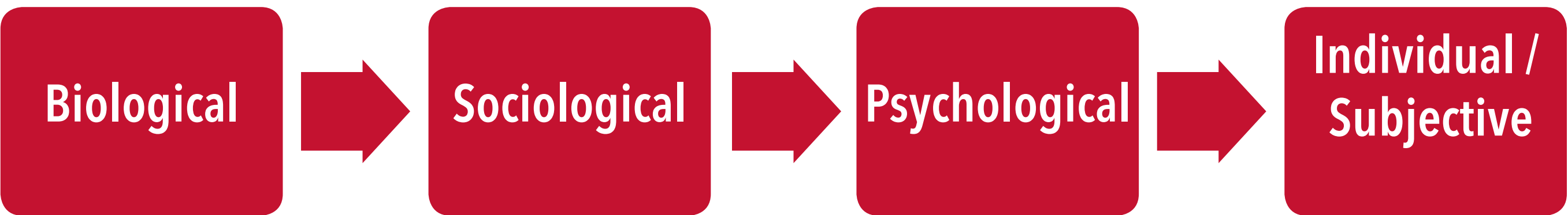# To Be or Not to Be an Adult?: Markers of Adulthood among South African Emerging Adults

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Background and Context

- As the complexity of the world increases, the final step into true adulthood becomes more challenging (Gfellner & Bartoszuk, 2015; Katsiaficas, Suarez-Orozco, & Dias, 2015).
- Considering socio-cultural factors and marginalised social identities (Arnett, 2016; Furstenberg 2016; Lee & Waithaka, 2017; Obidoa et al., 2018), what does it mean to be an adult in countries in transition?

A shift in the markers that signal entrance into adulthood

Biological ➡ Sociological ➡ Psychological ➡ Individual / Subjective

(Nelson & Luster, 2016; Settersen, Ottusch, & Schneider, 2015)

Aim and Objectives of the Study

= to explore and describe how emerging adults in South Africa experience their transition into adulthood.

Research Approach and Design

= Equal-weight, simultaneous, mixed-methods design

Quantitative Results

Participants (N=736):
- M_{Age}=21.9 • Gender composition: Female=71.7%; Male=27.7%
- Racial distribution: *Black*=65.2%; *White*=21.7%; *Coloured*=7.2%
- Ethnolinguistic representation: *seSotho*=20.9%; *Afrikaans*=19.4%; *seTswana*=11.8%; *isiXhosa*=11.4%; *isiZulu*=12.2%; *English*=9.9%
- Classify themselves as: Grown up=49.6%; In between=41.4%; Adolescent=7.5%

Surveys completed

- *Markers of Adulthood scale* (Arnett, 2001; Arnett & Padilla-Walker, 2015; Sharon, 2016)
- *Satisfaction with Life scale* (Pavot & Diener, 1993)
- *Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory - Identity scale* (Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981)

Markers of adulthood: Rank ordered according to Endorsement and Attainment (See supplementary material).

Subscales (supported through exploratory factor analyses)	Rank order Endorsement (0 to 1) / Attainment (0 to 1) / Fit (-1 to 1)	Gender differences (Multivariate analyses of variance)
RES Responsibility	Highest endorsement (M=.79; SD=.26)	
RT Role Transitions	Lowest attainment (M=.09; SD=.16) Worst Fit (M=-.45; SD=.33)	
NC Norm Compliance	Highest attainment (M=.78; SD=.25) Best Fit (M=.48; SD=.42)	*Men scored significantly lower wrt attainment*
RM Relational Maturity		*Men scored significantly higher wrt endorsement*
BIO Bio/ Chronological	Lowest endorsement (M=.52; SD=.26)	*Men scored significantly higher wrt attainment*

Multivariate analyses of variance yielded various ethno-cultural differences – mostly between isiZulu and isiXhosa groups on the one hand and Afrikaans and English groups on the other.

Correlation Matrix - Pearson's *r (p)*			
	Regard self to be an Adult	**Feel Adult in Various Contexts**	**Achieved Markers**
Age	.334** (*p*=.000)	.028 (*p*=.457)	.450** (*p*=.000)
Regard self to be an Adult	-	.112** (*p*=.003)	.298** (*p*=.000)
Feel Adult in Various Contexts		-	.099* (*p*=.012)

Correlation Matrix - Pearson's *r (p)*		
	Identity Achievement	**Satisfaction with Life**
Endorsement / Attainment Fit	.207** (*p*=.000)	.154** (*p*=.000)
Identity Achievement	-	.478** (*p*=.000)

Qualitative Results

Participants (N=59):
- M_{Age}=20.5
- *Gender composition: Female=44.2%; Male=49.1%*
- *Racial distribution: Black=76.3%; White=11.8%; Coloured=11.8%*

Reflections from eight focus group discussions were thematically analysed. (See supplementary material)

Preparing for adulthood – a state of being in between		
"The big three" – with a twist		
Taking responsibility for yourself	Making independent decisions – but with the option of interdependence	Becoming financially independent – but with a communal responsibility

"Objective" vs subjective markers	
Norms and role transitions	Its about the attitude…. Self confidence, respect, how you carry yourself

Gender nuances	
For males	For females

Shaped by culture – living in two worlds

Feelings about adulthood – balancing freedom and responsibility	
Responsibility (faced with a bit of fear)	Freedom (associated with excitement)

Living in the rainbow nation (the South African situation)	
The strengths - diversity	The challenges – unemployment, corruption, crime, racial tension, and violence

Conclusion

- Alignment between endorsement and attainment of markers relates positively to identity achievement and satisfaction with life (Galanaki & Leontopoulou, 2017; Gfellner & Bartoszuk 2016).
- Criteria for adulthood cut across gender and cultural boundaries, but nuances evident.
- Divergent pathways in the face of inequality and vulnerability (Arnett, 2016; Silva 2016).
- Challenges of identity negotiation among upwardly mobile emerging adults.
- Social responsibilities are prioritised, with strong family-oriented, neighbourhood and community markers (Hall & Walls, 2016; Katsiaficas, 2015; Obidoa et al., 2018).
- Importance of balancing individualistic criteria (responsibility and independent decision-making) with immense civic, social, and familial responsibility and worldviews of interdependence (Arnett, 2016; Radmacher & Azmitia, 2013).
- Dialectic tensions and contradictions experienced in the various contexts (Katsiaficas, Suarez-Orozco, & Dias, 2015).