



Working Towards a Work Identity: The Emergence of Professional Identity among Young Scholars in South Africa

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[Aim of the Study]

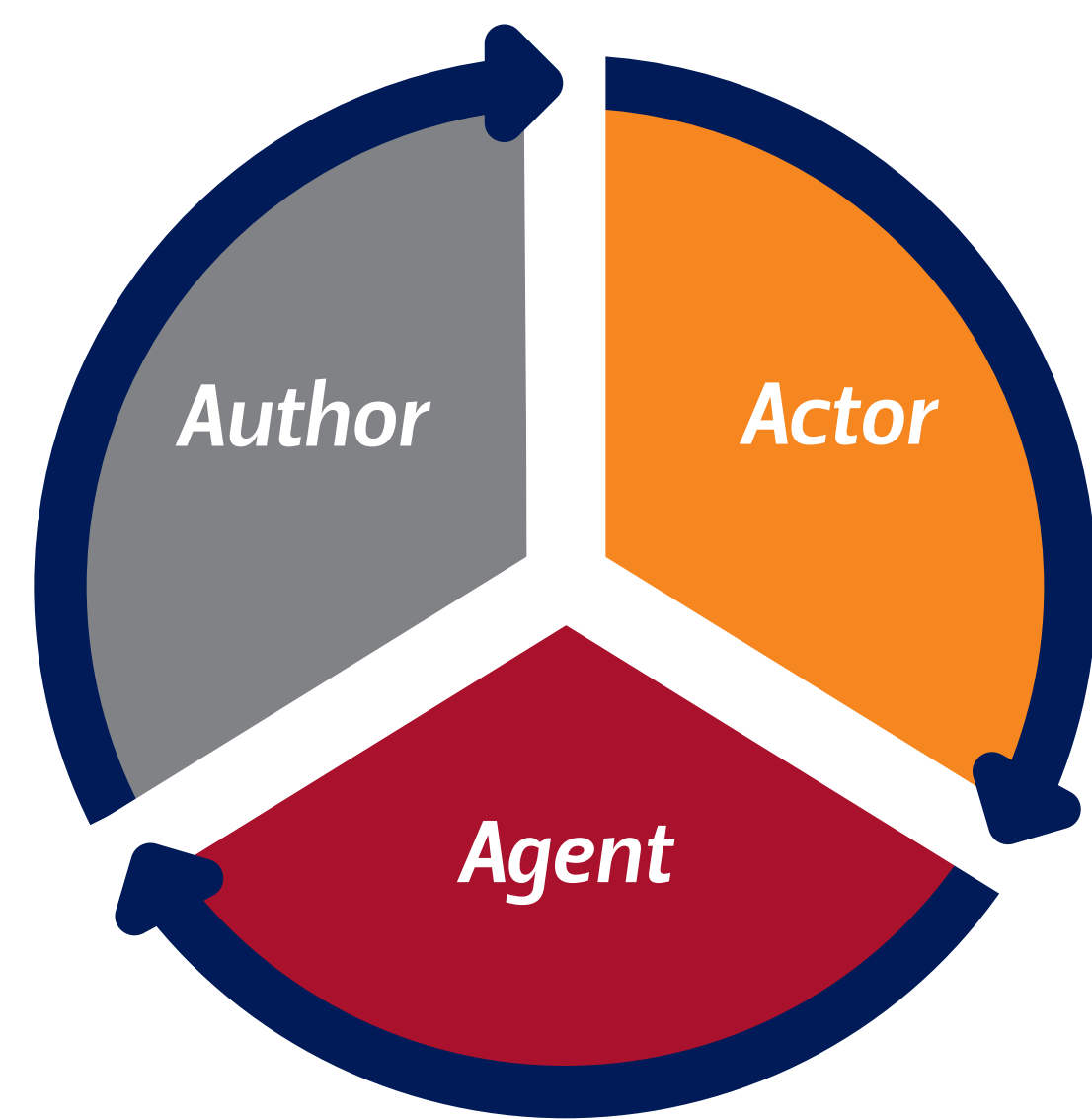
= to explore how individuals develop their professional identities as they transition between being students and becoming young professionals.

[Theoretical Lenses]

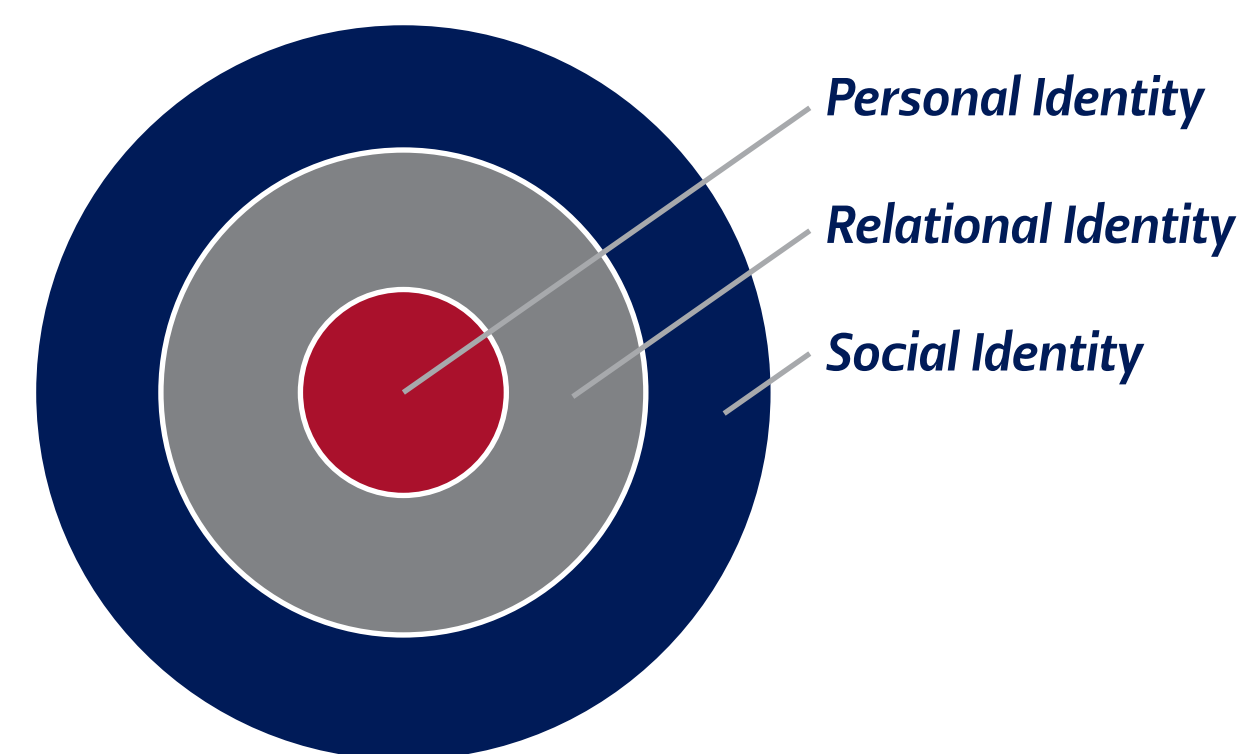
Career Construction and Life Design Theory (Savickas, 2011, 2012, 2013)



Identity work (Brown, 2015; Caza et al., 2018) and Life Stories (McAdams, 2016)



Tri-dimensional identity model (Adams & van de Vijver, 2017)



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The current study is part of a larger interdisciplinary research project, Selves within Selves on a University Campus: The intersectionality of Student Identity Development in a Transitional Society, focused on the various identity formations, negotiations, and performances of South African students. The study is supported by an interdisciplinary grant from the Office of the Vice-Rector: Research and Internationalisation at the University of the Free State. (UFS-HSD2022/1149/22).

[Interdisciplinary Research Team]



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[Methods]

Paradigm: Social constructionism
Approach: Qualitative (explorative and descriptive)
Participants: Eight young professionals at the University of the Free State in South Africa
Data collection: Individual interviews to narrate the journeys from being students to becoming professionals.
Data analysis: Thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2007). Individual narratives, followed by cross-case analysis informed by concepts of career construction and identity development

[Examples of Interview Questions]

- How would you describe your professional identity at this stage of your career?
- How does being a young professional match/conflict with who you are and how you see yourself?
- How has the role of a young professional influenced/changed how you view yourself and the world?
- How do you navigate between your personal experience as a student and your current role as a young professional?
- In what ways do you see your professional identity evolving in the future?
- What advice would you give to other young scholars who are in the process of developing their own professional identities?

[A Participatory Peer Design]

Co-researchers: Postgraduate students as peer researchers.
• Participants felt more comfortable sharing in-depth experiences with peers
• Novice researchers received training in research and development as emerging scholars



Francois Naudé



Paballo Seseli

Identity Dimentions	Career Adaptability Concepts	Participants' Career Narratives and Life Themes
Personal	Curiosity to explore self and future scenarios	A Future Focus with Big Dreams <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The sky is the limit... don't be afraid to try new things... everything at the end, it's going to connect.• It drives you to dream more, it drives you to strive more... whatever opportunity that is there, go for it... Clear Career Ambitions and Professional Goals <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I don't want to stay a facilitator my whole life... I want to publish... I want to finish my PhD, and, hopefully, someday, I want to be a professor. Authoring a Story of Growth – The Need to Reconstruct the Self <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professionally, I still want to grow... it doesn't end here. I still have a lot that I need to learn.• I enjoy coming alive...
	Confidence to pursue career aspirations	Overcoming to Become – Starting with a Lack of Confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I have gone from someone that had to remark my own essays like three times to try and figure out how it should be to someone that's in a position where I can help others. Remaining Focused on Goals through Personal Challenges and Losses <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I realised that I am so strong... my mind is stronger than my heart... I do not let it destroy me... Knowing Preferences and Owning Competence <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I love teaching... identify myself as an aspiring academic• This is my terrain. This is where I thrive... Finding Meaning in the Professional Role <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being a facilitator actually fulfils a role that I never knew that I needed.• The minute I step into the class... my tiredness is gone...
Relational	Cooperation	Co-constructing the Self by Engaging with Others – Seeing Self in Others <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I know how it feels to be there... Belonging – I Fit Somewhere <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being amongst other academics made me feel that I belong... I'm within people who are exactly like me, like I'm blending in, and I'm comfortable with myself, and I'm growing Working Together – Strength in Others <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It's a matter of knowing who your bridges are...• Together as a group, we can do much more than when I'm alone. Inspiration from Rolemodels – It starts with being given the opportunity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• If I didn't have that bit of a push from the department, I wouldn't have done it Stepping into the Role as Guardian Becomes Part of You <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You need to be mindful; you can change people's lives; for better or for worse.• They need to look up to us... they think... 'if she can do it, I can do it as well' Touching Lives and Opening Opportunities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• You need to ensure that these students get the best from you... That hour can make a difference in their life forever.
Contextual	Concern about a vocational future	Living in a World of Change and Challenge <ul style="list-style-type: none">• We are living in a forever changing world... the tools that we used then are not really working now.• That not knowing gets me... I'm in the working world. I don't have control of everything. So not being in control, it drives me crazy Being Confronted with Hindrances: Reflecting on Mismatches, Dislikes and Not Finding Self <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I can tell you the money's not good. I'm not gonna lie...• I do not have friends. I do not go out. I. It's just always me and books ... Wanting More <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Facilitation has pushed me to wanting to know more, to furthering my studies.• I'm not feeling challenged anymore, and I'm definitely ready to move on to the next level.
	Control over a vocational future	Seeing Opportunity <ul style="list-style-type: none">• There are opportunities out there. It's just a matter of opening up myself to those opportunities.• Before doing this, I definitely would have taken whatever job I could get... now I'm a lot more self-assured... I'm not going to undersell myself. Taking Action <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Going from the person asking all the questions to the person having to find answers.• Don't ask me to be the planner of no, no, no. Not behind, in front. In front! More than Just Work – Agency in Taking on a Broader Perspective than the Self <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I see myself in the future kind of being the individual who helps identify very talented young, specifically black women...• My responsibility in a community, in a nation. It starts with me and it goes out like this. So, I can't expect them to do things that I don't do.

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