yourself, you start looking at the way you associate yourself: ‘Who shall I associate myself with? Are they going to contribute to what I am looking forward to or are they actually going to hinder me, stop me from getting to where I want to get?’ I think it is more important to do self-evaluation, you look at the people surrounding you, you look at the things hindering you to get to a stage where you fully discovered who you are, what you can do, what you are capable of doing.
- 3.45 **Male participant:** The things that you were doing these past years were quite different from things here at university. At some point, you discover your potential, your passion, and many different things. In your community for example, I was a Hydrocephalus patient, there is no one who were going to university and you were the first one – not in Qwa-Qwa, in South Africa as a whole. When I was thinking about university, some people said yes you can go. I would never think I would be this far. I said maybe let's go for it. Let me see. Everything that is happening now is a miracle. I never thought I'm this guy who loves church, who loves Christ, but when coming to this university, I have discovered myself because there are various churches in here, there are various fellowships in here. When I was in school I hated church, but now I have discovered myself and I am still busy to discover myself.
- 3.46 **Male participant:** Yes, self-discovery is continuous. Even for people that is married. People say you have to discover the person that you are marrying, but the truth is self-discovery is continuous, it evolves from time to time, and it is evolutionary.  
(New person entering – the group just explains to the new person what were they speaking about for example emerging adulthood, the different stages, possibilities etc.)
- 3.47 **Interviewer:** The next questions are regarding identity. I know you have mentioned things now like self-exploration, learning who you are and the possibilities, but what would you guys say is identity, how do you think it I formed?

- 3.48 **Male participant:** I think identity is one's personal reflection because in order for me to recognise your identity, I first have to know your personality. For example, your social life can tell me more about your identity – how you live with other people and those kinds of things.
- 3.49 **Male participant:** I think that is very true and according to my opinion, I think identity is the way we identify ourselves to other people. In a literal context, identity is what makes a distinction between different kinds of people. Understanding the concept identity, would help us understand and accept each other, hence we know that we are different and not the same. Identity ultimately serves as a distinction. People are not the same. They will never be the same. Even twins are not the same. The only distinction that makes it possible for us to see people in different views from different perspectives, is identity. Identity is the way you actually introduce your being to other people.
- 3.50 **Interviewer:** Do you guys agree?
- 3.51 **Male participant:** I agree ...
- 3.52 **Interviewer:** Any other opinions on how identity is formed besides personality, social context, knowing yourself, identifying yourself to others?
- 3.53 **Male participant:** There are various aspects that can contribute to the makeup of our identity.
- 3.54 **Interviewer:** Like what?
- 3.55 **Male participant:** The environment around us, sometimes we can even look at genetic predisposition. Hence, I have said, identity serves as a distinctive agent, so I don't believe that a genetic predisposition plays much of a role. I am actually talking about the link between you and your siblings and your parents. Since identity is something that makes a distinction, it distinguishes you from other people. I think the environment plays a central role in making up your identity – the people that you are surrounded with, churches, schools. I think there are various things that actually play a role in making up our identity.
- 3.56 **Male participant:** Even self-introspection can contribute to identity. Even socially, this is from there and that is from there.
- 3.57 **Male participant:** How your parents raise you also plays a big role in identity.
- 3.58 **Interviewer:** Would you guys say the things that you just mentioned were the things that formed your identity up until now?
- 3.59 **Male participant:** Apparently, yes ...
- 3.60 **Interviewer:** What experiences do you have if you think about dealing with challenges to your own identity development?
- 3.61 **Male participant:** I think one of the aspects that I think we forgot that also plays a role in the development of our identity is modelling. If we are modelling, we tend to have different people that we look up to and most of the challenge will be which one is actually the one that I need to look up to and then follow their steps. I think that is one of the challenges – where you are caught up in the middle of two choices. Should I model a leader or someone else? That is when the confusion starts. According to some social cognitive theorists, most of the learning in the social cognitive context correlates with our internal beings somehow. We tend to look up to people who have more or less the similar gifts or talents. That is how to determine who might be the right person to look up to. One of the challenges with regards to identity is who should I follow, who should I learn from.
- 3.62 **Interviewer:** The next questions are based on students' view of the future. How do you view your future in general? Do you see it as more positive or more negative as for example your parents' lives and why would you say that?

- 3.63 **Male participant:** Our future of this generation is more productive for example our parents never go to school until this far, but I'm the one again who is going to school. It is a privilege and again it is positive. If I can have a degree, it is something else. The doors are open. It gives you a personal experience ... an exposure ... to different fields.
- 3.64 **Interviewer:** Anyone else?
- 3.65 **Male participant:** I think that is it.
- 3.66 **Male participant:** I think the future of this generation is going to change. There is going to be a great deal of change, because when we look at the previous generation, they didn't get the opportunity that we are having now, that we are now exposed to. It is a clear indication of the transformation that is taking place, the transition that has begun, and the possibilities that we are exposed to. I think it entirely up to us whether we push to change the history or if we just pull off.
- 3.67 **Interviewer:** Would you all say that your view for the future is positive?
- 3.68 **Male participant:** Positive
- 3.69 **Male participant:** Positive
- 3.70 **Male participant:** Positive, because all of the opportunities is much exposed to us. It's up to you if you take the opportunity or not.
- 3.71 **Interviewer:** More specifically, what does your future have in store for you, what does the next ten years look like?
- 3.72 **Male participant:** Ten years to come I think, or I know, I will be the first doctor, who was a patient to become a doctor, an upcoming neurologist, a surgeon. I will be the first one.
- 3.73 **Male participant:** I will be the first to finish university, from my community I will be the first and I will be a psychologist. That is the biggest opportunity I have received.
- 3.74 **Male participant:** I also expect much, I expect more coming on my way. Uhm ... I think this generation is very privileged to be exposed to different opportunities. For me, I believe I will be the first doctor ever like when I look at my generation, how they proceed at home, there has not been a single person that had been a doctor. I will be the first one. I will make sure that I enrol for my PhD and I will make sure that I get it. For now, it might be a mystery for others because now if you share your ambitions, people just think it is a mystery, but I am keen and I am looking forward to greater a thing that is coming.
- 3.75 **Interviewer:** How does your family perceive your future? It is interesting to know – all of you are first generation students so you have something in common. What are some of the opinions of your parents and siblings or even your extended family?
- 3.76 **Male participant:** They have been encouraging, they have encouraged me to work and to give the best. Even when they call me, sometimes I want to cry because the things they say are in line with what I am passionate about. They fought to make sure that in the end of the day I am doing what I am supposed to do. Although most of my family cannot contribute to study fees and clothing, but they can contribute with words of encouragement and therefore they play a very important role. Whenever I study and I feel like I am breaking down, their words are lingering in my mind. They always tell me to push to the level best and to make sure that I work. The way they encourage me is not the type of encouragement that is pressure. It is the type of encouragement that makes you see the need for working. It makes you see the reason why you came here. I believe they play a very central part encouraging, even contributing financially.
- 3.77 **Male participant:** I also get a lot of support from my family, even my community. The person that I am now, the person that I am back at home, are the same person I am in the future, because attitude and respect is firstly important. Even the community says "you are the one that is going to change the situation at home". That is encouraging.



Even though my parents don't give me encouraging words due to the fact that I am emotional, I know they are encouraging me in the way they act and the things they do. I see that I have to work hard, otherwise things will be worse for them.

- 3.78 **Male participant:** I got positive encouragements and some negative encouragements. The positive encouragements are from my parents. Even if they can't afford to pay for my fees, they are trying to say "No, remember why you study" when I am tired. They remind me of things will be worse when I just come back. With my adult brothers, it is quite different, because they only got matric and now they are working. They got jobs and their own families. My mom and dad are encouraging me – their Facebook status and WhatsApp is positive. They will always say there is hope and we will try. Even if they are not working and living with pension money, they will sacrifice. They will say: "Just do it, we are waiting for you!" It gives me that hope, it encourages me even if I think of quitting. What else do I need – they are supporting me. When I go home now, it will be miserable.
- 3.79 **Interviewer:** Would you almost go as far to say that you keep on going because of your family and the views they have for your future?
- 3.80 **Male participant:** Yes ...
- 3.81 **Male participant:** Yes ...
- 3.82 **Male participant:** Yes, because like I said earlier, it took my mom a bad, tough five years to raise me to get to primary school. It was hard for her. I was sick and we had to go from Qwa-Qwa to Bloemfontein two times a month. It took my parents five years caring for me. Sometime I spend three years in hospital and they were there coming to see me so I don't have a reason to quit. They did their best, so I have to do my best. In 2014 I got officially married, because I working. Now, some people said why are you going back to university, what about your wife, but what I like about myself is that I don't hear those voices. When I was a young boy in primary school and they asked me what I wanted to be, I said I wanted to be a doctor. I want to be a doctor to help the people who are like me. There is a lack of doctors and I want to transform those things and give them hope. Other families will have hope for their children if they hear my story. Even with medical records that said the opposite, I did it because my parents encouraged me. I don't have a reason to quit.
- 3.83 **Interviewer:** Thanks guys, that was the last question!

#### **FGS Focus Group 4**

- 4.1 **Interviewer:** How do you understand the term emerging adulthood?
- 4.2 **Female participant:** I think it is in the early stages of your twenties – twenty, twenty-one, where you still learn how to be an adult.
- 4.3 **Male participant:** Like she said – the stage in your twenties – where you are emerging from the other stages to the young adult stages.
- 4.4 **Male participant:** I think it is a transition stage between ... from childhood to adulthood. This is the stage where you make important decisions that will have an impact on the rest of your life, going forward, like choosing a career path to follow.
- 4.5 **Male participant:** I think it is a point where you start learning a lot of things, you start differentiating between different things, internal and external factors, and the impact of these factors in your life. I believe when you are growing up, the things that you learn at home, is not the same things that you are going to experience here at university. It is all about transition and the external factors.
- 4.6 **Female participant:** Again, it is a stage where you learn to live without your family, you work or you go to university. It is a transition like he stated.
- 4.7 **Interviewer: Feel free to discuss it amongst yourself.**
- 4.8 **Male participant:** When do you think the “emerging” starts?
- 4.9 **Female participant:** I think it starts when you finish high school, because during high school, you still receive pocket money from your parents, they still drive you to school and attend your meetings and all of a sudden you start varsity and you have to decide what you are going to do with your life. Especially for first-generation students, like if your parents went to a university, they would know where to take you and what to do, but because they did not, you have to take all the decisions by yourself.
- 4.10 **Male participant:** In some way, I agree with what she said, but I also think it has to do with the environment that you grew up in. When I was finished with high school, some of the children start being responsible and took care of their siblings, but some people start doing that in Grade 10 or Grade 11. It depends on the people that you grew up with. If you grew up with older people, it might have an impact on you, you might mature on an earlier age.
- 4.11 **Female participant:** Are you saying you can emerge to adulthood when you are still young?
- 4.12 **Male participant:** Yes ...
- 4.13 **Male participant:** I think it can happen earlier, but then you are still not in that stage. You may start having responsibilities, you are forced into it, but you are still not in that stage when you are young.
- 4.14 **Interviewer:** What are some of the significant challenges that you have faced while being in this developmental stage? In what stage, do you guys think you are? Would you say you are in the developmental stage of emerging adulthood?
- 4.15 **Male participant:** Yes, I think I would say that ...  
(Most of the other people said yes)
- 4.16 **Male participant:** For me, I am not quite sure yet ... I am just being honest with you guys. Because I grew up with my uncles and everyone and I learned a lot of things when I was still 13-15. I didn't spend much time with people that are the same age than me. I spent more time with people that are 5-6 years older than I am ... so they taught me a lot of things when I was still young, so I don't know if I am in that stage or not.
- 4.17 **Interviewer:** What are some of the significant challenges that you have faced while being in this developmental stage of emerging adulthood - whether you were in it, or whether you are in it now?

- 4.18 **Female participant:** I am from a small town, so I didn't always realise what I need. When you get to university, you realise that you need a lot of things and you have to work hard for them. For example, bursaries and when you go to university, you take a lot of responsibilities on yourself. You have to decide when your next meal is going to be, how you spend your money and when are you going to buy clothes. My challenge was, when I got here, that my family couldn't support me financially so I had to find ways for myself. In school, they always made plans to assist me, but now I had to make plans myself.
- 4.19 **Male participant:** The most significant challenge I can think of is my friends. I am a guy who lives alone. I don't have any friends in fact. I had to choose the kind of friends that will suit into my lifestyle – the way I want to live it. Choosing friends is quite a challenge for me – I don't find it easy to make friends.
- 4.20 **Female participant:** When you are in school, if you spend your money, you know you will get more, but here you have to spend your money wisely. At first, you won't spend it responsibly, because you are used to spend it daily. In university, when you get money it is for the whole month and that is challenging.
- 4.21 **Male participant:** I agree with the other three colleagues; the most significant challenge is the decision making. You have a lot of decisions in your hand like who to make friends with, with who are you going and if you make the wrong choice, it will face you directly. So, all I'm saying is decision making is most difficult challenge in this stage.
- 4.22 **Male participant:** They said everything, but I just want to say something from a cultural perspective. There are different cultures in South Africa that do things in a different way, but back home you are in one village or town and used to just one culture. You know how they do things for example in church the girls are just allowed to wear skirts and not trousers and everything. It is the culture. When you come here, everything is different. You see girls going to church wearing trousers. It all comes back to the decision-making and your choice of friends. Some of them may influence you to change from how you did things in the past.
- 4.23 **Female participant:** Do you think change is a bad thing or is it possible that change means you are growing up and realising you are not only limited to what your society or community teaches you? What if you are aware and accept how other people do things although it is not the same than you? You don't necessarily have to change your way of doing, but accept it and be aware.
- 4.24 **Male participant:** that is how you adapt to a different environment, not change. If you change, you might change completely, and if you go home you do things that you didn't do in the past. It is all about adapting to a new environment.
- 4.25 **Interviewer:** If we say that you are in this stage of emerging adulthood, how do you experience this stage of your life with regards to student life as well as your personal life?
- 4.26 **Female participant:** I think it is awesome! (Laughter) I think it's awesome being an adult because you get to be responsible. You get to see good things and bad things. For me
- 4.27 **Female participant:** It is good. I get to learn who I am, without ... like before I came here I had a lot of ideals that was the result of the environment that I grew up in. In my hometown, I was never exposed to different races, except from school where we did English, we did everything else in our home language. When you get here, you stay with people from different colours, different cultures, different countries. You learn how they live, and about their different cultures. When I go home now, I am a different

- person from who I was in matric. Because certain ideals changed when I came to campus.
- 4.28 **Male participant:** I think the experience is ... both good and bad. You are exposed to different things, exposed to different cultures and we are from different cultures.
- 4.29 **Interviewer:** Okay we have a “good” and a “bad” and an “awesome”?
- 4.30 **Male participant:** I think it is being exposed to everything now and with that, you have to live with the rest of your life. You get to deal with different people, you have to make choices about your career. There are a lot of decisions and you have to make them now.
- 4.31 **Interviewer:** Next question, do you experience your life currently as a time of stability or instability and why?
- 4.32 **Male participant:** I think I am finding my feet, it is better than first semester. Everything is reality now, I think different about things, but sometimes you want clarity about things and it just doesn't happen because my culture is clashing with reality. So in terms of that, eish, it's not good.
- 4.33 **Interviewer:** So, you would say unstable?
- 4.34 **Male participant:** Yes ...
- 4.35 **Female participant:** When I think about stability, I think about a working person with a stable income every month and the same routine. With that definition, I don't think I am stable, because a student always has to work towards what you want to become, what job or business you want to have. We are not yet stable because we are still working towards the goal of being stable ... so for me ... I am not stable.
- 4.36 **Male participant:** For me, let me say I'm in between. Let's call it a developmental stage. We are getting exposed to a lot of things so I won't say my life is stable or not. I will just say I am in a development stage between a lot of things.
- 4.37 **Male participant:** It is unstable. Every aspect in my life ... academically, emotionally, everything is just unstable, because I am still developing now. So it's really unstable.
- 4.38 **Female participant:** I also think it is unstable, because there are some decisions that you have to take and then you are not sure what to take and what not to take, for example, I was supposed to do my second year in BSc, but I had no money. I wasn't sure what to do and then I end up doing education. It is unstable because I don't know, the choices that I make is this good or ...
- 4.39 **Female participant:** Even me, I have the same story, with not having a source of income from parents so you have to make decisions that are going to impact your future. I am with her, because I did two years of BSc but with my third year I had financial trouble – I never had a stable funding. In my third year, funding for education was available and then I had to make a decision. Your high school dreams change during university and sometime you should take a road that you never thought of.
- 4.40 **Male participant:** You also get a different idea about what you want to do for example, you always wanted to be a doctor, but now you see what doctors really do and you decide against it so it is very unstable.
- 4.41 **Interviewer:** So, you have mentioned what the causes of the stability and the instability are – it is basically the finances, the different study pathways. Do you think this stage in your life is a time of possibilities? What possibilities come to mind?
- 4.42 **Male participant:** At this stage, everything is possible ... since grade 10 I realised everything is possible. Like sometimes someone would just help you and sponsor a ticket for a plane or help you get into a programme. I really believe everything is possible in this stage, you just have to believe you can do it. If someone wants to accomplish something great, you must ask yourself “Why not me?” Everything is possible, it is based on the decisions that you make in your life.

- 4.43 **Female participant:** Because I started education, I got an opportunity to be part of an international programme. When I started education, I never had an idea that it would open up so many opportunities for me and in the process, I fell in love with helping people. In the end, it is going to help me to help other people.
- 4.44 **Male participant:** Yes, there are a lot of possibilities in this stage. We are meeting different people, people with different social economic backgrounds. Every day we get exposed to different opportunities out there. There are a lot of opportunities for a person to succeed out there.
- 4.45 **Female participant:** It depends on the people you are associated with and on how you approach certain opportunities. I don't know what to say ... It is possible if you consider everything around you.
- 4.46 **Male participant:** I think possibilities are there ... opportunities are there, but it comes with responsibilities. But the competition is intense in everything. It is a 50/50 thing.
- 4.47 **Male participant:** He is right - possibility comes with responsibilities. Like we are first-generation students and struggling financially, so if we approach someone for a business idea to help you with money, because you are hungry for opportunity, they set up the contract to give you 25% and take 75% for themselves, forgetting that you were the one who came up with the idea. So, there is possibility, but you must be careful, you might end up selling your future.
- 4.48 **Female participant:** I think if there is an opportunity and three people go for the opportunity you must think what distinguish you from the rest. If you apply for a job or write a test, what qualities do you have that will put you ahead of the others. It means that you must put in more work and more dedication. As much as opportunities are there, it is how you work.
- 4.49 **Male participant:** The good thing is like she said – what distinguishes you from others.
- 4.50 **Interviewer:** When making important decisions, do you take others into consideration or do you feel you are free to make choice that do not have consequences relating to others?
- 4.51 **Male participant:** I have to think about others a lot when making decisions, because at home my family is interconnected so I can't just make a decision on my own. I applied for a scholarship in China, but my mother didn't want me to go ... so I had to turn the scholarship down. My decisions affect others so I can't make them on my own.
- 4.52 **Female participant:** I have a friend, but we are from different backgrounds. She is the only child and gets everything from her parents. I have a family and a brother. When we work, and we both get the same amount of money, the first thing she is going to do is buy clothes, do this, and do her hair. When I get money, I have to think "this much is for this" and "that much is for that" so I can't just make everything about me. I know there are people who need the money more than I do.
- 4.53 **Male participant:** Last month I had to make a decision regarding money and your friends tell you to do something whereby they can benefit as well, but I tried to accommodate them before I made the decision. At the end of the day I decided to take the money and travel around the world and there I will meet a lot of entrepreneurs, because those people will help you in the future. If I am going to take that money, I will sell my future as a trade-off. Like your life being traded for money.
- 4.54 **Male participant:** When making a decision, I think you have to consider others, because like he said it influences a lot of people. It is the right thing to do. It is a necessity.
- 4.55 **Female participant:** I also think you have to consider other people, for example, at home, we are so many and my aunt is taking care of us ... we are 7 orphans. When coming to clothes I can't just say "I need clothes", I have to think about others. I have

- to think about the small ones, what they are going to eat at school. I am old, I can survive hunger, but with them, they are too small, they can't survive hunger. I think you have to consider other people when making decisions.
- 4.56 **Female participant:** I think the consideration of other people also gives motivation to study ... trying to make the best of yourself for example if you know your home situation is like this and you find yourself lazy and don't want to study, you just remind yourself where you come from and keep pushing.
- 4.57 **Male participant:** Another thing came to my mind, since we are first-generation, it is hard, and you have to consider your parents with your decisions. Some of our parents didn't have the opportunity to go to university, like I was saying with scholarship and everything. So when you want to go out of the country, your parents won't let you go because they are worried about your safety. So as a first-generation student, it is good to have someone to whom you look up to so if you have to make a decision, you can ask them for advice.
- 4.58 **Interviewer:** Do you feel like you have reached adulthood yet and are you trying different possibilities to learn more about yourself?
- 4.59 **Male participant:** I don't think I have reached adulthood yet. (laughter)
- 4.60 **Male participant:** I also haven't reach adulthood yet. For me, adulthood is the time where there is so much responsibility and at this point I haven't had that much responsibility. I think I will reach adulthood when I get married or when I start to think about marriage. For now, I just want to explore life.
- 4.61 **Female participant:** I don't think I have reach adulthood yet, because I am still developing and there are still many things that I have to learn about myself.
- 4.62 **Female participant:** I also think I am getting there.
- 4.63 **Male participant:** I don't think I have reached adulthood since I am still depending on other people financially and things like that. If I can do things by myself, that is when I will say I have reached adulthood.
- 4.64 **Male participant:** I think I am still very young, far from adulthood. (Laughter). I just turned 21 this year, but I wouldn't see myself as an adult now. It is my first year at this university and I am still treated like a child at home.
- 4.65 **Interviewer:** Do you think you are trying out different possibilities in order to learn more about yourself and why?
- 4.66 **Female participant:** Like I said, I have started working and getting out of my comfort zone and that challenged me a lot. I have to find a balance. I have a schedule for the first time now that is not just going to class, eat, sleep, and watch series. I had to find a balance between studying and all those things. I feel there has been a lot of growth in the last two months.
- 4.67 **Male participant:** I think I try out things to get to know myself ... being part of this study can be one example. So, I try out everything that I can. I try out stuff to see my weaknesses and strengths and stuff.
- 4.68 **Male participant:** We can improve by trying out what we do best in our lives, but it is challenging for example you want to play soccer, but you can't afford soccer so you sit back and not play soccer. That are some of the challenges what we face sometimes.
- 4.69 **Female participant:** I just want to add, sometimes the challenge is to get the funding for whatever you want to do.
- 4.70 **Male participant:** I think I am still trying to know myself, I like reading a lot of motivational books and one of the books that helped me a lot in discovering myself is one with the title "What on earth am I here for". That was a question I was always asking myself. I think in that process, I discovered my purpose.

- 4.71 **Female participant:** I think I am also trying to know myself, with the changing of a course leaving BSc and going to education. At home, I always loved teaching the younger ones at home, so I think I will see now if teaching is really my thing.
- 4.72 **Interviewer:** What is identity and what has formed your identity up until now?
- 4.73 **Male participant:** I believe identity is who I am. Identity is basically me. I believe my identity is formed by how I grew up, my surroundings, and by the challenges I faced along the way. I can't expect someone from a total different area to be just like me.
- 4.74 **Female participant:** Like I have mentioned earlier, the people that I interacted with ... has formed me into the person that I am today and developed my identity.
- 4.75 **Male participant:** I was born in Lesotho, I studied there from grade 1 to grade 5 and then we moved to South Africa and I finished grade 12 here in South Africa. My identity is a mix between when I grew up in Lesotho and when I grew up in South Africa.
- 4.76 **Male participant:** My identity is based on a lot of external factors like my family. That is where I identify myself and share their history. I also identify myself with the people I spend a lot of time with. How you identify yourself is part of learning.
- 4.77 **Male participant:** Your nationality also forms your identity. Another thing about identity is you might identify yourself as a teacher, but someone else may identify you as a leader. You have never known that you can be a leader, but someone discovered it in you and see this person is a public figure. You can identify yourself and other people can help you to identify yourself.
- 4.78 **Interviewer:** How do you perceive your future? Do you perceive it as more positive or more negative than for example your parents' life?
- 4.79 **Male participant:** I think my future is going to be brighter than my parents' life because I will graduate and get a degree while my parents couldn't graduate at all or get any certificate.
- 4.80 **Female participant:** I think it is better – like he said, the opportunities that we have, they did not have and we need to make the best from what we have.
- 4.81 **Male participant:** I am a guy who does a lot of self-evaluation. Almost every day I evaluate today I have done this, today I have done that. What I love about university up to this point is how they teach you to think. Even if I quit school now, I will still become more successful than my parents, because now I know how to think.
- 4.82 **Male participant:** My future is very positive, because I have been exposed to a lot of opportunities in life, getting to travel around the world – that is something that my parents never do. In that process, you start to inspire other people and when you inspire other people you keep on working harder. It is like being a millionaire – you have that fear of one day losing this money, so you keep on working hard. If you fail, you also fail other people, because other people are looking up to you. I view my future as positive because I get exposed to a lot of things. Not just from university, like I said I love to read a lot of books. That is how I learn a lot of things.
- 4.83 **Male participant:** My future is good. When I compare it with my parents, they did not have the opportunities but in terms of decision making, they were good. So we have to learn to make good choices.
- 4.84 **Male participant:** The people who you spend a lot of time with, also determine your future. Like your friends.
- 4.85 **Male participant:** I hear, but I also think it depends on you. I am a not person who likes going out, drinking, but my friends like going out. Still they don't come to me and say let's go out, because they respect the fact that I do not go out. The things I share with them like our passion for leadership and all those things that is what keeps us together, our similarities, even if we have our differences.

- 4.86 **Interviewer:** How does the rest of your family perceive your future? What are some of the opinions of your parents, siblings and even your extended family?
- 4.87 **Female participant:** My little brother always says: “we going to your house one day” ... They have these high expectations, so it is important to work hard.
- 4.88 **Male participant:** They believe I am a leader. They always call me nicknames which are encouraging. Like they say “Hay Mr CEO, Mr CEO ... ” It encourages me to work hard. I don’t want that nickname and end up being something else.
- 4.89 **Male participant:** My family is really expecting a lot from me. They haven’t really said it, but you can see it from their attitude. They want me to be a successful person in life and earn a lot of money. They are really expecting a lot from me.
- 4.90 **Female participant:** It means a lot to me that they believe in my, they want the best for me and believe that I will finish. They do believe in me so they are expecting a lot from me.
- 4.91 **Male participant:** I think we share common goal. All of our parents expect something for us. From my family, I am the first one to enter university, I was the first one in the community to pass grade 11 ... so my family is expecting a lot, more specifically, my father.
- 4.92 **Male participant:** Yes, they put pressure on you. I know I am just a first year, but they are treating me as I am something big and I know I am only beginning this difficult journey.
- 4.93 **Male participant:** For them it is an achievement to be at university. Assignments, tests, everything.
- 4.94 **Female participant:** Like he said, it is how they treat you. It is different now from how it was. When I told my grandmother about university, she said “Wow, you are a woman, alone by yourself?”
- 4.95 **Male participant:** Last year, I was in grade 12, they still treated me like a child, but now I have grown and they treat me like I am grown.
- 4.96 **Male participant:** My family are not the kind of family who will ask you “How are you doing at school?” I think it is because I am the first-generation to come to university so they don’t really follow on my academics. They only wait for exam times and then ask, “Why did you get only 40% for this module?” but they never asked me during the semester. Because I am the first-generation, they expect me to perform very well.
- 4.97 **Female participant:** And then they will say, “In high school you would get 90s”. (Laughter)
- 4.98 **Interviewer:** Any last comments?
- 4.99 **Male participant:** Now we might recognise one another on campus and be like I know you from this session. And I want to leave you guys with a quote; “Don’t allow your background to put you back on the ground”.
- 4.100 **Interviewer:** Thank you guys!



## Appendix F – Ethical Clearance Certificate



Faculty of the Humanities

25-May-2016

Dear **Prof Naude**

Ethics Clearance: **Identity, engagement and success among first- and continuous-generation students**

Principal Investigator: **Prof Luzelle Naude**

Department: **Psychology (Bloemfontein Campus)**

### **APPLICATION APPROVED**

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities. I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Research Ethics Committee of the faculty that you have been granted ethical clearance for your research.

Your ethical clearance number, to be used in all correspondence is: **UFS-HSD2016/0313**

**This ethical clearance number is valid for research conducted for one year from issuance.** Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure we are kept up to date with your progress and any ethical implications that may arise.

Thank you for submitting this proposal for ethical clearance and we wish you every success with your research.

Yours Sincerely

Prof. Robert Peacock  
Chair: Research Ethics Committee  
Faculty of the Humanities



## **Appendix G – Research Diary Entry/Example of the Researcher's Reflective Journal**

Reflection following focus group discussions

The two focus groups today were overall an enjoyable experience. I was disappointed when only a few students showed up for the first interview, as a lot of preparation went into the discussions. This also made me anxious about the focus groups that would follow, as I realised how students were not motivated enough to attend.

During the first discussion, I realised how students were eager to participate and did not seem too shy to be honest. The second focus group was even more enjoyable, as participants really elaborated on their experiences of EA and the challenges they faced as students at university. The willingness to participate was fascinating and made the job as a facilitator a lot easier, as I only interrupted when the discussion went too far off topic.

At some stages I did, however, feel excluded, as if students did not even care if I was present. This made sense when I considered the group cohesions that were formed due to the students having things in common with one another. They formed a little group of students who seemed to support one another and share in their struggles of university. It was an interesting observation.

Some participants spoke more than others, and it was easy to identify the dominant individuals. At some stages, I had to ask the quieter students what their thoughts were, as it seemed like they would keep quiet for the entire discussion.

Participants really seemed to enjoy the focus groups and really connected with one another. I could see how the different generational groups found commonalities in their lives and related to one another. At some stages, it also seemed like participants learned from one another or encouraged one another. This was also interesting to observe.

## Appendix H – Turnitin Report

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