Gender identities in emerging adulthood: A social constructivist perspective

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Clinical Psychology

University of the Free State

Supervisor: Prof. L. Naudé

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Declaration

I, Thabiso Nicoline Dinale, hereby declare that this study, ***Gender identities in emerging adulthood: A social constructivist perspective***, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Magister Artium in Clinical 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 cede copyright of the thesis to the University of the Free State, and all royalties from intellectual property that was developed during the study at the University of the Free State will accrue to the University.

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I hereby provide permission that this dissertation be submitted for examination - in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an applied Master's in Clinical Psychology, in the Department of Psychology, Faculty of the Humanities, at the University of the Free State.

I approve the submission for assessment and that the submitted work has not previously, either in part or in its entirety, been submitted to the examiners or moderators.

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Declaration by Language Editor

I, **Glenda Holcroft, (ID 5103060026082)**, a professional language practitioner, declare that I conducted the language, technical and APA reference editing of this dissertation, *Gender identities in emerging adulthood: A social constructivist perspective,* by Ms T. N. Dinale.

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The most terrifying thing is to accept oneself completely.

— **C. Jung**

Abstract

Emerging adulthood is a complex developmental stage, with one of its main developmental tasks being the exploration of an identity. This aspect was therefore the focus of the research study, and at its centre were emerging adults' perceptions of gender identity. The research study focused on university students as emerging adults in the South African context.

Literature regarding gender identity informed the study. The theoretical framework of the research study was the social constructivist perspective. This theoretical framework indicated that factors such as the family, peers, social structures, culture and socio-political history, religion and the media have a direct influence on emerging adults' conceptualisation of gender identity. Moreover, the understanding of gender identity was located in terms such as gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender-appropriate behaviour.

A qualitative framework was selected to explore the participants' perceptions of gender identity. The data collection process took the form of two focus groups and five individual interviews. The participants were identified by means of convenience and snowball sampling. The data was analysed by using thematic analysis.

The research findings confirmed and, in some instances, contradicted previous research studies on gender identity. The research study indicated that the conceptualisation of gender identity has evolved with time. In addition, there was evidence that gender identity was informed by internal and external processes. It was noted that gender identity is a complex construct and is best understood as occurring on a continuum that includes femininity, androgyny and masculinity. It was also noted that gender identity is influenced by processes such as social categorisation, gender stereotypes and larger societal systems. There was evidence that gender identity can be conceptualised on the basis of personal story construction. Some limitations of the research study were identified, and these may assist in directing future studies in this specific area.

Keywords: emerging adulthood, gender identity, gender continuum, femininity, androgyny, masculinity, social construction, family, peers, social structures, culture and socio-political history, religion and media.

Contents

Chapter 1: Overview and Rationale of the Study

The title of the research study is *Gender identities in emerging adulthood: A social constructivist perspective*. Emerging adults' perspectives on gender identity are explored. This chapter focuses on a discussion of the context of and rationale for the research study. The aim of the study is stated, and a summary of the research methods used is given. An overview of the chapter layout of the dissertation is provided, and the chapter ends with a brief summary.

1.1 Context and Rationale of the Study

One of the developmental tasks of emerging adults is to seek a deepened understanding of the self. People in this developmental stage prioritise focusing on themselves (Smith & Snell, 2009). Emerging adults have an innate need to ponder important issues (Arnett, 2007). Hence, the researcher believed that the identified population group would be likely to provide insightful information about gender identity. Emerging adulthood has also been identified as a period of feeling 'in-between'. This means that emerging adults are neither adolescents nor adults. Their positioning in development could give them the advantage of having a broader understanding of the research topic. The researcher hypothesised that the information provided by the participants would potentially be different from that provided by people at a fixed developmental stage (Arnett, 2007). In summary, the researcher purposefully chose emerging adults as the research participants because of the complexities accompanying this developmental stage.

A number of factors influenced the researcher's decision to explore the construct of gender identity. There is contradictory information in the literature regarding the conceptualisation of gender identity. Some theorists understand gender identity from a biological perspective and accordingly define it in terms of whether someone is male or female (Meissner, 2000). Other theorists include concepts such as sexual orientation, specifically heterosexuality, homosexuality, trans-sexuality and bisexuality, in their conceptualisation of the construct (Austin, Johnson, & Wojcik, 2009). By contrast, Stets and Burke (2000, p. 997) define gender identity as "the degree to which persons see themselves as masculine or feminine given what it means to be a man or woman in society". Stets and Burke's conceptualisation of gender identity resonated with the researcher, and this influenced her decision to investigate gender identity as existing on a continuum. The continuum includes the concepts of femininity, androgyny and masculinity (Duerst-Lahti, 2007). While reviewing research studies on gender

identity, the researcher discovered that most of the research that had been conducted on the identified subject was not of South African origin. In addition, there are very few studies on gender identity in the university context. Therefore, the researcher hopes that her work will contribute to the body of research on gender identity studies specifically in the context of South African universities.

There is also a personal reason for the researcher's decision to explore gender identity. The researcher is an emerging adult and she is going through her own process of understanding her gender identity and the factors that have shaped her conceptualisation of the construct. She is curious about the origin of the ideologies regarding her gender identity. She therefore conducted the research study in the hope that she would uncover new truths about her opinions on gender identity.

The researcher's decision to choose the social constructivist perspective as the theoretical framework of the research study was influenced by a number of factors. The principles of social constructivism suggest that the understanding of constructs and the process of meaning making is influenced by sociocultural factors (Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2005). The researcher came to understand that people are innately social beings who understand themselves in relation to others. She is interested in exploring the societal factors that assist and influence emerging adults in their conceptualisation of gender identity.

1.2 Theoretical Grounding of the Study

The research study is introduced by conceptualising emerging adulthood. Emerging adulthood is identified as a developmental stage that occurs between adolescence and early adulthood (Arnett, 1998). Emerging adults are therefore neither adolescents nor fully-fledged adults. Arnett (1998) was the theorist who proposed the developmental stage of emerging adulthood and identified its five distinguishing characteristics as the age of instability, the age of self-focus, the age of feeling in-between, the age of possibilities and the age of identity exploration.

Other theorists, including Erikson and Marcia, also contributed to the work of identity development (Watts, Cockcroft, & Duncan, 2009). Erikson identified eight psychosocial stages of development. These stages are: basic trust versus basic mistrust; autonomy versus shame and doubt; initiative versus guilt; industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion; intimacy versus isolation; generativity versus stagnation; and integrity versus despair. The psychosocial stage of identity versus role confusion specifically influenced identity studies.

Marcia (2002) introduced the identity status theory. Marcia asserted that identity development is influenced by expected or unexpected life events (Marcia, 2002). He also postulated that identity development occurs in two dimensions, namely experiencing a crisis and committing to a decision. Furthermore, he identified four alternative statuses of identity formation: identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity achievement.

Besides the approaches outlined above, the narrative approach to identity and the social identity theory have also been used to expand the understanding of identity development. In terms of the narrative approach, identity is a fluid, complex concept and is constructed in different contexts (Barkhuizen, 2016). The social identity theory, on the other hand, states that identity develops through three processes: social categorisation, social identification and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

With reference to gender identity specifically, it is often associated with a particular set of concepts, which include femininity, masculinity, sexual orientation, homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality, sexual identity, gender stereotypes, gender attitudes and gender roles. Different perspectives on gender identity are also explored in this study, namely the nature versus nurture debate, the gender continuum theory, narrative approaches to gender identity and the social constructivist approach.

The social constructivist approach maintains that knowledge and meaning making are processes that are constructed in social interactions. Therefore, for the proper understanding of a concept, the context in which it occurs should be taken into consideration. In the same manner, perspectives on gender identity are influenced by specific social factors. These factors may include, but are not limited to, ethnicity, race, gender, social class, family values, religion, historical and cultural background (Kalpana, 2014). This study also argues that the process of understanding gender identity occurs as a result of observing and imitating gender-based behaviours in the environment.

1.3 Overview of the Research Methodology

The aim of this research study was to explore gender identities during emerging adulthood from a social constructivist perspective.

The study is qualitative in nature and hence focuses on conceptualising gender identity on the basis of the subjective experiences of the participants. The research study is also explorative and descriptive in nature (Hancock, Ockleford, & Windridge, 2007). By applying the principles

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of explorative research, the researcher aims to acquire an in-depth understanding of gender identity. Furthermore, the nature of the questions the researcher asked required the participants to provide descriptive responses. This aligns with what is expected from descriptive research.

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006) were used in the research study. By means of convenience sampling, the researcher selected participants on the basis of the fact that they were emerging adults (between the ages of 18 and 25) and were studying at the University of the Free State. Once the participants had been selected using convenience sampling, snowball sampling (Babbie, 2007) was utilised. This meant that the researcher asked the participants who were part of the research study to identify potential new participants.

Before the data collection process began, the researcher conducted two pilot interviews to assist in developing appropriate research processes and questions. Final data collection was carried out by means of two focus groups and five individual interviews.

The transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher first read all the transcriptions from the focus groups and the individual interviews in order to familiarise herself with the data; she then organised the data according to overarching themes. Appropriate subthemes were identified from the main themes. This was followed by carefully studying the data and organising the results in a way that would represent the perspectives of the participants.

The ethical procedures that were followed include receiving authorisation from the Department of Psychology and the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities at the University of the Free State. The researcher compiled an informed consent document that provided a summary of the research study. The participants thus received adequate background information before making the decision to participate in the research study. In addition, all the participants who participated in the research study signed this informed consent document. Other ethical principles that were adhered to include confidentiality, anonymity and non-maleficence.

To address issues of trustworthiness, the following factors were considered: transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The researcher made every effort to ensure that the research results were a representation of the participants' perspectives. To ensure transferability, the researcher provided thorough information regarding the context of the research study. In addition, all the processes that were followed in the research study are described in detail to assist other researchers who might want to duplicate the study.

1.4 Outline of Chapters

Chapter 2 focuses on discussing existing literature on emerging adulthood and gender identity. The concept of emerging adulthood is discussed in detail. The main theories explored in this chapter include the work of Arnett, Erikson and Marcia. Additional theories such as narrative approaches to identity, the social identity theory and the social constructivist theory are also discussed.

In chapter 3, the methodology of the research study is discussed. The following areas are explored: a) research rationale and aim; b) research design and approach; c) research participants and sampling procedures; d) procedures of data collection; e) data analysis; f) ethical considerations and g) issues of trustworthiness.

In chapter 4, the research results are outlined. The results are organised in terms of overarching themes and subthemes. Some of the main themes discussed are power dynamics, relationship dynamics and career dynamics. Overarching themes that summarise the factors that influence gender identity are also included. These factors include family, religion, cultural background, society and the media.

Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the research results. This discussion focuses on comparing and contrasting the research results with theoretical frameworks of gender identity studies.

Chapter 6 provides a summary of the research results. The limitations of this research study are discussed, and recommendations for further research are provided.

1.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented an overview of the dissertation, the aim, context and rationale of the study and its theoretical background. A brief overview was given of the following: the research design and approach, the research participants and the sampling procedures, the procedures of data collection and data analysis, and ethical considerations. The last section provided an outline of the chapters in the dissertation.

Chapter 2: Emerging Adulthood and Gender Identity

The aim of this chapter is to offer a comprehensive explanation of emerging adulthood and gender identity. The different aspects of emerging adulthood are identified and discussed. Theories of identity, and their application to gender identity, are also discussed. Lastly, the social constructivist approach and the social factors related to gender identity are addressed.

2.1 Emerging Adulthood

In the section below, the concept of emerging adulthood is defined, and the dimensions of emerging adulthood are explored.

2.1.1 Definition of emerging adulthood.

Emerging adulthood is a developmental stage that occurs between adolescence and early adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 25 (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood is neither like adolescence nor like early adulthood (Berk, 2004). Certain developmental tasks have been exclusively and historically associated with adolescence and others with early adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

In the 1970s, adolescents were mainly dependent on their parents and preoccupied with the task of achieving an identity. At that time, most people were employed, married and had become parents by the time they were in their early 20s. In fact, getting married and starting a family was identified as the most important achievement. A similar trend was noted following the Great Depression and World War II. During this period most people sought security, and one of the ways in which they could be guaranteed such security was by starting a family (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). In addition, during that period most people wanted to have large families, so it made sense for them to start having children in their early 20s. Lastly, there were limited opportunities for women to pursue a career, and as a result most of them prioritised parenthood over the pursuit of employment.

In contemporary society there seems to be a significant delay in the attainment of the developmental tasks formerly associated with early adulthood (Bussey, 2011). People spend longer periods in their parents' care, are often enrolled in tertiary institutions past their mid-twenties and postpone starting a family. Young people have more resources allowing them to pursue a career. Consequently, most women want to take advantage of their new-found freedom and invest their time in a suitable career (Schwartz, Zamboanga, Luyck, Meca, &

Ritchie, 2013). Young people might want to further their education and have a stable career before committing to marriage and parenthood (Schwartz, 2005). Because of these changes in society, people are able to delay marriage and parenthood in order to allow for the accomplishment of other goals. Moreover, marriage and parenthood are no longer seen as the highest accomplishment. A potential explanation for this might be that marriage and parenthood symbolise the end of independence and freedom. Therefore, most people want to delay this until they feel ready for the sacrifices that accompany these duties (Schwartz et al., 2013). These changes in society resulted in the need to conceptualise a new developmental stage between adolescence and early adulthood, which has been termed emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

2.1.2 Aspects of emerging adulthood.

Arnett identified five distinguishing features of emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). In his view, this period is the age of instability, the age of self-focus, the age of feeling in-between, the age of possibilities and the age of identity exploration.

The age of instability refers to the multiple changes people experience during emerging adulthood. The changes are broad and may occur in the areas of residence, work, romantic relationships and school. Most adolescents live with their parents. When enrolling at university, they are likely to move from the parental home and live in a university residence or with a housemate. Being involved in a relationship opens up the possibility of yet another residential change, where people choose to reside with their partner. The pursuit of a romantic relationship may present its own challenges. For instance, although people might invest themselves in a relationship, they are often unsure about its potential outcome. Furthermore, people in long-term relationships may be unsure about their stance on marriage and parenthood.

Securing a job may also involve an element of instability, as it may require people to move residence or even move to a different province or country in order to pursue their dreams. The pursuit of a career may also be accompanied by multiple changes. For instance, it is likely that people will change universities, university modules or their university majors. Some people may pursue one career, only to change their career later in life (Arnett, 2004). Although emerging adulthood might be a stage filled with enthusiasm, it is also filled with uncertainty and anxiety. This is because most people experience their lives as unsettled and are uncertain about the potential outcomes of their lives.

There is a sense of self-focus during emerging adulthood. It is a period of introspection in which people are able to focus solely on their own needs and pursuits (Arnett, 2006a), as it

allows them a significant amount of autonomy. It is crucial for people to explore the range of choices available to them while the opportunity still presents itself, as later stages of development might not provide the same opportunity for self-focus. The increasing level of independence also suggests that people in emerging adulthood have to become more involved in their own lives, as they are more autonomous than they were in previous developmental stages (Arnett, 2000). Parental involvement might decrease; therefore, emerging adults pay more attention to themselves and their own well-being. Everyday decisions such as doing laundry, deciding what to cook, what time to go home, which neighbourhood to live in and choosing a job all include an element of focusing on the self (Côté, 2006; Kroger & Marcia, 2011). People generally become self-sufficient during emerging adulthood.

Emerging adults also experience this stage as an age of feeling in-between. They experience themselves as neither adolescents nor adults. This suggests that there are certain aspects of their lives that are associated with adolescence. On the other hand, they have characteristics that suggest that they have entered the stage of adulthood (Arnett, 1998). Criteria that suggest that one has reached the developmental stage of adulthood include accepting a sense of responsibility, making independent decisions and becoming financially independent (Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005). Most people between the ages of 18 and 25 cannot claim that they fully meet these criteria. Although they might have a sense of responsibility, this does not mean that they are fully responsible for their lives. Emerging adults are able to make decisions; however, they might have to consult their caregivers as they might still be under their care. Finally, although some people may be employed during emerging adulthood, most of them are not financially independent and may seek the assistance of their parents (Arnett, 2006a).

Emerging adulthood is also identified as an age of possibilities. The period between late teens and late twenties is devoted to utilising resources and exploring the possibilities that are available in terms of education, work or career, love, marriage and parenthood (Waters, Carr, Keflalas, & Holdaway, 2011). People are likely to find their first job before entering the stage of emerging adulthood. For example, many people have their first job in high school or early in their university studies (McLean & Syed, 2016). The motivation to find work in adolescence is often different from that in emerging adulthood: most adolescents seek work because they want an extra income, while the decision to seek employment in emerging adulthood is often related to the need to lay the foundation for adult occupation. Some South African university students have to seek employment in order to pay for their tuition fees. This occurs as most of these students' families cannot afford to fund their education. In some instances, students have

to take a gap year and seek temporary employment in order to raise funds for their university studies (The South African College of Applied Psychology, 2017). The research findings support the statement that it is common for people to be employed before entering the stage of emerging adulthood.

Emerging adults are also often selective of the type of jobs they choose. This is because they want their work to align with whatever career they are interested in pursuing in the future (Schwartz et al., 2013). During the process of career selection, it is important for people to consider their skill set, interests, dislikes and the possibility of having a long-term, successful, well-paying career in that field (Arnett, 2007). On the contrary, the possibility of having a successful career is not guaranteed for emerging adults in the South African context. This is due to the fact that the unemployment rate in South Africa is high, especially for people that are between the ages of 15 and 24 years old (Statistics South Africa, 2017).

Although emerging adults may have aspirations in life, these aspirations are not permanent and are often subject to change. However, towards the end of this developmental stage people may be motivated to make enduring, life-changing choices. For instance, people have to eventually settle on a career, make decisions about whether they will commit to a partner or marry and decide whether they want to have a family (Schwartz et al., 2013). The permanent nature of these decisions may limit the extent to which people can change their decisions later in life. At the core of emerging adulthood is the idea that the possibilities that are available are endless.

Emerging adulthood is also called the age of identity exploration, as individuals are preoccupied with the task of exploring who they are and what they want out of life. People in this developmental stage have the opportunity to explore different ways of living without the pressure of having to commit to a particular way of life (Arnett, 2006a). The process of identity exploration is similar to free role experimentation. This means that emerging adulthood allows people free reign when trying to find their place in society (Arnett, 2006b).

During emerging adulthood, people seek a deeper level of intimacy. One of their first steps towards achieving intimacy is to understand themselves. This self-exploration might be followed by the desire to deliberate on the type of partner that is most suitable for them. Furthermore, people might have the desire to explore the characteristics that they find attractive or unattractive in a partner. This process of exploration might ultimately influence the kind of spouse people choose for themselves (Barry, Madsen, Nelson, Carroll, & Badger, 2009).

To conclude, emerging adulthood is a relatively new concept. The development of the concept occurred as a result of changes in society. In the past, there were distinct differences

between adolescence and fully-fledged adulthood. However, the same cannot be said about contemporary society. This required the introduction of a new developmental stage, termed 'emerging adulthood', with its five aspects of development.

2.2 Identity Development during Emerging Adulthood

In this section, various theories related to identity development are presented to provide a theoretical foundation for understanding identity. The two seminal theorists who have contributed to the understanding of identity development are Erikson and Marcia (Watts et al., 2009). In addition to these theorists, narrative approaches to identity, as well as the social identity theory, are discussed.

2.2.1 Erikson's psychosocial stages of development.

Erikson postulated that there are eight psychosocial stages of development (Watts et al., 2009).

Table 1

Erikson's psychosocial theory (Craig & Dunn, 2010; Schultz & Schultz, 2009; Weiten, 2014)

Age	Stage	Description
Birth to 12-18 months	Basic trust vs basic mistrust	One should establish a sense of trust in people and the world.
12-18 months to 3 years	Autonomy vs shame & doubt	One should become aware of one's sense of independence.
3 to 6 years	Initiative vs guilt	This is an exploratory stage
6 to 12 years	Industry vs inferiority	Mastery of basic working skills is crucial in this stage.
Adolescence	Identity vs role confusion	Identity formation occurs in this stage.
Early adulthood	Intimacy vs isolation	Relationships are often prioritised in this stage.
Middle adulthood	Generativity vs stagnation	In this stage, the focus is on making a meaningful contribution to society.
Late adulthood	Integrity vs despair	Reflection on one's life often occurs in this stage. One hopes to have lived a meaningful life.

According to Erikson, the developmental task that is prioritised during adolescence (and young adulthood) is the development of an identity. Therefore, the stage of *identity versus role confusion* will be central to this discussion. There are multiple ways in which identity can be understood. One of the questions people need to answer in order to understand their identity is Who am I? (Craig & Dunn, 2010). One way in which this question can be answered is for people to consider their age, gender, race or ethnicity, skills, relationship status and position in society (Pérez-Sales, 2010).

The purpose of the stage of adolescence is to move from identity confusion to identity achievement. There are a number of changes that adolescents face, among them physical growth, sexual maturity and the integration of ideas about themselves. The two possible developmental outcomes of adolescence are identity crisis and identity achievement. Identity crisis might occur as a result of the adolescent's failure to achieve an ego identity. On the other hand, identity achievement is the successful resolution of this developmental stage. It is dependent on the adolescent's developmental progress through the previous developmental stages. Adolescents should have resolved issues of trust, autonomy, initiative and industry in order to obtain identity achievement (Watts et al., 2009).

2.2.2 Marcia's identity status theory.

Marcia developed the identity status theory. This is an expansion of Erikson's psychosocial stages of development (Marcia, 1966). Marcia understood identity formation as a process that is influenced by a series of life events. These events may be either expected or unexpected (Marcia, 2002). Consequently, he postulated that identity development occurs in two stages, namely a crisis experience followed by exploration and committing to a decision (Marcia, 1966). Marcia suggested that the process of identity development is fostered by the experience of a crisis. The experience of a crisis motivates people to explore the different identity options that are available to them and, as a result, to commit to a specific decision. For example, if a Grade 12 learner is faced with the crisis of making a career choice and enrolling for a programme at university, this person might research and explore the different programmes available. From this exploration, the person might learn that they are interested in health sciences and decide to pursue a career as a medical doctor. The decision to study medicine is an example of commitment. On the contrary, if people do not experience a crisis followed by exploration, they will commit to a decision that represents what others expect from them.

According to Marcia, the experience of a crisis, the process of exploration and committing to a specific decision generate four possible statuses of identity formation, namely identity

diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium and identity achievement (Craig & Dunn, 2010; Marcia, 1966).

Table 2

Summary of the identity statuses (Marcia, 1966)

	No commitment	Commitment
No exploration	Identity diffusion	Identity foreclosure
Exploration	Identity moratorium	Identity achievement

Identity diffusion occurs when adolescents do not experience a crisis; consequently, there is no exploration or commitment that takes place at this stage (Marcia, 1966). Adolescents are not aware that they have important choices to make. In addition, adolescents do not have an idea of who they are and who they want to be (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). In the identity foreclosure state, people do not experience a crisis, nor do they explore; however, they make a commitment. Therefore, these people make a commitment despite not exploring the different options that are available to them. It is likely that they will make a commitment that reflects what others expect from them. For instance, people might choose a lifestyle that is similar to that of their parents (Marcia, 2002). In the identity moratorium state, people experience a crisis and go through the exploration process; however, no commitment is made (Marcia, 1966). The reason for not making a commitment could be that they want to explore all their avenues and search for a path that best suit them (Schultz & Schultz, 2009). They might experience their lack of commitment as distressing. Lastly, in the identity achievement state, people experience a crisis, identity exploration occurs, and a commitment is made.

To sum up, for identity achievement to occur, it is crucial for people to explore the different roles that exist in society. This can be achieved by choosing roles that best represent them and contribute to forming a cohesive sense of identity (Marcia, 1966).

2.2.3 Narrative approaches to identity.

In contrast to the status approaches described above, the narrative approach to identity regards identity as a concept that is fluid, complex and constructed in different contexts (Barkhuizen, 2016). Identity is therefore negotiated, situational and changeable. The negotiation of identity can be understood in different ways. For instance, identity is negotiated between majority and minority groups and between institutions of power. Therefore, the narrative approach suggests that all people have equal opportunities to express their own understanding of identity (Borg, 2006). In addition, the conceptualisation of identity is explored in social spaces where relationships and interactions occur.

The people who construct identity have specific attitudes, beliefs, expectations and assumptions about the broader social context. Therefore, the characteristics they possess influence their understanding of identity (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014). Identities are constructed across time and space (Barkhuizen, 2016). This means that people's identities are constructed in relationship with the world at different times. For instance, the way in which identity was understood in the 1950s is different from the way the concept is constructed in current society. Austin et al. (2009, p.107) have a holistic understanding of identity: they define it as referencing "how a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future."

McAdams and Olson (2010) postulated that the narrative construction of an identity encompasses dispositional traits. This suggests that identity formation exists in unique and culturally anchored meanings. Therefore, people use their personal life experiences to generate meaning. At the core of identity construction is the life stories of the people concerned. The narrative becomes personal, as it provides people with a sense of cohesion, purpose and relatedness. This understanding of identity correlates with Erikson's view of identity synthesis (Erikson, 1968). Ultimately, identity formation occurs as a result of the integration of the multiple roles that people assume in society.

Identity can also be understood as being equivalent to a life story. This life story is internalised and can serve a function in creating meaning and purpose for people's lives (McAdams, 2006). The creation of a life story is largely influenced by the dominant cultural narrative that people are submerged in. This suggests that human beings are innately story tellers; consequently, the way in which people live their lives is like the unfolding of a series of stories. McAdams (1985) argued that the period between late adolescence and early adulthood is the time during which people interpret their lives as evolving stories that include

aspects of their past and their imagined future. In addition, the identity formation process can be understood in terms of how people create narratives from their lived experiences. These stories can be told to internal members of the groups ('in-groups') or to 'out-groups'. People tend to relate these stories to their knowledge of the self, others and the world. McAdams (2006) pointed out that the meaning making process of identity is often influenced by people's need to find a balance between their autonomy (agency) and relationships (communion). This way of thinking acknowledges that human beings require both separation and connectedness. Furthermore, once a narrative is created, it is implemented. For instance, the stories can be used to guide people in their decision-making processes (Singer, 2004).

2.2.4 Social identity theory.

According to the social identity theory, identity and group formation occurs through the three processes of social categorisation, social identification and social comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Social categorisation refers to the way people see themselves as belonging to a specific group. Social categorisations are organised in terms of categories such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, culture, social class, religion and/or peer groups. Social categorisation introduces the concept of in-groups and out-groups. Belonging to an in-group or out-group is a form of social identification. Social identification often leads to social comparison. Tajfel and Turner (1986) postulated that people tend to perceive their in-group in a positive light whereas the out-group is perceived to be negative. The motivation to view their in-group as positive occurs because people define themselves in relation to the group. Therefore, they have a personal connection to the in-group. The possibility of viewing their in-group in a negative light threatens their sense of self (Bussey, 2011). To sum up, the purpose of this identification is to protect and strengthen one's self-identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

People often adopt the set of values, attitudes and behaviours of their in-group. This forms a basis for the development of their social identity. Gender identity is a form of social identity. Group belonging will thus also influence gender identity. According to Golshirazian, Dhillon, Maltz, Payne and Rabow (2015), people seek connectivity, therefore, they are more likely to conform to their in-group. For example, some college female students in the United States of America quit sports such as basketball and taekwondo because these sports were labelled as masculine. Therefore, the sports did not fit in with the idea of femininity. A similar pattern of behaviour was noted in high-school students. For instance, these students reported that some sports were labelled as feminine whilst others were labelled as masculine. These students were

encouraged by members of their social group only to participate in sports that complemented their gender identity (Golshirazian et al., 2015).

This section focused on exploring theories of identity development. Both Erikson and Marcia's theories focused on the process of identity formation. The narrative approach highlighted that identity development is a process that is fluid, flexible and contextual. Therefore, identity can only be understood within the context in which it occurs. The narrative approach also emphasised that identity development is influenced by the value system of a specific group of people. Lastly, the social identity theory conceptualised identity development in terms of in-groups and out-groups. At the core of the social identity theory is the concept of belonging and exclusion. The function of in-groups is to create belonging, whereas out-groups are often excluded, prejudiced, stereotyped or discriminated against.

2.3 Gender Identity and Related Concepts

Gender identity is an intricate concept. For gender identity to be understood, certain related concepts need to be acknowledged. These concepts are explored in detail in the section below.

2.3.1 Definitions and conceptualisations of gender identity and related terms.

Gender is traditionally defined as a set of characteristics that are associated with biological gender. There are two categories of biological gender: male and female. The characteristics that govern the understanding of maleness and femaleness include physical attributes such as external genitalia, sex chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones and the internal reproductive structures (American Psychological Association, 2015).

Most people associate gender identity with biological gender; in fact, gender identity has multiple meanings, including whether a person is male or female, but also the perspectives of femininity and masculinity. Stets and Burke (2000, p. 997) defined gender identity as "the degree to which persons see themselves as masculine or feminine given what it means to be a man or woman in society." There are four important continua: these are biological gender (female, intersex, male), gender identity (female, bi-gender and male), gender expression (femininity, androgyny and masculinity); and sexual orientation (attracted to females, bisexual, attracted to males).

Some scholars believe gender identity is related to sexual orientation (Austin et al., 2009). Sexual orientation refers to attraction towards members of a gender category. This group of people may belong to the same gender category as that of the person who feels the attraction,

or a different gender category (American Psychological Association, 2013). Homosexuality refers to when a person is physically and emotionally attracted to people of the same gender as them (American Psychological Association, 2015). Heterosexuality refers to when a person is attracted to people of a different gender. Lastly, bisexuality refers to when a person is romantically, sexually and physically attracted to both males and females (American Psychological Association, 2013). Sexual orientation does not have to fit into set categories, however, but is fluid and occurs on a continuum (Duerst-Lahti, 2007).

Another concept that emerges when discussing gender identity is sexual identity. Sexual identity refers to how one thinks of oneself in terms of to whom one is romantically and sexually attracted to. Sexual identity is sometimes used interchangeably with the term sexual orientation identity. Sexual orientation identity refers to the way in which people identify with or oppose identifying with a specific sexual orientation (Austin et al., 2009).

Gender stereotypes, gender attitudes and gender roles are closely related to gender identity. Gender roles may be defined as the set of roles, activities, expectations and behaviours assigned to males and females. Gender identity is self-identified, whereas gender role is manifested within society by observable factors such as one's appearance, actions and behaviour. Therefore, the gender roles of males and females are predetermined by society and involve typical characteristics and mannerisms that a person is expected to display (Butler, 2008). For example, one's gender role is either male or female if one displays behaviour that is often associated with being either masculine or feminine. Some theorists believe that gender role is an outward expression of gender identity.

The above section has indicated that gender identity is a complex and dynamic concept. Whereas some theorists understand gender identity in terms of biological gender, others conceptualise it in terms of what it means to be feminine or masculine. This research has focused on understanding gender identity from the perspective of femininity and masculinity. Femininity and masculinity can only be understood within the scope of concepts such as gender stereotypes and gender roles.

2.3.2 Perspectives on gender identity.

The following perspectives on gender identity are discussed in the section below: the nature versus nurture debate, the gender continuum theory and the narrative approach.

2.3.2.1 The nature versus nurture debate.

Gender identity formation can be influenced by both biological and social or environmental factors. This supports the nature versus nurture debate (Newman, 2012). From a biological point of view, genes, as well as pre- and postnatal hormone levels, can influence biological gender development and subsequently also gender identity. The hormones that determine one's biological gender are produced during foetal development (Boles & Tatro, 2013). According to this argument, gender identity occurs at the prenatal stage and therefore does not change throughout development. This aligns with the biochemical theory of gender identity. Various theorists, however, do not agree with this and support alternative explanations of gender identity.

The social learning theory relates to the nurture aspect of gender identity development. The social learning theory postulates that children form a gender identity by observing and imitating gender-like behaviours from their environment (Stets & Burke, 2000). The gender-like behaviours may be conveyed by family members, authority figures, mass media and other influential people in the child's life. At first, the person learns to distinguish between gender differences, for instance, between males and females (Crespi, 2014). This is followed by the person's ability to differentiate between femininity, androgyny and masculinity and the ways in which these concepts are expressed. The notions of femininity, androgyny and masculinity are learned through the process of reinforcement and modelling (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1963). According to the social learning theory, learning is a continuous process and gender identity is fluid and changes across space and time.

2.3.2.2 The gender continuum theory.

Gender identity exists on a continuum within the framework of femininity, androgyny and masculinity (Roussell, 2013). The continuum perspective suggests that gender identity should not be understood as a simple term but should be understood holistically (Mattingly, 2008). Furthermore, gender identity should be understood in the context of social class, ethnicity, race and sexuality, as meaning making is situated in the person's cultural context.

The term femininity is often associated with females and the term masculinity with males. The concepts of femininity and masculinity are often understood in terms of personality traits. However, this way of thinking is limited, and these concepts should rather be understood as cultural manifestations. Femininity and masculinity cannot be explained outside of people's cultural experiences (Verta, 2008). Femininity and masculinity are developed through socialisation and individual construction of self-identity (Roussell, 2013).

Stets and Burke (2008) asserted that the concepts of femininity and masculinity have social definitions. For instance, it is socially acceptable for females to identify as feminine and for males to identify as masculine. However, the social understanding of these terms is not limited to this. For example, some males view themselves as feminine whereas some women identify with being masculine (Paechter, 2006). Stereotypical and traditional feminine traits include weakness, vulnerability, being nurturing, passive and gentle, and having a sense of invisibility (Jeanes, 2011). Masculine traits include boldness, the ability to lead and a sense of superiority. Based on this traditionalist view, it is evident that femininity is regarded as the weaker identity. The postfeminist perspective on femininity stands in contrast to this traditional view: from this perspective, femininity is associated with concepts such as rebellion, empowerment, independence and equality (Roussell, 2013). This new understanding of femininity challenges previously accepted, traditional and patriarchal conceptualisations of femininity and masculinity (Jeanes, 2011).

The introduction of the term androgyny has closed the gap in the understanding of gender identity. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines androgyny as the possession of both male and female characteristics. Therefore, people who are androgynous are neither primarily feminine nor primarily masculine. They possess a blend of both traits. The term androgyny developed as a framework for interpreting similarities and differences among individuals according to the degree to which they described themselves in terms of characteristics traditionally associated with masculinity and femininity (Prakash et al., 2010). The basis of understanding androgyny is similar to that of understanding femininity and masculinity: it is primarily based on the manner in which people identify themselves. However, in other ways, it is dependent on societal understanding (Rice, 2016). When people identify as androgynous it suggests that their identity is both flexible and adaptable. Therefore, they are not required to act in a manner that is primarily masculine or feminine. They can choose how they want to conduct themselves depending on what the situation requires.

People who identify as androgynous are more fluid in their identity than people who identify as exclusively masculine or feminine and can therefore embody traditional masculine and feminine traits. In the literature, the term psychological androgyny is used as a synonym for androgyny. Psychological androgyny is associated with higher rates of psychological health. One of the reasons for this may be that people who are androgynous are not forced to adhere to a particular identity and have free will in this regard (Prakash et al., 2010).

2.3.2.3 Narrative approaches to gender identity.

Another way of understanding gender identity is by means of the narrative framework (McLean, Shucard, & Syed, 2016). In order to understand this phenomenon, it is necessary to explore both the personal and cultural components that influence the development of gender identity. The development of gender identity involves the internalisation of broad cultural structures. These cultural structures influence the conception of the understanding and beliefs about gender identity. The Eriksonian understanding of gender identity is that it is a means of "constructing a sense of felt coherence across time, context, and within one's culture" (Syed & McLean, 2016, p. 7). Therefore, gender identity is a dynamic process that is influenced by people's history and their current circumstances. There are differences in the ways in which males and females experience gender identity. For instance, females usually engage in more identity explorations with regard to domains of family roles when compared to males (Frisén & Wängqvist, 2011). Other researchers state that the most influential aspect of gender identity is not the re-negotiation of childhood influences, but the manner in which people identify themselves in comparison to their cultural norms and expectations of identifying as either feminine or masculine (Grysman & Hudson, 2013).

One of the functions of master narratives is to highlight culturally shared stories that provide guidelines for belonging to a specific culture. They also provide guidelines about the importance of subscribing to cultural norms and guidance for personal story construction. Based on this perspective, one may hypothesise that people's expression of gender identity is culturally appropriate. For instance, the way in which people expresses their femininity or masculinity is aligned to their cultural background. Emerging adulthood is a stage where identity development is the main psychosocial task. However, it is also during this developmental stage that people become aware of larger cultural and social structures. Consequently, the need to develop a desired gender identity might conflict with standards of cultural appropriateness (McLean et al., 2016).

At the core of the narrative approach to gender identity is the understanding that people have an innate need to search for meaning in life. This meaning can be created in two ways. On one hand, people seek to understand themselves as unique individuals. On the other hand, they seek to understand themselves as social beings who belong to a greater social system (McLean & Syed, 2016). Therefore, characteristics such as life stage, gender, ethnicity, class and culture assist in conceptualising the meaning of life.

To conclude, various perspectives of gender identity exist. While the nature debate conceptualises gender identity development as occurring in the prenatal process, the nurture

debate states that gender identity is the result of societal factors. The gender continuum theory challenges the view that gender identity is a binary concept and states that gender identity occurs on a continuum which involves femininity, androgyny and masculinity. Lastly, the narrative approach emphasises that gender identity is embedded in culture.

2.4 The Social Constructivist Approach to Understanding Gender Identity

According to the social constructivist theory, "thinking is located in social and physical contexts, not within the individual's mind" (Kalpana, 2014, p. 28). This means that people create meaning based on what they are exposed to in their environment. Therefore, knowledge and meaning making are co-constructed in social interactions. Knowledge production also goes through the process of negotiation, re-negotiation and modification (Bussey, 2011). Due to its contextual influences the conceptualisation of gender identity is not constant and might not be generalisable to other contexts (Kalpana, 2014). Other factors that influence the social construction of gender identity are ethnicity, race, gender, social class, family values, religion, historical and cultural background. Because men and women are socialised differently, the development of their gender identity is often different (Blum, Mmari, & Moreau, 2017). For instance, females often internalise the characteristics that they value in their mothers, whilst males internalise the characteristics they value in their fathers (Fulcher & Coyle, 2011).

In expansion, the social constructivist theory asserts that there is no universally distinct characteristic that is masculine or feminine (Brickell, 2006). For instance, some communities communicate to its members that gender identity does not have to be understood in terms of specific categories. The construct can be understood as being fluid. This encourages members of society to be more explorative in their conceptualisation of gender identity (Kalpana, 2014). As a result, males might be open to describing their gender identity in terms of traits that are traditionally either feminine or masculine, and the same can be said for females. Therefore, the understanding of gender identity has been transformed to such an extent that strict labelling and categorisation are no longer necessary (Eckert, 2013).

The section below focuses on the various social aspects that relate to gender identity development. These social aspects include family, peers, societal structures, culture and socio-political factors, religion and the media.

2.4.1. Family.

In the past, a family was identified as a heteronormative system. This means that it was understood to be made up of a heterosexual couple and children. However, contemporary society has challenged this ideology. Lubbe (2007) conceptualised a family as a group of people who are related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual making and/or legal ties. This definition does not view the family on the basis of biological sexual characteristics. The expansion of the definition of the family is related to the fact that there is a rise in same-sex relationships both in South Africa and internationally (Sutherland, Roberts, Gabriel, Struwig, & Gordon, 2016).

The family is the first setting into which people are socialised. Therefore, it is in this system that they learn values, principles and socially acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Consequently, the family is a system that can predict the likelihood of people adopting traditional or non-traditional ways of expressing their gender identity (Barry et al., 2009). One of the first things children learn is whether they are male or females. This has several implications. For instance, in most traditional families, children are often dressed in gender-specific colours. For instance, girls are often dressed in pink whereas boys are dressed in blue. This influences gender socialisation (Kulik, 2005). This might also serve as an illustration of the principles of the social learning theory (Bandura et al., 1963). Other ways in which children are made aware of their gender differences is in the toys they play with. It is common for female children to be given dolls and kitchen sets, while male children are likely to receive gifts such as cars, guns or tools that are suggestive of the importance of manual labour. Therefore, from an early age, females and males are aware of their gender differences and the gender stereotypical messages that are communicated to them. For example, the family communicates the message that females are responsible for household duties whereas males are responsible for providing or being productive in the workplace (Kulik, 2005). In addition, parents' attitudes towards gender roles have been linked to gender-typed attitudes and behaviours that are adopted by emerging adults. The quality of the relationship between children and their parents might contribute to the likelihood of emerging adults adopting their parent's proposed expression of a gender identity (Pomerantz, Ng, & Wang, 2004).

In order to understand the construction of gender identity from a South African perspective, it is crucial to take into consideration the political history of the country (Mantell & Needham, 2009). For instance, the pre-apartheid era emphasised that feminine identity was inferior to masculine identity. However, this perspective seems to have changed with the rise of democracy. Sutherland et al. (2016) indicated that men in contemporary society have embraced

a modern perspective on masculinity. For instance, it has been reported that African men have learned to be less controlling towards women, which did not exist in the apartheid era. This perspective is embraced in different families. The realisation that men and women should be treated as equals has resulted in men being less dominating. The literature reveals that this can be demonstrated by the structure in the home. For instance, in some households, men and women divide the household responsibilities evenly. This is an indication that the conceptualisation of gender identity has transformed throughout the years (Sutherland et al., 2016).

2.4.2 Peers.

A peer group is defined as a social group that consists of people of the same social status who share similar interests and are close in age. Watts et al. (2009) indicated that one of the factors that can influence the development of gender identity is belonging to a peer group. There are a number of reasons people prioritise relationships with their peers. For instance, peer relationships create a sense of belonging (Watts et al., 2009). Peers also influence the ways in which people see themselves, others and the world. In addition, people's perception of gender identity and gender identity development is largely influenced by either an in-group or an out-group. The formation of cliques is also an important factor among peers. In some instances, the purpose of same-gender cliques is to create a sense of relatedness, belonging and shared experience (Arain et al., 2013). It is likely that different-gender cliques will form at a later stage. Belonging to a different-gender clique might help people to learn the expectations of the opposite gender.

Friends might be identified as a proxy family for emerging adults. Therefore, it is likely that emerging adults will rely on their friends for support, advice and companionship (Barry et al., 2009). There are differences between the friendships between females and those between males. For instance, in their friendships, women often provide companionship, intimacy, emotional security and affection. On the other hand, most male friendships involve competition, self-validation and the presence of a reliable alliance (Greif, 2009). Although friendships can contribute positively to people's lives, they may also have negative aspects. For example, friends often experience conflict and power inequalities with one another, and some friendships can be antagonistic. It is therefore crucial for emerging adults to choose their friends carefully (Barry et al., 2009).

The attachment and social support provided by peers may act as a buffer for psychological distress. Social support is particularly important in emerging adulthood, as this is a transitional

stage. Transitional stages are often accompanied by a combination of challenges, and it is therefore crucial for people to have a stable support system. To sum up, peer relationships might assist in subjective and psychological well-being (Arain et al., 2013).

Barry et al. (2009) postulated that peers, social groups and romantic relationships have a direct influence on gender identification. Romantic relationships can potentially shape gender identity. Romantic relationships assist in making people more aware of gender differences and the gender roles that are linked to being male and female. Consequently, people in romantic relationships are likely to express their femininity or masculinity in a stereotypical manner, as a result of social learning and observation of peers (Ward & Harrison, 2005). Parenthood is another factor that is believed to influence gender identity. For instance, when people become parents they are expected to assume the traditional role of motherhood or fatherhood (Barry et al., 2009). For instance, women are expected to be the primary caregivers whereas men can take a passive approach to parenting. Consequently, being the primary caregiver is understood to be a feminine trait and the responsibility of females.

Collier, van Beusekom, Bos and Sandfort (2013) indicated that, with regard to the South African population, issues of gender identity are often related to victimisation. For example, specific peer groups may marginalise and victimise people who are identified as expressing gender identity characteristics that do not align with their biological gender. An illustration of this is the murder of Eudy Simelane, a former Banyana Banyana soccer player, who was murdered for identifying as gay and being an activist for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) movement. Eudy was brutally murdered because her peers viewed the expression of her gender identity as unfeminine (Annie, 2009).

2.4.3 Social structures.

Social structures are defined as specific institutions where there is an occurrence of interactions between people (Booysen, 2007). Examples of social structures are schools, sports groups, economic status groups, education, the law and social classes. People are above all social beings. Therefore, they have the desire to experience a sense of belonging. In this regard people understand themselves in relation to others and the social structures in which they function. In an attempt to belong, people might adhere to societal standards for what it means to be male, female, feminine, masculine or even androgynous. They might do so without questioning or considering what their personal stance is on issues of gender identity (Carlson & Heth, 2009).

To illustrate this point, the question of occupation will be used to demonstrate societal influences on gender identity. Certain occupations in society are more common among men than women. These include police officer, doctor, architect and construction worker. There are also several occupational roles associated with being female or feminine, such as midwifery, teaching, social work and nursing. The presence of occupation segregation has created and maintains gender inequality (Busch & Holst, 2011).

There is a historical explanation for the existence of occupational segregation both in South Africa and globally. Women's ability to bear children is one of the characteristics that have traditionally put them at a disadvantage when it comes to the job market. This means that during pregnancy and after delivery they are more likely to require time off from work. This can have a negative impact on production in the workplace. The ability to bear children has hence been identified as an interruption to the continuity of employment (Orr & van Meelis, 2014).

Furthermore, in the 19th century women were identified as domestic and maternal beings, and women who entered the labour market were regarded as inferior to men. This was demonstrated by the salary gap that existed between men and women. Therefore, masculine and feminine identities were subject to inequality (Foucault, 2007). Gennrich (2013) indicated that, in the South African culture, masculinity is closely related to concepts such as aggression, competition, power and a violent nature. Masculinity is also understood to be superior to femininity. Furthermore, there is a close relationship between masculinity and the sports culture. By contrast, femininity is largely related to subordination and the lack of independence.

Although there is still inequality between men and women, society has made progress in this regard. For instance, women are no longer recognised as being solely domestic and maternal beings. They are celebrated for their contribution to the labour market (Mophosho, 2013). For instance, some theorists argue that traditionally gendered occupations are outdated and no longer applicable in modern society (Casale & Posel, 2011). Although certain careers were previously male dominated, that does not mean that women are incapable of being successful in these occupations. Architecture is a male dominated industry; however, there are women who are highly successful in this field. This serves as an indication that men and women can compete in the same industry (Bornman et al., 2012). Emerging adults in contemporary society have a different perspective on gender-specific occupations.

2.4.4 Culture and socio-political history.

Both culture and socio-political history have an influence on the conceptualisation of gender identity. Culture is defined as encompassing the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a group of people or society. A cross-cultural study indicated that there are cultural variations to gender and gender identity (Wood & Eagly, 2002). According to Wood and Eagly (2002), gender is a universal category, but the process of gender socialisation varies across cultures. For instance, the way in which the South African population conceptualises gender might be different from the European approach. The expression of gender identity also varies cross-culturally (Wood & Eagly, 2002).

Before gender identity in the South African context can be discussed, it is important to take into consideration the socio-political history of the country and the racial inequalities that consequently exist in South Africa (Abramovitz, 2014). The expression of femininity, androgyny and masculinity has racial implications. The places occupied by men and women in history were different. Historically, men had more privileges than women and consequently more opportunities, especially in the labour market. This is because society functioned as a binary and unequal system. It is also important to note that white men had more privileges than men belonging to other racial groups (Hook, 2004).

Masculinity is traditionally associated with career aspirations, superiority, dominance and success (Busch & Holst, 2011). However, in the apartheid era this was only true of white males, and the status of black men was almost as low as that of black women. Therefore, gender identity and the privileges associated with it were determined first by race and ethnicity and not necessarily informed by biological gender. With regard to contemporary society, there seem to be similarities between gender identity in the African, English, Afrikaans and Indian cultures. The narrative that is highlighted by all these cultures is that the masculine identity is the preferred identity. This way of understanding gender identity affects people of all developmental stages, emerging adults included.

2.4.5 Religion.

Gender identity develops across different domains, one of which is religion. Mans and Lauwrens (2013) define religion as the belief in and worship of a superhuman power, especially a personal God or gods. The domain of religion can be used to foster attachment and to improve levels of emotional involvement (Ashdown, Homa, & Brown, 2014). Religion can also be utilised as a tool to assist in the development of a self-concept. An example of this self-concept is gender identity. Ultimately religion has a large influence on the understanding of gender

identity and the process of gender identity development (Chakraborty & Guha, 2013). Religion influences the way in which people understand their position in society. Furthermore, religion also has an impact on the way men and women socialise and ultimately interact with each other.

Booysen (2007) indicated that South Africa has eight religions with twenty-five denominations. The most popular religions in South Africa are Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Religious affiliations have a direct influence on gender identity formation.

The views of Christian Afrikaans women on gender identity provide an insight into gender identity seen through a Christian lens. Women are expected to fit the Biblical description outlined in Proverbs 31:10-31. Christian women are believed to be religious, dependable, righteous, trustworthy, noble, diligent, loving, sympathetic, pure, meek, submissive and passive. It is further indicated in the scripture that women of Christ are home makers, mothers and ultimately devoted to God. In addition, they are inspirational and a source of strength to their husbands. Lastly, Christian women are expected to have high moral standards and bring joy to those around them (Mans & Lauwrens, 2013).

The characteristics discussed above indicate that, according to the Christian faith, femininity is viewed from the point of view of patriarchy. In addition, the scripture is inclusive and prescribes that all women of faith should embody the characteristics discussed in Proverbs 31: 10-31. Therefore, it may be hypothesised that emerging adults are also expected to express their femininity in a manner that correlates with the scripture.

The Hindu religion emphasises that it is the responsibility of women to take on the duties of a 'good wife'. For instance, women should view their husbands as gods, follow them, serve them and pray for them. Men are expected to treat their wives as goddesses. In addition, men are expected to provide for the material needs of women as well as giving them security and protection (Knipe, 1991). Consequently, the role of the provider is associated with masculinity.

The Muslim religion is governed by two main principles. Firstly, there is spiritual equality between men and women. Secondly, women are expected to exemplify femininity whereas men should exemplify masculinity. Women are identified as the dominant figure in the home, whereas men's dominance is witnessed in the outside world, i.e. in the workplace. However, these responsibilities are not rigid. This is illustrated by prominent public figures. There are examples of Muslim women who were queens, wealthy businesswomen and elected heads of states (Chakraborty & Guha, 2013).

2.4.6 The media.

One of the main contributors to the understanding of gender identity is the media (Durham & Kellner, 2006). It should be noted that the media has a powerful influence on the culture of society. Hence, it is responsible for shaping societal structures and operations (Gauntlett, 2008). In line with this argument, the media has assisted in constructing gender, gender identity, gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender norms. One of the ways in which this is achieved is through advertising. Through advertising, messages about acceptable male or female attributes are communicated. Consequently, the messages communicated by the media shape people's opinions of acceptable and unacceptable ways of expressing their gender identity. Because of the coercive nature of advertising, the consumers of this information are likely to align their gender identity with what is communicated by the media (Gauntlett, 2008).

Emerging adults are particularly influenced by the media as they are the main consumers of different forms of media, including television, radio, magazines, movies, the internet and, most significantly, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and so on. Roussell (2013) indicated that in the 1940s and 1950s, magazines depicted the ideal of femininity as the "happy housewife heroine". Although some forms of media still maintain a traditional view of masculinity and femininity, other forms of media are challenging the status quo with regard to gender identity.

Some South African television shows and advertisements normalise the domesticity and dependency of women and strengthen the ideology that men have power, control and influence in society (Hadland, Louw, Sesanti, & Wasserman, 2008). Furthermore, successful and business-oriented women are often not celebrated for their contribution to the business world — on the contrary, it is their attractiveness that is highlighted instead. For example, in 2013 Gerry Elsdon was suspended from her job. The story was covered by the *Mail & Guardian*, which reported that "the South African Red Cross's governing board has suspended former beauty queen and TV personality Gerry Elsdon with immediate effect" (Letwaba, 2013, p. 1). This article failed to highlight that Gerry Elsdon is a successful female entrepreneur and ambassador of several companies.

However, there are other publications that do, indeed, recognise and celebrate women for their career achievements. For example, *Destiny Magazine* profiles multiple female celebrities and focus on their success and contribution to society instead of their physical appearance. These celebrities include women such as Bonang Matheba, Basetsana Khumalo, Terry Pheto and many more (Young, 2017).

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter identified one of the main characteristics of emerging adulthood as the sense of exploration experienced by the individuals in this developmental stage. Although there are many positive aspects of emerging adulthood, the developmental stage has its challenges. The discussion on gender identity highlighted three main concepts: femininity, androgyny and masculinity, indicating that gender identity occurs on a continuum and is influenced by various societal factors. These factors included family, peers, culture and socio-political history, religion and the media. The work of Arnett, Erikson and Marcia formed the foundation of identity studies, and various theoretical frameworks were utilised to conceptualise gender identity, including the nature versus nurture perspective, narrative approaches to gender identity, social identity theory and the social constructivist approach.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter presents a discussion of various aspects of the research methodology, namely a) research rationale and aim, b) research design and approach, c) research participants and sampling procedures, d) procedures of data collection, e) data analysis, f) ethical considerations, and g) issues of trustworthiness. A summary of the chapter is then provided.

3.1 Research Rationale and Aim

Several factors motivated the researcher to conduct research focusing on gender identity. The researcher is an emerging adult and she is going through the process of making meaning of her own gender identity. She wants to determine the origin of her conceptualisation of gender identity. Although the research study was motivated by the researcher's personal reasons, there are also academic factors that inspired the research study. A significant amount of research that has been conducted on gender identity is not of South African origin. The researcher wants to give attention to research on gender identity that will highlight the perceptions of the South African population and the exploration of a multi-cultural perspective on gender identity. There is a scarcity of gender identity studies on emerging adulthood conducted in South African universities. Therefore, the aim of the research study was to explore the gender identities of emerging adults taking into consideration their social context.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

The research paradigm and the research approach that were utilised in the research study will be explored in detail.

The theoretical grounding of the research study was the social constructivist perspective. In terms of the social constructivist viewpoint, gender identity develops as a result of sociocultural influences (Schneider, Gruman, & Coutts, 2005). Some of the societal factors that influence the construction of gender identity are ethnic background, family values, religion, historical and cultural background. Because men and women are socialised differently, the development of their gender identity is often different. Therefore, the ways in which people are socialised will influence their identity formation. This means that females often internalise the characteristics that they value in their mothers. Males, on the other hand, internalise the characteristics they value in their fathers (Fulcher & Coyle, 2011). One of the strengths of the

social constructivist perspective is that it recognises people's ability to construct their own perceptions and reality (Burr, King, & Butt, 2014). It also acknowledges that people are actively involved in developing their own 'truth' about a phenomenon. However, the social constructivist perspective has been criticised for being anti-realistic, because it does not accept that people's viewpoints are a direct reflection of reality.

The qualitative research approach was used in the research study. Qualitative research focuses on people's subjective experiences (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin, 2007). The advantage of qualitative research is that it recognises that people have different perceptions and realities, which are explored in an attempt to understand people holistically (O'Leary, 2014). The use of qualitative research enables the researcher to provide thick descriptions and detailed, contextual information (Creswell, 2007). Qualitative research also acknowledges that the researcher is the 'tool' of the research study, as they are actively involved in interpreting the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Qualitative research is often questioned for its validity, as the researcher may be too immersed in the research study, which may call in question their ability to be objective (Bryman, 2009).

This research study is both explorative and descriptive in nature. In explorative research, the researcher allows flexibility and does not impose a particular structure during the data collection process (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Kagee, 2006). This type of research design allows the researcher to access information that the participants deem important. However, when doing explorative research, there is a possibility that the participants may be biased and may provide responses that they regard as socially appropriate. Descriptive research focuses on describing a specific phenomenon. In this case, the research described the gender identity of emerging adults. The phenomenon was explored from a social constructivist perspective. Descriptive research allows the researcher to observe a phenomenon in its natural setting. However, it has been criticised as being unrealistic and unscientific.

3.3 Research Participants and Sampling Procedures

The following steps were followed in choosing the sample for the research study; determining the sampling frame, sampling size, sampling technique and sample (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). A sampling frame refers to all the units that the researcher is interested in studying. The sampling frame of the research study was as follows: emerging adults (people aged between 18 and 25), registered students at the University of the Free State. The sampling frame did not have limitations with regards to gender, race, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, sexual identity, sexual preference, gender identity, religion, area of academic study, year of study and language. The researcher's target for the sampling size was a total of 20 participants. The researcher was of the opinion that a qualitative research approach was appropriate for the research study. This was followed by choosing convenience sampling and later snowball sampling as the sampling techniques. The steps discussed earlier led to the researcher choosing a specific sample for the research study.

The principle of convenience sampling is for the researcher to select participants based on their convenient accessibility and proximity (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Convenience sampling was suitable for this research study due to the time limitations placed on completing the clinical psychology master's programme. The researcher could not reach an adequate number of participants by utilising convenience sampling. In an attempt to increase the sample size the researcher implemented the use of snowball sampling. Therefore, two types of sampling techniques were utilised to access participants.

The participants who were identified through convenience sampling were asked to identify other potential participants. This process is an example of snowball sampling. Snowball sampling is technically defined as a non-probability sampling technique where existing participants of a research study recruit new participants among their acquaintances (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The participants that were identified through snowball sampling were contacted by the researcher. The researcher scheduled an appointment with the potential participants to give them an overview of her research study. The researcher also enquired about whether these participants were interested in partaking in the research study. The contact details of all interested parties were collected. These participants were later contacted and arrangements were made for the interview process. Prior to the commencement of the interview

process the participants signed an informed consent document and some ethical issues were addressed.

Snowball sampling is particularly useful when the researcher has no other ways of reaching new participants, as it can assist the researcher to access new participants. In addition, snowball sampling may help the researcher to gain access to participants who might be hard to reach and may aid the researcher in the process of enriching sampling clusters. However, snowball sampling has shortcomings. For instance, its use may lead to the researcher developing a premature understanding of the research topic and providing premature research results (Noy, 2008).

Table 3

Biographic information

Characteristics	Focus group1	Focus group 2	Individual interviews	Pilot study
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female
	Female	Male	Female	Male
	Female	Male	Male	
	Male	Male		
		Female		
		Female		
Age	23	19	24	19
	23	19	21	21
	22	21	23	
	22	21		
		19		
		19		
Year of study	4th year	1st year	3rd year	1st year
	4th year	2nd year	2nd year	3rd year
	4th year	3rd year	4th year	
	4th year	2nd year		
		1st year		
		1st year		
Ethnicity	Pakistani	African	African	African
	White	Coloured	African	African
	African	African	White	
	White	African		
		African		
		African		

3.4 Procedures of Data Collection

Before the data collection process for the main study began, the researcher conducted two pilot interviews. There were two participants, one male and one female. The participants that took part in the pilot study were not part of the main research study. The participants for the pilot interviews were identified by utilising convenience sampling. Conducting a pilot study has some benefits, as it can assist the researcher in developing appropriate research processes and questions. It can also give the researcher an indication of the potential success or failure of the research study (Baker, 1994). Consequently, the research questions asked in the pilot study were utilised as a template in the process of compiling appropriate questions for the main study. After analysing the data from the pilot study, the researcher began preparations for the main research study. Data was collected in the form of two focus groups and five individual interviews. The transcriptions were not included in the dissertation as including this information could have been ethically compromising. However, they can be requested for verification.

The researcher identified a gatekeeper for the research study. The gatekeeper assisted the researcher in accessing potential participants (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). The gatekeeper, who was a lecturer, informed the students in his class about the researcher's topic. He liaised with the researcher and scheduled a meeting for the researcher to market her research to his students. During the first interaction between the researcher and students; the researcher gave the students a brief overview of the research study. All the students who confirmed their interest in participating in the research study were given a consent form which they had to read and sign. Upon returning the consent document (see Appendix B), the participants were then contacted, and arrangements were made for the focus groups and individual interviews. The interview process took place at a time that was convenient for both the researcher and the participants.

The first set of data was collected by making use of two focus groups. A focus group is an information gathering technique where data is collected in the form of interactions that occur between a group of people (Acocella, 2012). The researcher chose to utilise focus groups due to some of its advantages. For instance, focus groups provide the researcher with the opportunity to collect high-quality information from multiple sources within a short period of time (Acocella, 2012; Bryman, 2009). Focus groups also encourage people to interact with

each other and may increase the amount of information generated during the discussion. Therefore, the group discussion is the main tool through which data is generated (Morgan, 2013). One of the disadvantages of focus groups is that people may be tempted to give socially desirable answers to avoid being judged by other members of the group (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

The first focus group consisted of a total number of four participants; three participants were female whereas one was male. The total number of participants in the second focus group was six. There was an equal number of males and females in this group. There were some technical aspects to organising the focus group. For instance, the researcher booked a venue and participants were informed of the date and time of the focus groups. Prior to the commencement of the focus group discussion the researcher gave the participants a brief overview of the research study. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and were also informed about some of the ethical considerations of the research study. For example, they were encouraged to respect the opinions of others.

In addition, the privacy of the participants was prioritised, and they were urged to not discuss the content shared in the focus groups and individual interviews with third parties. The participants gave consent for the information to be recorded and were also assured of anonymity. For instance, their names are not included in the transcriptions. The researcher assumed the role of the moderator during the focus group discussions. It was also her responsibility to ensure that the participants focused on discussing issues that were relevant to the research topic. During the discussions the researcher encouraged the participants to share their opinions in an attempt to maximise the amount of information generated during the discussions. Lastly, the researcher was responsible for bringing the discussion to a close and she expressed her gratitude towards the participants for sharing their knowledge regarding the gender identity of emerging adults.

The researcher intended to collect data by utilising four focus groups. However, she only managed to conduct two focus groups due to the low participant turnover. In an attempt to collect more data she included individual interviews as part of the data collection process. She interviewed three more people, two females and one male. An interview refers to a verbal exchange between an interviewer and interviewee. The researcher can ask the interviewee specific questions about a topic (Varga-Atkins & O'Brien, 2009). The technical processes of conducting the individual interviews were similar to that the focus groups.

Both the focus groups and individual interviews were semi-structured in nature. Maree (2007) stated that prior to conducting semi-structured interviews the researcher often compiles

a list of pre-determined questions. During the data collection process the researcher has the opportunity to probe and ask the participants to clarify their responses. The researcher can also ask follow-up questions based on the participants' responses. The researcher's ability to probe for further information is a clear advantage of semi-structured interviews (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). However, when facilitating semi-structured interviews there is a possibility that the researcher may get side-tracked by trivial information. This is something that the researcher was cognisant of, and she only asked questions that were relevant to the research topic. The questions in this study focused on participants' perceptions of the term gender identity and the aspects that relate to gender identity (see Appendix C). The content of the focus groups, individual interviews and pilot study was recorded and then transcribed verbatim for the purpose of data analysis. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to investigate how the emerging adults perceived gender identity. Braun and Clarke (2006) defined thematic analysis as a process that entails the identification, analysis and reporting of patterns (themes) within a collected set of data. These themes should represent the main ideas that were identified by the research participants (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Identifying themes is one of the core functions of thematic analysis. A theme may be defined as a co-occurring idea in a set of data. Before a researcher can identify themes, several tasks need to be accomplished. In this study, the researcher's first task was to familiarise herself with the data. The data was then coded by marking different sections of the data as relevant to the themes. It is also often helpful for the researcher to use the words of the participants when writing up the themes (Anderson, 2007).

In this research study inductive theoretical analysis was used. The researcher identified themes that were strongly linked to the data. After the main themes had been extracted from the data, corresponding subthemes were identified. The advantage of thematic analysis is that it allows the researcher to analyse the data in different ways and give the data various meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). However, thematic analysis has been criticised for being too descriptive and not paying enough attention to the actual analysis of the data. Inappropriate research questions and a poorly conducted data analysis can have a negative impact on the thematic analysis process. Consequently, the findings may not accurately reflect the participant's perspective. The researcher was cognisant of these possible challenges. Lastly, the dissemination of findings will occur in the form of information contained in the dissertation.

The researcher also intends to write a publishable article to ensure that the information is available to interested parties and contributes to the body of work on gender identity studies.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

All relevant ethical procedures were followed, and permission was granted by the relevant committees before the research study was conducted. These parties included the Research Committee of the Department of Psychology and the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of the Humanities (see Appendix A). This research study formed part of a larger study that was titled *"On becoming a therapist"*. Therefore, ethical clearance was provided for this research study with that consideration in mind. Allan (2011) stated that, in the selection of participants, it is crucial for justice to be maintained. Therefore, participants were not excluded from the research study on the basis of their ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, sexual preference, gender or cultural background. In addition, the principle of social justice was maintained. The researcher ensured that the participants selected for the research study met the inclusion criteria. They were emerging adults who were registered students at the University of the Free State.

Before the focus groups and individual interviews commenced the participants were briefed on the content of the study. In addition, the researcher ensured that each participant signed an informed consent document (see Appendix B) before participating in the research study. The participants were also ensured of confidentiality. Confidentiality was maintained throughout the course of the research study. To adhere to the confidentiality principle, the participants were discouraged from discussing the content of the focus groups and individual interviews with third parties. Participants were made aware that focus groups had more limitations regarding confidentiality. Therefore, the participants were encouraged to respect the privacy and dignity of fellow participants. Further steps were taken by the researcher to adhere to the confidentiality principle. For instance, all the information that was collected in the duration of the research study was stored on a laptop. Access to the laptop required a password. In addition, the folders that contained the verbatim transcriptions and audio recordings were encrypted with a password that was only known to the researcher.

The participants were informed that the information they provided would be included in the researcher's dissertation, however pseudonyms will be used to preserve their identity. Lastly, the researcher was honest with the research participants, and they were not deceived in any way during the research process.

Other ethical principles that were adhered to included avoidance of potential harm or risk, the appropriate selection of participants and competence of the researcher. Various steps were taken to minimise the chances of any harm being caused to the participants. For example, at the beginning of the interview process the researcher informed the participants that they were expected to respect the opinions of others (Allan, 2011). The participants were informed that they had the right to privacy and were encouraged to share information only if they felt comfortable doing so. In addition, all the participants were students at the University of the Free State, consequently, the researcher made attempts to ensure that the research schedule did not interfere with the participants' academic commitments. Participating in the research study had the potential of exposing the students to potential harm. There is a possibility that some of the participants were coerced by their peers to participate in the research study. In addition, lecturers strongly encourage postgraduate students to participate in research studies due to the likelihood that their curriculum might include a research project. These students are told that they need exposure to research processes in order to become great researchers. Therefore, the researcher reiterated that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the research study at their own discretion.

In addition, the participants were informed that if they experienced distress during or after the interview process they should make use of the psychological services available at the Student Counselling and Development Centre. Lastly, the researcher reported the research results in an objective, honest, non-judgemental manner, and presented the participants and their contributions in a respectful and dignified manner (Bailey, 1987).

3.7 Issues of Trustworthiness

The researcher used different methods of data collection to ensure trustworthiness (Maree, 2007). The data collection process included two focus groups, five individual interviews and the use of existing literature. When discussing trustworthiness in qualitative research, issues of transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability should be considered.

Transferability is found when the researcher can guarantee that the research results will be applicable in a different context. For the purpose of this research study, the researcher achieved transferability by ensuring that all information was reported in detail to allow for the duplication of the research study. However, whoever decides to duplicate the study needs to

make a sound judgement as to whether or not the study will be applicable to their context (Terre Blanche et al., 2006).

Credibility can be defined as the ability to ensure that the outcomes of the research study will be congruent with reality (Shenton, 2014). In order to ensure credibility, the researcher made use of triangulation. Guion (2002) stated that triangulation entails the use of more than one approach in the investigation of a research question. In this research study, data triangulation, theoretical triangulation and investigator triangulation were used to ensure credibility (Guion, 2002). The researcher ensured data triangulation by correlating the data gathered from the focus groups and individual interviews with existing literature.

Dependability refers to when the research study and all its processes are reported in detail, to allow other researchers to duplicate the specific study (Shenton, 2014). For the purposes of this research study, the researcher ensured that all the information that was collected was thoroughly documented and reported.

According to Shenton (2014), confirmability occurs when the researcher can ensure that the findings of the research study reflect the perceptions and opinions of the participants and not their own preconceptions. Therefore, the researcher ensured that she reported only the information that was provided by the participants.

Another important aspect to consider in qualitative research is reflexivity. Jootun, McGhee and Marland (2009) defined reflexivity as the process in which the researcher reflects on how their own values, preconceptions and behaviours can affect the participants' interpretations and responses. Researchers have to realise that they are part of the social world that they are studying, and that this can affect their objectivity. To ensure the credibility of this research study, the researcher reflected on her own perceptions of gender identity from the start to the completion of the research study.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter focused on discussing the methodology of the research. It pointed out that the aim of the research study was to explore emerging adults' perceptions of gender identities and the societal influences of the construct. The social constructivist perspective was the research paradigm used in the research study, to indicate how the concept of gender identity is socially constructed. The researcher identified qualitative research as the appropriate research approach, chosen because it provided an in-depth understanding of gender identity. The data was collected in the form of two focus groups and five individual interviews. Group dynamics

were observed and interpreted where applicable. The sampling procedures were convenience and snowball sampling. Data collection was followed by verbatim transcription of the research data, which was later analysed using thematic analysis. Lastly, overarching themes and subthemes were identified to represent the perceptions of the research participants.

Chapter 4: Research Results

In this chapter, the results of the research study are presented. The themes that emerged from the focus groups and individual interviews are identified. The first section of the chapter presents participants' views regarding gender identity, and the second section focuses on their opinions about aspects that relate to the formation of gender identity. The research results reflect the participants' perspectives. Direct quotations are included to provide the context of the results.

4.1 Participants' Views on Gender Identity

The main themes that were identified are presented in three overarching categories: power dynamics, relationship dynamics and career dynamics. Each of these themes consists of subthemes, which will be explicated to give an in-depth view of the participants' perspectives on gender identity.

Table 4

Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Power dynamics	Strength
	Aggression/abuse
	Superiority and inferiority
Relationship dynamics	Parenting
	Relationship roles
Career dynamics	Career aspirations
	Income

4.1.1 Power dynamics.

According to the participants, there are power dynamics that exist between men and women. In an attempt to elaborate on their opinions, subthemes such as strength, aggression/abuse, superiority and inferiority are presented and described.

4.1.1.1 Strength.

Most of the participants linked strength to masculinity: "*Masculinity — (laughs) — I think of "strong". Strong comes to mind, I think of, like, being strong, in a sense of — not physically at all times but emotionally as well, I think — that's how I understand it — masculinity*" (6.16 Female Participant, Individual Interview 4). Other participants expanded on this view: "*Masculinity is someone who is tough and — my understanding is a man who is just tough, and he takes control…*" (5.20 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3).

Most of the participants agreed that the reason why society expects men to engage in tasks requiring physical activity is that it is in their nature to be strong. It was also highlighted that men are expected to protect women. The following statement sums up the views presented by the participants: "*Be a man, you're strong, don't cry, chill, protect them if you see a gun, don't run away, stand and protect them*" (4.33 Female Participant, Individual Interview 2).

The perspectives of the male participants echoed those of the female participants in that they conceptualised masculinity in terms of strength: "*Yes, especially in terms of the differentiation between male and female. Men often have to be muscular or dominant in that way*" (3.14 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1). In contrast to this, some male participants stated that there are instances where females are stronger than males: "*We are seeing women going to the gym and becoming muscular now, like seriously, and you know they are becoming stronger than other males*" (7.70 Male Participant; Individual Interview 5).

Some discrepancies were noted in the ways in which female participants understood the subtheme of strength. Some female participants believed that women are the leaders of society and possess strength: "*Women are actually the backbone of every society, uhm, women, what kind of influence [do] they have in society? Uhm — very, very strong women, I mean, check women like Winnie Mandela, she is actually — she was doing all the work when Nelson Mandela was in jail*" (5.4 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3). The views of other female participants supported this notion: "*Yes, I can identify with that, because I feel like, as much — as much as a woman you are nurturing, you have to be strong to be able to nurture other people, you know, you…*" (4.31 Female Participant, Individual Interview 2).

On the other hand, some female participants believed in the ideology that men are the stronger gender: "*Because you work outside. As washing dishes and housework and whatever is for females, and then working outside, the more strength you need to pick up bricks and build or whatever, it's more masculine, or thought of as a male duty instead of a female duty*" (2.21 Female Participant, Focus Group 2).

Some female participants reported that, although males are expected to display strength, they appreciate it when men display emotion*: "A lot of women, including me, actually love that. I love a man who can actually sit down and tell me how he's feeling, what he thinks of certain things. A lot of men aren't vocal, men don't communicate as much as we do, or as we would like them to. They don't talk about their feelings as much as we would like them to. A man who is very in touch with his femininity, that is amazing, although I still love a man who is like, you know, all tough and masculine and yes — Yeah!*" (5.28 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3).

4.1.1.2 Aggression/abuse.

The participants highlighted the fact that men's possession of physical strength introduces the concept of aggression and physical abuse. Men can use their physical strength in a manner that can be detrimental to women. This theme was prevalent in focus group 1 but was not discussed in focus group 2 or any of the individual interviews. The participants stated the following: "*He is in jail, he has been beating his wife, domestic violence*" (1.177 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The participants pointed out that perpetrators of abuse are often not penalised for their violent acts: "*Again I will mention names, but then Mayweather, the boxer, we all know he abuses women, but that has no implication on his career. Instead he earns money, he milks money, but we all know that he beats up women like he has…*" (1.145 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

In addition, the participants noted that women are often blamed for being victims of physical abuse: "*How did you provoke the man? Because you know he is angry, all men are angry, they are aggressive, how did you provoke him? You should know this; men get angry*" (1.155 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The participants also pointed out that there are incidents of female-to-male violence in society. However, men are discouraged from showing vulnerability: "*I agree with the stereotype that you are not supposed to show weakness, you will be the laughing stock of the village or the community if you went to the police and said 'Ooh, my wife is beating me' and stuff like that…*" (1.194 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

4.1.1.3 Superiority and inferiority.

There were some discrepancies regarding how femininity and masculinity are related to superiority and inferiority. Most of the participants associated masculinity with superiority: "*I feel like they're going to — even in the tiny things, they might just want to come out as superior...*" (4.9 Female Participant, Individual Interview 2).

Other participants highlighted the notion that women are expected to be submissive: "*Submissive now to their male counterparts, [of] which they haven't been, but because of the expectation that has been placed, they now have to change it, and then that trend carries on throughout their lives...*" (1.16 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). Furthermore, the participants emphasised that women are often viewed as weak and fragile: "*No, but that is the thing, like: 'Because you are a woman, you are weak, I will help you, I will support you...'*" (1.163 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

Some participants said that if a man was not the breadwinner of his family they would describe him as inferior: "*To be honest, I would at a quick glance say he is inferior*" (2.114 Female Participant, Focus Group 2).

A significant number of female participants indicated that they do not support the idea of a patriarchal society. Their desire is to exist in a society where there is equality between men and women: "*So I want to be equal to a man, so that the gender identity stereotype is gone. I am a feminist: I don't believe men are better than women, I don't believe a woman is better than a man. So, I believe we are equal. So, if a man competes with me, my dominant — my masculine side comes out, but when I work with somebody that is soft, I am softer, the nurturing trait comes out*" (1.75 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

Some participants pointed out that the terms inferiority, superiority, dominance and weakness should not be used as strict measures of femininity and masculinity. They expressed the opinion that such judgements should be made on a case-to-case basis: "*And everything comes from: different strokes for different folks*" (2.87 Male Participant, Focus Group 2). One participant reiterated this point by stating that women, too, can be dominant: "*Some women I know are extremely dominating, they have their way and that's the only way, kind of thing. So, it's almost like they are very opinionated on their way (unclear) and dominate other people through that*" (3.47 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1).

In this section, the main theme was power dynamics, and the subthemes that were identified were: strength, aggression/abuse, superiority and inferiority. The majority of the participants related strength to masculinity; however, there were other participants who disagreed with this viewpoint. Some participants highlighted that there are instances where

females are physically stronger than males. In addition, the participants indicated that men's possession of physical strength can contribute to incidents of male-to-female violence. Most participants linked superiority to masculinity and inferiority to femininity. There were instances were some participants disagreed with this ideology. Some participants indicated that these terms were relative and were gender-fluid.

4.1.2 Relationship dynamics.

Relationships present their own set of dynamics. The subthemes discussed in the section below are parenting and relationship roles. The participants indicated that males and females have different expectations regarding parenting, and also indicated that certain roles in relationships are identified as feminine whilst others are regarded as masculine.

4.1.2.1 Parenting.

Most of the participants had a traditional view of parenting. They suggested that one of the main contributions women can make to society is to take care of their children and to ensure the well-being of their offspring: "*The female in the family must take care of the kids*" (2.108 Male Participant, Focus Group 2). However, some participants disagreed with this view: "*For example, where the male was supposed to be the breadwinner in the family, sometimes they become the stay-at-home father, looking after the family or doing home chores, and the mother is the main provider, or the female is the main provider, so the roles are slowly but surely changing*" (3.29 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1). The participants expressed the opinion that either men or women can assume the role of the primary caregiver when it comes to parenting. The sharing of parental responsibilities was reiterated by this participant: "*Uhm, and then the man doesn't have to carry the baby for nine months. At the end of the day it's still a baby, and we both have to share the responsibilities*" (7.56 Male Participant, Individual Interview 5).

4.1.2.2 Relationship roles.

Most of the participants agreed with the opinion that men are often identified as the head of the household: "*The man is the head of the house.*" (1.89 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The participants also expressed the view that femininity was associated with support: "*You need a neck, a supporting structure, feminism is that for me*" (1.82 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The participants used a metaphor to clarify their points, indicating that the man is the 'head' of the household whereas the woman is the 'neck'. In addition, most of the

participants understood masculinity in relation to the ability to provide: "*The provider, the breadwinner…*" (2.29 Female Participant, Focus Group 2).

Most of the participants articulated the view that one of the roles for females is to be nurturing: "*Like, as a female, and as a woman — and if you feel like you are female, it's always about caring about people, always being there, always sorting people out, you know, like mother figures — (Interviewer: Like nurturing?) Yes, want to nurture people, like, you know, that's what it is for me, and maybe look pretty — yeah*" (4.19 Female Participant, Individual Interview 2). Another role that the participants associated with femininity was being domesticated: "*Domestication*" (2.23 Female Participant, Focus Group 2). The participants also indicated that the message that women should be domesticated was reinforced from an early age: "*Already at a young age, if you can't cook they are like: 'What are you going to do when you get married?'*" (1.129 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). Furthermore, the participants reported that women have the responsibility for making the house comfortable for their family: "*She makes a house a home*" (2.48 Female Participant, Focus Group 2).

Some male participants articulated that men are often judged if they do not assume the leadership position in their homes or relationships: "*But isn't it worse — don't you feel like men are so much judged — when you see circumstances where the woman is so much more in charge in the relationship or household, then you say, 'Oh, that man doesn't have a backbone, he can't stand up for himself'*" (1.102 Male Participant, Focus Group 1).

Some female participants disagreed with the view that providing for the family was a task associated with masculinity: "*No, I don't accept that, I believe that the woman can also go out and work from eight to five and come back and maybe cook. I believe that the husband can actually help her, like they can take turns to cook. I know a lot of men would be like: 'Oh, it's not supposed to be that way' but I believe that it is a 50/50 thing, for me, we need to help each other*" (6.32 Female Participant, Individual Interview 4). This sums up the opinion that both men and women can be domesticated.

The participants further revealed that females should prioritise compromise, especially in romantic relationships: "*But it's that the construct of compromise gets engraved in us as soon as we start becoming an emerging adult: compromise, a woman should compromise*" (1.18 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). Women are also expected to show sympathy to their partners: "*Or sympathetic, you must always be sympathetic*" (1.221 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

In this section, the main theme of relationship dynamics was presented. Parenting and relationship roles were identified as the subthemes. Most of the participants agreed that

parenting was the responsibility of females. However, other participants challenged this view and expressed the opinion that men can be equally involved in parenting as women. In terms of the subtheme of relationship roles, most participants agreed that men are often the head of the household and are responsible for providing for their families. Some participants expressed the belief that women are expected to be nurturing, domesticated and supportive of their partner. However, other participants indicated that women have the same capacity to provide as men do. Therefore, they should be allowed to assume the role of the primary provider.

4.1.3 Career dynamics.

The participants highlighted the fact that there are different dynamics at play regarding the careers of males and females. These dynamics include career aspirations and issues related to the income gap that exists between men and women.

4.1.3.1 Career aspirations.

Most of the participants felt that women are not provided with the same career opportunities as men: "*Well, I think that one is kind of basic, though. — (Clears throat). We know that in our social spaces women are not, like, fully empowered. The rules are still associated with — clean the house, domestic work, taking care of the babies — you know, like — like, there is — there is sort of a negative debate towards woman acquiring, uhm, bigger positions in-in-in companies or organisations — uhm — mainly because we know that a woman has to go through pregnancies…*" (7.12 Male Participant, Individual Interview 5). There was a general consensus amongst the participants that men receive preferential treatment with regard to their positions in the workplace*: "But, because they are male figures, uhm — it's still regarded that they can acquire bigger positions, the leading roles, you know…" (*7.20 Male Participant, Individual Interview 5).

Furthermore, most of the participants emphasised the view that women are not granted the same opportunities as men with regard to career growth: "*You won't be allowed specific careers or to enter into specific careers or go up the corporate ladder of whatever specific career it is, because you are a woman*" (1.38 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The participants stated further that there are instances where men get recognition for occupational results that were produced by women: "*Or if we would be in a situation and I take control, maybe be a superior position wise — career-wise, and I handle the situation, the recognition will not be given to me, it will be given to him, even though I handled the situation and I was down on the ground…*" (1.94 Female participant, Focus Group 1).

The participants argued further that it is challenging to have a successful romantic relationship if both partners are employed: "*Careers mess relationships up, it does: if she's working nine to five, she's tired, she can't cook, she's bringing pizza home*" (2.92 Female Participant, Focus Group 2). Other participants highlighted that if both partners are employed, one of the partners should compromise and be willing to assist their partner with some of the responsibilities: "*Um, I grew up in a house where I was just surrounded by girls and that whole thing of compromise...*" (1.24 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The female participants believed that women are natural multi-taskers and are able to balance different aspects of their lives: "*The kids will be fetched from school, they will be bathed before my dad comes home, there's food on the table, it's done. I feel like women can multi-task, they can get things done*" (2.96 Female Participant, Focus Group 2). Some participants indicated that women in powerful positions (in their career) are treated differently from men in similar positions: "*As these big people that can be CEOs or whatever, they see them as very gentle people, they don't see – when a woman is very, like, out there, like very dominant, they see that as being bossy, but when a man is dominant, it's okay, it's like: 'No, he is fine, he is the boss you know, he is in a big position, he is allowed to do that', but when a woman does that, it is like: 'No, she is being bossy', or she is being a certain way that is not accepted — you know? Yeah*" (5.12 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3).

Other female participants challenged the perception that men can pursue their career aspirations whereas females should be domesticated: "*Yes, I do think that there is a difference, because as I grew up the man is supposed to be the one who works hard, he is supposed to be out at eight in the morning and come back at five, and the woman is supposed to be the one at home, cooking and cleaning, and has all of the chores. So, the gender identities do differ, but in today's society I don't really accept that*" (6.30 Female Participant, Individual Interview 4).

Some participants associated career aspirations with masculinity, whereas others challenged this viewpoint: "*But I don't, I don't see that as being masculine. I don't see a woman who is at the office doing all these things as being masculine. I don't feel a woman who is in the office, or who is the CEO or the boss, is manly. She is still a woman. She is just doing what most people see as a man's job. But I don't see it as being manly…*" (5.34 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3).

4.1.3.2 Income.

The participants agreed that the differences between the income bracket of men and that of women is vast: "*Even across the salary scale, women in South Africa don't get paid for the equal position as men.*" (1.36 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). There was consensus among the female participants that they wanted to be seen as equal to men in the workplace: "*…When I see a woman that is actually a CEO, I just see — I look at that woman and see — I actually think she is very feminine when I look at her. Because you are thriving, you know you want equal rights for every woman and man. You know… and you actually playing a role in that. You know, you want to be seen as equal.*" (5.40 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3). The male participants indicated that they were not opposed to women earning more money than them: "*It's fine*" (2.70 Male Participant, Focus Group 2).

In this section, the theme of career dynamics was presented. Career aspirations and income were the supporting themes. The general consensus among the participants was that women are not provided with the same career opportunities as men. Some participants also felt that men are more likely to make more money than women, even if they occupy the same position. However, other participants argued that women are able to achieve the same career success as men. The participants pointed to examples of women making great contributions in their occupations and assuming leadership positions such as CEO.

4.2 Aspects that Relate to the Formation of Gender Identity

There are multiple aspects that, according to the participants, relate to the formation of gender identity. These aspects include family, religion, cultural background, society and the media.

Table 5

Themes and subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Family	Gender-specific toys, colours and clothing items
	Gender-specific chores and activities
Religion	
Cultural background	
Society	
Media	

4.2.1. Family.

Most of the participants identified the family as one of the institutions that contributed to their understanding of gender identity: *"It is difficult to say from where, 'cause I feel like everybody knows it either from their family or from observing somebody like that"* (3.51 Male participant, Individual Interview 1*).* The other participants agreed with this viewpoint: "*I would say the family institution*" (1.117 Female participant, Focus Group 1).

The participants highlighted that the family shapes different aspects of gender identity, example include gender specific toys, colours and clothing items, gender specific chores and activities.

4.2.1.1 Gender specific toys, colours and clothing items.

Most of the participants stated that ideas about gender-appropriate toys were reinforced in early childhood: "*From a young age, you are given a colour to wear and you are given toys to play with.*" (3.20 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1). These participants gave examples of instances where gender-specific toys were prescribed: "*So if you are a female, for*

example, you get perhaps a small set of tea cups or a (unclear), or a guy would get, like, a truck or something like that to play with" (3.22 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1).

Other participants, however, indicated that their families had not set specific restrictions on the types of toys they were allowed to play with: "*Say, if I wanted to play with the tea set, it was totally fine. She wasn't bothered by that, and the same if I wanted to play with other stuff. So, it was never a forced thing, like: 'You have to be like this, or you have to be like that' in my family growing up, and with other families you do see extremities, and just seeing that and knowing that, you can choose a side and be more open-minded…*" (3.31 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1).

The participants noted that ideas about gender appropriate colours have changed: "*He can wear a pink shirt, everybody is going to be like: 'Okay'. But my father wearing a bright pink shirt and skinny jeans in his time — he would have been an outcast*" (1.246 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). Another participant agreed that families had, in earlier times, insisted that they wear specific items of clothing to complement their gender: "*In the olden days you had to wear that (referring to a dress) every day because you are a lady*" (1.244 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). These points indicate that wearing clothing of gender-specific colours had been prescribed in their parent's generation; however, this is not the case today.

Other participants reported that this had not been the norm in their families: "*Like, as a child I was literally a tomboy; she was okay with that; she didn't try to enforce things on me, she would suggest, like: 'Do you want to wear pants, or do you want to wear a dress?' and I would say 'Pants'. On another day I would be on some — 'I want to wear the dress today' and she would be on some — 'Okay, it's fine'. Whichever way I wanted it, she would accept it, yeah*" (2.207 Female participant, Focus Group 2).

There was a general consensus among the participants that the understanding of what is gender appropriate is situation-specific: "*But I think it's also based on whether you have a girl child or a boy child — okay, maybe at home, because — if I'm wearing pants, it's fine, whatever, but now I see with my brother, if I put nail polish or whatever, my dad throws a fit, so I think with girls it's more: 'She'll grow out of it' or 'It's okay' or 'It may change' but then with boys its more cautious, so 'He can't do that now, he'll get used to it'*" (2.208 Female Participant, Focus Group 2). This statement also suggests that families place more pressure on males than on females when it comes to the appropriateness of gender identity expression.

4.2.1.2 Gender specific chores and activities.

The participants reported that their families placed expectations on them regarding the chores and activities that were appropriate to their gender: "… *'Let him go play, you girls should be cooking and cleaning the house.' See, that's how the guy cruise[s], so for him, every — like, chores in the house — it's a woman's job, so in a way that's how he saw the mother doing things in the house*" (4.59 Female Participant, Individual Interview 2). The participants reported that these attitudes can still be observed in modern society: "*Exactly! I have seen so many guys who are so filthy, they can't clean, and I have heard their mom say, 'Ag, I can't wait for you to get a wife, this is not my job'*" (1.133 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

In this section, participants indicated that the family is the first place in which children are exposed to attitudes regarding gender identity. Two subthemes were identified, namely gender-specific toys, colours and clothing items, and gender-specific chores and activities. The views shared by the participants in this section were varied. Some participants declared that their parents had expressed specific opinions about gender-specific toys, colours and clothing. Others, however, reported that this had not been the case in their homes, and that their parents had allowed them the freedom to choose the toys they wanted to play with and the clothing items they wanted to wear. Lastly, most of the participants agreed that, in their families, females were responsible for doing chores such as cooking and cleaning, while this was not expected of the males.

4.2.2 Religion.

Most of the participants identified religion as one of the factors that had influenced their conceptualisation of gender identity: "*Everything about religion, the culture, everything combined, and it literally gives you — you are born into this, you are literally born into the stereotype, you cannot escape it*" (1.120 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The participants indicated that they could not challenge their religious views, as these principles had been taught to them from a young age: "*You can't question something, when, like, the first seven years it's the only thing you are accustomed to*" (1.121 Male Participant, Focus Group 1).

The participants also reported that they could not challenge their religious views on gender identity, as these opinions were recorded in religious texts*: "After you, like, get into the books of religion and there is proof there, and it is the evidence. It is written, perhaps maybe in the Bible or the Torah or the Quran, then you can't even-even — to an authoritarian figure, or your parents. If they base it there and they give you that book, you cannot question any further because there it is, it is written in text*" (1.282 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

4.2.3 Cultural background.

Most of the participants reported that their cultural background assisted them in conceptualising their gender identity: "*In the Afrikaans culture, it is still like, people see it as the male should be the main provider and the woman is not allowed to like talk back to him, she has to submit under him.*" (3.59 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1).

The participants noted that their cultural background had constructed ideologies in relation to gender-appropriate and gender-inappropriate behaviour: "*Culture, a lot of cultures — even our culture you know? — A woman should be able to do certain things, you know, when you were a child, like even now, when you do certain things they ask: 'What kind of a girl are you, what kind of a lady are you, or what kind of woman are you going to be, or wife are you going to be one day?' That's what they say to you when you don't wash the dishes or when you don't make your bed or when you are just, like, living — (laughs) how I live right now — when you are messy!*" (5.16 Female participant, Individual Interview 3).

The participants reported that some cultural groups were stricter than others about the expression of gender identity: "*Yes. In certain cultures, it is acceptable for a male to be more feminine, and in other cultures it is not allowed at all. Then it is seen as a sign of weakness perhaps*" (3.53 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1).

Most of the participants noted that collectivist cultures were stricter than individualist cultures about gender-appropriate behaviour: "*But I think, because we live in South Africa, this place is still more collectivistic, the culture here, whereas if you would have to compare it to Europe or America where it is individualistic, there feminism is coming up properly, like that is how it is supposed to be*" (1.31 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The participants suggested that, although some behaviours are acceptable in some cultures, they might be unacceptable in others: "*This equality thing is seen, if anything, in the African culture as disrespect*" (1.90 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

Some participants reported that there have been some changes in the understanding of gender identity from a cultural perspective: "*I feel like, in our tradition, we take two steps forward and one step back. So, we are improving, you see the changes, but for us it feels like we are still on the damn same path as our parents. Because we take two steps forward and we were like: 'Yes!' And then we will take one step back, so we have made progress but not that much*" (1.251 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

Some participants reported that, regardless of their cultural background, they still try to be autonomous in constructing their gender identity: "*I believe in you being who you want to be and what you want to be, regardless of culture and what they say. You know, now that*

everything is modernised and everything, you know — don't let your — I don't believe in that — letting your culture or even society that modernises all things influence who you want to be, Yes, everything around you is going to influence you, you're going to have a big part of who you are, but you should decide whether I want to be that person or that kind of a wife one day — you know, if one day I am a wife — yes I would want to cook for my husband, once in a while — (laughs) you know? Not every day, but yes, I believe that as a woman, or for me, you should cook, you know, but also, you should live a little — your whole life shouldn't be centred around what your culture says…" (5.18 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3).

The participants agreed that their cultural background had shaped their understanding of gender identity. Some African participants reported that their culture emphasises that women should be domesticated and that anyone who deviates from this norm is frowned upon. Other participants noted that the Afrikaans culture is also strict regarding issues of gender identity. For instance, men are expected to be the providers in their families, whereas women are expected to be submissive. The participants indicated that collectivist cultures were stricter than individualist cultures regarding adherence to culturally-appropriate behaviours and practices. Lastly, some participants expressed the desire to make autonomous decisions regarding their gender identity.

4.2.4 Society.

Most of the participants agreed that society has the greatest influence on gender identity: "*… So, in terms of me, it's both what you see and what society — or what you think society — sees from or expects from you*" (3.8 Male Participant, Individual Interview 1). The participants alluded to the fact that people often express their gender identity in the ways that society deems appropriate: "*What is appropriate for the society, how you should behave to be accepted as normal, being a girl being a boy, ja*" (1.3 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

Society encompasses the communities and environments in which people are brought up: "*…I see it in my community, like how — because when you are the woman, you are supposed to do certain things, like cook, clean, be that traditional woman. So, in my community, that is how they — they told us that, it was portrayed that way, they showed us that it is supposed to be that way, so it's not only like one person that teaches me, it is influenced by external factors*" (6.22 Female Participant, Individual Interview 4). The participants identified the university (in this case, the University of the Free State) as one of the societal influences of their gender identity: "*Okay. The society aspect — UFS, it's just here. The way everyone looks at everyone, the way they comment on certain things — the way they expect you to react as a woman to*

certain things, like: '*You're not supposed to do this, you're a girl*'; '*You're not supposed to come to school like this*'; '*You look pretty*'; '*That's what women do*'; '*You're not supposed to be wearing a dress, you're a guy, 'cause it's wrong*' — so for me, it's UFS" (4.37 Female Participant, Individual Interview 2).

Other participants indicated that society's expectations of men are different from its expectations of women: "*But I feel the extent to which it is stressed on men is different from how it is stressed upon women. It is implemented and pushed into their (participant referring to females) faces*" (1.128 Female participant, Focus Group 1). The general consensus among the participants was that people should be allowed the freedom to form their own conceptualisation of gender identity, regardless of what society prescribes: "*People decided to be fearlessly themselves and then society had no other choice but to accept them — it — and we are still trying to — like we are still getting there*" (5.52 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3).

Some participants provided examples of people challenging the status quo regarding gender identity: "*We had actually in our matric year an androgynous fashion show, because I went to an all-girls school, so it was basically pushing against the status quo like, girls can also rock things guys can. And you see it that's why we have boyfriend jeans and that's why girls can wear power suits, it's — you know — it has become a thing and I-I-I mean, people argue [that] because we do this, girls become less feminine, girls are-are actually becoming more masculine, they are tougher these days, some people have a problem with it*" (2.120 Female Participant, Focus Group 2). Some participants reported that the modelling profession is challenging views of traditionally appropriate feminine and masculine behaviour: "*Because, I mean, he's modelling, that's his profession. Models are really clean, they take care of themselves, like you will find a model — a guy who models — and he will put foundation on and he will go to tanning salons and stuff, but that's just for work, you know. And he'll be very (claps hands) clean but not gay clean*" (2.174 Female Participant, Focus Group 2).

4.2.5 Media.

The media was also identified as a factor that influenced the participants' understanding of gender identity. The participants reported that people often align their gender identity with what is displayed in the media: "*So, that is why I said the media, what you see on TV you have to do, because everybody accepts it, everybody looks at it, so that is why I said media, it comes from there as well…*" (1.141 Female Participant, Focus Group 1). The participants also noted that the American media has a large influence on the construction of gender identity: "*And I think*

when media starts, we see everything that America is doing, so actually — ja” (1.139 Female Participant, Focus Group 1).

The participants also pointed out that there are a number of different forms of media influencing emerging adults' conceptualisation of gender identity: “*Yoh, everything from the talk shows, you know, things that are real, to all this reality shows, to series, to movies, there's always something that is always wrong about women that needs to be fixed. In everything there's always something that women did, this — it should've been like that, but it should be fixed as a woman should not be doing…*” (4.41 Female Participant, Individual Interview 2). The participants identified social media as the main medium of communication shaping their perceptions of gender identity: “*Social media, uhm, it actually, uhm, it opens all these — it gives you an eye into what is happening. It is almost like a — that your whole life you have that — maybe you're not certain about certain things — it is almost like — let me describe it as someone who doesn't have good eyesight and they finally put on their glasses and the trees are not like big blobs anymore, they are trees, you know? I feel like sometimes social media does do that for you, it's almost like it clarifies certain things for you and you get to see what other people are doing outside, you know? So, I think it does show you all these women, all these amazing women out there in the world doing their different things. You kind of aspire to be something like that, you know?*” (5.46 Female Participant, Individual Interview 3).

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter shed light on how the participants conceptualised gender identity. Several themes and subthemes were identified, based on the information that had been provided by the participants in the focus groups and individual interviews. The main themes included power dynamics, relationship dynamics and career dynamics. The institutions that were believed to be the main influencers of gender identity were family, religion, cultural background, society and the media. To some extent, there were similarities in the ideas generated by the participants regarding gender identity. However, there were instances in which their ideas contradicted one another. This chapter illustrated the diversity in the participants' opinions of gender identity. Lastly, the differences between the opinions of male and female participants were highlighted. This indicated that gender (maleness and femaleness) has some implications for the conceptualisation of gender identity.

<center>**Chapter 5: Discussion**</center>

This section discusses the research results and compares them with theoretical frameworks of gender identity studies. The results of previous research studies in the field of gender identity are discussed, and a summary of the chapter is provided.

5.1. Conceptualising Gender Identity

In this research study, the participants understood gender identity mainly from the perspective of femininity and masculinity. Androgyny was an unfamiliar concept to most of the participants. The participants explained gender identity using related terms, such as gender roles, gender stereotypes and gender-appropriate behaviour. In addition, issues surrounding power dynamics, relationship dynamics and career dynamics were discussed in order to broaden the understanding of gender identity.

5.1.1 Femininity.

The participants demonstrated a broad understanding of the concept of femininity. Some female participants reported that one of the lessons imparted to them by their elders had been the importance of being domesticated and engaging in activities that would ensure that they become a good spouse and mother. One of the ways in which the participants were prepared for the tasks that were associated with femininity was by encouraging them (from an early age) to engage in household chores. Examples of these chores included washing the dishes, cleaning and cooking. On the basis of the above discussion it is evident that gender roles were enforced in early childhood (Bussey, 2011).

An alternative way of understanding gender identity in relation to femininity is through the work of Erikson (Craig & Dunn, 2010). Erikson maintained that identity formation is an important developmental task, especially for adolescents. One of the ways in which people explore their identity is by asking questions such as "Who am I"? (Watts et al., 2009). The female participants in the research study conceptualised their identity in terms of being domesticated. Therefore, it can be hypothesised that when they were confronted with the question "Who am I?" their answer was 'I am domesticated'. Therefore, being domesticated formed part of their gender identity. In addition, the participants' conceptualisation of women as domestic beings reflects the findings of Foucault (2007). In summary, the opinions that the

emerging adults had about their gender identity correlate with what they had been taught in childhood.

The participants reported that femininity was closely related to motherhood. They expressed the view that women were expected to procreate and take care of their offspring. It was indicated that, in most cases, females assumed the role of the primary caregiver and had to sacrifice a potential career in order raise their children. The participants reported that they had been taught that "raising children was a woman's job". Therefore, it was the norm for women not to have a professional career. The U.S Bureau of the Census (1997) seems to support the participants' perspective, as it revealed that, in traditional society, women did not prioritise their careers. In addition, some of the participants seem to have embraced the ideology that femininity is associated with motherhood, some of them without exploring their own perceptions of the construct. Therefore, their opinions on femininity aligned with those of their families. In terms of Marcia's identity status theory (2002), this would be regarded as an example of identity foreclosure.

The participants' views also seemed to align with the results of Barry et al. (2009), which indicated that, traditionally, women were expected to be the primary caregivers of their children. It can also be argued that the perception that femininity is related to motherhood is a type of gender stereotype, and it is thus expected that women assume this role. Conversely, men were encouraged to take a passive approach towards parenting. The findings of Barry et al. (2009) are reflected in the findings of this research study, which indicate that men are indeed encouraged to be uninvolved parents.

The female participants reported that, from an early age, their parents had constantly conveyed the message that nurturing is related to femininity. It is likely that these family members modelled these behaviours to the participants. As a result, the participants learned to be nurturing by observing and thus modelling their parents' behaviours. This correlates with the principles of the social learning theory (Bandura et al., 1963). The participants' viewpoints also support existing literature on gender identity, which indicates that traditional feminine characteristics include weakness, vulnerability, being nurturing, passive, gentle and having a sense of invisibility (Jeanes, 2011).

Most of the participants testified that femininity was understood in relation to terms such as inferiority, submissiveness and weakness. The ideology that females were inferior to men was further expanded by highlighting that in most cases, men assumed powerful positions in society. Therefore, women often viewed themselves as inferior to men. The participants also reported that women were taught to submit to the authority of men. One of the ways in which

this was done was by discouraging them from questioning men's decisions and supporting them instead. The belief that women are inferior to men has its origins in South Africa's socio-political history, which encouraged the functioning of a patriarchal society. For instance, during the apartheid area, messages that men and women are not equal were constantly communicated (Mantell & Needham, 2009). This way of thinking was reinforced by the narrative that was communicated to people during that era. This correlates with narrative approaches to identity, which suggest that ideologies are both situational and contextual (Barkhuizen, 2016). Therefore, at that time, it was fitting for ideas about inequality to be normalised. However, new truths have emerged in society which indicate that equality between men and women is possible (Roussell, 2013).

Furthermore, whereas men were viewed as strong, women were identified as weak. The participants reported that one of the reasons why females are regarded as weak is that they are less physically strong than males. The participants' views are supported by one side of the nature versus nurture debate, which states that gender identity is influenced by genetics and the presence of specific hormones. In fact, biology indicates that men are likely to be physically stronger than women because of their possession of higher testosterone levels (Boles & Tatro, 2013). This viewpoint led to the assumption that women were weak and therefore had to be protected. This viewpoint correlates with the results of the work of Jeanes (2011), which identified women as the weaker gender.

However, most of the female participants expressed the desire to be treated as equal to men. Some participants stated that their desire was fuelled by the fact that they were feminists, whilst others reported that they wanted to challenge the status quo. The postfeminist perspective of femininity regards women as strong, independent, empowered and equal to men. Consequently, the female participants' desire for equality aligns with postfeminist studies on gender identity (Roussell, 2013).

Other participants testified that women are exceptionally strong and are the backbone of society. An important societal figure that was identified as embodying strength was Winnie Mandela. The participants pointed out that, while Nelson Mandela was in prison, Winnie Mandela had taken on the task of taking care of the family by herself. The participants therefore argued that women can be both nurturing and strong. This perspective might be a reflection of the changes in society and may be the result of changes in social relationships (Cerezo, Morales, Quintero, & Rothman, 2014). The argument above exemplifies the view that women can embody traditionally feminine and masculine traits. This can be interpreted as suggesting that women can have an androgynous identity. In addition, most of the female participants

expressed the view that women are natural multi-taskers, being able to assume multiple roles simultaneously. For instance, they can assume the role of mother, supportive spouse, nurturer and professional concurrently. There are examples of women in South Africa who have achieved both personal and professional success, specifically Gerry Elsdon (Letwaba, 2013). Finally, the participants reported that cleanliness was a trait that was prioritised by females. For example, the female participants had been taught to wear clean clothes and be presentable at all times. Anyone who did not meet these standards was referred to as unfeminine. This is an example of a socially constructed idea (Kalpana, 2014). Although the participants had been taught that cleanliness exemplifies femininity, some of them still embrace this ideology at their current developmental stage, which is emerging adulthood.

5.1.2 Masculinity.

The main attributes that the participants identified in their discussion of masculinity were being head of the household and having the ability to provide. Men were expected both to be financially responsible for their families and to prioritise career aspirations. For instance, the participants testified that they had been exposed to the idea that men should have a "nine-to-five job". This reflects the concept of social categorisation, which forms part of the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In this instance, men were socially categorised on the basis of their ability to pursue a career. In the context of this research study, social categorisation stipulates that men are expected to assume the role of the provider and seek career success. An alternative explanation for identifying men as the *head* of the household may be found in the notion of patriarchy (Busch & Holst, 2011). In traditional society, men were believed to be superior to women, and this belief was manifested by their positioning in the household. There is theoretical evidence that suggests that this ideology occurred through social construction. In this instance, men were socialised to view themselves as head of the household and, hence, superior to women. This ideology may eventually have been embraced by women and later became a norm (Kalpana, 2014).

Men have been favoured in the labour market (U.S Bureau of the Census, 1997). For instance, they have usually earned more money than women in similar positions. This inequality stems from the fact that traditional society viewed women as secondary citizens compared to men (Chisholm et al., 2009). In addition, in the face of the Great Depression and World War II, most females sought security and thus chose marriage over career pursuits (U.S Bureau of the Census, 1997). Therefore, when they first entered the labour market they were at a disadvantage compared to men. The narrative approach to identity states that identity is

constructed in relation to the attitudes, beliefs, expectations and assumptions of a group of people (Saewyc, 2017). It may be concluded therefore that men's advantage in the labour market was based on an assumption of their superiority.

There is evidence that contradicts the view that men are currently at an advantage in the labour market. Bornman et al. (2012) indicated that in modern society men and women can compete in the same market. This is because females have proved their ability to have career success. Furthermore, women in contemporary society exist in an era of possibilities and can choose to explore their identity in a number of different ways (Arnett, 2000). As a result, they have incorporated career advancement into their identity. This was borne out by the emerging adults who participated in the research study, as they reported that it has become socially acceptable for women to prioritise their careers. A plausible explanation for this transformation is the process of socialisation (Bussey, 2011). Finally, it may be pointed out that the inconsistencies in the findings regarding the position of men and women in the workplace is an indication of the evolution of society, as expected by social constructivist theories (Kalpana, 2014).

Although most participants agreed that men often prioritise career success over parenting, other participants disagreed with this viewpoint. Some participants indicated that they knew men who had sacrificed their careers in order to prioritise parenting. In this instance, these men challenged societal views of gender roles relating to employment. This example of men challenging the status quo regarding gender roles endorses the viewpoint that gender roles are contextual, fluid and subject to change. This perspective concurs with the narrative approach to identity, which emphasises the view that identity is a concept that is "fluid, multiple and is constructed in different contexts" (Barkhuizen, 2016, p. 32). It should be noted that gender roles are manifested in society; therefore, people who do not observe these gender roles are often judged (Butler, 2008). This aligns with what the participants reported about stay-at home-fathers. It was reported that these men were often frowned upon and were identified as inferior to males who prioritise career success over parenting.

The perception that men are superior to women should be revisited. This viewpoint was supported by Jeanes (2011), who indicated that men had an innate desire to be superior to women. This ideology can be understood from multiple theoretical frameworks. Firstly, people contributed to creating this narrative. Therefore, some of the emerging adults have integrated this ideology into their lives and have accepted it as the ultimate truth. This way of understanding gender identity aligns with the narrative approach to identity (Barkhuizen, 2016). Secondly, this ideology was socially constructed on the relationships that exist between

people (Blum, Mmari & Moreau, 2017). This viewpoint complements the theoretical framework of this research study. Lastly, the belief system that men are superior and possess strength can be identified as a form of gender stereotype. As with most stereotypes, this is not necessarily a reflection of the truth. The gender stereotype possibly exists for the purpose of social categorisation.

In addition, the participants reported that men's possession of physical strength was often detrimental to women. They provided examples of high-profile men, such as Floyd Mayweather, being physically aggressive towards women. The participants indicated that although Floyd Mayweather had been involved in many incidents of domestic abuse, there are no recorded consequences of his behaviour. There is a possibility that other men in society commit the same crime because they have learned, through observation, that such behaviour is acceptable or goes unpunished. It is also likely that some men are modelling this behaviour as they have observed its occurrence in their immediate environments. This offers a behaviourist perspective of understanding the relatedness of masculinity to physical aggression (Bandura et al., 1963).

Furthermore, the participants expressed that, although women are often victims of domestic violence, they are repeatedly blamed for their misfortune. For example, women are sometimes accused of provoking men to become aggressive. This perception of domestic abuse could have been influenced by processes of observational learning, as postulated by the social learning theory (Bandura et al., 1963). Although the participants stated that they were aware of female-to-male domestic violence, they expressed the view that the incidence of such violence was low. The participants also indicated that men were discouraged from reporting incidents of domestic abuse in which they were the victims, as they would be mocked and called weak. The assumption that men would be called weak for being victims of domestic violence could have been influenced by the gender stereotype that men should be strong.

Some female participants reported that, although they were appreciative of men who displayed strength, they were often impressed by men who express their emotions. However, these participants stated that men's expression of emotions should occur within limits. For instance, it was unacceptable for men to be more emotional than women. This is similar to the findings of (Blum et al., 2017) that indicated that men are discouraged against displaying emotions. These participants reported that they viewed men who were more emotionally vulnerable than women as weak and feminine. Their views may have been influenced by socialisation and observational learning.

The last characteristic that was linked to masculinity was being undomesticated. The participants pointed out that men were often discouraged from being domesticated, as that was identified as women's responsibility. The participants provided examples of mothers who visited their children at university to cook and clean for them. In some instances, the mothers would make comments that they could not wait for their sons to get married, so that their spouses could take care of them. A plausible explanation for this view might be that domesticity is a role assigned to females, and that people thus constructed the idea that it was socially unacceptable for men to be domesticated. This viewpoint aligns with the perspective of the social construction approach, which postulates that ideologies are constructed in social interactions (Eckert, 2013).

5.1.3 Androgyny.

Although most of the participants were not familiar with the concept of androgyny, they were aware that gender identity does not consist only of the binary categories of femininity and masculinity. Some of the participants explained an androgynous identity as "the grey area". Based on their responses it was evident that the participants were aware that gender identity occurred on a continuum. The participants' understanding corresponds with the gender continuum theory, which states that gender identity exists on a continuum and is fluid. The gender continuum consists of femininity, androgyny and masculinity (Roussell, 2013). The narrative approach to identity also supports the view that gender identity is fluid, complex and can only be understood in the contexts in which it occurs (Barkhuizen, 2016).

Most of the participants grasped the idea that people did not have to be either masculine or feminine. Some participants reported that they knew males who embodied traditionally feminine and masculine traits. However, they believed that the possession of opposing traits did not make them less masculine than men who only embraced their masculine side. One participant reported that her father was soft; however, she still viewed him as strong and masculine. Consequently, his softness did not take away from his masculinity. The opinions of the participants suggested that androgyny has become a socially accepted gender identity. This is similar to the perception that the conceptualisation of gender identity has become more inclusive (McAdams & Olson, 2010).

The participants reported that the embodiment of androgynous identities is popular among models and actors. The way in which the participants made sense of androgyny was based on the social identity theory's concept of social categorisation (Tajfel & Turner, 1966). The participants reported that some male models and actors wear make-up and at times appear more

feminine than average men. These participants reported that they accept people who choose to express their gender identity in that way, especially if it is for work purposes. However, they implied that, although they embraced androgynous identities, there were exceptions to this. They reported that they find it problematic when males want to appear more feminine than biological females. They also said that they did not approve of males who over-exaggerate traditionally feminine behaviour.

Some participants spoke about a man they knew who referred to himself as 'Angel Dust' (a pseudonym). This man complained that there were no dustbins in the male bathrooms and that he could therefore not dispose of his sanitary towels. The participants experienced his behaviour as unusual, as it was impossible for him to experience menses because he was biologically male. These participants reported that he tried "too hard to be feminine". Angel Dust's behaviour might be explained by the fact that he is an emerging adult undergoing the process of identity exploration. According to Arnett (2000), the process of identity exploration is a normal developmental task for emerging adults. Therefore, although Angel Dust's behaviour seems odd, it is developmentally appropriate. The participants' reaction to Angel Dust demonstrates the view that people experience difficulties accepting behaviour that does not fit into specific gender stereotypes (Austin et al., 2009). Based on the principles of the social construction theory, it can be alleged that what is viewed as gender-inappropriate behaviour may be acceptable in the future. That might occur through socialisation and would consequently create opportunities for new knowledge regarding gender identity (Bussey, 2011).

5.2 Factors influencing Gender Identity

The different factors that influence gender identity will be explored. The participants identified a number of factors that informed their understanding of gender identity, namely family, peers, social structures, culture and socio-political history, religion and media.

5.2.1 Family.

The family is the first place into which people are socialised and therefore has a significant influence on how they relate to others and to the world. Most of the participants reported that the family is one of the main institutions that had assisted them in conceptualising their gender identity. The findings of this research study align with the work of Barry et al. (2009), which indicated that the family system influences whether people adopt a traditional or non-traditional

way of expressing their gender identity. The participants also reported that messages about gender-appropriate behaviour had been communicated to them from an early age. They observed that most parents dressed their children in gender-specific colours from an early age, for example, pink was popular among females whereas blue was often worn by males. The participants stated that these colours had been chosen for them and that they had not had an input in this regard. Based on these views, a significant number of the participants seem to have reached only the identity foreclosure stage in their identity formation process. This hypothesis was reached because they had not explored their gender identity and had, rather, adopted the gender identity that their families deemed as appropriate. The abovementioned opinion is based on Marcia's identity status theory (Marcia, 1966).

The participants also reported that they had learnt that some toys were associated with femininity whilst others were associated with masculinity. For example, it was common for girl children to be given tea-sets, whereas boy children often received trucks as gifts. Another common finding was that most parents dressed their children in what they regarded as gender-appropriate clothing items. For instance, girls often wore dresses, whereas boys wore pants. These actions have likely contributed to stereotypes regarding gender-appropriate ways of dressing. Furthermore, it is evident that messages regarding gender identity were reinforced in earlier developmental stages and were strengthened over time, as some of the emerging adults' behavioural manifestations correspond with what they were taught in childhood. Therefore, the process of conceptualising gender identity can be understood from the perspective of the social learning theory (Bandura et al., 1963).

However, some exceptions were noted among the participants' views. Some participants reported that their families did not have strict rules about gender-appropriate toys, colours and clothing items. For example, they said that their parents had allowed them to play with any toys regardless of whether the toys were regarded as feminine or masculine. A specific female participant identified herself as having been a tomboy and reported that her gender identity had been influenced by the fact that her family had allowed her freedom in her choice of clothes, allowing her to wear clothes that most people would have labelled masculine. The exceptions noted in the research results demonstrated that some families did not have strict regulations regarding gender stereotypes and the appropriate expression of gender identity. It may be assumed that these families created their own narrative regarding gender identity. This hypothesis is supported by the narrative approach to identity, which states that the conceptualisation of constructs is situational and is developed within a specific context (Borg, 2006).

Furthermore, the participants who were allowed to express their gender identity in a fluid manner indicated that their families had allowed them autonomy. It may be hypothesised that participants who were not forced to wear gender-specific clothing items had the freedom to construct their own gender identity. The participant who identified herself as a tomboy reported that she integrated both traditional masculine and feminine characteristics into her gender identity. The evidence suggests that her choice of clothing was androgynous in nature. This aligns with the definition of androgyny as the possession of both traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine traits (Prakash et al., 2010).

Some participants reported that their families had reinforced messages regarding the gender appropriateness of chores and activities. In most cases, they were expected to accept these views. For example, most participants reported that females were raised to believe that cleaning and cooking were feminine chores, and that men were therefore discouraged from performing such chores. The participants reported that some parents encouraged their sons to be both undomesticated and not too concerned with cleanliness. This reinforced the viewpoint that females were expected to be domesticated. It is likely that the value system of females was influenced by the opinions described above and, consequently, that they strived to display socially acceptable behaviour. It was evident that most of the participants conceptualised gender identity in terms of what had been communicated to them in early childhood. This serves as an illustration of the impact of socially learned behaviour and the fact that learned behaviour manifests itself in later developmental stages, in this instance, emerging adulthood (Bandura et al., 1963).

This subsection may be summarised by referring to the work of Barry et al. (2009), which found that the family system is instrumental in determining the likelihood of people adopting traditional or non-traditional ways of expressing their gender identity. In addition, the social learning theory can be applied to explain gender typing behaviour. The social learning theory maintains that children learn gender-appropriate behaviour from family members and authority figures. This implies that the conceptualisation of gender identity is informed by processes such as observation and modelling (Crespi, 2014). Consequently, the perceptions and behaviours of the emerging adults in the research study were most probably a reflection of early learning processes.

5.2.2 Peers.

Peer groups influence people's construction and understanding of identity (Watts et al., 2009). This occurs for a number of reasons, such as people's need to identify with a specific group or to establish group cohesion. These findings align with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, which stated that adolescents prioritise peer relationships because such relationships contribute to the development of their identity (Craig & Dunn, 2010). It states further that romantic relationships highlight the difference between femininity and masculinity and intensify gender typing behaviour (Arain et al., 2013; Watts et al., 2009). However, in this research study, the participants did not refer to peer groups when discussing their perceptions of gender identity.

5.2.3 Social structures.

People are, above all, social beings (Bussey, 2011). This means that they understand themselves in relation to others. Consequently, it can be deduced that emerging adults understand their gender identity on the basis of their relationships and what they observe in their immediate environments (Carlson & Heth, 2009). The participants in the research study reported that they often express their gender identity in terms of what is deemed appropriate by society. For example, society communicates the view that femininity is synonymous with nurturance, support and procreation. The female participants reported that they strive to demonstrate these characteristics.

On the other hand, the male participants reported that they prioritised providing for a family and career aspirations, as this aligned with societal expectations. In addition, the participants reported that the university context (in this case, the University of the Free State) places expectations on them regarding their gender identity. The female participants reported that they are judged if they attend class without being well groomed, and other students may comment that their appearance is unfeminine. However, the same expectations are not placed on men. The male participants reported that this is because masculinity is not associated with cleanliness. These opinions correlate with the social constructivist approach to gender identity, which states that knowledge and meaning making are constructed in social interactions (Bussey, 2011).

Some participants reported that they desire to be autonomous in their conceptualisation of gender identity. This desire was fuelled by the fact that they disagree with the binary categorisation of gender identity. Their perspective reflects the social constructivist approach, which emphasises that the understanding of constructs is not constant and often necessitates

change (Bussey, 2011). The emerging adults in the research study expressed on numerous occasions that they wished to challenge the status quo of gender identity and develop their own understanding of the construct.

5.2.4 Culture and socio-political history.

Most of the participants reported that their cultural background had influenced their gender identity. The participant noted that the African culture emphasises the importance of females being feminine and males being masculine. For example, females are expected to be maternal, domesticated and take care of the home. On the other hand, males are expected to be the breadwinners and provide financially for their families. These findings are similar to those of Jeanes (2011). The opinions expressed also complement the narrative approach to gender identity, which states that ideas exist as a result of opinions that are shared in the broader cultural context (McAdams & Olson, 2010).

The participants reported that the African culture discourages feminism. In fact, they conveyed the message that the expression of feminism is regarded as disrespectful to African cultural values. Other participants reported that the Afrikaans culture is conservative and is also strict regarding traditional expressions of femininity and masculinity. Additionally, the participants reported that they noted differences between collectivist and individualist cultures with regard to gender identity. They were of the opinion that collectivist cultures prioritise embracing traditional feminine and masculine roles, while individualistic cultures, such as the American culture, indicate that the expression of gender identity is self-determined. It was the participants' viewpoint that individualist cultures are liberal, do not prescribe traditional ways of expressing gender identity, and allow for fluidity in the expression of gender identity. The differences noted between individualist and collectivist cultures and their conceptualisation of gender identity demonstrate that the definition of constructs is context-specific. This aligns with the views of the narrative approaches to identity (Barkhuizen, 2016).

The participants reported that, although they respect their cultural views of gender identity, they would nevertheless prefer to generate their own ideas of the construct. Most of them indicated that they embody a combination of both feminine and masculine traits. According to the literature, this suggests that their identity is androgynous in nature (Prakash et al., 2010). There is evidence to indicate that, although ideologies of gender identity are culturally constructed, people have the ability to self-construct ideas. This highlights the fact that people are autonomous beings and can be involved in personal story construction (Syed & McLean,

2016). Finally, the participants made no mention of socio-political history as a factor that had shaped their understanding of gender identity.

5.2.5 Religion.

Most of the participants reported that their religious background had influenced their understanding of gender identity. It was emphasised that, like family, religion is something that people are born into. The participants indicated that messages regarding the appropriateness of gender identity have been in existence for many years and are difficult to challenge. The participants noted that religion discourages people from creating their own understanding of gender identity. However, the participants did not provide examples of their own understanding of gender identity in the context of religion.

Mans and Lauwrens (2013) use terms such as submissiveness, supportiveness, meekness and motherliness in describing people who have feminine identities. Knipe (1991), by contrast, understands masculinity in terms of leadership and provision. Considering this evidence, the participants expressed the view that religion limits the process of identity exploration and felt that religion is a stumbling block in their desire to achieve the developmental task associated with emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000). It may be hypothesised that religion provides social categorisation with regard to gender identity, which is associated with the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

5.2.6 Media.

The last system to be identified as having assisted the participants in conceptualising gender identity was the media. The participants reported that different media of communication had had an influence on their gender identity, among them television programmes (i.e. reality shows, talk shows), movies and social media. The participants indicated that social media played a significant role in their understanding of femininity, androgyny and masculinity. The research findings of Galdi, Maass and Cadinu (2014) reflect the views of the participants, who reported that social media are easily accessible and expose them to different ideologies regarding gender identity. They therefore have access to the opinions of millions of people on the subject of gender identity and consequently incorporate these ideologies into their own understanding of gender identity. As a result, they are accepted by others, which is indicative of the fact that emerging adults prioritise social belonging (Erikson, 1968). Gauntlett (2008) added that advertising is another factor that informs the understanding of gender identity. Advertising has the ability to influence the perspectives of others through its coercive abilities.

However, the participants in the research study made no mention of advertising as a factor that had shaped their views of gender identity.

5.3 Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to discuss the research findings in relation to existing literature on gender identity studies, to determine whether there were correlations or inconsistencies in this regard. The gender continuum theory states that gender identity consists of the concepts of femininity, androgyny and masculinity. The information provided by the participants concurred with this theoretical framework. In addition, there was a discussion on the factors that contributed to the understanding of gender identity. These factors included, but were not limited to family, media, society, cultural background and religion. It was indicated that family plays a crucial role in determining the degree to which people might adopt a traditional or non-traditional ideology of gender identity. In addition, the participants reported that individualist and collectivist cultures have different ways of conceptualising gender identity. This chapter revealed that religion is an aspect that is constant in the participants' lives, and it is therefore challenging for them to change religious views. Consequently, the participants asserted that religion limits their conceptualisation of gender identity. Lastly, it was noted that media play a crucial role in shaping emerging adults' perspectives on gender identity.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

This chapter summarises the most significant findings of the research study, including its value and contribution. The limitations that were identified in the research study are discussed, and recommendations for further research are made. The chapter is concluded with a summary.

6.1 Value and Contributions of the Research Study

There is an increasing amount of research being carried out on emerging adulthood. This research study followed the new trend of exploring this newly-identified developmental stage. The researcher reviewed gender identity studies and found that most of the literature is not of South African origin. Therefore, in focusing on the South African population, the researcher hoped to contribute to the foundation of gender identity studies in South Africa. Even more scarce are gender identity studies on emerging adulthood conducted at South African universities. In conducting this research study, the researcher hopes to contribute to the body of research on identity studies at tertiary institutions in South Africa.

This research study focused on understanding gender identity on basis of the gender continuum theory, which takes femininity, androgyny and masculinity into consideration (Roussell, 2013). The research study incorporated the 'grey area' (androgyny), which most gender identity studies neglect. This in itself is of value, as the research study broadened the spectrum of the conceptualisation of gender identity. Consequently, the research study has set the foundation for further research to incorporate androgyny into the conceptualisation of gender identity.

Although participants discussed gender identity mostly in terms of femininity and masculinity (most of the participants were not familiar with the technical term of androgyny), they did express awareness that gender identity is fluid and that the conceptualisation of this construct is subject to change. It became clear that, while gender stereotypes and roles still exist, participants hold opinions that include more fluid conceptualisations of gender identity.

The theoretical framework of the research study was the social constructivist perspective. The participants were required to reflect on the factors that had shaped their understanding of gender identity. Consequently, they had to reflect carefully on the origin of their ideological understanding of gender identity. In their discussions, the participants challenged the perspectives of the different systems that had influenced their conceptualisation of gender identity. Participants concluded that, although systems such as the family, media, social

structures, culture and religion had influenced their conceptualisation of gender identity, they also had the power to define this construct for themselves. They became aware of the fact that they were also personally responsible for the construction of their gender identity. This correlates with the social constructivist approach, which asserts that new truths can emerge as people are encouraged to be more explorative in their understanding of a concept (Kalpana, 2014).

Some of the participants shared the opinion that the conceptualisation of gender identity was different in individualist and collectivist cultures. It was noted that collectivist cultures encouraged the traditional expression of gender identity, whereas individualist cultures advocated autonomy. This aligns with the narrative approach to identity, which postulates that the conceptualisation of gender identity is context-specific (McLean et al., 2016). Although this seemed obvious to some participants, other participants were intrigued by this discovery and showed an interest in exploring this further.

Furthermore, the research study was of personal value to the researcher, as she was forced to confront her own understanding of gender identity. Like the participants, the researcher also had the responsibility to identify the factors that had shaped her understanding of gender identity. Throughout this process the researcher realised that she had been passive and had accepted ideologies of gender identity without questioning them. As a result, she made the discovery that she had not been able to reach identity achievement, and she began the process of redefining her ideology of gender identity in order to fulfil the developmental tasks proposed by Marcia's identity status theory (Marcia, 1966). In the end, both the participants and the researcher discovered that gender identity is a complex construct and its understanding is influenced by multiple factors. These factors are numerous and are subject to change depending on context.

6.2 Limitations of this Research Study

The study was insightful, and the participants made a valuable contribution. However, some limitations were noted by the researcher and are discussed below.

The researcher's initial intention was to conduct four focus groups, because she wanted to observe the dynamics between participants. This is particularly important, as focus groups often lead to debates between the participants. However, because of poor attendance, the researcher only managed to conduct two focus groups. This was then followed up with five individual interviews. Although individual interviews provide less opportunity for social

interaction and the social construction of knowledge, the five interviews provided information on the personal reflections of the participants. Attempts were thus made to continue the interview process until such a time that there was data saturation.

In terms of the participants, the male-to-female ratio was not equal. Most of the participants were female. It should be noted that the participants were asked to share their subjective experience of their understanding of gender identity. Therefore, there is a possibility that the 'male voice' was under-represented. Although there were fewer male participants than females, the perceptions of males were presented. For instance, some of the female participants were able to share men's conceptualisations of gender identity by reflecting on conversations they had had with males.

English was the medium of communication for both the focus groups and the individual interviews. It is important to note that the participants were from different language groups. Therefore, there were some participants whose first language was not English. This posed a challenge for some participants, as they experienced difficulties at times expressing themselves in English. This may have influenced the quality of information that was communicated. Although it would have been ideal for the participants to communicate in the language they were comfortable with, this would have introduced its own challenges. For instance, there was a possibility that the participants would not have understood each other at all times, and this would have possibly had a negative effect on group cohesion.

The researcher tried to ensure that the environment in which the focus groups and individual interviews were conducted was free from distractions. However, there were some interferences encountered during the data collection process. For instance, some participants entered the interview room in the middle of the discussion. Some participants experienced this as distracting. In addition, the interruption could have affected the participant's train of thought. In one individual interview, the participant received an important phone call during the process. Therefore, the recording had to be paused to allow him to attend to the phone call. Upon ending the call, the participants could not recall what he had been communicating before he was interrupted.

6.3 Recommendations for Future Research Studies

Considering the limitations of the study, some recommendations can be made for further research. These recommendations will be discussed below.

It is recommended that further studies relating to gender identity in emerging adults should include more focus groups. This is based on the observation that the researcher made, that communication in a group setting evoked opinions that individual participants would otherwise not have been exposed to. The participants in the focus group also challenged the perspectives of others. This contributed to participants gaining new insight into gender identity during the data collection process. In addition, other researchers who are interested in the field of gender identity can make an executive decision about the size of the focus groups and ratio of females to males. However, the current researcher feels it is important for the male/female ratio to be equal in order to increase the chances of representing both male and female perspectives.

Participants might feel more comfortable expressing their opinions in their first language. If there is diversity amongst participants in terms of their primary language, the use of a translator is indicated. However, it should be noted that using a translator might affect the rapport built between the researcher and participants. In addition, the use of a translator might contaminate the data. Therefore, the inclusion or exclusion of a translator is a decision that should be made with caution.

Based on the research conducted, it was noted that one of the factors that influenced the participants' understanding of gender identity was their cultural background. Consequently, it is suggested for further research to take into consideration a multicultural approach to conceptualising gender identity. The researcher recommends that the multicultural approach should also take into consideration the difference between individualist and collectivist cultures in conceptualising gender identity. Furthermore, future research could explore how family dynamics, such as how either being raised in a single-parent household, by both parents, by homosexual parents or being raised in a stepfamily can contribute to emerging adult's conceptualisation of gender identity. Lastly, future research could explore the conceptualisation of gender identity from a different lens and not focus on femininity, masculinity and androgyny. It would be intriguing to see if the findings would align or contradict with that of the researcher

6.4 Chapter Summary

In this chapter the researcher discussed the value of the research study and possible contributions she has made to the field. The research study facilitated a deepened understanding of the construction of gender identity among emerging adults. This is in line with Arnett's theory, which stated that emerging adulthood is a stage that encourages self-focus. There are limited gender identity studies in South Africa. Therefore, it can be said that the researcher contributed to filling the gap in identity studies in our country. In addition, throughout the process of writing the dissertation, the researcher noted that there are limitations to her research study, and these were outlined in this chapter. Identifying the gaps in the dissertation assisted the researcher in formulating recommendations for further research. Lastly, this chapter, and the dissertation as a whole, highlighted the understanding that emerging adulthood is a complex developmental stage, and that emerging adults are faced with multiple challenges.

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Appendix A - Ethical Clearance by Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of Humanities)

1 June 2015

Prof L Naudé
Department of Psychology
UFS

Ethical Clearance Application: On becoming a therapist

Dear Prof Naudé

With reference to your application for ethical clearance with the Faculty of the Humanities, I am pleased to inform you on behalf of the Ethics Board 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-HUM-2015-82

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 in writing.

We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your research project be submitted in writing 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,

Katinka de Wet
Ethics Committee (Faculty of Humanities)
Copy: Charné Vercueil (Research Co-ordinator: Faculty of Humanities)

Appendix B - Participant Consent Form

Reference: Thabiso Dinale
University of the Free State
BLOEMFONTEIN
9301

Cell number: 081 0155 117
Email: ntdinale@gmail.com
August 2015

Dear Student

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study. The study is on the gender identity of emerging adults. The name of the project is "Gender identities in emerging adulthood: A social constructivist perspective". The aim of the research study is to explore gender identities in emerging adults in their social context.

If you would like to partake in the study, you will be expected to take part in a focus group or individual interview where you will discuss your opinions on the different issues of gender identity. The length of the focus group will be 50-60 minutes.

I am sure you will benefit from this study as it will provide you with more insight on how:

- Society may influence your understanding of gender identity and the meanings that you associate with this concept, and
- Your developmental stage (emerging adulthood) informs your perception on the ideology of gender identity.

I do not foresee any possible physical, psychological and social risks involved in participating in this study. You are free to share only the information that you are comfortable with, your privacy will be protected, and you are free to withdraw from this project at any time without any negative consequences.

Your participation in this study will be managed with the utmost degree of confidentiality. Your name will not be associated with any of the comments and all the data gathered will be kept secure.

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. Should any difficult personal issues arise during the course of this study, I will endeavour to see that a qualified expert (e.g. a counsellor at student counselling) is contacted and able to assist you.

If you experience any discomfort or unhappiness with the way the study is being conducted, please feel free to contact me directly.

Kind regards
Thabiso Dinale

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To be completed by the participant

Study: **"Gender identities in emerging adulthood: A social constructivist perspective"**

Researcher: **Thabiso Dinale**

Participant's Details

Name: _____

Cell number: _____

Email address: _____

Age: _____

Gender: _____

Racial / ethnic group: _____

Home language: _____

- I hereby give free and informed consent to participate in the abovementioned study.
- I understand what the study is about, why I am participating and what the risks and benefits are.
- I give the student / 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 C - Interview Schedule

Questions for discussion

1. What do you understand by the term gender identity?

2. Do you have a biological or psychological understanding of gender identity? Elaborate.

3. Do you think men and women have different gender identities? If yes, please elaborate.

4. What do you understand by the terms femininity and masculinity?

5. Do you think gender identity can be explained in terms of femininity, masculinity or androgyny?

6. Who or what has informed your understanding of femininity, masculinity or androgyny?

7. Do you think society plays a role in informing your ideas of femininity, masculinity and androgyny?

8. What are some of the roles that are associated with being feminine, masculine or androgynous?

Appendix D – Turnitin

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